

**AJET**

# **CONNECT**

News & Events, Arts & Culture, Lifestyle, Community

**APRIL  
2020**

**Not Just a JET Dependent - the KOUHAI**

**Tokyo Is Burning: Falling in love with Japan's Drag Scene**

**From Creating Teaching Resources to Pursuing Illustration**

**Living in Japan With a Disability**

**One Man and a History of Jingles**



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



# COVID-19 FAQ

In response to some frequently asked questions, AJET has compiled the information below. If you have any additional questions, concerns, or comments concerning the COVID-19 pandemic, please send them to [exec@ajet.net](mailto:exec@ajet.net).

**Remember to take care of yourself and seek the support you need.**

## Q: Is my job protected?

Yes. As a contracted employee, JET participants are protected workers. You cannot be fired for catching the virus, working from home with permission, or under lockdown containment measures. Additionally, in the new governmentally mandated changes, your contract should provide for paid time off if you have a virus that could infect others, or could damage your heart or lungs by going about course of work duties. If it is ever insinuated that your job is at risk at any point, check your contract and contact your CO immediately.

## Q: I'm thinking about breaking contract.

This is a personal decision that should not be made lightly. It is impossible to know exactly how the situation unfolds in the future. AJET strongly recommends that you discuss your decision directly with your family and friends. JETs should prioritize their health and safety above all else. If you are not comfortable discussing this with someone you know, try reaching out to AJET Peer Support Group.

## Q: What is the government doing? Why is it different from other countries?

In response to the pandemic, the Japanese government has never and does not plan to do widespread testing. Although widespread testing is the WHO recommendation, they have decided to track infection clusters instead. A large part of the reasoning for that may be that by Japanese policy, anyone infected with a contagious virus must be hospitalized. This could cause comparatively minor cases to take up needed hospital beds, which is why it is difficult to get a test without proximity to a confirmed case or pneumonia. However, as cases rise, this may change. For example, in Hyogo, the governor announced that minor cases would be placed in hotels being prepared for this purpose, to save hospital beds for critical cases. A person who is diagnosed with COVID-19 may stay in a hospital, a hotel, or maybe even be asked to stay at their home if that is an option down the line, depending on the severity of their symptoms.

This week, the national government has issued a month-long State of Emergency for Tokyo, Kanagawa, Saitama, Chiba, Osaka, Hyogo, and Fukuoka. Residents across Japan are encouraged to stay home and avoid non-essential outings. Due to the nature of the Japanese constitution, measures like forcibly quarantining or shutting down businesses are not possible and Japan has not imposed a lockdown like many other countries have done. What this means for the rest of Japan will be determined by your local authorities and JETs are encouraged to follow the directive of their local governments, as well as effective measures that have been utilized in other countries, such as social distancing. As businesses voluntarily comply with government recommendations, it is possible that they begin shutting down or reducing hours and services. JETs should be prepared for such a scenario and make sure to equip themselves with the necessary supplies.

## Q: What can I do to protect myself?

Most JETs are still being asked to come to work as scheduled, though this may vary on a case-by-case basis. Your work schedule and accommodating it Most JETs are still being asked to come to work as scheduled, though this may vary on a case-by-case basis. Your work schedule and accommodating it is the decision of your Contracting Organization. You must contact your CO about the expected procedure. You are can still use your *nenkyu* or *daikyū* if you wish to not go to work, though some CO's are offering special leave or additional *nenkyu* days due to the situation. This varies depending on the CO, so please ask them directly. is the decision of your Contracting Organization. You must contact your CO about the expected procedure. You are can still use your *nenkyu* or *daikyū* if you wish to not go to work, though some CO's are offering special leave or additional *nenkyu* days due to the situation. This varies depending on the CO, so please ask them directly.

Though most JETs do not have the option of self-quarantining themselves, AJET strongly recommends that you voluntarily implement social distancing and quarantine-like restrictions. This includes limiting non-essential outings, travel, and social gatherings. Continued good health practices (hand washing, cough etiquette, not touching your face, eating healthy food, etc.) are of course recommended.

If you are unable to obtain the necessary items or are an immune-compromised person, asthmatic person, or in another high-risk group, we strongly recommend reaching out to your local AJET community, your CO, and your direct supervisor. Some JETs have had success purchasing masks and hand sanitizer through their place of work. Some JETs have also created networks to deliver supplies and needed essentials for those who aren't able to obtain them. Many outlets are offering assistance, so please reach out if you need help.

# Attention Artists!

Want to get your artwork an audience  
in Japan?

**2020**



**submissions open**

C the art issue for 2020  
[c-theartissue.tumblr.com](https://c-theartissue.tumblr.com)

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Huda Samakaab  
Ross McSwiney  
Veronique Hynes  
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- 
- 12 — The World of Anime Stage Shows  
by Victoria Esnard
- 16 — A Venture into a World of Ice by Elsie Tay
- 20 — How to be a lesbian in Japan  
by Clare Grady
- 24 — Anime and Manga Translations: The Fall  
of Localization by Adriana Garcia
- 28 — From Creating Teaching Resources to  
Pursuing Illustration by Hana Kinoshita
- 34 — #MelaninandJBeauty  
by Christina Bellevue
- 38 — Sakura? For Spring? Groundbreaking.  
by Isabelle Teo
- 42 — April Releases
- 44 — Tokyo is Burning: Falling in Love with  
Japan's Drag Scene by Kat Joplin
- 56 — Entertainment Without Borders: The  
Virtues of VPNs by Hannah Lysons
- 62 — One Man and a History of Jingles  
by Linka Wade
- 64 — Japan Through the Lens: Capturing  
precious moments in my camera  
by Laura Pueringer
- 68 — Barrier-Free, Body and Mind  
by Huda Samakaab
- 72 — Japow—A Whiteroom Experience  
by Ross McSwiney
- 76 — The Longest Cross-country Ski Race in  
Japan by Sheila Mulherin
- 80 — Beer, Balloons and Magic Curses:  
Welcome to the Wonderful World of  
Japanese Professional Baseball  
by Veronique Hynes
- 88 — Covid-19 by Emma Harding
- 94 — Not *just* a JET Dependent—The KŌHAI  
(後輩 junior) by Rhema Baquero
- 100 — In Jesus' Name, (R)Amen—Kaedama!!  
by Erica Park
- 106 — Nature's Candy by Hoong Shao Ting
- 110 — Pear Picking and Wine Tasting in Kobe  
by Sophie McCarthy
- 114 — Three Days in Shikoku by Daniel Cruse
- 118 — Introducing the West to the Rest  
by Sophia Freckmann

# LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

This month's letter from the editor is brought to you by a *very* warm desk. Like most ALTs throughout the country I have been bound to my desk the past couple of weeks. It has been a bizarre experience and one that we will talk about in years to come of how we experienced a pandemic in a foreign country. Times like this I really urge the importance of self care and ensuring that you are keeping up good habits. Recently I've been trying to cook new things and remaining active. Because my workday has been finishing earlier (shockingly having seen my fellow teachers peacing out at 2:30) I have been going on hour long walks after work. Exercise is such a simple but effective way to improve our mood. Moreover that spring sunshine has been a real savior. Times like this I am very lucky that I have my own car to zip off into nature to let my mind unwind. But if you live in a larger city I would highly recommend walking and listening to podcasts. It's one of my favourite things to do while traveling. And another tip is to listen to the podcasts on 1.25x speed this is a *game changer*. Lately I have been trying to listen to all "The History of Japan" episodes which has proven to be quite the task.

Another thing to remember is to check on your mates. Give them a ring or send them a message. Many of my friends have been experiencing a surge of homesickness. Some have even decided to pack up early and return home. Please be there for your friends and make sure that no one feels more isolated than they need to be. On the lighter side of things JET Programemes has been churning out some very relatable content recently. A historical moment happened when a unicorn SEA emerged and the group went nuts. Thanks Mitch for providing some entertainment during these trying times.

Now the best way to burn some deskwarming time is reading my favourite articles of the month:

1. Community presents an article to share the stories of the dependents who come over on a spouse visa and learn about the variety of their experiences. Read more about this topic with **Not Just a JET Dependent - the KOUHAI**.
2. Entertainment presents an incredible insight into the world of Drag in Tokyo. I found it particularly thought-provoking learning about the contrast between the eastern and the western takes on drag. Read more at **Tokyo Is Burning: Falling in love with Japan's Drag Scene**.
3. Language presents an ex-ALTS experience of becoming an illustrator and how they used their time as an ALT to hone in on their craft. Read more at **From Creating Teaching Resources to Pursuing Illustration**.
4. Wellness presents an article about having cerebral palsy in Japan and disability rights. It was an eye opening read, if you'd like to read it for yourself **Living in Japan With a Disability**.
5. Culture presents an article about the little jingles you hear before the train departs at the station and how they came about in **One Man and a History of Jingles**. Next time you hear one you will have a newfound appreciation!

Submissions are still open until the 30th of April. You can learn more about the guidelines and submission process [here](#). If you have any questions about anything *CONNECT* related please feel free to contact me on [connect.editor@ajet.net](mailto:connect.editor@ajet.net).

Alice Ridley  
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Photo: Charlotte Coetzee

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*"you must get outside, and feel all right, producing some creativity that can stand the daylight (and the smog)." —Sesshu Foster*

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*"Of course, they say every atom in our bodies was once part of a star. Maybe I'm not leaving... maybe I'm going home." —Vincent Freeman, "Gattaca"*

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*"Everything that is saved can't be set on fire."  
—Dalton Day*

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*"You're jealous. You are just like a rat jumping around the corner looking for a food! Very jealous." —Maritess Trospen*

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*"You know, it's funny; when you look at someone through rose-colored glasses, all the red flag just look like flags."  
—Wanda the Owl, "Bojack Horseman"*

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*"The 'Amazing' can only be created by facing fear, risk, and failure during the process."  
—Superman*

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*"Pah! You are one reliable guy. Put me down as a reference on your next job application!"  
—Apollo, Animal Crossing Pocket Camp*

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*"'And what would humans be without love?' RARE, said Death."—Terry Pratchett, *Sourcery**

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*"Stand out. Someone has to. It is easy to follow along. It can feel strange to do or say something different. But without that unease, there is no freedom. Remember Rosa Parks. The moment you set an example, the spell of the status quo is broken, and others will follow."*  
—*On Tyranny; Twenty Lessons From the Twentieth Century*, by Timothy Snyder

Photo: Dermot Ryan (Kobe)



The World of

# ANIME STAGE SHOWS

Victoria Esnard (Hyogo)



Welcome to the world of anime stage shows! Technically, in Japan, these shows are covered under the moniker “2.5D theater,” bringing together the best of both animation and extreme cosplay talent. In 2020, pretty much any popular anime from the last decade and even several shows I had never heard of were up for grabs when it came to stage adaptation. Surprisingly, most of the stage adaptations are created as musicals, whereas music-based anime adapt the original songs for the stage. With impressive fight and dance choreography, as well as show-exclusive merch, these are certainly special events that any anime fan won’t want to miss.

**To start, let’s talk tickets.**

The 2.5D Theater [website](#) is available in English and provides all the information you need about which shows are coming up and how to buy tickets. If you would like to skip the Japanese wait lines at the Loppi machine and buy a ticket from a fully English website, there’s even a handy feature that lets you know if international tickets are available.. Usually, when buying international tickets, you will not be able to select the seat, as these seats are already pre-chosen. Once they’re sold out, they’re gone. You may also be required to show your passport when you pick up tickets, but at least you can skip the Will-Call ticket line. Sometimes this option might be better than purchasing what tickets are left on the Japanese website.





with a few in Kobe at the appropriately-named AiiA 2.5 Theater Kobe, located near the Kobe shinkansen station. While waiting for the tickets to drop at 10 a.m. on a Saturday in front of the Loppi machine, I realized I would run into the same issues that I had when buying tickets to the Ghibli Museum. It's not uncommon for this machine to be completely overrun with requests and the server just can't seem to handle the traffic. This was an excellent opportunity to take advantage of the international ticket website, where I was able to purchase tickets at the same price as the higher-end seats in a selected area just for foreigners. Talk about foreigner privilege.

The show date arrived and I attended, driving myself down to Kobe from Tanba, and dragging my sister in tow. Our seats were in the second row of the mezzanine level with another group of foreigners from France, who were just as excited to see the show as we were.

The stage was lit up with a typical *Kimetsu no Yaiba* motif and even though photos weren't allowed, we were able to take a picture of at least the stage set before the show began. It's important to note that the show is entirely in Japanese, and there is no audio guide in English provided for these types of stage shows. Whether you already know the story or not, it is still quite enjoyable and something wonderful to behold. Before the show began, an attendant approached us and let us know the rules of the theater in English: No photos or video, leave the theater to eat or drink.

Effects in 2.5D theater are a bit odd compared to the traditional Broadway theater experience. Simply put, it feels like an extremely extravagant cosplay stage show that you could expect at a cosplay skit contest. However, the use of music, extras to fill in expertly coordinated dance numbers, light effects, and video projections brings the entire thing together and really reminds you that this is part stage show and part anime. For example, during the fight scene when Tanjiro and Inosuke first meet, Inosuke shows off his incredible body flexibility by doing a full back-bend and putting his head between his legs. Such flexibility might be reserved for a performer from Cirque du Soleil, but a Japanese stage show couldn't possibly pull

There are usually two pricing tiers for anime stage show tickets: tickets in the orchestra and closer to the stage can be around 10,000 yen, while tickets a little farther back and around the mezzanine level might be a few thousand yen cheaper. Paying the cost to travel to the larger cities where these shows are held can also add to the price, making this possibly an expensive endeavor. For the ultimate anime fan, it's certainly worth it to experience something unique and to add to your merch collection.

### Recalling My First Stage Show Experience

Arguably the most popular anime of the last year (at least according to my elementary and middle school students), *Kimetsu no Yaiba* was graced with a stage adaptation in late January. When I saw the news, I jumped at the chance to go to the show, being a big fan myself. This particular show was being held with numerous showings in Tokyo (of course)

off such a feat. The crew is able to creatively showcase such an effect with the use of a stage ninja's legs at the back of the stage.

During the fight scene with the arrow demon, stage ninjas come out in force with red arrow ribbons, making it difficult for Tanjirou to swing his sword. All of the main characters' signature attacks are also shown off with light projection on the stage's back wall, as shown [here](#). The characters' costumes were simply out of this world, and very faithful to the original artists' design. The chosen actors were able to encapsulate their characters wonderfully, with Zenitsu's actor perfectly hitting his shrill scream and Nezuko making adorable gestures in the background while the main characters are talking.

website and subscribe to their newsletter. You can see a list of all the upcoming shows until summer 2020, with new shows announced regularly. Notable mentions include the My Hero Academia Stage Show, Haikyuu, Durarara!, a second part to the Hypnosis Mic project, the constantly running Sailor Moon show and the one I'm most looking forward to: Fire Force. Of course if you do miss a chance to attend any of these stage shows, DVD and Blu-ray copies of the shows are available for purchase on the Japanese HMV website.

As an anime fan for more than 15 years, I could never imagine seeing anything like this where I came from in Canada. The best I could hope for was dedicated fans putting on their own short skits for Instagram, or at an anime



When the show is over, you have an opportunity to buy some of the available merchandise. These are usually random blind bags of clear files, pictures of the actors and a few extra goodies such as keychains, bracelets, towels or head scarves. If you aren't able to get yourself tickets to the show, these goods are available for purchase online with a link from the official stage show website, and are carried at affiliated stores.

### More 2.5D Theater

If you're interested in seeing one of your favorite anime adapted into the stage show, I encourage you to check out the 2.5D musical theater

convention. Being a weeb in Japan has never been better and if you're looking to level up your anime-fan game, this is the way to do it.

All photos from: Victoria Esnard

*Victoria is a first-year JET currently living in the middle of Hyogo Prefecture. She is originally from Ottawa, Canada and has been a lifelong anime and Nintendo fan. She enjoys playing Splatoon, spending entirely too much money on figures and manga, and hiking on the weekends. You can find more pictures from her outings on her Instagram [@tori\\_in\\_japan](#). Her cosplay account is a secret to everybody.*

# A Venture into





# World of Ice

Elsie Tay (Hokkaido)

Hello from the snowy north! While you lucky southerners herald in spring and sakura, Hokkaido will remain under the cold spell for a while longer. As someone who hails from the tropical island of Singapore, I'm the ultimate winter newbie. Since I'm placed right here in the winter wonderland of Japan, what better way to fully immerse in the winter experience than by going to an ice festival?

February is Hokkaido's month to show off its gems. The prefecture was brimming with snow festivals and other activities, welcoming back the bustle and vitality that had been rather subdued during the quiet winter months. Together with a couple of JETs from my area, we decided to make our way down to the Lake Shikotsu Ice Festival on February 1st.

Lake Shikotsu (支湖 *Shikotsu-ko*) is conveniently located in Chitose, and 40 minutes from Sapporo by car. Its name, *shikotsu* comes from *shikot*, meaning large valley in the Ainu language. A part of the Shikotsu-Toya National Park, the caldera lake also holds the title of the second deepest lake in Japan. When my friends and I arrived, we were extremely lucky to be

greeted with a clear view of Lake Shikotsu as well as the surrounding mountains of Mt. Eniwa, Mt. Fuppushi and Mt. Tarumae.

Amid the backdrop of a sunny, cloud-streaked sky, Lake Shikotsu's quaint charms washed over us like a soothing balm. Tranquil waters sat nestled in the midst of breathtaking mountains with snow-capped peaks jutting through the clouds. The encircling ridges were blanketed in a scattering of white snow, bringing a slight jaggedness to the austere yet alluring winter landscape of the lake. For the more adventurous, cross the red Yamasentetsu Bridge and walk to a small area at the end where you can stroll down to the lake for a closer look.

The Ice Festival took place next to the lake. Tickets cost 300 yen per person, with re-entry allowed. Aptly enough, the entrance to the festival was in the form of an ice cave, with a few mini displays to gear you up for the icy paradise you're about to enter. When I stepped onto the festival grounds proper, the first thing that caught my eyes was the sight of two

colossal ice towers. Rows of icicles covered all sides, giving the icy monoliths an otherworldly look reminiscent of the Chinese mythological dramas that I grew up watching.

Aside from the ice towers, the festival also had a number of ice caves featuring displays within them. From beautifully carved chandeliers to recreating a shrine out of ice, each cave was uniquely themed and showcased exhibits with varying sights and sounds, making you feel as though you had ventured into different universes.

A display that stood out in particular was an exhibit of plants and trees crafted to resemble an enchanted ice forest. Frozen plants and trees were exquisitely arranged to form walls of greenery around the walking path. Rows and rows of icicles hung from the branches and covered the entire cave from ground to ceiling, seeming like cascading waterfalls that got frozen in time, and then were lit up in a brilliant green.

The highlight of the festival had to be the magnificent two-storey ice castle built with a corridor, balconies, and even a large spiral staircase. How often can you get to say that you've been in an ice castle? Not often would be my bet. It was surreal stepping on the icy floor and walking by those translucent blue-tinged ice walls. My favourite moment would have to be standing on the balcony on the second floor and seeing a bird's eye view of the entire festival.

Other than the ice sculptures, visitors were also treated to a recreation of the Biei Blue Pond, ice slides, piping hot festival food and for the young ones, pony rides. There was even an ice skating rink. As the sky turned dark, the ice sculptures were lit up in vibrant hues of blue, green, red and more. Going up the castle again felt like a whole new experience at night, and it was ethereal to see the entire festival grounds glow in a kaleidoscopic of colours.

The festival knew how to go out with a bang, ending the night with a fireworks show. The seven-minute performance saw the sky being lit in an explosion of colours for an enraptured crowd.

Compared to the other winter festivals, the Lake Shikotsu Ice Festival may be smaller in size, but it also felt more intimate and cosy. Each exhibit was a world in itself and a delight to explore. One key point was how the exhibits felt more interactive and were intricately crafted to stimulate the senses. Plus, the gorgeous scenery of Lake Shikotsu was the cherry on top. The festival's proximity to Sapporo also makes it perfect for a day trip. Next time you're in the area, do consider putting the Lake Shikotsu Ice Festival on your list!

All photos by: Elsie Tay

*Elsie Tay is a first-year ALT who hails from the Little Red Dot. She is currently frost-bound by Hokkaido's snowy winters and from being awestruck at the beautiful mountains, rivers and scenery here. When not figuring out the intricacies of the English language with her students, she writes and draws in her free time. She is also a herbivore that's always on the lookout for plant-based meals. Do follow the [HAJET Polestar magazine](#) for more Hokkaido adventures.*





# How to be a Lesbian in Japan

## Or, more specifically, how to date women as another woman in Japan

Clare Grady (Hyogo JET Alumnus)

This is something I thought was impossible when I moved to Japan in 2012 as a new JET ALT questioning her sexuality. But here I am now, on the other side (with a girlfriend of 1.5 years), after having figured it all out on my own.

There were no resources I could find at that time, so I want to create those resources for other women like myself who want to get into the wlw (women-loving women) dating world in Japan. Because it is very possible!

### Japanese Lesbian Culture

#### *Top/Bottom Relationships*

Having coming out in Japan, I am not the best person to make comparisons between lesbian culture in Japan versus other countries but I have noticed, and had confirmed by others, that lesbian couples in Japan tend to adhere

to the traditional roles of a top ("*tachi*") and a bottom ("*neko*") more so than abroad. While I have seen some girls speak out against this culture of announcing to others your "position," it is included in almost all dating profiles and will definitely come up in conversations about dating.

It can even be a determining factor in whether you can be friends with another lesbian or not! Two neko or two tachi can hang out as friends no problem, but a tachi and a neko together? That would be a date and possibly considered cheating if either person has a significant other. As most of my friends are non-lesbian foreigners, and my (Japanese) girlfriend is not into that clear-cut top/bottom culture either, I have not had any issue with this so far. But, this culture does exist, so do not be surprised if it happens to you! Also, don't be surprised if



people assume your “position” based on the length of your hair alone!

### Coming Out

It is often said that most sexual minorities are not out in Japan. That doesn't mean that no one is, and it doesn't mean that your partner will not come out for you. In fact, similar to how male/female couples often don't introduce their partner to their family until they are sure of marriage, sexual minorities in Japan tend to only come out to their family when they have a long-term, serious partner to introduce. This was the case for me and seems to be common from my research on Japanese YouTube coming out stories.

However, because many are not out, meeting people to date becomes more difficult. This is one of the reasons why I suggest lesbian-specific apps, bars, and events for meeting other women.

### Looks and Popularity

If you've ever seen “The L Word,” you may have noticed that the most butch-looking character, Shane, is also the biggest heart breaker. I have noticed this myself and had it confirmed by other women here: in America, masculine women are popular; but in Japan, they are not. Of course, everyone has their own preferences, but after speaking with lesbian dating event organizers, it seems that feminine wlw are in the highest demand here.

Coming from America, I made the mistake of thinking I had to dress more masculine in order to attract women, but that doesn't seem

to be the case in Japan (and isn't necessarily the case in America, either). Time and time again I hear that there are too many butch tachi and not enough femme neko to date. I was surprised to hear that butch women are not popular here, but it's apparently true. So, if you're attracted to more masculine women, why not go up and say so? (It worked for me!) My guess is they will be pleasantly surprised to have someone interested in them. That said, I have also

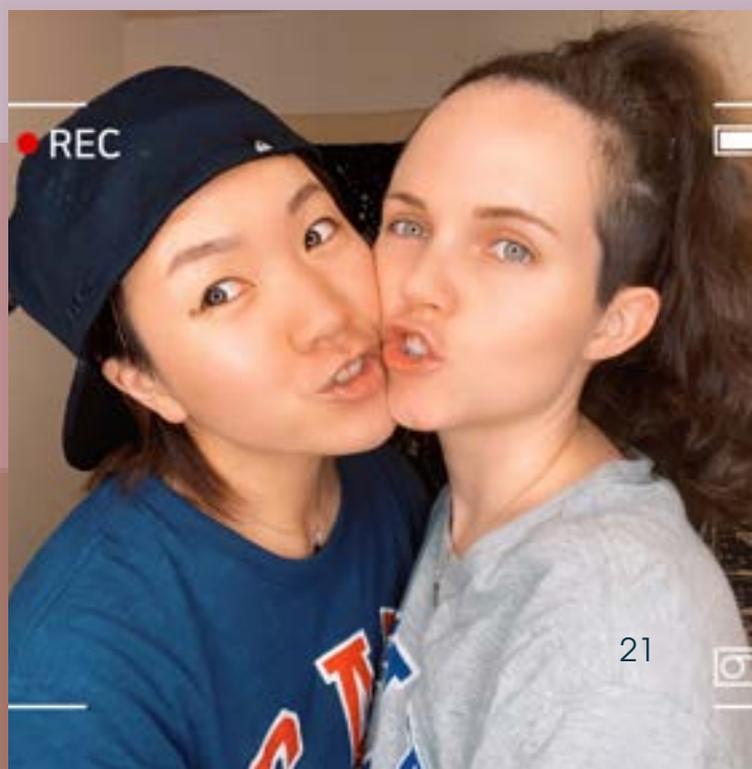
heard that androgynous types (“*chuusei*”) are becoming more popular recently, and I don't think foreigners are held to the same standards. I think it's best to just be yourself and be confident. Other than language difficulties, I do not believe you will have any extra difficulty dating due to being a foreigner.

### How to Meet Women

While relationships can start from friendships or in the workplace, the most common ways that two women start dating here are: lesbian apps, lesbian bars, lesbian events, lesbian message boards, or being introduced by a fellow wlw friend.

### Lesbian Apps

Some of the top lesbian apps in Japan are: LBT Chat, LING, LMap, HER, and OkCupid. These are all available on the App Store. Other than HER and OkCupid, all lesbian apps in Japan





are specifically interested in meeting foreigners, so check your local Stonewall group's Facebook for those kinds of events!

### *Lesbian Message Boards*

There are several types of "message boards" for different topics and different locations. "Message board" in Japanese is 掲示板 (けいじばん, *keijiban*), and a Google search with the terms "lesbian", "message

board", and "(your location)" may bring up some local ones where you can scroll through others' posts and post an ad for yourself. As always, be careful of who you interact with online!

### *Introduction from Friend*

If you're just getting into the wlw dating scene here and plan to be in Japan for a while, I suggest you start off making wlw friends first. You can ask questions, go to bars/events together, and once you get to know each other, they can give you advice and introduce you to other single gay girls! Friends usually last longer than relationships anyway, right?

### **Japanese Lesbian Vocabulary**

Here are some of the most common vocabulary to describe your position/looks/sexuality and to describe the type of girl you are looking for.

#### *Positions\**

Top: タチ *tachi*

Bottom: ネコ *neko*

Vers: リバ (*riba*) (short for リバーズ *riba-su*)

\*You can add バリ~ (*bari~*) before to say "extremely ~". For example, バリタ

チ *baritachiis* someone who only tops, never bottoms, aka "stone".

#### *Looks\*\**

Butch: ボイ *boi* (short for ボーイッシュ *bo-ish*)

Femme: フェム *femu*

Androgynous: 中性 (ちゅうせい *chuusei*)

are in Japanese with little English. If you prefer a partner who speaks English or is actively looking to date a foreigner, HER and OkCupid are your better bets. I do not recommend Tinder to find gay girls in Japan; you should use a lesbian-specific app whether it's in Japanese or English.

### *Lesbian Bars*

There are probably more lesbian bars than you think, but not in every prefecture. While Tokyo and Osaka have by far the most, there are also lesbian bars in Sapporo, Aomori, Sendai, Nagoya, Kyoto, Nara, Kobe, Hiroshima, Fukuoka, and Okinawa (Okayama had one that closed in 2019). And yes, it is perfectly normal to go to a bar and not drink alcohol. I have seen plenty of women frequent bars who are sober or have at most one drink for the whole night.

### *Lesbian Events*

There are big, women-only club events in the big cities like Tokyo, Osaka, Nagoya, Fukuoka, Sapporo, Sendai, and Naha. These are often once a month or once every couple of months, and are all-night dance club events with go-go dancers and meet-and-greet activities. There are also smaller speed dating type events hosted by lesbian bars which are often advertised through the bars' Twitter pages, so following lesbian bars' Twitters is a good way to get notified of those.

There are also general LGBT events hosted by Stonewall groups, which will naturally attract Japanese women who speak English and/or

\*\*You can add ~よりの~ (*yorino*) in between two to be more specific. For example, フェムよりの中性 would mean “femme-leaning androgynous”. This can be used for positions, too. For example, タチよりのリバ would mean “top-leaning vers”.

## Sexuality

Lesbian: レズビアン (*rezubian* (often shortened to ビアン or L)\*\*\*

Bisexual: バイセクシャル (*baisekuzharu* (often shortened to バイ or B)

Pansexual: パンセクシャル

(*pansekusharu* (often shortened to パン or P)

Straight: ノンケ (*nonke*(from English “non-” + Japanese 気)



\*\*\*レズ (*rezu*) is often used as a slur and therefore avoided. Also, ゲイ (*gei*) is only used for men.

## Other lesbian resources

[L Japan](#): This is my YouTube channel, that is mostly a couple’s channel with my girlfriend (in Japanese) and also has some informative videos about lesbian dating in Japan (in English). We accept topics requests and have an anonymous question box.

- [L Bian TV](#): This is the most popular Japanese lesbian couple on YouTube who also have videos about lesbian culture (in Japanese). If you want to get familiar with typical lesbian issues in Japan, this is a great resource.

- [Nijiusagi.com](#): This is a website that lists lesbians bars and events in English. The lists are not exhaustive, but it is the best English resource out there, so I recommend this to those who do not trust their Japanese skills. Here’s their [twitter account](#).

- [Gachirezu.com](#): This is an all-Japanese website with loads of

information about upcoming lesbian events, lesbian message boards, and LGBT-related articles.

In conclusion, it is entirely possible to date women in Japan even as a foreigner. As for dating Japanese people in general, I think it’s more appropriate for the foreigner to at least initiate conversation; otherwise, the Japanese person may not know whether you speak Japanese, whether you are just passing through or live in Japan, nor whether you are even interested in Japanese people. So, if you are looking to date Japanese girls, my biggest suggestion is to be proactive and open-minded!

All photos by: Clare

*Clare is a former JET ALT of Gifu prefecture, currently working as an assistant professor for a university in Hyogo prefecture. She and her girlfriend recently started a YouTube channel (L Japan) in November 2019 to raise awareness about binational/lesbian couples in Japan. Clare can be contacted through this email address: [qingting312@gmail.com](mailto:qingting312@gmail.com)*



# Anime and Manga Translations: THE FALL OF LOCALIZATION

Adriana Garcia (Sapporo Alumnus)

If you've been following the anime and manga scene in your home country, you've most likely noticed the increase in both quality and quantity of Japanese titles in bookstores, online libraries, DVD sections, and even streaming services. Both legal and illegal translations have developed throughout the years due to the proliferation of the internet, which allows opinions and feedback to be shared, as well as the growing ability of fans to understand the original Japanese sources. Such changes include decreased localization—the adaptation of settings and people to fit where the audience is from rather than keeping it Japanese—as well as the speed of release dates and reduced translation times.

Early anime translations have become dated, largely due to the rampant nature of localization. Character's names were often changed completely in order to appeal to English speaking audiences. Even our dear "Tetsuwan Atomu" was not immune to this localization treatment and is still known today as "Astro Boy". If you know the story of "Astro Boy", you would know that Astro was built by Dr. Boynton to replace his late son, Toby. That is to say, *Atomu* was built by *Dr. Tenma* to replace his late son, *Tobio*. These names were mixed together in the 2009 "Astro Boy" CGI film (which was surprisingly good!) starring Nicolas Cage

as Dr. Tenma, and his son being called both "Toby Tenma" and "Astro".

My personal favorite example of localization would be in "Mahha Go Go Go", where names were given based on personality. Goh was a race car driver, so he was given the name "Speed." His little brother Kurio was hyper and chipper like a sprite, so he was given the name "Spritle." His girlfriend was cunning and a bit of a trickster, and so she was named "Trixie." His parents were stuck with the names "Pops" and "Moms," but due to the family nature of this race team, they were given the last name "Racer." And just like that the series "Speed Racer" was born, a name that stuck with the 2007 Japanese-dubbed live-action movie as well.

"Battle of the Planets," the American localization of the Japanese 1972 anime series "Gatchaman," is listed among one of the greatest victims of this localization process, with a translation never really being made at all. It can be argued that this had been done for several early anime, but this one stands out the most because the localized plot of "Battle of the Planets" was made up by watching what happened; words were added to fit the scene rather than in any attempt to translate, and death scenes were removed to make the show more child-friendly.

By the 1990s translation attempts had improved. There were still name changes in “Sailor Moon” but not in “Dragon Ball Z.” At this time, anime wasn’t just something on TV anymore. It was something being sold on VHS and being rented in video stores across Western countries.

Manga was also not immune to the aforementioned localization system. If the manga was based on an anime that was already localized, then an effort was made to match the name changes. “Case Closed” is particularly notable due to two different companies releasing the anime and manga resulting in some characters ending up with two different English names. Nowadays this practice has ceased; new characters have their original Japanese name while pre-existing characters have the localized version (thank goodness the protagonist “Conan” remained as “Conan”).



A more recent translation of “Case Closed” explains some Japanese, rather than localizing it out entirely.

Another big factor in manga publication is the fact that English is not read the same way as Japanese (left-to-right, as opposed to right-to-left). Last Christmas, my cousin asked me why the manga she bought her son was backwards and the simple explanation was that it was kept the same way it was published in Japanese—with the right-to-left style. Tokyopop, an American distributor, licensor, and publisher of anime and manga, can be credited for popularizing the authentic right-to-left manga format, which halted the previous trend of



Fushigi Yuugi: first edition (mirrored) vs. second edition

mirroring manga pages to match the English left-to-right reading style. Mirroring meant that most of the characters became left-handed, anime visuals may not match the manga adaptations because manga panels were literally backwards, and if any Japanese words were left in the background they were also mirrored (my favorite example of this tendency to flip background text occurred in “Ranma 1/2,” where it actually wasn’t even Japanese text that was flipped, but an English lesson on a blackboard.)

One of the most amazing outcomes of adapting manga for American audiences was the adaptation of “Akira.” Not only was the art flipped, but it was also colored. While a few colored pages here and there can happen in manga, it is essentially a black and white artform. American comic books are released in a shorter thirty-page full-color releases. This translated to some shorter chapter releases for some Japanese series (“Sailor Moon” was one of these), but this wasn’t the case for “Akira.” “Akira” was released in the massive six-volume series that it is known for today, but when initially released by Marvel comics it was also [completely colored](#). This massive effort was made so that it would appeal to Western comic book readers who were not used to the black-and-white manga standard. This full-color method did not become the norm in translated manga, but is amazing nonetheless. The colored manga version was released to coincide with the “Akira” film adaptation, the latter of which triggered a surge in popularity of anime in the Western world.



Along with increased popularity of anime came an interest in Japan itself. A widening audience was becoming more open to studying Japanese culture and language.

Japanese language and culture classes

saw an increase in enrollment and more people learned to understand the cultural differences in media without needing it to be reinterpreted. As a result localization, for the most part, has since disappeared. Onigiri is now allowed to be onigiri, even if it is usually referred to as a “rice ball,” unlike the infamous [Pokemon gaffe](#) where the character Brock called an onigiri a “jelly-filled doughnut.” Manga is printed in the right-to-left format with the last page being a warning to start on the other end and a how-to guide for reading it in the correct order.

A major factor in the decrease of localization, which I mentioned earlier, was the rise of the internet. It is much easier to share videos (and manga images) nowadays than in the days of VHS. Community sharing through the internet has given rise to two things: the “fansubber” and the “simulsub”.

The fansubber came first. People on the internet, from literally anywhere around the world, would get ahold of original Japanese media and translate it for the public. The concept of the fansubber—or, in terms of manga, “scanlator”—is fascinating because this was not done for money (although donations could be requested) but to share the media with other fans who did not have the Japanese skills needed to enjoy the original. They still exist due to the demand of fans for immediate translations that distribution companies do not meet. Early fan translators had an unwritten rule to stop translating once the rights

were secured by an official company. I am personally seeing some series which have three different translations, with fans accepting the official release as the authentic version, but the other two being preferred by some because they were uploaded first, despite becoming seemingly unnecessary thanks to the official release.

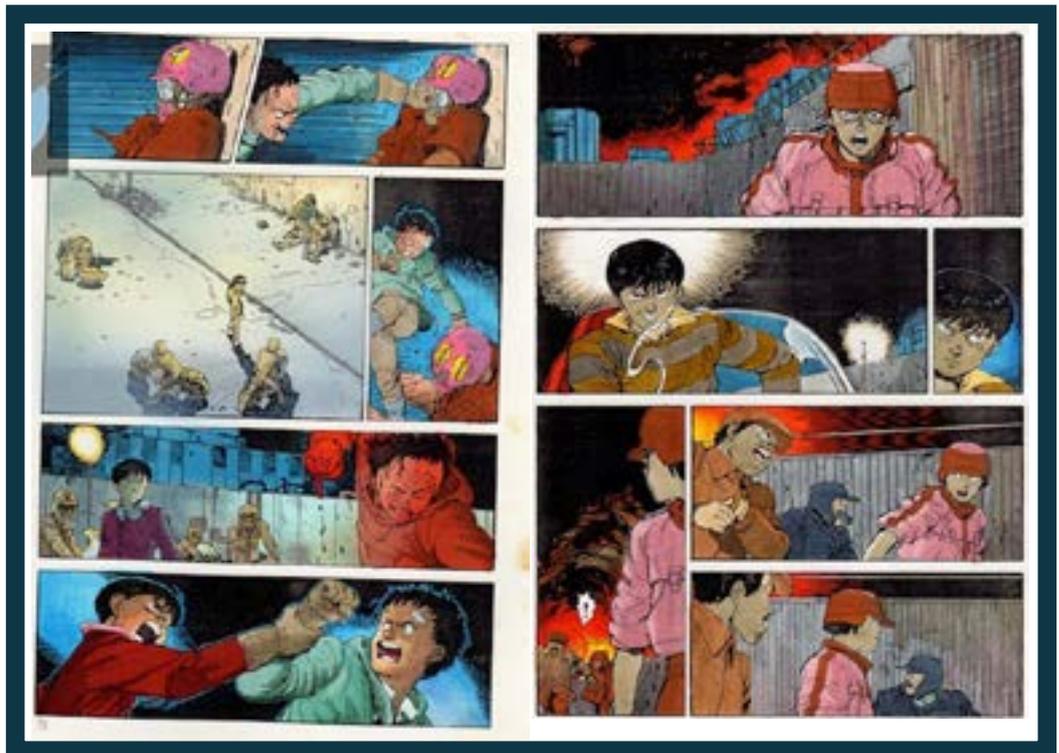
The “simulsub” and even “simuldub” is a relatively new concept for the anime community. Simulsub is essentially when the official distribution company translates and uploads the new anime episode or manga chapter as soon as it reaches them. Most streaming networks (for example, Crunchyroll) pride themselves on the fact that their subtitled versions are uploaded an hour after premiering in Japan. Simuldubs, which are English voiceovers of the episode, take longer, as they are weekly releases of the anime episodes with an official dub cast. Creating a simuldub can take weeks so there is a significant delay, however, as this is all shared online it’s much better than waiting for DVD releases or TV airings!

Comparing early anime/manga translations to those nowadays is a curious thing to do. Some are found laughable, some are even being retranslated. Things can still be censored for broadcast reasons but not to change the race of the main character. We shouldn’t, however, undermine the importance of those original localizations of anime and manga—without them, we wouldn’t have the quality, quantity and accessibility that we have today. Funimation released a subbed version of “Speed Racer” a few years back, but there was apprehension of a redub as the original is almost considered sacred despite its faults. The existence of redubs is perhaps the greatest example of the fall of localization. “Sailor Moon” and “One Piece” were both redubbed to change the original censorship and previous name changes.

Overall, fan demand has changed the translation landscape, with non-Japanese fans having an improved grasp on Japanese language as well



"Akira" Volume 1, p. 144,  
 colored vs. uncolored  
 (colored image courtesy of  
[www.felixcomicart.com](http://www.felixcomicart.com))



as the internet taking over to meet translation supply and demand. The increased output of fansubs and simulsubs on the internet, coupled with the growing anime/manga communities, means that the process of localization no longer has the influence that it once did. "True" translations are what the fans want, which is why now it would be impossible to call a "rice ball" a "jelly doughnut".

All Photos from: Adriana Garcia

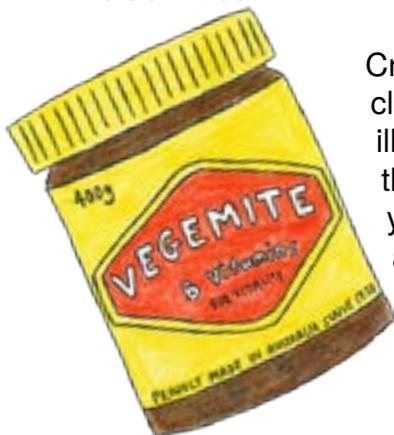
*Adriana was a JET in Sapporo for two years working in a high school. She is currently working towards her Master's in Linguistic Anthropology from the University of Nevada, Reno in her hometown in the USA. Her focus is on anime fans and translation changes.*



From 2016 to 2019, I was an ALT in Tokyo at an all-girls senior high school. For three years, I had the pleasure of teaching English to around three hundred sweet girls, bonding with them over our mutual love of *Arashi*, and marvelling at how naturally talented all of them are at drawing. Highlights from my time there include playing tennis (terribly) with the tennis club, tricking unsuspecting students and teachers into trying Vegemite at the *bunkasai* (school festival), and having popular celebs Ikuta Toma and Hirose Suzu come to the school to prank the girls for a Japanese TV show. You know, the usual JET experience.

I was very lucky at my school not only for these weird and wonderful experiences, but also for the amount of freedom I was afforded as an ALT, to create any kind of activities and teaching resources I wanted, and to teach classes in the ways that I believed would best engage the students. The teachers I team-taught with were open-minded and gave me a free rein, allowing me to make conversation classes as fun as possible, and give the girls plenty of opportunities to practice communicating aloud in English.

Since I've always been passionate about drawing, it was only natural for me to incorporate my own silly illustrations into my classes and teaching resources. I drew elaborate scenes rich in details for the students to describe in English, made illustrated *karuta* cards to test their vocabulary, and included drawings throughout my PowerPoints, not only to add an element of fun to boring old English class but also act as visual aids for the concepts I was attempting to explain. It was such a delight seeing the girls react to new illustrated resources I introduced, and lovely to watch them engage with and get fully immersed in the activities.



Creating all sorts of classes, activities and illustrated resources throughout my three years as an ALT was an incredibly valuable

Vegemite – an illustration for a class all about Australia.



Dressing up for a Halloween conversation class.

experience for two main reasons. First, it allowed me to hone my teaching-resource-making skills, and (hopefully) cultivate an atmosphere in which learning and practising English was not a terrifying experience, but an enjoyable one. By incorporating elements of fun and plenty of silly drawings, I wanted to show the light-hearted side of learning English—one where making mistakes, is in fact, part of the fun, and where getting the message across is more important than perfect grammar.

Second, it allowed me to get my creative juices flowing on a daily basis, and realise what my next step after the JET Programme would entail. It gave me the courage to return back to Australia and pursue a career in illustration—and even incorporate my resource-making skills in my work. While I'm still at the beginning of my studies and career, since leaving Japan I've had the chance to create illustrations for Japanese language learning resources for the Japan Foundation Sydney, and have illustrated a Japanese language learning workbook called *Casual Nihongo* which is set to be published this month. While I'm now helping to make resources for learning Japanese rather than English, all the skills I acquired while I was an ALT have definitely come in handy, and I'm excited about the future.

When I embarked on the JET Programme in 2016, I had no teaching experience and no idea of how to make learning resources. It was terrifying being thrown into the deep end, but I managed to swim rather than sink, and now in 2020, drawing and creating resources has somehow become a part of my life and career even after finishing the JET Programme.

So, to bring my rambling to a close, for anyone out there who might be struggling to make activities and classes just as I did at the beginning of my ALT adventures, here are five things I usually keep in mind or do when creating activities/teaching resources/classes.

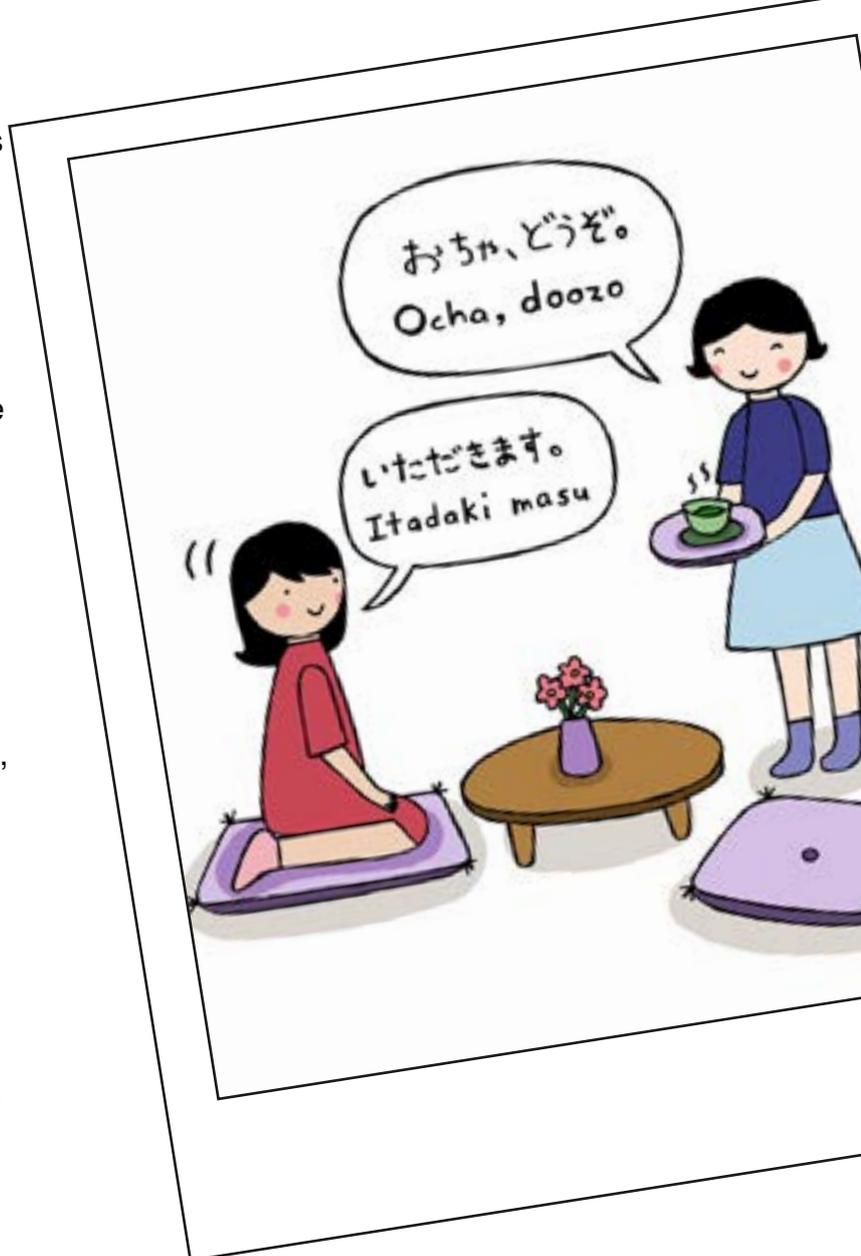
**Do some research.** It never hurts to do a Google search to see what kind of activities already exist out on the interwebs. From those, I picked and chose the best and most relevant parts, and combined them in a way that made the most sense to me and my students.

**Be clear about your point.** I wanted to make sure that I (and thereby my students) actually understood what it was I was trying to teach. When including illustrations, I did it not just to make the resource look pretty, but to make the activity clearer and easier to understand.

**Give context.** It helps to show students why you're covering a specific topic, and how it could be useful to them. The more relevant the students feel it is to them, the more they can find a sliver of motivation to participate and engage.

**Make it fun.** Not every part of learning English can be made fun, but whenever possible, I tried to make the experience enjoyable by adding as many visual elements as possible, getting the class up on their feet and moving around, playing games, and getting the students themselves to draw pictures to aid them in their discussions.

**Think about the students.** I think the most important thing is to always put yourself in the shoes of your students. If you were a bored and confused teenager, stuck in a class you didn't like but were forced to take, would this make sense to you? Would you understand it? Would it be fun?



## GOOD LUCK WITH ALL YOUR FUTURE ENDEAVOURS, AND HAVE FUN!

*Hana is a former ALT, currently studying and working in Sydney, Australia as an illustrator. Her interests include rabbits, drawing, positive psychology, and of course, Japan. See more of her illustrations on Instagram (@hanaunderthetree) or her website at [www.hanaunderthetree.com](http://www.hanaunderthetree.com).*

All photos by: Hana Kinoshita

Illustration for the  
Japan Foundation  
Sydney.



An illustration for the Australia  
Homestay information booklet.

An original illustration  
I used as a teaching  
resource – 'Describe  
everything you can see!'

# ARTS AND CULTURE

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*"The only way of catching a train I have ever discovered is to miss the train before."*

— G.K. Chesterton

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*"We're all born naked and the rest is drag."*

—RuPaul Charles

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*"Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own."* —Matthew 6:34

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Photo: Megan Luedtke





#MelaninandBeauty  
Christina Bellevue (Ibaraki)

If you're a beauty lover like me, then it only makes sense that you'd want to take advantage of your stay in Japan to discover local brands and try new products. While we may not have the means to splurge on an ¥80,000 face cream inspired by [neuroscience](#) or a ¥170,000 skin-firming device beloved by models and [makeup artists](#), there are more affordable products out there that allow us to indulge in Japanese beauty!

As a black woman and beauty lover, I've been on a mission to find beauty products that would suit me while I lived in Japan, a country where the average beauty consumer sits at the opposite end of the skin tone and hair type spectrum as I do. I've also had many people of colour (mostly black women) message me asking if it's possible to do a full face of makeup using only Japanese products.

Since moving here, I've done a lot of research and tried on. So. Many. Products.

And the good news is...YES!

With a bit of ingenuity and finessing, it is possible to use only Japanese beauty products for a fresh, everyday makeup look. Since Japanese drugstore beauty products are somewhat iffy as they tend to lack pigmentation, or look ashy on dark and deep skin tones, your best bet is to save your dollars and add a few key J-beauty products to your beauty stash.

The recommendations below should help get you started!

## MAKEUP FOR COMPLEXION AKA BASE MAKEUP

Welp, this is the most challenging category for any melanated folks living in Japan. Also known as base makeup in Japan, there are indeed Japanese beauty brands that cater to darker skin tones. [Koh](#)

[Gen Do](#), [Shiseido](#), [Sensai](#), [Clé de Peau Beauté](#), [NARS\\*](#), [Laura Mercier\\*](#), and [tarte\\*](#) are all Japanese beauty brands that offer a decent-to-extensive range of darker shades in their foundations and concealers.

Now, they ain't no Fenty Beauty, but their products still work for us.

Thing is, even if the brands listed above are owned by Japanese parent companies, the darkest shades in their respective base makeup collections are often designed for and sold exclusively in Western markets.

SIGH.

A good option is to order them from [Sephora US](#) or [iBeautystore.com](#), a Hong Kong-based online beauty retailer that specialises in Western brands unavailable in Japan (with cheaper prices than retail and free shipping anywhere in Japan to boot). If you live in the Tokyo area, the ENTIRE shade range of [tarte babassu foundcealer foundations](#) and [shape tape concealers](#) are also available at the [Maison Kosé flagship store](#) in Ginza.

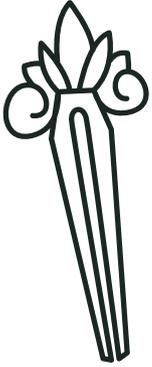
Locally, I also discovered RMK and FIVEISM X THREE, two homegrown Japanese brands that offer a couple of darker shades in their foundations and concealers. This foundation in shade [Coffee Brown](#) from RMK, as well as the [Naked Complexion Bars](#) in shades 13 Darius, 14 Joaquin and 15 Wyatt and the [Concealed Bar](#) in shade 05 from FIVEISM x THREE are all products that could work on certain darker complexions.

\*I classify NARS, Laura Mercier and Tarte Cosmetics as Japanese brands because they are owned by Japanese beauty groups: Shiseido owns [NARS](#) and [Laura Mercier](#), while Kosé owns [tarte](#).



## MAKEUP FOR EYES, LIPS, CHEEKS AKA POINT MAKEUP

Thankfully, point makeup—makeup for eyebrows, eyes, cheeks and lips—that's suitable for darker complexions is easier to find at every price point.



### Eyebrows:

Look no further than this cult eyebrow [liquid pen](#) and matching [eyebrow gel](#) in shade Khaki for the most natural-looking, sweatproof eyebrows you wish you were born with. Worth every penny.

### Eyeshadow:

So many options to choose from! This “drugstore MAC” brand offers tons of pigmented single [eyeshadows](#) at an affordable price, while my all-time favourite cream [eyeshadow pencils](#) are from a brand named after the “hangover” *igari* makeup look that was all the rage in Japan a few years ago. I also like these eyeshadow quads based on [eye colour](#), and these silky-



smooth powder [eyeshadows](#) from a Japanese makeup artist who studied under Fran Nars and Pat McGrath. If you love sparkly eyes, then you can't go wrong with these pots of [glitter magic](#). And if you're feeling bougie, then you might as well go all out with this divine [eyeshadow quad](#).

### Eyeliner:

I love this “tattoo-like”, [waterproof eyeliner](#), these [colourful liquid eyeliners](#) with comfortable grip, and these multi-tasking [and lip pencils](#) for a pigmented pop of color. This geisha-favourite, [jet-black gel eyeliner](#) is also a must if you like your eyeliner dark all night without getting “raccoon eyes” by the end of the day.



Photo: Eco Warrior Princess on Unsplash.com

Photo: Eye for Ebony on Unsplash.com



Photo: Eloise Ambursley on Unsplash.com



Japanese  
Illinois  
darkly  
little  
extra  
with

**Cheeks:**

This [raspberry blush](#) in shade #16 Sister of Night is the most universally-flattering shade I've ever seen. It can be worn sheer or more pigmented. It also works on every skin tone, from the fairest to the deepest. A must-buy!

**Highlighter:**

This trio of versatile, shimmery [gold and champagne highlighters](#) or this [face illuminator](#) will make them cheekbones POP.

**Lips:**

Try this "[milk tea beige](#)" [lipgloss](#) for a perfect, brown skin-friendly nude look; or this lovely [burgundy lip gloss](#) and [deep red lipstick](#) from Japan's first-ever vegan and halal makeup brand, Race, for a vampy pout. These [semi-matte lipsticks](#) apply like a dream without leaving your lips feeling dry, and here's another luxurious, juicy [berry lipstick](#) option if you want to splurge.

liquid  
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*Christina is a second-year Canadian JET living in Ibaraki. When she's not checking out her local LOFT or Donki for new beauty discoveries, you can find her sweating her butt off at a kickboxing gym, bingeing Korean dramas and bowls of chocolate flakes cereals, or driving off in her car to go explore something, somewhere! You can follow her on IG [@diverse beauty trends](#) for more #JBEAUTYFORPOC discoveries and recommendations*



# SAKURA? FOR SPRING

Cover Image: Taisiia Stupak on Unsplash.com | Article Images: Isabelle Teo



# ...? GROUNDBREAKING.



Spring is in the air! As we shed our jackets and embrace the sun, it's time to spruce up our wardrobe! Though sakura-themed clothing and pastel pinks will probably return in full force this season, other trends are cropping up to break the monotony. My frivolous activity of choice while desk warming is scrolling through endless style articles, dreaming of how magnificent I could be when I'm eventually released back into the wild, so let me share the fruits of my labour.

## Colour Me Impressed!

When one thinks of spring colours, soft pastels leap to mind and this year . . . is no different. However, this year's シャーベットカラー (*shaabetto kara*), or sherbert colours, do lean heavily towards the cool side for a refreshing feel against the incoming heat. Let's stay away from the traditional sakura pinks—you want to pop in contrast to your surroundings after all! Think icy blues, lavender, and mint, but don't be restricted to them! For example, if you want to wear yellow, choose cool-toned yellows with green bases.

For more masculine fashion, muted colours such as earthy tones and subdued blues are the way to go! To go with the theme of sustainability and nature, earthy tones, from soft sands to terracotta browns, have been popping up all around stores. They work whether your fashion is feminine, masculine, and anything beyond. Classic blue especially has been chosen as the [Colour of the Year](#) and a hue that instils calm is definitely welcome in the current world we live in.

## Show Some Skin!

As society grows more open to showing skin, fashion is happy to take advantage. バックシャン (*bakkushan*) is a combination of the English word 'back' and the German word 'schön', which means beautiful. This trend focuses on showing off the beauty of the back in a refined manner, and it looks particularly refreshing after your back and shoulders have been hiding away in the cold of autumn and winter. There are many variations to this style, from how open that back is, to the inclusion of ribbon or lace, so there'll be something for everyone!

シア素材 (*shiaa sozai*), or sheer fabric, is also gaining popularity. Chiffon, lace, tulle, and even sweaters with a looser knit—anything that hints coyly at what's underneath. Most common are sheer shirts with neat colours or blouses with sheer sleeves for a more elegant and mature look.

## Go Big or Go Home!

With all these pale colours and delicate fabric, a splash of excitement is sorely needed. Whether it be bolder silhouettes or louder accessories, there are plenty of ways to spice up your outfits this spring!

The boxy silhouette of wider pants is hot this season. For a tighter cinch and a more defined waist, look for culottes (キュロット). Both long-length culottes for a more mature feel and short-length culottes for a fun, girlish feel are popular in spring, especially as the weather grows warmer and the breeze is greatly appreciated. For a more masculine fit, look for wide-legged pants (ワイドパンツ)!

As for patterns, instead of the small flowers that you've probably seen all year round and the sakura petals that float across half the dresses in store, go for larger, bolder floral prints! Heck, ditch the flowers altogether, and go tie-dye. Yes, you heard right—tie-dye (タイダイ) is on the upswing right now, and I for one am excited about the challenge. While in my opinion, a loud and cheerful swirl of colours will never be remiss, this season brings a wash of more delicate colours, with soft blues and greys.



Finally, finish off your outfit with some statement accessories. Bring a little glam with larger earrings. Bags with thicker bamboo handles align with the nature theme of spring perfectly. Wear your favourite chonky, old school ダッドスニーカー (dad sneakers).

## A Shoutout to Fellow Northerners

Of course, Japan's a big country and the northern prefectures might still be feeling the chill, though this year has been a lot warmer, it still snows in Akita even into March. And if you're like me, from a tropical island and never quite warm until the temperature nears 30°C, you'll need ways to stay warm well into spring.

An outerwear piece (アウター) is always a good idea to keep warm. Trench coats (トレンチコート) are an excellent investment that rarely go out of style, especially in classic tan or beige. Pair them with light denim and flat shoes for an elegant but comfortable look. Casual blazers (ジャケット) are also a great choice and a great choice for those working in schools and offices.

A personal favourite is to style my favourite sweater from winter with loose, flowing skirts. Choose a pleated skirt (プリーツスカート) for a more refined skirt, or go all out with patterned skirts for a pop of fun!

Don't just take my word for it—research trends for yourself! The world of fashion is ever-evolving, even if you don't want to trawl through countless Japanese text, the images should be more than enough to give you some much-needed inspiration. Fashion-themed listicles are equally popular

### TODAY'S WORD

毎日更新

人気ショップスタッフが着こなすトレンドアイテム

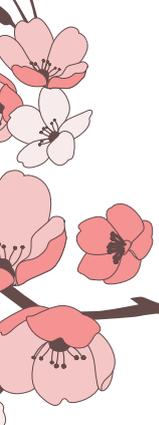
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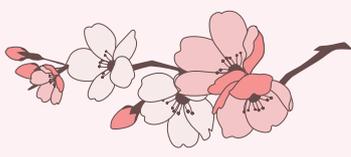
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Japanese side of the internet. I've tried to include as many Japanese search phrases as I could in the article above, but here are a few terms to help your search:

- 春コーデ — spring coordination | メンズ — men's
- トレンド — trends | 低身長 — short stature
- 高身長 — tall stature | プラスサイズ — plus size

I personally like the street style website [WEAR](#) that features everyday looks that are actually wearable. You can also sort based on height, age, and even hairstyle! There's also a section called [トレンドキーワード](#) (*torendo kiiwado*) that keeps track of trends. The more prolific models link to their pieces so you can shop their look. [Zozotown](#) is another popular shopping site that also sells used clothing, and at the time of writing this, it has a whole section featuring trends for spring and summer. Both have mobile apps for your convenience!

I hope these points have inspired you to upgrade your spring wardrobe! And remember, wherever you find your fashion inspiration, these trends are only suggestions that can be subsumed into your own style! Dress to your own best!

*Isabelle Teo is a second-year elementary school ALT in the chilly wastelands of Akita. She writes and cooks and wants to burn to ashes.*



# APRIL RELEASES

Rachel Fagundes (Okayama)

## MOVIES

### April 3

- The Dead Don't Die (2019)
- Captive State (2019)
- The Current War: Director's Cut (2017)
- Vox Lux (2018)
- So Long, My Son (2019)
- Dark Figure of Crime (2018)
- More Than Blue (2018)
- White Riot (2019)

### April 4

- Talking About Trees (2019)
- Dead Souls (2018)

### April 10

- Waves (2019)
- Adrift (2018)
- The New King of Comedy (2019)

### April 17

- Danger Close (2019)
- Blinded by the Light (2019)
- Theatre (2020)

### April 24

- Chhichhore (2019)
- Frankie (2019)
- Claire Darling (2018)
- Violet Evergarden: The Movie (2020)
- Psychomagie, un art pour guérir (2019)
- Yarn (2020)

### April 25

- God Exists, Her Name Is Petrunya (2019)

## GAMES

### April 2

- Endzone: A World Apart – Steam Early Access (PC)

### April 3

- Resident Evil 3 (PC, Xbox One, PS4)
- In Other Waters (PC, Switch)

### April 7

- Disaster Report 4 (PC, PS4, Switch)

### April 10

- Final Fantasy 7 Remake (PS4)

### April 16

- Hellpoint (PC, PS4, Xbox One, Switch)

### April 21

- The Flower Collectors (PC)

### April 23

- Cloudpunk (PC)

### April 24

- Trials of Mana (PC, PS4, Switch)
- Naruto Shippuden: Ultimate Ninja Storm 4 – Road to Boruto (Switch)
- Predator: Hunting Grounds (PC, PS4)

### April 28

- Sakura Wars (PS4)
- Snowrunner (PC, PS4, Xbox One)
- Moving Out (PC, PS4, Xbox One, Switch)
- Gears Tactics (PC)

### April 30

- Legends of Runeterra (PC, mobile)

Sources:

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

<https://www.vg247.com/2020/02/18/video-game-release-dates-2020/>



Moving to the worst thing for gave me, a f clean slate to presentation. isolated like from any rea

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# TOKYO IS BURNING

FALLING IN LOVE WITH JAPAN'S DRAG SCENE

●●●●●●●●●●  
Kat Joplin (Tokyo)

the inaka of Oita, Japan was the best and for my queer agenda. On the one hand, it was a freshly out-of-the-closet genderqueer, a chance to reinvent myself and change my gender. On the other, I was geographically far from home, never before, and prefectures away from the gay scene.

I came to JET in 2018 to enroll in a Japanese language school in Yokohama, I felt like a bottle of champagne. My three years in the countryside were hard and fulfilling, but finally, I had made it. I decided I would be “that gay student.” I came out a year off loud and proud, flamboyant, and proud of nonbinaries. In a room of classmates and faculty, I stood and said: “I’m Kat. I study Japanese literature. I’m

X-gender and prefer ‘kare’ or ‘anohito.’ Yoroshiku.” The room clapped loudly.

After orientation was over, one of my classmates approached me.

“I really liked your *jikoshoukai*,” they said. “I’m kinda private about it, but I’m X-gender too. Do you watch ‘RuPaul’s Drag Race’?”

This was how I met my drag sister Angel Heart, the first fellow nonbinary person I had met since coming out four years earlier. Over the following six months we would bounce from binge-watching “Drag Race,” to experimenting with makeup in my apartment, to going out to gay clubs and drag shows in Tokyo, to planning our own drag debut that June.



People talk about falling in love, and whirlwind romance, and meeting people they feel they've known a lifetime. I feel that describes our journey into drag very well. We didn't start drag—we plunged into it, like Meryl Streep off the stairs in "Death Becomes Her." At the end of my time on JET, I never could have guessed I would become a drag king/queen, or how important my circle of drag friends would become in my life.

## Drag in the East and West

Drag, or gender-bending performance art, can be found in many different iterations worldwide. In America, drag balls began in the 1900s as an important social and political movement among LGBTQ communities of color, and were heavily structured around "drag houses," or queer found-families. These houses, usually headed by a drag mother and or father, were places of refuge for otherwise homeless queer youth. Houses competed against one another in drag balls and pageants. Drag queens went on to become the face of the LGBTQ rights movement, when transgender activist and drag queen Marsha P. Johnson began the Stonewall Riots in 1969, famously throwing the first brick at New York police.

Japan, like many other countries, has a long history of gender-bending and cross-dressing in art, including kabuki drama and Takarazuka musical theater. Building off pre-existing underground gender subversion, drag was introduced to Japan in the 1980s and 90s through Western media representations like "Priscilla, Queen of the Desert" and "La Cage aux Folles". Adopting the showy, pageant-style presentation of the queens in these films, Japanese drag queens went on to establish their own genre of drag within Japan's underground burlesque and cabaret scene, working as bar mamas and hostesses when not performing, and focusing on niche humor, camp, and gags when on stage.

Osaka's Nadja Grandiva is one of the most celebrated queens from this genre of Japanese-style drag. Often performing in a kimono or conservative western dress, Nadja is most famous for her lip-sync and fan dance to the children's song, "Naka, Naka, Hoi," which she has performed for years. Typically

in Japanese-style drag shows, queens perform the same routines over and over throughout their careers, creating a bond of familiarity with their fans.

Alongside this older form of Japanese drag, a new generation of Western-style drag, as seen on shows like “RuPaul’s Drag Race” and “The Boulet Brothers’ Dragula,” is taking root via the influx of international residents to Japanese cities. Compared to the camp and comedy of Japanese-style drag, this genre generally features extravagant dress and wide repertoires of songs (usually pop or hip-hop), accompanied by dance such as voguing or whacking. Under the influence of “Drag Race,” these performances have become increasingly elaborate and costly, with stunts and surprises such as wardrobe reveals.

There is a strong divide in the demographics drawn to these respective types of drag. The humor and jokes, as well as the campiness, found in Japanese-style drag often make it difficult to access for foreign audience goers. Meanwhile, though most Western-style drag shows have a mix of expats and Japanese people among the audience and cast of queens, these shows tend to favor English. Despite this separation, the two schools of Japanese-style and Western-style drag in Tokyo form a rich and eclectic scene, where many drag kings and queens feel at liberty to experiment with artistic and even avant-garde performances. Most make and assemble their own costumes from thrift stores, online shops, and the all-powerful Daiso.

## Closet Ball

The event Angel and I debuted at, the Tokyo Closet Ball, is one of the longest-running international drag circles and variety shows in Tokyo, organized and MC-ed by drag queen Tatianna Lee since 2013. Like any crew with a mixture of Japanese and international participants, the line-up changes from year to year as performers leave the country.

A typical maxi ball in Bar Rosso features a crowd of Japanese, non-Japanese, gay, and straight (but mostly gay) audience members, crammed on stools and couches near the stage, and standing around bar tables in the back. Performers wedge themselves in a narrow curtained-off changing room at the very rear of the venue, behind owner Toku-san’s lights-and-music command console. Prep time backstage invariably becomes chaotic: props slide behind backpacks, performers lose hair brushes they were using ten seconds ago. The

calmer and more seasoned queens and kings float above the panic, taking selfies with their wig caps and half-finished makeup.

Getting from the dressing room to the stage is always a special challenge. Most performers start their numbers from the back of the venue, strutting down the aisle as the music plays. For my own maxi debut—a lip-sync to Florence + the Machine’s cover of “Girl With One Eye”—I scuttled through the audience with a towel over my head, and Toku-san hit the music once I was stationed in the far corner of the stage.

I never would have picked myself for the performing type. Growing up, I was shy. Years of mediocre violin recitals had left me a nervous mess. JET changed everything, however, and after years of clowning around in front of a class of judgmental teenagers, the sound of an enthusiastic audience is a high like no other.

## Drag Families

While drag houses still make up the core of the western drag scene, in Japan they have been slow to develop. Most Japanese drag queens support one another as friends, *senpai*, *kouhai*, and occasionally organize themselves into troupes. Drag houses have only recently begun appearing, in some cases as a branding strategy and in others as the more traditional found-family of “Pose” and “Paris is Burning.”

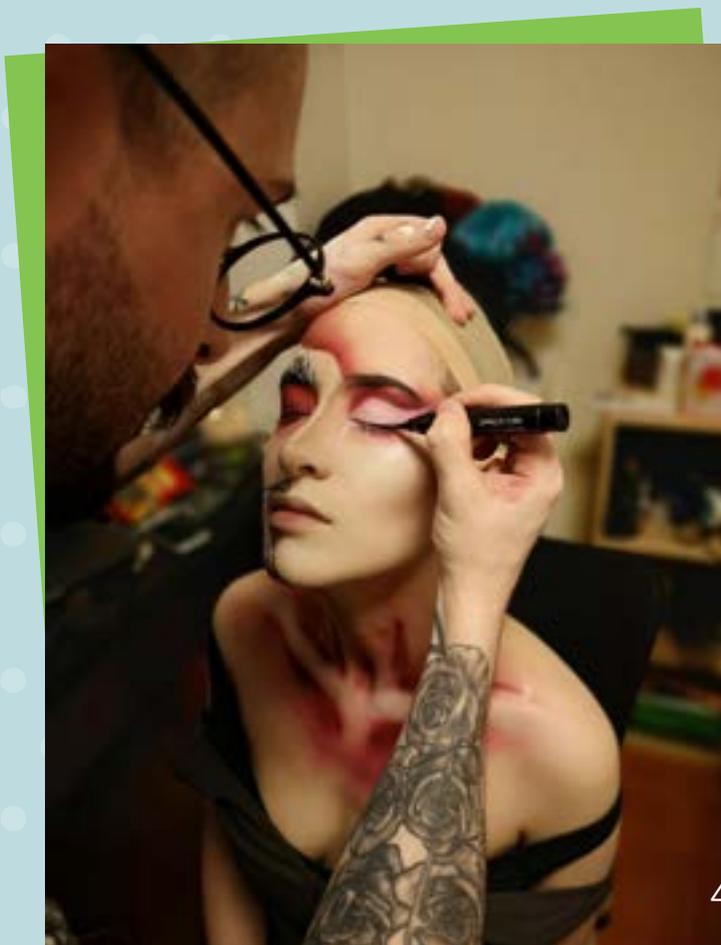


Photo: Le Horla and Ross Verik  
Credit: Atsushi Fukumori

My own drag family consists of myself and my sister Angel, longtime friend Stefani St. Sl\*t, and drag parents Ross Verik (Scottish makeup artist and music producer) and Die Schwarze Frau (Swedish model and B-movie director Yukiro Dravarius). While we do not all live under the same roof, as the drag families of “Pose” do, forming an alliance such as this has been a meaningful source of support for me, creatively and emotionally—and even physically, I think, as I stagger around my share-house in stiletto heels, clutching Angel’s arm.



Photo: Haus of Schwarz

“They’ve always called me mother because I slay. Now I have given birth so the struggle is more real! I feel like helping new drag apprentices with a similar aesthetic and passion for drag is every queen’s duty, and it is very rewarding.”—Die Schwarze Frau

**“My drag kids both allow me to relive the excitement I felt when I first started dressing up, and also inspire me and make me excited for the future. I’m super proud of how quickly they’re both developing.”—Ross Verik**

## Welcome to Tokyo Drag

As a weirdo with trouble fitting in in most spaces, I can say that the drag scene I’ve encountered here is a warm and friendly circle. It’s a first for me to be a part of a group of people who not only tolerate my weirdness but say, “That’s all? Be weirder.”

Whether you’re a visitor or a long-time resident, here’s how to check out Tokyo’s drag scene. My top picks are:

**Bar Rosso** at Shinjuku Gyoenmae, which hosts both the Tokyo Closet Ball maxi show and Gaishoku’s Beauty Blenda series, and **Bar G** in Asagaya for TCB’s mini shows. Details and schedules for both TCB and BB can be found on their respective Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram pages.

**1. Tokyo Closet Ball** is the place for experimental, grungy, and highly diverse drag, where all are welcome and performances range from dance to live-action magic shows. Entry is 2000 yen for the maxi show and free entry for the mini shows.

**2. Beauty Blenda** is a higher budget, more glam focused drag production which features a lot of talent including contortionists and pole dancers. Entry is typically 3000 yen.



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**Aisotope Lounge**, one of Ni-Chome's largest dance clubs, holds regular drag events multiple nights of the week, including both drag performances and drag hostesses. Audience members can enjoy both Japanese-style and Western-style drag shows, and performances there are mixtures of pop dance numbers and gag-heavy comedy.

**Eagle Tokyo Blue** hosts weekly **Dragmania** events on Saturdays or Sundays, with episode viewings accompanied by drag performances. Featuring murals by queer artist and manga illustrator Jiraiya, Eagle Blue is a stylish gay bar with dance space, and its patio bar counterpart, Eagle Tokyo (without the "Blue") is situated one block north.

For adult audiences only, **Department H** is a monthly fetish event held in Uguisudani. Hosted by famous Japanese drag queen Margarette (seen in VICE Japan), H traditionally begins its night with a pageant-style walk by some of Japan's most celebrated and longest performing drag queens, including Onan Spacemermaid, Bouillabaisse, and Masaki Durian. Interspersing the night's raunchier acts, drag shows are a mix of both Japanese-style and Western-style drag king and queen acts.

Other, more sporadic events include **Witch Garden (Majo no Hanazono)**, a goth, visual kei, and avant-garde inspired party organized by Die Schwarze Frau and held at **Club Science**, and **EGOMANIAC**, an alternative 90s style underground house party hosted and DJ-ed by Osaka-based drag queen Belgium Solanas. Starting this year, Die Schwarze Frau and Belgium will collaborate on a new event, **Viral Succubus Nacht**.

Hope to see you there!

*Kat Joplin (drag king/queen Le Horla) moved to Oita, Japan in the summer of 2015 to pursue the JET program after living in California their whole life. During their three years on JET, they got very fit from hiking and biking, and very fat from eating Oita's fried chicken.*

*As a drag performer, Kat enjoys mixing traditional glamor with a touch of the otherworldly, or the horrible. As a human being, Kat likes natto.*

# Featured Queens, Kings, Artists



**Angel Heart**, is my drag sister in the Haus of Schwarz. She is in her third year in Japan. Angel performs with a goth-punk aesthetic, often splicing audio from rock music and cult classic horror films to create a complete story on stage. She sees her Angel persona as “existing in this liminal space between and outside of gender,” a way of expressing her nonbinary experience through art.

We currently perform together at Beauty Blenda and Tokyo Closet Ball.



**Belgium Solanas**, also known as Australian photographer and filmmaker Michael Judd, is a longtime resident and performer of Osaka and Nagoya, beginning drag in 2010. She often performs experimental and avant-garde shows, bucking the conventions of mainstream drag, and cites her inspiration as a “mixture of cinematic/photographic influences from the 20th century, performance art, surrealism, glamour, and garbage.” This is her nineteenth year in Japan.

In Tokyo, Belgium can be seen performing most regularly at Tokyo Closet Ball, occasionally Witch Garden, and at her own underground party, EGOMANIAC.



# ists, and Other Hot Garbage

Credit: Christopher Simons



Credit: Yohei Onishii



**Die Schwarze Frau**, the alter ego of Yukiro Dravarious, is a Swedish-born model, filmmaker, and singer, formerly of the band VERJ together with Ross Verik. He became fascinated with makeup and the feminine aesthetic at age fifteen and officially began drag in 2011, winning the crown of Miss Tokyo Closet Ball 2016. He has lived in Japan for thirteen years.

As DSF, Yukiro performs regularly at Tokyo Closet Ball, Beauty Blenda, Dragmania, his own club event, Witch Garden, and various goth and fetish clubs throughout the year.

Born in the Ukraine and raised in the UK, Yana Kolesnyk splits her time performing as **Erik Shawn** (a drag king inspired by androgynous host boys) and as **Furiosa** (a persona based on burlesque and cabaret). Yana enjoys drag as a creative outlet and way of utilizing her background in acting, and hopes that one day drag kings will receive the same mainstream recognition as queens. She has lived in Japan for nine years, and performed drag for eight. She was crowned Miss Tokyo Closet Ball 2017.

Yana performs at Tokyo Closet Ball regularly, switching between her personas.





Credit: Axel

**Julia YMIT** is a singer and music producer originally from the US. One of Tokyo's original club kids, she has been performing in drag-style costumes to accompany her music career since 2005, and officially debuted as a bio-queen in 2018. In 2019 she was crowned Miss Tokyo Closet Ball. This is her fifteenth year in Japan.

She currently performs as Julia YMIT at Tokyo Closet Ball, Beauty Blenda, and Witch Garden.



**Kosmic Sans** is a Parisian-born performer who has lived in Japan for the past nine years. With a profession in graphic design and a talent for costume-making and wig-styling, she is known for her sharp, artistic looks and versatile drag performances combining dance, acting, and digital media. She is inspired most by pop culture and the politics of deconstructing feminine identity.

Kosmic performs at a wide range of events and venues—currently, her most regular shows are at Aisotope Lounge, Eagle Tokyo Blue's Dragmania, Tokyo Closet Ball, and Beauty Blenda.





**Okini** is one of the youngest and newest queens entering the scene, having moved to Tokyo from Hiroshima and started drag only last year. Her performances employ elaborate makeup, athletic dance, and range thematically from comedy to tragedy. About her goals and underlying concept, Okini feels that her drag is undefinable, because it is a never-ending and always evolving process.

Okini is a regular performer at Beauty Blenda.



**Ross Verik**, born in Scotland, is a makeup artist, music producer, and singer, known for his work in bands SURGYN and VERJ. His art, both musical and visual, is often inspired by gender-bending, surgical themes, and the visual kei movement of the 90s and early 2000s. He has been Tokyo-based for the last four years.

SURGYN will reunite for their eleven year anniversary at the 2021 Resistanz music festival in Sheffield. Meanwhile, Ross is launching a new music collaboration with musician Adrian Windsor, Veil of Rain. His makeup work can most often be seen on the glamorous living doll Le Horla, but he provides drag, glamor, and casual makeovers to a wide range of clients.





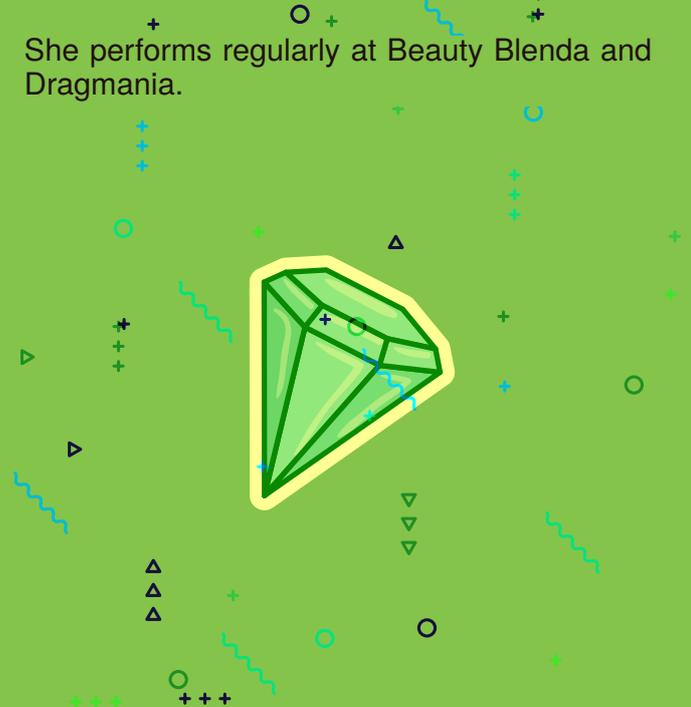
**Stefani St. Sl\*t**, drag persona of Nguyen Ngoc Phuc of Hanoi, Vietnam, is the current reigning Miss Tokyo Closet Ball 2020. Her drag style is known for its elaborate headdresses, handcrafted costumes, and vogue dancing. We originally met in Oita Prefecture when I was in JET and she was finishing undergrad at APU.

She performs regularly at Tokyo Closet Ball and will appear in Viral Succubus Nacht.



One of the top dancing queens in Tokyo, **Xtra** is a new but ambitious addition to Beauty Blenda's line-up. Born to a Japanese mother and Filipino-Spanish father, Xtra grew up performing at home, impersonating celebrities to the delight of her little brother. Xtra built her drag persona as a "dress-up doll and makeup canvas" in order to explore cosmetics and fashion. Her goal is always to amaze audiences with her stunts, tricks, and double-joints.

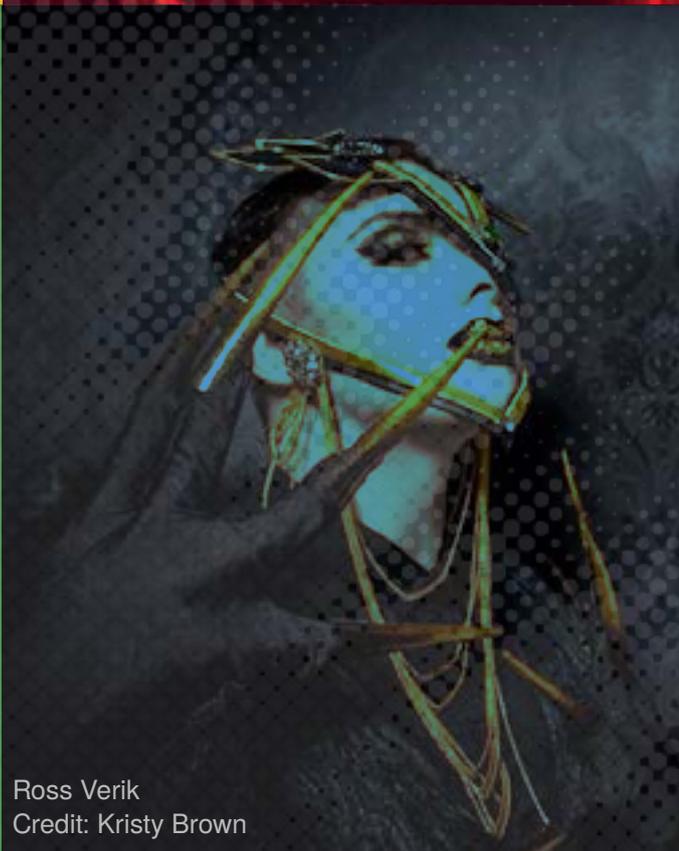
She performs regularly at Beauty Blenda and Dragmania.



Die Schwarze Frau

Stefani St. Sl\*t and Le Horla

# TOKYO IS BURNING



Ross Verik  
Credit: Kristy Brown



Okini

# VPN

Hannah Lysons (Gunma)

## Entertainment Without Borders: The Virtues of VPNs

With more media becoming available online and more streaming services springing up everywhere, keeping up with English language entertainment while living in a foreign country should be easier than ever before. However, some of us have found geographic restrictions to be more of a hindrance than expected. Whether that's finding out that Crunchyroll is blocked in Japan, missing your favourite national television shows, or finding that BBC iPlayer is only accessible in the UK. Many streaming services such as Hulu and BBC iPlayer are only accessible in their respective countries, and the recent announcement that Netflix will finally be streaming the Studio Ghibli films on their platform came bittersweet to those living in Japan and North America. While the rest of the world gets to indulge in the fantastic films that marked many of our childhoods, those of us living here in Japan will be left out. Don't hope is not lost! VPNs are a simple and effective way to expand your entertainment options.

If you're scratching your head at yet another technological acronym, let me give you a quick rundown on what a VPN is, why you should have one, and what your options are.

**Entertainment Without Borders:**  
Hannah Lysons (Gunma)

## WHAT IS A VIRTUAL PRIVATE NETWORK (VPN)?

VPN stands for Virtual Private Network, which might sound even more confusing than the acronym alone. However, as VPNs make their way into the mainstream, it's good to know exactly what they are.

When you access your internet, imagine a virtual tunnel connecting your device (laptop, smartphone etc.) to your internet service provider (ISP), which holds the power to connect you to the internet. This tunnel is your internet connection, and along it travels all the data that you send back and forth when you use the internet. When you log into your favourite social networking service you send data like your username and password down the internet tunnel and in return, they send you the data back that allows you to access the site (basically). The problem here is this: your internet service provider can see all the data that you send down that tunnel, and all the data that is being sent back to you, if they choose to look at it. Internet security is a massive issue in this digital age, and this is where VPNs come in.

A VPN will essentially make that internet tunnel secret. Your internet service provider can still see that you're sending data back and forth down their internet connection tunnel, but they cannot access the data anymore. A VPN will mask the data being sent by giving you a virtual IP (internet protocol) address.

Your IP address is a unique set of numbers that refers to your internet connection tunnel. This is your IP address, and it locates where exactly in the world you are too. That's how your internet use is identified. But a virtual IP address provided by a VPN isn't pinpointing you as you sit at your laptop, it's pinpointing a server in whatever country you choose. All your data is safe from the prying eyes of your internet service provider, and they can't geo-locate you through your IP address anymore.

## WHAT CAN YOU DO WITH A VPN?

First and foremost, a VPN is essential for internet security. For example, when you use public WiFi networks, any person can access the data that you're sending down that "internet tunnel". A VPN will protect you from that. Most importantly, the fact that a VPN can be virtually located anywhere in the world means that the websites you visit can be fooled into thinking you're actually in that part of the world. So if you set your VPN to virtually locate in North America, all the websites you visit will look like the version that is displayed in North America, no matter where in the world you are. This is great for things like Netflix. If there is a show only available in America that you're dying to watch, but you're out here in Japan, then you can set your VPN to virtually locate you in America and access that version of Netflix (or another streaming service or website of your choice). It's easy to switch back and forth between different countries as well. With the click of a



button, you will be able to switch from Japan to North America, to Europe, and back to Japan again. Each time, you will be virtually located in that country and the websites you visit will display as such.



## INTERNATIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

MOVIES	COUNTRY (ORIGIN)	WHERE TO WATCH
Baahubali: The Beginning	India	Netflix, most countries that are not Japan
City of God	Brazil	Netflix USA
Jackie Brown	USA	Netflix Canada, France
Mad Max 2: The Road Warrior	Australia	Netflix Germany, South Korea
Nausicaa of the Valley of the Wind	Japan	Netflix, everywhere except Japan, USA
Pan's Labyrinth	Mexico + Spain	Netflix USA, India
Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse	USA	Nexflix USA, South Korea
Strictly Ballroom	Australia	Netflix USA
SERIES		
Killing Eve	UK	Hulu, BBC iPlayer
Letterkenney	Canada	Hulu
Louis Theroux's Weird Weekends	UK	Netflix UK
MasterChef Australia	Australia	10play.com.au/masterchef
My Brilliant Friend	Italy + USA	HBO GO
The Office (US)	USA	Netflix USA, Canada
The Untamed	China	Netflix UK, USA
Over the Garden Wall	USA	Netflix UK, France
Parks and Recreation	USA	Netflix USA
Pride and Prejudice (1995 BBC)	UK	Netflix UK
A Question of Sport	UK	BBC iPlayer
Samurai Champloo	Japan	Netflix Australia, France*
Trigun	Japan	Netflix South Korea, India
Weightlifting Fairy Kim Bok-joo	Korea	Netflix UK, Japan*
Xena: Warrior Princess	USA + New Zealand	NBC App

\*English subtitles unavailable.

It's worth mentioning here the legality of a VPN. By law, VPNs aren't illegal in most countries, including Japan. While it's contested that using a VPN for accessing streaming services such as Netflix should be illegal due to copyright laws, there is actually nothing technically illegal about it. However, if you're going to use a VPN for illegal things, such as P2P file sharing (more commonly known as "torrenting"), then you are still breaking the law and can be held responsible if found out.

For more information on where you can and can't use a VPN, check the resources box!

# HIGH VPN IS THE BEST?

There are many VPNs on the market and that number only continues to grow. In order to give you some information on which might be the best VPN for you, let's compare the pros and cons of three highly-rated VPNs

## **NordVPN**

NordVPN is one of the most highly rated VPNs on the market, for multiple reasons. In 2018 it won PCMag's VPN of the Year award and has been an editor's choice ever since. It boasts over 62 countries to choose your server from, and the ability to decide which city in larger countries like the USA. It comes with an application which is easy to install, the basic features are easy to use for novices, and it has been rated highly for first-time users. You can have six simultaneous connections across devices, which is more than the average service offers.

However, NordVPN does come with a larger price tag. A standard monthly subscription will set you back \$11.95 USD, but if you subscribe to the three-year plan, your average monthly cost will lower to \$3.49 per month. NordVPN comes with a 30-day money-back guarantee as well, so you have a month to decide whether it's worth splashing out. The service usually allows you to use streaming services such as Netflix, although some individual servers will restrict your access. However, as NordVPN has over 4,000 servers to choose from, this shouldn't pose much of a problem.

## **Private Internet Access VPN**

Our final VPN service on this list, Private Internet Access VPN, was PCMag's first Reader's Choice award for VPNs. It allows 10 simultaneous connections across devices, which is more than the average service offers, and with a choice of 32 countries worldwide it has a reasonably large choice of servers.

Once set up, the application is easy for novices to navigate. Unlike other services, it offers a six-month subscription plan at an average monthly cost of \$4.49 USD, or a monthly subscription for \$9.95 USD and a 1-year plan at an average cost of \$2.42 USD per month, a competitive price with many of the features that other services offer as well.

## **ExpressVPN**

ExpressVPN is one of the other larger services on offer. With servers in 94 countries across the world, it offers the most countries to choose from of any VPN service. The interface is hailed as being very simple and intuitive for novices, and like NordVPN it comes with a 30-day money-back guarantee. Despite this, it only offers three simultaneous connections across devices and the price is relatively high in comparison to other services. A monthly subscription to ExpressVPN will set you back \$12.95 USD, and a one-year subscription will lower your average monthly cost to \$8.32 USD. When compared to other services, ExpressVPN does not appear to offer as many features for its higher price.

# IS THERE SUCH A THING AS FREE VP

VPNs can be quite pricey, but there are free options out there! However, free VPNs come with drawbacks that paid services tend not to have. Let's look at two of the most highly rated free options on the market.

## Tunnelbear VPN

The VPN service TunnelBear offers a free option that is hailed as one of the most user-friendly on the market. The only restriction is that you are limited to 500MB of data per month. There are more than 23 locations for you to choose from worldwide, and if 500MB of data per month seems like a tight constraint, tweeting your support of TunnelBear could mean that they up your data limit to 1GB per month. While still a little restrictive if your main purpose is streaming, this is a good option for people wanting an easy first time experience with VPNs.

## Windscribe VPN

Windscribe is a relatively new VPN service that boasts some impressive features, even in the free version. You get an allowance of 10GB of data per month if you sign up using your email address, and you can have an unlimited number of device connections which is even better than some paid services. You are, however, limited to only 10 location choices in the free version, and it has been noted that some of these locations can be intermittent in their connection. But with such a large data allowance, this could be the perfect option for those just starting out in their VPN journey.

## VPN COMPARISON DATA

PAID	STANDARD MONTHLY PRICE	1 YEAR PLAN MONTHLY PRICE	SIMULTANEOUS CONNECTIONS (#)	COUNTRIES (#)	DATA RESTRICTIONS
NordVPN	\$11.95	\$6.99	6	62+	none
ExpressVPN	\$12.95	\$8.92	3	94	none
PIA VPN	\$9.95	\$2.42	10	32	none
FREE					
TunnelBear	\$0	\$0	5	23+	500MB per month
Windscribe	\$0	\$0	unlimited	10	10GB per month*

\*e-mail sign up is required to get 10GB a month.  
Without an email user limit is 2GB a month.

## HOW TO SET UP A VPN

Once you've chosen the VPN service that you think is right for you, it's now time to install the application which will provide you with your VPN. Even though VPNs are very technical things, most services are extremely user-friendly. If you're on a laptop, you'll just have to download the application like you would anything else on a laptop and log in to your account. On a smartphone or other portable device, you'll be able to find the service's application through your device's app store, then

you log in to your account and you're good to go. This process varies from service to service, but most provide a very streamlined way of setting things up, so don't worry!

This was by no means an exhaustive list of the best VPNs, but I hope this article has been helpful in your search for a VPN and understanding how they work. Check out the resource box for more reviews and even more options. Now, go out there and consume all the Netflix you can. Totoro is waiting for you!

\*\*All Information accurate at the time of writing

\*\*\*All prices in USD were accurate at the time of writing

N?

*Hannah is a first-year ALT in Gunma prefecture, originally from the North West of England. She can usually be found on her laptop, or with her phone in hand, at the helm of CONNECT's social media presence. Otherwise, she's often playing Skyrim or struggling with learning Japanese.*

VPN

#### **Resources**

[Blog on the legality of VPNs](#)

[PCMag review of the best paid VPNs](#)

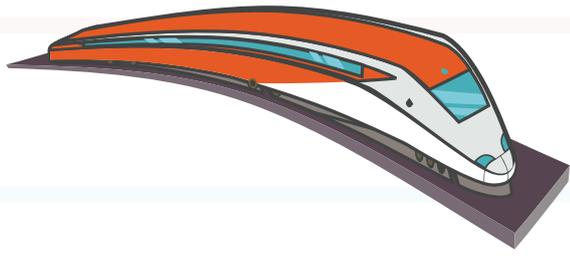
[TechRadar review on the best paid VPNs](#)

[PCMag review of the best free VPNs](#)

[TechRadar review of the best free VPNs](#)

[Japanese Language blog on VPNs](#)

[Unofficial Netflix Online Global Search](#)



# One Man and a History of Jingles

Linka Wade (Gunma)

Mukaiya Minoru is a name you've probably never heard, but you've absolutely listened to his works. Multiple times. Possibly even every day. Maybe you even know some of his tunes so well, you can hum along with them. Millions of people listen to his music every day, and he is one of the most played musicians in the world. Yet, each of his hit songs is only seven seconds long. Mukaiya is the composer of around 170 (he lost count along the way) *hassha merodii*. *Hassha merodii* (発車メロデー) is translated as "train departure melody," and is the little jingle that plays in train stations to signal when the train is about to leave. The jingles are unique to each station, with almost every train station in Japan having one. Some specific lines even have their own *hassha merodii*, such as the famous Yamanote Line jingle. So, how does someone become the (almost) exclusive composer of Japan's distinctive train station jingles?

## Who is Mukaiya Minoru?

Mukaiya spent most of his music career playing keyboard for a band called Casiopea, where he was introduced to using synthesizers. In 1985, he founded Ongakukan, a company that began with music lessons and leasing recording equipment, then moved to develop computer games—including a renowned train simulator game creatively named Train Simulator. The train simulator grew into more games, games so realistic that they caught the attention of JR (Japan Railways Group). Now, Ongakukan makes advanced simulators for training JR train and shinkansen operators. The company also branched out into some other things

along the way, including artist management to manage Mukaiya's jingle compositions (1). At heart though, Mukaiya was a *tetsudou otaku*, colloquially known as "a big ol' nerd for trains" (2) You're probably familiar, at least somewhat, with the culture of train fanatics—I know I have regularly been treated to excited chatter about favorite trains from my elementary schoolers. *Hassha merodii* made their entrance to train stations in 1989, and Mukaiya recognized a way to combine his passions for music and trains. He said that "As a musician and train enthusiast, it's an honour to make train departure melody—I feel joy making it and it's also made by a train fan" (6). He took over the role of the primary composer after the original sound engineer, Ide Hiroaki, retired in the early 2000s (3).

## Composing a Hassha Merodii

Each melody is exactly seven seconds long—the exact amount of "dwell time" a train has in a station to remain perfectly on time. Each is composed very carefully. The noise of the jingle can't be irritating to the passengers, and it can't be too disruptive. The sound has to integrate smoothly into the atmosphere of the train station and for Mukaiya, the jingle has to fit the train station or line. When composing a melody for a station, Mukaiya will visit that station and observe it. How does the train come in? Around a curve, or through a tunnel? What's the geography around that station like? What's the area around the station like? Is it historical, or more hip and modern? All these factors are taken into account to make the perfect melody. The jingles in Kyoto, or other areas with historical significance, are composed using traditional instruments such

as *koto* or *shamisen*. Stations in areas around universities are created to have a more modern sound to appeal to the younger crowd. Shibuya Station's melody is a bright crescendo because the train has to climb a steep hill to get to the next station. Other stations' melodies are references to local culture, like the birthplace of "Astro Boy", Takadanobaba, has a jingle version of the main opening theme for the show (4). Some lines, like the Tozai Metro line, even form a complete song when all the station jingles are put together (2).

## The Purpose of Hassha Merodii

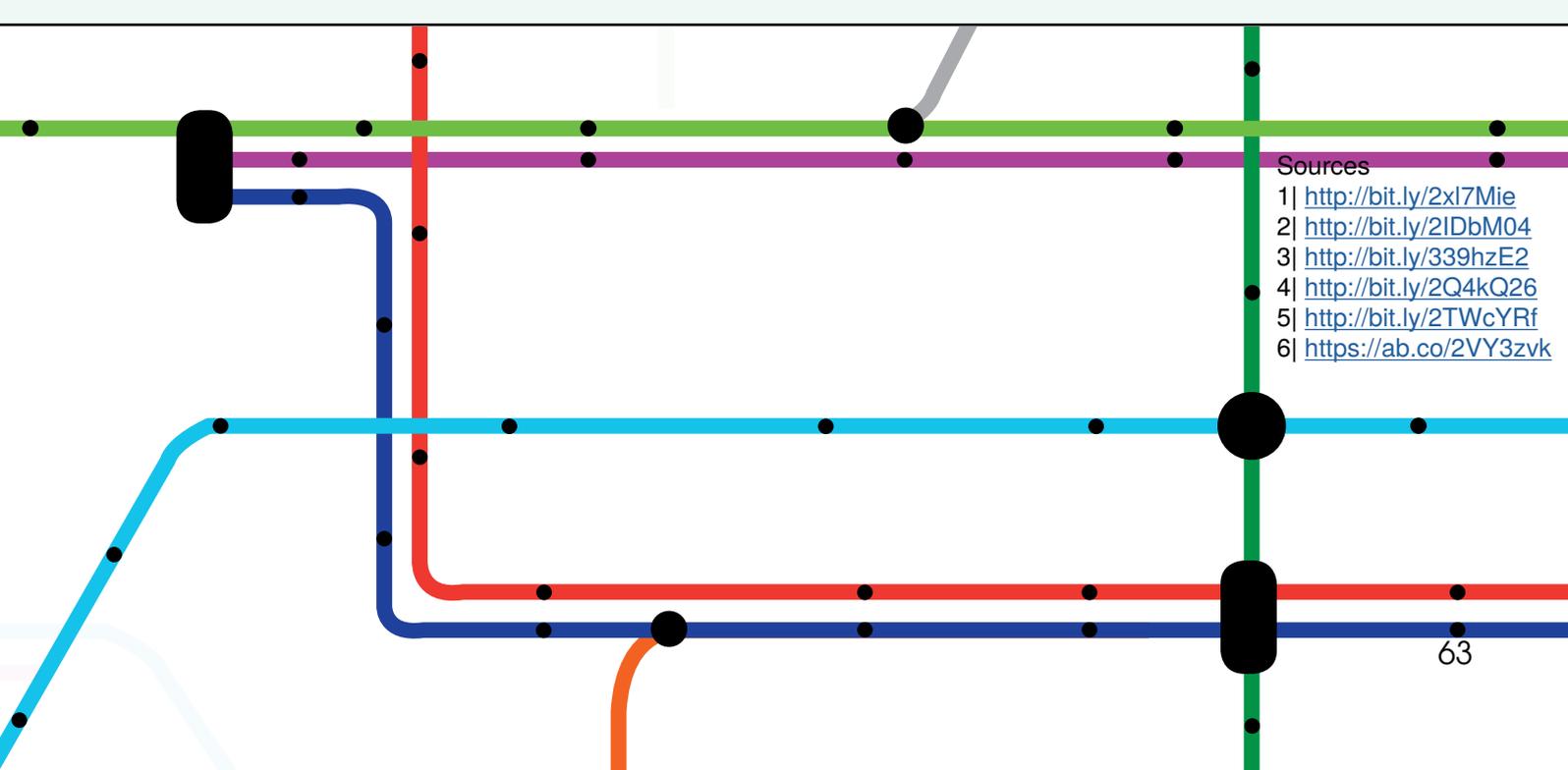
At the end of the day, hassha merodii weren't introduced to Japanese train stations simply because the train companies thought having distinctive jingles would be really cool. The jingles are actually a tool for using "nudge theory" on passengers. Nudge theory is a psychological theory that states that small "nudges" can be used to influence someone to behave in the best interest of themselves or others. In this case, the sound of hassha merodii nudges people to either hustle up and get on the train, or stop and wait for the next one (5). Commuting on Japanese trains can be crazy. There's a ton of people, there are so many different platforms and lines to sort out, and you have to run up and down five different staircases to make it to your transfer in time. Now imagine if the departure of a train was signaled by a buzzer or alarm. That would make being in a frantic train station so much worse. Comparatively, a seven-second gentle melody to tell you that your train is leaving vastly reduces anxiety. The tune is a calm notifier to judge whether or not you can make that train. A study conducted at Tokyo Station in 2008 showed that the number of injuries related to passengers rushing to a train dropped by 25%

after hassha merodii were introduced (5). Mukaiya himself believes that the jingles are "good for their [passengers] health, for their work, for walking." He composes the jingles with the passengers in mind, wanting them to be calm and happy in the midst of their hectic days (4).

## Jingle All the Way

I had never heard of Mukaiya Minoru, nor seriously thought about the omnipresent train jingles, until watching an episode of "James May: Our Man in Japan" (available on Amazon Prime!) and seeing a section with Mukaiya. I highly recommend this [clip](#), and the show in general for entertainment purposes. Anyway, the next time you're sitting in a train station, I challenge you to listen to the jingles around you and think about what it would be like if they weren't there. Perhaps you'd like having one more source of noise out of the way, but perhaps you'd miss the calming or cheery sounds in the midst of all the hustle and bustle. Personally, I have always enjoyed the upbeat little tunes filling the air in the stations and since learning about Mukaiya, I've found them all the more interesting. I often find myself wondering what the particular inspiration or theme for the jingle was, or trying to relate the jingle to what I see at the station.

*Linka is a second-year ALT in Gunma. She lives with her husband and two guinea pigs in the deep inaka. She enjoys being the Events section editor for CONNECT, traveling, touring onsen, and photography. She is spending her time in desk warming purgatory trying to absorb her JLPT study materials via osmosis instead of study, and looking at memes. You can find her on Instagram as @linkaslens or on her blog, [Linka Learns Things](#).*



### Sources

- 1| <http://bit.ly/2xl7Mie>
- 2| <http://bit.ly/2lDbM04>
- 3| <http://bit.ly/339hzE2>
- 4| <http://bit.ly/2Q4kQ26>
- 5| <http://bit.ly/2TWcYRf>
- 6| <https://ab.co/2VY3zvk>

# JAPAN THROUGH THE LENS:

## Capturing precious moments in my camera

Laura Pueringer (Akita)

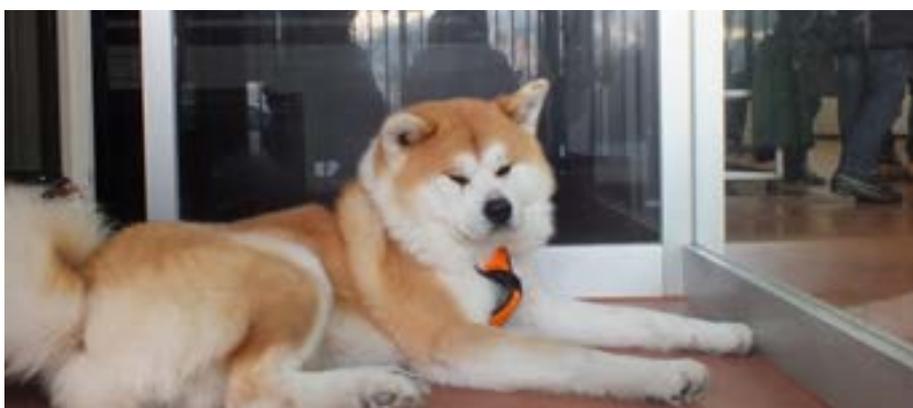
Living in Akita Prefecture for the second time in my life, I have found inspiration in just about everything I see around me. The trees in Akita seem greener than anything I've ever seen before. The air is clean and crisp. The people are kind and caring. The mountains are always in the distance, begging for adventurers to give them a climb. The crows are loud and unapologetically present in a glorious way. Life here is so much like life back home, and yet so different at the same time.

I grew up never without a pencil in my hand and notebook in my bag. As college came and went, I realized I had fallen out of touch with my artistic side. After first coming to Akita four years ago for study abroad, I found myself constantly inspired and excited by the world around me. When I spoke with loved ones back home, I realized that I couldn't quite convey the beauty of the place I was living in, so I started to take pictures to share with them. I started off using just my phone camera, and slowly evolved into a bigger and better camera. As I tried to capture the scenery around me, I began to connect with the side of me I had lost in the hurry of trying to get somewhere fast.

Tohoku has become my second home, and I want to slow down and appreciate every moment while it lasts.

Although I am new to photography, I've found a great amount of love for it. There is something so magical and amazing about being able to share my stories through the photos I've taken. My tales of living in Japan seem so much more concrete and tangible when there is imagery to go with them.

In my photography, I want to capture moments in time as I see them. I have developed a love for traveling and experiencing new places, foods, and traditions everywhere I go. I take photos of the things I do so that I can not only share them with others, but also to be able to preserve my memories in a physical way. When I look back on photos I've taken, sometimes I remember details I had forgotten, or I can relive the moment I took the photo. I take photos of nature and places mostly, although my love for Akita





... does tend to sneak in there quite a bit. Snow and leaves will disappear, but the impression they leave on me won't. I may not visit a place more than once, but I will always remember how I felt while I was there. That is what I want to capture in my photographs.

... has taught me how to adventure beyond my comfort zone, and how to cherish small things, like snow falling on the ground, or the sunlight peeking through the trees as I climb up a staircase to a shrine tucked away in the mountains.

... you'd like to see more of my journey in Japan and beyond, I upload to my [Instagram](#), especially about places I've visited and foods I've eaten. I also write on [my blog](#) about things



to do and life here in Akita Prefecture. I have a [Society6](#) where prints and other items with my photographs are available for purchase. I hope to be able to carry the inspiration and creativity that I have rediscovered in Japan forward in my life and share what I've been blessed to experience with others.

*A Minnesotan girl living in Akita Prefecture, Laura Pueringer is a second-year senior high school ALT in the JET Program.*



# LIFESTYLE

A group of people, including men and women, are gathered around a stone railing. One man in a light blue jacket is leaning over the railing, holding a small metal cup and pouring water. Other people are looking on, some with expressions of interest or anticipation. The background shows a stone wall and some greenery, suggesting an outdoor setting like a festival or a shrine.

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## Rashaad Jordan

*"I always laugh when people ask me about rebounding techniques. I've got a technique. It's called just go get the damn ball."*

—Charles Barkley

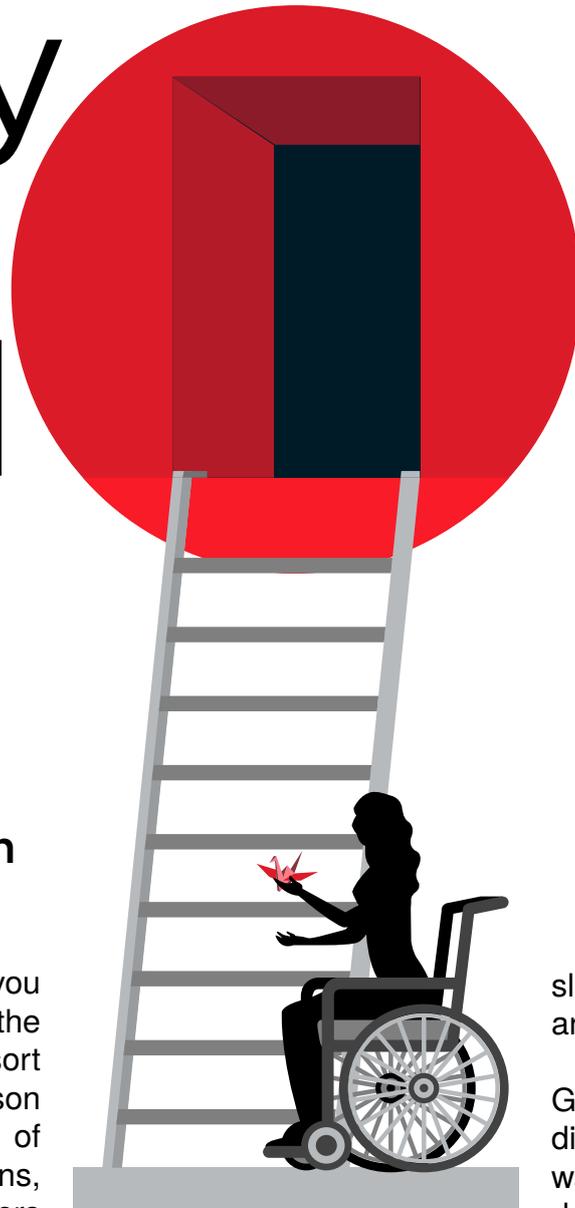
Photo: Charlotte Coetzee



# Barrier-Free, Body and Mind

Living  
with a  
Disability  
in Japan

Huda Samakaab (Chiba)



## Growing Up With a Disability

What sort of person do you picture when you hear the word “disability?” What sort of lifestyle is this person living? Even in the face of our preconceived notions, living with a disability covers a wide range of conditions and experiences. Despite this fact, it can be difficult to find perspectives from people with disabilities in regards to major life events, even in the case of the well-chronicled excitement and anxiety of moving abroad. I ran into this issue prior to relocating to Japan, agonizing over whether I would be able to perform well as a JET and not finding much information

from participants with physical disabilities that were similar to my own.

I have had spastic diplegic cerebral palsy since birth, which means the muscles in my legs are tighter than average and prone to spasms. Though many with cerebral palsy are permanently wheelchair-bound or unable to communicate without assistive devices, I am able to walk and live independently. However, I walk

slowly, often lose my balance, and usually use leg braces.

Growing up with a physical disability in the United States was a succession of admittedly daunting events that I perceived as normal: a wheelchair followed by crutches, crutches followed by walkers, specialized 504 plans for educational accommodations, a few surgeries, and re-learning how to walk a couple times. From a young age, I was encouraged to seek out resources for assistance and establish routines that worked for me. When I finally moved to Japan, I realized that I would have to start from scratch to find new routines and figure out how to best advocate for myself.

## Everyday Life While on JET

As quaint and convenient as my Chiba neighborhood is, getting around can be tough at times. More so than in the United States, I've found that the sidewalks in my city can often be uneven, and my feet have occasionally come close to getting stuck in sidewalk drainage holes.

My work days start and end with a staring match between myself and the small, railing-less staircase that leads up to my elementary school. My thought process is usually something like this: Will I go upstairs starting with my left foot today, or with my right? Should I wobble my way downstairs and hope that I don't fall, or should I reach down and grab that big planter for support?

What if someone sees me grab the planter and thinks that I'm a weird flower thief? At a certain point, it's best to ignore the flurry of questions in your head and charge forward, provided that you don't make a mess of things. It's a lot easier to go down a flight of stairs if you don't overthink it.



## Overcoming Obstacles

As you can likely tell, my physical struggles exist alongside mental and emotional hurdles that I have encountered upon ending my sedentary college lifestyle and beginning work as an ALT. Faced with the many physical minutiae of teaching—repeatedly climbing staircases, flipping flashcards, passing out worksheets, and handing out stickers—I often

feel deeply ashamed at how clumsily I complete these tasks. In a way, it is as if my body is a marionette that I am controlling from the inside-out, and I can only watch in embarrassment as my knees lock, or my fingers shake or grow stiff and wooden.

Despite the fact that I thought I completely understood my physical limits after over 20

years of life, the demanding role of classroom assistant has taught me that my body was merely used to a certain set of circumstances. Rather than ruminating on whether I'm an inconvenience to my JTEs and students, I've chosen to work on focusing on what I can do well and effectively communicating my needs.

## The Current Situation in Japan

From a political perspective, disabled adult wards in Japan only gained the right to vote in 2013 after an intellectually-disabled woman in Ibaraki Prefecture successfully sued the Japanese government, arguing that the Public Office Elections Law that prevented her from voting was unconstitutional. This law was originally put into effect due to concerns that disabled individuals lacked the “... intellectual abilities to understand candidates’ positions.”

Regardless of one’s intellectual ability, depriving an individual of

their right to vote is a denial of their personhood. At its worst, ableist prejudice in Japan has led to acts of senseless violence. This is embodied by the 2016 massacre in Sagami-hara, Yokohama, wherein 19 disabled individuals in a living facility were stabbed to death by an employee who explicitly stated that “... his purpose was to eliminate disabled people from the world.” It’s soul-crushing to think that someone could see another human being unworthy of life, a viewpoint that stems from ignorance of the fact that those with disabilities can contribute to society, love others,

and pursue their dreams, even if they require assistance from others to do so.

Despite these tragic events within the history of Japan’s disabled population, strides towards a more inclusive future have been made and continue to this day. In 2006, Japan passed the Barrier-Free Act, legislation that would improve accessibility nationwide for the disabled and elderly by providing more ramps, elevators, tactile paving, and accessible toilets in public spaces and transportation hubs.

## Strides Towards a Brighter Future

Japan is also a regularly participating country in the Paralympic Games, providing its disabled athletes with a spotlight to showcase their strengths and amazing achievements. My school recently hosted Paralympic wheelchair rugby athlete Imai

Tomoaki as a speaker. It was immensely heartwarming to see how attentively a gymnasium full of fourth-graders listened to him recount winning a bronze medal at the 2016 Rio Olympics.

I merely observed in the distance, but seeing the

glee on their faces as they watched a wheelchair rugby demonstration made me feel much more welcome in my school. I’m sure that my fourth-grade self, still wobbly and clearly able to remember her own time in a wheelchair, would have been overjoyed.





*Huda Samakaab is currently a first-year ALT in Chiba. She has a BA in English and writes poetry whenever inspiration strikes. Huda's also a huge bookworm, a fan of anime and gaming culture, and a frequent lurker of neighborhood taiyaki stands. Follow her on Twitter at @hudagoesnuts for more musings.*





# A Whiteroom Experience

Ross McSwiney (Hokkaido)

Japan is blessed with so many natural features, climates and people passionate about sport and the outdoors. The country has many stunning mountainous regions, world-famous *Japow* (legendary powder snow), and hundreds of ski resorts scattered across Hokkaido and Honshu—but they've largely been overlooked by the international skiing and snowboarding community.

I first discovered the opportunities that existed whilst on a ski holiday to Hokkaido 17 years ago. I had made the trip with four fellow ski patrollers to experience the Japow we had heard rumors about. Little did I know at the time that it would become not only my passion but my business and such a large part of my life.

So after a number of years as an avid holidaying ski enthusiast, I made the lifestyle decision to make an annual winter migration to Hokkaido. I had sold a business in Australia and decided it was the perfect time to make a career change and follow my true passion, which would become my new business venture.

# Evolution or Reinvention?

Turning one's passion into a career is the dream of many. As a wise person once said to me, "If you make your passion your job, you'll never work a day in your life."

When I sold my small business, we were at a point as a family where we had achieved a form of financial stability. My wife and I had discussed the future and my desire to reinvent my career. It was something she has always supported me in, so we were able to take a new direction in life, for our family.

The opportunity to work as a ski guide in Japan came about through an associate I was introduced to. I guided for his company for a number of winters and as part of that process, I was subcontracted to work on some of Whiteroom Tours' planned excursions in Japan. After meeting the company's owner, Paul Ellis, and being impressed with his business model and desire to start his own guiding operation, we established [Whiteroom Japan](#). Whiteroom Japan now encompasses [Whiteroom Guides](#), with bases in Niseko, Furano and the Tohoku region. We also operate [Pension Full Note](#) and [Half Note Bar & Café](#) in Niseko Hirafu.

The skiing and snowboarding world has finally awoken to the fantastic offerings that exist in Asia. Initially, only a small number of Australians came to Japan at the start of the new millennium, but word spread quickly to other parts of the globe. Not only was it the reliability of Japow that excited potential visitors, but open spaces (Japanese skiers prefer not to ski off the main course, so that means a lot of pristine powder snow for others), unique culture, exceptional cuisine, animated nightlife, and beautiful onsen were major attractions as well.

This coincided with a number of savvy entrepreneurs and snow sports enthusiasts seeing the potential for growth and business opportunities. So international travel operators and property developers are now a staple of

a number of the larger, popular Japanese ski resort areas.

It has taken some time, but Japan is now at the forefront of international travel as a ski and snowboard destination. The internet and social media have played huge roles, along with ski magazines, movies and promotion by the ski industry in general. Coupled with the growth in the middle class in countries such as China, Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia, skiing and snowboarding is becoming part of the social norm across Asia. This norm, however, is actually in its infancy and we will see the snowsports industry in Asia continue to grow. Unlike in Japan, the general Asian market has only discovered skiing and snowboarding in recent times. Combine this with major investment in Japanese ski resorts and the development of ski and snowboarding equipment over the past 20 years (allowing the average skier or boarder to venture further off-piste with ease) and you have the perfect recipe for sustainable growth in the marketplace.



# Changing Landscape

Slowly, I have watched the changes wash over the ski regions of Japan—such as an influx of foreign skiers, the establishment of foreign-owned Japanese companies and businesses, mass development of certain major ski resort destinations, and a cultural change of the Japanese people towards doing business with foreigners and foreign companies. Some see the changes as being mostly positive—like increased employment opportunities and economic benefits from greater investment and rising popularity. But others view the changes, such as an increase in popularity and visitors many regions have experienced, as developments that haven't enhanced local cultures (The atmosphere of some small villages have changed as they have become internationally recognised resort).



# Life in the Whiteroom

After eleven phenomenal seasons, Whiteroom has grown from humble beginnings with a handful of employees to now employing full-time office staff both in Australia and Japan, as well as a large number of seasonal ski and snowboard guides, hospitality and lodge staff.

Whiteroom's services have grown with the skiing and boarding community and now include over 50 fully guided and hosted tours in Japan each winter. Additionally, we also offer private travel packages to Japan, guiding for all skill levels, ranging from powder clinics (transitioning from the course to off course and tree skiing), lift-accessed backcountry to full backcountry touring across some of Hokkaido's and Tohoku's renowned major mountain peaks. In all of this, I've never lost sight of my initial passion and the Whiteroom philosophy:

*Our mission is to provide the best possible, most adventurous and deepest Japan powder experience for our guests*

I continue to have what some friends call the perfect lifestyle: not only running a company in an industry that I love and have been involved with for over 25 years but continuing to guide my regular clients throughout Hokkaido and Tohoku while sharing the richness of experiences Japan has to offer.

My family has made Hokkaido our second home, and we spend anywhere between five and nine months there each year. Besides the thrill of winter in Japan, we continue to experience the joys of the other seasons that exist here. Yes, wintertime is both business and pleasure, but the other seasons offer a wide variety of sporting activities. If you enjoy road cycling, mountain biking, golf, tennis, white water rafting, fishing, surfing, sea kayaking, stand up paddleboarding, windsurfing, trekking or climbing—then Japan is for you. These are just a few of the activities that make Hokkaido, and Japan, perfect for the sporting life.

All Photos: Greg Young,  
the media manager of  
Whiteroom Tours

## UNDER-CULTURE-ADVENTURE



*Ross McSwiney has seen more winter than most people see in two lifetimes. He has over 25 years experience as a Ski Patroller, National Ski Patrol Trainer and Examiner—in addition to having skied 17 years in Hokkaido and spent 11 as a ski guide (Seven of which have been with Whiteroom). Ross is a part-owner of Whiteroom Japan and heads the Japan operations.*

# The Longest Cross-country Ski Race in Japan

Sheila Mulherin (Hokkaido)

## *A Winter Adventure*

Hokkaido's winter earns fame through its powder snow, endless white landscape, and ice festivals. The prefecture also introduced me to the wonderful world of cross-country skiing. The sport fits me like a glove due to my strong endurance base built from running long

distance since childhood, and love of winter and the outdoors. Soon after making connections in the cross-country skiing community, I heard about an 80-kilometer ski marathon that piqued my interest. Held in late February, it stretches from Okushirataki to Yubetsu. I set

the 2019 race in my sights, but the winter of 2018-2019 had arrived in a less than desirable manner. I broke my wrist and needed surgery in September 2018. Then severely injured a tendon in my left ankle that October, so I couldn't easily build an endurance base.

## Ski Season Arrives

At last, my injuries healed enough to ski in late December. I was buoyed hearing about the race's gentle course (only one long steep hill climb in the middle) and generous time limit of eleven hours. Despite my uncertainty, I took a leap and registered for the race, I put faith in my leg muscles to pull

out magic like they had in the past on dry land. I worked back into a comfortable running and weightlifting routine, and put in long ski days whenever possible to whip myself into the best shape possible. On consecutive days in early February, I did 15 and 33-kilometer races in Otaki and Chitose respectively.

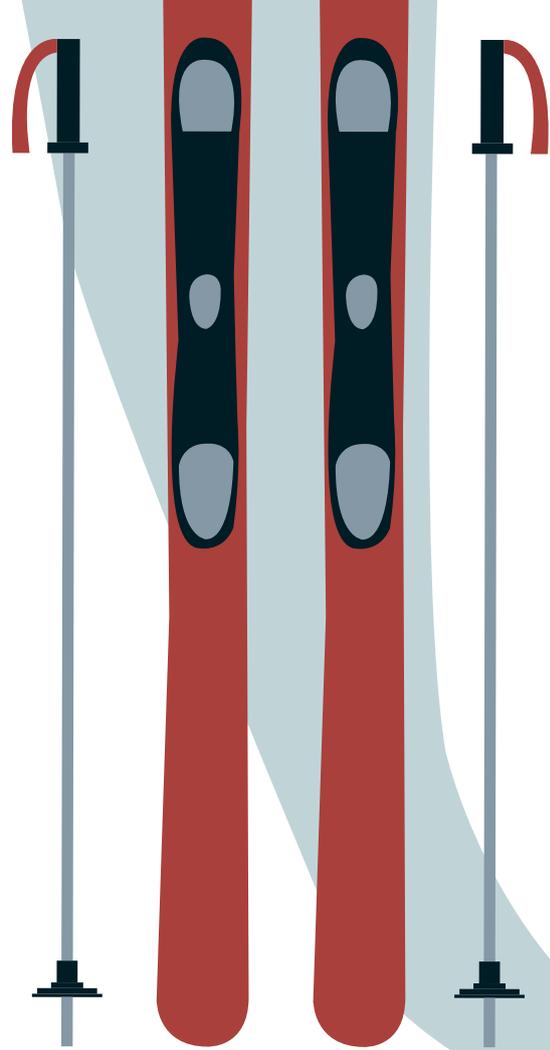
The next weekend was the Miyasama 38-kilometer race in Biei. The course had stunning beauty, and presented a challenge due to its steep climbs, swift descents, and snow blowing hard at my face. Despite my fatigued arms and burning hips, I finished well before the cutoff time.



## The Big Race Day Looms

The last week of February arrived, and I was as prepared as possible for the Yubetsu ski race. In the information packet sent out, a menu was included, so I had in mind the vegan-friendly options I'd consume at each aid station: fruit, *daifuku*, *umeboshi* and black sesame *onigiri*. Early on race day morning, I drove to Yubetsu for the 4:50 a.m. shuttle bus to the Kita Taisetsu Ski Resort, the starting location for the 56 and 80 km events. The site had

the bib number pickup, and plenty of warm space to change clothes, stretch, prepare gear and socialize with other skiers. The field of skiers was similar to what I've observed at other competitions, (running) marathons and trail races in Japan. About 90% of the participants were men, mostly middle aged, although there were a smattering of young skiers and tough grandpas.



# The Race Start

A little before 7:30 a.m., we all gathered at the start and stood in separate parallel ski tracks, to push straight ahead for the first 50 meters of the race. A woman whom I recognized from the Miyasama ski race took part in this event as well. Like in Miyasama, she was dressed like a cow, and took off well ahead of me quickly after the start.

Upon hearing this was my first 80-kilometer race several skiers offered a hearty “*Ganbatte kudasai!*” and I wished them the same. The gun went off, staff and spectators exclaiming “*Itterasshai!*” We slid ahead and skied out of our

starting lanes, dispersing a bit before slowing for the crowd in front of us. A hill appeared before us and we widened our stance and stomped up, organizing fluidly into lines. The herd of skiers stretched out after a few kilometers and I skied with more freedom.

Fleeting whiteout conditions occurred in the first 10-15 kilometers, which proved unnerving. I’m glad I skied alone at those moments, because I couldn’t see anyone even two meters in front of me. After those whiteouts, several skiers caught up to me and we made small talk, stilted by the strong wind and my low Japanese ability. The course

## Oh, We’re Halfway There

At approximately the halfway point, the course led us directly onto the streets, through the town of Maruseppu. The locals had come out to cheer us on with kindness and enthusiasm. I appreciated their warm smiles and encouragement. The lunch aid station offered pork soup, which I passed on for orange juice. Maruseppu did indeed have a never-ending steep climb. I pointed my skis into a wide V shape, and stomped up.

The warm midday sun moistened the snow a bit and I grew warmer. The weather remained pleasant—it was sunny or cloudy for most of

the day. The course passed a convenience store that staff had encouraged us to stop at if needed. Popping off skis and using a warm bathroom during the race was quite nice! The course flattened out and led us straight along a river leading north to Engaru, where the shorter races merged with ours. Talented children zipped around me and zoomed ahead out of sight. Their fresh energy inspired me!

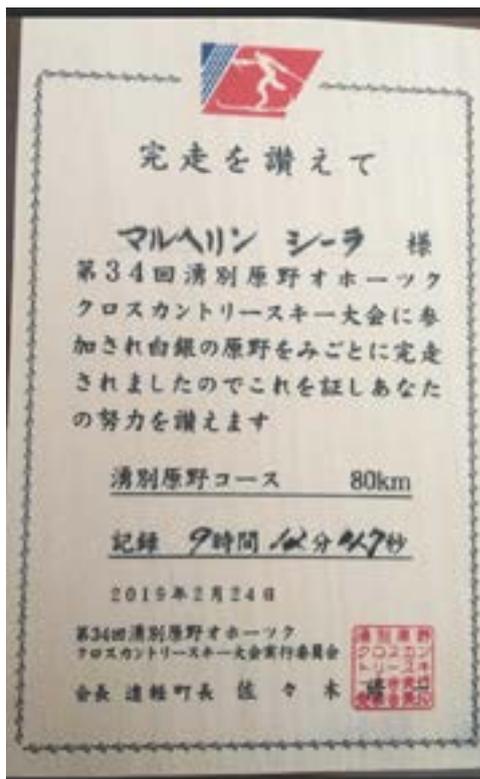
Novice skiers of all ages took part in the race as well, working hard to stay upright. Several near me fell, assisted back on their skis by someone near them. I offered words

of encouragement, happy they were doing their best in a new sport. Surprisingly, I glided along with ease after 50 km. Spectators cheered me on from the bridges above. Kids watched curiously and exclaimed “*Gaikokujin desu!*” I smiled and waved. The course split in Engaru, a straight line to the finish line for the shorter races, and a bend to the left continuing the race for the 80 km skiers. I took my designated turn, where silence fell around me.

I carried on. We crossed a narrow bridge where we had to ski classic-style, a challenge for those with skate skis, which

my attention, taking me through a river, a road, and into a forest. At aid stations, I ate bananas and the like. As I exited an aid station, volunteers shouted “Itterasshai!” and “batte kudasai!”

As time went on, my suboptimal winter season training and weaker technical skills caught up with me as fatigue took over. At the bottom of the hills, controlling myself at sharp turns proved difficult. I felt as a man pushed as a Kappa came down the hill behind me. A kind staff member moved swiftly to pull me off the course while the Kappa passed me uninterrupted.



smooth and tractionless. I powered on, using my upper body. The aid stations at 60, 65 and 70 km became increasingly crowded with skiers resting and stretching. The pain became noticeably set in for me as I slid in swiftly only to grab my water bottle and down a banana and orange slices. Like in other ultramarathons, sitting on the toilet, except when using the restroom. Stopping only briefly so the pain is brief, so it's easier to push on to the finish line without stopping.

The final ten kilometers presented the hardest part of the race. The powerful wind slowed my pace,

and the course had become icy. Skidding on the ice proved an arduous task for my fatigued legs to go in the desired direction. My hips burned and I progressed slowly. Nonetheless, I persisted. The finish line approached. After dark, tiki torches would light the way.

*Sheila is an English teacher in Hokkaido. Originally from Boston, USA, she can be seen hiking, reading, trying out new vegan recipes, playing with her adorable cats Bailey and Maisy, or running obscenely long distances on the roads and trails. She also looks forward to the Hokkaido winters when she can cross-country ski.*

# The Finish

Alas, I would finish before the torches were lit. With only three kilometers to go, I felt buoyant and free. Staff guided me through Yubetsu Town to the finishing track. I heard my name and bib number over the loudspeaker, and enthusiastic spectators and volunteers cheering wildly with noisemakers, “*Ganbarimashita! Otsukaresama deshita!*” The finishing sprint around a track is a different experience on skis than on feet. I had more energy in me and wanted to sprint, but my skis only allowed so much speed before wobbling. I glided into the finish after nine hours and twelve minutes, drained and sore but relieved and happy.

Volunteers graciously helped pop off my skis. The transition to walking after skiing for over nine hours proved itself arduous. I gingerly made my way back to the building. Staff offered me onigiri and kindly prepared a vegan-friendly soup for me upon request: noodles with soy sauce, salt and green onions. And I was presented with a finisher's certificate made of a unique material: wood!

# Final Thoughts

Lack of snow cancelled the race in 2020. The race organizers generously refunded every skier's entry fee, and even gave us a race brooch. This event impressed me so much, with its beautiful and diverse landscapes, the seamless organization, the kindness of the staff and fellow skiers, and the way it challenged me to push my physical limits. I had only learned how to cross-country ski last year, and faced a lot of setbacks early on, yet I still accomplished a major goal. I can't wait to toe the starting line in 2021.

We all possess the capability of learning new skills and producing amazing results, despite setbacks. You never know where your new adventure will take you.

The graphic features four stylized baseballs arranged in a circle. Each baseball is white with black stitching and is surrounded by a large, curved flame shape. The flames are colored: top-left is yellow and orange, top-right is orange and black, bottom-left is blue and red, and bottom-right is yellow and black. The text is centered within the circle.

# BEER, BALLOONS AND MAGIC COURSES:

Welcome to the Wonderful World of  
Japanese Professional Baseball

Veronique Hynes (Nara)

Each spring brings out the start of baseball season, so let's talk about Japan's number one sport. The regular pro baseball season was supposed to start March 20th but has been delayed until at least May (1) due to the COVID-19 outbreak. Spectators were banned from pre-season games in February because of the virus and government appeals to limit large gatherings. As of now, Nippon Professional Baseball (NPB) has not announced when it will begin selling tickets again. But hopefully, we can all enjoy a live baseball game this season.

## The Game

NPB is divided into two leagues: the Central and the Pacific Leagues. Each one has six teams; they all face squads from the opposite league in midseason interleague matchups. The top three teams in each league advance to the playoffs and the league champions will play each other in the Japan Series in November to crown the champions of Japan.

Japanese baseball has mostly the same rules as Major League Baseball (MLB), with the major exception being that NPB games have a time limit. Regular season NPB games can go to a maximum of 12 innings, while playoff games can go up to 15. Another difference is that Japanese games can end in a tie, while MLB games will just go on until one team outscores the other. Japanese teams have a roster of 28 players, unlike the 25-man roster in MLB. NPB also uses a smaller baseball, strike zone and playing field.



We won't go through all twelve teams, but here is a brief list of some teams of

## Yomiuri Giants

The oldest professional baseball team in Japan, the Yomiuri Giants play in the Tokyo Dome and have won the Japan Series a whopping 22 times, more than any other team in NPB. Ace and six-time NPB all-star Sugano Tomoyuki is one to look out for. The right-hander tossed a no-hitter against the Tokyo Yakult Swallows in the playoffs last season. The Giants also boast 2019 Central League MVP Sakamoto Hayato. The Golden Glove-winning shortstop hit .312 and 40 homers (second-most in the CL) last year (2).

At the risk of sounding biased, I hate them. I'll explain why later in this article.



## Hanshin Tigers

They have a long-standing rivalry with the Giants, and if you ever get the chance to see the two teams play each other, I highly recommend it. Key cogs include outfielder Itoi Yoshio and pitcher Fujikawa Kyuji. They have only won the Japan Series once (in 1985), and some fans think their title drought (which included not returning to the Japan Series until 2003) is the result of a curse placed on the team from when over-exuberant fans threw a statue of Colonel Sanders into the Dotonbori River following the Tigers' Japan Series win (3).



# Teams

Note. The following have large fan bases or have done well in recent seasons.

## Fukuoka Softbank Hawks

The dominant force in Japanese baseball this past decade, the Hawks have treated fans at the recently renamed PayPay Dome (4) to three consecutive Japan Series titles. Softbank's best hitter is outfielder Yanagita Yuki. Despite missing most of 2019 due to injury, he played a key role in the Hawks' victory in the Japan series. He also impressed Major Leaguers during a postseason Japan-MLB All-Star Series (5). If key reliever Dennis Sarfate can regain full health after missing last season due to injury (6), the Hawks will receive a big boost in the bullpen.



## Saitama Seibu Lions

The Lions have won a total 13 Series championships and finished the past two seasons at the top of the Pacific League but were eliminated both times by the Hawks in the playoffs. Infielders Yamakawa Hotaka and Nakamura Takeya bring the power (they hit 43 (7) and 30 homers (8) respectively in 2019) but neither of them were named the 2019 Pacific League MVP. That would be catcher Mori Tomoya, who led the PL with a .329 batting average and as well as finishing third with 105 RBIs (9). On the mound, one Lion worth paying attention to is Matsuzaka Daisuke, who returns to Seibu after stints in the Major Leagues (he earned a World Series ring with the Boston Red Sox in 2007) and the Chunichi Dragons.

However, they'll be without Akiyama Shogo, who starred for the Lions for nine years before making the jump to MLB with the Cincinnati Reds.



## Foreigners in NPB

Teams can have a maximum of four non-Japanese players on their roster. All four cannot be pitchers or position players. That being said, a number of foreign baseball players have become “big in Japan,” often after striking out in MLB. Examples include the aforementioned American-born Sarfate, who had an unremarkable career in the Majors, but since coming to NPB in 2011, has broken the league record for most saves in a season (10) and has won three Japan Series titles with the Hawks (not counting 2018 and 2019, when he only pitched six innings in April of the former year (11) (12)).

But one foreign newcomer to watch (and one that definitely doesn't fit the bill of having struck out in MLB) is Adam Jones. The five-time MLB All-Star signed a two-year contract with the Orix Buffaloes during the offseason (with an option for a third year) after spending the vast majority of his career (which includes 282 homers) with the Baltimore Orioles (13).



## The Fans

I recommend everybody go to an NPB game at least once because the atmosphere is just so much fun. Japanese baseball fans are as interesting to watch as the game itself, as each team has white-gloved cheerleaders in the stands who clap and lead the crowd through cheer songs like traffic cops on crack. There will be a designed fight song for each player as he goes to bat, and the cheerleaders will be accompanied by a brass band. The cheerleaders will then politely sit down to allow the opposing team's cheerleaders to do their thing. During certain games, everyone in the stands will simultaneously launch balloons into the sky during the seventh inning for good luck.

Japanese stadiums' relaxed policies on booze also help keep things festive. Fans are allowed to bring in up to 1,000 ml of their own alcohol. At Koshien Stadium, cans and glass bottles are banned, but don't worry. If you bring a Strong Zero, stadium staff will pour your drink into a paper cup for you. And if you forget to bring your own drinks, there will be girls in cute uniforms selling beer in the stands from the portable kegs on their backs.

All teams have a legion of dedicated fans that travel to every game, but the most zealous of them all are definitely Hanshin Tigers fans, who will occasionally outnumber the home team fans at away games. Yes, Tigers fans are annoying. I can say this because I drank the yellow kool-aid and now own a lot of Tigers swag.

*Veronique Hynes is a third-year ALT from Ottawa, Canada. She is enjoying all the perks that come with living in Nara Prefecture: the deer, proximity to nature, the deer, persimmons and the deer.*

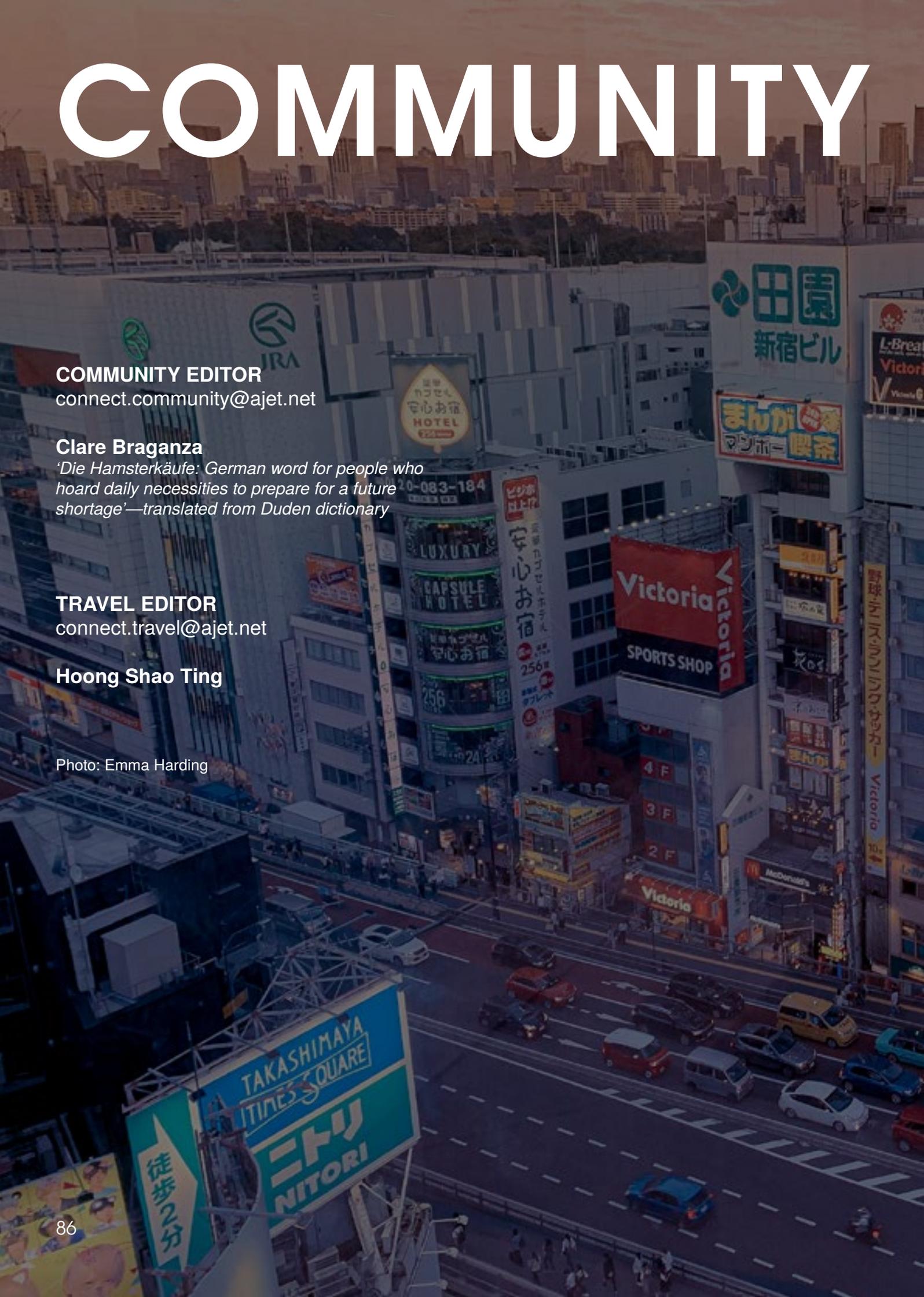
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Photos: Yentel Le Roux



# COMMUNITY



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*'Die Hamsterkäufe: German word for people who hoard daily necessities to prepare for a future shortage'—translated from Duden dictionary*

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Photo: Emma Harding





**COVID-19**

**Paper Masks, Politics, and  
Panic-Buying in J**

Emma Harding (Tokyo)

Coronavirus, or COVID-19, has, in the space of a few short weeks, become an international problem. At the time of writing, the disease has been confirmed in 113 countries and territories with well over 110,000 cases. (1) Despite its origins remaining unclear, its global impact is irrefutable, and the effects have been felt across the world. It seems COVID-19 is capable of more than simply making people sick—it continues to test economies, cause political unrest, divide countries, close borders, cancel public events, and has revealed some interesting human behaviour during times of crisis, confusion, and fear. The travel and tourism industry has suffered immeasurably, perhaps more than any other, but what about its impact in Japan?

The first case in Japan was confirmed in mid-January. (2) It's no secret that initially, public and government reactions were slow—despite countries such as Vietnam closing schools early on, Japan's remained open. As of late February, there were no checks being conducted at Japan's major airports. Popular attractions and tourist hotspots remained open. It seemed to be 'business as usual,' save for one cruise ship which had been docked in Yokohama for weeks. The government's reaction to the crisis aboard the Diamond Princess would be a grave indication of things to come. It was widely criticised as being too slow, too bureaucratic, and ultimately a prime example of what not to do during an outbreak. Witnesses reported chaotic scenes in which no one individual was responsible for infection prevention, passenger quarantine, and/or plans for disembarkation and containment. In the confusion, the Japanese government underestimated the risks, ignored recommended medical practice for evacuating passengers, and activated only low-level protocols for dealing with such outbreaks. Seven people died and nearly 700 were infected, including several government officials who were dispatched to deal with the virus (and who vastly outnumbered the medical and epidemiological professionals onsite). (3) (4)

Over the course of a few days at the end of February, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe would announce a government

recommendation that schools be closed to students, and asked companies to consider allowing employees to work from home where possible. There were no new travel restrictions, however. In fact, for weeks the government had only restricted entry by people from the epicentre of the outbreak in Hubei province, and it wasn't until well into March that any additional restrictions were put in place. (5) Any real decisive action remains to be seen from the government of Japan—there have been economic assurances for small businesses, and some financial support offered to parents dealing with the school closures, but other than that, Abe has made only suggestions, recommendations, and requests.

Ultimately, companies, schools, and local governments have been left to their own devices in deciding how to react to the presence of COVID-19 in Japan. Once schools decided to close in Tokyo (in part as a result of the school closures in Hokkaido), many attractions followed—places like Disneyland, Universal Studios, and FujiQ Highland all announced they would close until (at least) mid March. The Kabuki Theatre cancelled all performances for a fortnight, and for the first time in the sport's history, the Osaka sumo tournament would be televised with no live spectators. Concerts were cancelled or postponed, leaving the thousands of

and  
Japan

students who were off school with not much to do but congregate in Shibuya, and tourists putting off their travel plans until a later time. For an up to date list of the numerous closures, I am maintaining a [live tracker here](#).

In the absence of any real guidance or advice from the top, the responsibility of prevention and protection has fallen to the Japanese people, with mixed results.

In some cases, the reaction has been decisive and effective. Some companies began to boldly go where no Japanese company had gone before—the world of telework. Employers such as Panasonic, NEC, and Mitsubishi asked (or, in some cases, mandated) employees to work from home. (6) In a country where physical presence and long hours are highly valued, and technology is not, this was a huge step forward. Some education authorities allowed their teachers and ALTs to work from home, however others did not. ESID remains the ethos of the ALT experience in Japan. It will be interesting to observe whether the concept of remote working in Japan outlasts the course of COVID-19. Additionally, the number of cases of the flu has been far lower than last year. This may be because more people have received a flu shot (there was speculation early on that this might protect against COVID-19), or because the population is now simply more



aware of hand hygiene and preventing the spread of infectious diseases.

The reactions of people in Japan haven't been all positive, however. The country has seen panic-buying, acts of xenophobia, and even one man in Aichi who, after testing positive, was not quarantined and instead went on a bar crawl, joking and bragging about having the virus to other patrons. It is not clear whether he has infected any of the people he came into contact with.

In what many describe as 'hysteria,' residents in their thousands have been panic-buying products such as masks and toilet paper. In early March, a Tokyo hospital treating coronavirus patients told staff members that only one surgical mask per person would be allocated each day due to a supply shortage. (7) According to a survey conducted by the Japanese Medical and Dental Practitioners Association, almost 90% of hospitals did not have enough supply of masks in Kyoto. (8) There have been robberies and fist fights over the availability of masks in Japan. To some, the desire for masks during this outbreak defied logic—the World Health Organisation have always advised that paper masks are ineffective against the virus, but public demand for them did not falter. (9) (10)



COVID-19 is not reported to cause diarrhoea, and a quarantine at home should only last for 14 days at most. (11) Therefore, why did some feel it necessary to buy hundreds of rolls of toilet paper? Why not ensure you have hand soap or sanitiser, things the WHO have recommended people use? There are differing views on why the toilet paper shortage happened. It seems the most commonly accepted belief is that false information began circulating on social media, claiming that the raw materials for masks and toilet paper are the same, and that almost all of the toilet paper that is sold in Japan comes from China. Netizens and news outlets speculated that there would be a shortage as a result, and this became a self-fulfilling prophecy.

## **On social media, photos of physical altercations and long queues to buy toilet paper went viral.**

It is not entirely clear why masks are being bought up. Some speculate that it is out of habit, and that there is a deeply entrenched cultural belief amongst Japanese people that a mask will protect you (rather than protect others from you, which is what they are designed for). Others wonder if it's just a manifestation of the confusion and uncertainty many people are feeling. In the absence of any guidance from local health officials on how to protect ourselves, it is possible many people feel that they should be doing something rather than nothing. Certainly in Tokyo, the number of people wearing masks has observably increased. It's worth noting however that it is also flu and allergy season, which also necessitates wearing a mask for many people suffering with either. In short, COVID-19 could not have come at a worse time in Japan. Where healthy people have been bulk buying masks in a desperate bid to protect themselves, they have left little to no supplies for those who are actually sick.

The shortages of toilet paper, however, are a much more interesting phenomenon.

The Japanese government has said they will try to assist with an increased production of masks, but have not yet implemented a limit on the number of masks an individual can purchase (unlike its neighbour South Korea). On 10 March, the government approved a bill to grant Abe the power to declare a state of emergency but in the absence of any real, decisive action from the government so far, we are

left wondering what the PM may announce over the coming weeks. The government has attracted a lot of criticism for downplaying the risk of the virus, especially given Japan is a country in which 28% of its citizens are over 60. (12)

So far, it seems that the significant-international-sporting-event-which-shall-not-be-named is set to go ahead as planned\*, many schools are set to reopen, some attractions have begun to welcome guests again (with extra protective measures such as temperature scanning and hand sanitiser) and it won't be long before Japan is back to 'business as usual'. With Japan's leadership demonstrating such a *laissez faire* attitude, the implementation of any further protective and preventative measures may end up unfairly falling to its people.

*\*While the Olympics have now been rescheduled for 2021, sadly this decision provided weeks of speculation, uncertainty, and distraction. Time spent on rescheduling the Games could have been better used to prepare Japan's hospitals or to consider long-term, robust measures to counter the coronavirus threat in Japan.*

Sources:

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All Photos by: Emma Harding

*Emma is currently a first-year JET working at a senior high school in downtown Tokyo. When she isn't teaching, Emma enjoys blogging at [Emma-Loves.com](http://Emma-Loves.com), photography, eating Japanese food and playing Final Fantasy XIV.*



Photo: Emma Harding



# Not *just* a JET Dependent —The KŌHAI (後輩 junior)

They moved to Kobe, Japan with a spouse visa, but these partners are on their own journey.

Rhema Baquero (Hyogo)

The city of Kobe, unofficially, is the family placement for JETs. There are 11 dependent partners and several children of the ALTs living in the city, not to mention the many JET-JET couples or those who married in Japan. But while partners are off teaching, these new arrival dependents find their own ways to make Japan a memorable experience.

# Making the Move

Animal Crossing: New Horizons has hit the markets, but over 10 years ago, Oklahoman **Carlos Hernandez**, met Chelsea of Delaware when she entered his town on Animal Crossing: Wild World for the DS. After staying connected through the game for years, they became official in 2007 and took turns traveling to see each other for a week at a time for several years. They married in 2017 and set their sights on Japan.

“That’s been her dream, her whole life, so I always encouraged her. I always helped her out whenever she needed anything with her application, helped her get to her important points on time,” he said. “I wasn’t nervous. I was always hopeful for her that she would be able to do this. And here we are.”

After eight months of working in San Francisco, **Logan Smyth** met Trella Rath during a get-together at a friend’s apartment. They began talking and were married about five years later in 2019. JET is something his wife was always interested in.

“I think initially I was a little bit scared about picking up our lives and doing something new for a bit. But the more I thought about it was like ‘oh, it’s important to Trella, I don’t want to just shut down the possibility’,” he said. “We’ve been in San Francisco for a long time, so I was like ‘ok, let’s try something new, why not?’”

Six years ago, **Elizabeth**, waited in the airport for her then boyfriend Kevin **Bachmann** to return

Elizabeth Bachmann



Carlos Hernandez



Logan Smyth

from his study abroad in Japan. He proposed to her in the airport. In July 2019, the first and second chair alto saxophones who began dating in their high school band, made the big move to Japan.

“He loved it, and even before he came home he was like ‘Liz, there’s a JET Programme. There’s a JET Programme. I would love to experience Japan with you. It’s a completely different culture, I think you’d love it,” she said. At that time, she didn’t want to leave her job and family in New York where she spent all of her life. But after he finished his master’s degree in education, she was ready.

# Daily Life

**Hernandez**, 28, wakes up as Chelsea leaves and makes breakfast and coffee—a treat that he never took time for before. He likes to have a moment on his balcony which overlooks the mountain. He takes care of the housework, but appreciates the leisurely pace he can take now.

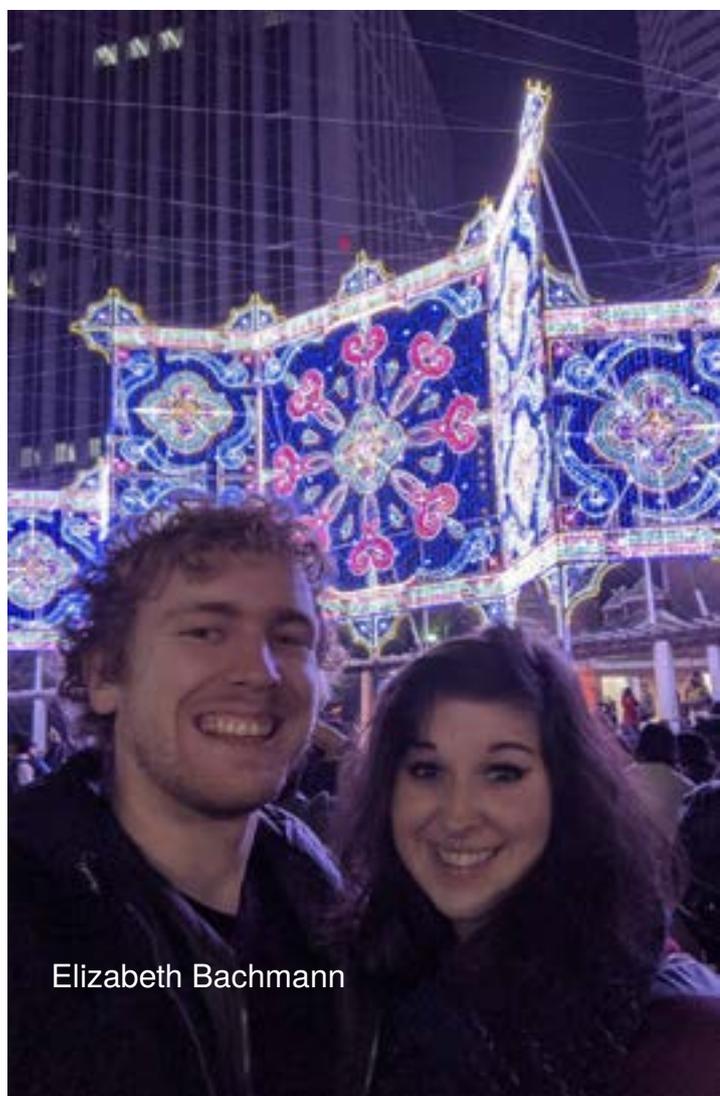
“I know my wife, she works every day, and I just want to make sure she can come home and not have to worry about any of that. She has the food ready, the dishes are done, her clothes are set out. When you’ve got the time and the patience for it, it’s just a normal thing. It is super nice to be able to just do that for her,” he said. “I know I have it easy right now, so it is nice to try to give back to her in the best way that I can.”

**Smyth**, 32, works weekdays in software on Firefox. Each morning, he chats with Rath, junior high and elementary school ALT, before work and then starts his own at 8 a.m. Most of his day is spent at his desk with the occasional breaks for instant curry, gelatin fruit cups or a walk.

“A lot of the work, because I’m here, because of the time zone difference, we’ve tried to plan out tasks that I can mostly work on without needing dependencies on other people,” he said. “That’s nice because I don’t have to stop and wait for someone else. But on the other hand, the social aspect of it feels more isolated some of the time.”

Each morning, **Bachmann**, 27, makes breakfast and lunch for her husband, a junior high and elementary school ALT. In the evening, she makes favorite dishes of stir fry noodles, とんかつ (tonkatsu), お好み焼き (okonomiyaki), たこ焼き (takoyaki), or すき焼き (sukiyaki.)

“I like to try different things, and then sometimes I like to experiment at home with Japanese dishes,” she said. “That’s a nice thing for me staying home. I really like cooking, so if it’s a dish I’ve never done before I can give myself time to prep it and cook it and see if it turns out. It’s fifty-fifty if it’s good.”



# Honing Hobbies

Each morning, **Hernandez** powers up his laptop to read the news, stream, or to make music or memes. He has been creating for a while, though it is difficult for him to consider himself a streamer or musician until he is near a professional level. Now, he streams Call of Duty on Twitch and Youtube. **Hernandez** occasionally streams with his wife and hopes to build a community of streamers here.

“Making your own content is definitely very fulfilling. Definitely satisfying to see a part that you’ve worked on and you’re able to share it and get it out there. Even if it doesn’t get many responses or people don’t react to it the way you want to,” he said.

**Smyth’s** degree is in electrical engineering, but he’s always been interested in learning software. He also initially planned to study Japanese.

“I came here with the intention of ‘oh, I’ll do a bunch of online courses and stuff too.’ It’s been

harder to do that than I expected just like energy-wise,” he said. “Not knowing Japanese is tough, I think that hurts discoverability for ‘how do I find new things?’. It’s all pretty intimidating in general. I think it is a little bit harder for me to be motivated too. I’m going in with the expectation that we’ll leave eventually and go back. How invested do you want to get in the local community if you’re not going to be staying for a long time?”

On most days, **Bachmann** sets up her gaming equipment to stream for about 6 hours. She plays Sims 4, Planet Zoo, and other simulation builder games on her channel. The online communication has helped her adjust to her time in Japan, especially when her friends and family pop in to chat.

“Currently, I don’t know why, what got my stream really going is Farming Simulator 2019. It’s great. It’s a good time.”



# Contributing to the Household

**Bachmann** worked at her family's winery and garden center shop back in America. Now she takes care of home needs like laundry, dishes and cooking. She is grateful for her husband's help when she needs it, and that he does not pressure her to get a job at the moment.

"We're comfortable, very comfortable and happy," she said. "It's a very simple, easy 主婦(shufu/housewife) life. But I enjoy it. I'm happy."

In America, **Hernandez** worked at UPS for eight years, leaving the position as a supervisor. He has applied for jobs in teaching, housekeeping and food service, but the past few months of job hunting was disheartening for him.

"I feel bad for everybody really, my wife and friends who want to see me succeed," he said. "The thing that does keep me going is everyday there's new jobs and every day I can put in that application. That's what kind of keeps me motivated is just knowing that it is going to work out one day, and I'll make my wife happy and be able to do things I want to do."

As of March, he began substitute teaching part-time for elementary students. To help get himself into the right mindset, he said he imagined being on a hyper episode of *Barney*.

"After the first day, I was able to gather a basic structure on how to work with each of the age groups. I just need some more practice to develop my own style and rhythm of teaching," he said. "Being out of my comfort zone, mentally, I was drained after my first day. Working with kids for four hours straight really takes it out of me!"

**Smyth** considers himself privileged on the job front since he was able to transition to a telecommuting position. He quit his job with Mozilla and was hired by a Japanese company that contracts him to his previous employer. While here, he transitioned his dependent visa which capped his hours at 28 to the full time visa.

"I think the positives for me, I definitely don't miss having to commute into an office," he said. "I think it also gives you a little bit more freedom to control your schedule. If I'm not feeling productive in general, I feel less bad about 'OK, I'm going to take an hour off and go for a walk and make up that time later in the week when I'm better in a place to focus'."

His position is global with many early morning meetings with California coworkers and some end of the day meetings with Europe.

"I think that I definitely have felt more isolated. It's harder not to have just random chats with people in an office," he said. "I think it's also a little bit easier to let yourself get absorbed and sort of overwork yourself. Which I've actually been more aware of in Japan because in the US, I didn't have to track my hours, whereas here to comply with Japan and laws about overworking your employees, I actually have to track my time."

## Staying Social

The **Hernandez**' enjoy their spontaneous sightseeing around Kobe. He waits for her to leave work after his lessons on Friday, and for them, getting food can spiral into an adventure. Hernandez also enjoys spending time with the friends he has made in the neighborhood.

"I always think about how many friends that I have and how there are so many people surrounding me," he said. "Typically, the weekends are the best. That's when my wife has time. That's when everybody else mostly has time and we can just get together and just hang out. That's what I like the most is being around people because that's something I never had until this point. Even if I'm not directly involved, I just like that atmosphere seeing everybody is together, communicating and generally having a good time."



Rath and Rath also enjoy spending time with their ALTs. He said it helped that she already knew the 'lay of the land' before he arrived, but it can be difficult to find a fit within the community because his neighborhood does not have much interaction between the foreigners there. The couple also enjoys traveling, occasionally checking out new bars and going for walks. Rath said going to a sumo wrestling match in Fukuoka was his favorite experience in Japan.

Rath wants to tell [friends and family] about what a nice time we have, the culture, the general experience of teaching from Trella's side, seeing the country and the way that it works. There are certainly a lot of differences in general between the US and Japan, some positive, some negative," he said. "I think it's important to get out of our comfort zone and see the way other parts of the world work."

The **Bachmanns** like to host get-togethers with the friends they've made of dependents and ALTs. Last fall, she and her husband traveled to Wakayama with **Hernandez**, another dependent Marc Baquero and their spouses. Her favorite memory so far was when Kevin surprised her with tickets to see [Mumford and Sons](#) in Osaka.

"Super corny, but [my goal is] to see as much in Japan as possible, and basically any Asian country since it's so cheap to fly. [ . . . ] And to experience the culture. I am a simple person," she said.

*Rhema Baquero is a second-year ALT from America in the great port city of Kobe. She can often be found in a coffee shop either reading, writing, drawing, or studying Japanese. After playing rugby at university and graduate school, she was excited to finally attend the Rugby World Cup.*

# In Jesus's Name, (R)Amen

## —Kaedama!!

### Japan's Dark History with Christianity

Erica Park (Kyoto)

Christianity's impact on Japanese culture is . . . debatable. Don't get me wrong, it's definitely there—in fact, I wrote an entire article about it last month!—but sometimes, it can be hard to clock. Traditions for Christian holidays like Christmas have changed to fit Japanese tastes past the point of recognition for most foreigners (“Christmas is Kentucky”, anyone?), and the *aesthetics* of Christianity seem to be embraced rather than for its *ideologies*. Previously, I discussed how the religion has permeated Japanese culture, as well as interviewing a Japanese Christian to learn more about contemporary Japanese views of Christianity. Through the interview, I better understood not only Japan's image of Christianity, but also how Japan viewed religion in general, and I hope some readers will be able to as well.



Christmas is Kentucky.

A painting of Antonio de Mota demonstrating how to use a European gun



The one thing I still didn't really understand was why only 2% of the population identifies as Christian. It has been around in Japan since the mid-1500s (almost 500 years!) and I knew that there were incidents like the 26 Martyrs, but that had happened 1597! What happened between then and now for Christianity's growth to be so stunted in Japan? I took to the books, Internet searches and articles, and as it turns out, Japan's history with Christianity is far darker than I realized.

It all started out happily enough. After Portuguese traders, Antonio de Mota and Francisco Zeimoto, accidentally discovered Japan's shores in 1543, the first Christian missionaries sailed from Portugal to Japan in 1549 and began working. Spearheading the effort was Francis Xavier, a Jesuit monk. Though evangelizing the Japanese people was the *main* goal, the Portuguese were keenly aware that establishing Christianity in Japan could help expand their trading territory further, and with that, the race to convert (and earn money) was on.

Unfortunately, initial efforts weren't one hundred percent successful. In addition to the language barrier, missionaries had a hard time explaining Christianity to the Japanese, who questioned how a God who created everything, including evil, could be good. Most were indifferent, and tolerated the missionaries at best. Oda Nobunaga, the most powerful warlord at the time, supported their activities, but never converted nor pushed policies to further their work. Still, the missionaries managed to catch the attention of powerful people who wanted in on the trade and commerce they brought.

Shrewd *shoguns* (military dictators) gave some missionaries license to practice and teach in their territories in exchange for access to foreign goods, like silk and porcelain. Japanese people were seriously craving Chinese goods because China had stopped trading with Japan after pirate attacks, and Portuguese missionaries took the opportunity



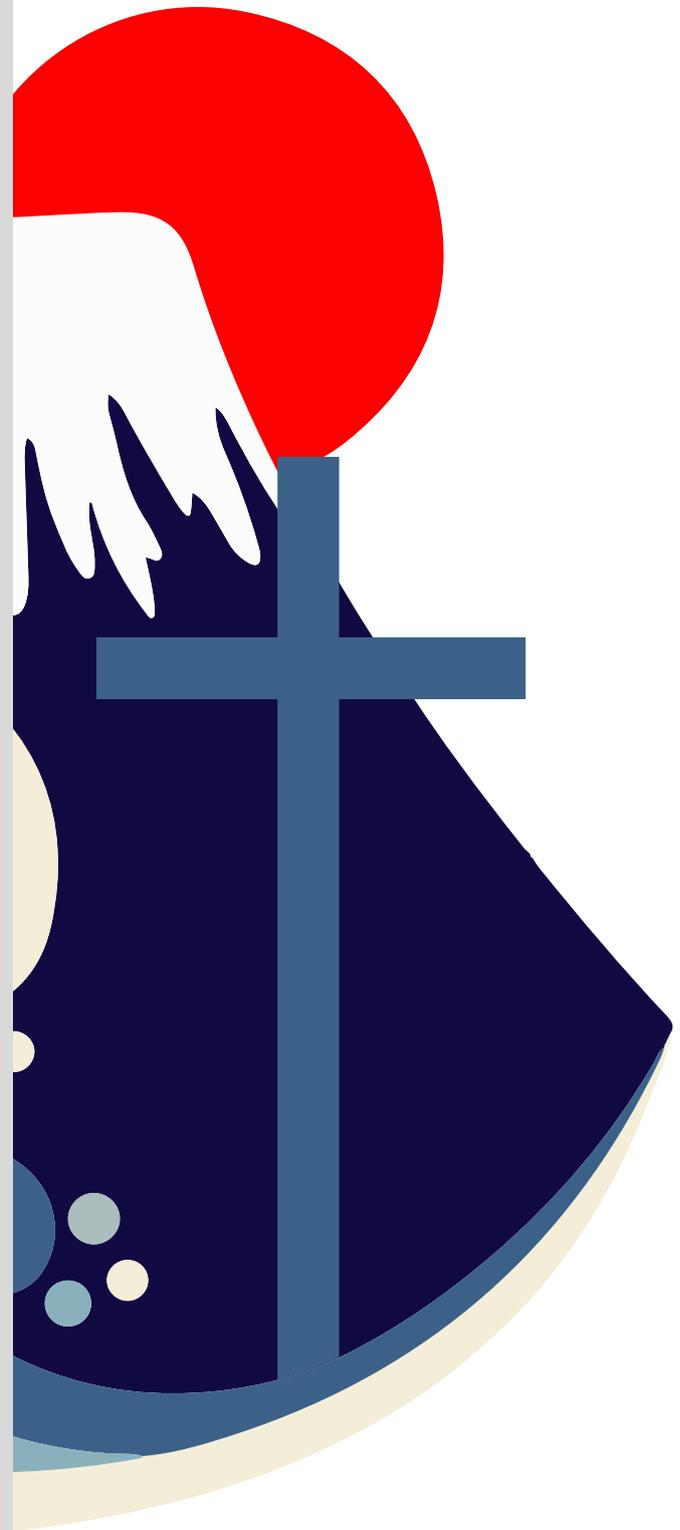
Francis Xavier

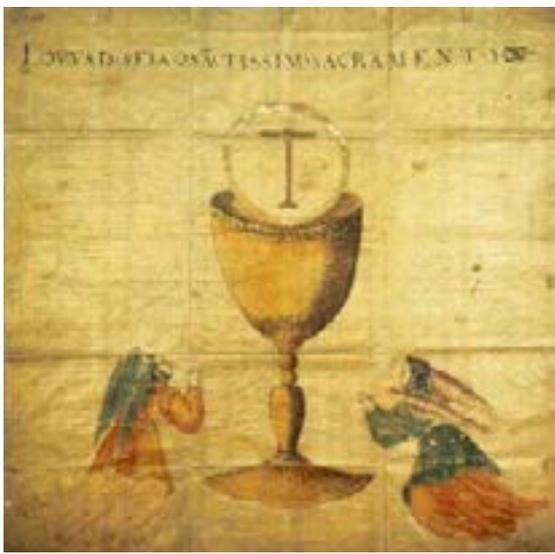
to motivate people to convert. Some *daimyos* (feudal lords) even voluntarily converted so Portuguese traders would be more willing to trade with them. Seeing Portugal's success, Spain eventually joined in too, sending over Franciscan monks to Japan. Slowly, but steadily, the Christian movement spread across Kyushu and Western Japan, reaching around 200,000 members by 1582.

Alas, missionaries' progress slowed down when Japan was reunified under Toyotomi Hideyoshi, who feared the growing influence of foreigners in Japan. Hideyoshi's suspicions weren't exactly unwarranted, either; much to his horror, Hideyoshi discovered that the Portuguese were purchasing Japanese people for the slave trade, and found foreigners' disdain for Buddhist traditions troubling. Things came to a head after the San Felipe incident of 1596, when the Spanish trade ship, the San Felipe, crashed into Shikoku and was ransacked by the daimyo of the area.

Up to this point, Hideyoshi had tolerated Christians, albeit with some side-eye, but to maintain diplomatic relations stable with Spain, Hideyoshi sent a representative to speak with the sailors of the San Felipe. The following meeting proved to be a disaster, however, and the representative reported back what he understood from their conversation: that the influx of Christian missionaries in Japan was, in fact, phase one of a bigger plan to conquer Japan as a Spanish colony, and if all went to plan, Spain would be sending in *conquistadors* to finish the job.

Though it's up for debate whether or not this plan was real, Hideyoshi was furious, and fearing loss of his power, he quickly issued an edict to remove all Christians from Japan swiftly. To discourage further converts, the warlord ordered the torture and execution of 26 Catholics, later known as the 26 Martyrs of Japan (remember them?). Unfortunately, their deaths were just the beginning, and over the next few decades, more than 200





Rebel banners during the Shimabara Rebellion



Fumi-e with an image of Jesus crucified

Christians were executed, with many others persecuted for their faith.

Things went from bad to worse in 1637, under Tokugawa Ieyasu's reign, when 16-year-old(!) Amakusa Shiro led the Shimabara Rebellion against the current rulers. Many of the rebels, including Shiro, were Catholic, and had originally joined forces to fight against strict Christian persecution. The rebellion's eventual failure, however, caused the deaths of an estimated 37,000 insurgents and instigated an even more serious crackdown on Christian activities. Those suspected of practicing Christianity were captured and could be tortured until they denounced the religion, or even executed.

One interrogation method was using a *fumi-e* (literally 'stepping picture'). Authorities would order suspects to step on fumi-es, which were metal plates with pictures of Jesus Christ or the Virgin Mary on them. Those who refused to step on them would then be branded as Christians and be forced to recant their faith or else be tortured or executed. Countless others had land confiscated or were reduced to utter poverty, and the rampant persecution forced Christians to go into hiding, thus beginning the era of the *kakure kirishitan*, or "hidden Christians" who practiced their faith in secrecy.

These hidden Christians took great, ingenious lengths to disguise their religion. Besides physically hiding their activities, they disguised anything to do with Christianity; holy iconography was hidden in statues of the Buddha and his disciples, Latin prayers were changed to sound more like Buddhist chants, and all printed word was eliminated, with followers resorting to orally reciting the scripture instead. Christianity became a tradition that was passed down generations, and this system continued until the Christianity ban was finally lifted during the Meiji Era.

Of course, the road to religious freedom was not a fast one. It all started with America

making trade agreements with Japan. As the number of foreigners began to increase, Japan and America passed the Treaty of Amity & Commerce in 1858, which only allowed *Americans* to practice their religion and establish places of worship. Around this time, the practice of using fumi-e to out Christians was abolished as well. Although they weren't allowed to spread the religion, Christian clergymen began to pour into Japan, and 15 years later, in 1873, Japanese people were granted religious freedom, too. This didn't mean Japanese Christians weren't persecuted anymore, however. Christians were still considered a liability to the government, and politicians were concerned that Christians would be difficult to control or subdue. Even more damning was that many Christians did not recognize the divinity of the Emperor, and as the country began to colonize Asia, one of the opposing groups was, you guessed it, Christians! As nationalism started sweeping up Japan, Christians became seen as more and more of a disgrace to society. In other words, Japanese Christians were still very much considered 'the other' in their own country, but it would only get worse when Japan entered World War II.

Like with colonization, Japanese Christians were strongly against the war, much to the ire of more patriotic neighbors. Accounts of Christians receiving less rations or even being taken away by special forces are ample, and it wasn't much better in the army, either; Christian soldiers were blacklisted if they were discovered, and labelled as a risk to the regime. Those who disobeyed orders because of their faith were severely punished or tortured.

The shift towards acceptance began once Japan surrendered and, more importantly, the Emperor renounced his divinity, a huge blow to national pride. Post-war Japan was a difficult landscape to navigate, and under General MacArthur's project to suppress Japanese nationalism, Japan's entire identity was changed or reevaluated. Traditions

and values people had maintained for generations meant nothing when faced with hunger and violence in this new, unfamiliar environment that was once their home. Many turned to religion for solace, and with the large presence of foreigners, Christianity started to become a more widely accepted religion.

In my interview, I was told that many Japanese people saw Christians as too moralistic, uncompromising, and soft. However, through my research for this article, I realized that, actually, Christians have been seen as rebels, insurgents, and in some ways, revolutionaries. They chose to embrace the unfamiliar over traditional Japanese values, and when they were ordered to disconnect from the foreign influence of the religion, they disobeyed and tried to preserve their faith as much as possible. For a country like Japan, whose people pride themselves in maintaining traditions for decades or even centuries, what the early Christians did was absolutely radical. There are many, many valid problems with organized religion, and I myself don't identify as Christian anymore despite my upbringing, but I am awed by the sheer perseverance of the Japanese Christians.

If you would like to learn more about Japanese Christians, you can find historically significant sights in Kyushu, like Oura Cathedral in Nagasaki, the oldest standing church in Japan. There are also several remote areas around Kyushu where *kakure* Christians practiced their faith in defiance of authority, such as Hirado island or the Goto islands.

Even though Christianity may never truly be a major religion in Japan, I hope and pray that the country's promise to grant religious freedom to everyone, citizens and foreigners, will never be broken. Amen.



*"Maria Kannon" - The Virgin Mary disguised as a Buddhist figure.*

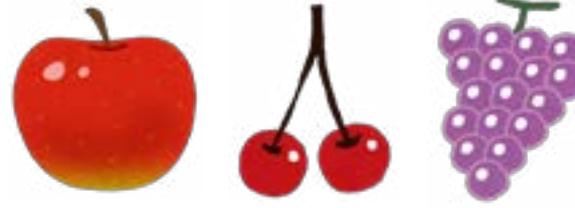


*General Macarthur and Emperor Hirohito.*

*Erica is currently working as an ALT in Kyotanabe City, Kyoto Prefecture. Her main interests are Japanese traditional culture, going to art museums, and chatting with new people (preferably over a tumbler of Laphroaig). When she's not doodling or daydreaming about finally getting tickets to a Takarazuka performance, she's trying to hunt down 80s city pop records.*

All Photos: Erica Park

# Nature's Candy



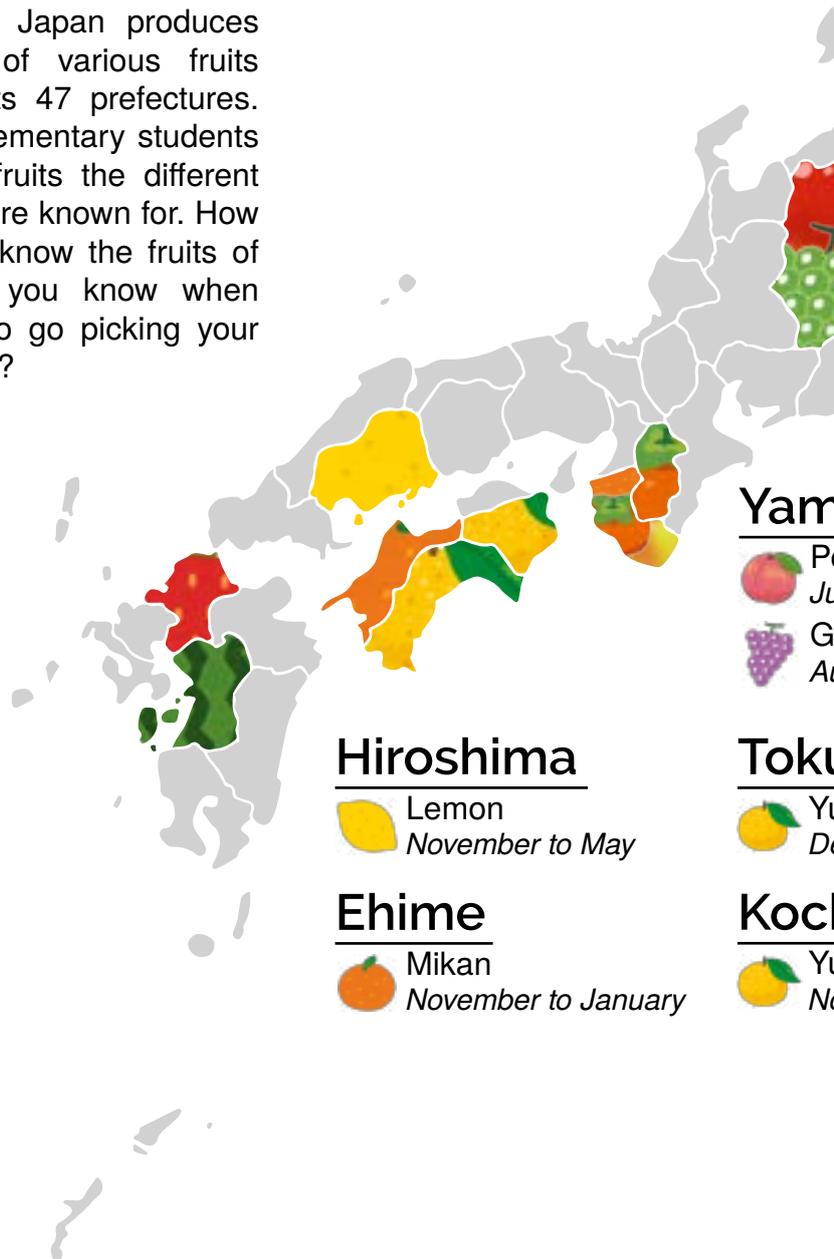
## Japan's fresh fruits

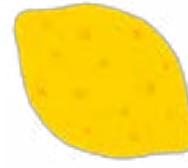
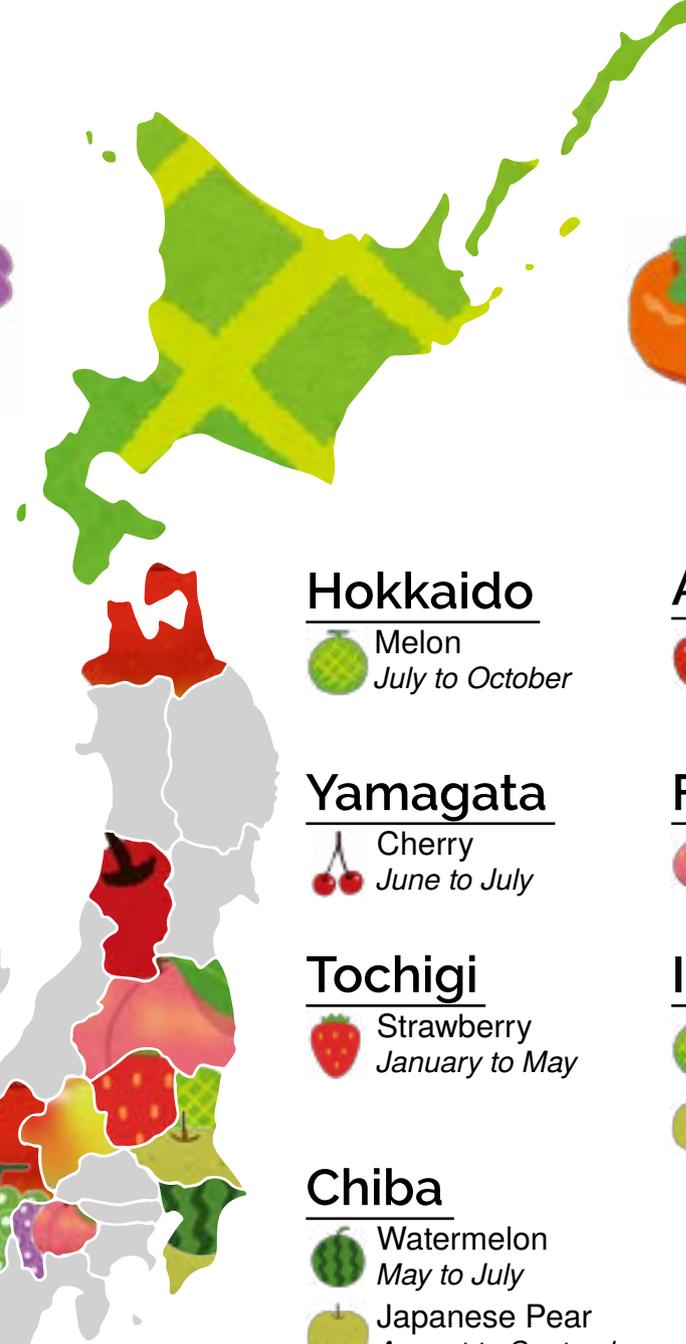
Hoong Shao Ting (Nagano)

Before coming to Japan, I never understood the true meaning of 'fresh local produce' since I grew up in Singapore where most things are imported. "Sensei, Shinano Sweet and Shinano Gold are yummy but *a bit* expensive. Akiba is nice and cheap!" Fresh to Nagano, my elementary school students educated me on how to pick my apples down to the species. I remember watching documentaries on strawberries, grapes and etc. (I highly recommend YouTubing NHK World's Japanology series) and being extremely impressed by the Japanese's love for them, as well as the effort that goes into producing the perfect

fruit—reason why some can fetch such [high prices](#)).

With distinct seasons, varied climates, fertile soil and clean water, Japan produces a plethora of various fruits throughout its 47 prefectures. In school, elementary students study what fruits the different prefectures are known for. How well do you know the fruits of Japan? Do you know when and where to go picking your favourite fruit?





## Hokkaido

 Melon  
July to October

## Aomori

 Apple  
September to November;  
January to April

## Yamagata

 Cherry  
June to July

## Fukushima

 Peach  
July to September

## Tochigi

 Strawberry  
January to May

## Ibaraki

 Melon  
May to June  
 Japanese Pear  
August to September

## Chiba

 Watermelon  
May to July  
 Japanese Pear  
August to September

*\*Most prefectures produce several types of fruit. This map is a non-exhaustive, simplified summary featuring only 1-2 of the representative prefectures per type of fruit.*

*\*\*This is a rough guide of the peak production [periods](#). Please confirm with the orchards/farms if you plan to go fruit picking, as dates may vary according to place, weather and species.*

## Manashi

 Peach  
June to August  
 Grapes  
August to October

## Nagano

 Apple  
August to December  
 Grapes  
September to November

## Gunma

 Plum  
June

## Fukushima

 Pumpkin  
December

Illustrations from Irasutoya

## Wakayama

 Mikan  
November to February

## Nara

 Persimmon  
October to December

## Chi

 Pumpkin  
November to December

 Plum  
June

 Persimmon  
September to November

# for the love of strawberries



Strawberry parfait, strawberry *daifuku*, strawberry shortcake and even strawberry buffets . . . If you have not come across these while living in Japan, you must be living under a rock, because Japan loves *ichigo*. According to [JETRO](#), Japan comes out on top in terms of strawberry consumption and boasts around 300 different varieties. With everybody competing for a slice of the pie

and meticulously growing these red gems in greenhouses, strawberries can be enjoyed in Japan almost throughout the year.

Strawberry picking is extremely popular around this time of the year, so if you have not gone yet, check out [Ichigo Walker Plus](#) for a comprehensive list of strawberry farms. The site is in Japanese, but plop the

link into Google Translate and you will be able to find places in your preferred region that are currently in season, offer all-you-can-eat or feature your favourite type of strawberry! Meanwhile, here are some pictures from Se-Gil, Dahlia and Katie to get your appetite for strawberries going.



## Katie Sampaio (Saitama)

I went to Japan's No. 1 strawberry-producing region—Tochigi! [JA Hagano Mashiko Tourism Strawberry Complex](#) boasts 111 greenhouses and unlimited all-you-can-eat Tochtome strawberries.



*Before Japan, Shao Ting never knew fresh strawberries could smell so good. You can find her busy chasing after flowers this spring and summer. Follow her [@inSakuraLand](#) for tidbits and tips on Japan travel.*



## Se-Gil Feldsott (Nagano)

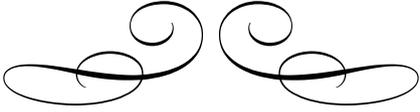
I went strawberry picking in February with my wife, Julie, while visiting my aunt and uncle in Fuji, and saw some amazing views of Mount Fuji while we were there. Unfortunately, for the all-you-can-pick, you do not get to take any home (i.e. you have to eat what you pick) so I ate 51, and Julie ate 36! They were so delicious! We ate all of the ripened strawberries we could find in our assigned picking section.



## Dahlia Lemelin (Gunma)

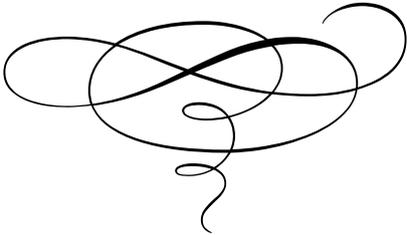
In mid-February, a small group of Gunma JETs met for some strawberry picking just outside Takasaki, at [Farm Club Nakazato](#) (ファームクラブ中里農場). For 1800 yen, you get access to a greenhouse for an unlimited time, all-you-can-eat strawberry picking! With the deal including a small plastic tray to pour chocolate or condensed milk (self-serve!) to dip your strawberries, it is recommended you come hungry!



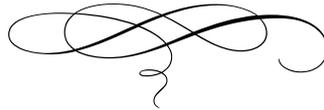


Pear Picking  
and  
Wine Tasting in  
Kobe

Sophie McCarthy (Hyogo)



While Kobe is the sixth largest city in Japan, many are unaware that just on the other side of the Rokko Mountain Range lies much untapped beauty and nature still within city limits. Due to this advantageous design, organizations like [Eat Local Kobe](#) (webpage in Japanese only) have been given the opportunity to thrive. By having ample land available in the Kita and Nishi Wards, Eat Local Kobe is able to grow produce and then quickly deliver it to their restaurant and weekly farmers market in downtown Kobe, thus encouraging the relatively small farm-to-table lifestyle in Japan.



This being said, Nishi Ward has also allowed fruit picking excursions to flourish. [Kobekankonashi Orchards](#) (website in Japanese only) offers a plethora of activities, from potato digging to pear picking. Japanese Pear season begins around the end of summer to early fall. The best time to go is September, as the weather is cooler and the pears are at their peak ripeness. This orchard in particular offers a *tabehoudai* a.k.a. “all-you-can-eat” option. You begin by entering the orchard and picking up a straw mat that you can place anywhere under the pear trees. Then, you get picking! Instructions are provided on what pears are ripe for picking as well as the proper way to remove it from the branch. After that, you can sit under the pear trees and cut your pear up for eating (knife and plate provided). Unlike American pears, Japanese pears more closely resemble apples and are much sweeter. After you finish, you can also buy pears to take home if you desire.



### Accessibility:

*From Sannomiya, you can take a bus or train to Miki Station and then a bus to the orchard. It is about a 10-minute walk from the bus stop. There is also a parking lot if you drive a car.*



The correct soil and climate conditions to grow wine grapes in the Nishi Ward saw the opening of [Kobe Winery](#) in 1983. Now, after winning multiple wine awards, Kobe Winery offers tours and tastings apart from selling their wine in restaurants and shops throughout Hyogo Prefecture. Spanning 40 acres, visitors are allowed to help pick grapes during harvest season, which runs from August to October. A tour of the grounds also includes a look inside the bottling factory and wine barrel fermentation rooms. A tasting of their signature whites and reds is also included. The best part is that the tour is free! On site is also a fantastic gift shop with *omiyage* for all your wine-loving friends.



### Accessibility:

*From Sannomiya, take the subway to Seishin-Chuo Station. Then, either walk 30 minutes or catch a bus that drops you off right in front of the winery. Free parking is also available.*

Next time you visit Kansai, I urge you to reconsider the overcrowded Osaka and Kyoto, and hop on over to Kobe for a day or two. While a large city, Kobe has far less tourists and locals are less likely to assume you are a tourist to Japan as well. From Kobe Beef to mountain hiking, famous *onsens* to Chinatown, Kobe is uniquely its own and unlike any other city in Japan.

All Photos: Sophie McCarthy

*Sophie is a second-year JET working at a SHS in Northern Kobe. She is from Philadelphia and enjoys thrifting, photography, and coffee in her spare time. Follow her on Instagram @[sophielmccarthy](#) if you are interested in seeing her favorite spots in Kobe, or shoot her a PM so that she can send you her interactive Google map.*







# Three Days in **Shikoku**

Daniel Cruse (Ehime)



# Day 1: *Mikan-gari*

My suggestions mostly consisted of castles, temples and an excursion out to an island in the Seto Inland Sea, but my companion had a different idea:

“I want to go *mikan* picking!”

“Okay, I’m not sure where we could do that...”

A quick Google search, a phone call and we were on our way to a previously unknown (to me) mikan orchard in Doi in western Shikokuchuo, Ehime. We wandered down a couple of side streets trying to find the place. Eventually, a friendly elderly woman greeted us, equipped us with buckets and led us past some hedges to her mikan grove.

Shikoku has a robust community of arachnids, and many of them make their homes in orchards like the one we visited. We took care not to disturb them as we made our

way through the mikan trees.

I had been blueberry and huckleberry picking growing up in the Pacific Northwest of North America and as with the blueberry picking I did back then, it’s all-you-can eat at the mikan orchard. I was impressed that every tree seemed to be surrounded with a ring of mikan that had ripened and fallen off, unpicked. The owner suggested we avoid the largest and most pristine-looking fruit in favor of smaller ones with blemishes. Sure enough, the smaller fruit were riper and juicier. After we finished picking and eating our fill, she packed them in boxes advertising her organic mikan orchard and sold us the fruit at ¥800/10 kg.

The advertised picking season for the Ando mikan orchard is October through December, nevertheless, we were heartily welcomed in early January and the roadside mikan stall in my neighborhood had bags of fruit for sale through the end of the month.



# KU

Reservation via fax (0896-74-2516) is required. Read more about [Ando Farm](#) (安藤農園) [here](#) (Japanese only).

# Day 2: Naoshima

We got a late start around midmorning. It was an hour's drive to the ferry terminal in Takamatsu.

My only visit to this city was a layover at the central train station in late July. Laden with large luggage bags at the time, I had struggled to keep to the shade then; with no escape from the humidity, I dripped with sweat.

On this day, I was relieved to find a parking lot near the ferry terminal. Pleasant sunshine was accompanied by a bitter wind whipping across the wharf. As we arrived at the ticket booths, I second-guessed my choice of island. Megijima is the most famous (no one who taught elementary English with "Hi, Friends!" can forget the Onigashima chant, much as we may wish to.) Shodojima is the largest in the area, and a friend's friend grows olives there, but Naoshima is the art island, and we bought an express ticket. The other islands could wait for another day.

We arrived at the island and disembarked. One of Yayoi Kusama's famous pumpkins ("Red Pumpkin," hollow on the inside and dotted with black spots) awaited, but we hurried onto a bus to explore what seems to be the island's main attraction—the [Chichu Art Museum](#). The bus arrived at the ticket center, where we learnt that entrance is staggered; we'd need to wait an hour. We passed the time with a pleasant walk down the narrow yet picturesque road overlooking the beach.

The art museum is largely subterranean, designed so as not to mar the landscape. Having expected something of a European-style art museum, I left puzzled but satisfied. A written description doesn't do it justice.

Rather than eat in the museum café, we made off for another village in the east of the island. The road there ran along several lakes, and I found myself humming the tune "Seto



*no Hana-yome*" (The Bride of Seto). It's a song about a young woman leaving her family and home behind her, poignantly telling her brother not to cry for her. I heard it rehearsed and performed by my former choir in north Japan. Last July, I went to my last rehearsal with them before moving away. At the end, I had tried to read a goodbye message, but started weeping.

The hostel-café we had chosen on eastern Naoshima turned out to be closed. Moving on through the village, we heard loud laughter, which seemed to come a bit incongruously from a group of black-clad funeral attendees. After a long search (it was past normal lunch hours), we found a café, then decided to set out to find one more pumpkin. The bright sunlight of the afternoon was gone and we shivered as we retraced our steps to a hotel complex on the beach. At long last, we reached Yayoi Kusama's Yellow Pumpkin. We waited our turn to take pictures with the pumpkin, glowing over the water at dusk.





Kobo Daishi at Sankakuji

## Day 3: Temple No. 61

When I accepted a job in Ehime, the first thing the internet told me about Shikoku was [Kobo Daishi's pilgrimage route](#) a.k.a. the Shikoku Junrei or Henro. Each year pilgrims from around the world circumambulate the island and visit the 88 designated temples (as well as associated shrines and *bangai*, other temples near the route.) My city has one temple, Sankakuji (Temple 65), so the occasional walking pilgrim (Japanese or European) can be seen equipped with a conical *sugekasa* hat and staff. The largest city in the area, Niihama, has no pilgrimage temples, but the next town over has five.

Today we head in that direction, west.

We park at a nearby shrine by accident. As we walk to [Kouon-ji](#), the 61st temple on the pilgrimage, my companion comments on the strong scent.

It smells to me of incense. A sign near the entrance speaks to this temple having a special meaning related to childbirth—perhaps that explains the feeling of vibrancy here.

We walk up to a multistory gray brick structure with six large pillars on the front facade. Passing the temple bell and shop, we climb the stairs to the right of the building to the main hall on the second floor. A huge golden Buddha is flanked by two smaller statues on an elevated dais. A woman writes on a votive candle, while another prays loudly.

As we are about to leave, two priests enter and sit in the central elevated dais, facing one another perpendicularly. The one facing the left wall begins chanting, interspersed with an occasional cough. The priest facing the central golden Buddha statue lites a fire and fans the flames.

Though it's different from the religious services I grew up attending, I don't mind. I'm filled with a feeling of familiarity and warmth.

All Photos: Daniel Cruse

*Daniel Cruse is a CIR at Shikokuchuo City Hall in eastern Ehime. Until last July, he was a JET ALT in Ofunato, Iwate, and as a high school student, he spent a wonderful (though very sweaty) six weeks in Shiraho, Ishigaki Island. He enjoys singing and traveling around Southeast Asia and Japan. He looks forward to exploring Kanto, Chubu and Kyushu in the future. His Instagram handle is [@dbasimc](#).*

# Introducing the West to the Rest

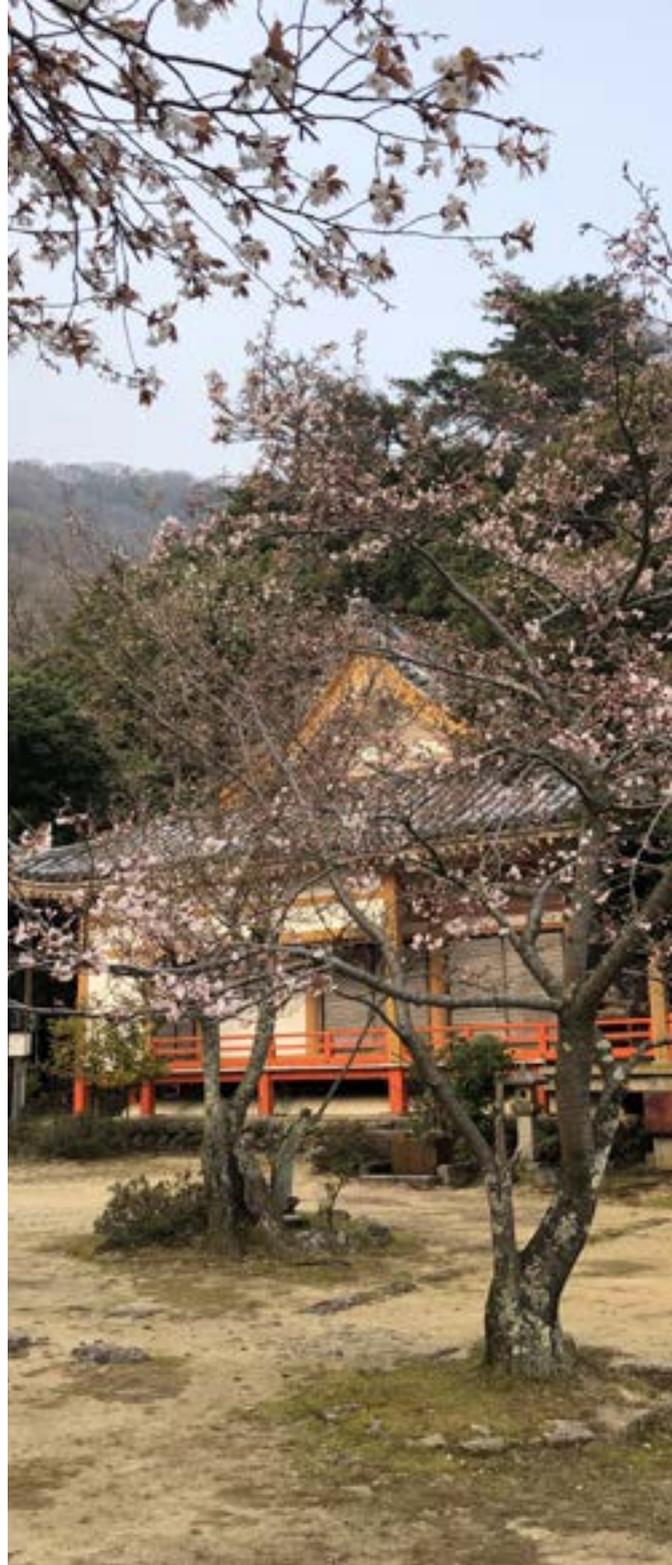
## *The forgotten side of Shiga*

Sophia Freckmann (Shiga)

On a hot summer's day at the end of May in my hometown of Prague, I received an email titled, "Welcome to Takashima City, Shiga Prefecture." I opened the email excitedly and read its contents. If my face could turn into a question mark, it would have at that point—I immediately paid a visit to my good friend, Google. I would be lying if I said that the minimal amount of information online on what to expect from a place I would be living in didn't worry me, but I knew that I would learn with time.

Sounds familiar? Chances are, many of you posted to places apart from the familiar big cities didn't

know what to expect initially as well. Similar to when traveling to a new place: even if you do your research, you are most often still surprised when you finally make it there. Just shy of two years later, I feel that my zero knowledge of Takashima City (高島市) has undoubtedly increased. One of the things we can do is share the knowledge about our new homes for others' benefit. And, in light of recent events where teachers are advised not to travel abroad, it's perhaps even more of a reason to explore places in Japan! Here are a few reasons why I think you should visit Takashima.



## *Introducing Takashima*

Once called Omi Province, modern-day Shiga Prefecture held the capital of Japan, Otsu. The prefecture's historic name still lingers as a reminder in town names as well as the prefecture's own *wagyu*, Omi beef. Unlike the east side of Shiga Prefecture, with a

Shinkansen station at Maibara making it more quickly and easily accessible, the west side of Lake Biwa is significantly less developed. Less than an hour's train ride on the local Kosei Line from Kyoto, Takashima is made up of small towns Omi-Takashima,

Adogawa, Kutsuki, Shin-asahi, Omi-Imazu and Makino.

Takashima means 'tall island' and there is something poetically island-like about the place. To the east of the city sits the largest lake in Japan, Lake Biwa, which one could

mistake as the sea when looking across it. To the west are the mountains that make up the Takashima Trail. And the rest? Well, many, many rice fields. As for how they came up with the part about being ‘tall,’ your guess is as good as mine!

From natural and historic landmarks to cafés and other local produce, it makes for a popular day-trip destination year-round. Active types may find themselves in the area when completing the Biwa Ichi, a cycle around the whole lake, doing water sports during the

summer, or hiking the many trails in the mountains. Tourists most notably tend to flock over during spring for the cherry blossoms and also for autumn foliage.

## Shirahige Shrine and many buddhas

Perhaps one of the main sites that brings tourists to Takashima is Shirahige Shrine. The shrine is located in the town of Omi-Takashima, the first stop in Takashima city. The town used to be sister cities with a town in Ireland, and many connections between the two countries still remain, particularly, a love for the author Jonathan Swift. As the train pulls into the station, it’s hard to miss the huge brown statue of a western man tied with ropes held by little people. As some towns have famous heroes in their main square, Omi-Takashima has Gulliver.

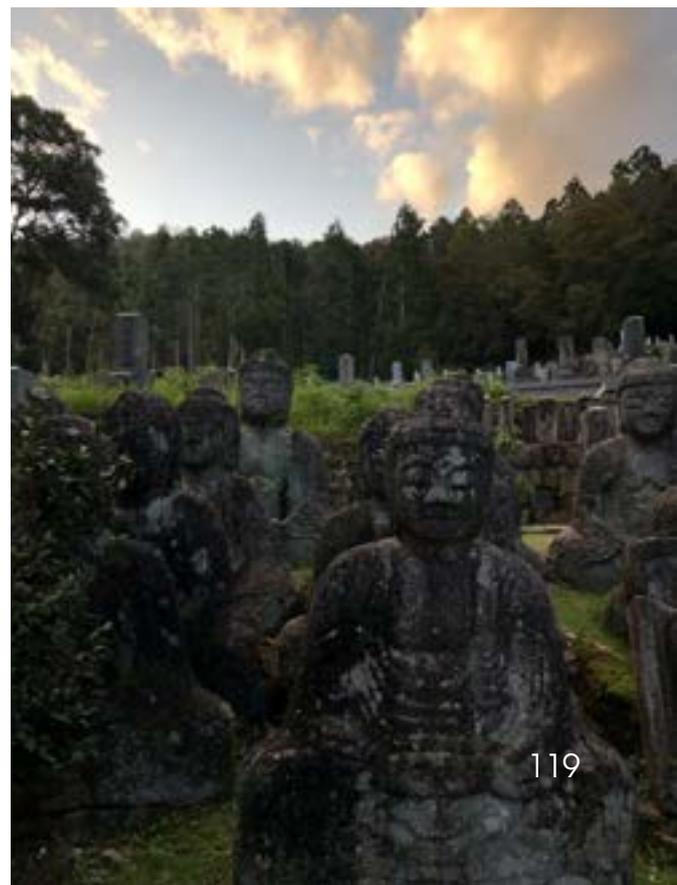
Shirahige Shrine is about a 20-minute walk away from the station. Parking is available for those traveling by car, making the walk much shorter. The shrine itself is known for bestowing blessings of longevity (fun fact: *shirahige* means ‘white beard’), love, fertility, and

safe voyages upon its pilgrims. If you don’t quite need the blessings, it’s still worth a visit for the great phototunity alone. The shrine has an iconic *torii* gate—think Hiroshima’s Miyajima Island or Lake Ashi’s torii gates—although admittedly smaller, and a lighter shade of red.

As a warning, an unfortunate mistake in city planning allowed a highway road to run between the shrine and the shore of Lake Biwa where the torii gate stands. There is no pedestrian crossing, so do make sure to look before you cross. For those who played Frogger growing up, those skills do not go to waste here.

On your walk back to your transportation of choice, off the main road and up a small hill in Ukawa sits a graveyard with an impressive amount (48

to be exact) of life-sized sitting buddhas. The buddhas sit quietly as if pondering the lake below, and vary in size, postures, and facial expressions. It’s not well-known, but the surreal atmosphere is sure to make you want to pinch and bring yourself back to reality. Continue along back to the main road and you’ll find an abandoned hotel with potential for ghost sightings, although not guaranteed.



*The Pensive Buddhas*

## Chikubushima

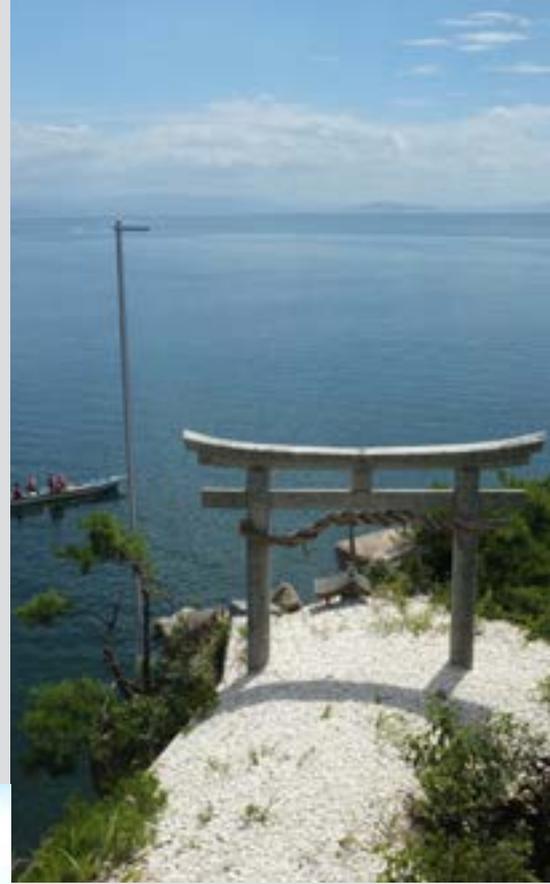
There are three islands located in Lake Biwa. Boarding a ferry at Omi-Imazu port, it is possible to visit one of the islands, called Chikubushima. The island which is only two kilometres across holds one of the 33 temples of the Saigoku Kannon Pilgrimage, and is known for its mystical energy. Tickets can be purchased from Omi-Imazu port, with ferry times varying seasonally (details can be found [here](#)). Visitors are allowed to explore

the island for between 75 to 85 minutes.

You can also test your throwing skills and the island's mystical powers in *kawarake-nage*, earthenware tile-throwing between the torii gate, with Lake Biwa as a backdrop. Chikubushima is located equal distances from Omi-Imazu and Nagahama, so it is also possible to access the island from Nagahama Port.



Chikubushima



*The target which magically seems closer than it is.*

## Metasequoia Namiki and Kaizu Osaki

The northernmost part of the city is Makino, one of the only two places in Japan written only in Katakana (the other being Niseko in Hokkaido, making the two sister cities for this reason). It's the place where the seasons are most visible and best enjoyed in Takashima.

The hot summer, although milder than in the cities, is a great time for swimming at Sunny Beach. In autumn, you can see the changing colors of fall leaves at the Metasequoia Namiki (featured in [CONNECT's October issue](#)). Every year in October in Makino, the Kuri Marathon takes place, allowing runners

to participate in a 2 or 10km run, or a half marathon. The races all end going down the famous 2.4km Metasequoia Namiki. Your reward? A pack of chestnuts and a snazzy t-shirt.

If you're lucky and the winter brings good amounts of snow, you can go snowshoeing or skiing at Makino Kogen. In spring, cherry trees along the coast next to the lake, known as Kaizu Osaki, are in full bloom. There is a path for walking under the cherry trees, as well as boats that allow viewings from the water. It's a beautiful sight that attracts a lot of visitors.



*Sakura in Makino.*

# Cafés Worth Visiting

Traveling should always be paired with good food and coffee. Here's the inside-scoop on some places to try in Takashima.

First on the list is [Wani Cafe](#) in Omi-Takashima, about a ten-minute walk from the station. The entrance to the café is not the most obvious, as it involves going through an alley off the main street. The café serves coffee, cakes, shaved ice, as well as *teishoku*, a.k.a. set meals. For a little over 2,000 yen, you can get a starter made from locally sourced seasonal produce, a choice of curry or pasta, and a choice of drink and dessert. It's run by a lovely couple, and the menu is constantly changing, fueled by their passion for cooking and making new things.

Another great cafe offering *teishoku* is [Cafe Collabo](#) located in Shin-Asahi. Also using seasonal produce, the set offers tastes of different dishes, paired with soup and rice, and sometimes even decorated with seasonal flowers (not edible, unfortunately). Lunch sets are served from 11:30 a.m., but popularity makes them run out fast! If you make it there and they have run out, don't worry,

you can still order à la carte. Be sure to check out the furniture refurbishment workshop connected to the café in the back for a look at some cool designs made using aged wood!

Don't have time for lunch but looking for a good cup of coffee? Also located in Shin-Asahi, [Coffee Works Plus](#) is an espresso bar offering visitors a choice of many different kinds of beans for your ideal brew. The shop itself is slightly small, only offering a few seats for customers, but take-away is also possible.

Last on the list, but definitely not least, is [Totoro](#) in Makino. It offers *teishoku* sets for both lunch and dinner. Featuring a very friendly atmosphere, there is a wide range of food on offer from *tempura*, steak, *katsu* to *sashimi* sets. Prices for the sets range from between 1,000 to 2,000 yen, but be sure to come with a big appetite (or a friend) as the portions are quite big!



WaniCafe



Seasonal Eats.

# Keep a lookout!

If you want to find out more about what Takashima has to offer, a recent tour in February was covered and featured in both the April and May issues of the Savvy magazine, which can be found at most convenience stores.



*A Greek/American/Irish citizen raised in the Czech Republic, Sophia is a second-year JET currently based in Takashima, Shiga Prefecture. When she isn't teaching at her junior high school, Sophia likes running, watching old films, listening to podcasts, or planning her next travel destination (although not all at the same time). You can follow her on Instagram [@sophiafreckmann](#).*

*Shirahige Shrine*

All Photos: Sophia Freckmann

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*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*, Alice Ridley, at [connect.editor@ajet.net](mailto:connect.editor@ajet.net) with your submissions, comments, and questions.

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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.

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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.



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