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Business & Language, Arts & Culture, Lifestyle, Community

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Hey folks! I'm proud to present to you the final issue for 2020 (thank *God* that's almost over) and our 99th issue! Our 100th issue is going to be something a little different and will be written entirely by our staff members. In February we will return back to the usual program after our team takes some needed rest over new years break.

We have a new feature in the Entertainment Section—quick fire reviews. This month features games, music, and podcast reviews. This will be an ongoing section so if you are interested in becoming a regular contributor please get in touch with Rachel at connect.entertainment@ajet.net.

Things I've been digging recently: the weather, frozen cherries from Gyomu Super (the best supermarket in Japan), and listening to the *Super Smash Hoes* [podcast](#) while playing *Stardew Valley* on the Nintendo Switch. I have tried to not talk so much about the weather recently but November's weather was absolutely *perfect* for hiking. I have been taking full advantage of this by tackling a hiking map I found in [Ashikaga City](#). It's my personal mission to complete all of these walks before the weather turns nasty. My top two walks would be 湯殿山 (Yudonosan) and 大小山 (Daishōyama) for an afternoon walk if you are in the area. There are full day hikes too but be aware that some tracks aren't well maintained so take extra caution. If you make it to any of these tracks I'd love to hear about it at connect.editor@ajet.net.

My picks from the December issue include something for those who have lived in Japan for a couple of years and for those who are newly incoming: Various current JETs offer advice to *kōhai* in "To Pack or Not to Pack, That is the Question" (featuring yours truly), an ex-ALT who has left Japan gives advice on the dreaded decision on leaving Japan in "Leaving Japan (Should You Stay, or Should You Go?)," an ALT who is absolutely thriving in their placement talks about teaching elementary school art classes and more in "Artist Spotlight: Carlos Sulpizio," a keen adventurer talks about tackling Japan's most dangerous national treasure while wearing straw shoes in "Taking a Walk in Another Kind of Shoe," and finally we can learn about why *Demon Slayer* is such a big hit in Japan in "An Open Taishō Secret: The Popularity of *Kimetsu no Yaiba*".

This month's content is very ALT heavy as I wanted to provide some useful information as December will be a turbulent month for some. *Gomen'nasai* if you aren't an ALT, I hope you still can learn something new.

Mata ne!



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Alice Ridley

"Gobble gobble gobble!" — My one-year-old niece's favourite word right now

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"When life gets too complicated will you stand with me after dark?" — Joji & BENEE, "Afterthought"

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"You are an aperture through which the universe is looking at and exploring itself." — Alan Watts

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"Hell, Ms. Sarah. Have good life." — One of my seventh grade students in a letter to me.

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"Rebellions are built on hope." — Cassian Andor, Rogue One: A Star Wars Story

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"To appreciate the beauty of a snowflake it is necessary to stand out in the cold." — Anonymous

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"Whatever unites us is greater than whatever divides us!" — A Dr. Bronner's soap bottle

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"The flower that blooms in adversity is the most rare and beautiful of all." — the Emperor of China, "Mulan"

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"Celebrate when you're half-done // And the finish won't be half as fun." — Lemony Snicket, The Slippery Slope

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"They say not to cry over spilled milk. I say go ahead. Cry over whatever you need to. Maaan, just let it out." — Pascal, Animal Crossing New Horizons

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日本語用語 Nihongo Lingo:

Getting a Jump Start on Words to Know

Sarah Baughn (Ishikawa)

According to the government of the United States of America, the Japanese language is categorized as a "Category IV—Super Hard" language. In that category, it stands out from the other languages with a little asterisk indicating that it's even more difficult than the others.

This is all to say that for English speakers, Japanese takes a long time to learn. If you're coming to Japan in the next few months and find yourself filled with the fear that you won't understand anything, I am here to confirm that no, no you won't understand anything.

What you do with that knowledge is up to you! You can try self-studying Japanese, which I highly recommend if you have any interest in it, or you can punt and learn just these few select phrases and try and coast by as best you can.

Here's a list of useful school-related words for Assistant Language Teachers (ALTs) who are just starting out:

People and Places

Knowing who is who and where you need to be is very valuable information!

- 校長先生 / こうちょうせんせい / *kōchō sensei* - school principal
- 教頭先生 / きょうとうせんせい / *kyōtō sensei* - vice principal
- 担任の先生 / たんにんのせんせい / *tan'nin no sensei* - homeroom teacher
- 職員室 / しょくいんしつ / *shokuinshitsu* - staff room
- 事務所 / じむしょ / *jimusho* - office
- 教室 / きょうしつ / *kyōshitsu* - classroom

Classroom Language

Without learning too hard into Japanese in the classroom, here are a few things to say to your kids when, inevitably, they are rowdy and you have to pretend you know what's going on and are a valuable authority figure:

- 止めて下さい / やめてください / *yamete kudasai* - please stop
- 静かにして下さい / しずかにしてください / *shizukanishite kudasai* - please be quiet
- 聞いて下さい / きいてください / *kiite kudasai* - please listen
- 座って下さい / すわってください / *suwatte kudasai* - please sit down

*nihongo lingo getting a
jump start on words to know
sarah baughn*

Greetings

Called あいさつ (*aisatsu*) in Japanese, this group of phrases require some situational explanations. I have included a smiley face to indicate the tone that the phrase will be said in, but the meaning is a bit more direct.

- おはようございます / *ohayō gozaimasu* - Good morning.

As you enter your school and the staff room, say this. Also, the first time you see someone every day, you should say this, it's polite. It means good morning, but it is common for this to be said throughout the school day if someone is just arriving at school for the first time.

- お先に失礼します / おさきにしつれいします / *osakinishitsurei shimasu* - Pardon me, I'm leaving now.

Say this at the end of the workday when you're leaving the office! Directly translated, it means "Sorry to be rude," but the situational translation is more "I'm leaving, goodbye! Do not ask me to do anything else today. 😊"

- お疲れ様でした / おつかれさまでした / *otsukaresama deshita* - Thank you for your hard work.

This is the appropriate response to someone else saying "Osakini shitsureshimasu" when they leave the office. Directly translated, it means "You look tired," but the situational translation is more aligned with "Good job, you worked hard!"

- よろしくお願いします / よろしくおねがいします / *yoroshiku onegaishimasu* - I look forward to working with you.

This phrase is used often and has a ton of different meanings. Say it at the end of your self-introduction to mean "Please treat me kindly." After that, I most often hear it after doing the greeting at the beginning of class. Or immediately after being asked to do something. If your coworker talks about doing something and then says "yoroshiku onegaishimasu," just assume that they're telling you "You Must Do This. 😊" I also hear it from students when asked to grade or give advice on their English directly.

Asking, Giving and Receiving

Being overly polite is always a good default if you're unsure when asking questions. Teachers at your school/schools are likely to be very busy so politely asking if they have time to talk to you will get you some brownie points.

- 今お時間は大丈夫ですか / いまおじかんはだいじょうぶですか / *ima ojikan daijōbudesuka* - Do you have a moment?

A good way to ask if someone has the time to talk to you, more directly translated: "Is your time okay now?"

- お仕事に失礼します / おしごとちゅうしつれいします / *oshigotochū shitsureishimasu* - Sorry for interrupting your work.

- これを頂いてもいいですか / これをいただいてもいいですか / *kore wo itadaite moiiidesuka* - Is it okay for me to have this?

This is a polite thing to say when getting a gift or receiving *omiyage* (gifts) if you're not sure.

- いただきます / *itadakimasu*

If you plan on eating that little snack you just received straight away, this is another little polite thing to say. Generally said before partaking in a meal, so also good if you are in an elementary or junior high school where you will be eating 給食 / きゅうしょく / *kyūshoku* (school lunches) with the students.

Another thing to keep in mind is that every school and person you meet will use the language differently. If you make a mistake or misunderstand, just apologize. In Japan, I've found that it's better to apologize for anything if there's even the slightest possible chance that you maybe could have caused some difficulty. For example, if you're late to work, then you should apologize and say why you made the mistake and why it won't happen again instead of blaming traffic. This feels unnatural to a lot of people! But I think it helps to keep in mind. It also means that some apologies are said to fit into this social expectation instead of always being entirely genuine. Gotta keep that social harmony!

Taking Things Beyond the Basics

So, you want to delve further into Japanese? Self-studying Japanese is a difficult mountain to climb. Combined with the numerous obstacles of kanji, grammar and verbs that conjugate based on politeness level, Japanese takes a time and effort that not many people are willing to put in.

I will say that learning Japanese is genuinely one of the most enjoyable experiences I've had with a language though, and will fill you with confidence if you want to learn literally anything else after it. For ALTs, learning Japanese while your students learn English will also give you a weird ability to relate to your students. I usually joke about how difficult Japanese is with my students when they complain about how difficult English is. This can lead to some pretty cool conversations.

Over the years, many people (especially on the internet) have found ways to fast-track the Japanese learning experience. It still takes a long time, of course, but it's possible to self-study in ways that people have never been able to before. There's a ton of wonderful articles on the internet about learning Japanese, but here's a simplified list of steps and resources you can use to help.

Step one: Learn *hiragana*. It's the basis of the language, and learning the sounds of Japanese is so helpful for learning the other alphabets. A lot of signs and names will have *furigana* (characters to show how kanji is read) that are written in hiragana. There are many apps (seriously, just Google "hiragana learning app").

Step two: Learn *katakana*. Katakana is used for loan words, from French to German, English and Portuguese. If you can read hiragana, then move on to katakana. A ton of food items in grocery stores are written in katakana, so it's super useful.

THEN, you can start looking at grammar and vocabulary and kanji.

Studying Resources

Here is a list of resources (you have to pay for) to study with:

1. Genki textbook series: Though better-suited for classroom use, it's a beginner textbook series that'll help walk you through the basics in a good way. Get it with the workbook!
2. WaniKani: A popular web-based kanji learning service that takes you from the basics all the way to barely used kanji (learn hiragana and katakana first though!). You have to pay a subscription fee for this on either a monthly, yearly or one-time lifetime basis.

3. Bun Pro: Japanese grammar resource and review site. The resources for each individual grammar point can be beneficial, but it's a bit overwhelming if you're starting with minimal Japanese.
4. Kitsun/Memrise/Tori/literally any flashcard service for vocabulary: There are so many of these. Find one you think is interesting and just try it out! I like Kitsun, but I've heard good things about all of them.
5. Italki: You can sign up for online lessons with a ton of different Japanese tutors if you want some help figuring out what to study.

And a special section for the "I don't want to spend any money" dude.

There are several free resources across the internet, but it's a daunting task to pull them all together to make a coherent Japanese learning experience. If you think your time is better spent doing that than paying for services, then here's some recs for you.

1. [Tae Kim's Grammar Guide](#): It's free and covers a lot of grammar! I use it as a resource to check grammar points occasionally.
2. [Japanese Test 4 You](#): A great free website that introduces JLPT grammar of all levels and offers lots of mock tests for practice.
3. [Japanese Ammo](#): This YouTube channel has a lot of good explanations and grammar for a lot of different levels.
4. [Anki](#): Anki is the free flashcard app that has a ton of different customization options. I find that intimidating personally, but a lot of people use it for flashcards.

This information comes from someone who's self-studied, as well as from a few other ALTs with a higher level of Japanese understanding. I've tried a variety of methods to learn the language and I'm prepping to take Japanese Language Proficiency Test at level N3. It is not an end-all-be-all source, but hopefully, it'll help other people who came to Japan with "none Japanese and left English" to get a few basic phrases and cultural context in their repertoire.

Sarah is a second-year JET from the USA now living on the tip of the beautiful Noto Peninsula in Ishikawa. She is eagerly awaiting the day she can once again travel across the country collecting goshuin, in the meantime, she's gearing up to take on the JLPT at N3.

Road to 2,000 Kanji

David Heyman (Shizuoka)



Like many who end up staying in Japan for any significant length of time, I have engaged in a love-hate relationship with *kanji*. On the one hand, being able to fully understand kanji as an avid reader would open up a whole new world of bookstores and novels for me to dive into. Additionally, kanji characters themselves are fascinating to learn about. I love how so many kanji characters are pictographic, their common meanings easily inferred by the way they look. My favourite example of this is the humble umbrella. When you look at the character *kasa*, 傘, you can clearly see four little people (人) taking shelter from the rain, and it brings an artistic flavour to the word.

On the other hand, I dislike how some kanji have five or more different readings, some of which are

not even in dictionaries or learning guides, and yet they seem to be one of the more common usages! Yes I'm looking at you, *kuda* (下), in *kudasai*. It can often be very frustrating to study a language when you keep hitting such roadblocks, which is one of the main reasons I have never seriously sat down and tried to study kanji outside of language learning apps like Duolingo.

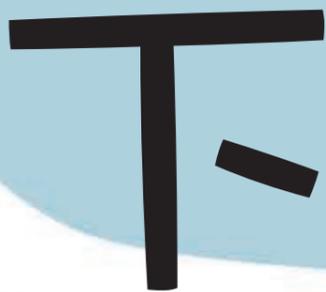
However, after living here for four years, and, if I am being honest, only casually studying Japanese, I have recently found the resolve to try a more intensive approach. Through a quick online search, you will find a very mixed bag of opinions on how best to approach learning kanji. Traditionally, and even in the actual Japanese native school system, kanji are learned through rote learning, an approach where you simply repeat and write the kanji until you have burned it into your brain. Recently, though, this method has received some rather negative attention, most notably from people who have tried to learn through this method and discovered, to their horror, that years later they are still unable to read

at anything close to a native speed. Some have even noted that when they stopped studying daily, they actually started to forget how to read some of the kanji they thought they had learned.

Another common method, often referred to as the Heisig method, after the author of a book on this subject, teaches kanji recognition through the memorising of English mnemonics. By assigning short stories to each kanji and radical, you can quickly recall both their English meanings and—if you are clever with your mnemonics—their base Japanese reading too. The only negative points to this style that I could find was the fact that you need to remember a story as opposed to one definition per kanji, and the fact that you would potentially have to create about 2,000 of these stories by yourself.

After speaking with a few friends who possess the general Japanese fluency that I wish to attain, with only one notable exception, all of them learned through and recommended the Heisig method. Not being one to ignore good advice, I soon set about trying to find a suitable book of mnemonics, because I don't really want to spend extra time creating my own. Why fix what isn't broken, right?

During my time online, I found a number of people talking about a "kanji challenge." In essence this was their various attempts at speed learning kanji, the fastest of which claimed they would do it in just one month! Sadly, this is a bit too intensive for me, given my day-to-day responsibilities and



commitments, so instead I settled on a more relaxed three months. In theory, by using the mnemonic devices, I will be able to learn 2,000 of the most commonly used kanji characters, including their English meanings and core readings over this limited timespan. Am I insane? Quite possibly, but given the positive feedback from people who have tried similar challenges, I am hopeful that this could be a way of getting lasting results.

While there are many books to choose from, I ended up buying Henshall's "A Guide to Remembering Japanese Characters." While not significantly different from the other books as far as I could tell, I liked that it included a little bit of history about the way the kanji have been written and how some of their translations have changed over time. If you decided to follow in my footsteps, then any mnemonic book is good as long as it includes the kanji, how to read it in Japanese, and, of course, the learning mnemonic itself! After having a quick flick through the guide, despite having said I don't want to be writing new mnemonics, I discovered that some of the language used in the book is a little dated or very technical. Since I think this will make it harder to remember some characters, I am going to go off the beaten path and make some minor changes in these cases. Hopefully this will make them much easier to remember.

In addition to this, I am going to be using spaced-repetition on Ankidroid and writing my very own deck of flashcards to help commit both the shape of the kanji and its mnemonic to memory. My theory here is that by making the cards myself, I get the bonus experience of writing things down without having to repeat it every day. Ankidroid will then help me with the spaced-repetition learning aspects of studying, meaning my only remaining

challenge is to add new cards to the deck every day. Oh, and remember nearly 2,000 kanji. While many recommend physically writing down kanji as a method to memorising the characters, I personally don't want to fall into the trap of rote learning and end up writing thousands of kanji every day.

Equipped with my learning methods and my deadline, now all I need to do is the actual studying! A little bit of maths is required at this stage—I know—shocking for an article about language, but it is a necessary evil to develop a plan of attack. Given that I need to study 1,945 kanji over 90 days, dividing the total number of kanji characters to be learned by 90 days shows me that I need to be studying approximately 22 kanji per day. It doesn't sound too daunting when put that way, since I will be breaking this up into micro learning sessions, essentially trying to study whenever I have a little bit of free time over the day. This will typically be when I am on the train to work and on my lunch break. This means that over the three learning sessions with the pockets of free time during my day, I only need to write and study 7 kanji at a time.

With that in mind, wish me luck!

David Heyman is a British-born writer now living and teaching English in Japan. He is generally quite easy to spot, being the only guy in the area with a massive beard.

IDIOM OF THE MONTH

Lara Yi (Incoming JET)



我田引水

GADEN'INSUI

The meaning of *gaden'insui* is to do or say something for one's own benefit, and can be translated into: drawing water for one's own rice paddy.

IDIOM BREAKDOWN (1)

我 / が / ga / I, *pronoun*

田 / でん / den / rice paddy, *noun*

引 / いん / in / to pull, *verb*

水 / すい / sui / water, *noun*

EXAMPLE SENTENCES (2,3)

そんな自己中心的な考えは、我田引水というものだ。

Son'na jiko chūshin-tekina kangae wa, gaden'insui to iu monoda.

Such self-centered thinking is called drawing water for one's own rice paddy.

SOURCES

1. <https://bit.ly/2ID0FYn>
2. <https://bit.ly/35x3raj>
3. <https://bit.ly/3px3on3>

RAISING THE SAILS

Charting your Financial Course during Turmoil

Derek Hurst (Nagano)

With COVID, wildfires, terrorism and Kanye West getting into American politics, 2020's been a tumultuous year to say the least. I know we're all tired of hearing about the USA; like a Big Mac-fueled pro wrestler who just won't leave the ring, the country has been boisterous and buffoon-like throughout the year (even more so than usual), but what happens there still affects the global economy, so we still have to pay attention.

For Japan, things are looking up. Fortunately, now that the United States election is (hopefully) finally decided and therefore behind us, investors can start charting a path forward. Make no mistake, it's not going to be easy. Coronavirus is still very much a thing, geopolitics has in many ways seldom been as unstable, and the truth is

no one really knows what the world is going to look like a month, let alone a year from now. Still, that is no reason not to keep up the good fight. International residents of Japan might even be afforded a few, unique financial opportunities that would otherwise not be available.

Japan has a few interesting things going for it in 2020 that other countries cannot claim. The first would have to be health-related: the exact reasons are hotly debated, but most will agree that Japan has—for now at least—been spared the worst of the pandemic. While countries in Europe and elsewhere are heading into further lockdowns as they grapple with worrying amounts of rising cases, Japan seems to have largely sidestepped the chaos. Regardless of the wisdom of it all,

business is more or less proceeding as usual. In fact, on Nov. 11, the Nikkei ended at its highest level since 1991, driven by ballooning hopes of a recovery in the Japanese economy.

What we have in Japan is the perfect storm of effective public health measures combining with fiscal stimulus, topped off with a cherry of investor optimism. International investors looking to finally get their feet wet in the Japanese markets could pick far worse times than now to jump in. An incredible opportunity now presents itself: to invest from the safe vantage of a country that seems to have handled the pandemic responsibly. Like a general viewing the fighting from a distance, we can take a measure of the things and make informed, cogent decisions without having to deal

with many of the health considerations investors in other countries are facing. In the end, that will mean we will average better returns, if we play our cards right.

Which brings us to the question: where exactly should we be putting our money? It's a question that everyone from billionaire business tycoon Warren Buffet to financial news site TheStreet co-founder Jim Cramer have been harping on about. The consensus right now is that people should basically keep doing what they've been doing—keep buying into the market. Great general advice, but not super helpful in my opinion. While I'm not a professional financial planner, there are a few specific industries that I think will continue to grow and prosper in these uncertain times.

CLOUD-COMPUTING AND BIG DATA:

Think Google/Amazon/Microsoft. I know those are only three of the big four (Facebook and Apple don't really fit into this particular category in my opinion), but these are also great companies that have posted incredible growth throughout the pandemic, and will continue to do so. Smaller, newer companies like Fastly, Palantir and Zoom are also primed for huge growth in 2021, so I would not hesitate to invest in those either. Even if an effective vaccine comes out before the end of the year, I think it is going to be awhile before things truly "get back to normal", and in the meantime, remote work and e-commerce will continue to become ever more dominant in our society.

FINTECH

Financial technology companies like Square and PayPal are not just growing exponentially right now because of COVID, but they are primed to pop over the next decade. As fiat money (government-issued currency) around the world begins to lose market share to crypto, I think we are going to see an explosion in Fintech that could be as big, if not even bigger than Web 2.0. This is definitely an industry to keep an eye on, and one which will yield huge gains if invested in now.



GREEN ENERGY AND EV MANUFACTURING

This may end up being the biggest one of all. Companies like Tesla and Nio are collectively up almost three-thousand percent since January and may be dominating the headlines right now, but there are a slew of smaller companies like Plug Power and Workhorse that are positioning themselves as disruptors in the energy sector. Robust competition in green energy is going to be good for everyone (aside from the oil companies, that is). Make no mistake: renewables are the future of energy, and companies that provide the infrastructure are going to be household names very soon.

The pandemic has in many ways sped up an economic process that would have otherwise taken years to come about. The writing is on the wall: the world has changed, and today's tech companies are the new blue-chips. Even Japan is getting rid of *hanko* stamps. Those who fail to get on the wagon now will face huge entry barriers down the road, and will most likely be left in the dust. So, take the advice of the elder statesmen like Buffett, by all means, but also look just a smidge past the horizon to what is coming down the pike. Keep investing, keep safe, and whatever you do—keep looking forward.



From a Conventional City Life to a Sustainable Lifestyle

Eco-Catering Hakkenzan



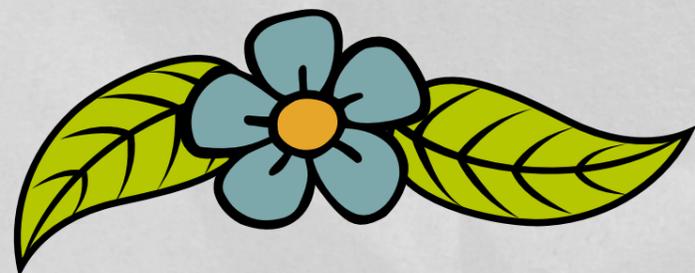
Birgit Bianca Fuerst (Hokkaidō) interviewed
by Sangeetha Ratnayake (Hokkaidō)

Birgit Bianca Fuerst's passion for the sustainable lifestyle began in 2006. Being a mother with three small kids, and her fondness for nature along with her German background was the foundation of *Hakkenzan EcoCatering*. She wanted her kids to grow up with nature: simple night walks and converting anything and everything natural into fun crafts was the beginning of her 14-year-and-counting journey in her sustainable lifestyle. *Hakkenzan EcoCatering* was initially a small community where moms and kids could get together and do some crafts to learn about nature-given opportunities, and then it grew up into a social business when she introduced eco-catering to the program in 2012.

"It is not the eco-catering everyone expects us to be. We are not a food delivery company. Instead, we are catering not the food, but the knowledge of sustainable lifestyle concepts and the happiness of living in the moment," Bianca said. Bianca came

to Sapporo in 1996 and worked for three years as a Coordinator for International Relations in the JET Program. At the same time, because of her passion for the environment, she acted as Head of the Environmental Council of Sapporo City for two years. During her time on the environmental council, her talks about her sustainable lifestyle in Germany ended up giving her the motivation to bring the concepts of sustainability in Japan. She started introducing renewable energy projects such as solar cookers, biomass, off-grid wind, and solar panels.

Hakkenzan EcoCatering closely follows the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Mainly the following goals of No. 3: Good health and well-being; No. 7: Affordable and clean energy; No. 12: Responsible production and consumption; No. 15: Life on land and No. 17: Partnerships for the goals.



As *Hakkenzan EcoCatering* is located next to the *Hakkenzan* orchard at the bottom of the amazing Mount *Hakkenzan* hiking trail, they have the amazing advantage of delivering their message of sustainability to participants with hands-on activities. With the partnership of *Hakkenzan* orchard, they show participants how to make pickles or jam using a solar cooker and freshly harvested organic fruit, learn the value of our food and where it comes from, appreciate every step of its journey and the people involved in that journey till it reaches your plate, and also learn the nutritional values of ingredients as they are

cooked. "I want people to learn about the chances they have for lifestyle," Bianca mentioned, while she was showing us how to boil eggs in a solar oven.

They use natural ingredients and materials which we can find in our surroundings, and teach us how to convert them into something amazing. Bianca brought this concept to the dining table at the "Eco Food Green Convention". Have you ever faced an awkward situation where you were looking for the waiter to refill your glass of wine? Or even though you do not need a refill, sometimes they refill your empty glass?



Hakkenzan EcoCatering came up with an idea that stops the food waste and makes the catering staff's jobs much easier during big events. Guests were given a small handmade pin at the convention and asked to put it on their glass if they want a refill. "We are trying to get the society into transition," Bianca said, because a small step is the beginning of the long journey of converting the conventional city lifestyle into an organic one.

As a result of all these efforts, Hakkenzan EcoCatering received the "Environmental Conservation Creation, Sapporo Mayor's Award" in 2016. With the help of not just local partners such as authorities in Sapporo and the locals living in the Hakkenzan area, but also international partners from all around the world in Germany, Switzerland, Malaysia, and Vietnam, Hakkenzan EcoCatering is currently continuing their mission by organizing training camps, workshops for everyone.

Weather is the biggest challenge for eco-catering programs. Hokkaidō is covered with snow for half of the year from November to April. During that time, food-related activities are not part of their programs. However, they overcame this challenge by organising outdoor winter activities like snow picnics or winter survival camps, where you can sit around a campfire and bond with your teammates. "People are so much attracted to bonfires, especially on a winter starry night. So why not give them a chance to enjoy the only three resources—fire, snow, and a sky full of stars—that they can find around them for free?"

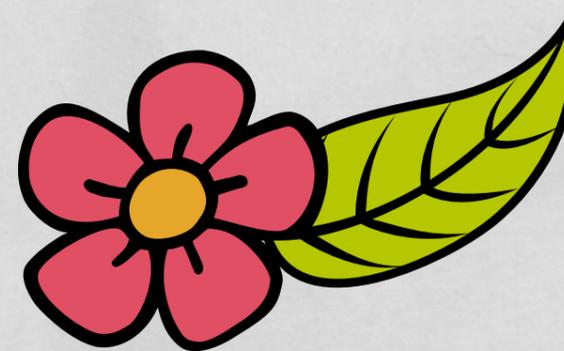


The Covid19 pandemic has been a challenge for everyone around the world. It is not a secret that it has affected community-based business the most. The Hakkenzan EcoCatering community is mostly families, kids, and students' groups in Sapporo. They also have the international community come to enjoy their eco-tourism targeted activities. Hakkenzan EcoCatering had to cancel all of their events, raising questions such as "How will it be?", "Can we survive?", and "How long is it going to last?"

Other local businesses have started converting into digital entrepreneurship. Hakkenzan EcoCatering was thinking about e-advertising, but their mission "to help people come to us to get hope and energize through our programs" made them patient and hopeful, and they are now slowly starting to serve society again. "I wanted to dare the technology. Even in a situation like this, I wanted to make our mission clear: how we can do outdoor events away from the screen."

Bianca is determined. On Oct. 31, 2020 they carefully held their first event since the pandemic, collaborating with the Hult Prize at Hokkaidō University and working to ensure that Hakkenzan EcoCatering is back in business and a safe place to conduct events.

"I hope we can give some hope and refreshing time for everyone," Bianca said at the end of the event.



Bianca is from Germany, living in Japan with her family. Aside from being a mom of three children, she inspires many from her creative ideas of sustainable lifestyle camps and team-building workshops. If you are in Hokkaidō and looking for something fun to do, you can contact her through their [website](#) and [social media](#).

Sangeetha is from Sri Lanka and studying Bioinformatics as a Ph.D. student at Hokkaidō University. Aside from her passion for computational biology, she enjoys hiking, dancing, and handcrafting. With her passion for social entrepreneurship and sustainability, she organizes events related to Sustainable Development Goals, Social Entrepreneurship, and Teambuilding for students.

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"I WON THIS ELECTION, BY A LOT!"
— Donald Trump, Twitter, 8th November 2020

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*"Ah, distinctly I remember it was in the bleak
December; And each separate dying ember
wrought its ghost upon the floor."*
— Edgar Allan Poe, "The Raven"

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*"I always find beauty in things that are odd and
imperfect, they are much more interesting."*
— Marc Jacobs

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*"It is the very mark of the spirit of rebellion to
crave for happiness in this life."* — Henrik Ibsen

To Pack or Not to Pack, That Is the Question

FASHION AND BEAUTY
ADVICE FROM
CURRENT JETS



After months of pandemic-induced closure, Japan's borders are now loosening restrictions and welcoming new residents. This is a particularly joyous moment for me, a long awaiting 2020 JET Programme participant, as we are finally preparing to arrive at our placements over the next few months. In anticipation of our packing struggles, **CONNECT** have enticed a number of current JETs into sharing their experience, knowledge, and hindsight regrets.

Shannon Stocker
(Hyōgo)



ALL THAT GLITTERS IS NOT GOLD

Packing is like Marmite, it can induce an intense fear or excitement, depending on the type of person you are. I am often tempted to pack every single piece of clothing I own *just in case*, but sometimes it serves to remember that old saying; 'all that glitters is not gold'. So, to avoid the perils of over- or under-packing, here's some valuable advice from people who have done both . . .

Come as light as possible because you're going to accumulate a lot of stuff while you're here. Seriously consider selling a lot of your stuff too if you think you'll be in Japan for a while. I packed all of my belongings and put them in storage. I know that when I go back a lot of things I thought would be important to me aren't anymore. The most useful thing you can bring is money. **KAYLA FRANCIS (TŌKYŌ)**

Underwear and bras. I'm busy and the underwear here look like doilies. I also order from Victoria Secret and they arrive very quickly.

Towels (on your first night you might be so tired and you just wanna take a shower and then you'll realize I don't have a towel . . . bring a towel!) **ELVIA VALLES (SAGA)**

MUST BRING ITEMS

Toothpaste and travel-size deodorant. I don't know of Japanese versions that do the job as well as the American versions. Western deodorant is effectively treated like gold among my friends. **IZUMI HANSEN (TŌKYŌ)**

I'm glad I bought my favourite perfume, deodorant, toothpaste and makeup. I'm also glad I brought my leather jacket and a comfortable pair of heels (that I barely ever wear) for my annoyingly wide feet. **KAYLA FRANCIS (TŌKYŌ)**

DEODORANT! For the people in back deodorant!! Zero waste haircare. Clothes that made me feel myself. **ALICE RIDLEY (GUNMA)**

PACKING REGRETS

I regret bringing a lot of clothes . . . I did so because I'm a chubby person and thought Japan would not carry plus size clothes. They do. But I'm also not living in an inaka area. So, it depends on your placement and availability.

I also brought summer wear that I never wore lol if you know you won't wear it don't bring it. Don't second guess or try to talk yourself into it. If you do regret not taking a clothing item you can always ask your family to send it to you later on. **ELVIA VALLES (SAGA)**

I would think about perfumes as Japanese people can be quite sensitive to smell. When I wear perfume I get anxious that it's too strong. Japanese people favour neutral smells. **ALICE RIDLEY (GUNMA)**

Outfits for wearing at home, T-shirts, warm sweaters. Japan has lots of seasonal goods made from the material that keeps you cool in summer heat and warm in winter cold. **NATALIA ORSHANSKAYA (NAGANO)**

I regret about 80% of the clothes I brought with me and think constantly about the things I chose to leave at home. For example, why did I bring three pairs of black heels that I never wear because they will probably kill me on my way to the train station? **KAYLA FRANCIS (TŌKYŌ)**

DRESS CODES

I'm at a private school and the dress code is a bit stricter than my friends' schools. When I first arrived I had to wear suit pants, a proper button down shirt and a necktie with a blazer on hand. Things have kind of relaxed since then as we've had a change of management and now things like polo shirts are more acceptable and we no longer have to wear neckties. I have definitely tried to push the limits at times, wearing turtlenecks and bright prints. I would definitely recommend testing the waters when you become comfortable at your school. **DAMIEN LEVI (TŌKYŌ)**

I wasn't told about the dress code. I was quite confused when I arrived and I would advise feeling it out of your own school once you arrive. Play it safe and then try new things. **ALICE RIDLEY (GUNMA)**

Semi-professional dress. A nice blouse and knee-length skirt with Oxfords were fine, but a put-together sweater and dark jeans with sneakers were also okay.

Suits were required for special events, like graduation or visits by delegations. I did stick to the dress code since it's respectful of the work being done in the school. **IZUMI HANSEN (TŌKYŌ)**



I assumed business and showed up in a blouse and dress pants. The other female teachers were in cool biz so the next day I dressed more comfortable for the weather but still professional. Never had a problem. **ELVIA VALLES (SAGA)**

I wasn't told my school's dress code before I left and it turned out there is no dress code at my work. Zara is my go to quick work attire store, but I recommend shopping thrift as much as you can. Standing out is not a bad thing. Be confident in your clothing choices! **ROBERT MCDONALD (TŌKYŌ)**

People in my office dress very smartly even the PE teachers when they're not in gym clothes. One of the PE teachers sometimes wears a waistcoat . . . I would say that I stick to the dress code but I have a lot more leeway since I am a woman and don't have to wear a suit. I normally wear a dress or a shirt with trousers/skirt. **KAYLA FRANCIS (TŌKYŌ)**

FOUR SEASONS

I packed only for the weather I was arriving in as I could only bring one suitcase on the flight I had. I packed a box of winter clothes and other stuff I might need later and got my family to send it once I found an apartment. **KAYLA FRANCIS (TŌKYŌ)**

I packed only for the season [that I arrived in] as I had no idea what to expect in Japan and never regretted it. **NATALIA ORSHANSKAYA (NAGANO)**

I'm from Wisconsin and never really liked summer so most of my clothes were more fall and winter clothing. I did buy light weight summer clothes for Japan but the bottoms weren't school appropriate so I never really wore them. **ELVIA VALLES (SAGA)**

IS THERE SOMETHING ON MY FACE?

Cramming a year's worth supply of your favourite skin and make-up products *might* seem like the logical thing to do but our sources tell us that Japan has some great alternative options for your faves. Before you stockpile and leave your local Superdrug half empty, have a read of our current JETs wise words, and you might be able to save some pennies.

WHAT BRANDS AND PRODUCTS HAVE YOU DISCOVERED THAT YOU CAN NO LONGER LIVE WITHOUT?

DHS is a popular brand here for a reason. I love their cleansing oil. It's cheap, effective and you can buy it in most drug stores.

I highly recommend going to the dermatologist here if you have any skin issues. Before I arrived in Japan my skin got really bad and the stuff my doctors gave me didn't help. I was heartbroken to get acne as an adult because I never had bad skin growing up and I take skincare very seriously (I love the Korean 10 step routine). My skin issues were caused by stress and also my hormones going crazy after I stopped taking the birth-control pill (no regrets) which apparently is super common. Moving here made it even worse and until I started going to a dermatologist it didn't get better. I was really worried they would tell me to go on the pill because it made me depressed. They did but thankfully after I explained the situation they were able to prescribe some vitamins and cream. The dermatologist is very cheap here and 70% is covered by our insurance. It took a long time for my skin to completely clear up (I'm talking months) but since then I haven't really broken out, not even on my period!

KAYLA FRANCIS (TŌKYŌ)

Innisfree. They have a green tea line and it's very nice and soothing. They also have gel creams which is great for oily skin because gel/jelly creams are moisturizing without being greasy.
ELVIA VALLES (SAGA)

CLEANSING OIL!!! I use the softymo speedy cleansing oil which is very gentle. What I like about this cleansing oil is that you don't have to double cleanse like other cleansing oil. Always check if it's required to do another cleanser after oil. **ALICE RIDLEY (GUNMA)**

Japan has a huge number of affordable skin care products with respect to local climate and environment. I would recommend bringing only the minimum things for your daily beauty routine. As soon as you settle in, you can buy everything you need from local drugstores. **NATALIA ORSHANSKAYA (NAGANO)**

I am currently using a significant amount of Elta MD, Thayers, Glossier, and Derma-E. For Japanese products, the onsen at home bath salts kits are significantly better than anything you could ever find at LUSH as well as the face masks here are such a higher quality for the price than outside Japan. Kose Q10, an amazing face cream I discovered in Japan, and Honpo eye cream are my current Japanese based skincare additions to my lineup. Honestly, Muji makes some great quality and affordable skin care products. I use their herbal facial mask that you apply after your cream and it locks in that lotion all day. Just an added barrier between your skin and the dry air.
ROBERT MCDONALD ((TŌKYŌ)



HAVE YOU HAD ANY DIFFICULTY FINDING YOUR FOUNDATION SHADE?

“ It was easy for me because I took a picture of the MAC foundation I normally use and took it to the store. I then paid probably more than double what I did back home for it. I'm mixed race and my complexion changes in the sun. It's not easy here and you may end up just going to a store you know you can buy it from. It exists, you just might find yourself paying more for it. **KAYLA FRANCIS (TŌKYŌ)** ”

“ It has been easier for me because I have yellow undertones. I haven't seen much by way of tan, brown, or black shades in Tōkyō, so if you have a darker skin tone, you may want to consider bringing your own foundation. **IZUMI HANSEN (TŌKYŌ)** ”

“ Personally I don't often wear foundation because it's too hot in Kyushu. But I've never had a problem finding a shade. **ELVIA VALLES (SAGA)** ”

WHAT IS THE PROTOCOL WITH TATTOOS AND PIERCINGS?

It is all ESID. I have pierced ears, four earrings and always wear them. I have three schools and so far no-one ever said anything to me, on the contrary, my teachers often show interest towards my accessories. As for the tattoo, I have it on my back, so it does not affect my daily life, but, for the onsens I have to cover it with a patch. **NATALIA ORSHANSKAYA (NAGANO)**

I have a septum piercing that I always had flipped up. I would never wear it down at school. Sometimes kids at elementary school would see it up my nose and ask questions but that's just kids being kids! I would try to avoid going to public events where I was wearing my ALT hat with it down. I would occasionally wear earrings in my ears but I felt this sometimes got side-eyes. **ALICE RIDLEY (GUNMA)**

A no go in my case, I was wearing a piercing in my ear during school in my first year and at the end of the day before I went home my supervisor very nicely asked me not to wear it again. I wasn't aware at the time that the school has a no-piercing rule. I was a bit surprised considering female coworkers had piercings in their ears! In terms of tattoos, mine are covered almost all the time by my clothing, however, when I wear sportswear or short socks they can show sometimes. I've never had anyone say anything about them being bad, just general interest when someone does notice. **DAMIEN LEVI (TŌKYŌ)**



IS WEARING NO MAKE-UP ACCEPTABLE IN WORK?

“ I think in inaka it's probably fine but I work in a private school in a very expensive/chic part of Tōkyō. Most of my coworkers wear some makeup and have their nails and hair done. That is nothing compared to how amazing the residents I see daily look. However, I simply do not have the time, money and patience to look like that every day. I love makeup and fashion and when I first arrived I wore makeup everyday. I live an hour away from my school and it was only a matter of time before I prioritised 10 minutes extra of sleep. My students were genuinely shocked to see me without makeup the first time. I mean that they full-on reacted, it wasn't rude or anything they just weren't used to it. It made me realise that they don't get to see women look casual very often and I thought it was important that they see that especially with any self-esteem issues they might be facing. So since then I rarely wear makeup to work unless I have plans afterwards. I'm sure my skin thanks me for it too. ”
KAYLA FRANCIS (TŌKYŌ)

“ It's very uncommon to not wear at least a little foundation, eye shadow, and maybe some lip color, even to the grocery store. I always feel out of place without makeup on at work or a long day out doing activities, though I've gotten over wearing no makeup to the grocery store if that's the only place I'm going that day. If you want to get away with just a little makeup (or no makeup), just put on a mask. ”
IZUMI HANSEN (TŌKYŌ)

THINGS ARE GETTING HAIRY

My wavy hair freaks out in the humidity, freezing temperatures, or even changes in water. If you're anything like me, you'll be worrying, almost daily, about how on earth you will tame your tresses in an entirely new climate . . .

I have always dyed my hair at the hairdresser's and upon coming to Japan I started struggling with my hair somewhere after six months. My European hair is thin and it was hard to find the Japanese hair colour that would suit me. Please remember that in case you are blonde or have a light hair colour, the local bleach will be too strong for you. Fortunately, after experimenting with local shades, I am back to my light pink hair again. **NATALIA ORSHANSKAYA (NAGANO)**

I have mildly wavy hair and Japanese people would often be confused about how much my hair varies day-to-day. **ALICE RIDLEY (GUNMA)**

If you have curly and texture hair, I definitely recommend bringing your comfortable shampoos and conditioners with you but also double check to see if maybe you can order it on Amazon.

Also depending on your placement you might be able to find your brand in stores! The weight from shampoo and conditioner bottles add up in your suitcase so save it as much as possible!
ELVIA VALLES (SAGA)

To Pack,
or Not to Pack
That Is the
Question



THAT TIME OF THE MONTH

For those of us who menstruate, the fear of not finding the right products can be daunting. We all have our preferred pads, tampons, or cups, and a life without them can feel uncomfortable. I have heard horror stories about having to adapt to a tampon-free world, but is that really the reality?

“ Japan has a variety of period products although you may find they are thicker and longer than in your own country.
NATALIA ORSHANSKAYA (NAGANO) ”

You can buy everything here. I'm not going to lie, I think the products suck either way too thin/small or thick. However, it's still useable and the answer to those questions depends on how picky you are about it.
KAYLA FRANCIS (TŌKYŌ)

WOULD YOU RECOMMEND BRINGING PERIOD PRODUCTS THAT YOU ARE USED TO?

You can definitely find pads in multiple sizes at local drugstores. Some menstrual cups are available online, but not as widely as in the US.
IZUMI HANSEN (TŌKYŌ)

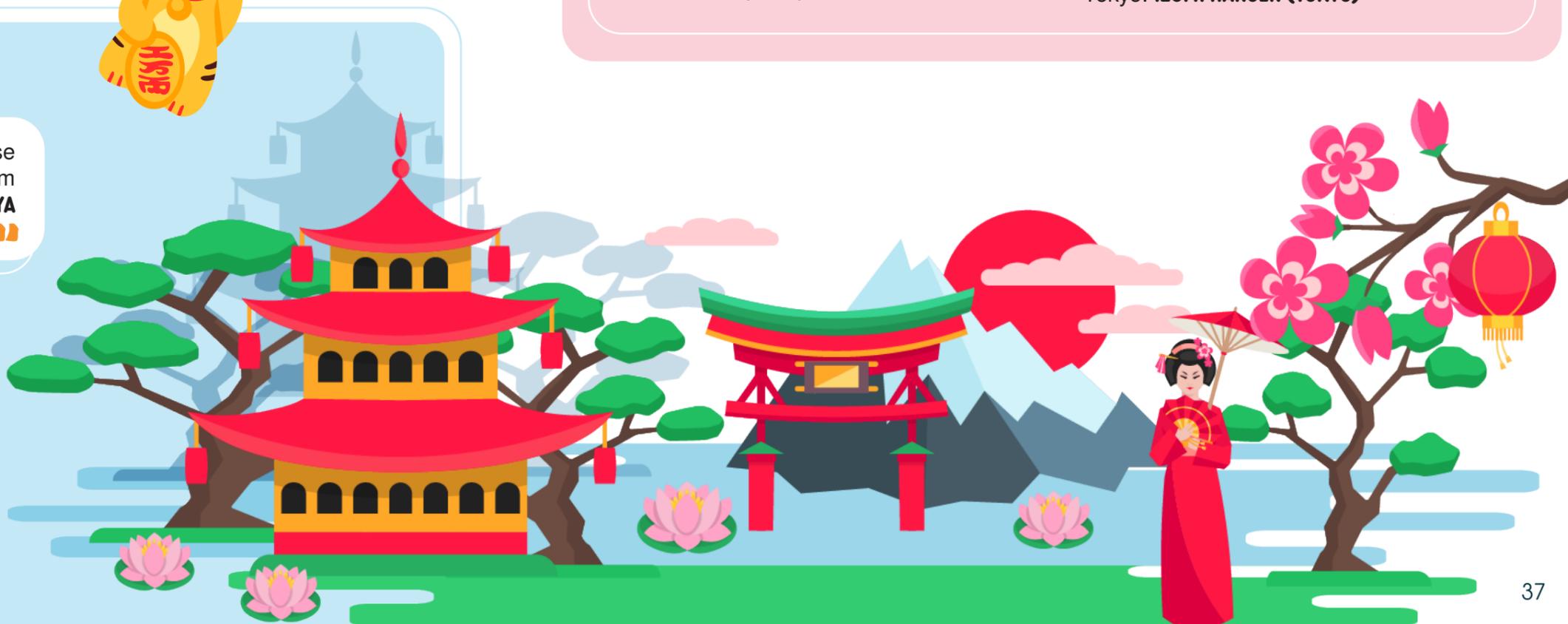
“ I brought a cup and I have never had to take a second glance at the horrid pad sections in Japanese supermarkets.
ALICE RIDLEY (GUNMA) ”

ARE TAMPONS HARD TO COME BY?

“ Yes! Bulk the tampons if you use them regularly. My parents send them to me in bulk.
NATALIA ORSHANSKAYA (NAGANO) ”

“ Yes, I have never seen tampons being sold.
ALICE RIDLEY (GUNMA) ”

“ Drugstore Mori and I think any drugstore has them but not a lot of options for tampons.
ELVIA VALLES (SAGA) ”



SAY YES TO THE DRESS

No, we're not talking about walking down the aisle. We're talking about whether I should *really* have a packing list that is 50% dresses? Inevitably, some of them will have to go, but how did current JETs fare with the clothing decisions?

Tall, petite, plus-sized, and everything in between

In Europe my size was S/M, in Japan I need to buy clothes of M/L/LL sizes. However, I struggle to find clothes for my teenage daughter because Japanese kids and women are slim.

I regret not bringing more underwear along. I tried to find something from local stores but it's either the design or the size issue that I don't like.
NATALIA ORSHANSKAYA (NAGANO)

There's a store called Rodeo. I got my winter coat there for a Hokkaido trip it was in the men's large and tall section and for nice prices!

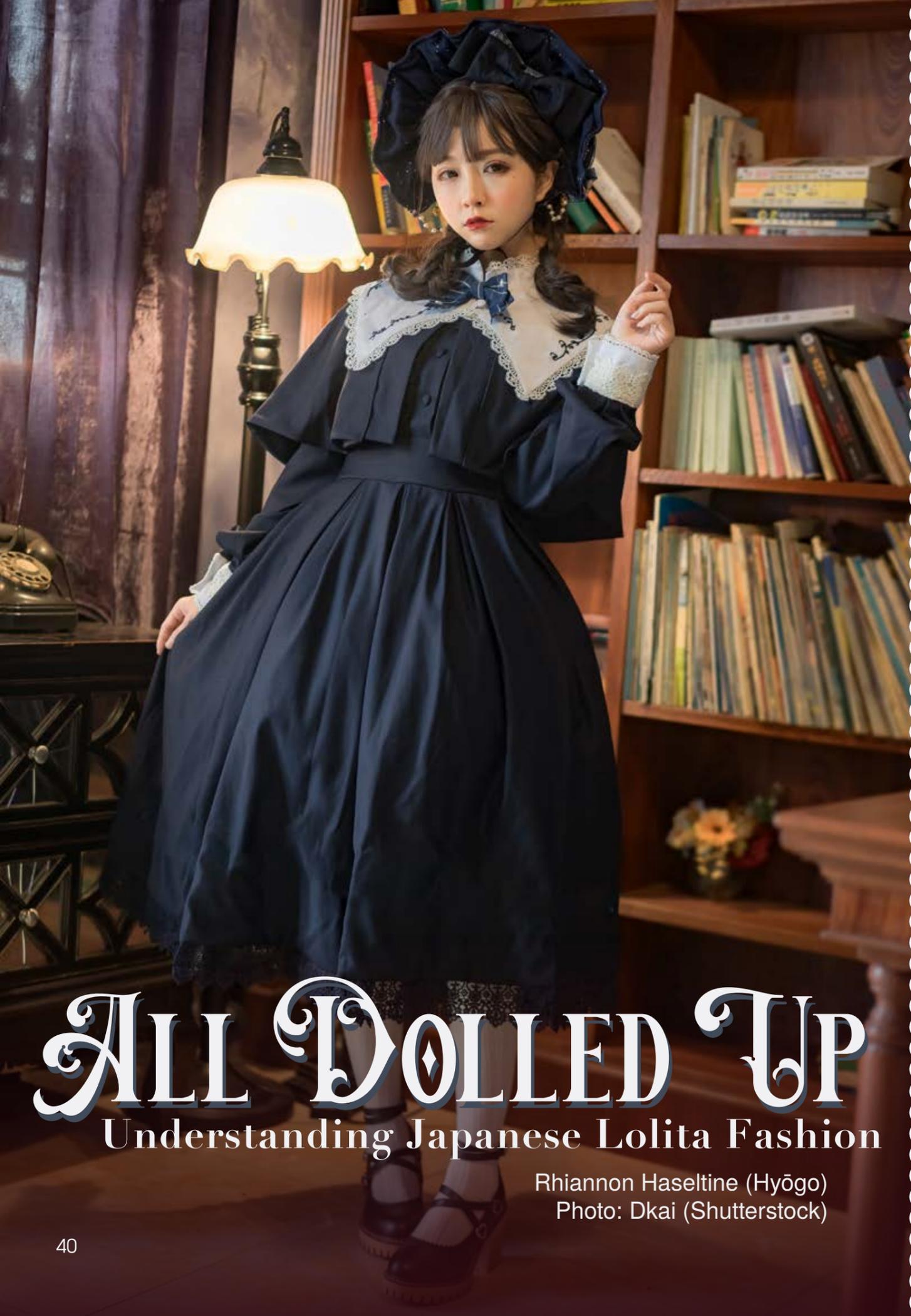
I'm busty so I order [bras] online.
ELVIA VALLES (SAGA)

I am fairly petite (5ft 2in) and Japan has been kind of great for me in that respect. I'm sure the tall girls struggle. However, I'm also quite curvy and the style here is very baggy/straight (I hope that makes sense) which looks awful on my body, I like things that go in at the waist. There are thousands of stores in Tōkyō but sometimes it can all feel very similar.

I would actually highly recommend you don't buy any clothing in advance unless you know you're going to struggle due to your height/size. I bought a few things from H&M before I arrived here and honestly, you don't know what the style or weather is going to be like until you get here. A lot of things I thought would be OK weren't. You need the money more than anything.

KAYLA FRANCIS (TŌKYŌ)

I brought [bras] from my home country. My friend noticed that she had a hard time finding unpadded bras anywhere, so I followed her advice and brought ones I knew would fit without padding. If you have bigger breasts, you will have a harder time finding a properly fitting bra. An aside: Wacoal is now available in some places in and around Tōkyō.
IZUMI HANSEN (TŌKYŌ)



ALL DOLLED UP

Understanding Japanese Lolita Fashion

Rhiannon Haseltine (Hyōgo)
Photo: Dkai (Shutterstock)

OK, hands up—who else had their first exposure to Japanese street fashion via Gwen Stefani’s ill-advised “Harajuku Girl” backup dancers, circa 2004? I cringe now, but as a 13-year-old unfamiliar with concepts like cultural appropriation and racial fetishization, I was intrigued. I’d had precious little prior exposure to Japanese culture—my hometown of York, UK probably didn’t even have a sushi restaurant back then—and now I was falling fast down a Google rabbit hole of Harajuku fashion photos. Of course, I was far from the first *gaikokujin* to fall in love with mid-2000s Japanese street style—its distinctive subcultures are world-renowned.

These subcultures have waxed and waned in popularity as trends anywhere do—but perhaps the most enduring has been Lolita. Characterized by the sorts of petticoated dresses you might otherwise have seen only on porcelain dolls and more ruffles, ribbons, and lace than you can shake a stick at, this style takes inspiration from Victorian and Rococo (think Marie Antoinette) fashion and combines it with a cutesy, childlike aesthetic. Historical accuracy is never the goal; we’re talking pure romantic fantasy here, dreamy ideas of aristocratic femininity and old-timey innocence.

Lolita might be ostentatious, but it is not a costume, and whether handmade or store-bought, high quality is the name of the game—you’ll find no cheap, shiny satin or fluffy cat ears here. In fact, Lolita comes with guidelines to follow if you want to avoid being labelled an *ita*—a pun on *itai*, translated as pain—and with several online communities poised to point out mistakes, it can be a notoriously intimidating subculture to newcomers.

Classic, Sweet, or Gothic?

That's not to suggest that creativity and experimentation are discouraged—on the contrary, the list of Lolita variations is as long as your arm. The three most common substyles are *classic* (a more mature, subdued Lolita look, with longer skirts, muted tones, and subtle patterns), *ama* (as cutesy as it gets, with sugary pastel shades and childlike prints abound), and *Gothic* (incorporating traditional goth fashion; darker colors, heavier makeup, and spooky motifs), but Lolita divides even further to include:

1 *Punk-loli* - incorporating typical British punk elements like plaid, safety pins, and leather. Inspired by the *shōjo* manga *Nana*.

2 *Country-loli* - lots of gingham and strawberry prints accessorized with straw baskets and hats. Think Insta-worthy cottagecore, then add more petticoats.

3 *Shiro/kuro-loli* - monochromatic Lolita co-ords (outfits) without patterns or prints.

4 *Nautical-loli* - inspired by all things seafaring. Sailor hats, anchor motifs, or pirate attire are popular.

5 *Guro-loli* - more common in photoshoots than in public, this substyle juxtaposes the sweetness of Lolita with horror-inspired fake blood and medical supplies.

6 *Wa-loli* - incorporates traditional Japanese clothing into Lolita co-ords. You might see kimono adapted for a petticoat, and *zori* or *geta* shoes. Related is *Qi-loli*, Chinese-inspired looks.

Lolita is, typically speaking, associated with cultivating a highly feminine look, but that doesn't mean that there aren't options for those inclined to more masculine attire. *Kodona*, or *ōji-loli*, takes its inspiration from Victorian boys clothing, featuring short pants or knickerbockers, waistcoats, and newsboy caps or bowler hats.



Photo: Dkai (Shutterstock)



Once Upon a Time

According to Mariela Nikolic of Savvy Tokyo, the Lolita style was so named in 1987 by fashion magazine Ryuko Tsushin. (1) The style itself, however, can trace its beginnings back to over a decade earlier.

The late 1960s/early 1970s saw the first seeds of the eventual Lolita look sown with the emergence of *kawaii* culture and *natural kei* fashion. Natural

kei, also the ancestor of modern-day *mori kei*, was inspired by a revival of Victorian aesthetics, featuring frilled floral dresses that wouldn't look out of place in an episode of *Little House on the Prairie*. This aesthetic contributed to a romanticized cultural image of *shōjo*, "young women", as socially free and unencumbered by obligation and responsibility but, for the first time, also now consumers in their own right thanks to social changes of the period. The earliest Lolita brands, Milk and Angelic Pretty (then named 'Pretty'), were established at this time.

The 1980s saw more Lolita stores open their doors, including cornerstone brand Baby the Stars Shine Bright, Jane Marple and HeartE, but it wasn't until the rise of visual kei music in the 1990s that Lolita, as we know it today, began to take shape. Early 90s Lolita looks were far simpler than the elaborate outfits of today, with nary a petticoat or bonnet in sight. Then came Malice Mizer in the late 90s, whose frontman Mana was key in solidifying the modern Lolita look and inspiring the emergence of Gothic Lolita. Mana's clothing line, *Moi-même-Moitié*, is still highly influential in the subculture.

Lolita's popularity skyrocketed in the early 2000s. 2001 marked the first publication of *The Gothic & Lolita Bible*, a magazine still seen to this day as essential reading for any Lolita

devotee. Then came 2002's release of Takemoto Novala's novel *Shimotsuma Monogatari* (known in English as *Kamikaze Girls*) about teenage Lolita Momoko's friendship with *yankī* girl Ichigo. A live-action adaptation swiftly followed. Girls worldwide clamoured to replicate Momoko's style, cementing Lolita in the public eye as a mainstay of Japanese street fashion.

Dolores on the Dotted Line

As a subculture intent on cultivating an image of innocence, you might imagine it to be controversy-free. Lolita, however, is plagued with misunderstanding from the wider public; largely thanks to the name, which has sinister, Nabokovian connotations to Western ears. The 1955 novel *Lolita* is the notorious tale of a middle-aged man's sexual obsession with his 12-year-old stepdaughter Dolores, aka Lolita.

That the childlike fashion shares its name with the eponymous character leads some to question the wearers' intentions; assuming that pandering to pedophilic fantasies is the goal. This assumption is, of course, universally rejected by Lolitas. With the exception of *ero-loli* (a now dead substyle in which the traditional Lolita look is sexed up with fishnet stockings, corsetry, and more skin on show), Lolita fashion is markedly non-sexualised. Many wearers even express relief at the freedom from sexual attention that Lolita offers

them. Teresa Younker, in her 2012 essay "Lolita: Dreaming, Despairing, Defying," disputes any connection between Lolita dress and 'lolicon' desires—stating that Lolita fashion expresses a confidence likely to put off predators, rather than entice them. (2)

If you're interested, **this** article from blog, F Yeah Lolita, discusses the etymology of the fashion's name and its connection to the novel further. One thing's for certain—if the name did come from the novel, there is no intent to emulate the titular character through dress or behavior. Even a rudimentary Google search for 1940s American teen fashion proves that the sartorial tastes of Dolores Haze would have been a far cry from the frilly Victorian confections favored by modern-day Lolitas.

Finding Freedom in Flounces

Since pandering to deviant sexual interests is decidedly *not* a motivation for donning a petticoat, what is? Does personal taste alone drive the desire to dress in frills and ruffles?

Of course, aesthetic appeal plays a big role—Lolita is cute. It's about as cute as fashion gets, and, to state the obvious, *kawaii* things are pretty damn popular in Japan.



But Lolita also offers a chance to escape the realities of adulthood—and the rigid social expectations it brings with it. Pressures to work hard and conform start as early as junior high school and only become weightier from there. Is it any wonder, then, that so many young people take solace in the return to the freedom of childhood?

Lolita fashion, despite the sweet and innocent image it projects, is a form of rebellion. Its extravagance is self-indulgence—an unwillingness to concede to societal ideals for behavior and beauty. As Momoko says in *Shimotsuma Monogatari*, "[C]hoosing things with your own personal sense of "I like this, I don't like that" is the

ultimate individualism." (3) Lolita bucks beauty standards, both Japanese and Western, and the poofy silhouettes and modest coverage make it an appealing option for many girls who feel excluded from mainstream fashion for reasons of body type or disability.

Fairytale Endings?

It's true that Lolita has been declining in recent years, with a number of online articles decreeing it "dead"—alongside the other Harajuku subcultures of yesteryear. Indeed, if you've recently made a pilgrimage to Takeshita Street

hoping to see people wearing the wild fashions that captured your imagination as a teenager, you were probably as disappointed as I was. The Gothic & Lolita Bible went on what looks to be a permanent hiatus in 2017, with Harajuku streetwear magazine FRUITS along with it.

A quick gander into any Lolita-related hashtag on social media, though, shows an international subculture alive and kicking, if smaller than before. After all, if escapism is the motivation behind Lolita fashion, when have young people needed that more than amidst the stresses of 2020? Lolita is a return to a romanticized, simpler time of life; a fantasy of innocence and freedom in fabric form. I, personally, don't see that appeal ending any time soon.

Rhiannon is a third-year JET originally hailing from York, UK. She graduated in 2016 with a degree in Costume Design & Making, a fact that still surprises her given how bad she is at sewing. She spends more time than is healthy in Osaka's vintage clothing stores, and also enjoys graphic design, drawing, and traumatizing herself with horror movies.

Sources

1. Savvy Tokyo
2. Harvard
3. Goodreads

Additional Sources

Asian Beat
 F Yeah Lolita
 Haenfler
 The Paris Review
 Research Gate



DUNGEONS & DRAGONS

IN THE DIGITAL AGE



So, What is D&D?

If you're really lost so far, don't panic!

Dungeons & Dragons is a fantasy role-playing game inspired by fiction like *The Lord of the Rings* and the works of Robert E. Howard. Basically, a group of (usually 4-6) friends will get together to tell a story. One person will act as the **DM** (Dungeon Master), who will run the game and describe the environment, people, and obstacles that the players encounter. The other players each invent a character, whose actions and choices they describe throughout the game. Dice rolls are used as a fair way to determine whether a character succeeds or fails at actions they attempt to take. And thus, a story emerges.

The tone of games can vary wildly from group to group, from wacky shenanigans to epic adventures, mystery, drama, horror, and everything in between. Ultimately, it's a game crafted by your imagination, and a great chance to spend time with your friends in a fun, creative, and collaborative way.

Rachel Fagundes (Okayama) | Reese Mills (Okayama)



Dungeons & Dragons is awesome and you should be playing! If you aren't already, good news: D&D is now easier to play than ever before, and Reese and I have assembled lots of excellent online resources to help you get started. Even better, new developments have made it possible to play D&D *online*, making it the perfect way to stay creative, connected to friends, and having fun while quarantining at home or struggling with an isolating rural placement. So, without further ado, here's our guide to some handy resources for D&D that can help you set up a game online whether you are an old pro or a complete beginner.



D&D Beyond

DnDBeyond.com is D&D's official website, and it's a treasure trove of useful tools and info, whether you are playing in person or online. They have everything from a basic intro for new players [here](#) to a pretty extensive free guide to the rules [here](#). (If that looks intimidating don't worry! It's ok to just jump in and learn as you go!) There are searchable and sortable lists of spells, feats, monsters, magic items, and more just waiting for you to explore. They also have a great [Quarantine](#)

[Resources](#) section to help folks play online, that features free campaigns your group can use to get started. D&D Beyond also has a great step-by-step walkthrough of character creation and (my favorite feature!) absolutely outstanding digital [character sheets](#). You can click any feature on the character sheet for handy rules explanations, and automatic calculations make leveling up a cinch. This is honestly a fantastic tool for both new and experienced players and makes D&D easier and more accessible than ever before.

DM Tips

As the DM, you can create a game group on D&D Beyond in the **My Campaigns** section. When players join your game group, you can see all their character sheets, making it easy to help players check rules and keep track of information.

While most basic content on D&D Beyond is available for free, some options and abilities are only available if purchased in the online store. You can get around this by either not using those additional

features or by manually adding them using the **Homebrew** option on the site. Members of your group will have access to any **homebrew rules** you've added, and any **rulebook content** you have purchased, giving the players the opportunity to get around paying for content.

If you want to purchase rulebooks or a campaign adventure, you can do so [here](#). The online versions have handy hyperlinks, allowing you to access the relevant information more easily than in a PDF file or a print edition.

Online Tabletops

D&D is usually played around a table, snacking and laughing with a group of friends. Some DMs provide maps or drawings to help the players visualize the space they are in. And of course, everyone has dice to roll when the action starts heating up. So how do you transfer these things into playing online?

Online tabletops are set up specifically to recreate your cozy kitchen table online, and provide all the tools you need to play in one place. There are a few different online tabletops to choose from, but we recommend [Roll20](#) since it's free and awesome.

The players and the DM can all log into Roll20 together to see shared maps and character placemarkers. There is also a digital dice roller that allows everyone logged into your game to see the rolls, which keeps the game honest. Roll20 has a Skype-like video and audio chat option built into its toolbox, so everyone can see and speak to one another throughout the game. There are even nifty tools that your DM can use to add background music to your adventure. You can check out Roll20's [video guide for players](#) for a more in-depth explanation of their various cool features.

DM Tips

As the DM, you gain the ability to give players control over tokens, prepare multiple map pages to switch to, play music, hide or reveal maps and tokens during game, and give out informative notes or handouts. They have a great [video guide for DMs](#) to help you get set up.

When setting up, you can manually add everything, or you can purchase a campaign adventure in the [Roll20 Shop](#), which will give you access to the PDF and the ready-to-play pre-made Roll20 maps for that adventure.

Note: While online tabletops can be helpful tools to enhance your game, they are not actually necessary in order to play D&D online. Less tech-savvy groups may be happier skipping all that and just sticking to the three basics:

1. Character sheets (shared with your group on D&D Beyond)
2. Dice (like this [digital dice roller](#) if you don't have your own)
3. Friends (you can just Skype with your group members or use any other similar service)

And let your imaginations do the rest!

Finding Friends to Game With

Starting a gaming group is a great way to get to know other expats in your area! If you're struggling to make connections in a new country in these isolating times, invite some acquaintances to play D&D with you. After running amok and slaying dragons together for a few sessions, you'll be tried and true companions! Gaming is also a good way to stay in touch with friends back home (time zones allowing). It can be hard to keep up with old friends while living abroad, but if you are in a weekly online game together, the time to see one another is already scheduled in.

However, if you're still struggling to find folks to game with, there are resources that can help you connect with online players too. Both [D&D Beyond](#) and [Roll20](#) have forums for players looking for groups and vice versa.

Reese Mills has also started up a Facebook group [Expats - Okayama Gaming Hub](#) that can help folks (anywhere in Japan!) interested in playing D&D find one another. He will even help people set up their group or find one to join.

Watching a Game

Still nervous about getting started? Intimidated by the weird dice or lots of new rules? Don't worry! You definitely don't need to have everything memorized in order to play. Most people learn as they go, and more experienced players in the group can always give newcomers a helping hand. Still, many beginners find it helpful to watch a game in action before they get started, to get a better picture of what playing a D&D game is actually like and how the game mechanics actually work.

There are quite a number of YouTube videos and podcast recordings of D&D groups that can be a great starting point for getting into the game.

In particular, we recommend [Critical Role](#). This D&D game, played by a group of voice actors, has done a lot to demystify D&D and make it seem exciting and accessible to beginners. It may help new players, or those friends still on the fence about giving it a try, feel more comfortable getting started. Critical Role is also available as a podcast and can be watched live every week on Twitch.

[Dice, Camera, Action](#) is another great option. This game is run by a lead D&D designer and takes players through the gothic *Curse of Strahd* campaign.



So, You Want to be a DM

Great! We can help you out with that too!

Dungeons & Dragons has tons of pre-written scenarios that will provide you with all the tools you need to run a great adventure for your friends. These campaigns are composed by professional writers and game designers, and range from high seas adventures to heavy metal dungeon crawls. Want to run a high fantasy heist? There's a campaign for that. Want to punch a dinosaur? There's a campaign for that too.

You're also welcome to just, you know, *make shit up*. D&D is a game about imagination, and if you don't see what you're looking for in a pre-written adventure, you can always modify the material to your liking—or make up completely original worlds, monsters, and adventures of your own. Want more Afrofuturism in your fantasy? Sweet, put it in there. Want to create a gritty political thriller with elves? You can do that too. Want to send your players on a quest to rescue Lord Guy Fieri from the gangsters of Flavor Town? I have a friend who is playing in one such campaign right now, and it sounds fuckin' *wild*.

Whatever makes your game easy to manage and fun to play, it's all okay!

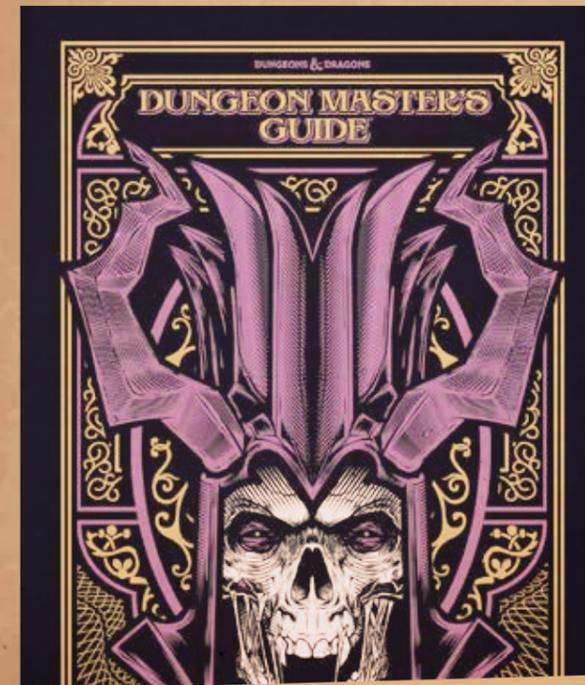
DM Tips

Here are some additional resources specifically to help new DMs get started.

THE CORE RULEBOOKS

There are three core rulebooks to the game, but you can start off by using the free basic rules on [D&D Beyond](#), then use google to find obscure rules as needed. Still, you may want to buy the three rulebooks once you're invested in the game.

These include the [Player's Handbook](#) for player rules, the [Dungeon Master's Guide](#) for the game rules, and the [Monster Manual](#) for listing all the monster stats. You definitely don't need to read all three books from cover to cover; just skim at the start, then pick the relevant pages as you need them.



THE DM SCREEN

A tool for the DM to hide dice rolls and use as a cheat sheet for looking up key rules or information during the game. You can get a physical one, or use google to find a free online version, like on [D&D Compendium](#).

BOX SETS AND MORE

Now if, like me, you are feeling a little overwhelmed when starting out, I recommend getting the [D&D Starter Set](#). It contains a pre-made adventure, a set of dice, a DM screen, character sheets, a world map, and basic rules to start with. The pre-made adventure [The Lost Mines of Phandelver](#) can last for around 15 games or more, giving the DM everything they need to reference in the booklets for rules, story, maps, character and enemy information, and progression guidance. Using this, I can say it helped me and my players learn the basics, giving us a fun adventure to grow and progress from. The [Essentials Kit](#) includes similar material but has the adventure [The Dragon of Ice Spire Peak](#), which can be more difficult to run as a starting DM because of the sandbox approach to the quests.

You can also supplement these adventures with D&D Beyond's free [Encounter of the Week](#) and other free official material [here](#).

Now gather your party and venture forth!



Adventure Awaits

We hope that these resources can set you on the path to adventure, and help you build friendships and tell fantastic stories of your own. Good luck, and have fun storming the castle!



*Rachel is the Entertainment editor of **CONNECT** Magazine. When she isn't pretending to be an anxious goblin wizard in D&D, she's terrorizing her friends with eldritch abominations in Call of Cthulhu. She also likes the Italian Renaissance, Japanese festivals, morbid folk ballads, and good books. She will steal your cat.*

Reese is a second-year British ALT in Okayama Prefecture, formerly a game designer in Scotland, UK. He can be found on the Facebook group "Expats - Okayama Gaming Hub," updating the group with gaming news and sales, or playing D&D online with the members. Otherwise he is tinkering with gaming projects in UE4 or practicing 3D art in Blender—oh, and I guess a bit of Japanese too.





DECEMBER REVIEWS & RECOMMEN DATIONS

Recommended Video Game: *Hades*

Nathan Post (Gunma)

Studio: Supergiant Games
Platform: Nintendo Switch, PC

With 2020 finally winding down (oh, thank God), Game of the Year discussions are starting up, often about the same few big titles: *Final Fantasy VII Remake*, *The Last of Us II*, *Ghost of Tsushima*, etc. But one smaller title recently came out of the woodwork to shake up those discussions. That title is *Hades*.

Hades has been available in some form in early access since late 2018, but the game finally exited early access and released its final version on Switch and PC this September, and man, was it worth the wait.

Hades is a roguelike game in the vein of the *Binding of Isaac* or *Dead Cells*, made by Supergiant Games of *Bastion*, *Transistor*, and *Pyre* fame. *Hades* has the same isometric, animated style as their earlier titles, with a high-action combat system most similar to *Bastion*.



You take on the role of Prince Zagreus, son of Hades, as he seeks to escape the underworld in search of his long-lost mother on the surface. Hades isn't exactly the most understanding of fathers though, and it's his job to keep people in the underworld, son or no. Each escape attempt acts as a self-contained "run." When you die, that's it. You go back to Hades' palace and get ready to try again.

Each escape attempt sees various Greek gods assisting you with various powers, or "Boons," that give you all kinds of different active and passive abilities. One run, you'll be slashing your way through the underworld with a sword that shoots Zeus' lightning bolts that chain between targets and cause them to explode. Then the next run, you'll be wielding a bow that fires swathes of homing arrows that leave enemies drunk and hungover with the power of Dionysus' wine.

As you progress further in a run, you'll amass more and more boons, weapon upgrades, powerups, and more, mixing and matching

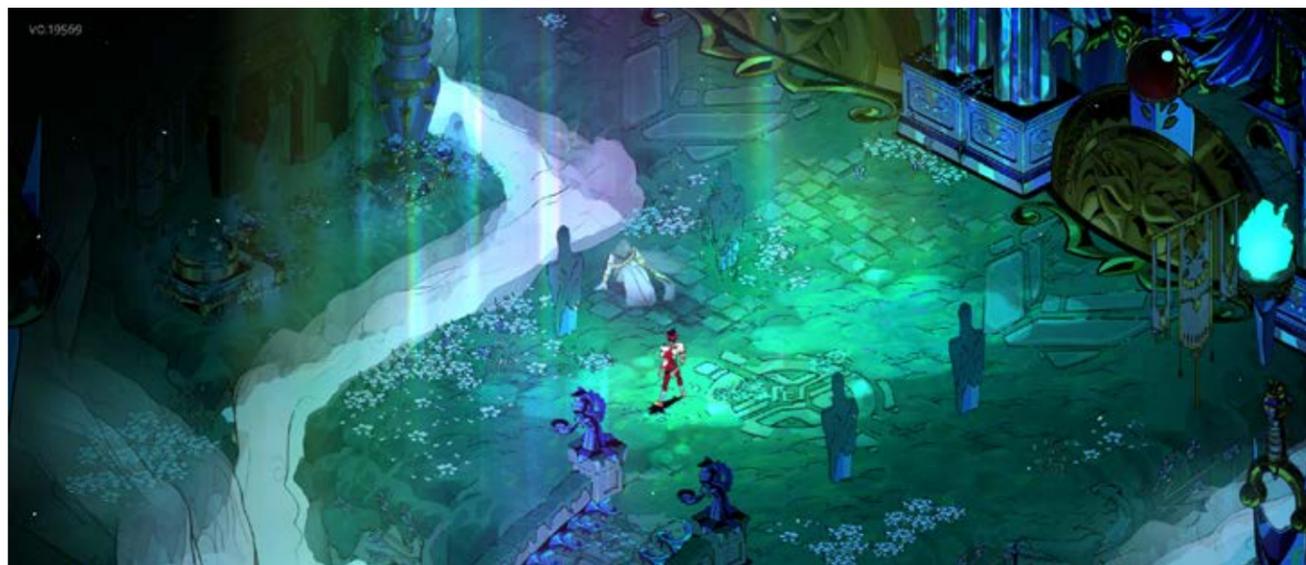
powers of the gods in a way that makes every escape attempt feel truly unique.

There is so much more to praise about this game, from the driving bass riffs of its music, to the absolutely top-notch voice acting of its characters, to the story itself and the way it slowly unfolds across and between your runs, whether you win or lose.

But above all else, *Hades* is just pure, unbridled fun. You'll be telling yourself, "just one more run" over and over again, battling monsters and seeking the perfect combination of godly powers until the sun comes up and you realize you have work in three hours.

Don't go thinking you've seen all of 2020's best titles without first adding this one to your library.

Nathan Post is a former JET who taught in Gunma from 2014 to 2019. These days he's freelancing as a Japanese to English game translator while teaching English on the side.



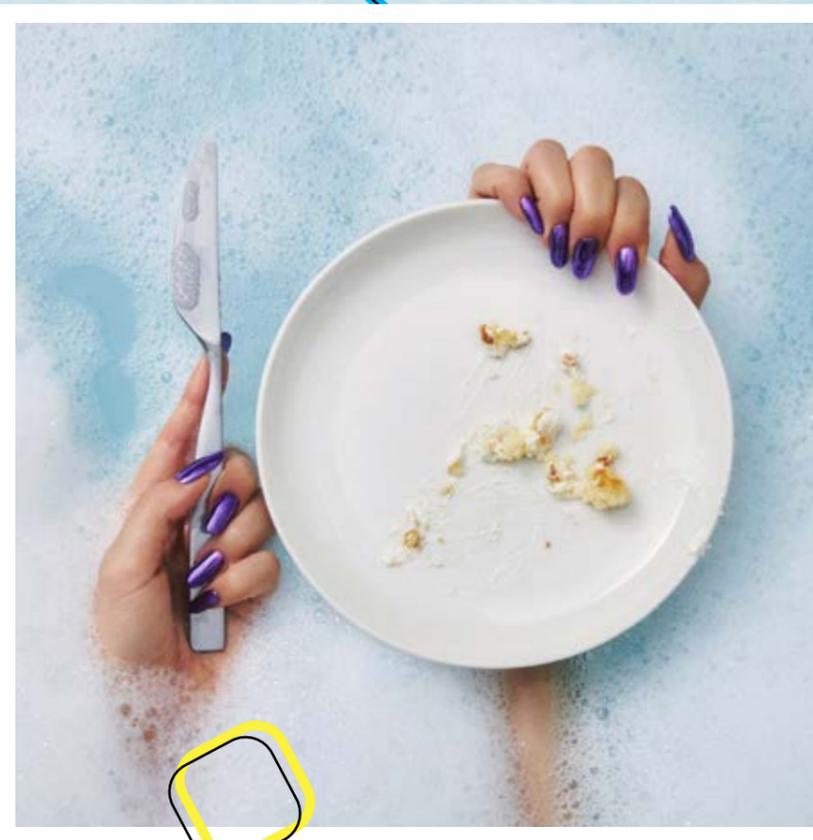
Recommended Album: 10 by tricot

Paige Adrian (Gunma)

10, released on October 21, marks the fifth studio album and tenth anniversary for the Kyōto-based math-rock band, tricot. Their previous album, *真っ黒*, came out early this year and was already a strong release for 2020. A standby for Japanese rock fans, tricot is known for their angular riffs and Nakajima Ikumi's lead vocals that can be both powerful and soft in the same measure.

While this sound remains a staple for the band, they switch things up a little on *10*. Describing the album as “colorful” and a “challenge,” tricot maintains their consistent rock vibe while experimenting with new instrumentals and genres. Album opener “おまえ” launches into a noticeably lighter but energetic pop-punk sound, giving me throwback feels to 2000s Paramore. The fast-paced “WARP” has Nakajima try her hand at rapping, while distinctive handclaps and bongos create unique percussion on “箱.” *10* hosts a range of softer moments as well; beautiful backing vocals appear on a few tracks, and “Laststep” and “體” are slower, dramatic conclusions to the album.

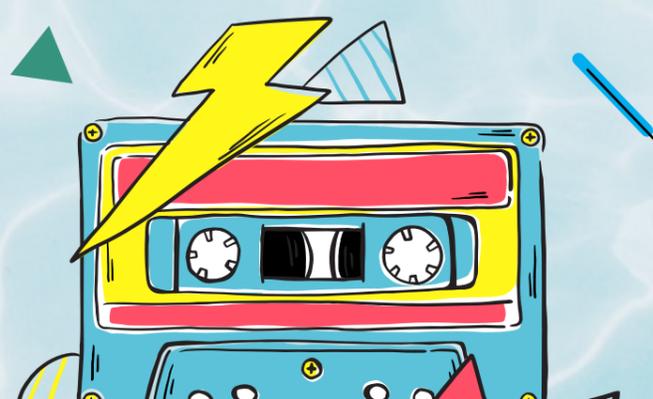
Nakajima's expression can shift a song's atmosphere from dreamy to triumphant to ominous and back again. *10*'s lyrics deal with familiar themes of nostalgia and longing, but with intriguing mentions of light-speed travel, witches' presents, ghost ships, and . . . talking to a garbage bin.



Try out “サマーナイトタウン” for tricot's best pop groove. Or, if you'd like to see a horror-homage music video with that aforementioned pop-punk sound, “悪戯” is an excellent watch.

If you're interested in pop-rock with a layer of instrumental complexity, *10* comes highly recommended.

Paige Adrian spent two years on JET in Gunma before coming back to Canada this year. She dabbles in writing, photography, and illustration when she's not drinking milk tea or doing pandemic karaoke at home. You can see more of her work [here](#).



Recommended Podcast: The Magnus Archives

Rachel Fagundes (Okayama)

The Magnus Archives is a horror anthology podcast written and narrated by Jonathan Sims. The podcast presents itself as a series of “statements” given to The Magnus Institute, renowned paranormal research facility, London, by those who have experienced something strange or supernatural. These “statements,” collected in the Institute's archives over the years, are read aloud by our narrator, the new Head Archivist (recently appointed following the sudden, violent death of his predecessor). This creates a clever frame story around the roughly 20-30 min weird tales: of a spelunking adventure gone horribly wrong; a mysterious piper heard from the trenches of WWI; coffins that moan and sing in the rain; unsettling deliveries made by still-more-unsettling delivery men; doors that shouldn't be there; and, of course, the damned *books*.

The whole series is a fun, spooky, delight and—without giving too much away—evolves quite a bit as it goes along. While the statements at first appear to be unconnected, the more the Head Archivist and

his research assistants delve into their mysteries, the more they begin to overlap, revealing unsettling patterns to the horrors lurking in the dark. *The Magnus Archives* creates a rich mythology of cosmic horror as the “frame story” develops into a truly epic overarching plot spanning five excellent seasons.

In addition to great writing, memorable characters, and good production quality, *The Magnus Archives* is also noteworthy for having excellent queer representation. I also particularly appreciate that the series avoids falling back on using lazy tropes or exploiting trauma for shock value. Sexual assault, for example, is not at all present in the series, which I find a nice change of pace from much of the horror genre.

The Magnus Archives is currently halfway through its final season, hurtling towards the conclusion of its long and twisted journey, and, if it sticks the landing, it's sure to become a modern horror classic. Now is the perfect time to start the series and enjoy a good binge before the spoilers come out.

It can be found for free [here](#) and wherever else podcasts are a thing.

*Rachel Fagundes is the Entertainment Editor of **CONNECT**. She likes cats, naps, cat naps, Japanese festivals, and good books.*



DECEMBER RELEASES

Rachel Fagundes (Okayama)

MOVIES

December 1

- The Promised Neverland (2020)

December 4

- The Witches (2020)
- Portrait of a Lady on Fire (2019)
- Better Watch Out (2016)
- Love Sarah (2020)
- 100 Things (2018)
- Silent Tokyo (2020)
- Town Without Sea (2020)

December 5

- Fate/Grand Order the Sacred Round Table Realm: Camelot (2020)

December 11

- The High Note (2020)
- The Kindness of Strangers (2019)
- Dogs Don't Wear Pants (2019)
- Someone, Somewhere (2019)
- Away (2019)
- Helmut Newton: The Bad and the Beautiful (2020)
- Happy Old Year (2019)
- New Interpretation Records of the Three Kingdoms (2020)

- Netflix vs. the World (2019)
- Tengaramon (2020)
- Yes ka No ka Hanbun ka (2020)

December 17

- Ribbit (2014)

December 18

- Wonder Woman 1984 (2020)
- Bill & Ted Face the Music (2020)
- Book Club (2018)
- Those Who Remained (2019)
- The Closet (2020)
- Golden Voices (2019)
- Kamen Rider Zero-One: Real×Time (2020)
- Kamen Rider Saber: The Phoenix Swordsman and the Book of Ruin (2020)

December 25

- Song to Song (2017)
- Josee, the Tiger and the Fish (2020)
- Pokémon the Movie: Secrets of the Jungle (2020)
- Funan (2018)
- Gogo (2020)
- Awake (2020)
- Lip x Lip (2020)

GAMES

December 1

- Empire of Sin (PC, PS4, Xbox One, Switch)
- Project Wingman (PC)
- Worms Rumble (PC, PS4, PS5)
- Chronos: Before the Ashes (PC, PS4, Xbox One, Switch, Stadia)
- Twin Mirror (PC, PS4, Xbox One)

December 3

- El Hijo – A Wild West Tale (PC, Stadia)
- Per Aspera (PC)
- Phogs (PC, Xbox One, PS4, Switch, Stadia)
- Morbid: The Seven Acolytes (PC, PS4, Xbox One, Switch)
- Haven (PC, PS5, Xbox One, Xbox Series X/S)
- Immortals Fenyx Rising (PC, PS4, PS5, Xbox One, Xbox Series X/S, Switch, Stadia)

December 4

- Dragon Quest 11 S: Echoes of an Elusive Age – Definitive Edition (PC, PS4, Xbox One)

December 8

- Call of the Sea (PC, Xbox One, Xbox Series X)
- Puyo Puyo Tetris 2 (PS4, Xbox One, Xbox Series X/S, Switch)
- Temtem – Early Access (PS5)

December 9

- Unto the End (PC, PS4, Xbox One, Switch, Stadia)

December 10

- Cyberpunk 2077 (PC, PS4, PS5, Xbox One, Xbox Series X/S, Stadia)

December 11

- Medal of Honor: Above and Beyond (Oculus)

December 15

- Collection of Saga Final Fantasy Legend (Switch)

December 17

- Airborne Kingdom (PC)

December 22

- Override 2: Super Mech League (PC, PS4, PS5, Xbox One, Xbox Series X, Switch)

Sources:

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

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



AN OPEN TAISHŌ SECRET: THE POPULARITY OF “KIMETSU NO YAIBA”

Janine de Villa (Wakayama)

I can't speak for other Assistant Language Teachers, but one of my favorite seasons to go all out in a lesson is Halloween. Every year, I try to figure out what's popular among my students and base my Halloween costume on that. This year was a no-brainer. I decided to go as Kochō Shinobu, a character from the hit show *Kimetsu no Yaiba* (*Demon Slayer*) and, needless to say, the kids (and even the adults!) went crazy for it.

In this article, armed with my humble observations, knowledge of the first season, and my love for all things *shōnen*, I want to tackle what makes *Kimetsu no Yaiba* so special.

But first, let me clear some things up: Shōnen (少年) is a Japanese word used to describe young boys under 15 years of age. As a manga term, it encompasses a whole genre of anime and manga targeted towards that demo-graphic. The majority of works in this genre are action-based adventures, typically undertaken by a male protagonist and his cohort, in a fictional setting. Though some titles, especially sports-centric ones, ground themselves more on reality, a common feature in every shōnen work is climactic battle sequences.

Kimetsu no Yaiba fits this description well. Serialized in the popular *Shōnen Jump*, a weekly manga anthology magazine, *Kimetsu no Yaiba* tells the story of Kamado Tanjirō, the eldest son of a coal-mining family. Tanjirō's world is teeming with demons, who eventually attack his family while he is away for work. Tanjirō goes home to find his little sister, Nezuko, the only one with her life spared, but at the cost of having been turned into a demon. From here, Tanjirō joins the Demon Slayer Corps in the hopes of finding a way to bring his sister back to normal.

So, how did *Kimetsu no Yaiba* become so popular?

THE UNIQUE SIBLING DYNAMIC

One of the reasons I gravitated towards the shōnen genre at such a young age was how straight-to-the-point its premise is. *Dragonball* is about a boy set out to collect magical wish-granting dragon balls, *One Piece* is about a boy in a journey to discover the ultimate treasure called One Piece; and *Kimetsu no Yaiba* is about a young boy who slays demons. What makes *Kimetsu no Yaiba* stand out among the rest, however, is the relationship between Tanjirō, and his little sister, Nezuko.

The classic shōnen protagonist is viewed as the courageous underdog by society. He is usually accompanied by a group of equally formidable friends that he would take a bullet for. However, whenever the show calls for a major battle scene, the main character faces the enemy alone. Tanjirō, however, is always



Janine de Villa dressed up as Shinobu



accompanied by Nezuko, hidden in the box he carries on his back. Only when the going gets tough for Tanjirō does she spring out, using her demon powers to aid her brother against other demons. She *literally* has his back.

Tanjirō and Nezuko, Ace and Luffy, Sasuke and Itachi, Edward and Alphonse: siblings in mainstream shōnen titles are quite abundant. However, the emphasis tends to be on the bond between brothers. Tanjirō and Nezuko's relationship is akin to that of Romeo and Juliet, in that they are two people from two very different worlds who care about each other deeply. However, instead of star-crossed lovers, they are brother and sister. The risk of them being together is further explained in the show, but their dynamic just pulls on your heartstrings and you can't help but cheer them on from the sidelines. Whereas most protagonists' call to adventure revolves around a more self-centred goal, Tanjirō's is simply to protect his sister, his only remaining family, at all costs.

AN OPEN LOVE LETTER TO THE JAPANESE INAKA

Most foreigners' basic knowledge of Japan can be attributed to three major eras: Edo, Meiji and Shōwa. A lot of shōnen manga draw inspiration from Edo period Japan (1603-1868). Economic growth paired with strict isolationist foreign policies made for a period of relative peace and a vibrant cultural scene. Manga artists look to the Edo period when they want their work to showcase that signature "age of samurai" flair (e.g. *Gintama*, *Samurai Champloo*). The Meiji era (1868-1912) brought with it a lot of political and social change in Japan, which in turn also provided plenty of material for manga artists to work with (e.g. *Rurouni Kenshin*). Finally, the Shōwa era (1926-1989) gave birth to pop idol culture and, although there are not many anime set in this era, one cannot deny the insane popularity of more recent anime focusing on idol groups (e.g. *Love Live!*, *Uta no Prince-Sama*, etc.).

Which brings us to *Kimetsu no Yaiba*, which is set in Taishō era Japan. The Taishō era is a lesser-known period in Japanese history, sandwiched between the Meiji and Shōwa era, and spanning only 12 years! Despite this, I find the juxtaposition of old feudal villages and a slowly Westernizing urban backdrop to be a smart means of story progression. The story starts off in the remote mountains, heading down to small agricultural towns and finally to the city capital with a myriad

of residents, both in traditional kimono and Western suits, alighting steam-powered passenger trains. The settings not only provide an endless roster of fun backdrops to gawk at, but also give Tanjirō and the gang a chance to be more relatable to those living outside Japan's major cities.

As an ALT in the countryside, I can see glimpses of the Kumano Kodo, an ancient pilgrimage network in my placement prefecture, in the mountains where Tanjirō lives and eventually does his training. Though *Kimetsu no Yaiba* creator, Gotōge Koyoharu, didn't specify where the story is set, many believe that he drew inspiration from his home prefecture of Fukuoka. Coincidentally, there is a place called Kamado Shrine in rural Fukuoka that was established to protect the Dazaifu government from a "demon gate." If I could find familiarity in the show, I could only imagine how my students, who have lived in the inaka (countryside) for their whole lives, feel. The scenes where Tanjirō and friends find themselves in Tōkyō, dazzled by the bright lights of the big city must especially strike a chord.

MARKETABLE CHARACTERS

Each character in *Kimetsu no Yaiba* has a distinct look, from the patterns on their haori (jackets worn over kimono) to the color palettes of their hair, which makes for a cornucopia of merchandising options. Promotion for anything *Kimetsu no Yaiba* parallels even that of any *One Piece* promotion I've seen. Unlike *One Piece* though, *Kimetsu no Yaiba* is a fairly short series, with only 26 anime episodes and one movie so far. However, that doesn't stop them from making sure that *Kimetsu no Yaiba* is seen literally



I find the juxtaposition of old feudal villages and a slowly Westernizing urban backdrop to be a smart means of story progression.





everywhere you go. I bet you've seen at least one kid repping their favourite character's haori pattern with a homemade *Kimetsu no Yaiba* face mask.

PRODUCTION QUALITY OVER QUANTITY

It's a well-known fact that successful shōnen titles try to churn out as much weekly content as possible. Take, for example, *One Piece*. With over 900 episodes and counting over the span of two decades, it is not feasible for animators to prioritize clean animation with a weekly deadline. As such, dedicated fans don't necessarily watch the show expecting a visual masterpiece. However, there was a shift in the early 2010s from the typical long-running series format of anime to more seasonal works which, in turn, gave animators more leeway to work on aesthetics.

A series with a solid story and charismatic characters is one thing, but add crisp, fluid animation into the mix, and you've got yourself a hit. I have to give major props to Ufotable, the studio that produces *Kimetsu no Yaiba*, for bringing this show to life so beautifully. The last time I was this impressed with an anime adaption was back in 2013 with *Shingeki no Kyojin* (*Attack on Titan*). Coincidentally, similar to *Shingeki no Kyojin*, the art in the anime adaptation of *Kimetsu no Yaiba* had a wider appeal compared to the manga.

As with any shōnen battle series, the climactic fights make or break the continued interest of fans. Each demon was written with a backstory, to garner sympathy and a unique power, keeping each encounter fresh, but it wouldn't be as effective if it weren't for how much care was put into making it look aesthetically pleasing as well.



KIMETSU IN THE CURRENT TIMES

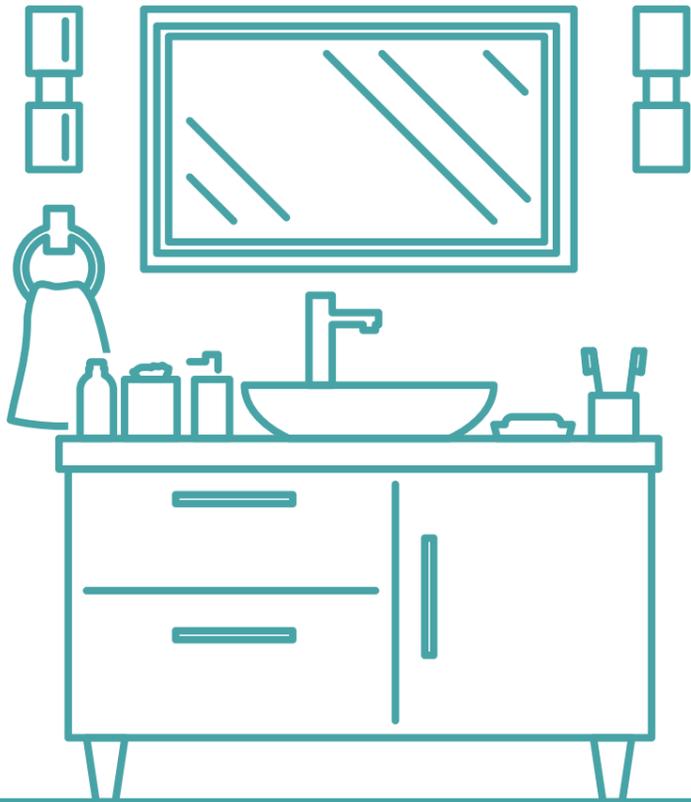
If I told my 9-year-old self how readily available manga and anime would be online in 2020, she wouldn't have believed me. Streaming sites like Netflix and Amazon Prime make for easy watching (and rewatching) of *Kimetsu no Yaiba*. The fact that they are also legal methods is a big deal in Japan, with its strict copyright laws. Despite these easy online access methods, physical manga sales of *Kimetsu no Yaiba* are also on fire, breaking *One Piece*'s 2011 record for most copies sold within a year.

As someone who only just watched the anime last summer, I admit I was late to the party. With *Kimetsu no Yaiba*'s weekly manga serialization ending last May, I wasn't sure if the Kimetsu hype would last until Halloween, thus rendering my costume irrelevant. However, following the release of the movie sequel, *Demon Slayer: Infinity Train*, on October 16, which promptly smashed the box office record previously held by none other than Studio Ghibli's 2001 mega-hit *Spirited Away*, the series' popularity has reached an all-time high.

Janine is the very first Philippine JET in Wakayama and no one will ever hear the end of it. She is an ordinary person with an extraordinary talent for binging shows, making to-do lists and doing her best.

Photos by Janine de Villa.
Media by Ufotable and Koyoharu Gotōge.
Graphics from Freepik

If I told my 9-year-old self how readily available manga and anime would be online in 2020, she wouldn't have believed me.



THE TOKYO TOILET PROJECT

A CYCLING TOUR WHERE BATHROOM BREAKS ARE THE MAIN ATTRACTION

BEN EVERITT (TŌKYŌ)

One out of four people in Japan face a disability of some kind, and, as the country ages, this proportion will continue to rise. On top of this, as the country ambitiously aims to welcome several million more tourists for the Olympics next year, the capital city will have to accommodate for the needs of a diverse range of people. These needs, of course, extend even to something as basic as going to the toilet.

In recent months, “[THE TOKYO TOILET](#)” project, initiated by the Shibuya Ward, has been aiming to address this need for more public restrooms throughout the city with revolutionary toilet designs. As the initiative states, “Toilets are the symbol of Japan’s world-renowned hospitality culture” (1), in which each toilet designed by a renowned Japanese architect presents solutions to some of the social stigmas often associated with a public restroom. Accompanied by some cycle-savvy JETs, we went to explore these new toilets one by one through the streets of Tōkyō.

NISHIHARA ITCHŌME PARK

On one of the last remaining warm, sunny days of September, we chose to embark upon our bicycle toilet tour from Nishihara Itchōme Park. The toilets, designed by Takenosuke Sakakura, were a series of simple cubicles with opaque glass walls that are illuminated like lanterns for the park users during the night. As the interior walls are glazed with illustrations of forest trees finished on the opaque glass, the space is lit with natural sunlight that makes the facilities feel less claustrophobic from the inside.

This toilet introduced the common theme that we saw amongst all the facilities: the “だれでもトイレ (everyone’s toilet).” As the name suggests, these gender-neutral, multipurpose toilets have additional features that benefit a diverse range of individual needs, which would otherwise be absent within a conventional gendered layout.



Such features include an ostomate (a discharge sink for ostomy patients), wheelchair-accessible bars, a bidet for Muslim patrons, baby chairs and care stations, a children’s toilet and changing stations, a care bed, and facilities for expecting mothers. Such a toilet design carries the fundamental concept of accessible design principles, whereby catering to the needs of a minority group of people improves the overall user experience for the wider population (the wheelchair-accessible ramp allowing access to prams and trollies is a common example).

Therefore, the multi-purpose toilet not only provides a space for the gender diverse, but also allows other users to comfortably use the space in which a gendered bathroom layout would usually cause impediments. Common examples of groups who may benefit from this design include nurses caring for a patient, or a parent caring for a child of a different gender. Such people can avoid potentially uncomfortable interactions when using ordinary, binary gendered bathrooms.

Another piece of positive feedback received was how demarcating the space as ‘multipurpose’ indicated the pragmatic necessity of a gender-neutral toilet without specifically focusing on the issues of gender identity.



**THE TRANSPARENT TOILETS:
HARU NO OGAWA COMMUNITY PARK, YOYOGI FUKAMACHI MINI PARK**

Building on the topic of accessibility, the transparent toilets at Haru no Ogawa Community Park and Yoyogi Fukamachi Mini Park challenge the issues of privacy within a public toilet. Designed by Shigeru Ban, the design motivation was to remove the uncomfortable associations commonly associated with public restrooms. Three colourful glass cubicles allow people to recognise the availability and conditions of the toilet instantly from the outside. When the toilet is in use, a mechanism ensures the glass box turns opaque once the door has been locked.

The Transparent Toilets had a nice design touch, where the colour scheme of the glass cubicles matched the surrounding use of the park. One park designated for sports used a mix of greens, teals, and yellow to match the field, while the toilet in the children's playground had bright reds and purples to match the playground equipment. The interior was finished with mirrors and reflective steel that created an infinity toilet effect, which further added to the surreal experience while making the space feel larger than reality.

UNLOCKED



LOCKED

Haru No Ogawa Community Park

Yoyogi Fukamachi Mini Park



JINGŪ DŌRI KŌEN

After cycling towards Miyashita Kōen, we encountered the *asagao* (Japanese morning glory) shaped toilet, designed by Tadao Ando. Based on the concept of the *engawa* (covered exterior wooden deck), the roof overhangs around the entire perimeter of the circular structure, creating a brief resting spot from the elements for people waiting in line. This prevents any side of the toilet from looking undesirable from the outside. The interior is dark. The walls are finished with an opaque purple glass between a series of slits within the walls, and as you walk inside, the gradual transition from light to dark makes the simple exercise of entering and exiting a public toilet an aesthetic experience.



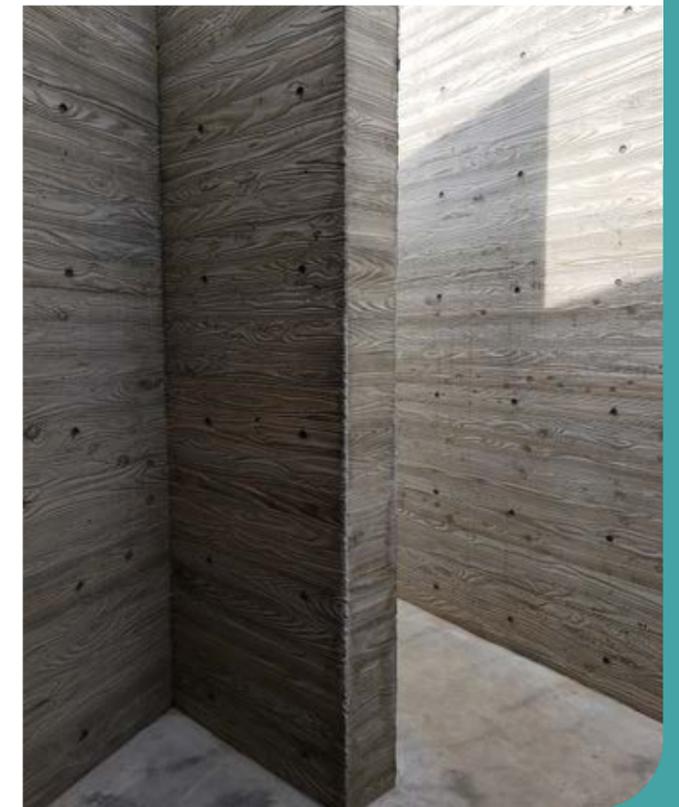
HIGASHI SANCHŌME

Cutting through the scramble square, we arrived at our final few toilets around Ebisu. The Higashi Sanchōme toilet was a vermillion steel tetrahedron designed to adapt to its tight and challenging site. Despite its very small area, it still managed to fulfil all necessary toilet functions, which was a testament to just how small and simple toilets can be, while still being accommodating. As a design influenced almost entirely by the surrounding street, the toilet manages to advertise itself with its abstract shape, while fitting flawlessly in with its surroundings.



EBISU EAST PARK

The toilet in the Ebisu East Park, or the Octopus Park, designed by Fumihiko Maki, is treated as a pleasant resting space that is integrated into the park, rather than a designated 'building.' The white toilets covered by a single steel plate roof are oriented around a small zen garden with rocks and trees in the middle. With natural light beaming from the hole in the center of the roof, this allows the space to still be used, even if its users aren't planning to use the restroom. In addition, a steel bench folds out from the side to allow its perimeter to still be pleasantly accessible. The fact that children are playing with toys right next to a toilet is a testament to how it's now become a park feature.



EBISU PARK

Although the above toilets are elegant and novel, a key critique to make among all the toilet designs is how they have underestimated the harshness of the elements and the city. It has been less than a month since construction was completed, and the white walls and glass finishes are beginning to show bruises and cracks. Although these toilets are constantly maintained by dedicated staff, it could very much be a matter of time before these toilets experience enough permanent damage to end up in the same undesirable state of the public toilet that they were trying to avoid initially.

It is for this reason that the final toilet that we observed was seen as the most successful public toilet design, for addressing the functional requirements of durability within its design concept. Entertainingly named 'Wonderwall,' the main influence came from the concept of a 川屋 (or 側屋), read as *kawaya*, which is a small wooden hut that stood over the river during the neolithic Jōmon era. The design intends to strip the toilet back to its most primitive state: a series of thick concrete timber formwork walls that separate the inside from the outside. The ambiguity of its overall shape changes the impression from the conventional connotations of a 'toilet' to a piece of abstract public art or playground to be interacted with. Not only is the material of the wall stimulating to the senses, it also provides a permanence that ensures its reliability.

Although all of these toilets addressed different problems associated with public bathroom design in very unique and novel ways, a common issue kept recurring, which was surprisingly unexplored as a design theme within any of the toilets. The issue was how each space was conventionally gendered with the retrospectively outdated signs of a 'man wearing pants,' 'woman wearing a dress,' and a torso with a plus sign indicating the gender-neutral multifunctional toilet. Creating these social separations actually affected the sense of freedom of being able to use any toilet that makes you feel comfortable, to the point where it hindered the accessibility of the spaces.

When visiting the transparent toilets, for example, one of the three singular cubicles designated as the male bathroom was completely out of order. We asked ourselves whether a situation like this requires an

intrusive 'reassigning' of genders on the spot, or does it mean the multifunctional toilet must now sustain twice its capacity? Furthermore, the fact that you can see a urinal, powder room, or a baby changing station through the transparent glass was a much clearer indicator of what the toilet can provide than any arbitrary symbol assigned to that particular space. For a father needing to help with his child's makeup, or a mother needing to help her child urinate standing, the process of gendering and othering these spaces creates the same problems of having to uncomfortably breach these spaces which are socially segregated. The most pragmatic solution, therefore, seemed to be labelling spaces based on their function, with pictograms of toilet facilities rather than over-gendering people.

As the urbanist Jane Jacobs said, "Cities have the capability of providing something for everybody, only because, and only when, they are created by everybody" (2). Despite the above-mentioned doubts, these designs do allow a diverse range of people to express their identity, and establish new social conventions within public places. They achieve all of this while manifesting as none other than a humble toilet. These uniquely Japanese design solutions are well worth experiencing while you're in Tōkyō, no matter what your fluid (or fibre) intake is.

Ben works as an architect in Tōkyō, but sometimes feels like he is employed as the token foreigner/English speaker to make the company look good. Outside of his job, he enjoys exploring Japan's outstanding architecture, both old and new.

Sources:
<https://bit.ly/2J1bmV4>
Jane Jacobs, 'The death and life of Great American cities' p. 238





Artist Spotlight

Carlos Sulpizio

Carlos Sulpizio (Chiba)

BACKGROUND

My name is Carlos Sulpizio. I am now a 5th year Assistant Language Teacher (ALT) located in Minamiboso, the most southern part of Chiba. I work mainly at an elementary and junior high school. Although being an English teacher is not my main goal, I absolutely love this job and my students dearly.

My life dream was to be an illustrator in Tokyo. Although elements of that still shine through, I feel that my goals have shifted a bit due to my experience on the JET Programme.

My placement is in the countryside of rural southern Chiba, filled with rice fields, mountains and beaches. This varied environment is full of a wide breadth of exciting painting challenges and gives me a chance to use a broad palette. I decided to paint my surroundings as soon as I arrived. The golden rice fields swaying like waves in the wind, the amazing rainbow palette sunsets, and the beautiful lush mountains were all there for me . . . especially when the homesickness and anxiety kicked in.

My first winter here was very hard—I was going through relationship problems, it was my first time living alone in my life, and the very cold and short winter days were depressing. It is the worst time to make a heavy decision like recontracting. However, I got through it and decided to stay another year. Painting in my house was a great help. I also sometimes made

The golden rice fields swaying like waves in the wind, the amazing rainbow palette sunsets, and the beautiful lush mountains were all there for me . . . especially when the homesickness and anxiety kicked in.

the three-hour trip to Tokyo to meet friends and had different adventures there. When spring came around, I decided to paint outside more often and take advantage of the amazing scenery around me. I also became closer with my community and students. I had a few *hanami* adventures in Yoyogi Park and painted many *sakura*. The short lifespan of peak sakura inspired me to go out and paint them in person as much as I could. From there, my method and style gradually began to blossom into what it is today. “Anytime, anywhere” is my motto. I bring my paints and sketchbook with me literally everywhere I go. The only time I part with them is when I am in an *onsen*. I even have my stuff with me in the classroom, just in case!

BRINGING ART INTO THE CLASSROOM

I am very lucky with my school board and placement, as they have been very supportive of me and my illustration work since the start. When I first came to my school, I showed the teachers and students some of my art, and I guess it established my presence as the “foreigner artist” type of character. It was great for my self-introduction as well, since showing my artwork and university thesis gallery was a

great way of talking about myself without too much talking. What I love about the world of image-making is that it transcends language. Anyone from anywhere can understand a feeling from a painting. They can even make their own interpretation of it!

The school also asked me to make the flyer artwork for our school's *undōkai* (sports festival), so I did! It was a great experience, and I now do the flyer design every year. The principal frames the originals and keeps them in the school entrance. It is interesting to see the progression over the years.

I often use the blackboard in class, drawing characters that the students like, or explaining a scene from the textbook to do a skit with the students along with myself and the Japanese Teacher of English (JTE). It's great for listening and understanding practice for all ages.

I also like to encourage my students to draw and doodle whenever they can! Some students show me their sketchbook weekly and ask for comments. I am always blown away by what they are capable of—and at such a young age! It inspires me to draw even more.

One important thing to note is that it is worth it to ask questions sometimes. Don't let the fear of "overstepping your boundaries" take complete control of your life. If you want to be more creatively active with your job, ask

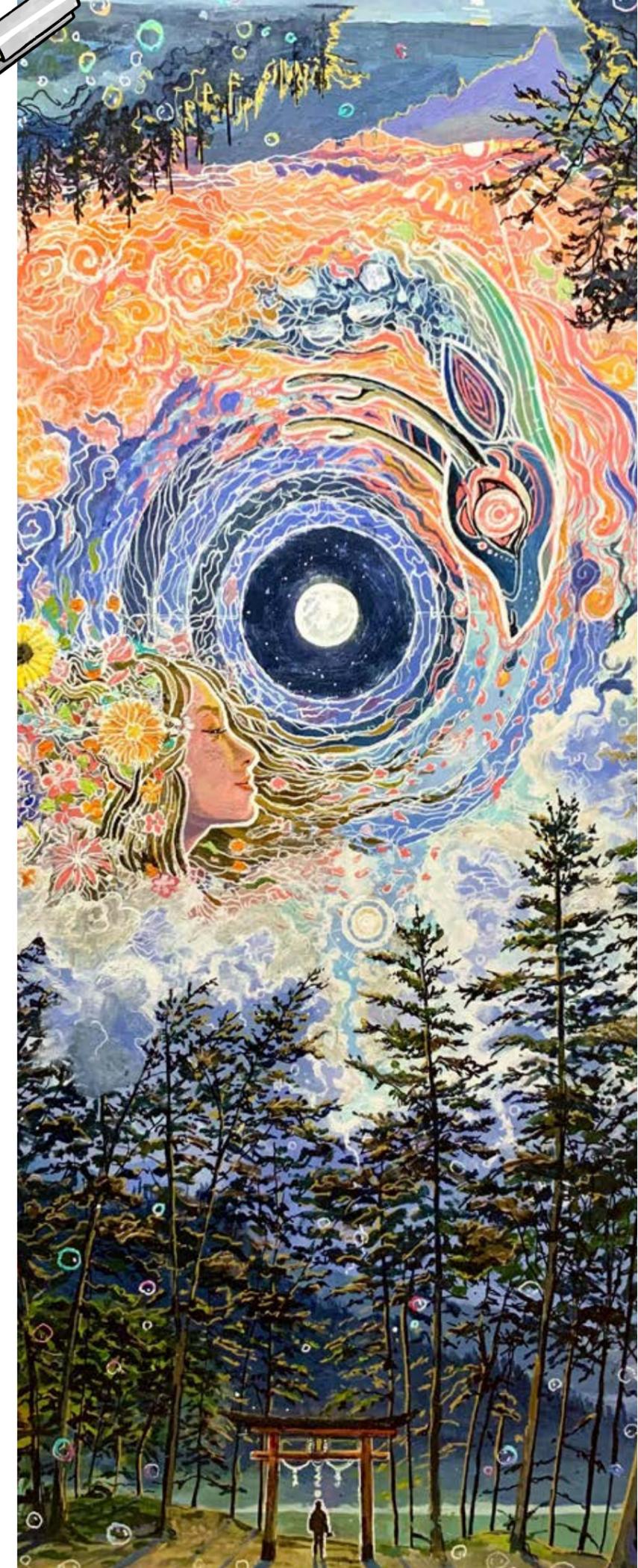
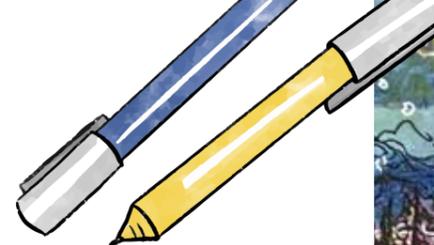
What I love about the world of image-making is that it transcends language. Anyone from anywhere can understand a feeling from a painting. They can even make their own interpretation of it!

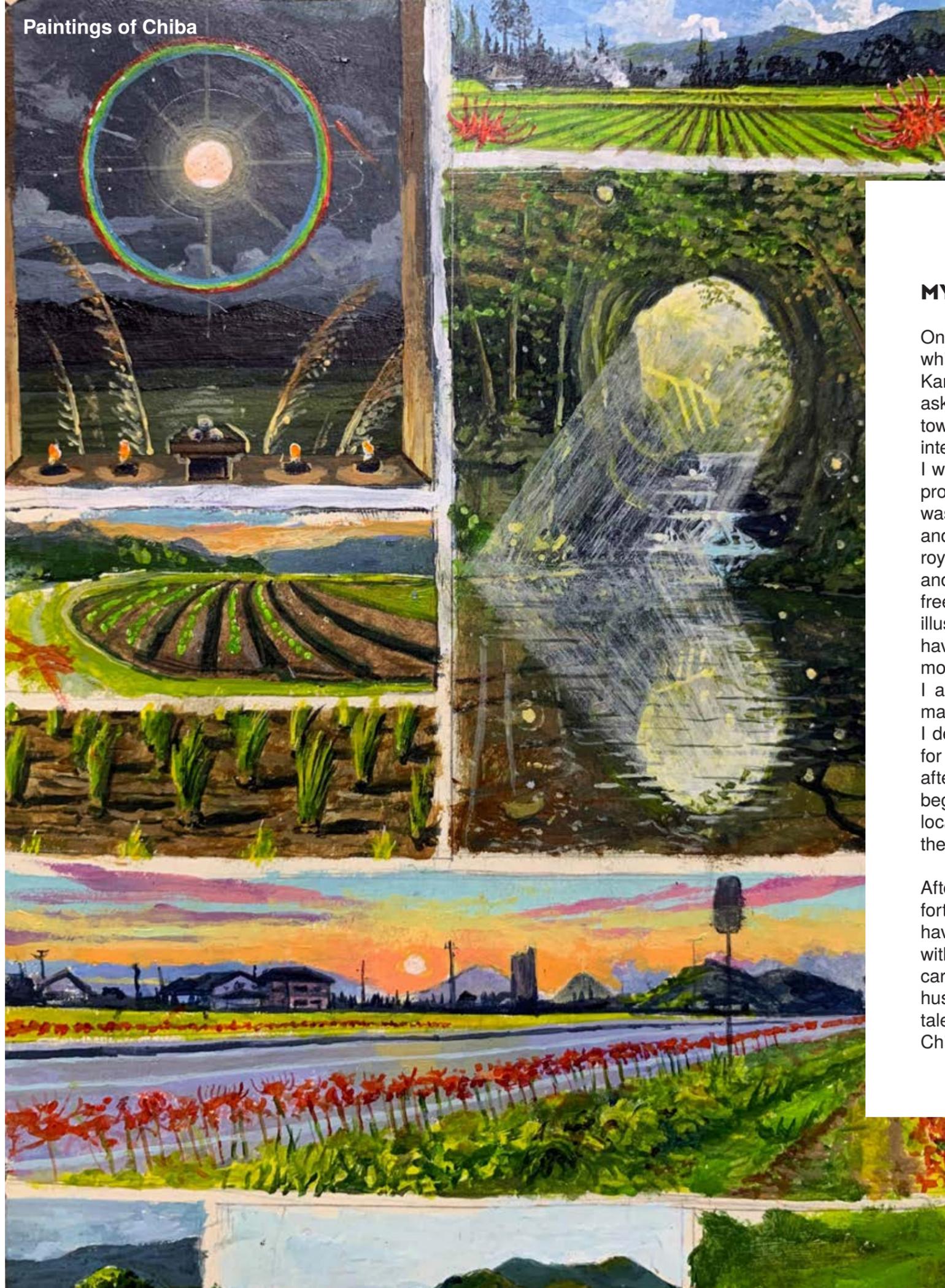
the school if it's ok to drop in on an art class! Doodle more and share it! If you're musical, maybe stick around with the brass band, or play the piano when the kids leave. Don't think of yourself as a burden; your placement is lucky to have you. I asked my supervisor if I could do illustration work outside of the school, knowing that my contract says we can't. He told me I could do so as long as no single transaction exceeded 100,000 yen. Of course every situation is different, but I think it is worth it to ask instead of fearing the unknown. I even sometimes leave the staff room and paint the beautiful nature surrounding my mountainside school (provided I have finished all other work) during periods with no classes. Deskwarming is a beautiful thing if you apply a sense of direction to it!

I even sometimes leave the staff room and paint the beautiful nature surrounding my mountainside school (provided I have finished all other work) during periods with no classes. Deskwarming is a beautiful thing if you apply a sense of direction to it!



Illustration for sports festival





MY RECENT PROJECTS

One of my favorite projects I have completed while being on JET is the Tomiyama Furusato Karuta project. My local municipal leaders asked me to create 44 illustrations based on our town of Tomiyama, its scenic locations, and its interesting history. It was a volunteer project, so I was hesitant at the beginning. There wasn't a profit margin either they made it clear that this was for the purpose of making the town happy and nothing else, so I wouldn't be able to get royalties either. 44 illustrations is a lot of work, and asking someone to do something like that for free is a bit disrespectful to myself and to other illustrators. That being said, I asked if I could have some boxes to sell so I could make some money and share my work with the community. I also realized that this kind of project would make my students and community really happy. I decided to do it with them in mind as well as for the satisfaction of having some sort of legacy after I finish JET. With that, the year-long project began, and I was taken around the town with locals to find different spots to draw for use in the karuta game.

After monthly meetings and a ton of back and forth, the cards are finally printed and done! I have a few boxes left to sell. I am quite happy with how the project turned out! My favorite card is of princess Satomi Fuse and her dog husband, Yatsufusa. They are from the local tale of *Hakkenden*, which took place in the lower Chiba area.



“Anytime, anywhere, a painting can be made,” be it on a train, the middle of Shibuya scramble, on the top of a mountain during the freezing sunrise . . . in a plane looking out the window, on the beach, on the bus, in the classroom — choose to create.



I also met a lovely music fest community made up of members both inside and outside of Tokyo, with very like-minded people who love to dance and smile past the sunrise. I particularly like the disco and house crowd. I often go to music festivals and do live painting, sometimes as staff and sometimes just for fun. I love the great energy at these events, and I like to use it in my artwork. I plan on having an exhibition with the 40+ pieces from live events that I have accumulated since 2017. These pieces have more of a fantasy or psychedelic flair to them, while combining nature and the stage in the foreground. It's really comforting to have this family of friends, both from Japan and overseas. This community has given me a sense of home and stability, and I look forward to partying again when Corona has calmed down a bit!

As I write this now, I am reflecting on my JET experience as a whole, and it seems that art was there the entire way. When I was depressed, when I was ecstatic, when I was neutral . . . art got me through it all. After breaking the chains of waiting for “motivation,” I have found a method of creating that enables me to have more output than ever before. . . . “Anytime, anywhere, a painting can be made,” be it on a train, the middle of Shibuya scramble, on the top of a mountain during the freezing sunrise . . . in a plane looking out the window, on the beach, on the bus, in the classroom choose to create. Accept that nothing is perfect, your expectations will rarely be met, and you will never be the best. Once you accept those three things, you are free and can create out of love instead of fear or concern. Love is the life force of art, and I feel a lot of love from my school and community. I am so grateful to JET and my incredible supervisor for this rollercoaster of an experience. If you went back in time and told first-year Carlos that it would be like this, he wouldn't believe you. . . . But change happens to all of us for better or for worse. I recommend focusing on the better. Use the “better” with every brush stroke.

I never want to stop.

Carlos Sulpizio is a fifth-year ALT from Canada working in Chiba Prefecture. He studied illustration at Sheridan College, Canada. He was first inspired by video game illustrations at a young age. You can see more of his art on his [Instagram](#).

Artwork from music festivals



Tomiyaama Furusato Karuta project



MEMORY UNDERTOW

Interview with Shinpei Takeda

But what always unsettled me was the dehumanization of the deaths. Nagasaki lost upwards of 80,000 people in the nuclear strike, with countless more maimed and injured. Try as I might, I realized I couldn't comprehend the scale of human loss, and I found it unsettling.

Shinpei Takeda (Ōsaka)
interviewed by Mark Christensen (Fukuoka)

In the West, Nagasaki is a name synonymous with disaster and death. For many, it brings to mind images of nuclear mushroom clouds or cold numbers of casualties. Beyond its cruel fate 75 years ago, though, the city is seemingly overlooked.

When I researched the final days of the Second World War as part of my degree, I took a special interest in studying the morality and use of nuclear weapons. I had to write arguments pertaining to and against the usage of such devices, their moral relevance to Just War theory, as well as their speculated role in what some have called “the Long Peace” (the unusual absence of a hot global conflict in the last seven decades). But there was something that always bothered me about the calculations.

You see, in discussions on the usage of the weapons, many issues have been examined. The length of the war, the planned invasion, deterrence against Russia, economics, the number of civilian casualties . . . to name a few. But what always unsettled me was the dehumanization of the deaths. Nagasaki lost upwards of 80,000 people in the nuclear strike, with countless more maimed and injured. Try as I might, I realized I couldn't comprehend the scale of human loss, and I found it unsettling. I decided that, if I ever had the opportunity, I would attempt to visit the city and see the cost for myself. Several years later, I was placed in Fukuoka with the JET Program, and I made the journey to learn the city's story.

In Nagasaki, I found that the Nuclear Museum is a very powerful place. It preserves a number of relics from the attack and helps to convey the dangers of nuclear weapons, and also discloses some of the graphic horrors that

victims experienced. It was very hard to witness the burns and irradiation that people suffered. Probably the most disturbing feature was seeing the “ghosts” of people flash-burned as images on objects.

The museum also notes how the victims of nuclear weapons include those who created them—and, in a twist, had a plaque for other locations, including my state. Washington State's Hanford Facility produced the fuel for the Nagasaki weapon and now suffers terrible contamination, earning it the nickname, “America's Chernobyl.” The consequences of nuclear technology reach far and wide.

There was a lot to digest, so afterwards, I took a trip to the nearby Peace Park. Shortly upon arrival, I noticed something unusual. Radiating away from the epicenter monument were mysterious white chalk seismic lines and QR codes. I began talking with a man about them

and discovered that he was Shinpei Takeda, the artist behind this remarkable project. He told me of the project's connection to the voices of the survivors, the project's symbolism, and the danger of nuclear technology. He agreed to an interview, and here are his thoughts on the project.



The QR code marker

M First, for those unfamiliar with the “Memory Undertow” project, what is it, and what is its purpose?

S It is a site-specific public art project at Nagasaki’s Hypocenter Park, otherwise known as “Ground Zero”—the center of the atomic bomb explosion on August 9th, 1945.

To this day, it is said that many victims are still buried underneath the ground since the entire neighborhood was completely destroyed, and soon after the war, the occupying US militaries came in and bulldozed over it with soil.

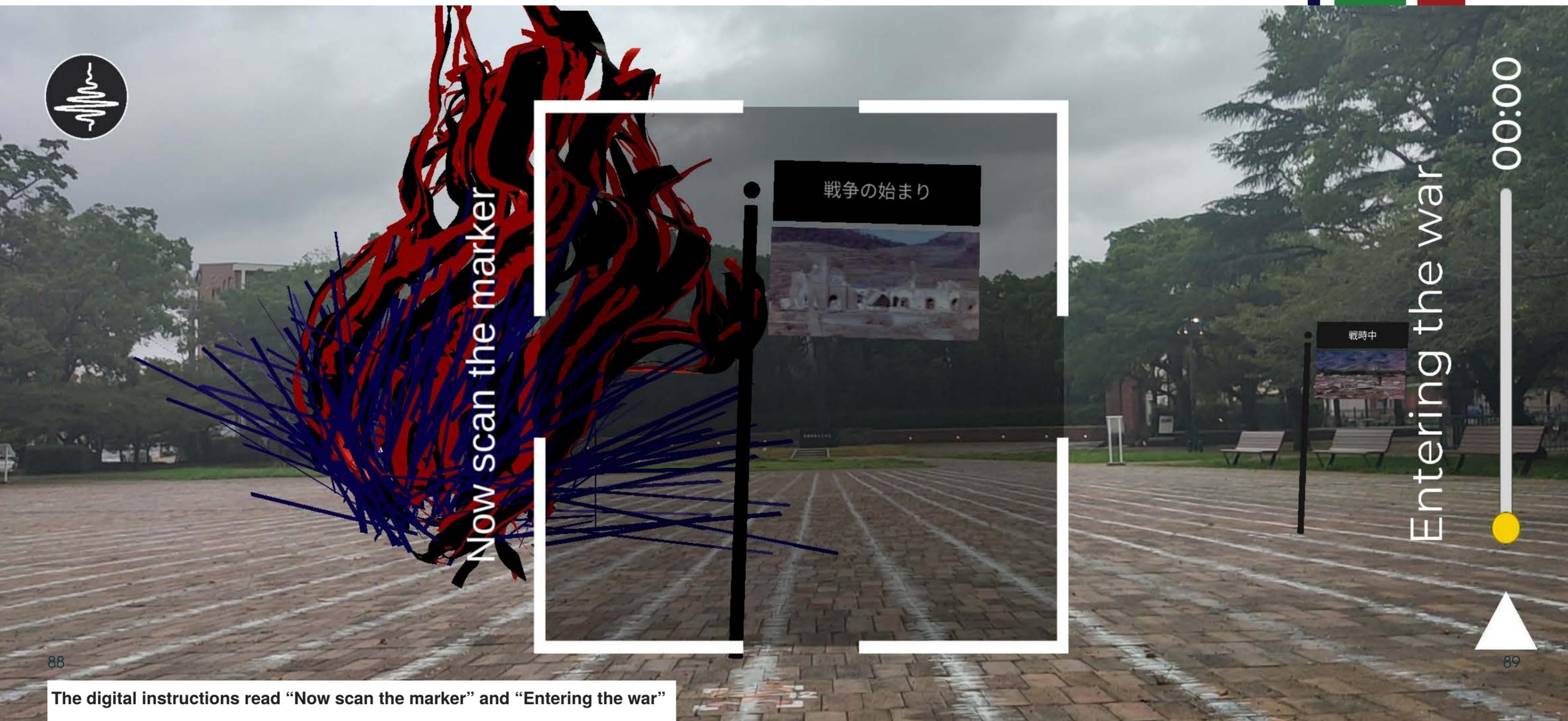
There, directly on the ground, I hand-painted the “voice vibration” from the interviews I have done with the survivors of the atomic bomb that have left Nagasaki and went abroad to countries like the USA, *Brasil*, and Bolivia.

The work lasted about one month before the 75th-anniversary commemoration of the Nagasaki atomic bombing and was later erased. I also developed an app called “Ground Zero,” where you can scan the voice patterns and listen to these voices via smartphone. The work culminated in a performance event on the evening of August 9th before it was erased

completely. My priority was that I wanted people to listen to and see the voices of the survivors as they stood on the “Ground Zero” and wanted people to imagine what their experiences were like.

M What inspired you to create this project, and how has Nagasaki influenced your art?

S I have been working on archiving the stories of the atomic bomb survivors abroad since 2005. Listening to them, I always questioned how these human stories were not quite communicated in the monuments in Nagasaki, so I wanted to find new portals into these human stories. This was the origin of the idea.



A memorial ceremony



Shinpei Takeda on the exhibition site



M Nuclear weapons left a tragic mark on Nagasaki's community. With this in mind, how have residents reacted to your project? How have visitors?

S First, many people were worried about the fact that I would paint directly on the Hypocenter Park, because it is often considered sacred as a place of contemplation, and also because many people are still buried there.

However, I believe by my being there every day painting it with my hand, it showed my sincerity, and most people reacted positively to my project. For some, it gave them a new way of relating to these stories, and for others, it gave them new possibilities and new parameters to talk about the project.

M For those reading today, what is the message you would like them to take away from this experience?

S There is still a website that was made for this project. You can go [here](#) and click on (3), and there is a way to listen to the stories without the app.

I would like people to visit Nagasaki and find out more about this complex issue that seems like history, but still is a big part of our contemporary lives if you think about the amount of active nuclear weapons there are in this world and the problem we have with radiation and nuclear reactors. Also, some survivors are still alive, and it is important not to forget that this incident is not such a distant past and that it could be repeated anytime. I also would like people to find new possibilities in ways to talk about this difficult and complex matter.

Shinpei Takeda is a visual artist and filmmaker who was born in Ōsaka. His works involve a wide range of themes regarding memories and history. He has also worked in Mexico, the US, Germany, and Austria. The diverse topics of his films include pre-WWII Japanese immigration to Tijuana, Mexico, and the atomic bomb survivors living in the Americas (Atopus Studio). More of his work can be seen on his [website](#).

Mark Christensen is a second-year Fukuoka ALT hailing from Snohomish, Washington. Aside from the adventures of being an ALT, he enjoys mountaineering, cosplay, and photography, which can be seen on [Instagram](#).

Listening to them, I always questioned how these human stories were not quite communicated in the monuments in Nagasaki, so I wanted to find new portals into these human stories. This was the origin of the idea.

LIFESTYLE

WELLNESS EDITOR

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Clare Braganza

"How was it possible for the world to be so beautiful and so cruel at the same time?" — Lian Hearn, 'Across the Nightingale Floor'

SPORTS EDITOR

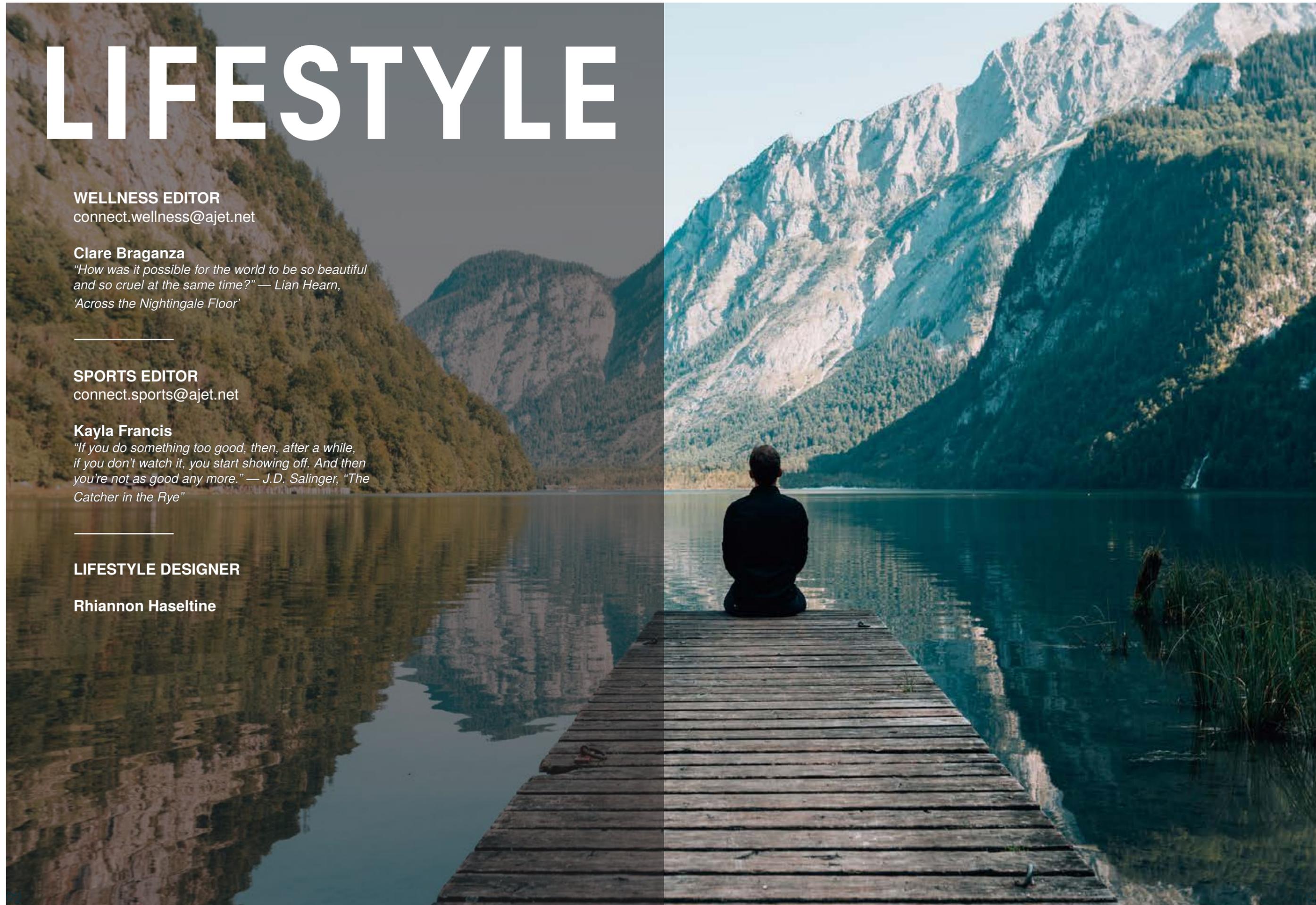
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Kayla Francis

"If you do something too good, then, after a while, if you don't watch it, you start showing off. And then you're not as good any more." — J.D. Salinger, 'The Catcher in the Rye'

LIFESTYLE DESIGNER

Rhiannon Haseltine





Feeling
Festive

*Making the Most of Christmas
Away from Home!*

**Jess Langshaw
(Kumamoto 2018-2020)**

Photos: Freepik, Jess Langshaw

Illustrations: Freepik

Living away from our home countries can be tricky. Add in darker nights, winter blues, and a global pandemic, and tricky becomes challenging. I'm here to give you some tips and tricks to boost that festive feeling!

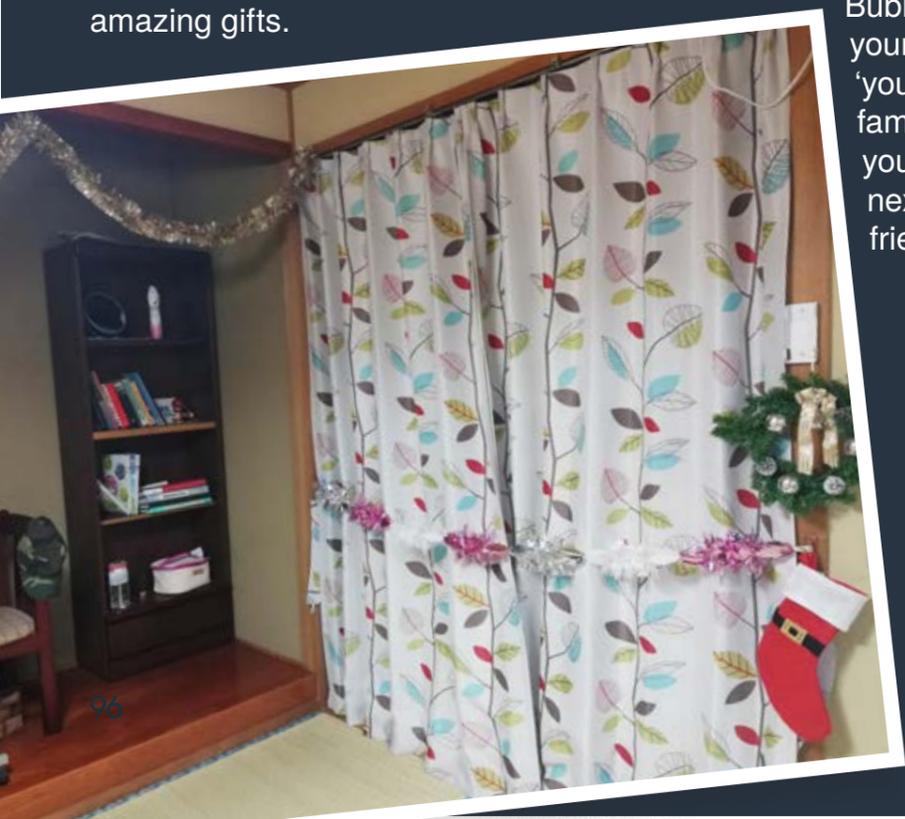
Disclaimer: this post is written from a white, Western perspective (where Christmas-related holidays are dominant) and so is narrowed by my own cultural background. There are many readers from all over the world with different cultures whose holidays aren't as recognised in Japan. I'd urge you to help people to recognise your holiday through celebration! Japan is a country waiting with open arms to learn, and you can engage with your own culture a little more fully, even away from home.



1. Go to Daiso

Daiso is my therapy space. I'd go to Daiso after a long day at work or on a weekend just to wander the aisles and browse the extremely good-value products whilst listening to the jazzy, prog playlists that just happen to play in every shop.

Daiso at Christmas is next level. It's a great place to buy decorations or stocking fillers for friends. Nitori is another great place to go, especially for getting some cosy, winter decor-like fluffy blankets, *kotatsu* essentials, as well as those all-important tree decorations (and trees)! You can have a look at their line up [here](#). Or, if you're feeling extra fancy, you could even head to Tokyu Hands for some amazing gifts.



2. Decorate EVERYTHING

You and your spaces are codependent, which means that how you decorate your space matters a LOT. If you want to feel more festive, then tinsel-ise your flat, your office, even your car! In my second year of living in Japan, I attended my friend's 'tree decoration' party. We turned up with decorations, drinks, and snacks and made a night of decorating her Christmas tree. It was an awesome night, and my friend didn't have to spend hours putting up decorations!

3. Get a Playlist Together

Fairytale of New York should definitely make this playlist. Other must-includes are Michael Bublé and Pentatonix. Zoning out of your everyday stresses to blast out the 'youuuuuuuuuuu' part of Mariah Carey's famous song is definitely going to help you feel festive. Why not take it to the next level and do it at karaoke—get your friends to join in as backing singers!



Enjoy the adventure, enjoy the difference. Grab a KFC!

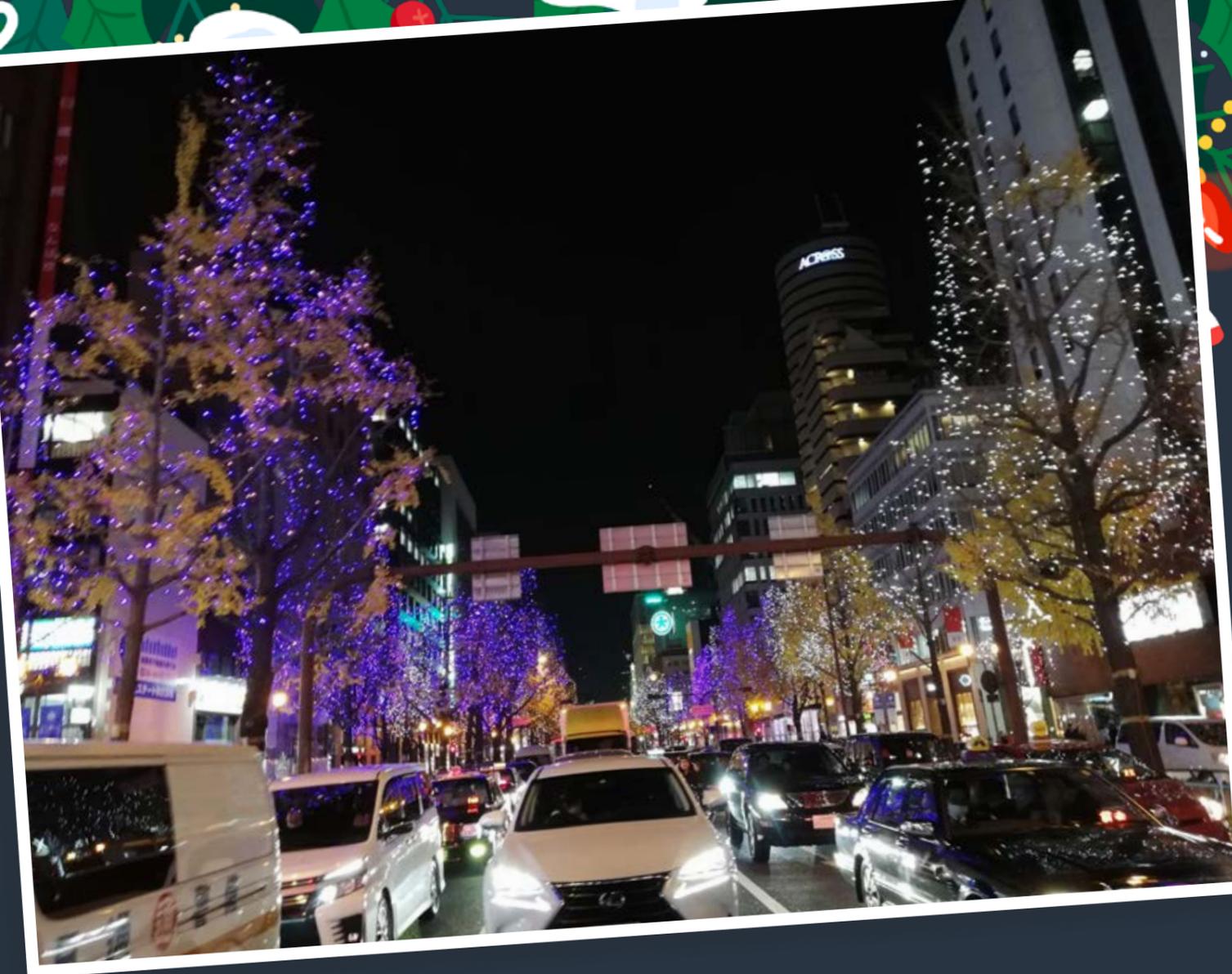
4. Eat Christmas

It's like that saying, 'If you can't beat 'em, join 'em.' If you don't feel it, eat it. Nothing gets me more excited than food. I LOVE food, and so, making themed food is an obvious plus. If you're lucky enough to have an oven (I went 1½ years in Japan without one) you could even bake! Gingerbread, shortbread, mince pies—you can bake pretty much anything really; just dust it with icing sugar snow and boom—festive.

5. Wander in your Winter Wonderland

Japan most likely doesn't celebrate Christmas the way that you're used to, but there are some similarities to those famous Christmas films. There are decorations, lights, cold weather for most, themed Starbucks drinks, and leafless trees. There are even ice-skating rinks, which make for an amazing date/friend date! For anyone remotely in the area, the ice-skating rink at Ebino Plateau is brilliant, and the views around there are stunning!





6. Call Home

Travel may be tricky right now, but you can still Zoom! Staring at your family member's pixelated faces can be a struggle, so mix it up by planning a quiz or games night! Charades is definitely festive and definitely possible over Zoom.

Another way to get in touch with home is by sending cards or presents. This is something you can start doing now to make sure they arrive on time. Pack your Daiso, Nitori, and Tokyu Hands gifts into a box with some cute cards and stickers, and send them home to spread the Christmas cheer!

7. Embrace the Difference

You're in Japan for a reason, and while that pull home from Christmas can be difficult, remember why you came; enjoy the adventure, enjoy the difference. Grab a KFC!

One difference that I came to love about my rural Japanese town is the seasonal produce. Back home, every food was available at any time, whereas in Japan, when you see chestnuts lining the shelves, you know that Christmas is coming. Stock up on those and enjoy blasting 'chestnuts roasting on an open fire' as you try to master getting the little treasures out of their notoriously difficult inner shells!

One thing that they go big with in Japan is New Year. I spent my first Japanese New Year in Japan with my host family making *osechi*, the New Year's feast! It was really fun, and I learnt a lot. Another Japanese custom is *hatsuhinode*, where people will get up early to greet the first sunrise of the year. I didn't get to try this one yet, but it's definitely on my list for 2021. I'm so ready to say goodbye to 2020 and welcome the New Year with open arms.

8. Spread some Christmas Magic

In times when Christmas magic seems to be lacking, bring it! It's like how teaching someone helps you to learn. When I was 12 (very late, I know) my mum broke the news that Father Christmas isn't real. In an attempt to console her very upset child, my mum told me that you can still believe in the spirit of Christmas. It's cheesy, I know, but I still think of that to this day. I'm the one to wish strangers a Merry Christmas, to pass out cards to the neighbours, to try and raise money for those in need, to bake gingerbread and shortbreads for mood-boosting gifts for friends and family. Volunteering is another great idea; you can check Facebook groups or ask around to see if anyone is in need of help during the difficult time of year. My area, the Kuma-gun on Kyūshū, was hit hard with floods this year, and they're definitely in need of some support, be it physical or financial.

9. Let It Be

Don't push it. If you're going to spend Christmas Day crying in bed, then do it. Just appreciate whichever day comes later when you feel better. Don't submit to the pressure of 'being happy' when you just don't. How you feel is more important than any holiday or societal pressure. This holiday season isn't going to be the same, I think that's safe to say. But we can still make the most of it. We can fill our homes and our lives with the Danish *hygge* (comfort) that goes so perfectly with Christmas. Preparing for Christmas itself can be a welcome distraction. Take care, focus on the positives, but enable the negatives and stay warm!

Merry Christmas, love Jess.

*Jess Langshaw was an ALT on the JET Programme for two years in the rural town of Asagiri in Kumamoto. She has contributed to **CONNECT Magazine**, Kumamoto's **YOKA**, and Japan Voices and consistently writes about all things positive on her personal blog, **Yokina Living!** She managed to travel round all of the prefectures in Kyūshū in her little kei car, *Tofu-san*, and met some wonderful people on the way—including herself! You can follow her adventures on this **blog**.*



Just two short months ago, life was very different. I was living in Shirasawa, a small village in Fukushima Prefecture, where I would start each morning watching a beautiful sunrise over the pond outside of my apartment window.

Now however, I am back home in London, England and although my bank account may suggest otherwise, I certainly feel richer for all of the magical moments from my time living in Japan. I am almost certainly not the same person as before and even now, it is as if my mind is still living there while my body adjusts to a new reality here in London. Perhaps in time these feelings will fade away, perhaps not. What I can honestly say is that I am at total peace with my decision to come home and embrace all of the new challenges that now await.

My reasons for leaving Japan

In 2018, I was fortunate enough to be selected for the JET Programme to become an English teacher in Japan. Looking back, I can still say that nothing matches the feeling of being a “sensei.” The energy that you get from the students when you walk into a classroom can never be replaced. Despite loving my job as an English teacher, I left for one main reason—I felt like I was no longer growing in my

role and in my opinion, growth is the single most important factor when it comes to our individual pursuits of happiness.

After two years of honing in on my craft, I felt ready for a new challenge outside of teaching. I considered other options such

as moving to the city and working for a Japanese organisation, but in the end I decided that I wanted to leave Japan on a high to protect my memories. I had seen too many people leave with resentment and I was worried that in time, this would eventually happen to me too.

The grass is always greener

Everybody’s personal circumstances are different, but there is one piece of advice which I feel is universal. If you can’t decide on whether you should stay or leave Japan, then you should



Leaving Japan

**Should you stay,
or should you go?**

Şenol Hasan (Fukushima 2018-2020)

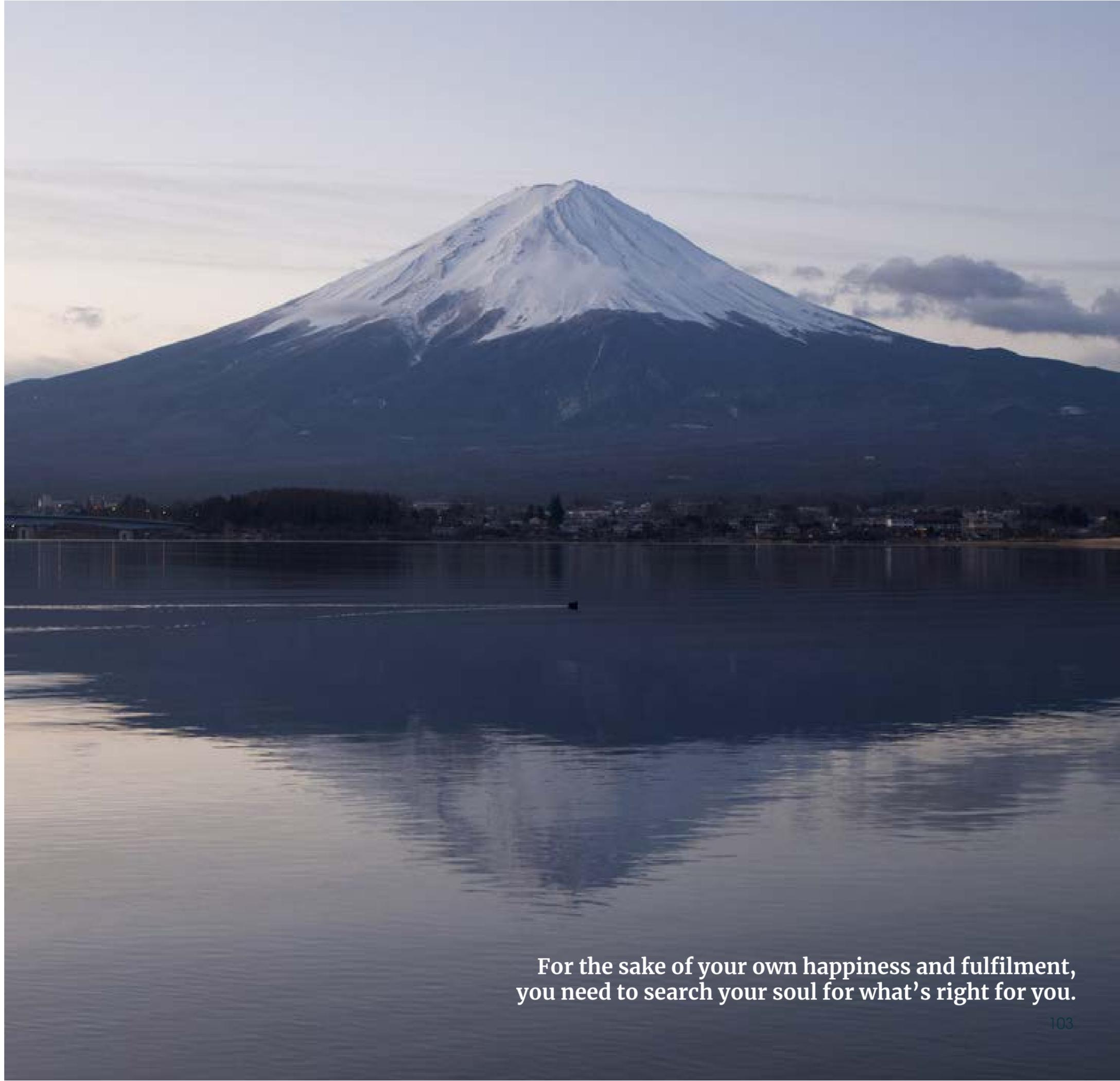
stay. Don't cut your time in Japan short unless your reasons are strong enough to do so.

If you do decide to leave, there will be times when you question your decision to return. However, the same is actually true if you stay—there may be times when you wish you did leave. This is perfectly normal: after all, the grass is always greener, isn't it? Every time my mind ponders over these thoughts, I remind myself of the reasons why I chose to leave. The big reasons for the decisions we make generally don't change, so we need to remind ourselves of these reasons whenever doubt creeps through.

If you are like me, you may be worried that returning home will feel like a step backwards. While it may seem this way at first, it is not. The reality is, going back may actually bring you a step closer to where you want to be.

On the other hand, you may wish to stay in Japan for the opportunity that it gives you to travel, regardless of whether you are satisfied with your work life or not. I do believe this is reason enough to stay as the fulfilment that you get from travelling can never be understated. The most important thing is to be honest with yourself and clear about your reasons, whether you decide to stay or leave.

As we've discussed, everybody's situation is different and for that reason it is also important not to be too influenced by other people's reasons for staying or leaving.



**For the sake of your own happiness and fulfilment,
you need to search your soul for what's right for you.**

Many are worried about things not being the same after their friends leave. This is a very valid concern, however, people leaving is just a part of life. Think about it this way, if you never left your home to come to Japan, would you have met the friends that you have now? Though this may be hard to imagine, if your friends in Japan leave, it's possible that you may end up making even stronger relationships with new friends. We never know what's waiting for us around the corner.

There is a Turkish saying that goes *"attan inip eşeğe binmek"* which literally translates to "getting off a horse to ride a donkey." Returning home may feel this way for you, too, especially if you are returning home to a country that is not handling the coronavirus pandemic as well as Japan.

Regardless of the ongoing pandemic, I can honestly say that returning home has brought me one step closer to where I want to be. If your heart tells you that leaving will do the same for you, then you know what to do. If it doesn't, then you should lean towards staying. You have nothing to lose.

Leaving Japan was one of the hardest experiences of my life, but ultimately it was the right thing for me to do. Japan will always be a part of me, and I will always be thankful for my time there and for all of the people that made my time there special. A new challenge now awaits, but one thing is for sure: everything I now go on to do will be better because of my experience of living in Japan and for that, I will be forever grateful.



Şenol Hasan is a former English Assistant Language Teacher (ALT) for Motomiya City in Fukushima Prefecture. In September 2020, he returned to his home in London, England where he is now teaching in a primary school. Şenol was born and raised in London, however, his family is originally from North Cyprus.

Discovering *The Pole:* Inclusivity in Pole Dancing

Rachel Schlaifer (Tōkyō)

I began pole dancing about three years ago at a very small local studio in Bloomington, Indiana, USA. What started as a mild curiosity mixed with a desperate attempt to lose weight quickly turned out to be one of the best decisions of my life. After struggling awkwardly through my first few beginner lessons (believe me, that giant pole is intimidating, and you don't really know what to do with your hands), I was hooked like a junkie. Still, it wasn't always sunshine and rainbows.

At first, I was really nervous because pole dancing has a certain stigma attached to it. When you pick up a basket weaving hobby or decide to learn how to bake, everyone is extremely supportive. If I told my friends

I was going to the gym instead of the pole dancing studio, they would have been ecstatic! Whenever I told my friends that I started pole dancing, however, they all gave me the same concerned look. It was as if I was about to drop out of college and work as a dancer at a gentlemen's club. Not that there would be anything wrong with that had I chosen that path. I found myself constantly facing concerned looks and questions about the appropriateness of my new favorite hobby, and I couldn't help but find it a bit discouraging.

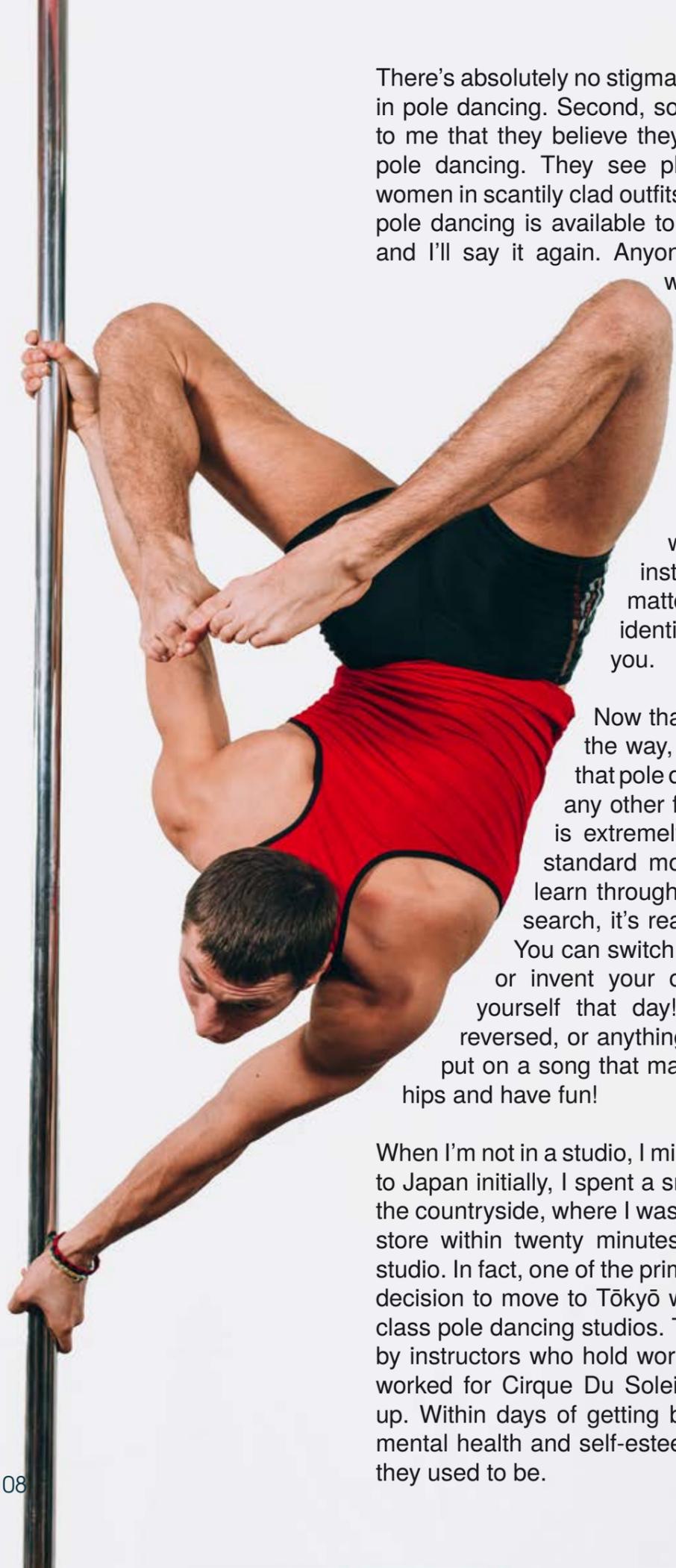
Despite all the stigma, however, the truth is that pole dancing is extremely empowering for anyone who steps into that world. I've never felt more empowered, beautiful, strong, and healthy than when I'm regularly going to a studio.

The women and men I've met in this community are some of the strongest, most inspiring athletes I've ever met. And yes, pole dancers are undoubtedly athletes. Have you ever seen someone support their entire body weight with just one arm or leg while suspended in mid-air? Because I have. A professional pole dancer has complete mastery over every muscle in their body—muscles I didn't even know existed previously! It's an incredible way to tone and strengthen your body, and I think that fact sometimes gets lost in fantasies of strip clubs and bachelor parties.

The pole dancing community is not only extremely empowering, but it is also extremely inclusive. Like with any community, there exists a strong and unique culture, which sometimes acts as a barrier for people looking to get started. There can be fear of being rejected, laughed at, or not being good enough. However, I'd like to dispel some of the top concerns that I've heard from people who wanted to try pole dancing but were too nervous.

First, with a myriad of beginner courses available with helpful and friendly instructors, it's extremely beginner-friendly. No one is going to judge you for awkwardly messing up the most basic pole spin. Instead, they're going to quickly jump to your aid and be cheering the loudest when you finally nail it!





There's absolutely no stigma against complete beginners in pole dancing. Second, some people have mentioned to me that they believe they're too overweight to begin pole dancing. They see photos of slim, fit, beautiful women in scantily clad outfits and find it intimidating. But, pole dancing is available to anyone. I've said it before, and I'll say it again. Anyone. No matter your gender,

weight, or anything. The pole will support your weight regardless of what it is, and your muscles will get stronger each time. Lastly, as I just mentioned earlier, gender is not an issue. There are plenty of male pole dancers all around the world! In fact, my very first instructor was male. It does not matter what gender, if any, you identify as. Pole dancing is for you.

Now that we got those myths out of the way, I'll mention one last reason that pole dancing changed my life. Like any other form of dance, pole dancing is extremely creative. While there are standard moves with names that you'll learn through classes or a quick Google search, it's really open to creative design. You can switch things up, swap out moves, or invent your own if you're really feeling yourself that day! Moves can be modified, reversed, or anything that you can think of. Just put on a song that makes you want to swing your hips and have fun!

When I'm not in a studio, I miss it constantly. After moving to Japan initially, I spent a small amount of time living in the countryside, where I was lucky to find even a grocery store within twenty minutes, let alone a pole dancing studio. In fact, one of the primary motivating factors in my decision to move to Tōkyō was the availability of world-class pole dancing studios. The opportunity to be taught by instructors who hold world titles and who have even worked for Cirque Du Soleil was far too good to pass up. Within days of getting back into a studio, I felt my mental health and self-esteem skyrocket back to where they used to be.

Despite living in Japan, it was quite easy to find a studio that offered instruction in English. Nothing that a three-minute Google search couldn't solve. I was surprised by how foreigner-friendly even the absolute beginner classes were! At least 50% of my classmates were foreigners, and the instructors all knew English. However, this is a perk of living in the city center. If you live outside of Tōkyō, maybe somewhere more rural like my previous town in Ibaraki, it can be difficult to find such a specific type of dance studio with the right equipment. However, there are several things you can do instead if there's not a studio near you. You can buy your own pole easily on Amazon and install it in your house (it's not terribly expensive and is usually easy to install if you have any extra space) and watch YouTube tutorial videos! If you don't have enough space in your apartment, you can try a different type of dance first. I managed to find an amazing Jazz and Modern Dance studio before moving to Tōkyō that taught me a lot about how to move my body in a more graceful manner, which has helped my pole dancing a lot. Pole actually incorporates lots of different types of dance choreography, so it's definitely fine to start with something else in order to feel comfortable moving your body, getting in shape, and training your muscles.



In Japan, I feel that pole dancing has become increasingly popular as a form of exercise among young women. Some studios have even gone so far as to label their pole classes as "fitness classes." Whether this is a preemptive attempt to avoid any sort of stigma or is genuinely their main focus, it really doesn't matter.

You can get whatever you individually desire out of your pole dancing classes, be it fitness or self-confidence (though the two often go hand in hand).

I see many young Japanese women signing up for these classes with the goal of losing weight, building muscle, and feeling sexy. For a more traditionally conservative country, this surprised me; but, it's a good sign, and I hope that they'll set an example for others to follow.

To this day, I'm still not sure how to share my number one passion with my own family for fear of their reactions. I'm sharing my experience now in the hopes that more and more young women and men can find the same empowerment and comfort through pole dancing without fear of judgement. I can't wait for the day that pole dancing is more popular or at least less stigmatized, and I think we're slowly heading in that direction. Pole dancing has improved every aspect of my life, both physically and mentally, and I wouldn't be the person that I am today without it.

Rachel is a 24-year-old Hoosier born and raised in the United States of America. She moved to Hitachinaka, Japan, in March of 2019 to work as an assistant English teacher and now lives in Tōkyō doing operations management and content creation for her new company. She has dabbled in various types of dance from the age of 15 and also spent brief amounts of time practicing gymnastics and cheerleading.



Photos:
Juanielgar (Freepik)
Sheremetaphoto (Freepik)
Anna_fedorova_it (Freepik)

For some people, snowboarding can be a hobby, a lifestyle, or a fashion statement. I see it as a skill that one can spend time improving, but it's most important to enjoy it.

I had spent a few years working at IBM, in the corporate Information Technology world, where there seems to be more theory than practice. I was taught to break everything down to further understand it, and I have loved applying this to snowboarding. Specifically, in helping others to snowboard, there can be difficult problems, and I just want to make it easier for others to improve. Snowboarding is an exercise that one can always improve; most snowboarders have a technique or a trick that they are working on.

The 2019-2020 winter season was my first time instructing, but I enjoy steep learning curves and dealing with the associated pressure. I came to Japan on an Educating Adventures Ski & Snowboard programme to learn how to be a snowboard instructor. The pros and cons of that scheme are for another time; however, it let me have a thrilling time over the winter in a wonderland-like place doing incredible work. I am now in a position to maybe work another season and to hopefully sit my level-two instructor exam. The level-two certification would allow me to be more employable in other resorts around the world.

My Wild Ride

Jonah Reid (Hokkaidō)



Why Japan?

I chose to instruct in Japan because I was ready for something completely different. In the end, it has become so much more than just a snowboarding trip, even more than a career change. Ignoring the current state of the world, all I can do is to recommend everything about Japan, especially the snow. The effects of COVID-19 were felt though,



as we were very scared at the start of the year. Niseko is an international hub of activity, and we felt that we were very susceptible to the virus due to the number of different nationalities that were present. Some of us believe that we were already infected in January when the first stages of the outbreak happened, whereas others believe that it didn't reach us. The 2019-2020 season was apparently the worst season for snow conditions that Japan has seen in recent history; I thought it was pretty sweet. While this may say a

lot about me, it reveals the severity of the conditions that I've snowboarded in before. I have mainly ridden in the French Alps during springtime, which is a mix of slush, ice, and sometimes rain. I was also taught to snowboard by my brother, who only had a couple of weeks of experience at the time (another steep learning curve).

So how exactly do you need to get started in snowboarding? Here's my guide on everything you need to know for your own wild ride.

Equipment

One of the problems with starting something like snowboarding is the attached price tag. The next problem is finding the balance between not committing enough money to having a quality time and spending so much that you feel like you have to enjoy yourself. My advice would be to initially rent clothing and equipment and find a real-snow slope closer to home than anywhere that requires a flight. You should experience wearing the gear, the cold, and the feel of snow under your boots and board before spending too much money. After having one or two lessons, you should begin to feel whether or not snowboarding is something you want to take further.

The Snowboard

After the taster sessions (depending on how much you've progressed already), I would suggest buying a good quality second-hand snowboard. The price tag should be lower, but do your research on the board: look up reviews, ask in online forums, and watch videos of people riding it to see what terrain the board suits best. One important specification regarding snowboards is their flex, on a scale of 1 (very flexible) to 10 (very stiff). As a beginner, it's better to get a board at the lower (more flexible, around 3-4)

end of the scale, as you will not be used to the physical effort of bending and flexing a board to manoeuvre around the piste.

Boots

For snowboarding boots, try to find something comfortable. A huge bonus that we have as snowboarders instead of skiers is that our feet are comfortable most of the time while riding. Find a flexible boot as a beginner, and as you progress you may find that your riding style changes to need stiffer boots.

Bindings

The bindings are what keep you safely attached to the board, so buying these second-hand can be unsettling if they are beaten up. There are a myriad of securing technologies, each worthy of their own independent review, that you should skim-read to understand their pros and cons.

Helmet-WEAR ONE!

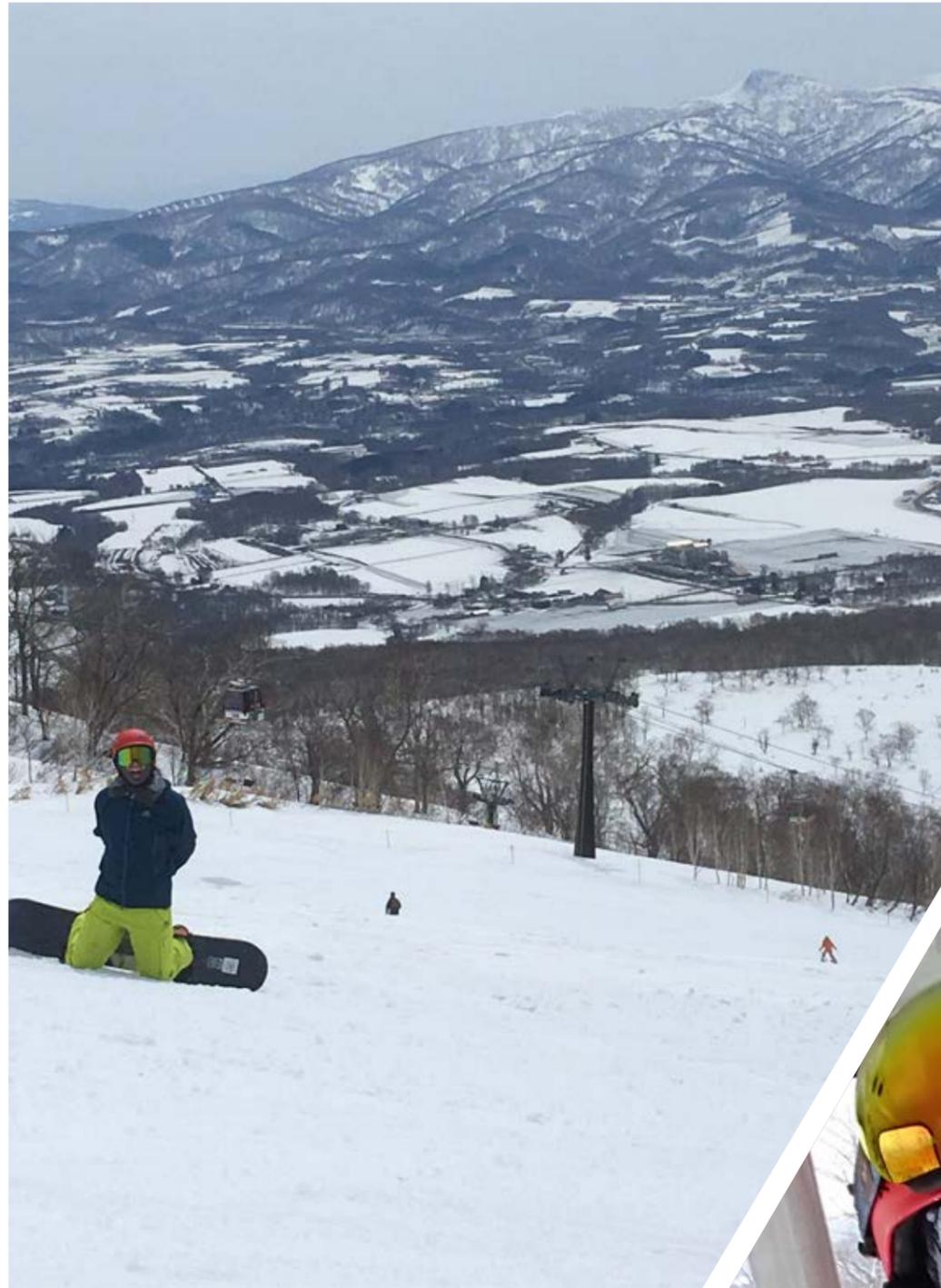
Preparation

In comparison to skiing, snowboarding is hard work, especially at the beginner stages. It takes more time to be able to maintain any momentum on a board rather than on skis. But don't let this daunting doom and gloom deter you

from giving it a go. Once you are able to perform the early-stage key thing in snowboarding: changing edges, the mountain is your oyster.

There are a few things that you can do to make the learning stages easier and more fun. With regards to physical fitness, the main muscle groups that you use will be in your legs. Get comfortable with being in a squat position for a long time; wall-sits and slow squats are good exercises to try out. Cardiovascular performance only becomes an issue when you want to spend more than an hour snowboarding at a time.

Some people can learn to snowboard in a day, but they have usually either done skateboarding or gymnastics previously or are especially gifted at picking up new things. When you are new to snowboarding, don't give yourself a time limit that you can't control. Aim to have fun and be relaxed about how fast you are able to learn. You will learn more while having fun.



Instructing

I really enjoy teaching people how to improve their snowboarding. I find it challenging because as an instructor one has to communicate in a way that the customer can understand. Thankfully, all of my

lessons last season were in English. However, within any language, there are varying degrees of terminology that can be used. Some people want to know how different parts of the snowboard work before they ride; others just want to experience the feeling of riding, and then adapt from there. An instructor must realise the best way in which a student learns in a short amount of time. Therefore, being able to read and understand how others think is a beneficial skill. Most lessons are about two hours long in the Niseko area, and within this period the

instructor must decide how much time should be spent on each aspect of a lesson. Differences between students will change how much time should be spent talking, demonstrating, practising, and reviewing. It is amongst all of these different factors that I find the true pleasure in teaching: no two lessons are the same. It's such a cliché phrase when people talk about their jobs. However, when you have so many different people that you can teach, in such a wide range of weather conditions, on 61 different runs in the Niseko United area, I really haven't had two lessons that have been the same.

Though I am hoping to work another season as an instructor, I am still planning on returning to the IT world. My interest in tech is only just surpassing how fun it is to ride a snowboard as a job.

Jonah is an engineer-turned-snowboard-instructor. He lived in the UK until he was 25, which is when he had a first-quartile-life-crisis and moved to Japan to pursue being a snowboarding instructor. Jonah enjoys studying the Japanese language, culture, and visiting the quiet beautiful places in Japan. You can follow him at offthebeatenpiste.net.



COMMUNITY AND TRAVEL

A photograph of a group of people silhouetted against a sunset sky over a beach. The silhouettes are reflected in the wet sand, creating a symmetrical effect. The sky transitions from a deep orange near the horizon to a darker purple at the top.

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"Old keys won't open new doors." — Manoj Chouhan

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Clarissa Combe

"If I loved you less, I might be able to talk about it more." — Jane Austen, Emma

COMMUNITY AND TRAVEL DESIGNER

Nate Ryman

LIFE AND DEATH ON **MOUNT ASO**

Mark Christensen (Fukuoka)

Volcanoes.

For some people, the word evokes images of blackened craters spewing forth glowing lava. For others, perhaps titanic mountains crowned with shimmering snow and glaciers. Either way, volcanoes are known as uniquely powerful places.

As a child, I loved volcanoes. Be it papier-mâché mountains exploding vinegar and baking soda, or the exotic locales featured on National Geographic, they fascinated me. Maybe this isn't so strange; Washington State is overshadowed by no less than five volcanoes. Still, my love for such mountains didn't reveal itself until much

later, after I had graduated college. At the time, I was struggling with finding a direction in life. I had recently gotten into hiking, and I decided to try climbing to clear my head. In an ironic twist, my first major summit was none other than Mount St. Helens.

For those unfamiliar, Mount St. Helens was the crown jewel of Washington State. Nearly a perfect cone volcano, it was known as 'the Mount Fuji of the West'. I say 'was' because in May 1980 the mountain erupted in the largest landslide in recorded history with the force of hundreds of nuclear weapons, absolutely devastating the surrounding region. It was a place of death and destruction. But, where there is death, there is also life.

When I visited, life had already emerged from the ashes. Trees and grasses had begun to regrow, and the shattered mountain was graced with beautiful wildflowers emerging from the rubble. Even from the summit, which yawns open like the broken ribcage of a giant, there is still life. Far below, the rumbling of the mountain's heart can still be heard. Be it the sense of adventure, the magical rebirth of the land, or the rumbling of Helen's heart; I was truly enthralled by the mountain. In short order, I began to climb and explore other local volcanoes, seeking out their own fascinating stories.

When I was selected for the JET Program and placed in Fukuoka, I was initially downcast. Kyūshū didn't strike me as a serious place for hiking, and I feared that there wouldn't be much here for me. I was very wrong. Instead, Kyūshū has some of the most fascinating mountains in Japan. Of these, Mount Aso is the most intriguing, and I had the privilege of visiting the mountain this year.



Aso Bunker



Gas Warning



Volcanic Desert

The first thing that sets Mount Aso apart is its size. Unlike traditional volcanoes like Fuji and Rainier, which tower thousands of meters over the land, Mount Aso is a short and squat volcano more reminiscent of a large hill. As my climbing partner and I descended from some steep cliff roads into the valley surrounding the mountain, I was surprised by the geology of the place. In many regions, volcanoes are surrounded and attached to other mountains. Aso, on the other hand, sits right in the center of a flat valley plain filled with beautiful green fields and pastures.

Further up, we entered some forests on the flanks of the mountain, but it wasn't long before we once again broke into fields and beautiful crater lakes.

As we approached the visitor's center, we discovered that the park was temporarily closed, and for a good reason. Mount Aso, being one of the most active volcanoes in Japan, periodically erupts white clouds of toxic sulfur dioxide. While the levels of gas reaching us at the center were very low, it was extremely painful. Have you ever inhaled water by accident and felt a raw and unpleasant scratchy feeling in your throat? The miasma emitted by the mountain caused a similar effect. For-

tunately for us, after about a half-hour of waiting, the gas dissipated and we were clear to proceed to the crater itself.

Because it was a beautiful day, we opted to walk to the crater. The path there offered a lovely vista of green fields highlighted by black volcanic rock. It also gave us our first encounter with a series of large concrete bunkers that provide shelter from flying volcanic rocks. Facing south to avoid gas and ash, this last line of defense offered a sober reminder of Aso's deadly fury. This need was emphasized by a nearby boulder that had smashed the path after being hurtled over 500 m from the crater.



Mount Aso Volcano

When we reached the parking lot, we joined many others on the fenced edge of the crater. Below the fence lies a deadly but beautiful turquoise blue lake from which clouds of gas boil forth. It might seem silly, but the plain white clouds felt malevolent and claustrophobic, especially with how fast they could materialize. The crater might be clear one moment, and if you looked away and then back, it would be filled with toxic clouds hundreds of meters high.

From the observatory, we made our way to the east along a series of boardwalks. The boardwalks guided hikers to a nearby trail, and as we walked, we were impressed by the fields of obsidian black volcanic sand and debris. According to the park, the area was a relatively small and unique biome known as a “volcanic desert”, a dead place inhospitable to all but the hardiest of plants. Spherical “lava bombs” could also be seen littering the zone. After some time, the black sand gave way to grassy hills and grey rocks.



The hills towering over the Aso crater revealed some interesting secrets. Mount Aso's crater has actually shifted over time, and there are now about a half dozen extinct or dormant craters lining the area. As we walked along the ridges to the east of the volcano, we were able to see a number of these places. Eventually, we made our way to a summit overlooking the primary crater.

In my experiences climbing and mountaineering, I have been exposed to a number of dangers, including avalanches, rockfalls, and giant glacial crevasses. However, nothing I have ever experienced has been as scary as this. The final part of the path was in a direct line less than a thousand meters from the active side of the crater. As billowing white clouds outlined the area, we made the decision to cautiously proceed with other hikers through an open but poten-

tially dangerous zone. As I did so, though, I was faced with the unpleasant reality of how much our safety relied upon the direction of the wind, something which I constantly checked. Indeed, shortly after we arrived, we heard evacuation alarms blaring and warning those south of us to evacuate the observatory we had visited earlier.

After briefly reaching the main overlook, we retreated to a safe distance well out of the gas zone and proceeded to climb the tallest peaks overlooking the area.

As we looked across Mount Aso and the verdant valleys surrounding the mountain, I was impressed by the scenic views. Something in the beauty, though, made my blood run cold. While there are pretty pastures and fields surrounding Aso, there are also distinct cliffs that neatly mark the edge of the surrounding valley. I knew the reason why, but it was hard to comprehend the scale in person. You see, while the volcano belching gas in the center of the park is Mount Aso, there's another Aso. The Aso Caldera. The large volcano belching smoke is, in reality, a pockmark on the face of a gigantic super-volcano. The structure is so large it could easily swallow Mount Fuji! Needless to say, it was a sobering lesson on the power and scale of nature.



Eruption



Aso

In the end, Mount Aso was not what I expected. Short, squat, and billowing white smoke, it appears far different than a classic volcano. But Aso is not a place to be judged by its cover. Rather than being boring or small, the volcano is a colorful place full of vibrant life, fascinating secrets, and unique hazards.

If you ever find yourself in Kumamoto, you should definitely check this mountain out!

Mark is a second-year Fukuoka ALT hailing from Snohomish, Washington, USA. Aside from the adventures of being an ALT, he enjoys mountaineering, cosplay, and photography.



Kimberly Fitzgerald (Niigata)

“But is it . . . safe?” I asked, holding up a pair of what can only be described as flip-flops literally made out of straw.

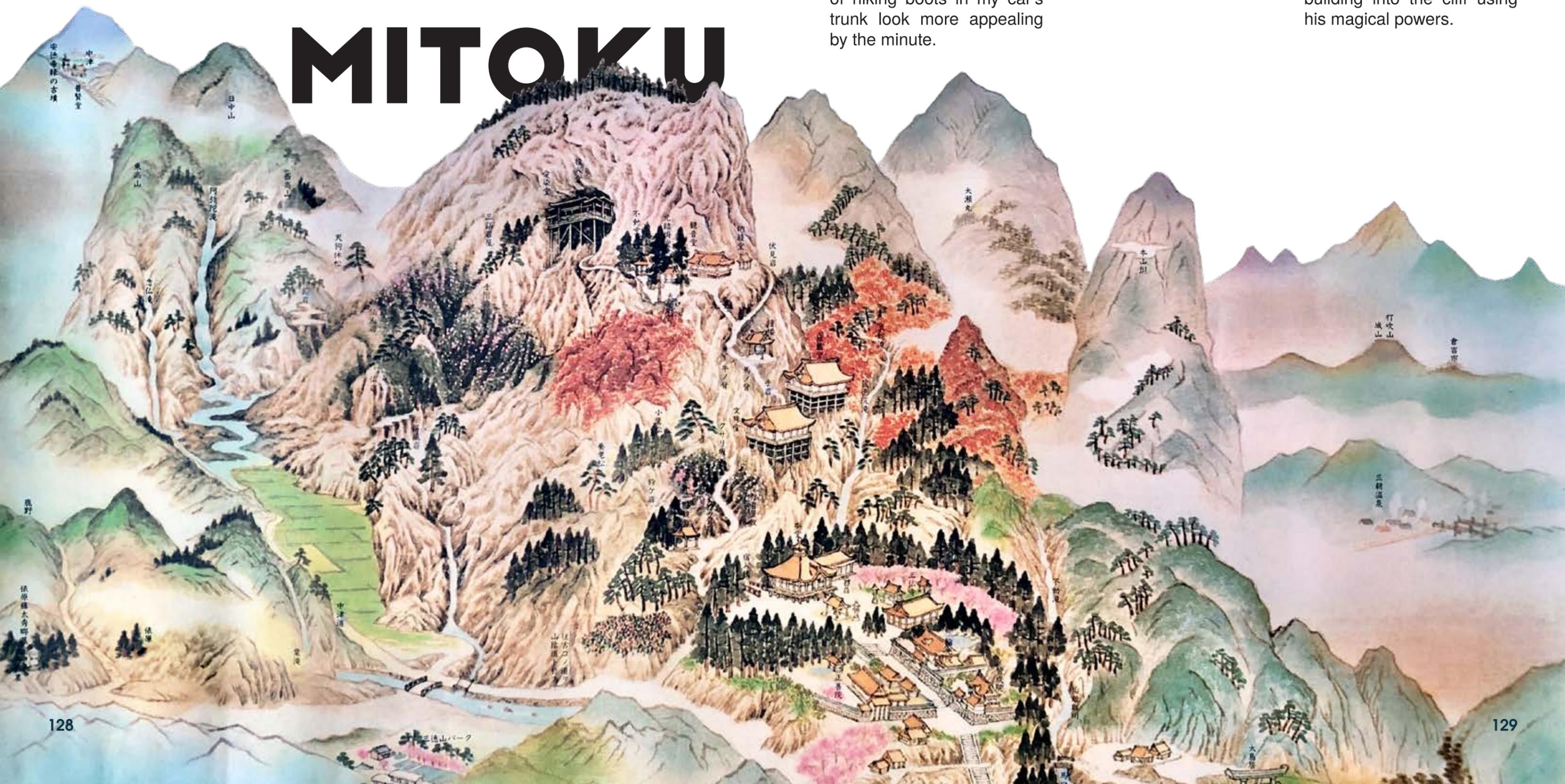
Waraji are straw sandals that have been used in Japan for over 200 years by everyone from peddlers to

TAKING A WALK IN ANOTHER KIND OF SHOE HIKING MOUNT MITOKU

monks. The idea of hiking up a mountainside in this traditional footwear was a romantic idea at first. But after hearing my tiny little *kei-car*'s engine whine the entire way up to the trailhead, I was having some serious second thoughts. Plus, the impending rainfall combined with the slick conditions from the morning's drizzle was making the high-tech pair of hiking boots in my car's trunk look more appealing by the minute.

We were on our way to hike the nearly 900 m tall Mount Mitoku in Japan's least populated prefecture, Tottori. Mount Mitoku houses the temple Sanbutsu-ji, famous for its Instagram-worthy views and home to what has become known as the most dangerous national treasure in Japan: Nageiredo Hall.

Clinging to a precipice, Nageiredo Hall is the uppermost building of Sanbutsu-ji and is shrouded in mystery. Sanbutsu-ji was founded in 706 by the founder of mountain asceticism himself, a monk named En no Gyōja. But no one knows exactly when or how Nageiredo Hall was constructed. Legends state that En no Gyōja arrived on a white cloud and threw the building into the cliff using his magical powers.



Conception myths aside, the process of hiking through Sanbutsu-ji is still a pilgrimage that mountain ascetic monks complete to this day. The hike is said to symbolize human existence, and by hiking through all of Sanbutsu-ji, you can purify all six senses (sight, sound, smell, touch, taste, and mind).

The act of hiking a mountain that monks use for training, and doing it while wearing traditional footwear, was what initially intrigued us about this hike. But now the idea of wearing straw shoes

to hike “the most dangerous national treasure in Japan” was the source of my morning’s anxiety. Strangely, the poorly-translated sign stating, “Hiking boots—recommend; Waraji—High recommend,” gave me the bit of confidence I needed to pay the 700 yen for my new kicks.

While itchy, a little stabby, and of questionable fashion merit, waraji make for surprisingly good hiking shoes. They are flexible, don’t retain moisture, and have excellent grip when tied tightly, which

is a good thing because Mount Mitoku will throw challenge after challenge at you.

After paying 400 yen to enter the temple grounds, you are free to roam around the statues and gardens of the lower temple. In order to reach the upper temple complex, you must have your shoes inspected and pay another nominal fee to embark on the hike. Hikers are not allowed to climb alone, so if you are traveling solo, they will ask you to join another group heading up. All groups must

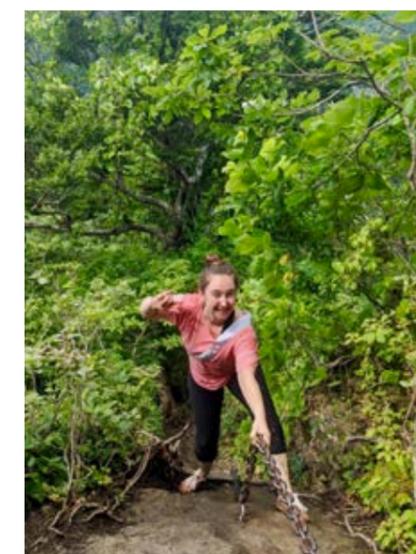
sign a log to document their departure and return. At this point, you can also purchase your waraji to hike in. They have shelves to store your shoes and a wash station to clean up afterwards. It is also worth noting that you are not allowed to climb with anything in your hands (hiking sticks, phone, water, etc.), and there are no water stations or restrooms beyond the second entrance hall. At the second hall, all hikers are given a sash (called *wagesa*) to symbolize your commencement on a journey of purification.

cannot attest to any purification, but I can state that the views along the way are absolutely breathtaking.

Reaching those views, however, is breathtaking in an entirely different sense. Though Mount Mitoku sits at 899.6 m above sea level, the hike through Sanbutsu-ji Temple is only about 600 m long. The elevation difference is approximately 200 m, and the hike averages about 1.5 to 2 hours for a round trip. Fairly early into the hike, there is an almost vertical climb where you

must use the roots of a tree as your handholds and footholds. Further on, you have to scale a rock face with a chain, then traverse a giant boulder with little more than an inch or two for footholds.

This may sound scary, and at times I did question Japan’s rather lax safety regulations, but it is doable for anyone of decent athletic ability. And despite being the most technical, it was not the most physically exhausting of my hikes in Japan.



My advice to anyone looking to climb Mount Mitoku is to bring a small backpack for water, cool-wipes, and a camera. I also “high recommend” paying the nominal fee for waraji. Not only do they make the hike feel more authentic, connecting you with a bit of history, but they are also beneficial in terms of grip and flexibility. Lastly, don’t let the nickname of “Japan’s most dangerous national treasure” scare you. Get out there, enjoy the breathtaking views, and experience for yourself why this hike is said to heighten all the senses.



Kimberly arrived in Japan just one short year ago from the USA and has loved every minute of it. She enjoys hiking and exploring everything Japan and her home prefecture of Niigata have to offer. When not planning her next trip or trying to recreate that one thing she ate at that one restaurant, she enjoys annoying her friends and neighbors with her endless questions.



SPEAK UP FOR GENDER EQUALITY:

SpeakHer

*Yan Fan (Tōkyō), Tutti Quintella (Tōkyō), Ann Kilzer (Tōkyō),
interviewed by Cameron Peagler (Yamaguchi)*

In a gender equality report by Pew Research Center, 94% of 34 surveyed countries were shown to believe gender equality is important. (1) However, it is no secret that we live in a world where there are still many disparities between men and women. Japan specifically is ranked 121st out of 153 countries in the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report 2020.

(2) Fortunately, I had the pleasure of interviewing Yan, Tutti, and Ann, the creators of SpeakHer. This group aims to help close the gender equality gap and raise the voices of women in Japan.

ONE PLATFORM, MANY VOICES

At its core, [SpeakHer](#) is a database of female public speakers that is available in English or Japanese. Speakers are either self-registered or nominated by other people. Anyone looking for a woman to speak at their event can search this database for a candidate who matches their criteria. Examples of different criteria include the ability to speak a specific foreign language, knowledge of health care, or understanding disaster preparation just to name a few. The site also promotes safety by moderating requests and providing women with the confidence to post their information without fear of harassment.

“THIS IS WHAT WE SHOULD BE DOING, HELPING OTHER PEOPLE FIND THEIR VOICE.”

The idea for SpeakHer was originally created by Emi Takemura, the co-founder of Peatix. She presented Yan with the concept in the hopes that someone from Yan's coding school, Code Chrysalis, would pick it up. Yan decided to take the project on herself and brought in Tutti and Ann. These three amazing women run the website by themselves with the hopes of empowering women speakers in Japan. While the database is fairly new, there are already many women speakers registered and the site is getting positive feedback from the community in Japan.

SpeakHer is also completely free with the conscious intent of giving back to the community and making an impact in Japan. To further promote this concept and increase the number of speakers, Ann recently hosted a COVID-19 conscious public speaking workshop. At the end of the workshop, attendees were tasked with making a short, impromptu speech about a topic of their choosing. Trainees once frozen with fear were able to deliver good presentations and share awesome stories for their audience. Ann's resolve was strengthened witnessing the growth of these trainees stating, “This is what we should be doing, helping other people find their voice.” The group echoed Ann's words by proposing a serious question: how is society supposed to make good decisions if we're only including half the voices in the room?





A FUTURE WITH NO FUTURE

Without a doubt, SpeakHer is one of the solutions necessary to make sure all voices are heard. When you limit the range of experiences, you limit the quality of the conversation, Yan said. However, what would be the best outcome for SpeakHer? Without any hesitation, Yan replied, “A world where there is no need to visit SpeakHer anymore.”

Of course, this makes sense. A future of diversity and inclusion in which a database like this was no longer needed. Achieving this future extends beyond



“...WHAT WOULD BE THE BEST OUTCOME FOR SPEAKHER?”

this platform the group emphasized. They continued by stating that SpeakHer was also another step to improving the quality and kinds of conversations being had about gender equality, and that it’s important for people to ask questions and not just say “these are how things have always been.” Even now, there is still very little education about diversity and inclusion in Japan, Tutti mentioned.

MORE WORDS OF WISDOM

As with all of my articles, I asked this group to share some words of inspiration for readers.

1) Tutti: “Everyone has a story to share. Even if you don’t define yourself as a public speaker, change your mindset because you have an individual experience worth sharing with the world.”

“A WORLD WHERE THERE IS NO NEED TO VISIT SPEAKHER ANYMORE.”

2) Yan: “It’s easy to be overwhelmed by seeing women’s representation low in Japan. Challenge people to find simple solutions in their daily lives. It could simply be echoing a woman’s voice or including a female into a panel of speakers. It’s important to start small to make an inclusive environment for everyone.”

3) Ann: “People are generally scared to start public speaking. You can do it and can get through it by starting small. Give a talk at your workplace or give a lightning talk. Slowly build up your skills and you will be able to speak to a larger audience.”

I challenge all readers to consider making small steps towards improvement in their own communities, with the hopes of one day achieving a future of equality and inclusion for all.

Cameron is a former registered nurse and national fencer. He loves promoting cultural exchange through writing, volunteer work, and other facets. You can find him in his free time playing video games or reading an engaging psychology book. He aspires to become a diplomat in the future.



Michael Herrington (Tōkyō)

The number one question people from back home ask me is, “How did you get so lucky?” But let me tell you, the journey here was anything but luck . . .

A NEW FLAVOR OF MUSIC:

ONETWENTY.

I come from Brunswick, a small town on the coast of Georgia about six hours driving from Atlanta in the USA. The first memories about my childhood that come to mind are lots of church, frequent beatings, and an extreme sense of boredom. That was just life growing up in my generation, but it wasn't all bad. From an early age, my grandmother encouraged me to pursue education as well as participate in the performing arts. This meant church plays, writing poetry, things like that. At the age of 10, I met my father who spurred my interest in hip-hop music.

It was love at first sight. As soon as I got my first computer, I used that passion to create my very first studio. The three “real” recording studios around town were constantly being shot up or raided by police. Having my own gave my friends and me a safe place to vent our frustrations. Nevertheless, outside of my oasis, life in this environment was dangerous. Having to survive through these conditions only made me hungrier to become successful. Seeing other children at school who were afforded the opportunity to live comfortable lives further fueled this desire. To seek this success, I needed to get out and see what else the world had to offer. However, it wasn't until I had enrolled in community college, failed miserably, and ended up staring down the barrel of a pistol that I decided to make a real change in my life. It was at that point when I decided to enlist in the United States Marine Corps.

“STARING DOWN THE
BARREL OF A PISTOL
THAT I DECIDED TO
MAKE A REAL CHANGE”

NEW COUNTRY. SAME APPETITE

My first duty station was Okinawa, Japan. Up until then, I knew absolutely nothing about Japan. I'd been seeing anime on television and wasn't even aware that it was Japanese; I just thought that it was much cooler than American cartoons. I lived in Okinawa for two years and began to grow into the person I am today. Okinawa was the first place I performed live. It's where I first started believing I had a chance at getting away from life as I had known it. So I took the chance to learn Japanese (mainly to make friends) and built relationships within the artist community around the island. By that point, I had a much better studio in my barracks room than back in Georgia. I kept telling myself that I had to build my craft if I wanted a better future. I left Okinawa in 2012 and returned to California where I finished my enlistment. At that point I made a critical decision; I decided to go back to college. However, this time was different. I was armed with discipline, a little bit of cash, and I was as hungry as ever. I made my rounds to visit family in Georgia and New York and then booked my ticket back to Japan.

“I WAS AS HUNGRY AS EVER”



During my time in Okinawa, I'd never actually visited Tōkyō. The military had far too many restrictions for me to comfortably go and enjoy the city. So when I returned, I was determined to live in Tōkyō. I knew that it was the New York equivalent of Japan, and I wasn't about to waste the small network I'd been building up until that point. So I got a place in Tōkyō and started college. At the same time, I tried to gather all of the misfits I would meet around Tōkyō—nyone odd at college, anyone interested in music, and anyone who wanted to be a part of something. I called the group LOKYO. I think when I finished college, we had done over 60 shows all over Tōkyō. We were known for coming to a venue in a large group and always sticking together. If I was at a venue you'd better believe the crew was with me, and we came to make noise. This taught me a lot about management and how to work well in a team. However, at the end of my college enlistment, disaster struck. I was deported!

BEFORE YOUR OBACHAN KNEW ME

My visa had run out. I knew that if I left Tōkyō three months shy of graduation then I'd never finish. I was also tired of being institutionalized after the military and was at my wit's end. So I stayed and finished college. I went to immigration the following week and was promptly deported. This was a heavy blow as it took all of my savings away and landed me in a situation similar to when I was in Brunswick. I'd reached out to a friend in Arizona for a place to stay. I just couldn't return home with my tail between my legs. But upon living there, I discovered that the situation was not what was originally promised. At my worst point, I decided to take a bus back to Georgia after my dad agreed to let me live with him. My first week back in Georgia I got a job at a restaurant as a busboy. My job was mainly cleaning glasses, but I made sure to clean them better than any other employee there.

“IF I WAS AT A VENUE YOU'D BETTER BELIEVE THE CREW WAS WITH ME. AND WE CAME TO MAKE NOISE”

After a year and a half at that restaurant, I'd worked my way onto the line and was looking to take the sauté station next. As soon as I'd collected enough to afford a ticket back to Tōkyō, I hopped on a bus to LAX (Los Angeles International Airport) and got out of town.

Present-day, I am a photography assistant and professional recording artist. I've gotten married and work with my wife on our very own multimedia brand. As you can gather, it wasn't luck that got me this far in life. As cliché as it sounds . . . it was hard work and a positive attitude. All of the experiences I've had led me to a point where I can give opportunities to other creative people around the world. I love giving back to the

creative community as it's very difficult to be a freelance artist. It requires a huge amount of sacrifice and enough people who believe in your vision. We spend so much time making our creations, yet more often than not, the product goes unappreciated and undervalued. COVID-19 made it even tougher for artists to earn a living wage since small-time musicians can't perform in front of large audiences without safety issues. There's never been a

more important time for artists to be able to earn online income and maintain an optimistic attitude. To do my part and help, I used my voice and influence to positively impact the artist community. By creating "Tokyo Flavors", a music video, I was able to do so.

“WE SPEND SO MUCH TIME MAKING OUR CREATIONS, YET MORE OFTEN THAN NOT, THE PRODUCT GOES UNAPPRECIATED AND UNDERVALUED”

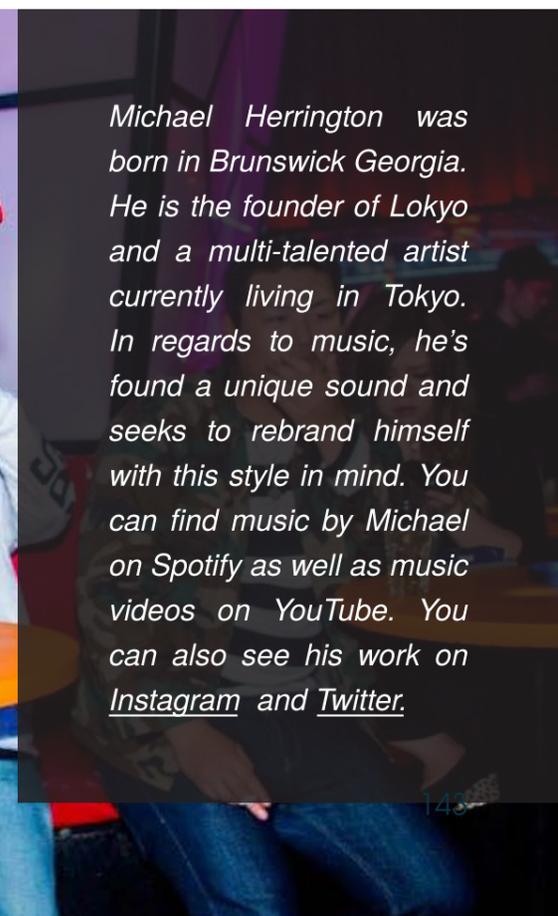
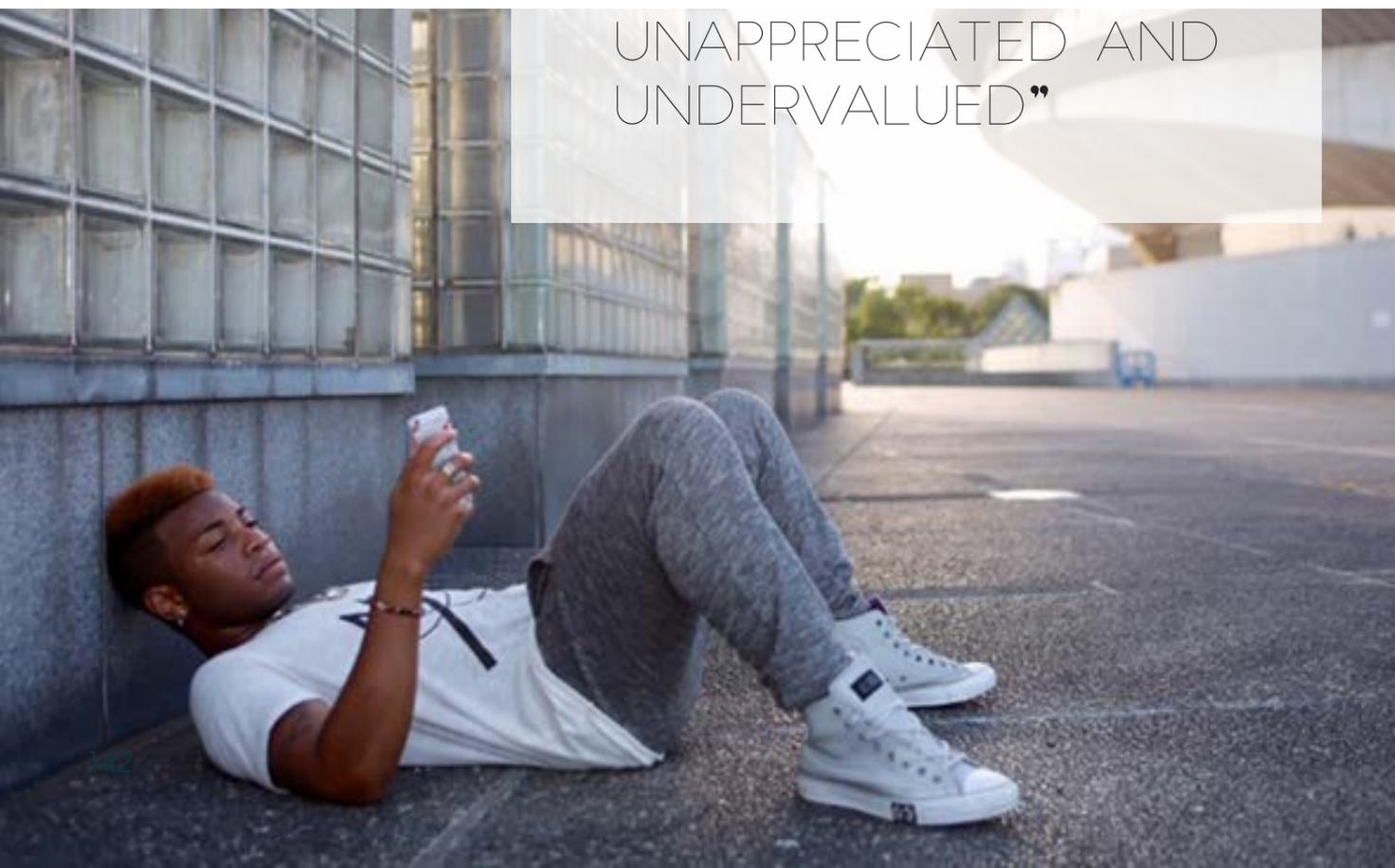
FROM JAPAN WITH LOVE

To inspire and uplift listeners, the lyrics of "Tokyo Flavors" talks about how patience, good vibes, and trustworthy friends helped me to succeed as a musician. One of the lyrics says, "Takusan no ai kudasai mainichi cuz the love is forever." It means, "Give me lots of love each day because love is forever." For me, being surrounded by love and support each day has helped me make it through tough times. To a musician, this could be something as simple as someone sharing your music or giving it a listen. Actually, in nearly all of my music I avoid using vulgar language, profanity, and offensive

terms in order to promote a more positive image of hip-hop music in general. There is so much music out there that talks about things that don't necessarily positively impact people's lives, and I wanted to make something different. However, I understand that the community needs more than inspiration to become successful.

With that in mind, I've created a Spotify playlist titled "Tokyo Flavors" intended to elevate musicians I feel are incredibly talented but underrated or simply undiscovered. 100% of the YouTube proceeds from the "Tokyo Flavors" music video will go towards pushing the playlist as far as I can take it! I'm not saying I stand above anyone

or have some incredible power. However, it's one small way I can give back to the artist community and help them gain the exposure they deserve without taking anything from the artists. Streaming services heavily favor artists featured on several playlists, and by simply listening to our music, you can give back to the creators around the world who work so hard simply to be heard. If you're interested in hearing new music from great artists around the world, check out the playlist. If you're on social media and you know someone who has good music or just would like to be featured yourself, also feel free to drop me a line. I'm always excited to hear new music and even more excited to make a new friend!



Michael Herrington was born in Brunswick Georgia. He is the founder of Lokyo and a multi-talented artist currently living in Tokyo. In regards to music, he's found a unique sound and seeks to rebrand himself with this style in mind. You can find music by Michael on Spotify as well as music videos on YouTube. You can also see his work on [Instagram](#) and [Twitter](#).

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

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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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