

AJET

# CONNECT

News & Events, Arts & Culture, Lifestyle, Community

MAY  
2019

Dust Off The Shelves — Rediscovering A Love of Reading on JET

Is Your Sunscreen Reef-Safe? — An Interview With An Expert

Start Your Engines — A Look at the Suzuka Circuit

LGBT Rights In The Workplace — One ALT's Efforts Towards Positive Change

Uji and All Things Matcha — Read Up On Japan's Green Tea Destination



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

# Calling all artists!

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

**2019**



**submissions open**

C the art issue for 2019

**[c-theartissue.tumblr.com](http://c-theartissue.tumblr.com)**



## LOOKING FOR FLEXIBLE STUDY OPTIONS?

The University of Birmingham's Department of English Language and Linguistics offers flexible personal development opportunities for professionals wishing to develop their skills and expertise. Our distance learning Masters programmes are delivered part-time over 30 months, to fit around your existing commitments.

### APPLIED LINGUISTICS MA

This programme is for professionals wishing to further their personal development, and those who are interested in learning more about possible applications of language research. You will study core modules in lexis, sociolinguistics and discourse analysis, with the option to study other topics such as corpus linguistics, functional grammar and multimodal communication.

### TEACHING ENGLISH TO SPEAKERS OF OTHER LANGUAGES (TESOL) MA

This programme is for practising teachers of English as a second or foreign language who wish to develop their knowledge of classroom methodology and materials design. You will study core modules in classroom research, language teaching methodology, pedagogic grammar and syllabus and materials, with the option to study other topics such as second language acquisition and teaching young learners.

### KEY FACTS

- Start in February, April, July, October or December
- Study entirely online
- All modules assessed by written assignment
- Pay per module

Find out more and apply:  
[www.birmingham.ac.uk/elal-dl](http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/elal-dl)

# CREDITS

## HEAD EDITOR

Lauren Hill

## ASSITANT EDITOR

Angela Hinck

## SECTION EDITORS

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

## CONTRIBUTORS

Emilie Aghajani  
Rachel Clark  
Rachelle Cosentino  
Rae DeFrane  
Peyton Goodman  
Eve Henty  
Emma Hollis  
Nicholas Jackson  
Rashaad Jordan  
Veronica King  
Jonathan Kling  
Damien Levi  
Jayson Madara

## HEAD OF DESIGN & LAYOUT

Ashley Hirasuna

## ASSISTANT DESIGNERS

Philippa Lawrie  
Rhema Baquero

## COVER PHOTO

Colette English

## TABLE OF CONTENTS PHOTO

Ashley Hirasuna

## ART & PHOTOGRAPHY

Colette English  
Nick Moulds  
Ashley Hirasuna  
Marc Baquero  
Avalon De Gannes  
Rhema Baquero

Stephani Moore  
James Mudd  
Sarah Ann-Marie Owen  
Laura Pollacco  
Christopher Sept  
Maja Thoenes  
Annelise Wilp

## HEAD WEB EDITOR

Dylan Brain

## ASSITANT WEB EDITOR

Alex Furukawa

## SOCIAL MEDIA

Celine Bennett  
Christopher Wai-Hoong Yuen

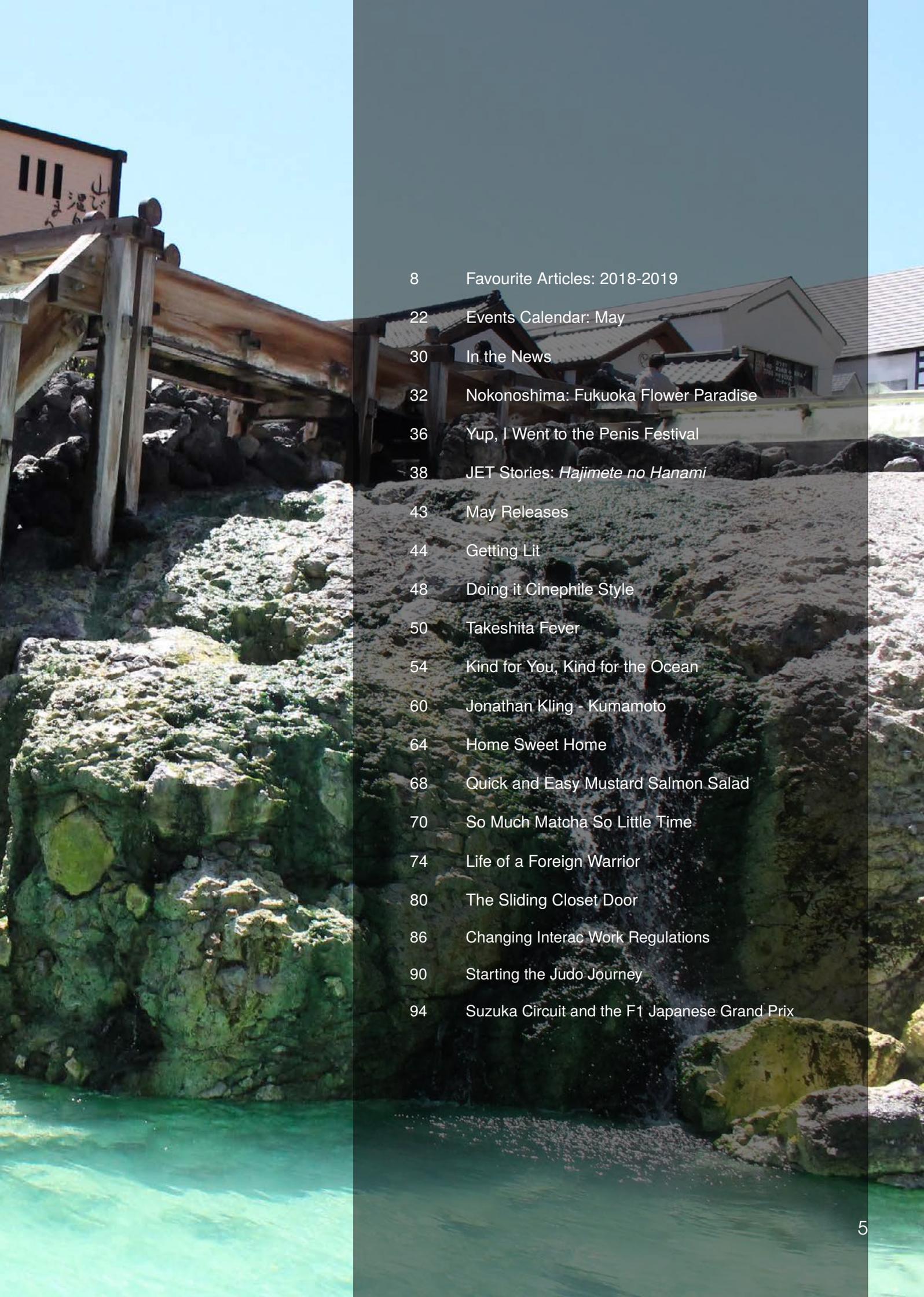
## COPY EDITOR

Emily Riley  
Zack Messenger

## GENERAL SECTION EDITOR

Tayler Skultety  
Gavin Au-Yeung

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



8	Favourite Articles: 2018-2019
22	Events Calendar: May
30	In the News
32	Nokonoshima: Fukuoka Flower Paradise
36	Yup, I Went to the Penis Festival
38	JET Stories: <i>Hajimete no Hanami</i>
43	May Releases
44	Getting Lit
48	Doing it Cinephile Style
50	Takeshita Fever
54	Kind for You, Kind for the Ocean
60	Jonathan Kling - Kumamoto
64	Home Sweet Home
68	Quick and Easy Mustard Salmon Salad
70	So Much Matcha So Little Time
74	Life of a Foreign Warrior
80	The Sliding Closet Door
86	Changing Interac Work Regulations
90	Starting the Judo Journey
94	Suzuka Circuit and the F1 Japanese Grand Prix

# LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Happy New Era!

I hope *Reiwa* is getting off to a fantastic start for everyone, and you're making the most of this once in a lifetime ten day Golden Week!

Right now is the perfect time of year to fly through your Japan bucket list, but if you've an hour or two to spare, why not check out Connect's May issue? This will be our last regular edition of the year, and you definitely don't want to miss out. To celebrate, we asked our team to think back on their favourite articles of the year; flip over to the reflection feature to see if any of your own picks got a mention!

Other highlights this month include our round up of your first-time *hanami* stories, an interview with the brain behind Japan's first coral-friendly sun lotion, a quick and awesome recipe for salmon mustard salad, and a look into the realities of being LGBT in Japan (pluuuuus, all the LGBT YA fiction recommendations you could ever wish for!).

The whole team have given their all to put this final issue together, and I hope you'll enjoy it as much as we've loved working on it. To all of Connect's readers and contributors this year, whether you stick with us every month or only check out the occasional feature - I want to say a huge thank you. Your stories and interest make Connect what it is!

See you in June for our Art Issue - we're not *quite* done yet!

Lauren Hill  
Head Editor  
3rd Year Tokyo ALT



Photo: Ashley Hirasuna



# FAVOURITE ART

---

*Head Editor*  
**LAUREN HILL**



## **WHICH ARTICLE HAVE YOU MOST ENJOYED IN ANOTHER SECTION, AND WHY?**

JET Programemes (December 2018)

This group is one of my favourites on Facebook; sometimes you just need to let off some of that "ohashi jyouzu" steam, right? Reading about the group's origins, and the creator's intention to help others deal with culture shock and feel a little less overwhelmed, was just the perfect combination of relatable, hilarious and wholesome. If you're not already a member, you'll want to be after this article.

## **DO YOU HAVE A FINAL MESSAGE FOR CONNECT'S READERS?**

To everyone who's been keeping up with Connect this year: a huge, huge thank you! Whether you've read the odd article, shared new issues, or even submitted your own stories and artwork - we wouldn't be the same without you! This magazine exists thanks to your hard work and unique experiences, and I feel lucky to have had the chance to read so many of them. We're a widely flung community, but I hope Connect has helped you feel a little closer to your fellow JETs and other expats. Though this will be my last year on the team, I'm excited to see what the future holds for Connect!

# THE 2018-2019 ICLES

---

*Assistant Head Editor*  
**ANGELA HINCK**



## **WHICH ARTICLE HAVE YOU MOST ENJOYED IN ANOTHER SECTION, AND WHY?**

I really liked the article Spines: Best Served Chilled from the entertainment section in the October 2018 issue. I love spooky stories all year round, so the recommendations are ones I've been able to enjoy well after Halloween. Also loved the horror movie framework the author used, and the awesome page design (go take a look if you haven't already, it's really cool!)

## **DO YOU HAVE A FINAL MESSAGE FOR CONNECT'S READERS?**

I just want to give a big thank-you to everyone who has read Connect this past year. Working with the magazine has been an amazing experience, and although I'll leave Japan this summer, I can't wait to see where Connect goes from here. If you like what we do, please get involved yourself! Apply as an editor or submit your own work. We'd love to hear from you either way.

---

*News Editor*  
**TRESHA BARRETT**



**WHICH ARTICLE HAVE YOU MOST ENJOYED IN YOUR OWN SECTION AND WHY?**

Changing Times for Tattoos in Japan?

I chose this article because I am an avid tattoo lover, I really enjoyed writing it, and I appreciate the underlying hope that has finally reared its head after so many years of controversy.

**WHICH ARTICLE HAVE YOU MOST ENJOYED IN ANOTHER SECTION, AND WHY?**

Spines: Best Served Chilled.

I absolutely love horror movies and the article was a fun read.

**DO YOU HAVE A FINAL MESSAGE FOR CONNECT'S READERS?**

Listen to that inner voice and always, *always* follow your highest joy ^^

# *Style and Beauty Editor* **LAURA POLLACCO**



## **WHICH ARTICLE HAVE YOU MOST ENJOYED IN YOUR OWN SECTION AND WHY?**

[The Colourful World of Kansai](#)

The moment I became editor I knew I wanted to do this interview and write this article. Kansai Yamamoto is such a fascinating and amazing person and I really wanted a chance to meet him again and share his life with others. It was worth all the hard work and time it took and I am thankful to Kansai and his team and all who helped me make it possible.

## **WHICH ARTICLE HAVE YOU MOST ENJOYED IN ANOTHER SECTION, AND WHY?**

[5 Japanese Women Artists You Ought to Know About](#)

I have enjoyed a lot from the Arts Section this year, it is great to have a platform to showcase JETs work. This article in particular was so interesting and inspiring, to see the work of these women and what they have achieved (the layout was beautiful as well).

## **DO YOU HAVE A FINAL MESSAGE FOR CONNECT'S READERS?**

Connect is about sharing, sharing the experiences and knowledge we have gained here on JET. Sometimes it will be something we can all relate to, but everyone has cultivated their own set of experiences and understandings living here in Japan. Sharing them with others is one of the best things we can do living here in Japan and I am thankful to all of those who have this year.

*Art Editor*

# TAYLA-PAIGE VAN SITTERT



## **WHICH ARTICLE HAVE YOU MOST ENJOYED IN YOUR OWN SECTION AND WHY?**

I really enjoyed connecting with the artists from the first issue I worked on; "[On Newness](#)" from the September issue. I still follow these artists creative and travel journeys through Japan, and I hope you do to. I also think the layout of this particular series is aesthetic af. Kudos to everyone who worked on it :)

## **WHICH ARTICLE HAVE YOU MOST ENJOYED IN ANOTHER SECTION, AND WHY?**

The article that still sticks with me is from the October issue, culture section; [Lessons Learned From a Changing Community](#). Perhaps it's because it's about an area close to where I am based, but probably because it is well written and has that micro-macro human to world element in it that makes an article really stand out.

## **DO YOU HAVE A FINAL MESSAGE FOR CONNECT'S READERS?**

I hope that whatever road you choose, you will always stop to admire the beauty in and around you.

---

# *Sports Editor* **NIKKITA KENT**



## **WHICH ARTICLE HAVE YOU MOST ENJOYED IN YOUR OWN SECTION AND WHY?**

Facing Your Fears at Canyons was my favorite article. Devyn got real about the challenges all new JETs face and gave others a spark of hope for the future. She proved how any JET can face their fears - in a canyon and on the program - by doing their very best and supporting one another.

## **WHICH ARTICLE HAVE YOU MOST ENJOYED IN ANOTHER SECTION, AND WHY?**

I loved Battling Through the SADness in December. As a tropical Floridian, I had never experienced SAD until I moved to Gunma. Molly hit the nail on the head with her commentary and actionable advice on how to overcome the disorder; I even tried a few of her suggestions and they really worked!

## **DO YOU HAVE A FINAL MESSAGE FOR CONNECT'S READERS?**

This magazine is what you make it. Connect is rife with colorful articles and stunning photography because of all the JETs involved, not just the magazine staff. So this year, get out there, make some more memories, and continue sharing them and inspiring each other in the JET community. Let's rock the new year!

---

# *Entertainment Editor* **SARAH WHITE**



## **WHICH ARTICLE HAVE YOU MOST ENJOYED IN YOUR OWN SECTION AND WHY?**

"Gaming with Dad" during the March issue was my favorite. As someone who hopes to work in the video game industry, accessibility issues were something I had never considered before. Getting this perspective was really invaluable for me, and I hope it's something the entertainment world considers more in the future.

## **WHICH ARTICLE HAVE YOU MOST ENJOYED IN ANOTHER SECTION, AND WHY?**

"Gender and Fashion: What We Learnt from Japan" during the November issue was excellent. I am a huge proponent for gender neutral fashion, and learning about how it has been shaped by Japanese fashion designers was really cool.

## **DO YOU HAVE A FINAL MESSAGE FOR CONNECT'S READERS?**

This year has been a whirlwind. Great times, bad times, and everything in between. But Connect has been a constant joy for me, and I hope you have enjoyed this year's magazine as much as I have! Whenever you're feeling down, take a peek inside an issue and remember that you aren't alone in this community. We're all in this together!

# Health and Nutrition Editor **AMANDA MULLER**



## **WHICH ARTICLE HAVE YOU MOST ENJOYED IN YOUR OWN SECTION AND WHY?**

My favorite article this year was [Lifestyle Spotlight: Keto in Japan](#). As someone who is interested in nutrition, I enjoy hearing about what lifestyle and diet changes work for other people. Reading about Jan's motivated made me feel motivated to stick to my goals as well!

## **WHICH ARTICLE HAVE YOU MOST ENJOYED IN ANOTHER SECTION, AND WHY?**

I loved the [Home Comforts](#) article from the Style and Beauty section. Seeing how everyone else created their own little space here inspired me to redecorate my apartment. My space is so much more homey now!

## **DO YOU HAVE A FINAL MESSAGE FOR CONNECT'S READERS?**

To friends and family at home, looking at your social media, living abroad seems like one adventure after another. We all know, however, that it can be tough sometimes. I hope the articles in Connect have helped readers, whether it be through tips provided or through the sense of community the magazine creates.

*Community Editor*  
**ALICE RIDLEY**



**WHICH ARTICLE HAVE YOU MOST ENJOYED IN YOUR OWN SECTION AND WHY?**

My favourite article was one of my first. The article entitled "Jet Programemes" because it was about something that really helped me see the light hearted side of being an ALT in Japan. Even to this day I still value chuckling at silly internet memes there.

**WHICH ARTICLE HAVE YOU MOST ENJOYED IN ANOTHER SECTION, AND WHY?**

The article entitled "ganbare" by Melanie Stacey from 2018's art issue really struck a cord with me emotionally as it encompassed the feeling of now being at the mercy of others who have to communicate for you, even in very personal situations.

**DO YOU HAVE A FINAL MESSAGE FOR CONNECT'S READERS?**

Dear connect readers, keep being brave in exploring new pockets of Japan's community! Whether its other expats or Japanese people, everyone has so much to give. Stay curious!

---

*Culture Editor*  
**ANNELISE WILP**



**WHICH ARTICLE HAVE YOU MOST ENJOYED IN YOUR OWN SECTION AND WHY?**

I've only overseen the April and May issues, but my favorite was making the hanami article for May 2019 because I got to read about different experiences.

**WHICH ARTICLE HAVE YOU MOST ENJOYED IN ANOTHER SECTION, AND WHY?**

I really enjoyed the "Homeward Bound" special in the January issue because it really resonated with me.

**DO YOU HAVE A FINAL MESSAGE FOR CONNECT'S READERS?**

I hope you found the articles helpful and enjoyable!  
Thanks for your support :)

---

*General Section Editor*  
**TAYLER SKULTETY**



**WHICH ARTICLE HAVE YOU MOST ENJOYED IN ANOTHER SECTION, AND WHY?**

The article I most enjoyed reading this year was "Finding Yourself in Japan or Some Other Cliche Yet Shockingly Accurate Sentiment" by Sarah White. This article captured the JET experience in a refreshing, enjoyable way. I genuinely felt sucked in.

**DO YOU HAVE A FINAL MESSAGE FOR CONNECT'S READERS?**

If you've ever considered getting involved with the magazine, don't wait, just do it! We're waiting to hear your story.



# NEWS AND EVENTS

## **NEWS EDITOR**

connect.news@ajet.net

**Tresha Barrett**

## **EVENTS EDITOR**

connect.events@ajet.net

**Peyton Goodman**

Photo: Marc Baquero



# Events Calendar:

May 2019

## 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

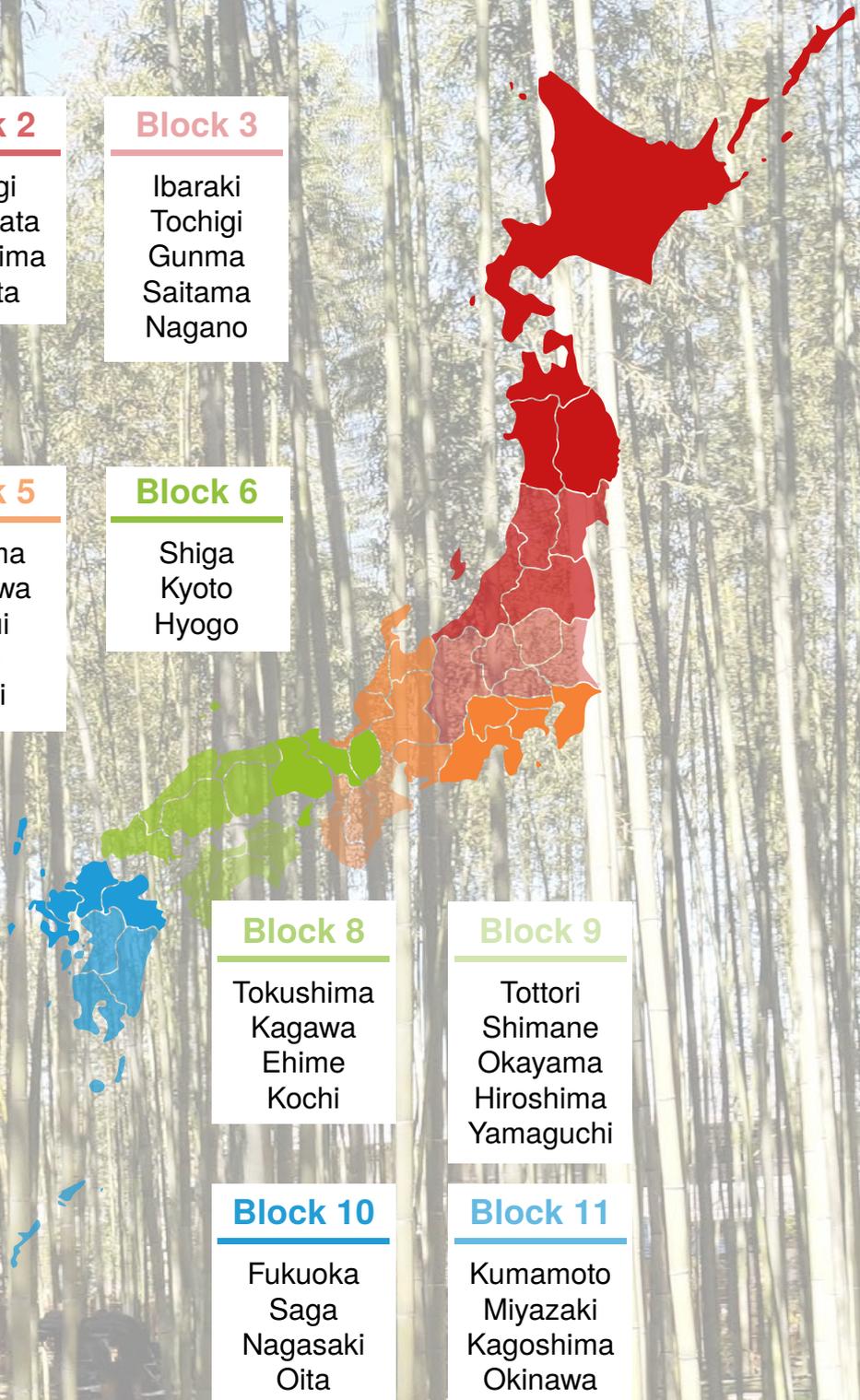
Tottori  
Shimane  
Okayama  
Hiroshima  
Yamaguchi

## Block 10

Fukuoka  
Saga  
Nagasaki  
Oita

## Block 11

Kumamoto  
Miyazaki  
Kagoshima  
Okinawa





## Block 1

### **Hachimantai City Fudo Waterfall Festival**

03 May  
Hachimantai City, Iwate Prefecture  
[Website in Japanese only](#)

### **Morioka Wide Area Handcrafted Village Spring Festival**

03 May - 06 May  
Morioka City, Iwate Prefecture  
[Website in Japanese only](#)

### **AOMORI Spring Festival**

05 May  
Aomori City, Aomori Prefecture  
[Website in Japanese only](#)

### **Akita Ramen Festa 2019**

06 May  
Akita City, Akita Prefecture  
[Website in English and Japanese](#)

### **Semaya Night Market**

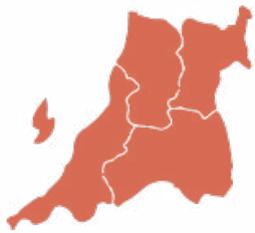
11 May  
Ichinoseki City, Iwate Prefecture  
[Website in Japanese only](#)

### **Sapporo Ramen Show 2019**

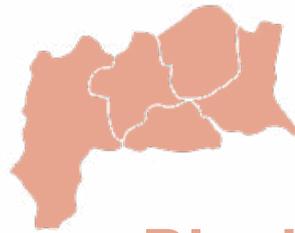
14 May - 26 May  
Sapporo City, Hokkaido Prefecture  
[Website in English and Japanese](#)

### **Okutsu Carcass and Fire Festival**

15 June  
Goshogawara City, Aomori Prefecture  
[Website in Japanese only](#)



## Block 2



## Block 3

### **Yonezawa Uesugi Festival 2019**

01 May - 03 May

Yonezawa City, Yamagata Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

### **Fukushima Ramen Show 2019**

06 May

Koriyama City, Fukushima Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

### **Sendai Ramen Festa 2019**

02 May - 06 May

Sendai City, Miyagi Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

### **Unuma Moss Phlox Festival 2019**

01 May - 12 May

Unuma City, Niigata Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

### **Sendai Aoba Festival 2019**

18 May - 19 May

Sendai City, Miyagi Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

### **Wine Tourism Yamagata 2019**

09 June

Kaminoyama City, Yamagata Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

### **Sakata Festival**

19 May - 21 May

Sakata City, Yamagata Prefecture

[Website in English only](#)

### **The Great Wisteria Festival 2019**

01 May - 19 May

Ashikaga City, Tochigi Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

### **KASAMA HIMATSURI 2019**

01 May - 05 May

Kasama City, Ibaraki Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

### **Fujioka Fuji Festival 2019**

01 May - 06 May

Fujioka City, Gunma Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

### **Large Kite-Flying Festival of Kasukabe 2019**

03 May - 05 May

Kasukabe City, Saitama Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

### **Misato Moss Phlox Festival 2019**

05 May

Takasaki City, Gunma Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

### **Hitachi Oktoberfest 2019**

05 May

Hitachi City, Ibaraki Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

### **Nagato Fuji Festival 2019**

06 May

Nagasu Town, Saitama Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

### **Togyo 1,000 Samurai Procession**

18 May

Nikko City, Tochigi Prefecture

[Website in English only](#)

### **Daisekkei Kura Matsuri**

25 May - 26 May

Ikeda Town, Nagano Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

### **Spring Beer Festival in Keyakihiroba**

29 May - 02 June

Saitama City, Saitama Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)



## Block 4



### **Fuji Shibazakura Festival**

01 May - 26 May

Fujikawaguchiko Town, Yamanashi Prefecture

[Website in English only](#)

### **HAISAI FESTA 2019**

01 May - 05 May

Kawasaki City, Kanagawa Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

### **Fuji Ramen Festa**

01 May - 06 May

Fuji City, Shizuoka Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

### **Makuhari Messe "Doki-Doki" Flea Market 2019**

03 May - 05 May

Chiba City, Chiba Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

### **Hamamatsu Festival**

03 May - 05 May

Hamamatsu City, Shizuoka Prefecture

[Website in English only](#)

### **Nagareyama Green Festival 2019**

04 May

Nagareyama City, Chiba Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)  
**EDC JAPAN 2019**

11 May - 12 May

Chiba City, Chiba Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

### **Akabane Baka Matsuri 2019**

11 May - 12 May

Tokyo City, Tokyo Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

### **ECOPA GOURMET STADIUM 2019**

11 May - 12 May

Fukuroi City, Shizuoka Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

### **OKINAWA Festival 2019**

18 May - 19 May

Tokyo City, Tokyo Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

### **Curry Festival in Yokosuka 2019**

18 May - 19 May

Yokosuka City, Kanagawa Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)



## Block 5

### The World of Chihayafuyu Exhibition

01 May - 23 June  
Awara City, Fukui Prefecture  
[Website in Japanese only](#)

### Sakura Festival in Tochio-Onsen 2019

01 May - 06 May  
Takayama City, Gifu Prefecture  
[Website in English and Japanese](#)

### All Japan Umaimono Matsuri 2019

01 May - 06 May  
Nagakute City, Aichi Prefecture  
[Website in English and Japanese](#)

### Sei Haku Sai Dekayama 2019

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

### Natural Wine Tasting La Munro 2019

11 May  
Ichinomiya City, Aichi Prefecture  
[Website in English and Japanese](#)

### SPICE TO AWA

11 May - 12 May  
Kanazawa City, Ishikawa Prefecture  
[Website in English and Japanese](#)

### The 31st Mihama / Itsuki Hiroshi Hometown Marathon

12 May  
Mihama Town, Fukui Prefecture  
[Website in Japanese only](#)

### Kuzuryu New Green Festival

18 May - 19 May  
Ono City, Fukui Prefecture  
[Website in Japanese only](#)

### Three Kingdoms Festival

19 May - 21 May  
Sakai City, Fukui Prefecture  
[Website in Japanese only](#)

### Echizen Ceramic Art Festival

25 May - 27 May  
Echizen Village, Fukui Prefecture  
[Website in Japanese only](#)

### Toyama's Sanno Festival 2019

31 May - 02 June  
Toyama City, Toyama Prefecture  
[Website in Japanese only](#)



## Block 6

### Kobe Wine Festival in Spring 2019

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

### Kankame-Inari Festival

14 May - 15 May  
Kyoto City, Kyoto Prefecture  
[Website in English only](#)

### Aoi Matsuri

15 May  
Kyoto City, Kyoto Prefecture  
[Website in English only](#)

### Kobe Festival

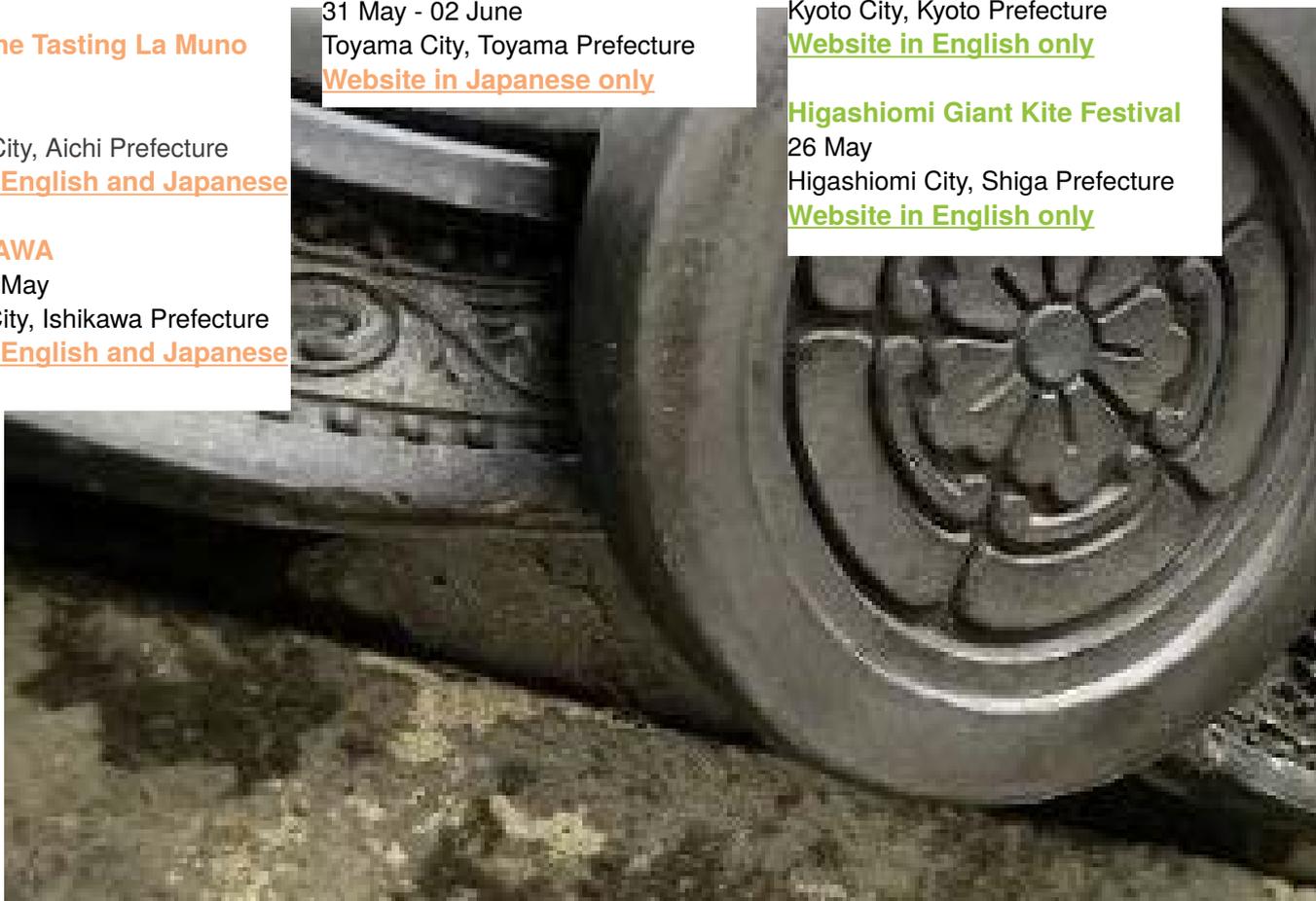
18 May - 19 May  
Kobe City, Hyogo Prefecture  
[Website in English only](#)

### Mifune Festival

19 May  
Kyoto City, Kyoto Prefecture  
[Website in English only](#)

### Higashiomi Giant Kite Festival

26 May  
Higashiomi City, Shiga Prefecture  
[Website in English only](#)





## Block 7

### LOHAS FESTA BANPAKU 2019

01 May  
Suita City, Osaka Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

### Sekai no Beer Hakurankai (World Beer Fair)

01 May - 05 May  
Osaka City, Osaka Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

### Iga Ueno NINJA Festa

01 May - 06 May  
Iga City, Mie Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

### FOOD SONIC 2019

01 May - 06 May  
Osaka City, Osaka Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

### Heijokyo Tempyo Sai Festival

03 May - 05 May  
Nara City, Nara Prefecture

[Website in English only](#)

### Shirukake Festival

05 May  
Nara City, Nara Prefecture

[Website in English only](#)

### Manyo Gagaku Festival

05 May  
Nara City, Nara Prefecture

[Website in English only](#)

### Hula Festival in Green Flower Center

12 May  
Wakayama City, Wakayama Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

### Miyako Princess Yosakoi Festival

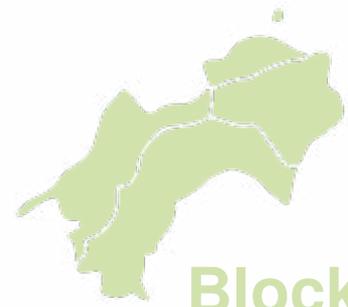
12 May  
Gobo City, Wakayama Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

### The 51st Sand Festival

25 May  
Shirarahama City, Wakayama Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)



## Block 8

### Ehime Prefecture Museum of History and Culture Golden Week Event

01 May - 06 May  
Saiyo City, Ehime Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

### Fuji Mountain Azalea Festival

01 May - 15 May  
Oiso City, Ehime Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

### Marugame Castle Festival 2019

01 May - 03 May  
Marugame City, Kagawa Prefecture

[Website in Japanese and English](#)

### Tosa Ichiya Hike procession "Fuji Matsuri"

03 May  
Shimanto City, Kochi Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

### Tokushima Craft Beer Festival 2019

17 May - 19 May  
Tokushima City, Tokushima Prefecture

[Website in Japanese and English](#)

### Tosaga Soka Festival

19 May  
Kochi City, Kochi Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)





## Block 9

### **YAMAGUCHI OKTOBERFEST 2019**

01 May - 06 May

Yamaguchi City, Yamaguchi Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

### **Gyoza Fes HIROSHIMA 2019**

02 May - 06 May

Hiroshima City, Hiroshima Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

### **Hiroshima Flower Festival**

03 May - 05 May

Hiroshima City, Hiroshima Prefecture

[Website in English only](#)

### **Shinkawa Market Festival**

03 May - 05 May

Ube City, Yamaguchi Prefecture

[Webpage in English only](#)

### **Shibukawa Fuji Festival**

04 May - 05 May

Tamano City, Okayama Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

### **The 43rd Chito Dodan Festival**

11 May - 12 May

Chito Town, Tottori Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

### **Kurashiki Sansai City Morning Market**

19 May

Kurashiki City, Okayama Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

### **The 17th Totteoki Two-Day Walk 2019**

25 May - 26 May

Ama Town, Shimane Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

### **Oyama Mountain Festival**

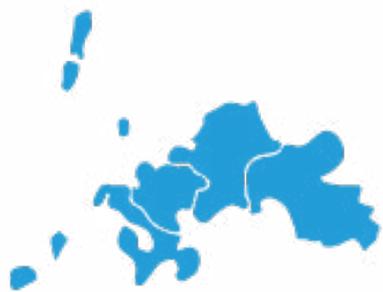
25 May - 01 June

Oyama Town, Tottori Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)



Photos:  
Avalon De Gannes  
Avalon De Gannes  
Rhema Baquero  
Rhema Baquero



## Block 10



## Block 11

### The 41th Kawakami Gorges Spring Festival 2019

01 May - 26 May

Saga City, Saga Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

### Inasayama Azalea Festival

01 May - 05 May

Nagasaki City, Nagasaki Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

### Arita Ceramics Bazaar

01 May - 05 May

Arita Town, Saga Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

### Super Curry Grand Prix

01 May - 06 May

Fukuoka City, Fukuoka Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

### Oita Ekimae Ramen-Haku 2019

02 May - 06 May

Oita City, Oita Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

### Hakata Dontaku Festival

03 May - 04 May

Fukuoka City, Fukuoka Prefecture

[Website in English only](#)

### Hirado Kaido Tokaijin Festival

03 May - 05 May

Hirado City, Nagasaki Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

### Itoda Gion Yamakasa

11 May - 12 May

Itoda Town, Fukuoka Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

### Fuji Hachimangu Shrine River Crossing Festival

18 May - 19 May

Tagawa City, Fukuoka Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

### Firefly's Hometown River Festival

25 May - 09 June

Shinkamigoto Town, Nagasaki Prefecture

[Webpage in Japanese only](#)

### 2019 Fukiagehama sand festival SAND & FLOWER Festa in

Minami Satsuma

01 May - 26 May

Minamisatsuma City, Kagoshima Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

### Spring Floral Festival

01 May - 26 May

Miyazaki City, Miyazaki Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

### Naha Hari

03 May - 05 May

Naha City, Okinawa Prefecture

[Website in English, French, Korean, and other languages](#)

### The 25th Kyushu International Three-Day March

10 May - 12 May

Yatsushiro City, Kumamoto Prefecture

[Website in English and Japanese](#)

### Hina Jomatsuri

12 May

Akune City, Kagoshima Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

### The 31st South Japan Cross Country Tournament

12 May

Kanaya City, Kagoshima Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)

### Sepe Tobe (Rice Planting Festival)

02 June

Hioki City, Kagoshima Prefecture

[Website in Japanese only](#)



# In The News

May 2019

Tresha Barrett (Kyoto)

## Reiwa: A New Era for Japan

In light of Emperor Akihito's upcoming abdication and Crown Prince Naruhito's coronation, Japan will soon see a new Imperial era called "Reiwa".

The new era, which means "beautiful harmony," was inspired by a passage from "Manyoshu," an 8th century anthology of classic poetry which was compiled during the Nara Period (710-784).

This is the first time an era's name has been taken from Japanese literature, as opposed to Chinese classics, which provided previous inspirations.

Following the announcement, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe explained the full meaning of "Reiwa" at a press conference. He stated that the Manyoshu (with its collection of about 4,500 poems) reflects Japan's "rich national culture and long traditions," and that hopefully the name will inspire a sense of harmony amongst Japanese citizens and an appreciation of the country's culture.

"Like the flowers of the plum tree blooming proudly in



spring after the cold winter, we wish the Japanese people to bloom like individual flowers with the (promise of the) future. With such a wish for Japan, we decided upon 'Reiwa,'" Prime Minister Abe declared.

Reiwa will officially begin on May 1st, when Crown Prince Naruhito ascends the throne.

Source: <https://cnn.it/2VeiEG0>

Image Source: <https://cnn.it/2VeiEG0>



# Japan's Working Age Population Hits Record Low

Recent data provided by Japan's Internal Ministry shows that the current percentage of the working population, those aged 15 to 64, has hit a record low.



The working-age people of Japan make up 60 percent of the overall population, a figure found to have been steadily decreasing for the past eight years. According to the ministry, the total population was about 126.4 million as of last October, which is a 0.21 percent drop since 2008. And of that 126.4 million, 75.4 million are those of working age, while 35.5 million are people aged 65 or older.

Furthermore, while the working-age population makes up 60 percent of Japan's populace, those aged 65 and older make up 28 percent of the total – which in itself is a record high. Also, in the latter group, more than half of them were aged 75 or older.

Another first is the percentage of children younger than 15, which is the lowest ever recorded - with their number falling to 12 percent.

This population decline is the largest one recorded for the country thus far.

Source: <https://bit.ly/2Gmt415>

Image Source: <https://bit.ly/2Z7qWSi>



# Nokonoshima: *Fukuoka Flower Paradise*

By Peyton Goodman (Oita)



Photo: Peyton Goodman

In many parts of Japan, the cherry blossoms have now turned into fresh spring leaves. However, that means a new season of flower-watching events will be starting. Japan is home to a variety of flowers, including the nemophila blossoms of Ibaraki's Hitachi Seaside Park, the hydrangeas of Kamakura, the wisterias of Kitakyushu, and many others. During spring vacation, I took a trip to Nokonoshima Island (Fukuoka City, Fukuoka Prefecture) which is a 15-minute ferry ride away from the mainland. There, I visited the island's famous flower park.

When you enter the park, you are greeted with a map that shows you the various sections. During my time there I saw cherry blossoms, rape blossoms, tulips, poppies, violets, and many others.

Flowers are not the only good point about this place. The island park also has ample space for various events and activities. There are many areas spread out throughout the park for recreational activities like soccer, volleyball, and other sports. There are also places to relax and have a nice picnic. Then, if you are looking for some animal love, there is a petting zoo. If one day isn't enough, there are rental cabins where you can stay overnight and enjoy a BBQ under the stars. It's the perfect place for an ALT event!

Tips:

- Watch out for flower status updates on the park [website](#). Usually there will be posts about whether a flower is in perfect bloom.
- When taking the ferry, try to stay on the first floor near the openings. You'll be able to get off the boat first.
- While it's possible to walk or bike to the park, it's a pretty steep climb most of the way. I suggest taking the bus.
- If you know you are going to be hungry, bring your own food. There are a couple of restaurants in the park, but they can be pricey (in my opinion) and the portions looked small. Luckily the park is a perfect place for a picnic!
- If you have time, walk back down to the ferry port. The bus can be pretty packed depending on when you visit the park. Also, the walk down is beautiful. You'll be able to get a good view of Fukuoka City and will see the various orange orchards on Nokonoshima.

*Peyton Goodman is a second year ALT in Hita city, Oita Prefecture. She spends her time listening to podcasts, reading manga, and watching video game walkthrough Youtube videos.*



# ARTS AND CULTURE

## CULTURE EDITOR

connect.culture@ajet.net

**Annelise Wilp**

## ENTERTAINMENT EDITOR

connect.entertainment@ajet.net

**Sarah White**

*"I don't care to be pretty. I care to look on the outside like I look on the inside." - Maggie Stiefvater, The Raven King*

## STYLE AND BEAUTY EDITOR

connect.fashion@ajet.net

**Laura Pollacco**

*"All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given us." - Gandalf*

## ARTS EDITOR

connect.arts@ajet.net

**Tayla-Paige van Sittert**

*Maybe you should try to write a haiku right now...*

Photo: Ashley Hirasuna



YUP  
TO THE I I WENT  
PENIS FESTIVAL

Annelise Wilp (Saitama)



You read that right: Japan has the Kanamara Festival (commonly known as the Penis Festival) in Kawasaki, Kanagawa prefecture, every April. Here's a little background on this unique festival.

The purpose of the Kanamara Festival is to pray for fertility, healthy marriage, and success in business (this one surprised me a bit). It is held at Kanayama Shrine, which holds *Hiko no Kami* and *Kanayama Hime no Kami*, the guardians of blacksmiths and sexuality. During the Edo period, working women (oftentimes sex workers) would stop at the shrine on their way to Kyoto to seek protection from illness and misfortune. Over time, people suffering from sexually transmitted diseases would come to the shrine at night to pray for health. And so began the Kanamara Festival, a celebration that would allow people of all backgrounds to be able to feel protected during the day as well. Today, proceeds from the Kanamara Festival go to HIV and AIDS Research.

Another JET from my prefecture invited me to the festival, and at first I was hesitant. What would people think of me attending this event? But then I did more research on the event and saw that the funds went to a good cause and figured

it would be an interesting cultural experience.

The festival started at 11:30 a.m., and my friend and I arrived in Kawasaki around 10 a.m. We thought we were early, but we were dead wrong. It felt like every foreigner in Tokyo had made the trip to this festival. We ended up waiting two hours to get in due to space limitations and the small size of the shrine. Once we were finally inside, we saw food trucks, a live band, and, of course, the famous phallic candies. It's not a day at the Penis Festival without a selfie with a phallic candy, right?

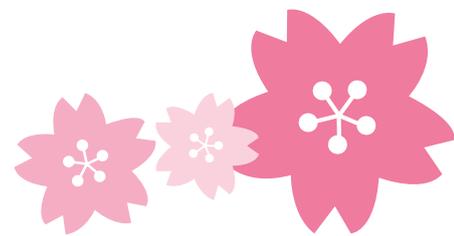
Finally, we saw what we came to see: the giant penis paraded through the streets. The most amusing part was a bus stopping in the middle of the road to let the giant float pass. The reactions of the passengers were priceless!

Despite the crowds and it feeling more like Lollapalooza with all of the foreigners, I enjoyed my day at the Kanamara Festival. While it's fun to take photos with all things phallic, it's important to remember the meaning of the festival and the diversity of the people who attended. There should be more events like this to celebrate and welcome all forms of sexuality.



*Annelise Wilp is a first-year JET from Chicago, currently living in Saitama prefecture. When she's not at school, she enjoys travel vlogging, reading, and writing her novel. You can follow her on [Instagram](#) and [Youtube](#) at [@annelisetravels](#).*

Source: <https://matcha-jp.com/en/5732>



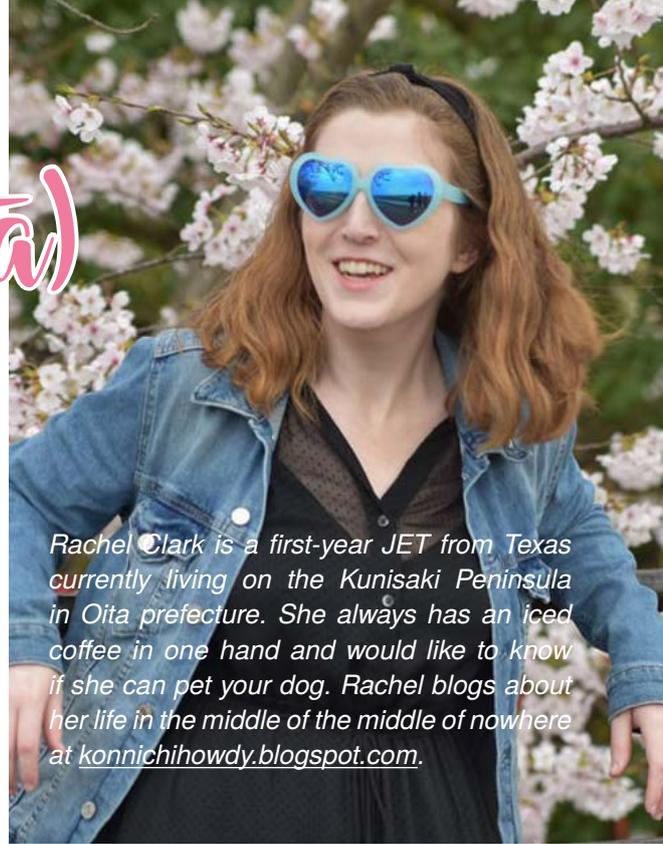
## ***JET STORIES:***

# ***Hajimete no Hanami***

Annelise Wilp (Saitama)

*Hanami*, or flower viewing, is a Japanese tradition of picnicking (and day drinking) under the cherry blossoms, or *sakura*, when they bloom in the spring. The cherry blossoms bloom at different times all over Japan, and people gather to enjoy the fleeting beauty of the blossoms, which only lasts about two weeks. Many JETs had neither seen the cherry blossoms in bloom nor experienced hanami before coming to Japan. Here are some of their stories of their first hanami.

# Rachel Clark (Oita)



What I learned at my first hanami:

1. I love cooking for friends. Spending ages on a batch of pies and seeing them demolished in a matter of hours is euphoric.
2. I'm bad at the game Werewolf. Historically, I'm a terrible liar and incredibly transparent even in games. This will take time to fix.
3. If you get a tiny piece of paper from a shrine surrounded by cherry blossoms and it tells you things are going to be alright, believe it. Because if the world around you is blooming into color and life, you can too.

*Rachel Clark is a first-year JET from Texas currently living on the Kunisaki Peninsula in Oita prefecture. She always has an iced coffee in one hand and would like to know if she can pet your dog. Rachel blogs about her life in the middle of the middle of nowhere at [konnichihowdy.blogspot.com](http://konnichihowdy.blogspot.com).*

# Sarah Ann-Marie Owen (Tokyo)

For me, hanami in Tokyo has been a mixture of absolutely stunning views and daunting encounters with huge crowds of occasionally aggressive tourists. All in all, Tokyo transforms from a concrete jungle to a beautiful wonderland for a few weeks once a year, and as long as you are prepared for the crowds, it's still pretty enjoyable. That said, with tourism set to increase year on year, I think it will be worth planning to branch out into other less popular and populated areas of Tokyo and, more widely, Japan for next year's sakura season.

*\*Author could not contact Sarah Owen and Eve Henty for author bios.*

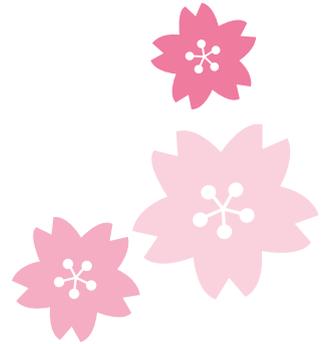




# Eve Henty (Shizuoka)

My first hanami was in Akita in 2009. A group of us, all international students, went to the park downtown and brought a little food and some drinks, but when we arrived we were soon welcomed into a group of elderly Japanese. I remember thinking *wow* you guys brought so *much food!* It was so lovely to experience the kindness of the Japanese. We couldn't speak much Japanese and they couldn't speak much English, but we all had a great time nonetheless.

*\*Author could not contact Sarah Owen and Eve Henty for author bios.*



# Emma Hollis (Okinawa)

Okinawa's sakura are a deeper pink than on the mainland, and they fall by the bud instead of petal by petal. I saw more sakura around my car park than when I went to an actual sakura festival early on in the season.



*Emma Hollis is an Australian first-year JET currently living in Naha, Okinawa. In her spare time she writes stories, watches vine compilations, and plans her next overseas adventure.*





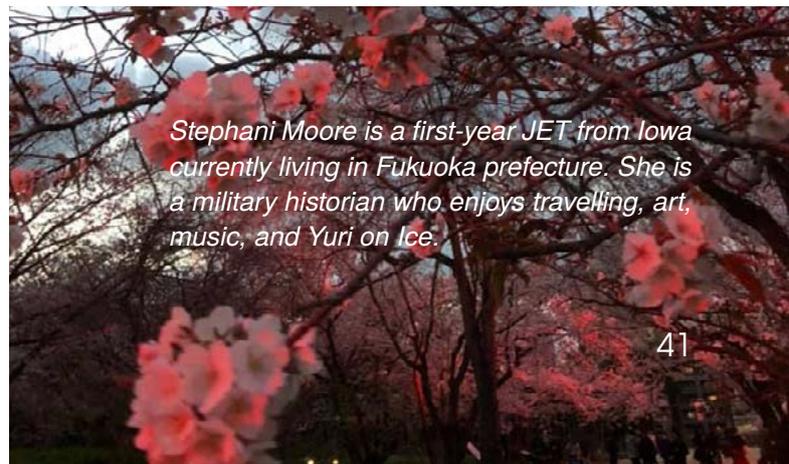
## Rachelle Cosentino (Tokushima)

*Rachelle Cosentino is a second-year JET from Pennsylvania. She is currently living in Tokushima prefecture with her husband, who is also a JET. Her hobbies include crocheting, hiking, photography, and calligraphy. She and her husband are expecting a baby boy this summer.*

My first hanami experience was last year, and it was at a beautiful location where lots of friends all gathered with snacks and drinks. While we were there, some of the local Japanese people next to us offered us some of their freshly caught and cooked wild boar, and it was so delicious! Shortly after, the wind blew threw really hard, and as the petals fell, a small child yelled out “sakura yuki!” It was magical!

## Stephani Moore (Fukuoka)

My first hanami was this year! I went to Maizuru Park alone about a half hour before sunset and stayed a while after because Maizuru Park does sakura illuminations with music! I was going to go the weekend before because there was an AJET meet up, but the sakura hadn't bloomed. Going alone was nice, though. I was able to quietly appreciate the beautiful sunset and the pretty colors of the illuminations in a more focused way. Hakata had an Italian pizza festival that weekend, so I ended my night with really good pizza!



*Stephani Moore is a first-year JET from Iowa currently living in Fukuoka prefecture. She is a military historian who enjoys travelling, art, music, and Yuri on Ice.*



## Annelise Wilp (Saitama)

I had always dreamed of seeing the cherry blossoms in Japan, and I was finally able to experience it with my new friends in Saitama. We went to Omiya Park, which was packed full of food stands, games, and, of course, people. There were little kids blowing bubbles and an old man riding around on his bike with his puppy on his shoulder. Even some newscasters came by to interview us (we did kind of stick out, after all). I couldn't have asked for a better hanami experience. I will remember it forever.

*Annelise Wilp is a first-year JET from Chicago currently living in Saitama prefecture. When she's not at school, she enjoys travel vlogging, reading, and writing her novel. You can follow her on [Instagram](#) and [Youtube](#) at [@annelisetravels](#).*

# MAY RELEASES

Sarah White (Fukui)

## MOVIES

May 3

- Pokémon Detective Pikachu (2019)
- The Foreigner (2017)
- Don't Worry, He Won't Get Far on Foot (2018)

May 10

- The Curse of La Llorona (2019)
- Overlord (2018)
- The White Crow (2018)

May 17

- Replicas (2018)
- Colette (2018)
- Galveston (2018)
- American Animals (2018)

May 24

- Ben Is Back (2018)

May 31

- Godzilla: King of the Monsters (2019)
- England Is Mine (2017)
- Anna and the Apocalypse (2017)

Sources:

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

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

Photo: Aneta Pawlik on Unsplash

## GAMES

May 2

- Steel Division 2 (PC)
- Rise of Industry (PC)

May 7-10

- Brief Battles (PC, PS4, Xbox One)
- For The King (PS4, Switch, Xbox One)
- Life is Strange 2 - Episode 3: Wastelands (PC, PS4, Xbox One)
- Saints Row: The Third - The Full Package (Switch)

May 14

- Rage 2 (PC, PS4, Xbox One)
- A Plague Tale: Innocence (PC, PS4, Xbox One)

May 21

- Assassin's Creed 3 Remastered (Switch)
- Atelier Lulua: The Scion of Arland (PC, PS4, Switch)
- Everybody's Golf VR (PS VR)
- Resident Evil Zero (Switch)
- Resident Evil HD Remaster (Switch)
- Resident Evil 4 (Switch)
- Observation (PC, PS4)
- Killing Floor: Double Feature (PS4, PS VR)
- Team Sonic Racing (PC, PS4, Xbox One, Switch)

May 23

- Total War: Three Kingdoms (PC)
- Pathologic 2 (PC)

May 24

- Dollhouse (PC, PS4)
- Sword Art Online: Hollow Realization
- Deluxe Edition (Switch)

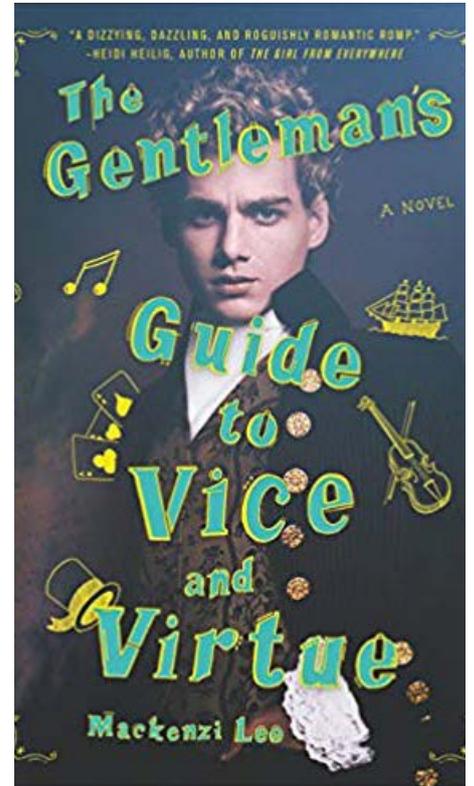
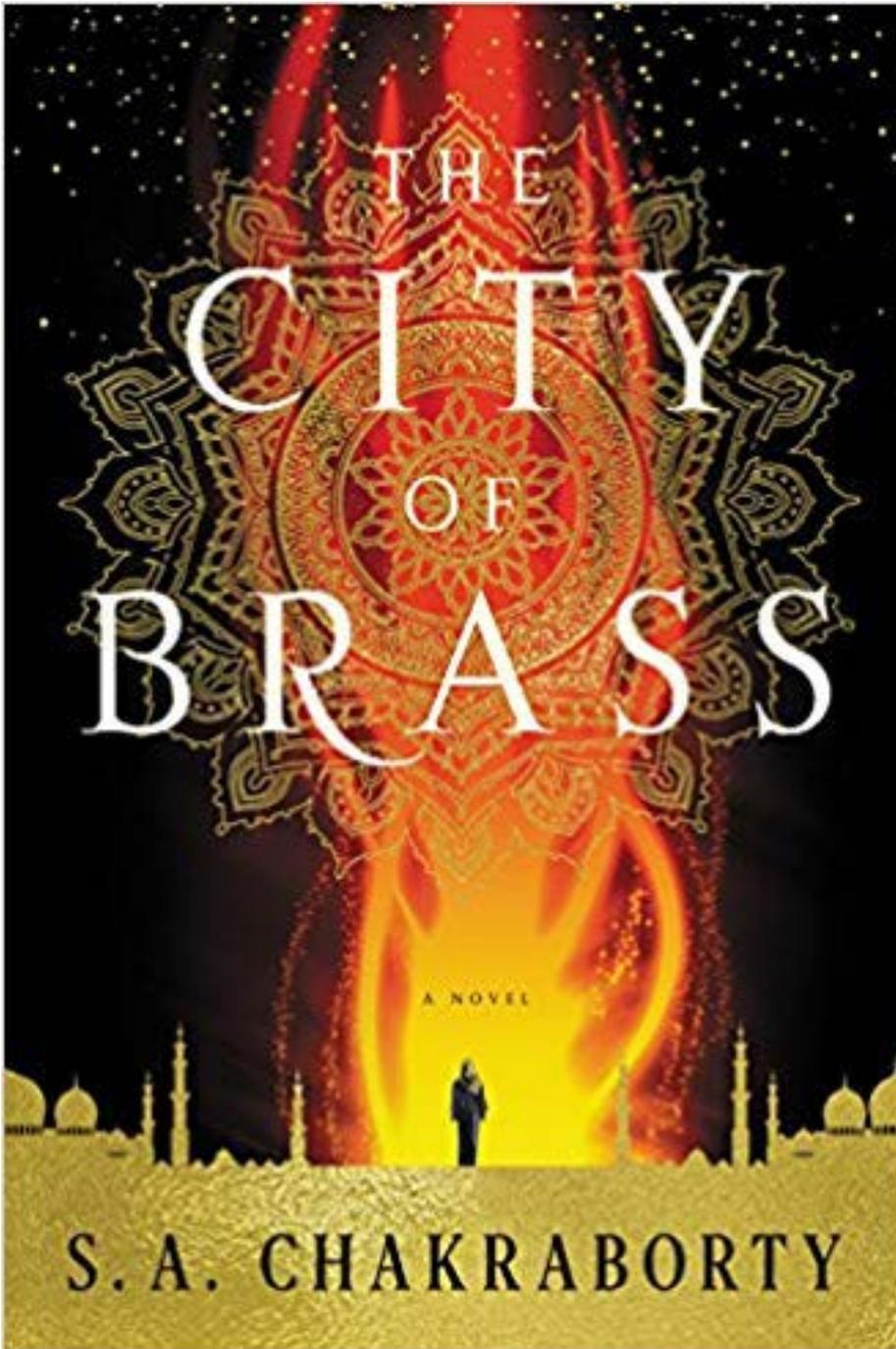
May 28

- Little Friends: Dogs & Cats (Switch)
- Blood & Truth (PS VR)
- Kingdom Come: Deliverance Royal Edition (PC, PS4, Xbox One)

# Getting Lit

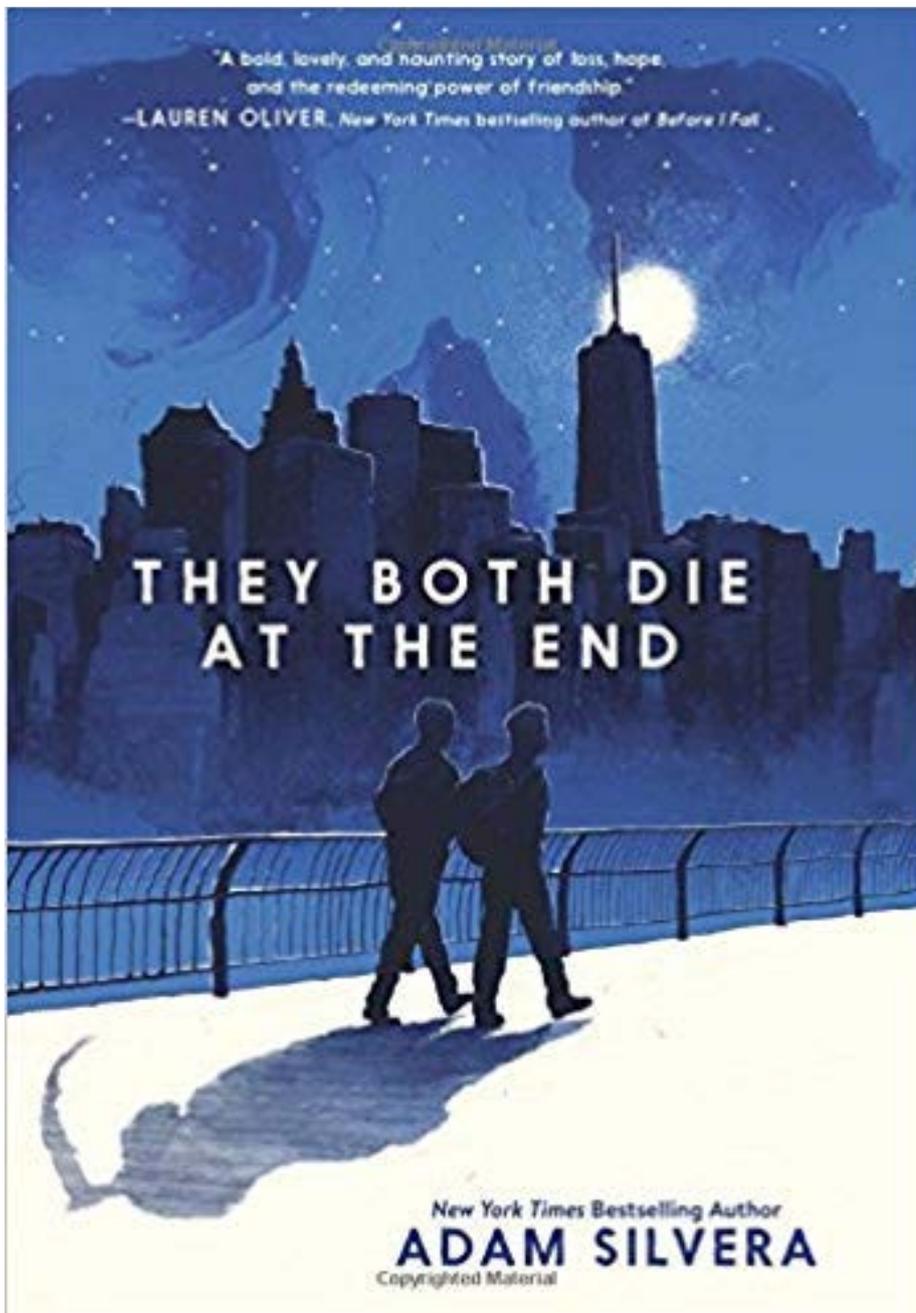
*Turning a New Page on an Old Hobby*

Damien Levi (Tokyo)



Do you have free time at school but are tired of studying Japanese for eight hours a day? Do the internet filters at school block you out of social media? Well here is a solution: reading! The great new way to keep your mind active on those slow days. Although this is not 100% my situation (I have fantastic, unfiltered internet), these are largely the same circumstances that brought out my inner bookworm after almost a decade of absence.

My first four months on JET were fantastic and busy, learning how to team-teach and studying Japanese, getting to know students and teachers, and generally enjoying my time here. Don't get me wrong,



I still love it, and there are always new things to be learned; however, I found myself with a lot more free time than anticipated.

Coming from a job where I was busy from start to finish, this free time was new to me, and I wasn't sure what to do with it. I'm talking late-December when classes are all wrapped up, students are on their class trips or busy in make-up classes, and I'm warming my desk until we go on break. I applaud anyone who can sit and study for hours on end. I tried, but the most

I could manage was two hours across applications, books, and conversations with a neighbouring teacher. Instead, I turned to a hobby I hadn't dedicated any real time to in years: reading.

I know it's so simple and something that millions of people do on the daily, but forced literacy study in the form of SSR (sustained silent reading) in high school and a series of dry textbooks in university had deterred me from reading anything other than graphic novels for the last seven years. Picking

up a book in December reignited the passion that 12-year old me had for reading back when *Harry Potter* was at its height. Only now, instead of a magical adventure of three friends that spanned seven books, I almost exclusively read queer-themed novels.

Representation matters, and it's this aspect that has me hooked. These books have allowed me to experience detailed, nuanced, and varied stories of queer people and their relationships more times in five months of reading than I have in five years' worth of mainstream film and television. In an article for *GQ Magazine*, Alim Kheraj discusses how "there is such a catharsis in reading queer teen fiction [as an adult]." He puts forward the idea that modern LGBTQ+ novels allow adults to reflect on their experiences through the lens of other people's stories and turn that into a form of group therapy.

When I was a teenager, I couldn't imagine a contemporary YA novel where the main character was queer, in a relationship, and didn't die by the time the novel finished. Thankfully the 'kill your gays' trope is almost well and truly out the door (I'll make an exception for Adam Silvera's *They Both Die at the End* because it's fantastic). For the most part, queer protagonists now have a chance at actually being happy at the end of their book.

It's reassuring to see the multitude of queer-themed book lists and recommendations on major publishing websites and media outlets. These books are so easily accessible now, and this representation is so important as it allows isolated, closeted, and struggling queer people to learn about stories and history they can identify with. Author, poet, and LGBTQ+ rights advocate

Mary Dorcey summarises their importance in an article with *The University Times*, saying “when [struggling queer people] get to know individuals who are open about their identity, confident, and fulfilled, their attitudes are changed, and they become self-accepting.”

This sentiment is echoed by author and editor Deborah Dixon for *Writers Helping Writers*. She says, “seeing people who look, act, and experience life like them in media makes a person feel included in a society, and it reinforces positive views of themselves and what they can achieve.”

This is not only an informative experience for those in the community, but also for straight readers as well. In the previously mentioned *University Times* article, author Michael Cunningham postulates that reading about characters different to oneself helps to develop empathy for others. Therefore, it would make sense that if people read about the ins and outs of LGBTQ+ lives, they will become “less likely to be homophobic, just as someone Western who has read about Middle Eastern lives is less likely (one hopes) to favour carpet-bombing entire countries.”

It makes me hopeful for teens these days to have such a variety of stories available to them. I’m also a tad jealous. As much as I’ve enjoyed rediscovering my passion for reading as an adult, the problem is that living in Japan makes finding these types of books domestically problematic. Even where I work in Kanda Jimbocho, the bookstore hotspot of Tokyo, locating English language books that aren’t international bestsellers is tricky.

Of course, ordering from online retailers is a solution, but for

the avid reader, a tiny Japanese apartment doesn’t have the space for anyone to start their own personal library. In this case, eBooks are your best bet. They’re generally cheaper than physical copies, and you don’t need an e-reader to view them. A laptop or even mobile phone does the job just as well. Alternatively, you could try reaching out to some fellow bookworms in Japan to set up a book exchange to get your hands on a new title.

Whether it’s during your vacation, on the weekend, or during a particularly long stretch of desk warming at school, free time on the JET is the perfect opportunity to develop new hobbies or rediscover old ones. If you’re like me and used to have a passion for reading that waned over the years, try picking up a new book and giving it a go. It’s possible you could discover a new genre or new stories that resonate with you more now that you’re older and with a greater sense of self. Film, television, and music are all storytelling devices when it comes down to it, so jump on the bandwagon and get those pages flipping.

*Damien Levi is a first-year ALT from Aotearoa/New Zealand, but Tokyo is where he’s at these days. In 2019 he’s taking on the Goodreads Reading Challenge, aiming to finish 52 books before the year is out. He’s hoping to add a Japanese language book to that list, even if it’s one for kids. When he actually puts down his books, you can find him listening and writing about music or playing video games. Find him on Instagram @damienlevi.*



Sources:  
<https://bit.ly/2tBOGQ3>  
<https://bit.ly/2U5hZW1>  
<https://bit.ly/2YVVRfL7>

Picture Credits:  
<https://bit.ly/2P7I2Li>  
<https://bit.ly/2UsXKGM>  
<https://bit.ly/2EHm6la>  
<https://bit.ly/2G30j8k>  
<https://bit.ly/2KALtLY>

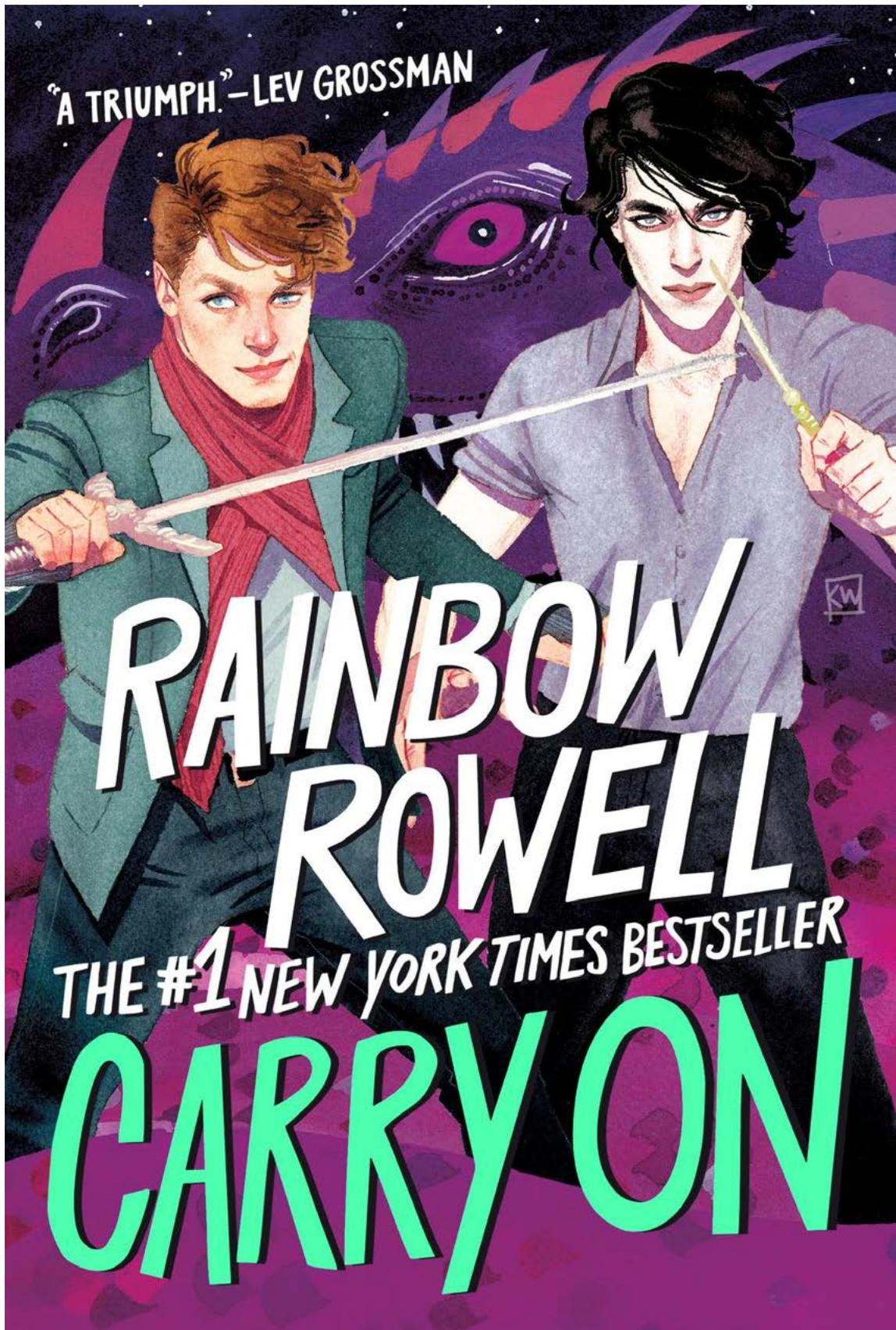
BESTSELLER

HT  
RET  
S

wings,  
ilities,  
stuff

BI  
SON

y, and beautifully unabashed,  
aders on both a cross-the-country  
deep dive into Abbi Jacobson's  
heart." —CHERYL STRAYED



# Doing it Cinephile Style

Picture this: there's a major film coming out that you're super excited to see. It's got A-list actors, a big budget, and palpable hype. You see a release date in the latest trailer, but because you live in Japan, you jump online to see if the release date is the same. You pull up the 'coming soon' tab and scroll, scroll, scroll until you find it and...! Not only is it not being released on the date you saw in the trailer; it's not being released in Japan until four months later. You close your laptop and sob.

This is a very common experience that foreigners living in Japan can attest to. Consider this example: *Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse* originally released in the USA in December of 2018. The film had been out a full three and a half months, won an Academy Award, and was available for digital download all before its Japanese March 8th release date.

There are logical explanations for the release date delays even if they aren't very good. Cinemas in Japan market films a lot more intensely and generally want to know that an English language film will be successful in the Japanese market before investing money into screenings that nobody attends. So what can you do when you're really keen on the latest flick but you don't want to wait a few months for it? Find a friend with a decent sized TV, get a group of friends together, and hold a movie night, baby.

Now I know what you're thinking: "But I'm still going to have to wait to see it." Yes, that is true as it is incredibly rare for a digital download store or streaming service to offer a new release shortly after its cinema run. But short of going overseas to see the flick, it's your best option. Besides, setting up a movie night is a great way to socialize without all the restrictions of a cinema. You can pause the film, eat any snacks you want, or even have a few drinks (because let's be honest, some comedy films need the assistance).

Mostly likely the biggest issue you're going to run into is a scheduling conflict, so it's best to plan in advance. Keep an eye out for when the film you want to see will be released online. Around a month before this date hits, send your invites out. A Facebook event is always good, and this gives attendees plenty of time to plan.

Conversely, you could have scheduling down no problem but, like many JETs, have a tiny one-room apartment that can barely fit you, let alone a group

of friends. This issue is a little hard to tackle if all your friends are in the same situation, but if you're truly committed, shuffling a few things around to make room isn't the end of the world.

So you've got the date locked in, your feature film set, and a location sorted. Now, you should really consider snacks. You're not at a cinema, so there's no rules about what you can and can't have; however, popcorn is a must, of course. The pre-popped stuff you can buy at the supermarket is straight garbage (apologies to those that like it), so don't even bother with that. Get along to a Don Quijote, and you can score yourself some butter-flavoured microwave popcorn for ¥99 a bag. No Donki in your area? Amazon will have your back.

When the day rolls around, it's good to have an episode of something mindless to throw on before your film: *Friends*, *How I Met Your Mother*, *The Fresh Prince*, something in that vein. This will

give you some time to get the snacks together, for everyone to pour themselves a drink and get comfortable, and for any late stragglers to arrive. If you have guests coming who maybe don't have the strongest English skills or are hard of hearing, it might be good to hop online and download some subtitles beforehand. Other than that, all that's left is to enjoy yourself! If there's time and enthusiasm, line up a double or triple-feature.

We may not get to choose where we get placed in Japan or who is placed there with us, but something we can do is make the most out of our time here. Getting together with a group of JETs from a variety of countries to hang out and watch a movie is a great bonding experience and a way to help make long-lasting friendships. Whether it's a laughing fit during a comedy, a jump scare in a horror, or some stifled tears through a sad drama, a shared moment may be simple, but don't take it for granted!

*Damien Levi is a first-year ALT originally from Aotearoa/ New Zealand. You can now find him on Tokyo trains listening to sad songs, looking out the windows, and pretending he's in a music video. He's currently conducting an experiment to see how many plants he can buy before his friends stage an intervention. His other hobbies include video games, writing about music, and reading YA fiction novels. Find him on Instagram @ damienlevi .*

# Takeshita Fever

Rae DeFrane (Tokyo)





Japan is a country known for many things: its food, its culture, its anime, and its street style. Harajuku style in particular has been definitive for a generation of stylistas, fashion students, and clothing lovers who flock in droves to the tight quarters of Takeshita Street to bask in the *kawaii* stylings that have become synonymous with Japanese street wear. Some of the stores found on this street, such as 6% Doki Doki, WC, and Closet Child reach shoppers worldwide through online retailers, perpetuating the Harajuku flavour. What is it about these wild and crazy styles that draws in the masses and sets them apart from other street styles?



Japanese street style, unlike the styles that line the streets of other fashion meccas such as New York, Los Angeles, Paris, and London, seems to be a hodge-podge of sizes, colours, and inspirations. Though the most popular of the styles often lean strongly into the feminine, the styles also often seem to mimic a child who was digging through their colorful older sister's closet and then dressed in front of the mirror. There are oversized sweaters, tiny skirts, bedazzled denim jackets straight from the 80s, and platform shoes straight out of the 90s, all in an array of pastels and rainbows of colours. In many ways, Japanese style is a bit of an anthropological time-capsule. Some of the most famous Japanese sub-fashions call back to periods in time that are no longer referenced in other cultures. This is not only true of the modern fashions of the last few decades but also of long-gone eras.



The inspirations for many Japanese street styles, much like many aspects of Japanese culture, are heavily influenced by other countries but are altered drastically to be given new life and remarketed to the same countries from whence they first came. One of the most famous Japanese subculture styles, known as 'Lolita,' is heavily influenced by Victorian and Edwardian aristocratic fashion. It involves petticoats, parasoles, corsets, and a lot of lace; and at the same time, it miss-matches those articles of clothing with extremely kitschy and heavily themed jewelry, shoes, fasteners and handbags. This gives the style a unique and overly-feminized look which appears to take it from a regal fashion to a kawaii statement of ribbons and cuteness. For example, although there are some other subcultures around the world which use these articles of clothing as well, none blend the ideas of cute and gothic in quite the same way as Gothic Lolita. The two most popular types of the Lolita style are, as previously mentioned, the Gothic, which utilizes blacks, purples, chains, and ripped and torn imagery alongside the feminine, and Sweet Lolita. Sweet Lolita invokes imagery of candy and rainbows and pastel colours. Both are amazingly different in their colour palettes and yet harken back to the same time period. I believe it is one of the most unique subcultures of fashion in the world and is also the one most synonymous with Japan.

The oversized style is also huge in Japan (pun intended). Whereas in other countries, especially Western ones, smaller articles of clothing

are glorified, certain parts of Japan value the opposite. Think long sleeves which reach down to the fingers, and slouching trousers coupled with open-toed shoes. It is very common for “free-size” items to be prevalent in stores, and they are often oversized on the wearer’s frame. It is much less common to find the equivalent “one-size-fits-all” in North America. Rather than being oversized, the item is made from a stretchy, more form-revealing material.

In most countries, good street fashion is polished and put together, telling an aesthetic story that may have taken hours to put together. In Japan, the more mismatched you are and the more inspirations you incorporate into your outfit, the more fashionable you are. Perhaps this is a reflection of rebellion against Japan’s culture of perfectionism and perceived lack of autonomy. In general, the Japanese, especially in their work lives, operate in a sea of neutral shades and similar-looking three-piece suits. Often, it is viewed as next-to impossible to get a job or a career in many fields without conforming to this rigorous dress-code. Perhaps a country’s street style is a reversed-mirror image of its culture and a way for people to express their innermost desires. For this reason, I doubt one will ever find a more unique yet tailored scene of fashion than the one in Japan.

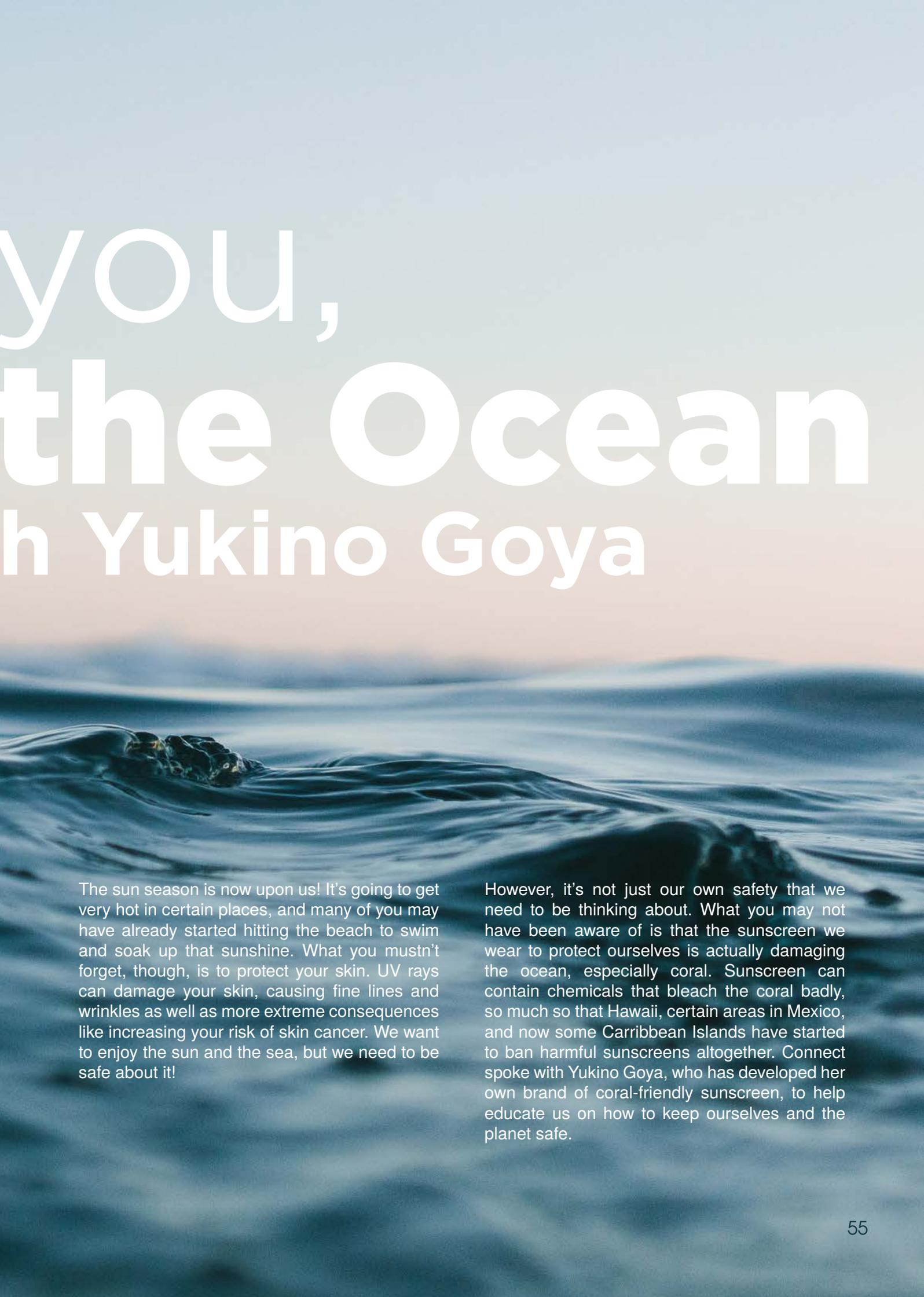
*Rae is a witch and storyteller currently based in Tokyo as an ALT who writes about travel and culture. She hails from the west coast of Canada in beautiful BC and she loves swimming and reading tarot.*





# Kind for **Kind for** An Interview with

Laura Pollacco (Kanagawa)



# you, the Ocean with Yukino Goya

The sun season is now upon us! It's going to get very hot in certain places, and many of you may have already started hitting the beach to swim and soak up that sunshine. What you mustn't forget, though, is to protect your skin. UV rays can damage your skin, causing fine lines and wrinkles as well as more extreme consequences like increasing your risk of skin cancer. We want to enjoy the sun and the sea, but we need to be safe about it!

However, it's not just our own safety that we need to be thinking about. What you may not have been aware of is that the sunscreen we wear to protect ourselves is actually damaging the ocean, especially coral. Sunscreen can contain chemicals that bleach the coral badly, so much so that Hawaii, certain areas in Mexico, and now some Caribbean Islands have started to ban harmful sunscreens altogether. Connect spoke with Yukino Goya, who has developed her own brand of coral-friendly sunscreen, to help educate us on how to keep ourselves and the planet safe.

**Q: Hello, Yukino! First off, please tell us a little about yourself. Where you grew up, your hobbies and passions, etc.**

**A:** Hello. My name is Yukino Goya, and I am an Okinawan local. I spent my early 20s living in Tokyo for 5 years and New York for 3 years. I've now been back and living in Okinawa for more than 10 years. I like watching anything comedic, and my passion is world peace.

**Q: What first made you aware of the problem of coral bleaching and its connection to sunscreen?**

**A:** I was at a famous beach for snorkelling when I was told by a diver that I was killing coral because I was putting on a lot of sunscreen on my body when I was about to go into the water. At first I couldn't really understand what this person was talking about. I was aware of my skin getting irritated when I used the regular sunscreen, and I was aware of the fact that the ocean has changed a lot in these 20 years as Okinawa has become a very popular travel destination. More people are trying scuba diving and snorkeling than ever before when they come to Okinawa. So I was aware of these things but not aware of the connection between sunscreen and coral bleaching until I googled it after being told I was killing the coral.

**Q: How exactly does sunscreen damage the coral?**

**A:** Some of the ingredients that combat harmful UV rays for humans can, in turn, harm the coral. Experts say that just one drop of a popular UV chemical ingredient, oxybenzone, found in sunscreen in a body of water the volume of six Olympic swimming pools can harm a coral's DNA. It is also toxic to humans. There are too many studies you can look up. It is very surprising. You might want to stop reading it.





**Q: I personally haven't seen many big branded sunscreens sell themselves as being coral-friendly. Do you think this will change?**

**A:** No. I don't think it will change for a while. Now I see many sunscreens which have stickers saying "REEF SAFE\*" — \* as they don't contain oxybenzone or octinoxate, two ingredients which are going to be banned by the regulations of Hawaii. But there are more, similar ingredients in those sunscreens which scientists also say are not reef-friendly. Palau decided to ban even more toxic chemicals than Hawaii to avoid this scam from sunscreen companies that are not actually making reef-safe sunscreen.

To make products eye-catching for customers, brands have to use various ingredients to achieve efficacy. The majority of the people will continue to choose their beauty over being eco-friendly. Big brands have to keep up their marketing game, so they can't afford to use high cost, all-natural ingredients for waterproof sunscreen in order to save costs for their big price ads.

**Q: How did you go about developing your sunscreen?**

**A:** I started buying many reef-safe sunscreens in America first and checked what each brand was doing and why they picked their ingredients. Then I made a sample at home and started talking to a cosmetic factory in Japan (though now I use one in Thailand). I was then contacted by a scientist based in Israel, a member of the Haereticus Environmental Laboratory, who specialized in sunscreen. They were able to give me some good advice. That was really helpful. This came about because my friend tweeted about me in English, so somehow this scientist found me and had the opportunity to visit Okinawa for a forum, and I was able to meet him and receive his advice in-person.



**Q: Your product has won a sustainability and environmental award. Can you tell us about it and how it felt to win?**

**A:** Receiving the 2018 Biodiversity Action Award Japan was very rewarding because it's not an easy business here in Japan. I didn't know how hard it would be to talk about how coral-safe sunscreen is necessary here in Okinawa. People will always be more interested after I am awarded or appear in the media, so it is the fastest way to open people's minds. I actually stopped doing active sales activities because many people don't want to hear about the fact that regular sunscreen is harming coral reefs through brands who are making "coral-safe" sunscreen. It is hard for people to understand because coral safety is a very new concept here. So I really needed that award!

Now, people who agree with what I am doing get in contact; they support us and spread the message to more people in a way that people understand. So my main goal for increasing sales activity is to be more reachable.

**Q: According to your website, you have a strong female team working together to help brand and market this product. Was it important to you to create a workplace that allowed for women to work from home and find flexibility with their work life and family life?**

**A:** My main staff in charge of purchase orders are working from home. We are trying to develop how we can make it work for us. It is very experimental, and to do that, my online shopping site says "We ship product within 3 days, if you are in a hurry please let us know." One of my main staff has a baby that is 2 years old. It is not difficult for her if she has 3 days to ship the product. I think she and I are very happy with this work style. I want to see the possibilities for what a small (micro) company can do to contribute to our society.

**Q: Do you have any big plans for yourself and the company coming up?**

**A:** YES! I am going to start a new social business which will be related to trash on the beach. I am very excited!

Picking up trash on the beach can be a fun activity during a trip to Okinawa. This program offers super easy steps for clean beaches and making connections with locals and people who want travelers to join this activity whenever you want. This will make a human circle of gratitude. This project will start before autumn 2019.

I will announce this project on my [page](#) in many languages and also on my instagram [@yukkigoya](#).





**Q: What message would you like to tell Connect and our readers in regards to the ocean and doing our part?**

**A:** For me, my idol is Sylvia Earle, a marine biologist, explorer, author, and lecturer. She is such a charismatic person. But we won't have her forever. We tend to think "There is an amazing person; this person would do their job to change the world." And we just sit there and listen and do nothing.

I want all ordinary people, like myself, not just scientists, not pop stars, to be aware that WE CAN SHARE a person like Sylvia's thoughts throughout the world. We can think the same way she does, so we don't need to wait for another idol to show up after our idol is gone. Right now she is alive; we can watch her talk and learn many things. The great part is that she has already done the study for us. Now we can act. Every person is an influencer. I want people to realize this. We are the future. We are not alone and we are connected globally. My passion is world peace. I think that with an environmental issue, many people can share the same goal and be connected to hit our goal together. I think this is the closest thing to world peace that I know.

You can buy Yukino's coral friendly sunscreen and help protect the ocean's ecosystem here: <https://naturalshop.official.ec/>

# Jonathan Kling Kumamoto



I have been passionate about art for as long as I can remember. As a child, I was more interested in science than fantasy, so I used to draw animals and give labels to all the different parts, much to the amusement of my parents.

By high school, I had finally delved into the world of fiction, and it was then that my pursuit of art truly began. I would often draw characters or scenes from video games I had played or books I had read. Heavily inspired by Matthew Reilly, I eventually attempted writing a novel with illustrations to go along with it. This continued for several years before I was hit by a four year artist's block.

Thankfully, my entrance into university as an illustration major helped revive my passion. I studied





Japanese and Japanese history alongside my major, which began to influence the development of my art style. I fell in love with *ukiyo-e*, the works of Hiroshige and Hokusai in particular. My interests became an unusual mix of comic art and traditional Japanese art. I've since been inspired by other similar art, such as the *Yaiba Ninja Gaiden* comic and Marjorie Liu's graphic novel, *Monstress*.



Recently I've been interested in drawing scenery with a somewhat stylized *ukiyo-e* approach. The images you see here are my most recent ones in this style. I hope to continue to improve my ability in this style, producing more works along this vein and eventually completing my own graphic novel. Art is one of the things that led me to Japan and is definitely one of the things that is keeping me here. My hope is that I will be able to work as a freelance illustrator or even for the right company after my time with JET.



Specifics about the artworks: all have been drawn from my travels around Kumamoto and Kagoshima this year. They are all digital works using Photoshop's default brushes and my own custom textures.



Check out more on Jono's Instagram: [@sereillustrations](https://www.instagram.com/sereillustrations)

# LIFESTYLE



## HEALTH & NUTRITION EDITOR

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

### Amanda Muller

*Every moment was a precious thing, having in it the essence of finality.” -Daphne du Maurier, Rebecca*

## TRAVEL EDITOR

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

### Amy Lee

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

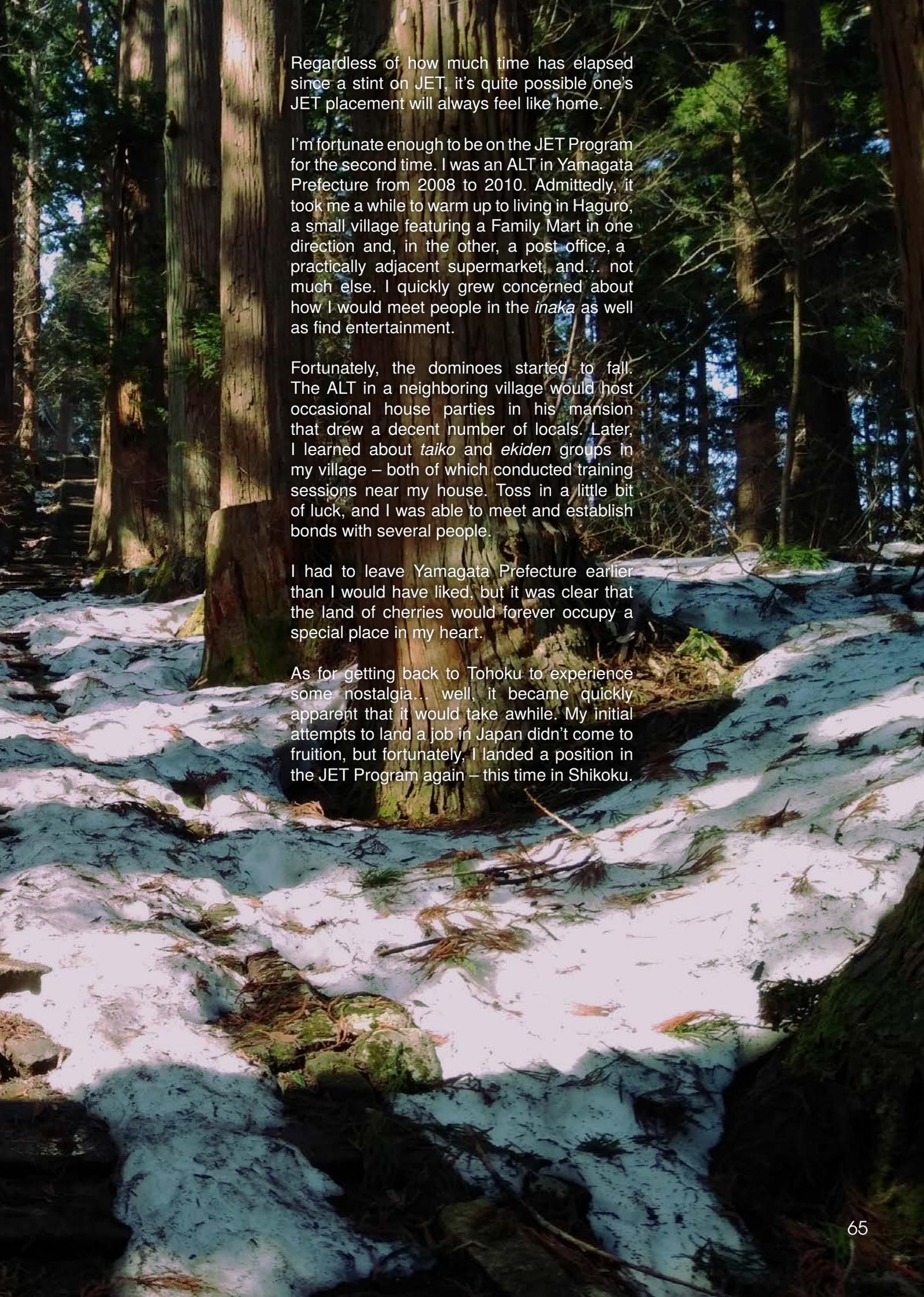
Photo: Nick Moulds



A photograph of a forest stream with snow on the ground and trees in the background. The stream flows over rocks, and the surrounding forest is dense with tall trees. The text is overlaid on the image.

— HOME —  
SWEET  
— HOME —

Rashaad Jordan (Kochi)

A photograph of a forest with large, weathered tree trunks in the foreground and snow on the ground. The trees are tall and thin, with some snow on their branches. The ground is covered in a layer of snow, with some rocks and fallen branches visible. The lighting is bright, suggesting a sunny day.

Regardless of how much time has elapsed since a stint on JET, it's quite possible one's JET placement will always feel like home.

I'm fortunate enough to be on the JET Program for the second time. I was an ALT in Yamagata Prefecture from 2008 to 2010. Admittedly, it took me a while to warm up to living in Haguro, a small village featuring a Family Mart in one direction and, in the other, a post office, a practically adjacent supermarket, and... not much else. I quickly grew concerned about how I would meet people in the *inaka* as well as find entertainment.

Fortunately, the dominoes started to fall. The ALT in a neighboring village would host occasional house parties in his mansion that drew a decent number of locals. Later, I learned about *taiko* and *ekiden* groups in my village – both of which conducted training sessions near my house. Toss in a little bit of luck, and I was able to meet and establish bonds with several people.

I had to leave Yamagata Prefecture earlier than I would have liked, but it was clear that the land of cherries would forever occupy a special place in my heart.

As for getting back to Tohoku to experience some nostalgia... well, it became quickly apparent that it would take awhile. My initial attempts to land a job in Japan didn't come to fruition, but fortunately, I landed a position in the JET Program again – this time in Shikoku.



Living in Japan again, a visit “home” was definitely in the cards. It helped that Yoko – a member of my former Tuesday night English conversation class – would often ask, “When are you coming back to Japan?” or “When will you return to Haguro?” What the hell was I going to say? “No, I’m not interested”?

My spring holiday in March proved to be the right time. Yoko, who agreed to house me for one night, asked if I had any plans for my stay in Haguro. After looking at a tourism website, I told her that I would like to visit Gyokusenji, a temple in the village. I told Yoko that I hadn’t visited before, and I figured it would be a nice, calming place.

So, off we went. As it turns out, my visit there brought a lot more than calmness and serenity. A trip to Gyokusenji ended up eliciting a surprise “Long time no see!” from three other members

of my old Tuesday night English conversation class that had showed up, including a woman named Ko who actually resides at the temple. I had forgotten that years ago she took me on a tour of the temple. We didn’t chat as much as we should have – in part because a bunch of us were fumbling in our attempts to decipher LINE. But hearing Ko’s announcement that she had become a grandmother brought a big smile to my face.

I hadn’t been in Yamagata Prefecture in nine years, so I figured that even in an *inaka* village where time seemingly stands still, certain things wouldn’t be the same. Indeed, before my return “home,” I knew that my old school had been totally rebuilt and that both my regularly frequented supermarket and favorite restaurant had closed – the former had been converted into a drugstore. The shock of all shocks was that my old house had turned into a patisserie.

But returning to a certain place for the first time in a long while can elicit a “home sweet home” feeling when it becomes clear that certain things haven’t changed.

For example, the same friendly face (who invited me to two summer barbecues) still works at the nearby Family Mart in addition to the small grocery store her family owns. Naoki – a buddy with whom I’ve often chatted via LINE or Messenger since leaving Yamagata Prefecture – still wants to practice English while talking about sports. And ascending Mount Haguro is still challenging.

***“As it turns out, my visit there brought a lot more than calmness and serenity.”***

This “home sweet home” feeling can be a reminder of the people and places that brought joy to a certain period of our lives. I felt it in Yamagata Prefecture as I stood on the road I had run on during the Tsuruoka City *Ekiden* years ago.

It also popped up when Yoko’s husband out-of-the blue invited an old *ekiden* teammate of mine over for a memorable chat about the good old days over beer.

Of course, home isn’t always a perfect place. I was a bit saddened because someone I saw again (one of the most remarkable people I met in Yamagata Prefecture) was displaying the effects of Father Time (mainly, his response time in English was slower than it used to be). I was also reminded that a language barrier prevented me from fully bonding even more with certain people I was able to see again.



Even so, I left Yamagata Prefecture with a burgeoning desire to make my time in Shikoku as memorable as my time in Tohoku was. It’s easy to reflect on life in Haguro with rose-colored glasses, but I struggled at times to get the most out of life there, like I currently am in Shikoku. However, if I can one day look back on Kochi like I view Yamagata Prefecture now, it will have been a marvelous time.

*Rashaad Jordan worked as a JET Program ALT in Yamagata Prefecture from 2008 to 2010. While living in the Tohoku region, he was a part of a taiko group and an ekiden club.*

# Quick and Easy Mustard Salmon Salad

---

Veronica King (Kyoto)

When you're really busy, sometimes you just want to make something easy, that doesn't take up a lot of your time. This salmon salad is super easy to make, and the best part is there's no cooking involved!

1 can salmon  
3 parts Dijon mustard  
2 parts lemon juice (or one part vinegar)  
2 parts extra-virgin olive oil  
2-3 tablespoons finely chopped onion  
Salt, pepper, any other desired spices

All you have to do to make this recipe is use a fork to break apart the salmon, and mix all the ingredients together in a bowl. It's that simple! The salmon will keep in the refrigerator for about three days, or you can put it in the freezer to keep it fresh for longer.

I like to pair this with potatoes dressed in the same dijon mixture as the protein salad, and a green salad with any fresh veggie I can get my hands on and dressed in homemade balsamic vinaigrette. Enjoy!





— So Much —  
**MATCHA**  
— So Little Time —

Emilie Aghajani (Kyoto)

I must have been asked what part of Kyoto I would be located in about a hundred times at Tokyo orientation, and every time I replied “Uji,” the person I was talking to would start to excitedly rhapsodize about their love of matcha. Since matcha’s rise in popularity, Uji has been renowned in Japan for its superior taste. Even in Kyoto city, stores selling matcha goods will advertise in big signs “Uji matcha.”

The hype surrounding Uji matcha is real, and it doesn’t disappoint. Matcha is everywhere in Uji—even the air smells like it, especially if the wind picks up. Even on the other side of the city, away from the big matcha fields, you’ll find some patches of matcha growing between two buildings on the side of a road.

While all of Uji is a matcha haven, the touristy area near Byodoin Temple especially is a treasure trove of matcha flavor. All the omiyage stores in Uji have matcha flavored treats, of course, including a special Kit-Kat flavored specifically with Uji matcha. And it's not just sweet treats that are matcha flavored in Uji; nearly every restaurant boasts matcha flavor in their food—everything is green, and everything is (obviously) delicious. Anything you could possibly want probably comes in a matcha flavor in Uji; ice cream, ramen, soba, gyoza, takoyaki, and even beer!

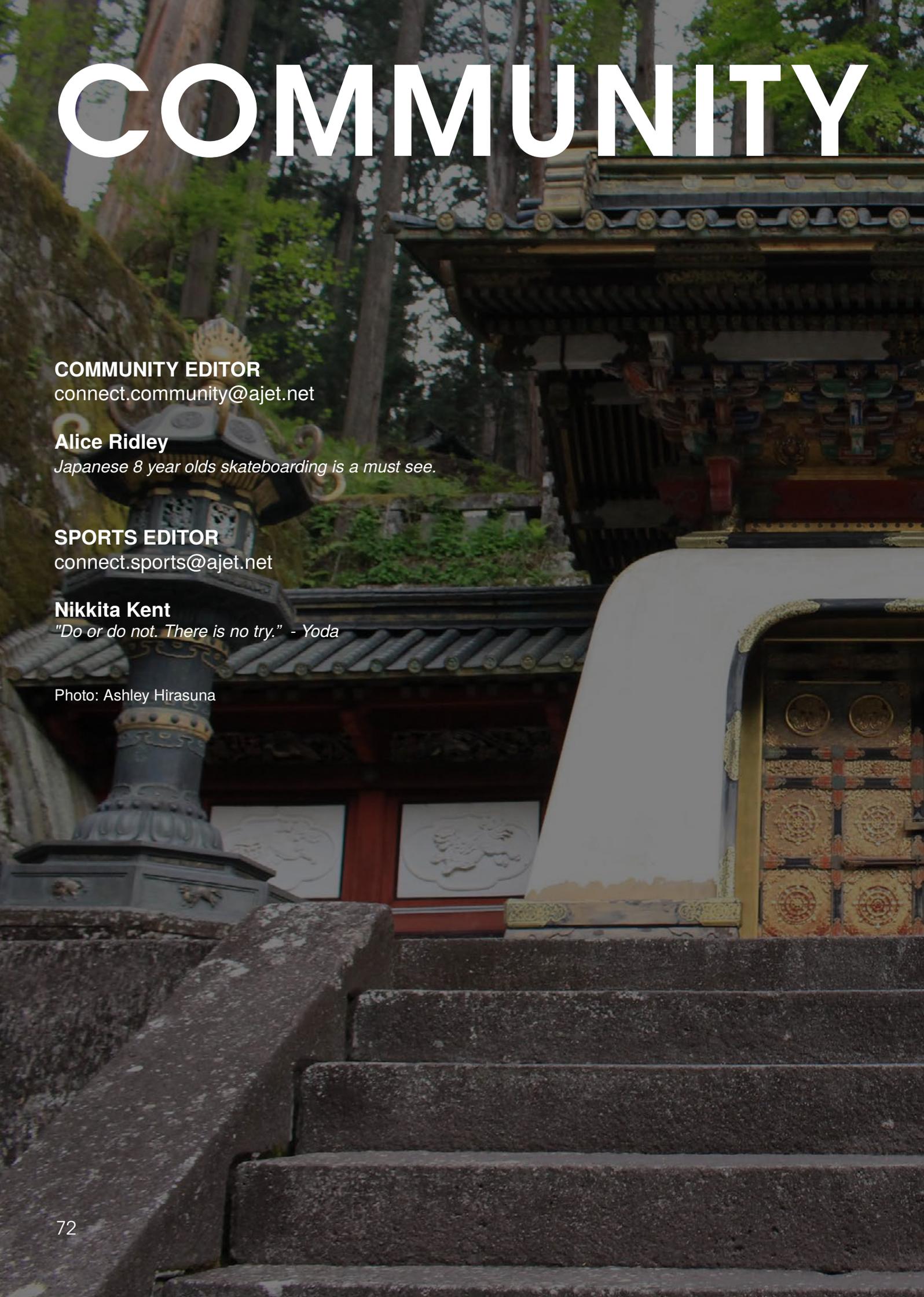
Of course, all the matcha flavored food is nice, but you can't go to Uji without tasting a bitter cup of matcha (with a seasonal sweet to compliment it, of course). There are several cafés around the city that you can go to for matcha, but if you want the full experience, you can see tea ceremony be performed right in front of you at *Taiho-an*, a traditional teahouse at the city's sightseeing center.

Aside from participating in tea ceremony, there are some other matcha-related activities you can do in Uji as well. *Fukujuen Ujicha Kobo* offers various tea-related workshops, such as a tea grinding class, and at *Takumi no Yakata* you can learn how to brew the perfect cup of tea.

Living in a town famous for matcha is as delicious as it sounds, but even more than that, it brings with it a sense of pride. Living in Uji, when you hear "matcha," you automatically feel proud knowing the matcha made in your city is the best there is. Now, drinking matcha (or eating foods and treats made of matcha!) reminds me of home.



# COMMUNITY



## COMMUNITY EDITOR

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

### Alice Ridley

*Japanese 8 year olds skateboarding is a must see.*

## SPORTS EDITOR

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

### Nikkita Kent

*"Do or do not. There is no try." - Yoda*

Photo: Ashley Hirasuna



# Life of a Foreign Warrior

Maja Thoenes (Gunma)

*Hanami*, flower viewing, is a popular event each year during springtime to witness the beautiful, pink return of spring to Gunma's mountains and valleys. However, the Kanra Castle Town Obata Sakura Festival is not your ordinary hanami experience. An annual event, this festival exists to celebrate the beloved sakura blossoms while simultaneously paying tribute to the era in which Obata was created. Hanami features a *Musha Gyoretsu*—a warrior parade.

Every year, the Kanra Board of Education invites Gunma ALTs to participate in this remarkable parade. I jumped at the chance to participate in this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. A few days before the event, I received some paperwork for the event. Among the package was a letter written entirely in Japanese, addressed to, "Maja Thoenes, foreign warrior."

On March 31st, all 11 "foreign warriors" rolled into the freezing, drizzling Kanra Junior High School Gym parking lot. As we filed inside one by one, the gym seemed to give off a warm, orange glow. Every inch of the floor was covered with weapons and neatly folded piles of clothing: bright red and pink *yukata* with spears, embroidered green and gold *kimono*, and full suits of obsidian samurai armor that stood like little mountains amongst the fabric plains. Although only eight in the morning, the gym was already brimming with people, and they collectively turned around to watch the stunned foreign warriors walk inside.





We found our piles of clothing and weaponry, and after a while, the rental gear workers were ready to help us dress. We started in our long underwear and put on two-toed *tabi* socks and sandals. Over that, a simple white robe, with a plain but mighty *obi* around our waists, restricting blood-flow to our brains. Next, the top—it was heavy and shiny, with wide sleeves that hid our hands. We stepped into pants made of the same fabric, creating the classic image of the warrior pant-suit of the samurai. These were tied around us at waist again, and we were wrapped a second time with another thick *obi*. Our weapons were next: a long katana with a leather belt around our hips, and a knife in a sheath that was forced in between the folds of the two *obi*. For the finishing touches, we tied the tassels on the neck of our robes, and we donned a stiff, black mesh hat. Some of us awkwardly tried to unsheathe our katana, while others snapped quick selfies and practiced their finest blue steel faces. We could hardly move or breathe in all the gear, but no doubt we looked as glorious and badass as we felt in our hearts.

Once everyone was dressed, we walked from the gym to the nearby *Rakusan-en*, a lovely Japanese-style garden built by the son of Oda Nobunaga. Nearly a hundred other procession participants were already there, taking photos in front of the koi fish pond and hiding from the sprinkling rain under the thatched roofs of the tea houses. After a short word

from the mayor and an introduction of two visiting comedians, all the participants lined up into formation for the procession.

Cannon fire from the top of the hill announced the festival's start. Just as we took our first steps, the sun came out.

Observers stood along the sides of the street with their cameras ready as we paraded through in groups, sporting dozens of different types of historical Japanese clothing. Heavily armored palace guards with towering kanji helmets and tiger fur coats, long red-robed philosophers with skyscraper hats, elementary school-aged peasant guards wearing bamboo sandals, historical royalty wearing colorful veils, and even horses bridled with teal masks, yellow tassels dancing on their noses. In the middle of all of this, the foreign warriors, marching and smiling amongst the waving flags and river of robes. We greeted the students, teachers and strangers that surrounded us on every side. The procession was occasionally paused so that we cheer together: *Ei, ei, oh! Ei, ei, oh!* Although the sakura overhead had barely begun to bloom, the warmth in the wind was undeniable—spring was here, and it almost felt like we were leading her in.

We marched from *Rakusan-en* to *Kanra Obatahachiman*, a humble shrine resting between



tall, noble pine trees. We took a break in the sun for some green tea, apple juice, and pictures before getting into formation once more for the trek back to the gardens. The festival had been waiting for our arrival, a taiko drum team welcoming us to our positions in front of a large stage, set up before an ocean of observers. The mayor gave a small speech to announce the official start of the Sakura Festival, and we gave our “Ei, ei, oh” war cry for a final time.

The procession’s journey had only been a little over two kilometers, but we were exhausted. Back in the gym, we stripped off our samurai gear in only a fraction of the time it had taken to put it on, covering the floor in fabric once more. We inhaled our bento while chatting about the parade—we had heard lots of compliments in English, such as “beautiful” and “handsome,” but we agreed that “Can you teach me English?” in Japanese had been our favorite. We had laughed and said that we could.

Although I doubt the historical accuracy of including a bunch of overseas English teachers in cultural celebration such as this, there was no doubt that the Kanra community was delighted by our involvement, and we were so honored to be a part of it all. The residents of Kanra are so friendly and outgoing—we were asked to take a staggering number of photos, and so many people went out of their way to ask us about ourselves and complement our awesome get-up.

It turned out that the Kanra Board of Education had sponsored our participation costs, including our lunch, so the entire experience was free of charge. The Kanra ALT supervisor even went so far as to follow us around during the procession, carrying our wallets and keys and making sure we all got back safely. We are so thankful for the kindness and generosity shown by the Kanra Board of Education to the participating ALTs each year, and we look forward to many more festivals in the future.

We left the gym and returned to the festival grounds to pay a little visit the food stalls that were serving *yakisoba*, *karaage*, *yakimajuu* and other enticing treats. We sat at the very back of the crowd for a while, our hands full of food, watching a live samurai drama. The actors fought their opponents, doing somersaults and backflips, their katana and robes thrashing in the wind. It was like a window into the past, the illusion spoiled only by the corny but endearing sound effects blasted over the speakers.

By the time the drama ended and applause filled the air, the grass where we once sat was empty. No one noticed, but we foreign warriors had quietly slipped away, the sakura budding above us.



*Maja Thoenes is a second year JET from Alabama. She is a published author, and enjoys hiking and bingeing Netflix. You can find her work on [Amazon](#).*

# LGBT Double Feature

A photograph of a crowd of people at night, likely at a Pride event. The scene is dimly lit, with a warm, golden light illuminating the crowd. In the background, there is a large, dark building with arched windows. To the right, a rainbow flag is visible, partially obscured by the crowd. The overall atmosphere is festive and communal.





# THE SLIDING CLOSET DOOR

*Coming Out in Japan's  
"One for All" Society*

Nicholas Jackson (Gifu)



Most of us who are living in Japan or used to have at some point received the dreaded question from children and adults alike: Do you have a boyfriend? A girlfriend? The answer can be as simple as “yes” or “no,” but the inquiry rarely ends there. If no, they’ll want to know your type, and if yes, they may want to know everything about the companion in question, from their occupation to their last name.

For those of us with non-heteronormative romantic inclinations or gender identities, these questions may feel uncomfortable, if not downright invasive. We are given a choice in these moments, to give a vague and likely unsatisfying answer utilizing some handy genderless Japanese terms (such as *koibito*, “lover”), or to come out then and there to everyone in earshot, and possibly the whole town. We all know how fast word can get around.

In my case, I clearly remember the first time I made the latter choice. An English teacher with whom I worked closely, and who sat next to me in the teacher’s room, one day popped the question. Did I have a girlfriend? At the time, no, but I did have a boyfriend. This teacher was approaching retirement age, and had always treated me with respect and kindness. I decided she was worth the risk, and was honest. Her English was excellent, but when she heard me say “boyfriend,” she second guessed herself, and thought she had misheard me.

“Did you say boyfriend?” Her eyes narrowed in confusion.

“Yes. I have a boyfriend.” I smiled and watched the gears turn in her head. It was a good ten seconds before she had collected her thoughts enough to speak again.



“Oh I see. That’s good. What does he do?” What followed was an amicable conversation about my significant other, much like one would have just about anywhere. Once she had fully realized that my partner was also a man, there was no sense of awkwardness or hesitation. From that point on she regularly asked me how he was doing, out of genuine curiosity.

The time it took for her to process my unexpected reply, however, goes to show how little prepared she was for it. She had likely never considered the idea that I would be in a relationship with another man. Why should she? Homosexual relationships are still rarely portrayed by the media, and one certainly doesn’t come across the sight of a same-sex couple holding hands, especially in rural areas like ours.

From anecdotal stories shared by non-Japanese friends and acquaintances who have come out to Japanese colleagues, voluntarily or otherwise, reactions vary by industry, location and age, but tend to skew positive. Older people like my co-teacher may need a little time to find the right response, while younger generations can be quicker to the draw, having at least heard the acronym “LGBT”,

as well as the term “sexual minorities,” which is what non-cis/straight people are called in Japan. Whether they are fully aware of the meanings of those letters, or those who have been added in recent years, they often respond with inquisitive acceptance. This brings a sigh of relief to many of us accustomed to the possibility of less welcoming responses abroad.

Do our Japanese counterparts in the LGBTQI+ community enjoy the same benefits of acceptance that we as foreign residents seem to? Signs point to yes, generally, *if* they decide to come out. That decision, however, can be even harder to make than in countries where reactions can have a far more negative, possibly even violent, impact.

The reasons for this hesitation are largely cultural, stemming from the centralized role of the nuclear family in Japanese society, as well as the concept heavily implied by Japanese education that “the nail that sticks out gets hammered down.” Readers of this article working in education, especially in rural areas, may attest to the importance of conformity in the education system, despite talk of individuality in finding one’s vocation, though there are signs this may be changing rapidly in recent years.



When people overcome this learned desire to conform, however, and speak their truth to those around them, they generally seem to be met with positive results. Jo, a 36-year-old Tokyo native, spoke of coming out as a teenager to his close friend of 6 years, who he calls Y. Having been together almost every day since age 13, even participating in the same after-school clubs, they were as “as close as brothers.”

One day, during their second year of high school, Y guessed, “Hey Jo, you like guys, don’t you?” Jo didn’t deny it. It was as natural as confirming one’s favorite food. But in a twist befitting a boy’s love drama, the two decided to date. After about half a year, they split up rather emotionally, even involving a scuffle during club activities. Jo blames their age and lack of experience for how things ended, but remembers the episode fondly, though sometimes with a tinge of regret. Years later, he reconciled with Y, now married with children, on Facebook, and now they remain friends.

Having come out to college friends, and retroactively to elementary, middle and high school friends by the time he graduated, he was ready to break the news to his parents at age 28. His mother had suspected his inclinations, as mothers often do, but had kept it to herself. Though his father wept in surprise, the outcome was favorable, as they both took the stance that it didn’t matter if their son was gay or not, as long as he was happy.

As for the workplace, Jo says that being open about his private life is a recent development, encouraged by what he sees as a warmer and more receptive environment, due to the increase

in younger colleagues, Japanese and otherwise. He has yet to feel ostracized by anyone at work due to his sexual orientation, a fact that many who have worked overseas may find surprising.

Jo’s story is echoed by many others, brave souls who have gone out on a limb to speak their truth. Kento, a Mie native currently living in Australia, recalls coming out to his family one by one after beginning a serious relationship. He notes how much more surprised they seemed that his partner was American than that he was male. His mother, a local tea ceremony instructor, advised against telling his father, fearing his thinking may be too conservative to understand his son’s orientation. Kento decided to break the news to his dad, along with that of his moving overseas, and was met with unexpected acceptance. His parents both wished for his happiness and fulfillment, however it may come. Whether to family, close friends, or new acquaintances, Kento’s honesty has always been met with affirmation.

Given that coming out, especially as an adult, anecdotally tends to yield positive results, what exactly is holding back the majority of Japan’s LGBTQI+ community from following suit and being open about who they are? According to a recent study, this hesitation may be largely due to queer invisibility in everyday life (2). Only about 5% of Japanese people claim to have a close friend or relative who is gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender.

There is no doubt that there are many more members of sexual minorities around than people are aware of, but the tendency to keep it to

themselves perpetuates the problem of invisibility. This reinforces the idea that anything other than marrying a member of the opposite sex and creating another picture-perfect nuclear family is abnormal, which in turn feeds into the cycle of invisibility by preventing people from coming out. The sense of responsibility for maintaining familial and societal norms, as well as the simple desire to fit in, continue to prompt deep hesitation. People either end up erecting impenetrable walls between their public and private lives, or only confiding in a trusted few in their inner circles at work or home (3).

The tides seem to be turning, however, as a new “gay boom” of sorts takes place in Japanese pop culture, with the inclusion of gay characters and subplots in popular TV shows such as “We Married as a Job,” “Half Blue” and *Tonari no Kazoku wa Aoku Mieru*. The latest addition to pop culture isn’t a character at all, but a real-life 21-year-old bi-curious makeup artist named Shunsuke Ikezoe on the internationally popular reality show “Terrace House.” His appearance on the show is considered a win for bisexual visibility, which many lament is still lacking in Western media.

Variety shows more frequently include panelists and guests who speak on their experiences as part of a sexual minority in Japan. As for the government, more and more municipalities are paving the way for civil partnerships that provide similar benefits to marriage, and yet others are including educational materials and programs about sexual minorities (4). These are welcome developments for those fighting for marriage equality in Japan, as these have proven milestones for other countries which now enjoy fully legalized gay marriage and legal protection from discrimination.

Although there is certainly a long way to go in terms of comprehensive rights for sexual minorities in Japan, anecdotes and statistics suggest that the overall environment for acceptance and inclusion

of gender and sexual diversity is changing for the better. The LGBT acronym and its meanings are more widely known, though people are still learning the subtleties of gender and sexual identities (1).

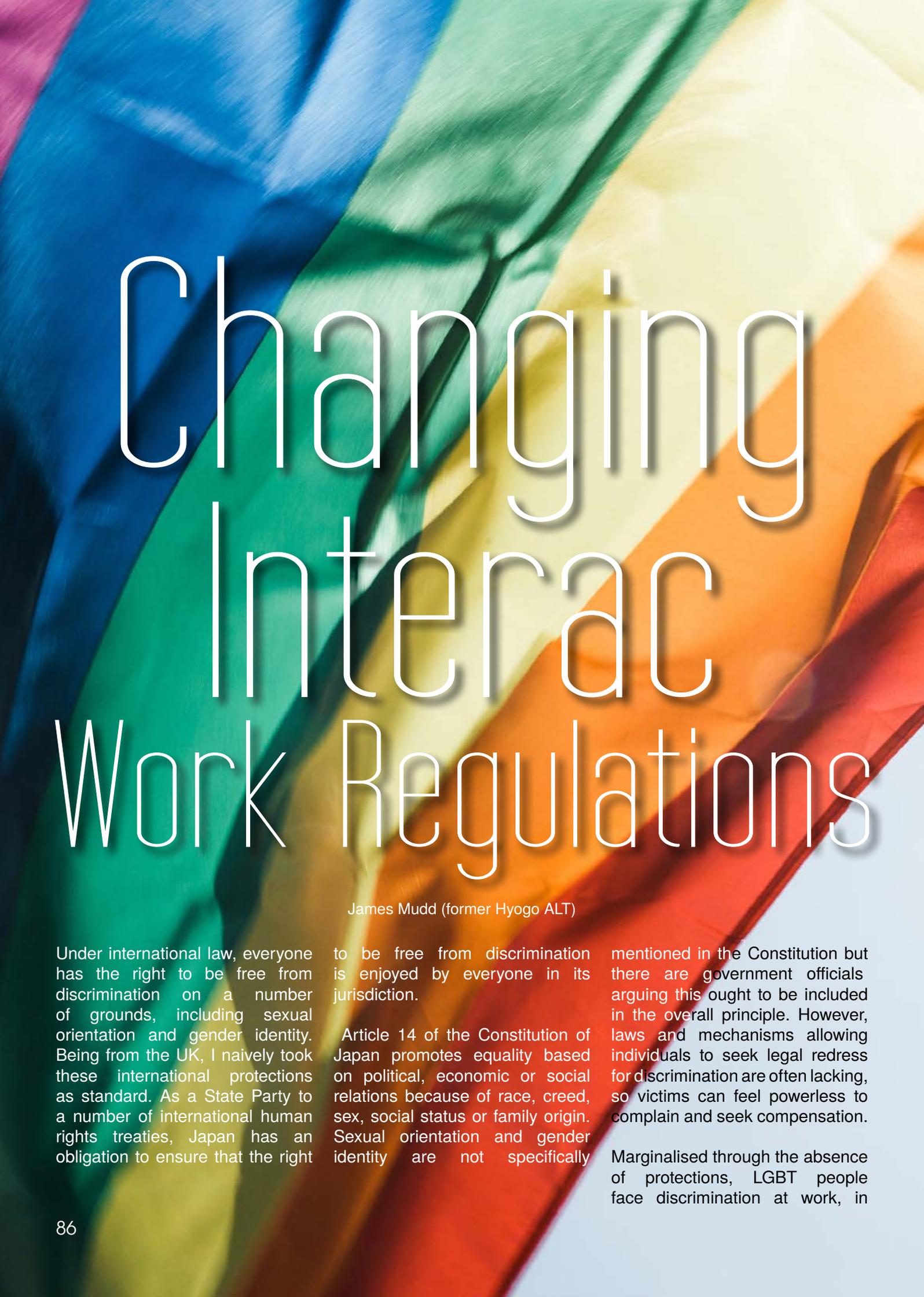
As more people come out, whether privately to their loved ones and acquaintances, or publicly to their audiences and fans, the atmosphere for acceptance in Japan will likely only improve, despite the inevitable dissenting voices. This is how the fight for gay rights began in every country currently enjoying those rights, with people being themselves, publicly and proudly. As the ever growing Tokyo Rainbow Pride festival and parade illustrates, along with its smaller but just as spirited counterparts across the country, enthusiasm for queer visibility and acceptance is clearly growing in Japanese society. Gay pride has arrived, all the way from Stonewall to the streets of Shibuya.

*Nicholas T. Jackson is a fourth year ALT in the heart of Gifu prefecture. He enjoys traveling, trying new foods, reading and occasionally writing. If you spot him in the wild, perhaps at Tokyo Rainbow Pride, be sure to say hi.*

Sources:

1. Kyodo (2019), More in Japan identify as LGBT as social awareness grows, study finds, The Japan Times, <https://bit.ly/2WeauxM>
2. Masami Tamagawa (2018), Coming Out of the Closet in Japan: An Exploratory Sociological Study, Journal of GLBT Family Studies, 14:5, 488-518, DOI: 10.1080/1550428X.2017.1338172
3. Samantha Loong, Jackie Hoffart (2013), Whether to come out at the office, The Japan Times, <https://bit.ly/2VyL3Kb>
4. Sawako Obara (2016), LGBT support grows among Japanese Schools, The Japan Times, <https://bit.ly/2IPbjKm>





# Changing Interac Work Regulations

James Mudd (former Hyogo ALT)

Under international law, everyone has the right to be free from discrimination on a number of grounds, including sexual orientation and gender identity. Being from the UK, I naively took these international protections as standard. As a State Party to a number of international human rights treaties, Japan has an obligation to ensure that the right

to be free from discrimination is enjoyed by everyone in its jurisdiction.

Article 14 of the Constitution of Japan promotes equality based on political, economic or social relations because of race, creed, sex, social status or family origin. Sexual orientation and gender identity are not specifically

mentioned in the Constitution but there are government officials arguing this ought to be included in the overall principle. However, laws and mechanisms allowing individuals to seek legal redress for discrimination are often lacking, so victims can feel powerless to complain and seek compensation.

Marginalised through the absence of protections, LGBT people face discrimination at work, in

education, family life and in many other areas. The prevalence of homophobic and transphobic views results in many LGBT people feeling compelled to conceal their sexual orientation or gender identity. As LGBT discrimination is not specifically referenced in the Constitution, it falls to employers to stand up for their LGBT staff by including these protections in their work regulations. The problem is that if nobody stands up and asks for these changes, employers will never realise the need to include something in the first place.

Although not as large a player as JET, Interac is still a significantly sized organisation. It has approximately 100 administrative staff, and a teaching team of over 2500 ALTs. Interac has fifteen branches servicing over 7000 different client organizations. Mostly these are local boards of education to whom Interac provides ALTs.

In March of last year, I was recruited by Interac and moved from England to Japan. After completing my induction training I accepted a placement in Kakogawa, a small town near Himeji. I quickly discovered how different life was in Japan and realised it was best not to make assumptions about anything. I wasn't sure if I could be open about my sexuality in school or whether it was wiser to conceal this fact and perhaps lie when faced with awkward personal questions. Nothing had been mentioned during my induction training, so I decided to do a little research.

I checked my employer's work regulations for statements concerning LGBT discrimination towards employees by other employees or clients. I discovered, however, that there was no reference to LGBT at all. This was deeply concerning.

When I raised this with Interac, they stated that they don't tolerate discrimination of any type and that their policy was outlined in their work regulations. I was directed to a statement that ALTs should not demean or bully someone regarding their physical characteristics, ancestral origin, birth, nationality or family composition. Although this was in line with current domestic law, in my mind the range of characteristics did not encompass sexual orientation or gender identity and so did not form a comprehensive non-discrimination policy. I raised this with my Managing Director and also pointed out that the work regulations document acts as a code of conduct relating only to ALTs. For any provision to be comprehensive it has to apply to the organisation as a whole, including other Interac staff. Then there was the question of the treatment of ALTs by the BOEs and by schools, as this seemed the most likely area for incidents to occur.

I was also troubled that the current climate and attitudes towards LGBT people in Japan had not been referenced during the ALT induction training. Interac recruits are from all over the world. Many people arrive with no experience of Japanese culture and are sent to work in remote areas. Lacking insight from discussions of potential issues, ALTs could easily and unwittingly find themselves in all sorts of potentially difficult situations, situations in which they would have no legal protection.

I thought that Interac must surely have LGBT Japanese staff members, but I also knew that Japanese people experience a great fear of standing out or being different. It was likely that these individuals existed but wouldn't

dare make themselves known. As a foreigner employed for one year, I had less to lose than a Japanese employee so I felt it was my duty to stand up for those who were too scared to. What was the worst that could happen? I could be dismissed and asked to return to the UK.

Resolved, I travelled to my regional branch office in Osaka, armed with a report by Amnesty International into Human Rights Law and Discrimination against LGBT People in Japan (May 2017). I asked to speak to my Managing Director and came out to her. I pointed out that many newly recruited ALTs, myself included, are completely unaware that, upon joining Interac, they are losing some of their human rights protections. I challenged Interac to address this.

I argued that, as an international recruiter, Interac should hold itself to international standards. I was aware that Japanese companies didn't typically legislate on this issue, but with the approach of the 2020 Olympic Games this was starting to change. By becoming a host country for the games, Japan has signed up to the Olympic Charter. As such, it now has commitments under international law. Article Six of the Olympic Charter states "The enjoyment of the rights and freedoms set forth in this Olympic Charter shall be secured without discrimination of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, sexual orientation, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status." Companies such as Fujitsu have already started to update their policies in line with the latest United Nations guidelines.

I pointed out that, at present, JET provides far greater recognition

of its LGBT employees. It covers these issues at induction sessions and, in fact, the online community Stonewall Japan was created by JET recruits in response to a need for a community safe space.

I was worried that my arguments would have no effect, but to my surprise I was invited to meet with representatives from Tokyo head office on 6th September. At the meeting, they revealed they would soon be revising all their work regulations and agreed it was time to address this and make adjustments towards becoming more inclusive. I was told an announcement by the Japanese Government relating to changes in the laws and regulations on

such issues was forthcoming. They wanted to wait on this guidance before acting. When I suggested it was best to start preparing now they explained they had little experience in this area. The changes would have to be shaped by the particularities of life in Japan and they didn't want to simply copy legislation from the West. Because of their lack of experience in this field, I put them in contact with LGBT Consultants, Nijiuro Diversity, to help them through the process.

A Skype meeting between Interac and Nijiuro was held on 17 January. I asked for outcomes and I was told that Nijiuro were happy with the proactive stance Interac

has been taking and had provided some useful insights.

I completed my contract in March, and flew back to London unsure what changes and policies would be implemented. I also had my doubts whether this work would continue in my absence.

I reached out to Interac recently. They made this statement;

“We revised our work regulations late last year. We moved forward with more specific language that addresses discrimination against individuals on the basis of personal criteria to better reflect the Company’s stance. Similarly, we also revised our Values and



Ethics guide to include specific sections on diversity and inclusion. Both the new work regulations and the new Values and Ethics guide were released at the beginning of the new school year.

This year the presentation on LGBT issues we launched at our Narita Initial Training event for new teachers two years ago had its best ever attendance and is being incorporated into more of the local Initial Training events as presenters become available.

The government information available online indicates that the matter of changes to the applicable laws and regulations continues to be under discussion.”

I was pleased by this announcement but also slightly disappointed no specific reference to LGBT was included. Visibility and recognition is so important in the struggle for equal rights. These are only baby steps but do represent a move in the right direction. It does, however, throw up a number of questions. Why are they still waiting for a government guidance that is obviously not coming anytime soon? What lengths are being taken to find local presenters and what qualifications do they need? Are they training managerial positions on sensitivity? Will they stand up for ‘out’ employees? Are they going to cover how to address LGBT school issues like harassment at work?

In Japan, change happens slowly and requires a build-up of momentum. Companies look to each other and are often afraid to be the first to do things differently. I thank Interac for working with me but would also like to remind them they still have a long way to go.



*James Mudd was an ALT who lived in Kakogawa, Hyogo who recently returned to the UK after one year teaching with Interac. He has been a campaigner on the issues of LGBT rights, homelessness, mental health and food waste. As well as teaching English he is an actor, poet and performance artist with a keen interest in traditional Japanese art forms.*

# STARTING THE JUDO JOURNEY

## MARTIAL ARTS IN AMERICA VS JAPAN

Christopher Sept (Gunma)



In the brisk autumn evening, I find myself flying. No subliminal dream, but a literal sense of the world revolving around me. My center of gravity has been taken, stolen by a master of physics and motion. My body reacts and I manage to find a somewhat comfortable position when my back lands with a resounding slap on the canvas of the dojo floor. Gazing up at the lights in the ceiling, my heartbeat pounding in my ears, I revel in the acquisition of something new.

**“SO THAT’S  
*OSOTOGARI*, EH?”**

# AND NOW, FOR SOME CONTEXT

I have been an admirer of martial arts and combat sports since I was in junior high school and have trained in several styles and schools, never really sitting in any one place for more than two years. After arriving in Japan in 2017, I decided that if there was ever a perfect chance to learn from grandmasters, it was now. But how could a petulant dojo-hopper fit in with students who have been training literally all their lives?

The answer came with the help of the glorious ALT connection network. A friend of mine worked with a JTE who was married to a prominent *judoka*, a person who trains in judo, who was willing to invite me to his training sessions on Friday nights. Daisuke had been training in judo for a long time and had even helped guide a few seminars in America. The company he works for put together a judo group under the guidance of a senior instructor. Daisuke was willing to vouch for me to come along. So, despite my nerves and lack of Japanese speaking ability, I dusted off my judo gi and saddled up for a night of new experiences.

## WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

Daisuke is a friendly martial arts enthusiast who's also working to improve his English. During the car ride to and from the Gunma Sports Center where we train, we attempted to accomplish simple English conversation practice. Through my discussions with him, I learned that martial arts, and sports in general, are very different in Japan than in America.

For one, when a student in Japan enters junior high school (JHS), they will often decide on a club that will likely become their primary focus for the rest of their scholastic career. If you did basketball in JHS, you will likely play all the way till you graduate university. That's just how it is.

I was shocked and explained to him how it works in my slice of

America. You get to choose from a selection of sports that rotates throughout the year. This forces athletes to try several different sports and can help students learn and try new things. Up until now, I saw it as unfortunate because you only ever become "decent" at a sport before you have to switch. But after talking to Daisuke and some other Japanese friends of mine, they feel that having a chance to try many different things sounds much better.

Another difference comes in the form of respect for tradition and the mentality of martial arts. Daisuke admits that he is a very traditional person, along with the head sensei at his company. Judo, and generally the whole of Japanese *budou*, or martial arts, is meant to be done as a pursuit tied



to your philosophy of life. To quote a tired cliché, "It's not a game, it's a way of life." He imparted to me that one of his fellow teammates got reprimanded because he said he was looking forward to "having fun at the tournament". In Japanese *budou*, tradition and respect are very important. So much so, in fact, that the head sensei won't even speak to you unless you have shown your diligence and tenacity first.

So, suffice to say, I was becoming very nervous about training with these guys.

# HERE COMES THE BOOM

When you think of a martial arts studio in America, you might think of a karate or tae kwon do dojo next to the Starbucks in the outlet mall off the highway. Within, there is a host of people ranging from 14 to 21 moving in unison and shouting. Most of them are wearing white belts but there are some various colors mixed throughout. Got that visual? Okay good, cause here is what I saw when I walked into the tatami room at the Gunma Sport Facility.

A handful of guys were milling about on the mats, warming up and stretching out. A couple had taken to the mat and were already grappling. Tied about the waist of each person in attendance was a weathered black belt that looked like it had been awarded at least a decade ago. I couldn't place exact ages, but they all appeared to be college students. College students built out of concrete and carbon fiber. Nerves were officially dialed to 11.

After I changed into my gi and affixed my starchy white belt around my waist, I accompanied Daisuke into warmups. Then a buzzer went off and I got my first wakeup call. I had anticipated this to be a typical training session. Go over some moves, repeat and retry, a little coaching here and there and we call it a night. What it turned out to be was, "Let's experiment with new ways to hurl each other around in a live-spar to hone the edge of our techniques for six minutes at a time." This kind of active training is called *randori*.

I had practiced enough judo in college to know a few things, but my three-month fling was about to get torn open. I squared off with Daisuke, bowed, and stepped in and I expected to get absolutely crushed. Our hands locked on lapels and—

## THE TESTAMENT OF A TRUE TEACHER

—he told me to adjust my grip. Too tense. Then he showed me proper footwork and went through it slowly. Then he took me to a mirror to practice my first *waza*, or technique. It's called *osotogari*, which means "large outer reap". You square up to your opponent, pull them off balance, then sweep out the leg nearest you.

Daisuke is many things, but a bully isn't one of them. He is an instructor and upon seeing a new pupil to mold, he couldn't resist. He took me through the steps, helped

me identify how to bend and shift and took special care to show me how to fall. In judo, perhaps more important than learning to throw is learning to fall.

By the end of my first night of training, I had learned just enough to be decently competent. I could feel the burn in my hands and feel calluses on my fingers, a sure sign that I was working hard. Then, Daisuke finally asked if I would like to join in the *randori* with the others. Feeling confident, I said yes.



# OH, THERE'S THE BOOM

I get thrashed. Not hard, but even when going 50%, these university powerhouses still get me off my feet and flying through the air. That being said, I still had a chance to at least make them work for it. When the final buzzer rang, I was a destroyed pile of meat, and I couldn't have been happier.



## WHAT YOU GET FROM A DOJO

As much as I like clashing muscle against muscle in a test of strength and skill, there is something about making friends in a dojo that I just can't find anywhere else. It is a combination of self-improvement and the support of others who are mutually attempting to achieve something more in their life. That unified goal forges a strong bond – one that surpasses language barriers. Mostly. There are still some awkward smiles and nods between us. But after these past few months of training, I am delighted to announce that the head sensei has come to train me personally. That's right, I have been accepted.

I could try and spin this into a "Find a martial art and you too can be happy!" article, but really, this is just my experience. What I will say is that you will find partaking in the community so much more enjoyable if you find something you can relate with and become passionate about. And believe me, most Japanese people will be excited to hear that you are interested in what they have to offer. Just put the word out, and the amazing network of JETs and ALTs will help you find what you're looking for.

And if it is a martial art you're looking for, just ask me. I can give you the lowdown on getting beaten up.

*Chris Sept is an ALT in Maebashi, Gunma at Maebashi Girls High School. Chris studied New Media Communications at Oregon State University and was also part of the marching band and worked at the local TV and radio stations. An avid enjoyer of sports, music and any kind of performing art, Chris has been seen dancing the **Danbe Odori** at festivals and acting like a stargazing tourist in Tokyo's Akihabara district. Chris is always willing to lend unsolicited advice like the old man he is.*

# SUZUKA CIRCUIT

## AND THE F1 JAPANESE GRAND PRIX

Jayson Madara (Nara)

“The 1 and Only”



When I was a little kid (we'll say roughly in the year 1998 or so), I received my first PlayStation. One of the original PlayStation's biggest hits was *Gran Turismo*. At the time, it was a truly difficult game for little Jayson to grasp, as its byline of "The Real Driving Simulator" left no mystery as to what this game entailed. I wasn't truly able to appreciate it as a game until I was much older, but what I was able to understand as a kid was that it was full of fantastic cars that I had *never* seen in my dull New Jersey suburb. For a generation of car enthusiasts, *Gran Turismo* was a gateway into the excesses of the Japanese automakers during the Bubble Economy, and put such legends as the Toyota Supra, Honda NSX, and Subaru Impreza into the minds of American drivers lusting after Japan's "forbidden fruit."



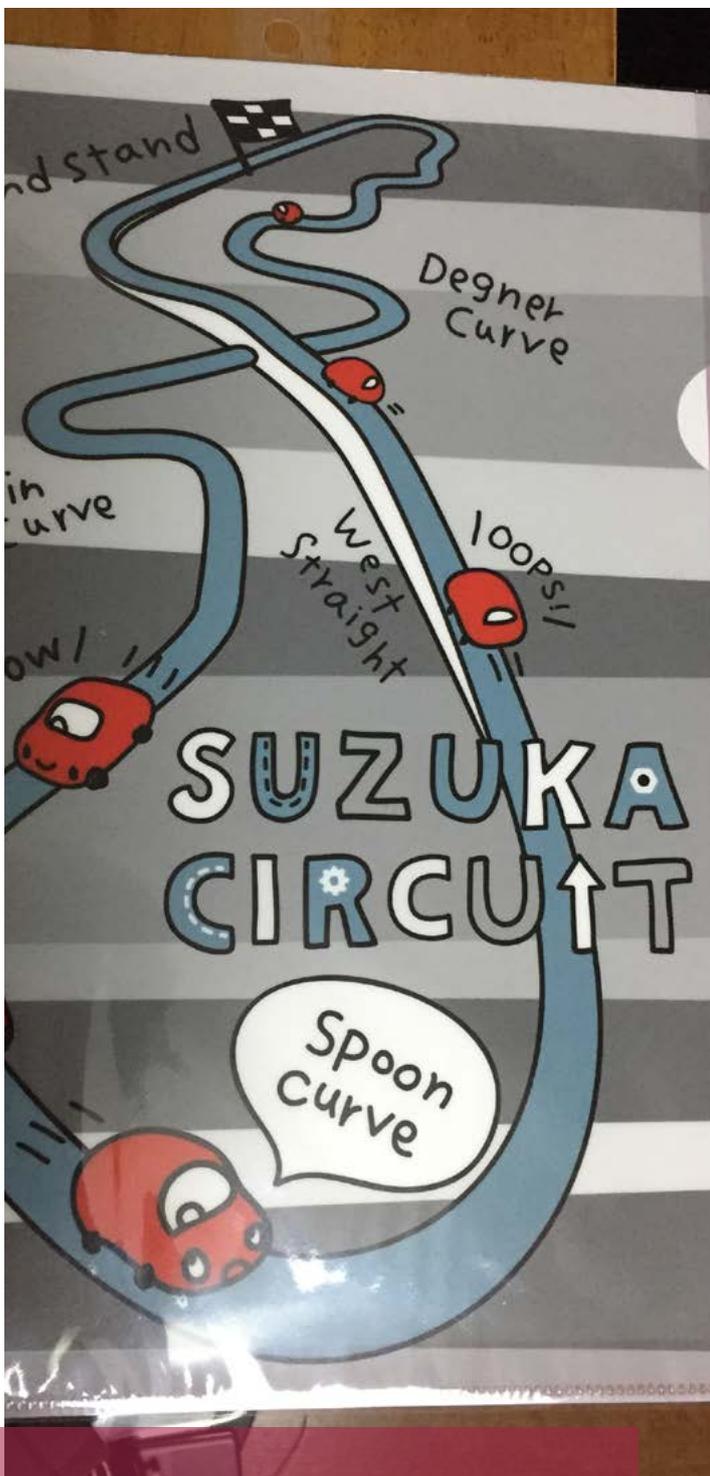
## A Little Background

---

When I first arrived in Japan on JET, I was immensely excited that my village placement would grant me access to a car. I already had a list planned of all the car-related things I wanted to do, like visiting the Toyota museums in Nagoya and taking a tour of the Mazda factory in Hiroshima. At the pre-departure orientation in New York, as we went around the table introducing ourselves, a fellow ALT mentioned her placement as Suzuka, and said she didn't know if there was anything famous in her town. After I picked my jaw up from the floor, I asked if she knew about the circuit, and added "seeing my first Formula 1 Grand Prix" to my Japan auto bucket list.

F1 has traditionally struggled to find success in the U.S., as Americans seem to prefer NASCAR's four left turns and a banked oval to any kind of circuit racing. However, it's had a presence in Japan for nearly as long as there were Japanese cars to race. The Suzuka Circuit was built in 1962 as a Honda test track, and served as a venue for both Honda internal testing and sports car racing until 1987, when it hosted its first Japanese Grand Prix (GP). Today, the circuit has changed a little, the track itself altered to improve safety conditions for the drivers, and the surrounding area filled with various fan amenities. Suzuka is currently one of the oldest circuits in the F1 calendar, and one of the most beloved.

# My Suzuka Journey



Fortunately for me, I became pretty good friends with that ALT from the orientation (Hi, Vanessa!), and we, together with our other friend Laura, bought our tickets and headed out to the track one mild day in October. Arriving at the track by shuttle bus from the train station, even the parking lot was mind blowing for me! Japanese car fans do not take their hobby lightly, and I could have spent hours exploring the lot looking at just how people got to Suzuka. Luckily, my friends were able to drag me away and we entered the main area of the circuit.

Outside the circuit itself, there was a lot for people to do. It has kind of a theme park atmosphere, with lots of rides for kids and tons of stalls to buy F1 team swag or souvenirs for your co-workers. We avoided the branded team merchandise (way overpriced), but found that the generic Suzuka Circuit souvenirs were actually quite good. This being Japan, renowned for quality souvenir goods at any and every tourist site, we weren't surprised; instead we were amused by how interesting souvenirs of a racetrack could be. Vanessa ended up with a really cute clear file to add to her collection, and I bought a keychain of the track outline. Another interesting thing to note, at least as far as the Grand Prix was concerned, was the food selection. We were surprised by the discovery of such a wide variety of regional specialties, like Kobe beef ("We're not even *near* Kobe though!"). As we would find out, the reasoning for this was the clientele attending the race that day.



# A Surprising Outcome

---

I expected that being located relatively far from the major hubs of Osaka and Tokyo, the audience at the GP would mainly be Japanese fans, with a smattering of foreigners who happened to be in the right place at the right time (i.e. us) and maybe a few diehard fans from abroad. This couldn't be farther from the truth. The main grandstands were filled with international F1 fans, each here to support their chosen team, manufacturer, or driver with the vigor and enthusiasm that I had thought reserved for American football fans! Within minutes of entry into the ticketed area, it was clear that casuals like us were in the minority. It was hard to miss the group of guys decked out in Ferrari gear (all the way up to the prancing horse heads!). Others had draped the grandstands with flags and messages for their favorite drivers.

Certainly only the richest of fans could afford to follow the race calendar around the world, but one thing that struck me on the F1 website was their advertisement of Suzuka as a stop off on a full Japan trip itinerary, which brings us to the meaning of this event. Even though it's a destination for F1 racing, the big draw of Suzuka is that you can experience a curated collection of the best cars of Japan, and then have a seat for the racing main event.

Japan's purposeful cultivation of its own image for the export market is a common theme in the nation's history. Just look at all the pottery produced for sale abroad during the Meiji period. For us ALTs though, this was something we didn't get to see often in our daily lives. Especially for me living in a tiny village, where the cedar-covered mountains were my whole daily view of what Japan was. While I would say that by signing up for the JET Program, getting that village level view of Japan is what we were looking for, being unexpectedly dropped into the easily digestible (pun intended) Japan-lite version wasn't a bad thing.

# Suzuka and You!

---

As JET participants, there's no arguing we all love Japan. While we might have our own special aspect of Japan we treasure most, in endeavoring to share our Japan experience with Japan outsiders, we often run into difficulty when their expectations of Japan don't line up with our reality. Thus, a day out at Suzuka will appeal to all audiences. It's got the racing and the cars for me, but also the food and souvenirs for the tourists. For many JETs who might not have the opportunity to travel across the country, if they're into racing and cars, the Japanese Grand Prix provides a chance to have a whirlwind tour of the big hits, all under the guise of an international sporting event.

This year's Japanese Grand Prix will take place on October 13th. There are a number of qualifying events and support races that occur on the days leading up to race day, so you could make a long weekend out of the trip, and visit some unique areas around Mie and Nagoya while you're at it. The circuit itself has a vast number of attractions and accommodations, so even if you're there for the whole event, you're not going to be bored. It's best to buy tickets early, as certain high-action seating areas will sell out in advance. No matter what your rationale for visiting, F1 weekend at Suzuka has aspects for all to enjoy. I highly recommend it for those JETs whose Japanese exposure started out behind a PlayStation controller, piloting a Skyline around a tricky corner at high speed.

*Jayson Madara was an ALT in Shimokitayama Village, Nara Prefecture from 2015-2017. He putted up Route 169 in a 2015 Suzuki Alto named Cherubino many times to visit 22 Japanese prefectures in two years. His hobbies include telling anyone and everyone about Shimokitayama Village, listening to eki-melo, and eating **misokatsu**. His biggest regret as an ALT was taking so long to get over himself and just get naked for an onsen. An unapologetic densha-otaku, he is currently employed in Visas and Compliance at Hult International Business School in Cambridge, Mass., where the densha are not nearly as inspiring.*

# STAY JAPAN JOBS

STARTING APRIL 2019!

## Find a job in Japan after JET

Our company has deep connections to local governments, municipalities and various companies in the travel and tourism industry and across Japan. We are offering a new matching service, exclusive to JETs, to help you find a new job in Japan after JET has finished.



### Personalized matching

We work closely with each candidate to discover your skills, strengths and interests and use that data to introduce you to new jobs. Of course, it's you who decides to interview with a potential company or not.

### Apply your skills from JET

Companies are looking for candidates with strong skills like the ones you have developed on JET. Put your skills to work and start a new career.

### Stay Close

Because of our deep connections, we can offer jobs in areas that other recruitment services can't match. That means you can stay close to the place you already live.

### Free of Charge

Our service is always free! Companies pay us because we help them find strong candidates like you. At no time in the process will you ever have to pay for any of the services we offer.

[Apply Now](#)

or visit: <https://forms.gle/Yt7G5EXRKn6ME3qx8>



**Hyakusenrenma Inc.**

2-18-20 Nakaura 5th Building 3F  
Kotobuki, Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo, 101-0021

# 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

You asked for it, and now *CONNECT* features comics. Whether you're a desk doodler or a published artist, we want to see your panels and strips about life in Japan.



## CONNECT WITH US

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

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