



AJET

# CONNECT

News & Events, Arts & Culture, Lifestyle, Community

**FEBRUARY  
2019**

Turn The Music Up – DJing in Japan

Chronic Illness in Japan – One ALT's Advice For Navigating The Challenges

LGBTQ In The Inaka – Finding Community and Support In the Countryside

Nabe Party! – Everything You Need To Know To Host Your Own

Kansai Yamamoto Interview – Conversation With Designer  
Whose Looks Were Rocked By Gaga and Bowie



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

# Culture Editor needed

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A woman in a pink kimono is kneeling and playing a large taiko drum. She is holding two wooden drumsticks and striking the drum. The drum is mounted on a wooden stand. The background is a warm, yellowish wall. The woman has her hair styled in a traditional Japanese bun.

**CONNECT**



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**2019**



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C the art issue for 2019  
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# LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Feeling those post-holiday blues? We get it! The combination of chilly weather, year-end desk warming, and narrowly swerving the flu 24/7 is enough to take its toll on any of us. Luckily, this time of year has plenty of plus sides, too! *Kotatsus*, piping hot Family Mart pizza buns, Valentines themed goodies wherever you look... and lots of free time to flick through our first regular issue of 2019!

This month, we've got everything you need to keep warm and stay in the know. Kicking off with the controversial, our News section explores the lessening stigma around Japanese tattoo artistry. Out of inspiration in the kitchen? Read our guide to throwing the ultimate *nabe* party! The seasonal ingredients are cheap, and the memories will be priceless! If you're looking to pick up a new hobby in 2019, this month's features on international cooking classes, DJ-ing in Japan, and one ALT's English boxing club will be right up your street. Got an eye for style? You won't want to miss our Fashion editor's incredible interview with costume designer Kansai Yamamoto.

Finally, but most importantly, don't forget to take care of yourself this month. Reach out to those around you if you need a bit of extra support; there's often community to be found where you least expect it. This month's issue is full of resources - a look inside the Beacon Takasaki LGBTQ launch party, self care tips from Gunma's own "emotional cat lady," and words of wisdom on managing a chronic condition during your time in Japan.

Happy reading! And remember, spring is almost here; *ehomaki* at the ready!

Lauren Hill  
Head Editor  
3rd Year Tokyo ALT



Photo: Tayler Skultety



# NEWS AND EVENTS

## NEWS EDITOR

[connect.news@ajet.net](mailto:connect.news@ajet.net)

## Tresha Barrett

*I dreamt I woke up to a dream... Makes you think.*

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[connect.events@ajet.net](mailto:connect.events@ajet.net)

## Peyton Goodman

*"Excelsior" -Stan Lee*

Photo: Avalon De Gannes



# Events Calendar:

February to Mid-March

## Block 1

Hokkaido  
Aomori  
Iwate  
Akita

## Block 2

Miyagi  
Yamagata  
Fukushima  
Niigata

## Block 3

Ibaraki  
Tochigi  
Gunma  
Saitama  
Nagano

## Block 4

Chiba  
Tokyo  
Kanagawa  
Yamanashi  
Shizuoka

## Block 5

Toyama  
Ishikawa  
Fukui  
Gifu  
Aichi

## Block 6

Shiga  
Kyoto  
Hyogo

## Block 7

Mie  
Osaka  
Nara  
Wakayama

## Block 8

Tokushima  
Kagawa  
Ehime  
Kochi

## Block 9

Tottori  
Shimane  
Okayama  
Hiroshima  
Yamaguchi

## Block 10

Fukuoka  
Saga  
Nagasaki  
Oita

## Block 11

Kumamoto  
Miyazaki  
Kagoshima  
Okinawa



## Block 1

### **Misawa Christmas Festival**

22 November - 14 January  
Misawa City, Aomori Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

### **Morioka Snow Light 2019**

07 February – 09 February  
Morioka City, Iwate Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

### **Otofuke Tokachigawa Shiratori Festival Sairinka 2019**

26 January – 24 February  
Otofuke-cho, Hokkaido Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

### **Yuki-doro Festival (Snow Lantern Festival) 2019**

08 February – 11 February  
Hirosaki City, Aomori Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

### **Sapporo Snow Festival 2019**

31 January – 11 February  
Sapporo City, Hokkaido Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

### **Otaru Snow Light Path 2019**

08 February – 17 February  
Otaru City, Hokkaido Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

### **Obihiro Ice Festival 2019**

01 February – 03 February  
Obihiro City, Hokkaido Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

### **Inukko Matsuri 2019**

09 February – 10 February  
Yuzawa City, Akita Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

### **Oyasukyo Shigakko Festival 2019**

02 February  
Yuzawa City, Akita Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

### **Kakunodate Fire Swing “KAMAKURA” 2019**

13 February – 14 February  
Semboku City, Akita Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

### **Iwate Snow Festival 2019**

02 February – 11 February  
Mt. Iwate, Iwate Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

### **SAKE GARDEN 2019**

21 February  
Akita City, Akita Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

### **2019 Sapporo Snow Festival**

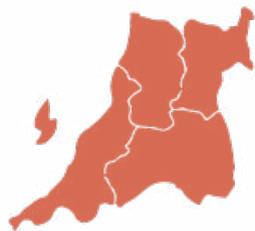
04 February – 11 February  
Sapporo City, Hokkaido Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

### **Iwate S-1 Sweets Fare 2019**

23 February – 24 February  
Takizawa City, Iwate Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)



## Block 2

### Hadaka Taru Mikoshi Festival

03 February

Kurihara City, Miyagi Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

### Matsushima Oyster Festival

03 February

Matsushima-machi, Miyagi Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

### Snow & Fire Festival 2019

09 February

Mishima-machi, Fukushima Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

### Uesugi Snow Lantern Festival 2019

09 February – 10 February

Yonezawa City, Yamagata Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

### Tadami Snow Festival

09 February – 10 February

Tadami Town, Fukushima Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

### Minamiuonuma Snow Festival 2019

09 February – 10 February

Minamiuonuma City, Niigata Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

### Nishiaizu Snow Country Festival 2019

09 February – 10 February

Nishiaizu-machi, Fukushima

Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

### Kasedori Festival

11 February

Kaminoyama City, Yamagata Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

### Shirakawa Daruma Ichi 2019

11 February

Shirakawa City, Fukushima Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

### Tokamachi Snow Festival 2019

15 February – 17 February

Tokamachi City, Niigata Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

### Ojiya Balloon Festival 2019

23 February – 24 February

Ojiya City, Niigata Prefecture

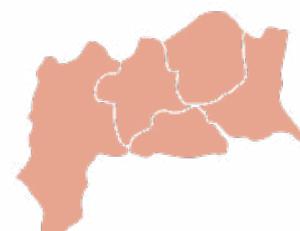
[Website in English and Japanese](#)

### Shiogama Shrine Hote Festival

10 March

Shiogama City, Miyagi Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)



## Block 3

### Kinu-Hime (Princess Kinu) Festival 2019

01 February – 31 March

Nikko City, Tochigi Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

### Setsubun Festival

03 February

Kashima City, Ibaraki Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

### Choco-RUN 2019 in Saitama

03 February

Saitama City, Saitama Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

### Sendayaki

04 February

Yamanouchi Town, Nagano Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)



## Block 4

### **Oami Fire Festival**

09 February

Otari Village, Nagano Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

### **Oigami Onsen Bikkuri Hina doll Festival 2019**

16 February – 31 March

Numata City, Gunma Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

### **Kounosubina 2019**

20 February – 10 March

Kounosu City, Saitama Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

### **Tokimata Naked Festival**

10 March

Iida City, Nagano Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

### **Kawaguchiko Winter Fireworks 2019**

12 January – 23 February

Fujikawaguchiko-machi, Yamanashi Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

### **Saiko Ice Festival 2019**

26 January – 17 February

Fujikawaguchiko-machi, Yamanashi Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

### **Shonan Strawberry Marche 2019**

01 February – 03 February

Hiratsuka City, Kanagawa Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

### **Nagano Wine Fes in Tokyo 2019**

03 February

Tokyo City, Tokyo Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

### **Kawasaki Daishi Setsubun-e**

03 February

Kawasaki City, Kanagawa Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

### **Naritasan Shinshoji Temple Setsubun-e 2019**

03 February

Narita City, Chiba Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

### **World Valentine Festival 2019**

09 February – 10 February

Shibuya-ku, Tokyo Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

### **Bishamonten Festival (Fuji City) 2019**

11 February – 13 February

Fuji City, Shizuoka Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

### **Katsuura Grande Hinamatsuri 2019**

22 February – 03 March

Katsura City, Chiba Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

### **20th Ayase International Festival**

24 February

Ayase City, Kanagawa Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

### **TOHOKU VIN-DAGE 2019**

03 March

Minato-ku, Tokyo Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)



## Block 5

### **Foodpia Kanazawa 2019**

26 January – 28 February  
Kanazawa City, Ishikawa Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

### **Toyama Nabe Jiman Taikai 2019**

01 February – 03 February  
Tateyama-machi, Toyama Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

### **Nagoya Ramen Matsuri 2019**

01 February – 11 February  
Nagoya City, Aichi Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

### **Nakao Kamakura Festival 2019**

01 February – 14 February  
Takayama City, Gifu Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

### **Snow Sculpture Contest 2019**

08 February – 17 February  
Takayama City, Gifu Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

### **Falling Star Lantern Night Event**

15 February  
Ohno City, Fukui Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

### **Hirayu-Otaki Keppyo Festival 2019**

15 February – 25 February  
Takayama City, Gifu Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

### **The 15th Wakasagi Takahama Hinamatsuri**

17 February – 03 March  
Takahama Town, Fukui Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

### **Nyūzen Ramen Matsuri & Sweets Matsuri 2018**

23 February – 24 February  
Nyuzen-machi, Toyama Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)



## Block 6

### **Snow Festival Snow Festival 2019 Snow Festival**

02 February  
Takashima City, Shiga Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

### **Yasaka Shrine Setsubun**

02 February – 03 February  
Kyoto City, Kyoto Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

### **Tajima Ranch Park Snow Festival**

03 February  
Shinza Onsen Town, Hyogo Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

### **Setsubun Festival**

03 February  
Taiga Town, Shiga Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

### **Heian Jingu Setsubun**

03 February  
Kyoto City, Kyoto Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

### **Ikuta Shrine Setsubun Festival**

03 February  
Kobe City, Hyogo Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

### **View of Yumura Lights**

09 February  
Yumura Onsen Town, Hyogo Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

### **Omihachiman Festival**

09 February – 24 March  
Omihachiman City, Shiga Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)



## Block 7



## Block 8

### Owase Ya-Ya Festival

01 February – 05 February  
Owase City, Mie Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

### Dojima Yakushido Setsubun Omizukumi Festival

03 February  
Osaka City, Osaka Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

### Shinto Ritual, Kitsune no Yomeiri (Fox's Wedding)

03 February  
Yokkaichi City, Mie Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

### Mottox World Wine Festival 2019

05 February  
Osaka City, Osaka Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

### Lantern Festival

06 February  
Shingu City, Wakayama Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

### Yoka Ebisu

07 February – 08 February  
Nabari City, Mie Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

### The 22nd Hashimoto Marathon

11 February  
Hashimoto City, Wakayama Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

### Dadaoshi Festival 2019

14 February  
Sakurai City, Nara Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

### Shunie Ceremony 2019

01 March – 14 March  
Nara City, Nara Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

### Ashizuri kamellia Matsuri 2019

01 February – 28 February  
Tosashimizu City, Kochi Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

### The 5th "25 days for Cat Lover by Cat Lovers" Cat Exhibition

01 February – 25 February  
Takamatsu City, Kagawa Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

### Awadori Event

03 February  
Tokushima City, Tokushima Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

### Sakana City Wakame Festival & Oyster Festival

16 February – 17 February  
Sakana City, Wakayama Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)



## Block 9

### **Umaimon Ichi (Delicious market) in Ainan 2019**

17 February  
Minamiuwa District, Ehime Prefecture  
[Website in English and Japanese](#)

### **Yoshitsune Festival**

17 February  
Komatsushima City, Wakayama Prefecture  
[Website in Japanese only](#)

### **The 27th Anan City Live Bamboo Festival**

24 February  
Anan City, Wakayama Prefecture  
[Website in Japanese only](#)

### **Tosa no “OKYAKU” 2019**

02 March – 10 March  
Kochi City, Kochi Prefecture  
[Website in English and Japanese](#)

### **Kisaragi Marche 2019 (SHIMANE)**

02 February – 17 February  
Matsue City, Shimane Prefecture  
[Website in English and Japanese](#)

### **The 24th West Japan Snowball Fighting Championship**

02 February – 03 February  
Wakasa-cho, Tottori Prefecture  
[Website in English and Japanese](#)

### **Winter Happy Festa 2019 14th Pot-1 Grand Prix**

03 February  
Hofu City, Yamaguchi Prefecture  
[Website in Japanese only](#)

### **Hinamon Festival**

07 February – 11 February  
Yamaguchi City, Yamaguchi Prefecture  
[Website in Japanese only](#)

### **Mihara Shingo-shi**

08 February – 10 February  
Mihara City, Hiroshima Prefecture  
[Website in Japanese only](#)

### **The 35th Miyajima Oyster Festival**

09 February – 10 February  
Miyajima City, Hiroshima Prefecture  
[Website in Japanese only](#)

### **Uplanded Kasato Island Island Trail 2019**

10 February  
Komatsu City, Yamaguchi Prefecture  
[Website in Japanese only](#)

### **The 8th Higashi Awakura Snow Festival Snowball Competition**

10 February  
Mimasaka City, Okayama Prefecture  
[Website in Japanese only](#)



## Block 10

### **Yutoku Inari Shrine Hatsuuma Festival**

02 February  
Kashima City, Saga Prefecture  
[Website in English and Japanese](#)

### **Crying Child Sumo**

03 February  
Hirado City, Nagasaki Prefecture  
[Website in English and Japanese](#)

### **Nagasaki Lantern Festival**

05 February – 19 February  
Nagasaki City, Nagasaki Prefecture  
[Website in English and Japanese](#)

### **HIKARI NO Valentine's day – TAKEO · Hiryugama Lantern Festival 2019**

09 February – 10 February  
Takeo City, Saga Prefecture  
[Website in English and Japanese](#)

### **Shinwa No Takachiho Kenkoku Festival**

11 February  
Takachiho Town, Nagasaki Prefecture  
[Website in English and Japanese](#)

### **Nakatsu Doll Festival**

16 February – 10 March  
Nakatsu City, Oita Prefecture  
[Website in English and Japanese](#)

### **Jojima Sakagurabiraki 2019**

16 February – 17 February  
Kurume City, Fukuoka Prefecture  
[Website in English and Japanese](#)



## Block 11

### **Takahashi Inari Shrine Hatsuuma Festival**

02 February  
Kumamoto City, Kumamoto Prefecture  
[Website in English and Japanese](#)

### **Gokase Highland Ski Resort Valentine's Day Event**

14 February  
Gokase-cho, Miyazaki Prefecture  
[Website in English and Japanese](#)

### **Kumamoto Castle Marathon**

17 February  
Kumamoto City, Kumamoto Prefecture  
[Website in English and Japanese](#)

### **The 27th Kuro-shima Island Ushi Matsuri 2019**

24 February  
Taketomi-cho, Okinawa Prefecture  
[Website in English and Japanese](#)

### **The 37th Higashimura Azalea Festival**

01 March – 24 March  
Higashi-son, Okinawa Prefecture  
[Website in English and Japanese](#)

### **Jiro Jiro Dance**

03 March  
Satsumasendai City, Kagoshima Prefecture  
[Website in English and Japanese](#)

### **Takae Taro Taro Dance**

03 March  
Satsumasendai City, Kagoshima Prefecture  
[Website in English and Japanese](#)

### **Amakusa Pearl Line Marathon**

10 March  
Amakusa City, Kumamoto Prefecture  
[Website in English and Japanese](#)

Photos:  
Emily Belding



## 10-day Golden Week:

### Bill Approved for Extended Holiday Around the Imperial Succession

Time to start planning for Japan's upcoming Golden Week! The Lower House of the Diet approved a bill that will give you the chance to experience ten vacation days of either lazing around, traveling, or just trying to squeeze as many activities as you can into the one-off holiday.

The approved legislation relates to the Imperial succession, which will see Crown Prince Naruhito ascend to the Imperial throne. The day of the event, May 1, will be designated as a holiday.

To get a clearer idea of how rare a 10-day holiday like this occurs, let's take a look at Japanese law. By law, if a weekday is sandwiched between national holidays, then that weekday will also become a public holiday. So, with April 29 and May 3 to 6 set to be national and public holidays this year, April 30 and May 2 will automatically become public holidays. Hence, a block of vacation days is created.

Note however that the 10-day vacation period will begin on Saturday, April 27, and will continue through to Monday, May 6. This means that four weekend days are included.

An enthronement ceremony for Crown Prince Naruhito's accession will be held on October 22 (which, according to the bill, will be yet another national holiday).

Emperor Akihito, 84, wishes to abdicate the Chrysanthemum Throne due to his advanced age and failing health, which he believes could prevent him from fulfilling his duties.

Emperor Akihito is the first Japanese monarch to relinquish the throne in about 200 years.

Source:  
<https://bit.ly/2C26ZTf>

Image Source:  
<https://bit.ly/2EdGewP> - Crown Prince Naruhito and Crown Princess Masako. Credit: KYODO



## Foreigners to Receive Quicker Accounts with Seven Bank

With the expected increase of foreign workers in Japan as a result of a newly enacted law, Seven Bank, a Japanese bank that has automatic teller machines in convenience stores across the country, is seeking to enable foreigners to open bank accounts as soon as they arrive.

The service, which is expected to begin in spring, will work with One Visa - a venture firm that provides online visa application services for foreigners in Japan, as well as people abroad who plan to move here.

In order to determine if a person is eligible for a bank account before they move to Japan, Seven Bank and One Visa will share personal information from visa applicants. By doing this, the usual six-month timeframe that is used

to do checks and ascertain if a foreigner is qualified for a bank account would be lessened to just several days upon arrival.

According to Masaaki Matsuhashi, a Seven Bank executive, the bank will hopefully be able to provide the necessary minimum financial services to foreigners upon their arrival.

Source:  
<https://bit.ly/2BbnjPR>

Image Source:  
<https://s.nikkei.com/2zTN4Vm>

## Walmart Partners with Rakuten to Open First E-Commerce Store in Japan

Retail giants Rakuten Inc. and Walmart Inc. have combined forces to open Walmart's first e-commerce store in Japan. This store, the Walmart Rakuten Ichiba Store, will be featured on the Rakuten Ichiba online shopping mall.

The Walmart Rakuten Ichiba Store will offer around 1,200 U.S. products from US brands that include clothing, outdoor items and kids' toys – with a plan to increase its product range in order to meet consumer needs.

Through the partnership, Walmart will fulfill orders in the U.S. and then send them by air to Japan where Rakuten will have them delivered. There is also a promise of no

surprises in shipping, duties, or taxes, as these will all be included in the final price.

“We are very excited to be working with Walmart to bring a diverse product lineup of American brands at affordable prices to Rakuten Ichiba users in Japan,” said Shunsuke Yazawa, executive officer and vice president of the marketplace business at Rakuten, Inc. “Through the opening of the Walmart Rakuten Ichiba Store, we hope to make Rakuten Ichiba an even more attractive destination for online shoppers in Japan.”

Source:  
<https://bit.ly/2SMt7Xx>





# Let's Eat

Kat Bralla (Kagawa Prefecture)

Language classes can be a hard sell. Everyone has sat through that mandatory Spanish (or whatever your forced foreign language was) class at too-early o'clock as a teenager, and endured the agonies of grammar, punctuation, and spelling. Personally, I've always enjoyed language classes, but a lot of people would prefer a different method to experience the world.

My city, Mitoyo, is very lucky to have an active exchange community. We may be a small city in the smallest prefecture on the smallest of Japan's main islands, but we know how to have some good, international experiences. Sometimes that means hosting parties for a mix of Japanese and foreign guests. Other times, it means traveling together to experience an often-overlooked area or aspect of our city. And sometimes, as in this particular case, it means holding cooking classes. I wish I could claim responsibility for creating it, but the international cooking class series has long been an annual event here.

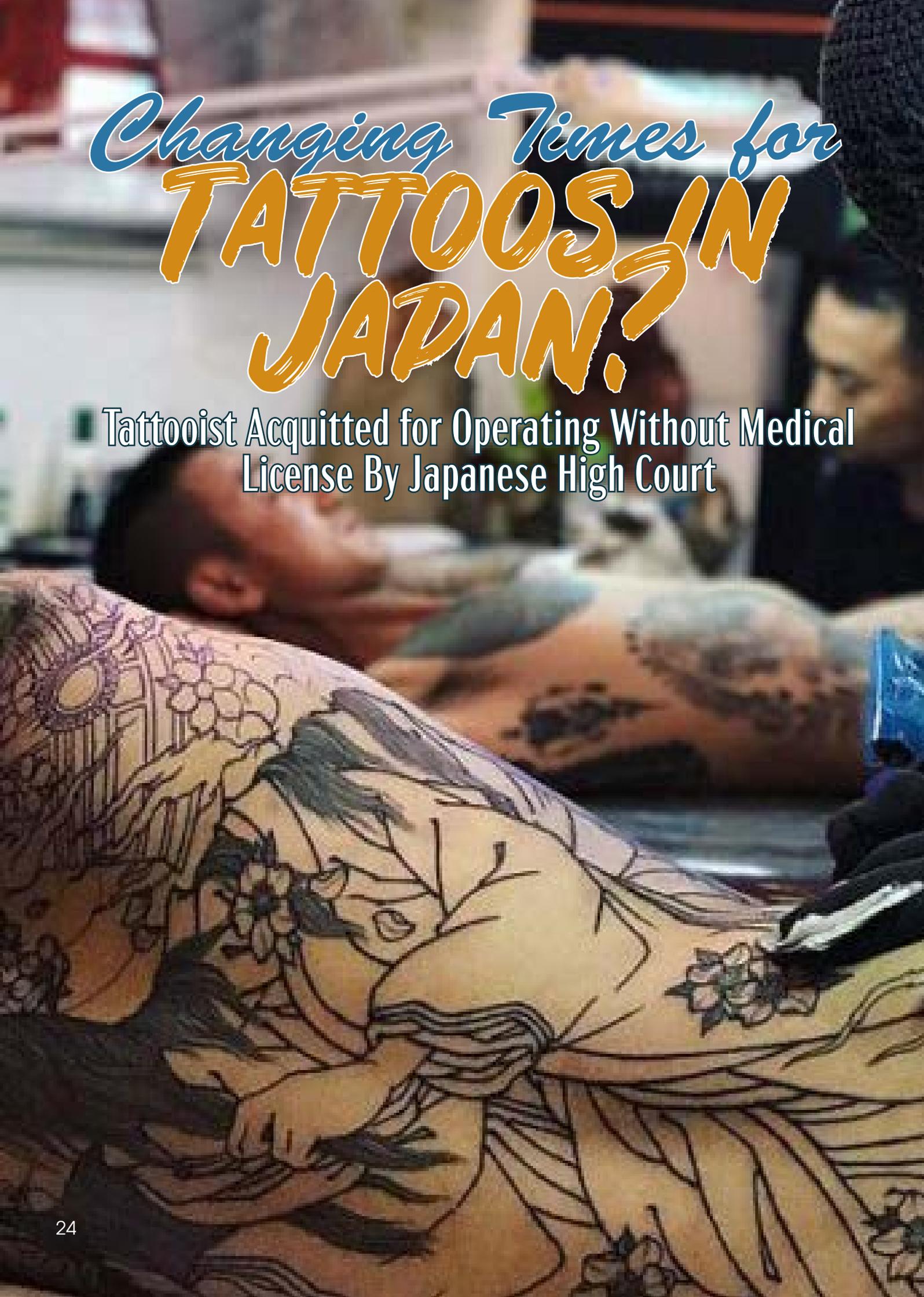
When I first came to Japan on JET, I was nervous, to say the least. Sure, I had been to Japan before, but this was miles away – literally – from anything I'd experienced before. Studying abroad may familiarize you with the culture, but it doesn't prepare you for living and working in it as an adult. For me,

Mitoyo's international events were a great bridge for getting more involved in the local community. So when I was invited to teach an American cooking class about halfway through my first year, I jumped at the chance.

As part of the class, I gave a short presentation about my background and was surprised by how much interest there was in the cultural aspect of what I discussed. Although they spoke very little English and seemed uninterested in learning the language, the people I met at the class were engaging earnestly with the foreign culture – or at least with its food. Most (if not all) of the students in the class were there to learn about the country just as much as they were there to learn about the cuisine.

This year, we're offering a wide range of exchange opportunities with five classes: Italian-Canadian, Filipino, Jamaican, South Korean, and Jewish-American. The students will have a chance to interact with these cultures in an organic, sensory way that language learning can't necessarily offer. So maybe you're not interested in studying English or French to experience a different culture. But when you say "Let's eat"? Now you're speaking my language.

*Kat Bralla was a JET in Kagawa from 2016-2018. She now works at the Mitoyo Tourism and Exchange Authority and has a crippling sushi addiction.*



# *Changing Times for* **TATTOOS IN** **JAPAN?**

**Tattooist Acquitted for Operating Without Medical License By Japanese High Court**



The art of tattooing in Japan has been blanketed in restrictions and stigmatizations for decades. This goes back to its association with the yakuza's emergence in the early 20th century, when elaborate tattoos were a sign of membership in one of the organized crime groups. Because of this, a stigma has been attached to an art form which once held a prominent place in Japan's history.

However, despite the low-key (and sometimes not so low-key) discrimination, the number of Japanese people who've been opting to get inked has been increasing over the years. So in 2001, in an attempt to curb their enthusiasm and regulate the industry, the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare looked to Article 17 of the Medical Practitioners' Act (1948) which states that "No person except a medical practitioner shall engage in medical practice."

This act, however, does not clearly state what constitutes a “medical practice,” so the ministry sought to rectify this by issuing a notice which stated, “針先に色素を付けながら、皮膚の表面に墨等の色素を入れる行為” [lit. putting pigment on a needle tip and inserting ink into the skin] constitutes a medical practice that can only be carried out by those with a medical practitioner’s license.

Still, it wasn’t until 14 years later that the authorities got involved.

In 2015, the Osaka Prefectural Police started cracking down on the tattoo industry, and two tattoo artists were arrested for violating the Medical Practitioners’ Act. Before then, the notice was primarily used by health authorities to regulate cosmetic makeup tattoo practitioners. (1)

It was during the 2015 crackdown that the studio of tattoo artist Taiki Masuda (who founded the campaign group Save Tattooing in Japan that same year) was raided by Osaka police. His tattoo equipment was confiscated and he was arrested for having tattooed three customers at the time. Masuda was subsequently fined 300,000 yen for breaching the Medical Practitioners’ Act.

However, unlike other tattoo artists who were fined, Masuda refused to pay — and instead chose to take his case to the Osaka District Court for trial because he believed to accept the fine was to tacitly accept that tattoo artists in Japan are criminals.

Masuda’s trial, which was held between April and August 2017, garnered a lot of attention because of the major implications it could’ve had on the tattooing industry. He even had support from experts in Japanese criminal law, including respected university professors who testified in his defense. Still, the outcome was not in his favor, and on September 27 he was once again found guilty of violating the Medical Practitioners’ Act and ordered to pay a fine of 150,000 yen. According to the district court, tattooists need medical knowledge and expertise because “the treatment could possibly cause a skin lesion or allergy.” (2)

Once again Masuda was opposed to giving up and chose to appeal the court’s ruling. Then, on November 14, his determination paid off when the Osaka High Court overturned the district court’s decision and acquitted Masuda for operating



Japanese #tattoo artist Taiki Masuda takes str  
stigma to court [p.dw.com/p/2camj](https://p.dw.com/p/2camj)

without a medical license, ruling that the process of tattooing is not a medical practice.

“The tattooing procedure is not relevant to medicine and it does not constitute a medical act controlled under the medical practitioners’ law,” said presiding judge Masaki Nishida during the ruling.

This unprecedented win for Masuda will likely be far-reaching in its implications on the Japanese tattooing industry. And although this does not mean that societal perceptions will improve overnight, it does mean that the art form will not die a slow death in a country where it was once revered. Tattoo artists now have the hope of being able to practice their craft without fear and subjugation.

With the 2020 Olympics fast approaching, Japanese attitudes toward tattoos are definitely going to be challenged when the country is faced with an influx of foreigners and athletes who will undoubtedly be sporting an array of ink. Will Japan still insist on turning away tattooed individuals from public baths, beaches, and water parks — or will a more pragmatic viewpoint arise?



Sources:  
(1) <https://bit.ly/2Q5gGlA>  
(2) <https://bit.ly/2zdHvAA>

Image Source:  
<https://bit.ly/2DQbH7Y>  
<https://bit.ly/2Q5gGlA>  
<https://bit.ly/2Q2lejN>

*Masuda and lawyers after court win.*

# ARTS AND CULTURE

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*We shouldn't be afraid of big and bold, it's amazing that we can feel overwhelmed and insane...but in a controlled way. So why not? (Yes, I just watched **Bohemian Rhapsody**)*

Photo: Kirsty Broderick





# Your Digital Valentine

Farrah Hasnain (Shizuoka)

As the home of one of the biggest gaming industries in the world, Japan has become a “game changer” in how we play. Over the years, new genres have been born and have continued to include all kinds of audiences, including the ones who usually go for shoujo manga. “Otome” games (乙女ゲーム), or “maiden games,” are story-driven video games aimed at a female audience. “Otome” is a genre of visual novels, but they also usually contain a dating sim element with a reverse-harem (逆ハレム) of male tropes to entice the female protagonist. By the end of the game, you’ll have one of the male characters fall in love with you.

This genre dates back to the early 90s. In 1994, the very first otome game, *Angelique*, was released for Super Famicom. Keiko Erikawa, the executive board member of Tecmo Koei, was also one of the creators of the game and the genre itself. In an interview with *Weekly Famitsu*, she talked about the challenges she experienced while producing the game, including the low number of female game developers and the lack of media targeted towards women. (1)

“Over thirty years ago, I was developing investment simulation games and combat games together with Yoichi Erikawa (Tecmo Koei Games CEO), but back then our customers were all male,” Erikawa explained. “The games were all from the male perspective. So I came up with the idea of making games for women and for a female audience.”

Otome games have recently become more accessible to Western audiences through English fan translations and official local releases starting almost 10 years ago. One of the most memorable otome games that has received worldwide recognition is “Hatoful Boyfriend” (ハートフル), a dating sim game where all the characters you encounter are pigeons. “Hatoful” is a play on the words “hato” (dove/pigeon), “hurtful,” and “heartful.”

Nowadays, otome games have a wide variety of themes, from male idol groups to actual Japanese historical figures from the Edo period, the *Shinsengumi* (though their otome game counterparts are much more *ikemen* compared to the real deal). Here are a list of popular games to get you started.

## *Hakuoki: Demon of the Fleeting Blossom*

You'll definitely brush up your knowledge of Japanese history and the Bakumatsu period through this game. In *Hakuoki*, you are a young woman searching for her father, a doctor for the Shinsengumi. Actual Shinsengumi members from history, including Toshizo Hijikata, Troop Captain Souji Okita, Hajime Saito, Heisuke Todo, Sanosuke Harada, and Shinpachi Nagakura are potential romantic partners. There is a twist, though: the Shinsengumi can turn into vampire-demons!

## *Uta no Prince-Sama*

As a student at *Saotome Gakuen*, you help your male peers break into the idol industry.

## *My Last First Kiss*

This game is produced by *Voltage*, one of the top otome app companies in Japan. They also produce games with their American subsidiary, *Voltage Entertainment USA*. In *My Last First Kiss*, you return to your hometown and reunite with your childhood friends and develop feelings for them.

## *Hustle Cat*

You play as Avery Gray, a high school graduate who gets a new job at a cat cafe... which has a twist. In the game, you can select your preferred pronouns (she/her, he/him, they/them), skin color, and hair length. There are characters of different genders who are all potential love interests for the protagonist. This game was originally a project backed by a Kickstarter; and since it has reached its goal, it has become available on Steam.

*Farrah Hasnain is a 5th year ALT teaching at a high school in Shizuoka. Her go-to otome game series is Hakuoki. Thanks to the game, she has extensive knowledge on the Shinsengumi.*

Sources:  
<https://bit.ly/2C81NfA>



A person wearing a black beanie and glasses is DJing at a club. They are holding a microphone to their mouth and pointing upwards with their right hand. The background is dark with vibrant green laser lights creating a dynamic atmosphere. The person is wearing a blue t-shirt and a black bag with a gold chain.

# ON THE AND

**My Experience a**

Hantz Ex

## THE FADE-IN

As far back as I can remember, music has been an integral part of my life. Periods of my life are demarcated by certain soundtracks – the most vivid being the hip-hop and reggae/dancehall tracks of my university days. So when I first came to Japan in 2010, I spent quite some time looking for places to unwind during the weekend. Unlike other ALTs who lived far away from cities with a passable nightlife, I was placed fairly near a medium-sized city: Kanazawa. I craved a nightlife that would provide me with the music I had grown accustomed to, leading me to spend my first year looking for clubs that would satisfy that craving. While the scene in Kanazawa had an abundance of 90s hip-hop, house, EDM, and J-Pop, there was a dearth of current mainstream hip-hop and dancehall. Following one lackluster event after another, I decided to take the plunge and learn to DJ myself.

# E I C H I I S I N I I S :

## as a DJ in Japan

il (Fukui)

### THE BASICS

If you are looking to DJ in Japan, the first step is familiarizing yourself with the equipment. Much like choosing Pokemon, there are three routes that most DJs take when starting out: vinyl, CDs, or emulation. Each have their own pros and cons.

People swear that vinyl produces a more faithful sound, and it is truer to the original art of DJing. However, it requires you to carry crates of vinyl records. You also need to prepare a set in advance, leaving you with much less room for improvising on your music selection.



Source: Wikipedia Technics SL-1200



Source: PioneerDJ.com CDJ-350

(Fun Fact: The slang phrase “on the ones and twos” comes from the Technics SL-1200 – which became the industry standard for all serious DJs worldwide.)

CDs are a more upgraded version of vinyl, with CDJ decks allowing for greater music selection. While it is not as much of a weight burden as carrying crates of vinyl albums, you still have to bring your entire music collection on CDs. Furthermore, you have to eject and replace CDs as you mix tracks.

Though it's widely criticized, the third option is by far the most popular of the three options: vinyl/cd emulation. With emulation, you can have the feel of using turntables or CDJ decks, but the selection of music is all done via your laptop. This requires you to have a moderately fast laptop that can support the processing demands of the software. Another downside of this option comes into play if you value the traditional DJ skills – because while this route lowers the bar for entry, it can also dull your technical abilities and lull you into a sense of complacency. Also, hipster DJs will never acknowledge you as a “real” DJ. So... there is that.



Source: Serato.com Serato DJ Pro



Source: PioneerDJ.com DDJ SB2

The majority of DJs in Japan use a laptop with vinyl/CD emulation, the preferred software being Serato's Scratch Live (which, as of last year, has upgraded to Serato DJ Pro). Most establishments provide the equipment – turntables, Rane SL-series audio interface hardware, two CD decks, and a mixer. The DJs are expected to bring their own laptop, headphones, CDs, and either the special vinyl records/CDs for Scratch Live or an MP3 controller. I chose the last route, picking up an MP3 controller made by Pioneer. With the DJ controller, you can bypass the need for turntables, as they are built into the controller itself. You simply hook up the controller to your laptop and then to the mixer. The downside is that you have to find a place on the DJ table to actually place this equipment, as most DJs in Japan prefer to use turntables with vinyl emulation. No matter which style you use, there is a plethora of available resources – Google-kun and Youtube-sensei are your friends.

## THE CROSSFADE

Getting your foot in the door is also not as difficult as you might imagine. After I spent time going to events and paying attention to the local DJs, they were much more comfortable initiating conversation with me. I built a network of connections through conversation and common interests. Once I was ready to try my hands, I already knew a few DJs, promoters, and owners that were willing to let me play the “warm-up” slots at their events.

When I first started, one of the most surprising realities of DJing in Japan was the financial aspect. Most of the DJs that I have encountered are hobbyists – much like myself. DJing is not their foremost means of income. In fact, to set-up a party or an event, they use their own money

to effectively rent the venue where it's to be held. Then, depending on the amount of people that attend the party, they may or may not break even. That is to say, often times they DJ for free or even at a loss. If you are not the event organizer, you can demand payment from that person, and if they feel that you have the ability to draw customers, they may oblige.

During the actual events themselves, I have found that Japanese DJs have an excellent talent for the technical aspects. For the most part, they can blend their music seamlessly. They can beat match and use the hardware with precision and efficiency. This means that the presentation is top quality. What lacks, in my opinion, is the music selection.

There is a rigidity to most Japanese DJs that I have come across. Most of them have a prepared set that they practiced before performing. While this is excellent from the technical point of view, it also means that if their set is not doing well, they will not, or often cannot, improvise. They will continue with their pre-planned set even if they watch the dance floor clear before their eyes.

On the cultural side of things, when an event is being planned, the organizer will often get all of the DJs together for a dinner meeting (because,

yes, everything in Japan comes with a meeting). It is an opportunity for everyone to meet each other and to pass around a healthy dose of “yoroshiku onegaishimasu”s. The organizers will use the dinner to present the timetables where each DJ is given their slot – anywhere from forty-five minutes to an hour. Any other relevant pre-event information is clarified. I have to admit, this does create a sense of team bonding – you all end up supporting each other. There is very little competition or desire to outperform the other DJs.

## THE FADEOUT

Having only started in Japan, I cannot compare being a DJ to anything back home. I have read horror stories about DJs back home not being paid for their set – this is not something I can say I have experienced or even heard happening in Japan. I can say that it has been an interesting journey, one that I would highly recommend anyone who has an appreciation of music to give a try.

*Hantz is from South Florida via Haiti. He has been living in Japan since 2010. Originally an ALT on JET, he has since taught English to all age groups – from elementary school to adults. When not in the classroom he enjoys listening to music, learning to play musical instruments, playing tabletop RPGs, and binge-watching movies and TV shows.*



# FEBRUARY RELEASES

Sarah White (Fukui)

## MOVIES

Feb 1

- Mary Poppins Returns (2018)
- Burning (2018)
- The Front Runner(2018)

Feb 2

- God's Own Country (2017)

Feb 8

- Aquaman (2018)
- First Man (2018)
- The Captain (2017)
- All the Devil's Men (2018)

Feb 9

- Reprisal (2018)

Feb 15

- The Favourite (2018)

Feb 22

- Alita: Battle Angel (2019)
- If Beale Street Could Talk (2018)
- The Happytime Murders (2018)
- The Guilty (2018)

## GAMES

Feb 1

- Ace Combat 7: Skies Unknown (PC)
- Animal Super Squad (Xbox One)
- Song of Memories (PS4)
- 8-Bit Hordes (PS4, Xbox One)
- Anthem free demo (PC, PS4, Xbox One)

Feb 5

- The Occupation (PC, PS4, Xbox One)
- Etrian Odyssey Nexus (3DS)
- Skorecery (PS4)
- Away: Journey to the Unexpected (PS4, Switch, Xbox One, PC)

Sources:

<https://www.imdb.com/calendar/?region=jp>

<https://www.vg247.com/2019/01/04/video-game-release-dates-2019/>

Photo: Ugur Akdemir on Unsplash



#### **Feb 6**

- 39 Days to Mars (Xbox One)
- Astroneer official launch (PC, Xbox One)
- Overkill's The Walking Dead (PS4, Xbox One)

#### **Feb 12**

- Arcade Spirits (PC)
- Evolution (PC, Android, iOS)
- Hyper Jam (PC, PS4, Xbox One)
- Trials Rising (PC, PS4, Xbox One, Switch)

#### **Feb 14**

- Degrees of Separation (PC, PS4, Xbox One, Switch)
- The Textorcist: The Story of Ray Bibbia (PC)
- Civilization 6: Gathering Storm (PC)
- Tokyo School Life (Switch)
- OlliOlli: Switch Stance (Switch)
- Resort Boss: Golf – Steam Early Access (PC)

#### **Feb 15**

- Metro: Exodus (PC, PS4, Xbox One)
- Crackdown 3 (PC, Xbox One)
- Far Cry New Dawn (PC, PS4, Xbox One)
- Jump Force (PC, PS4, Xbox One)
- Anthem EA/Origin Access trial (PC, Xbox One)

#### **Feb 22**

- Anthem (PC, PS4, Xbox One)
- Aragami: Shadow Edition (Switch)





# The Colorful World of Kansai!

An Interview





Kansai Yamamoto is a force of energy. For those who don't recognise the name, you will certainly have come across his work. He rose to international fame after designing many of David Bowie's spectacular stage costumes. His colourful and rebellious designs have constantly created a buzz, appealing to many music and fashion icons such as Lady Gaga, Elton John, Stevie Wonder and, of course, David Bowie. His ongoing enthusiasm and creativity have kept him going onward and upward, to question and create. Even now, at the age of 74, he shows no signs of slowing down.

This is not my first time meeting Kansai; I was lucky enough to meet him in 2015 for a similar interview. He certainly made an impression then, in a silver blazer and multi-coloured cowboy boots, and today is no different. Dressed in army camo pants and a colourful Princeton Uni hoodie, he looks as far from the typical salaryman image as possible. Looking like he would be snapped for a street style pic in central Tokyo, he represents the energetic, zany side of Japan. Luckily he remembers me from before, and after the usual pleasantries, we sit down to discuss the remarkable life he leads.

Kansai originally studied to be a civil engineer at high school before realising that he wasn't quite cut out for it. "I knew I was bad at math. But train design is all about calculation, you know, and I was absolutely hopeless with it. We didn't use calculators." After graduating he was tasked with building a dam in the mountains. "But I had no idea what to do, I was young and I wanted to do something more exciting." For him, that 'something' was fashion design, and in 1967 his designs won the Soen Magazine Prize, associated with the esteemed Bunka Fashion Institute. Other recipients

of the prize have been notable designers Yohji Yamamoto and Kenzo Takada.

Before receiving this award, his life had not been easy. "I was earning 10,000 yen a month, and after rent what's left was about 6,000 yen. And you divide that 6,000 yen by 30 days, which gives you 200 yen per day. To eat three meals a day, 200 yen gets you about 70 yen each... that was the kind of life I was living. And at the third year I won that award. So some people say that, Mr. Kansai you are a

rich man and don't seem like someone who has to work hard, but the truth is I was very poor, and in order to make a future for myself I gave everything I had at the time to win that award."

After the Soen Prize, Kansai's career in design really took off. In 1971, not only did he open his own company, Yamamoto Kansai Company, Ltd., but he became the first Japanese designer to showcase his designs at London Fashion Week. His designs wowed Western audiences with their colour and vibrancy, but it wasn't just his designs. Kansai himself became a man of great interest and was featured by many major fashion and lifestyle magazines such as LIFE Magazine and Vogue UK, who called him 'Amazing Mr. Kansai

Yamamoto.' Perhaps it was his distinctiveness as the first Japanese designer showcasing in the UK, but more than that it was his energy, his avant-garde way of thinking, that attracted people to him.

I ask him about his time spent living in London; just as we have faced our own difficulties and culture shock here, what was it like for him? Along with being stared at in the street by people (haven't many of us felt that here in Japan?), he recounts a specific culture shock of his own. "I rented a flat

"...but the truth is I was very poor, and in order to make a future for myself I gave everything I had at the time to win that award."

in the UK. And the way you take baths is different between Japan and UK. In the UK, you are not supposed to get water on the outside of the bathtub, and you finish everything on the inside, like soap and bubbles. But in Japan, you can get out of the bath, pour water on you... it's completely different." I recall from our last meeting that he told me he had a girlfriend back in the UK. "Yes, I remember that British girl. Well, she suggested we go to bathe together, and as I've said before it was all dirty, and she went into the dirty bath first, and I went in later. In Japan there is no such custom. Men always go into the clean (bath water), and we don't really bathe with dirty bath water. So that's something I remember very vividly." He is not one to shy away from such personal stories.

The acclaim that had come from his debut in London would lead to a fateful meeting in New York in 1973. At this time, David Bowie was a rising star. He had brought to life his persona of Ziggy Stardust and was intent on reaching out to the world. Kansai received a call from Bowie's producer telling him to come straight out to New York to have a meeting. The first time Kansai saw David Bowie, Bowie was descending from a glitter ball onto the stage at Radio Music City Hall. Kansai, with all his energy and love of the theatrical, felt a connection with this alien man in front of him.

I ask him if he knew, at that time, just how big David Bowie and his own designs were going to become. "I couldn't have imagined that he would become such an international star afterward, and given that time period, I didn't understand if he was male or female, but it didn't matter, our purpose was the same. He wanted to expand his business from the UK to New York and to the world, and I wanted to expand from Japan to the world. We both had the same goal, but it was quite difficult to understand each other because there was a fundamental difference in our understandings of aesthetics. However, what I really understood at that time was that he had a very strong personality." Kansai believes that in our lives we come to meet so many people, but we only truly connect with so few of them. For him, David Bowie was one of those people. Together, with Bowie's musical gifts and showmanship and

Kansai's designs, they created something the world will never forget.

During his designing, the one thing that became important to Kansai was showcasing his "Japaneseness," his love for his country and culture. "When we (Japanese nationals) are in Japan, we don't think about it because everyone around us is Japanese. But when we go abroad, we have to reveal who we are, we are Japanese." He infused his designs with the culture, colour and prints, taking inspiration from 'kabuki' and 'basara' (not the manga but rather a fashion style characterized for being loud and colourful) from the Azuchi-Momoyama Period (1568-1600). He adapted the colour-changing costumes that characterise kabuki performance for his shows in London, creating less of a runway and more of an event, the likes of which the people there had never seen. There are

many designers and lovers of Japanese street style that have Kansai to thank for the bold and colourful looks we have seen and still see today.

Kansai has been involved in a great many projects. His love of design spreads beyond the fashion runway. His projects have been numerous and varied, and they are often aimed at sharing Japanese culture with the world. From 2003, he was a member of a government tourism panel called *Kanko Rikkoku Kondankai* (Tourism Driven Nation). This panel was created to help encourage inbound tourism to Japan. As a part of this group, Kansai

designed the Keisei Skyliner from Narita Airport to Ueno. His goal was to create a design not solely for tourists but for families as well. For parents who have travelled all the way to Japan with young children, the toilets are designed to have somewhere to rest the child whilst the parent freshens up. Such design features earned the completed Skyliner two design awards. He has also been working on creating many event showcases, taking his designs onto the stage to promote Japanese culture around Russia and a number of Asian countries.

I ask him how it felt to move away from fashion to these events. "I never stopped doing fashion; fashion is included in everything I do. I didn't stop. It doesn't matter that I quit doing runway." Kansai fuses fashion and performance together for these events, and the colour and boldness of them is wonderful

"But when we  
go abroad,  
we have to  
reveal who we  
are, we are  
Japanese."

to watch. The events held here in Japan are called 'The Japan Genki Project Super Energy!!' Through these projects he wants to energize people's minds and encourage an awareness of Japanese culture. The event includes traditional Japanese art forms, such as taiko drumming, shamisen performances, and even karate. He invigorates them with his bold new designs and a sprinkling of Western influence. His performances pull in audiences of around 10,000 people who come to be captivated and entertained by this celebration of music, culture, performance and fashion.

So what is Kansai working on in the near future? He will be holding another 'Super Energy' event in Tokyo in June and has kindly extended an invite to CONNECT Magazine to come and watch. Of course, anyone can buy tickets, and I warmly encourage those of you with an interest in the fashion and culture of Japan to attend. On top of this, Kansai will also be taking on a tremendous task this March - travelling to the North Pole. When I ask him why he would undertake such a difficult and possibly dangerous task, his answer blows me

away. "Because there is no colour. Only white. That's why I am going. I mean, there is no colour. I would like to know what would happen to my character to see only white. Can you imagine! It will be -40°C!"

This thought alone shows you the true depths of Kansai's character. He will then be 75 years old and travelling to one of the most uninhabitable places in the world just to see how it makes him feel; he's a man who surrounds himself with colour heading to a place where there is none. He continues to be remarkable, and I wait with anticipation to see more of what he will do in the future. Kansai Yamamoto is nowhere close to stopping.

This article would not have been possible without the help of the following Translators:  
Aisha Sato, Student, translator during the interview.  
Dylan Wang, JET CIR 2nd year, post interview translator.  
Dylan Jekels, JET ALT 1st year, translating the entire article to Japanese for review.

I want to give my thanks to my friends for volunteering their skills and time to help me.



# The Things We Do For Art

Tayla-Paige van Sittert (Kumamoto)

If the right side of your brain twitches more than the left and your eyes dart wildly when you see anything remotely aesthetic, or if death feels close when you have not made something in a while, then you, my friend, are an artist. It's increasingly difficult these days to find the time to do the things we truly enjoy. It can also be intimidating and/or complicated when we want to create, but there's either so much inspiration out there that we can't choose what to do, or not enough. But we've gotta find a way; we just simply must, or the world will cease to make sense. Here are two artists in our midst doing just that.



# Jonnosam





# (Gumma)

Hey. My name is Jonosan (Jonathan). I'm a 26-year-old South African ALT in Gunma Prefecture. I have a background in fashion design and illustration. I'm currently working on my master's degree within the realm of sustainable, zero-waste fashion. Working at an academic senior high school while simultaneously writing a thesis and attempting to learn Japanese can get (beeping) overwhelming. How do I take the edge off? I down a glass of wine (or literally any alcohol), and I start sketching. My style of illustration is quick and fast-paced. I spend roughly around 10 minutes or less per illustration purely because I hate thinking during the process. To me, art and illustration need not be perfect and do not need to make sense. They are nonsensical, just like the altered reality that some of us spawn ourselves into. Beauty is skewed; reality is monotonous, so just be you.

Purge yourself and take a look at a series of my ten-minute sketches.

Check out more on Instagram: [@jjj\\_jonosan](https://www.instagram.com/jjj_jonosan)



*Communism, Hypnotism & The Beatles*

# Lizzie (Kagoshima) Armour

I'm Lizzie, a first year JET based in Kagoshima. I'm from Scotland and was a jeweller and printmaker back home. Whilst I figure out life in Japan and where to find craft clubs/an art community, I've taken up drawing. I love the outdoors, and a trip to Nara gave me so much material to draw. Japan is so full of inspiration everywhere.

You can see my jewellery on Facebook (Elizabeth Armour Jewellery), Instagram (@elizabetharmourjewellery), or my website ([www.elizabetharmour.com](http://www.elizabetharmour.com)).



# LIFESTYLE



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*"A lot of people like the snow. I find it to be an unnecessary freezing of water." -Carl Reiner*

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### Amy Lee

*"Rule 1: Find a place you trust and then try trusting it for awhile." Sister Corita Kent*

Photo: Tayler Skultety



Rachel Levy (Ishikawa)

# Living in Japan with Chronic Illness





Making the move to Japan can be scary for many people. There is a lot of uncertainty. “Will I adjust to this new lifestyle?” “Will I have a support system?” “Can I get the products and medications I need?” “Will I be able to express myself and my needs if there is a medical emergency?” These concerns apply to everyone, but they are amplified when you have a chronic medical condition. Unfortunately, there is no easy answer to these questions. If you are part of the JET Programme, you have undoubtedly heard the wonderfully unhelpful phrase, “*every situation is different,*” but for better or worse, that really is the case for most everything. However, arming yourself with information is arguably the best way to be prepared to face these challenges. Living and working in Japan with a chronic condition may have its challenges, but it isn’t impossible. I hope that by sharing my own experiences, it might help others in similar situations be better prepared, and hopefully avoid some of the pitfalls I encountered.

As soon as I began to fill out my application forms, my worries started to accumulate. I live with Fibromyalgia, Rheumatoid Arthritis, and Polycystic Ovary Syndrome, as well as struggling with anxiety and depression, and I worried that these conditions would disqualify me from participating in the JET Programme. I wasn’t sure how much I should disclose beforehand, but I was also worried that failing to mention my conditions could cause backlash down the line. With some hesitation, I decided to be upfront with my situation, and I recommend others do the same. Although it may be uncomfortable to discuss, chronic conditions are not automatically a disqualifier, and not being upfront with the information can not only cause added tension with your contracting organization, but can be potentially dangerous if an emergency should arise.

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Photo: Vladislav Muslakov on Unsplash



**“Living and working in Japan with a chronic condition may have its challenges, but it isn’t impossible”**

Luckily, my supervisor at my contracting organization is incredibly helpful and understanding. She was aware of my situation before I arrived in Japan, and is exceedingly helpful when I have any problems related to my conditions. Not everyone may be as lucky to have someone so understanding, but being upfront with any and all issues will help avoid conflict.

The most important thing is to know your limitations and to discuss them beforehand. In my experience, most people in Japan are understanding if you tell them you have a condition that prevents you from being able to do certain tasks, though it is better to tell them in advance, before the situation occurs. For example, if you work at a school and receive *kyuushoku* (school lunch) but have dietary restrictions, you should tell your supervisor before starting the job. Waiting until meal time on the first day gives the school little time to prepare and accommodate your needs, and makes situations unnecessarily difficult for others involved. It is also more likely that you will receive pushback from staff who think you are just being difficult, or simply prefer not to eat a certain menu item instead of having a legitimate reason to avoid it. This is true in other areas as well. If you work with young kids, you may not always be able to keep up with their energy, but if everyone involved knows this before it's a problem, they will be understanding when you just can't play on the floor with the kids one day. Even if you are like me and have a supervisor who is understanding and helpful, doing prep-work on your end will make things easier and smoother when problems do arise and will help it seem that you are truly doing your best. Although it often seems to be stereotyped that Japanese people

expect perfection all the time, it has been my experience that what they really expect is for you to put in your best effort. If you talk to them about potential issues beforehand, when those issues show up they will know it is not within your control and will be understanding of that.

It's also possible that language and cultural differences may prevent people from understanding your exact requirements, so be prepared to give some examples. In my experiences, the average person in Japan seems to know less about basic medical terminology than what I'm used to in America. This could be due to my placement in the countryside, or could be a difference in culture. Either way, I recommend learning some terms to help you describe your conditions and requirements and not just names of disease. Sometimes, even if you know the Japanese condition names, you will have to break things down in very simple explanations. For example, if you look up the Japanese name for Celiac disease, unless you are speaking to a doctor, in my experience it's very likely that the person you are speaking with will have no idea what that implies. Even stating that you can't eat gluten may not make much sense to them. It is better to provide examples and say "I can't eat things with wheat, like bread or spaghetti, but I can have rice noodles" in order to have your needs met.

If you require medication or certain medical devices for daily living, make sure to research in advance what options will be available to you in Japan. Some medications that are readily available in the United States may not be available in Japan, and may even be illegal to have with

you. When I was preparing to move, I made sure to check that my medications were legal to take with me, but failed to make sure that I could find a prescriber once I arrived. I falsely assumed that because I could take it with me from America that I would also be able to find it once arriving in Japan. This caused unnecessary difficulties for me, as I was almost out of my antidepressants I had brought with me when I discovered that the medication I was prescribed back home was not available in Japan. If I had done the appropriate research beforehand, I could have worked with my doctor to find an alternative before I left home, but instead, I was left scrambling to find a doctor and had to switch to a new medication faster than is recommended. Not only is this a hassle, but it can also cause serious side-effects and potentially disrupt your work performance. Luckily, I did not have a difficult time with the adjustment, but it could have been a disaster. Don't make the same mistake!

**“It may seem scary, but if my experiences are any indication, it won't prevent you from having a wonderful and successful experience in Japan.”**

This may be especially important if you take medications to manage pain. Unfortunately, pain medications in Japan are much weaker than what we are used to in the United States and other countries. Opiates are illegal, and even if you have a legal doctor's prescription back home, you can be jailed for possession of narcotics if you take them with you. In order to have a smooth transition, I highly recommend working with your doctor prior to arriving in Japan to find a legal alternative. It may not help as much as what you are used to, but the good news is, once you arrive in Japan, you may be able to find alternatives not readily available in your home country. The other benefit to the Japanese healthcare system compared to America is that insurance isn't an issue. Some medications which may have worked for me in America were not covered by my insurance or were too expensive for me to take regularly. I was amazed at how inexpensive, easy and convenient visiting a doctor for medication is in Japan and was shocked my first visit how readily my doctor

was willing to prescribe medications for any and all my symptoms instead of just prioritizing the worst. My supervisor accompanied me to my first appointment and warned me that I may have an expensive bill. Although it's true the first visit was more expensive than subsequent ones, I was shocked when my bill for the appointment was only about \$30 USD. I was prescribed 5 different medications. The bill for my medications was another \$30 for a month supply of each, bringing my grand total for the day to \$60 USD. Even with insurance, I was used to paying almost \$500 for my 3 prescriptions back home, so this was a very pleasant surprise! Although the differences in medications have taken some getting use to, the savings alone makes seeking and receiving medical treatment in Japan considerably better than my experiences in America.

Probably the most difficult thing for me about living in Japan with chronic medical conditions is transportation. If pain and mobility aren't part of your issues, or if you are living in a highly populated city with great public transport, this may not be a great concern for you. However, living with multiple chronic pain conditions in a small country town can be difficult. Before I came to Japan, I assumed that I would be able to rely on public transportation without much issue, however, this has not been the case. My town does have a train station, but trains run only about once an hour, meaning even small trips have to be carefully planned out and well timed to work out efficiently. This can be difficult if a sudden flare-up occurs unexpectedly. Additionally, my conditions and lack of efficient and reliable transportation has caused me to miss out on many opportunities that my fellow ALTs can participate in, simply because I don't have the same stamina and peace of mind that my body will be able to handle it. If you are going to be living somewhere removed from the big city, I highly recommend looking into getting a car and all that it requires before you arrive. Even if you don't end up using it daily, having a car as a backup on bad days will be invaluable.

Overall, living in Japan with a chronic illness is certainly different than living in America, but it's quite doable. In some ways, I'd even say it has been easier in Japan than in America. Make sure you do ample research and preparation in advance and have a support network in place and a plan of action in case of emergency or if your conditions worsen. It may seem scary, but if my experiences are any indication, it won't prevent you from having a wonderful and successful experience in Japan.

# Food, Drinks & More



## for Your Trip to Taiwan

Julianne Hackman (Kyoto Prefecture)

Foodies all over the world, are you deciding where to eat next? Taiwan has a huge selection of food and drinks for people of all types. From its traditional delicacies to the night market food fiesta and everything in between, Taiwan is every food lover's dream. The best part about Taiwan's food and drinks is that they are just as affordable as they are delicious.

You have not experienced Taiwan until you go to one of its numerous, renowned night markets filled with freshly prepared food and drinks. Taipei alone has multiple night markets, such as the Shilin night market, which is the biggest; the ShiDa night market; and the Tamsui night market, to name just a few. Are you a morning person? Don't worry! Many markets open early during the day, such as the Dongmen market, Zhongshan market, and Dalong market. Want to experience markets outside of Taipei? Check out Jiufen. This mountain town draws heavy comparison with the famous Studio Ghibli film *Spirited Away*. Jiufen is basically one huge market where you can fill your stomach. In all these markets, food, drinks, clothes, and souvenirs can all be purchased cheaply.



The Taiwanese definitely take pride in their food and you can taste it. Skewers, also known as *chuan* (pronounced chew-on), are a “can’t-miss” in Taiwan — especially their sweet and succulent sausages. You can really smother them in raw garlic for an extra kick. There are beef chuan, pork chuan, rice chuan, sausages, and many other chuan that you can “chew on”! If you don’t like skewers, there are hundreds of other options. You can enjoy some savory Chinese pancakes plain or with meat or eggs.

Anyone traveling to Taiwan must try the local speciality, dumplings stuffed with, well, anything you like. Taiwan is famous for its shrimp dumplings, vegetable dumplings, and more. *Xiao long bao*, or soup dumplings, are the local speciality and a favorite amongst the Taiwanese. Beyond the filling, dumplings here can be prepared in a variety of ways. Whether breaded, fried, steamed, or boiled, there’s bound to be a type of Taiwanese dumpling to suit any taste.



Feeling kind of soupy? You can make your own soup by picking out various vegetables, meats, and fish cakes at stalls from these markets. If you take some to go, you can eat the soup and its contents from a plastic bag while walking around the market. It was weird to me, but it was still worth it for the experience. If you don't want to make your own soup, Taiwan is just the place for you, my lazy friend! Another local speciality of Taiwan is beef noodle soup. The meat is always juicy, and the noodle is packed with flavor from the broth. As a word of warning, you may have some work to do if you order the meat with bones or tendons on it like I did. Nevertheless, beef noodle soup is one of the most loved dishes amongst Taiwanese and tourists alike.

If you're heading to Taiwan in the winter, why not try hot pot? This is a communal style casserole where everyone cooks the ingredients in the selected soup base and allows the meat or vegetables to soak up the flavor. What's nice about this is that you can choose the broth and customize your own dipping sauces. Although hot pot is better known in Mainland China and may be overlooked, do not miss the opportunity to try the Taiwanese version, huo-guo, which I truly enjoyed.

Not tempted by any of these options? Well Taiwan gives you so many more choices; you can eat Taiwanese popcorn chicken, fresh exotic fruits, duck meat or even duck's blood (my personal favorite), stinky tofu, and more. The options are truly unlimited!

Whatever you decide to eat, you'll be needing a drink to wash it down. Taiwan is famously known for inventing bubble tea. I had several types of bubble tea over my trip. My favorite was the dong gua cha which in English translates to winter melon tea. I have only ever heard of it in Taiwan. To ensure you order the famous tapioca pearls in your drink, make sure to ask for zhen zhu; otherwise your bubble tea will just be basically a milky smoothie.

Not into sweet things? Taiwan's got you covered with tons of selections of tea from rose, green, jasmine, pu'er, and the island's specialty, oolong. There are several famous tea places in Taiwan such as the Maokong Tea Village in the mountainous outskirts of Taipei. Many tea shops will offer you an opportunity to partake in a traditional Chinese tea ceremony. However, you don't have to go out of your way to find a fancy tea place in Taiwan — I simply went to order jasmine green tea at a tea shop in a mall, and to my surprise they performed the whole traditional tea ceremony with a modern twist right in front of me. Many times you don't know what you are going to find, so you just have to explore!

Although Taiwan is not known for coffee, Taipei has the highest Starbucks in the world located in Taipei 101. To get into Taipei 101 Starbucks, you must call and reserve at least a day in advance, and your stay at the cafe will be limited to 90 minutes. Much to our dismay, reservations during our

stay were being taken even farther in advance due to the holiday season, so be sure to plan your reservations accordingly. Nonetheless, there are so many other wonderful Starbucks branches and cafes in Taipei boasting great views.

Taiwan isn't just for food-lovers. It's also great as a travel destination for people who are looking for a new adventure. Taiwan has a rich history full of diverse intercultural contact. Exploring Taiwan, you can witness how many different countries influenced it and shaped it into an island that diverges from mainland China. Between night market visits and bubble tea stopovers, fill your itinerary with the National Palace museum, Chiang Kai-Shek memorial, Taipei Contemporary Art Museum, Taipei 101 Tower, Elephant Mountain, Tamsui coast, and everywhere in between. So while you're filling up your stomach, enjoy the wonderful experience of exploring Taiwan.





# Monkeying Around in Hell Valley

Carolyn Wilhelm (Niigata Prefecture)

On a crisp early winter day, we set out towards Jigokudani Monkey Park. The beautiful Jigokudani Valley lead the way. Its steep cliffs and steaming hot springs inspired the name “Hell Valley,” so, naturally, we gleefully walked deeper and deeper into “hell” with the promise of monkeys.



Basically, don't make the monkeys feel threatened; they're not afraid to fight. Of course, after seeing these signs, I was very intimidated by these fluffy creatures. They're cute, but they will cut you.

So holding my breath, I walked into the monkey park. You know that aggressive urge you get when you see something too cute? It's very troublesome when you know you would lose a fight to the cute thing.

Suddenly four monkeys appeared on the side of the road, their brown fluffy fur camouflaging them into the brown forest. Some of us had already walked past them before we noticed that the fluffy things weren't a kind of strange Japanese plant but living macaque monkeys watching us go by. We eagerly took pictures of them before continuing on with high hopes of seeing more.

The welcome center at the monkey park has signs about how to behave when around the monkeys. They warned that the monkeys could become aggressive if we approach them too quickly, look directly into their eyes, try to feed them, or stand with our arms outstretched trying to get a picture.



But enough about the fear; the monkeys are really amazing.

I was surprised by how many monkeys there were! Even though it is a monkey park, I have never seen so many monkeys in one location before. They easily numbered in the hundreds. They leapt through the hillside, gracefully ran after another, and shook the trees with their bouncing. They definitely had a sense of humor and no fear of heights.

My favorite monkey at the park was a baby that realized one rock was tilted like a seesaw. He started jumping and rocking it back and forth. An older monkey must have been too tired to handle the young monkey's excitement because she came over and shooed him away from the rock. Naturally, however, as children do, he was right back at it once the older monkey turned away.



The younger monkeys were definitely the most fun to watch — perhaps because they were less likely to win a fight. We found one group of four young monkeys in a cluster of trees. They had learned that the branches could bend, so they started a game of jumping on the branches, trying to knock each other off their respective branches. When they fell, they tumbled onto the branches below and rolled to the bottom. Then they would climb back up and start again!

The only unfortunate part of our trip was that the weather was slightly too warm for the monkeys to enter their onsen. A few were sitting in the onsen, but when they approached the hot spring they mostly just sat around the edge, occasionally sticking their faces in to drink water. However, those of us who braved the cold the next morning after it snowed got to see the Japanese macaques in their famous pose — settled comfortably in the hot spring with their hands clasped over the edge.

Personally, my favorite monkey wasn't found in the monkey park. While walking through the town of Yamanouchi tasting some of the local sake and taking in the beautiful valley, our group suddenly noticed a monkey perched on top of someone's house eating a persimmon. Monkeys are completely foreign to me, having grown up in central US, so to see one so casually sitting on top of someone's house was surprising. He looked as natural as a bird up there! However, this monkey had attitude. Aware of the group of humans suddenly ogling him and taking his picture, he started to get annoyed. Wanting to be left in peace with his persimmon, he took the seeds he had been collecting and hurled them at us. Lucky for us, monkeys aren't going to be in Major League Baseball anytime soon, but we got his message. We left to continue exploring



and looking out for other monkeys around town.

Traveling with AJET is always a bit of a risk, even more so when you travel with an AJET group filled with people who aren't from your prefecture. You never know if you will get along with the other people or if the trip will live up to your expectations. However, this AJET trip brought together some great ALTs, and I'm grateful that I got to share this experience with such funny and intelligent people.

We had fun monkeying around that weekend.

To learn more and watch the monkey onsen livestream, you can visit the [Jigokudani website](#).

*Carolyn Wilhelm is a first year JET from the US. Her hobbies are watching movies, getting lost, meeting new people, and appreciating the amazing views the world has to offer. She tends to do odd things like study French for eight years then move to Japan. Her main goal in life is to eat her way around the world.*

Images by:  
Steven Hoff

# *Confessions* of an **Emotional** **Cat Lady**

Managing  
Mental Health  
in the Inaka

Mandy Brixey (Gunma ALT 2016-current)





Hello, everyone! The cold winter months are here and that means SAD times can set in, and I don't just mean your lovely faces. I mean Seasonal Affective Disorder — not limited to, but most common in the winter months, where you hunker down in your heat-filled room, never to leave and face the cold, cruel world again (or at least until Monday). The threats to one's mental health are strongest during this time, I feel, especially for those who have found themselves in the *inaka*, where they may or may not be the sole ALT soldier, or one of few.

The glorious day arrives when you finally get your placement. You imagine a bustling city like Tokyo, or a placement swarming with all the traditional aspects of Kyoto, but when you look up your town and discover that it's the complete opposite. You continue with your positive outlook, arriving in your town and meeting all of the inhabitants. A day, a few weeks, or maybe a month goes by before cold isolation sets in. This is where you start to feel the toll on your mental health.

As a first year JET in 2016, I came here with my own set of problems. I had a medical emergency right before coming, which led to my therapist assigning my cat as an ESA, or an emotional support animal. There were odds and ends that basically ended with me not being able to amend my medical form, thus having to tell my Board of Education everything by hastily written email. It was agreed that upon arriving here, I would be reunited with my ESA within a year, but during that time, I would have to maintain my mental health in other ways. All of this while living in the town of Shimonita; total population: 7,000, ALT population: me.

Yes, Gunma JETs, I was probably the one you

saw at every JET conference that was either telling everyone the story I just told you, or crying in a corner surrounded by a few concerned, very kind individuals. I haven't actually heard this in person, but I'm told I'm known in the Gunma JET community as "the cat lady." I'm the one that was the prime example of why "JET doesn't allow pets," and was even given the stigma of "if you have that much of a mental health issue that you need your cat, you shouldn't come on the JET Program."

**...just because one has a mental health issue, or even develops one, does not mean you do not belong in the JET world.**

Let me just tell you this: while all of these things are true, and very good advice for most, just because one has a mental health issue, or even develops one, does not mean you do not belong in the JET world. Mental health issues are not limited to just the inaka, as they can happen anywhere, but they can and are made worse simply by isolation. In my town of Shimonita, I was the only ALT at the time. Shimonita is not as small as other areas of Gunma, such as Nanmoku, so my situation was in no way entirely unique. But the sudden stress of having to entrust my cat to (more) concerned and kind individuals, while still having to deal with my own

issues alone (as it certainly felt that way), was definitely a weight that could be considered too heavy for one person.

Everyone's advice is usually the same, inaka or not. Go out, meet people, start a club, etc. Feelings of loneliness are always normal when arriving in a new place; they show that you are adapting to your surroundings. However, there are some people who are just not social beings, who do not thrive from lots of social interaction, and who need other ways of combating their mental health issues. I was one of those people. I made a lot of mistakes my first year, and even my second. I focused on the negatives, and unfortunately most who encountered me probably remember me complaining, or having a negative outlook on something. Not a fun person to have a conversation with, right? I was one of those people who was just very lonely inside, looking for a way to vent their frustrations amidst a bunch of strangers in an otherwise isolated environment. Those situations, I found, didn't really benefit me.

What did benefit me, however, were things like journaling, talking to friends back home, and really just getting in touch with myself as a person. These seemed like trivial things, that didn't really seem to matter in the big picture, but they helped me through the hard times. Depression can hit hard, especially during the winter months. Even so, I always try to think of things that make me happy, like warm mugs of cocoa, good movies, and a warm, toasty *kotatsu*. Don't ever give up hope. Isolation can seem daunting and even eternal, but I promise you it isn't.

Another thing to consider, is that every situation is different. Yes, everyone hates this phrase, but it really is true. When I first came to my inaka

town, I thought I was the only one in isolation. I was so, so wrong. There were many other people besides me, and some of them lived not even an hour away from me. Everyone's situation is different, and your situation is not the only bad one, no matter how much it might feel that way. Perspective really makes a difference. Try to find a silver lining in a negative situation. If you're really depressed with deeper thoughts that can't be penetrated by positive fluffy ones,

**As horrible as it was, and it was very challenging, I can honestly say that I made me much stronger as a person.**

then please do seek help. JET also have a variety of mental health services available that I have personally found very helpful.

I decided, after coming out of the very dark, very scary time that was my first year as a JET, that I would tell my story to anyone I could, to help them through any mental health issues they might be facing. As horrible as it was, and it was very challenging, I can honestly say that I made me much stronger as a person. Yes, I brought my cat to Japan. Yes, it was for mental health reasons. Has it helped me? Since I got him back, yes, immensely. But it was the year without him that I really grew as a person and

learned other ways to manage my own issues. The best thing you can do for yourself is force yourself up every morning. Take risks. Go to that one bakery you pass everyday on the way home. You never know what the day might hold in store for you. Many a time I woke up thinking it would be like any other day, but I ended up meeting someone who changed my life, or saw a student's face light up, or just experienced something that moved me in a way that forced me to think about something other than my own dark situation.

Every situation is different, every story is different, and every day is a new chapter in our book of life. So while you're hunkered down in your heat-filled heaven, eating your *mikan* and watching your Youtube videos, just remember that everyone gets down sometimes, but there are ways out if it gets too deep and dark. If anyone ever needs a hand, or an ear that will listen, I, as well as the entire Facebook community of JETs are here to help light your way forward. I am the unofficial "cat lady" in the inaka, and I hope everyone, either in the inaka or not, finds healthy ways to manage their mental health this winter. No matter where we come from or what our circumstances are, we are all very important people! Your life is important, and our time on JET is a very special time in our lives! Kitty is snoring on my lap as I finish writing this, reminding me that all that I went through was more than worth it! It does get better! There is a light at the end of the tunnel and there is always help. I am living proof that people who come here, or develop mental health issues while here, can and do thrive. We can do this! I am cheering for all of you who are struggling or who have struggled. You are not alone; there is always help. Good luck to all of you, and feel free to reach out to me if anyone needs an ear! Kitty sends his purrs.

# COMMUNITY



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*"I was pleasantly surprised when I heard Christmas music playing in my local supermarket." - An alternative version of myself.*

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*"Hard work beats talent when talent doesn't work hard." Tim Notke*

Photo: Tayler Skultety





# BEING QUEER IN THE INAKA

*with Beacon Takasaki*

Bonnie Fisher (Gunma)

The other night, I put on my puffiest coat and braved the cold to take the bus down from my semi-rurally located apartment into the heart of the small city I call home. A month before, a friend had excitedly invited me to the kick-off party for a newly created organization intended to support the LGBTQ community in our area. We live in Takasaki, a city of around 300,000 people; the largest in Gunma prefecture. With its proximity to Tokyo, its bullet train platforms, and its central location it serves as a hub for the rest of Gunma prefecture and also as a connection between Tokyo and popular resort and ski destinations like Kusatsu, Karuizawa, and Gala Yuzawa. Gunma is a prefecture known for its abundant hot springs and beautiful nature, but also unflatteringly referred to as a no man's land by many Japanese and seen as deeply rural in spite of being within 45 minutes of the nation's capital by bullet train. As a Gunma native, my friend, and the mastermind of this new group, Kai Sekiguchi cites the spark for the creation of Beacon Takasaki as such: people should not feel they have to go to Tokyo to find community when we have it right here in Gunma.

The LGBTQQuestion event was held in a fairly modern and spacious bar right near the station and next door to a popular hangout spot for local JETs and other foreign residents. After checking in and paying at the front door, each guest was asked to sign into the guestbook and prepare a nametag. Guests were asked to share more about how they identify, if comfortable, by choosing from amongst several colors (purple, orange, green, blue, etc.) that represented each of the letters within the LGBTQ acronym. "S" (pink) for straight was also included. A small handout at the front explained, "it



is unfortunately still rare in Japan to meet openly LGBTQ people, so we are putting together this event (hopefully the first of many) to meet each other and share our own experiences and get to know each other." The room was packed with Japanese people and foreign folks alike bearing name tags with various colors and letters. Smiling people across the room were making their way from small social group to small social group showcasing their name tags as a way of introduction—hands were shaken, hugs were shared, and names exchanged. As I made my way to the back of the room, I saw a group of friends and strangers gathered around Kai. I had been met by a slightly nervous and busy-looking Kai minutes before

at the entrance, but the convivial atmosphere seemed to have steered Kai's spirits as he prepared to make a small introductory speech to the crowd.

The LGBTQQuestion event was a kind of meet-and-greet and kick-off party for the Beacon Takasaki group created by Kai. Within the introductory speech Kai eloquently expounded upon a few painful experiences growing up queer in rural Japan; feeling different, facing discrimination, feeling left out. However, Kai juxtaposed a message of hope with these painful memories. By starting this group, Kai intends to provide a space for the LGBTQ community and allies that is closer to home—for Gunma residents

and also other nearby areas. Moreover, Kai expressed a desire to not only create a welcoming environment where people can meet and connect, but also to help people raise consciousness, raise money for worthy causes, and participate in activism. After a moving and passionate explanation in both English and Japanese, Kai invited everyone to relax and get to know each other. I took this chance to congratulate Kai on how spectacularly the event came together and also to express my curiosity about the future of Beacon Takasaki.

If you follow the news regarding the LGBTQ community in Japan you may already know that several cities and municipalities around Japan have recently started to issue “partnership certificates.” (1) Additionally, in recent months

Tokyo has adopted an ordinance banning discrimination against the LGBT community ahead of the 2020 Olympics (2). With these issues in mind, Kai and I struck up a deep conversation about some of the concerns that immediately face LGBTQ residents of Gunma and perhaps even rural Japan at large. As a foreigner, I think it is incredibly important for me to listen and follow activists who are native to Japan so that I can learn more, so I found myself particularly drawn to the activism component of Beacon Takasaki and hoped to discuss further.

When asked about Beacon Takasaki’s next move Kai unhesitatingly emphasized the need for improvements in relation to HIV testing and education in our community. Testing is often expensive when performed

at a clinic, but our city offers monthly free testing for various STIs (including HIV). However, these testing sessions are held infrequently, at inconvenient times, and held in only one or two locations. In spite of the creation of one monthly evening HIV testing site, the logistics of the free tests are inconvenient at best and downright impossible for some at worst. Even for people who can take time off to utilize the testing services, the remaining stigma against same sex relations and the LGBTQ community might prevent one from safely and confidently knowing their status in relation to HIV and other STIs. Moreover, Kai and I both noted the gaps in knowledge the medical professionals at the testing site exhibited—conflating AIDS with HIV, not properly explaining either condition, and other general



misinformation that can be particularly harmful to at-risk and marginalized communities. Kai hopes Beacon Takasaki can meet regularly to provide a safe space for members, but also hopes the group can work together to utilize the brainpower and activism of its members. Some goals include working toward further acceptance of the LGBTQ community within Gunma and other tangible changes like increased availability of free HIV testing and information throughout the city and prefecture.

Feeling simultaneously excited for the future of the group and in awe of Kai's obvious skill at leadership and activism, I made the rounds and met other new friends participating in the event. The attendees numbered around 50 with both Japanese and foreigners alike who identified all across the

LGBTQ spectrum. The attendees' average age seemed to skew toward the twenties, but older and younger folks also participated. Most attendees hailed from various parts of Gunma, both rural and urban, but several folks from other prefectures (perhaps with connections to Gunma) made their way to the event as well. As everyone drank and ate and made merry, a sense of ease, camaraderie, and support was palpable throughout the room. The LGBTQ event ended before I knew it, as things often do when you're having fun. This cheerful group gathered in the bar on a chilly night in mid-December bid each other farewell, to continue on to after parties or to head home. There was a buzz of excitement and hope in that crowded doorway as we all exited the bar—new friendships

formed, a community solidified, and a sense of anticipation for the future of Beacon Takasaki. If you'd like to know more about Beacon Takasaki, check out the Beacon Takasaki webpage at <https://bit.ly/2AAixvS>.

*Bonnie Ewart-Fisher is a third year JET in Takasaki, Gunma Prefecture. Outside of her role as an ALT she helps plan cultural exchange events within Gunma, volunteers with the American Embassy in Tokyo, and participates in Gunma's JET Orientation Planning Committee. While in Japan she's done everything from joining an accordion orchestra with 50 local grandmas and grandpas to fronting a heavy metal band. Her hobbies include sewing, snowboarding, and eating.*

- (1) Ito, Hiroki. "Fukuoka to Introduce LGBT 'Partnership' System in April: The Asahi Shimbun." *The Asahi Shimbun*, 朝日新聞デジタル, 14 Feb. 2018, [www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201802140057.html](http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201802140057.html).
- (2) Osumi, Magdalena. "Tokyo Adopts Ordinance Banning Discrimination against LGBT Community." *The Japan Times*, *The Japan Times*, 5 Oct. 2018, [www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2018/10/05/national/tokyo-adopts-ordinance-banning-discrimination-lgbt-community/](http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2018/10/05/national/tokyo-adopts-ordinance-banning-discrimination-lgbt-community/).

# Creating Your Own Indoor Community



**Nabe Party Ed**

Winter can be rough, especially when living so far away from home. It's cold, it gets dark early and everyone is broke in the aftermath of a busy Christmas and winter vacation. This often makes it difficult for people to meet up with friends and be social. So how do you organise a get together when everyone is hibernating underneath their *kotatsu*? Throw a *nabe* Party!

Nabe is a one pot dish in which various ingredients are cooked in a soup. Everyone gathers around a large pot and you each help yourself to the food as it is cooked, replacing eaten ingredients as you go until everyone is full. It's a cheap and easy way to get some friends together to chase away the winter chill!

## To throw a nabe party you will need:

- a big pot
- a portable gas stove
- a gas can for the stove
- a big spoon for dishing up
- bowls and chopsticks for everyone
- ingredients!



# dition

**There are no rules when it comes to nabe; you can add nearly anything you want! The basic ingredients are:**

- the soup base
- vegetables
- proteins (meat, fish, tofu etc.)
- noodles

The first thing to decide is what soup base you will use. You can make your own, but I recommend buying the ready made packs. It saves a lot of time and effort. In winter, nearly all supermarkets will have shelves of ready made nabe soups of various flavours, such as sesame, soy sauce, dashi, *kimchi*, tomato and more! Once you have decided on your soup, you can think about what you want to put in it.

A lot of the common ingredients for nabe are very cheap, so you don't have to break the bank to throw an awesome nabe party. Nabe is versatile, so check out what's on sale at your supermarket to save some yennies. Nearly everything tastes good in nabe, even old vegetables, so don't forget to check out the clearance section too! Nabe is easy to customise to accommodate everyone's preferences. You can make it vegetarian, vegan, dairy free, fish free, gluten free etc. The key to a delicious nabe is to use ingredients that you and your friends like. Below are the ingredient I usually buy for a nabe party and how much everything costs\*.



# Abbie's foolproof Nabe recipe (for 6 people):

- 1 soup base = 248円
- half a large cabbage = 40円
- 3 carrots = 90円
- half of a *kabocha* pumpkin = 380円
- 2 blocks of firm tofu = 80円
- 3 large leeks = 120円
- 4 medium sized potatoes = 180円
- 1 bag of *enoki* mushrooms = 50円
- 2 packs of *nameko* mushrooms = 520円
- 2 packs of udon noodles = 60円
- 100 g beef slices = 400円
- 20 small chicken meatballs = 220円
- 1 gas can for the portable stove = 83円

**(Tip: frozen meat is often a lot cheaper than fresh!)**

**(a pack of three costs 248円)**

**Total = 2251円**

At roughly 375円 per person, nabe is super cheap. You could also ask your guests to bring a few things each and soon you will have a feast fit for emperors for only a few hundred yen each!

**(\*I live in rural Nagasaki so prices may vary for elsewhere)**

## Now that you have all your ingredients, it's time to get cooking!

- First, pour your soup into the pot and bring it to a boil. Once boiling, turn the heat down to a simmer.
- Second, prepare your ingredients. Wash, cut and peel everything so it is all ready to go straight into the pot.
- Third, place everything in easy reach of where you will eat.
- Next, gather everyone together around the pot. It's time to begin adding ingredients and to start the party!
- Once some of the ingredients are cooked, help yourself. Remember that every time you take something out of the pot, put some more back in!
- Nabe is a process of cooking, eating, adding to the pot, cooking, eating, adding some more... again and again until you're full.

## Tips:

- Don't overcrowd the pot as some ingredients take long to cook, like potatoes, so don't put too many in at once.
- Regularly stir the pot so nothing sticks to the bottom.
- If the soup gets low but you're not done, add some water.
- If there is any leftover soup, use it with rice to mop up the last of the soup, and if there are leftovers, use them for tomorrow's dinner!



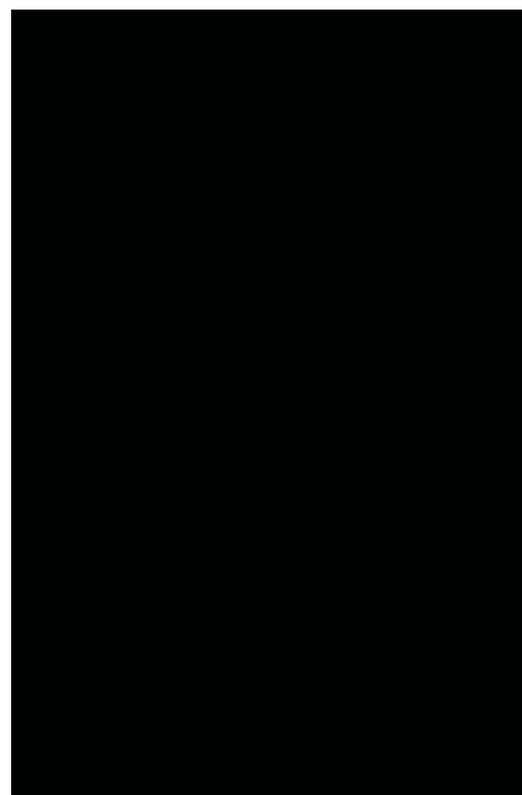


and remember that  
 longer to cook, like  
 many of them in at  
 thing burns on the  
 re not finished, just  
 try adding cooked  
 of all that flavour,  
 save them! Voilà:

Nabe is a great communal eating experience as everyone helps to add more ingredients to the pot and keep track of what is ready to eat. Nabe is a slower eating affair than most other dishes, but this just gives you more time to chill and chat.

Nabe is easy to cook, very cheap and easily customisable so everyone can enjoy it.

*Abbie is from the UK and currently a 4th year ALT in Mianmi Shimabara, Nagasaki. She teaches at two junior high schools and one elementary school. She enjoys **shuji** and collecting **goshuin** from shrines and temples. She loves exploring rural areas and going to little known cafes and is always happy to show people around her inaka but very beautiful area.*



# Volunteering for



g  
a New

Year



# Erica

Suffice it to say it's a little strange, spending your entire life celebrating Christmas on December 25th every year - and subsequently scrabbling to find something to do on New Year's Eve before you end up half-heartedly sitting on the sofa with your parents, watching the fireworks whizz into the sky above Big Ben on TV. New Year's Day will then find you either like any other day, sleeping in and trying to quash your inevitable dread at how the new school term/your first day back at work draws ever closer, or slowly dragging your hungover self back from your friend's house and dreaming of the Domino's that will await you once you get in the door and back into your pyjamas.... and then you move to Japan, where New Year's isn't like... that. Instead, you read it's the 紅白歌合戦 (*Kouhaku Uta Gassen*, or 'Red and White Song Battle' in English), eating hot soba on New Year's Eve and then going to your nearest shrine on New Year's Day for 初詣 (*hatsumode*), the first shrine visit of the new year, and 御節 (*osechi*), the beautifully presented new year's dishes (if you're Japanese, that is). Having been summoned home by my family for Christmas every year I was in Japan, I didn't get a chance to experience this myself either. New Year's Eve and New Year's Day are just a mark of time passing as it inevitably does, and usually notable for the sudden increase of people you see at the gym on January 2nd - but in Japan, it's something to be celebrated. So I did feel a sense of disappointment that this was something I wouldn't experience - until our CIR brought up the local community New Year's festival.

Machipia (まちぴあ) doesn't look too different to many of the other houses in the residential area of Utsunomiya it's located in, roughly twenty minutes' walk from the main station. The first thing that

greeted me when I entered roughly ten minutes late was the sheer volume of the taiko and flute coming from the main entrance to kick the event off. We'd been advised beforehand that there'd be traditional Japanese New Year's games, shadow puppets, and (most importantly) *mochi*-pounding. Never the biggest fan myself, there's something about fresh mochi with a dusting of *kinako* or a splash of soy sauce, eaten with disposable chopsticks out of a little styrofoam tray under the weak winter sun, that may have the power to convert even the most ambivalent of foreigners. We'd also been asked, if possible, to perhaps introduce 'some New Year's games from your country' (which unfortunately wouldn't involve much more than fireworks, alcohol and 'Auld Lang Syne') - but upon arrival, it seemed like our presence was enough. It wasn't exactly the most traditional Japanese New Year's celebration for us either - no shrines, no bell-ringing, no first sunrise - but it's not necessarily all about that, either. I whacked a wooden hammer into some mochi with a piece of masking tape with the words 'エリカ(アイルランド)' wrapped around my upper arm, attempted to paint a watercolour flower and got duly shown up by the small child next to me, got to meet my friend's students, and at the end of the event enjoyed *katsudon* bento with my fellow JETs and a group of volunteer students from the local university. There was something very local about it all, a community coming together to bring in a new year. And at the end of the day, I think it's always going to be the things like that which help remind you of what you've signed up for.

*Erica Horan is representing Ireland on the JET Programme and taught in Moka, Tochigi prefecture from 2015 to 2018. She is currently working in London, UK.*





## Xai

Like the neighborhood it's in, the venue is modest and unassuming but manages to sufficiently hold a variety of events throughout the day. With children running around playing games impossible for adults to understand, it even feels a little bit like being back home at a large family gathering. Just outside the venue, in the parking lot, you can have a go at walking on traditional Japanese stilts (it's much harder than it looks) and enjoy eating mochi (Japanese rice cakes) which virtually every Japanese person eats for New Year's. On the second floor, local school volunteers setup small shops selling trinkets and candy for children. The most impressive event that takes place is the traditional drum performance where people of all ages come together to continue ancient traditions of drumming for the new year. Although the event celebrates New Year's in Japan, the organizers' vision is to bring together New Year's cultures from all around the world. Because of this, foreigners to Japan are encouraged to join and share what their cultures do for New Year's. Even if your country doesn't do much on New Year's, it's still worthwhile to go and learn about Japan and traditions of other cultures. "Think globally, act locally" are words that best explain the Machipia New Year's event.

*Xai Her is from Wisconsin USA, is currently teaching in Tochigi-shi, Tochigi-ken since 2016 on the JET Programme.*

## Dale

The Machipia New Year's event was a highlight each year. Every year a group of ALTs from all over the prefecture would be invited to participate. The folks at Machipia were always very welcoming and were eager for us to jump right in. Each year there would be a large assortment of traditional activities, games, and demonstrations. From mochi making to taiko drumming, guests were able to move around from each area to have a chance to get involved. As an

American living in Japan, having an opportunity to join a community participate in traditions with folks from all age groups, really allows you to enjoy the experience all the more.

*Dale Brown is from Portland, Oregon USA and was based in Nikko, Tochigi Prefecture between 2013 and 2017 on the JET Programme.*

# Scott

Machipia, an Utsunomiya-based community center, is a special organization to many Tochigi-ites. In addition to hosting classes and serving as a key resource for the surrounding community, Machipia annually hosts a New Year's event when it opens its doors to share Japanese New Year traditions. During the event, their store of beautiful kimonos is on loan to guests, and the Japanese traditions are shared: mochi pounding, stilt-walking, traditional card games and performances. While the event itself is wonderful, my favorite part of Machipia's event is actually its conclusion. After guests have departed and we thoroughly clean the rooms, all of the event volunteers share a bento lunch and joyful "otsukare(s)" with one another. It is only then that we all meet, with each volunteer group giving a short speech, and then we learn of each group's role in the event. There is a great beauty in how the many local organizations, schools, universities, international associations, and we Tochigi JETs all collaborate for the success of Machipia's wonderful event. Between many people and between many groups, Machipia's New Year's builds the unforgettable bonds of a wonderful community and family.

*Scott Hirabayashi currently resides in North Potomac, Maryland. He was a former ALT in Kanuma-shi, Tochigi from 2015-2018.*





# A THREE YEAR MATCH



**Teaching  
English Boxing  
in Hyogo Pref.**



Ever since I can remember, I have had a keen interest in wanting to explore and experience a variety of cultures from all over the world. Now, I have been to over a dozen countries and each has been an extremely unique experience. However, the tourist paths always had familiarities in the form of some sort of Western influence that left me wanting. One day I started tossing around the idea of going to Japan. Not as a tourist, as I had done before, but as an expat. Well, why Japan? Many people give responses such as “I have always had an interest in Japanese culture” or “I really enjoy Japanese media and art”. While I was preparing to come to Japan shortly after being accepted into the JET Programme, I too defaulted to these reasonable and genuine reasons for wanting to come to Japan. In fact, I say these next words with the utmost humility, but it was not until my experiences in Japan up until now that I realized the significance of being a part of such an extraordinary feat that is JET. Because it is JET that has afforded me the opportunity to live and work in Japan and gain knowledge in not only education, but in inter-cultural understanding as well. Investing long-term in a foreign country has provided me with invaluable experiences, including the opportunity to help shape my town’s first ever English Boxing Gym.

The story begins like this, I had just finished a lesson at one of the local kindergartens with my two unconditionally nurturing and supportive JET senpais, who I could detail an entirely separate article on. We stopped in the parking lot to debrief and talk. After about five minutes of conversation, we heard a prominent but timid “Hello” from nearby. A youthful man in his late thirties with a strong, athletic build approached us and with a mix of English, Japanese, and a whole bunch of gestures, invited us to come try out his fitness boxing gym across the street. Little did I know at the time, but he would go on to become one of the greatest friends and supporters that I have had the privilege of meeting in this country.

After agreeing to try out fitness boxing, my cultural immersion was about to begin. The following week, I attended my first boxing session ever. As I walked into the gym, there was a boxing ring to the left and a three-panel mirror to the right. Besides immediately noticing the stark contrast between the bright hardwood floor and the light grey walls, the look of the gym was fairly typical. The gym was not large by any means, but it was not small; looking back, cozy would be a good way to describe both the setting and the atmosphere. There were different people of a variety of ages; the gym seemed to welcome everyone. I immediately recognized the man from the parking lot, his name was Tamura-san. He showed me around and introduced me to the different gym members before gathering the children in a circle to perform the inevitable self-introduction. At that time it seemed that the children were rather dumbfounded by my presence. However, after struggling through Japanese and quickly transitioning to English, I began to teach the children common warm-up exercises that I would perform in Canada for the various sports I had practiced there. That moment was the inception of the Tamba City English boxing gym.

I was hooked. As days became weeks, weeks became months, and months eventually became years. I began to learn more and more about the nature of this gym that I so serendipitously became a member of. There is one specific moment that I want to recount. It happened when I sat down with my now boxing instructor to discuss the reasons he values the participation of the local ALTs, of which I am the only remaining member. The reasons he listed exceeded anything superficial. What follows is the best summary of our multiple conversations. “This city is a small city and in addition to a small city mentality, it also holds a mentality that is a unique characteristic of Japan, whether that be good or bad.

The children in this city are afraid of foreigners. With your help, I want to break that stigma, so that they will not only make leaps in their abilities to use English for communication, but also grow as people. You can help me shape more tolerant and accepting people, who will shape our country positively.”

Reflecting on this now, these words inspired me to want to make something special of this boxing gym. I never wavered in the fact that I wanted to be able to have an impact on my community beyond just the classroom, but the question that I had constantly considered was the way in which I could make a difference. For example, in my town there are some opportunities to get involved outside of the classroom, but the motivation to associate with the ALT is not one so noble as the previously detailed conversation. That is, the many other instances that I have been asked to start an English class or host some other event seemed token. I feel the primary motivation to learn any other language should transcend just increasing ability or increasing academic prowess and test scores. Rather it should promote a special relationship and a curiosity to increase understanding between the parties involved.

When I first signed on to participate, I did not know that it would transition into an all-English training time. I had merely thought my participation would be all that was necessary. Now, thanks to the hard work of Tamura-sensei, we successfully conduct boxing training in English for about one hour four times a week. All activities ranging from the warm-up, to sparring with the mitts, or doing some reps with the gloves are done in English. Looking back on how the gym was when I started to where it is now, some might say it has not changed much. However, if you look into the roots, I think I can say with great satisfaction that the children, from the very first day that I met them to the present, have grown tremendously as individuals. I take pride in the fact that I have been able to make a meaningful contribution to my community. The children who participate are primarily in elementary school, with some students from junior high school and high school also in the mix. At the beginning they were quiet and reserved. And much like any town, any school, and with anyone in Japan the conversations were brief and forced with the underlying pressure of “You should take this opportunity to speak English” floating somewhere in the background. Now, do not get me wrong; the children were extremely polite. But it was not until spending hours and hours at practice and at gym events that I was finally able to break through those barriers. The commonality of sport

was what allowed us to truly bond. Now that the groundwork that has been put in place, I am able to reap the benefits. The children are no longer afraid to converse with me. They greet me with a warmth that emanates comfort and acceptance; acceptance in the sense that I am seen as one of them. The children will, of their own volition, speak to me with as much English as they can. I am extremely proud of what the children, my children, have accomplished. To be able to witness their growth, has been in every sense of the word, amazing. It is something that I could never have envisioned happening until I did it, because I did not know how, or if, my actions would make any difference at all. However, I think what perpetuated this growth started with the children’s willingness to listen, to comprehend, and to genuinely want to understand me. They deserve and need to be recognized for this.

I cannot finish without mentioning the man responsible for all of this: Tamura-sensei. When describing Tamura, people say he is a man who is always smiling and joking. He always playfully jabs at you in much the same way that locker room athletes usually do. When I think of him, I would describe him as the



kind of man that constantly gives and never asks for anything in return. Someone who will always be there to support you. After countless conversations at restaurants, in his gym, or as a guest in his home, I have had the opportunity to thoroughly understand this man. I believe his intentions for the children of Tamba City are nothing short of noble. His gym transcends a mere business. It is in every sense of the word a family. A family that has welcomed me and taken care of me throughout all of my experiences, good, bad, and neutral in Japan. It is experiences such as these that I believe embody the JET experience. And, it is a seeking of these types of experiences that fueled my desire to participate on JET. These experiences continue to motivate me in my day to day life in Japan and I will take them with me to any country I find myself in in the future. It only took one man and a small risk in a small countryside parking lot to change the lives of countless numbers of individuals from then, to now, and to the future.

*Caleb is currently a third year ALT working at both elementary school and junior high school in Hyogo Prefecture. He enjoys learning about history and the outdoors. When he is not teaching, you can find him exploring other prefectures in Japan.*





Finding  
Pride  
After  
the Fall

Brenden Bish (Gunma)

Most people would probably call me crazy to buy \$1,000 worth of equipment for a sport I've only tried once. Not to mention that this first attempt at barreling down a mountain strapped onto a snowboard left me with a concussion that was painful enough to persuade my young teenage self to stick to warmer sports.

Fast forward a decade, and soccer, football, basketball and even hockey all played their parts in keeping me off any more mountains. That was until I found myself living in a mountainous prefecture in Japan known as Gunma. Suddenly, I was searching for the perfect excuse to get out and about from my apartment which, because of winter, had grown even colder. Unfortunately, this gradual drop in temperature didn't make my daily dose of solitude any more welcoming.

Add in the fact that these past five months in Gunma have been filled with plenty of attempts at seeking a sense of belonging and a new balance in this country teeming with culture, and all of a sudden, a snowboard started sounding more and more like the perfect place to start. All of these factors, along with a New Year's day *waribiki* (discount) made dropping some hard earned cash on my very first snowboard that much easier. Two days later, I found myself waking up at 5:00 a.m. and heading to Kandatsu Kogen with my new board and my new snowboard instructors, (aka my friends).

Anticipation and a great convo made the hour and a half drive to the Niigata Prefecture fly by. My first ride up the lift brought on butterflies by the boatload. At that height, the view was truly to die for, and most likely, the reason I had to

concentrate on beating back the creeping doubt trying to convince me that I had made the wrong choice.

Once off the lift, I inched toward the edge of the slope and strapped up my bindings. I took a deep breath. Quickly spoke to the Man upstairs. Dug my heels in the mountain, and commenced to making my first run. As expected, the falls came in bunches. Thankfully enough, one early wipeout worthy of some rest and re-evaluation led my friend to make his way to my location and check my bindings. When he realized how loosely I had set them, he gave me my first lesson of the day.

Loose bindings are the equivalent to less control.

Less control = more falls

In similar fashion, as JET members try to adjust to life in Japan with so many elements that are outside of our control, stumbling and falling is inevitable. Some of these falls are more painful than others, but each and every one requires a decision to be made in the aftermath. To either stay down, or get back up.

After tightening up my bindings to the limit, I dusted myself off and took another crack at riding. Surprisingly enough, I finally managed to stand up for longer than 3 seconds. Of course this new found stability only led to falls that were now a bit more painful due to more speed entering the equation. Regardless, the joy of making even the slightest progress acted as an invisible armor that kept the pain at bay (at least until the next morning).

By my third and fourth runs, I realized I was making strides and wasn't falling as frequently. I even graduated onto other instructors (more friends). They walked me through everything from riding down on my toe side, to making my very first turn.

It felt amazing to actually accomplish making a complete turn. Even when I got over confident and started feeling myself in my new abilities, humility was quick to reacquaint my face with the mountain in yet another fall. Now that I was able to make turns, falling was a lot more nerve-racking and much more painful, but I was improving so much that

it had become way easier to pick myself up off the ground and get back to it.

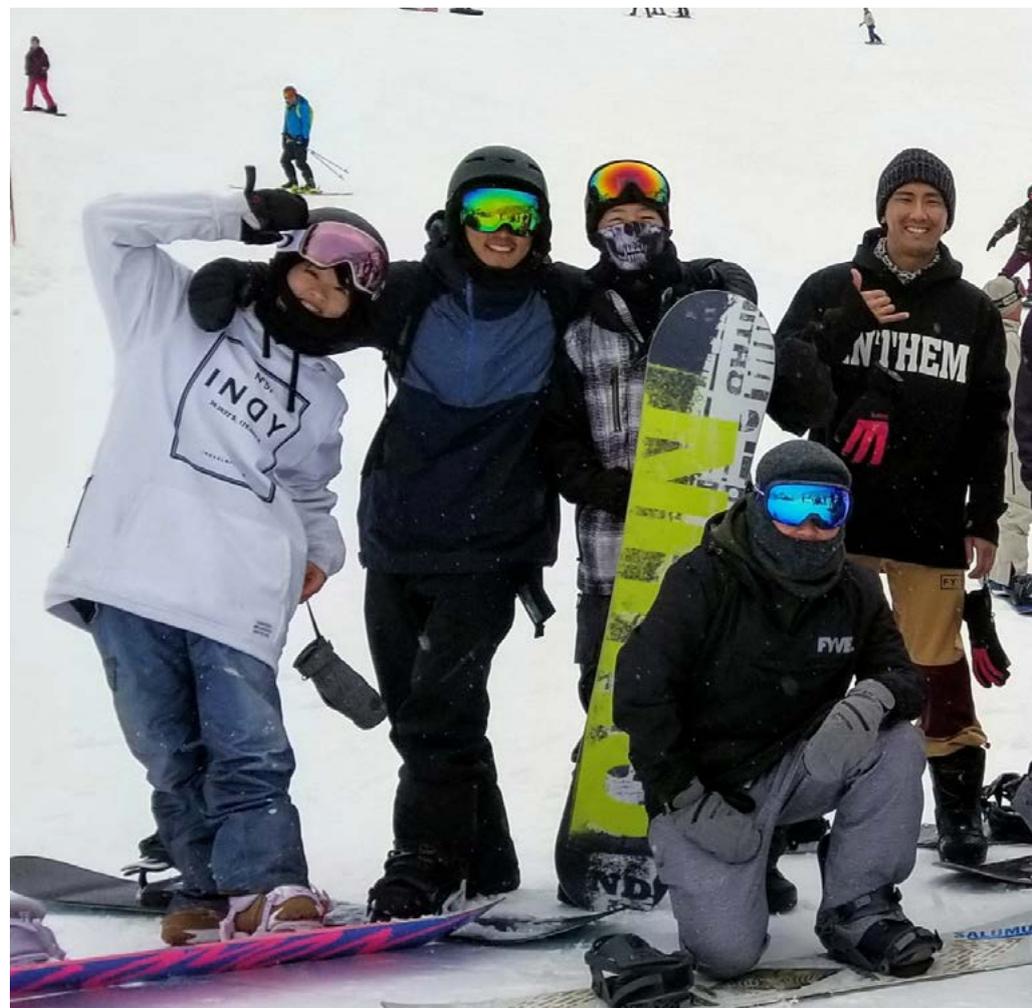
For me, finding a new balance on my board was very symbolic and extremely important. I pride myself on being able to locate and identify the proper balance in different areas of my life. Nonetheless, the last five months living in Japan have proven to be a real test in this regard. Beyond the constant on-and-off struggle with solitude, missing my family like crazy, and the difficulty in trying to find my footing with the Japanese language (which is a metaphorical mountain in itself), the question I kept finding at the root to most of my doubt and discomfort was “Do I really belong here?”

Once the honeymoon phase of arriving in Japan wears off, and the tradition and tiny details to everything that were once so astonishing become less interesting, you get locked into routine. This is when one starts to ask him/herself, “Can I really make a life here in this country?”

Making Japanese friends can be difficult (fall), communicating and understanding even some of the simplest things brings on challenges (another fall), and trying to get your point across and be understood can sometimes seem impossible (painful fall). During this first trip to the mountain, accepting the inevitability of failing made things easier. However, even with this mental edge, I still had to fight through pain, be uncomfortable, and battle the voices in my head constantly trying to convince me that going inside the lodge to warmth, safety, and comfort was my best bet. This was all while watching other snowboarders ride by on boards of their own so effortlessly.

This parallel between trying to gain the right skillset to survive on this mountain with its many slopes is, for me, identical to trying to figure out how to conquer the different slopes of culture shock in this country full of customs and traditions that, while appreciated and admired, aren't always the easiest to cope with. Our *senpais* and JTEs act as instructors, offering guidance and support, but ultimately, they aren't able to make the decision of whether or not we get back up after we fall.

For these reasons, among many others, I have the gut feeling that buying a snowboard may have been one of the biggest game changers in my experience thus far. That's because, while on this mountain constantly falling and fighting to get back up, I found hope. This hope derived from not only getting better at my ability to snowboard after each try, but also from arriving at a realization. I must learn to accept the challenges and hardships that cause me to fall, and make a conscious decision to not allow them to keep me down. For it is said that “Our greatest glory is not in never falling, but in rising every time we fall.” So, despite the undoubtable falls in my near future, whether on my board or on my journey, I am set and poised to get back to my feet, and continue learning, growing, and closing in on my purpose of being here in the Land of the Rising Sun.





*Brenden is an international poet who loves to travel, learn, and perform. At 28 years young, he has visited over 20 different countries and has performed poetry, spoken word, and storytelling in seven of them. He hopes to continue traveling the world - exploring, growing, learning, and performing. Brenden is currently teaching in Gunma, Japan while also trying to balance being a Pokémon Master, and improve both his chess and snowboarding abilities. Join him on his journey by checking out either his Instagram @Balanc3 or [Youtube channel](#).*



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# 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](mailto:connect.editor@ajet.net) with your submissions, comments, and questions.

## ARTICLES

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

## SPOTLIGHT

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

## COMMENTS

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

## PHOTOS

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

## HAIKU

Each month *CONNECT* will feature *haiku* from our readers. A *haiku* is simple, clean, and can be about anything you like! If you're an aspiring wordsmith with the soul of Basho, send all of your *haiku* along with your name and prefecture to [connect.editor@ajet.net](mailto:connect.editor@ajet.net).

## COMICS

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