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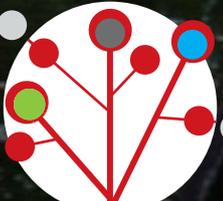
92 | Masks & Empty Seats: Watching Football In the Age of COVID

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Howdy readers!

I hope everyone's been enjoying the CONNECT content as much as I am! Lately, I've been enjoying trying some new things out from articles. Done the same? Get in touch I'd love to hear about it! Last month wellness featured some easy meal prep and I gave the [Harissa Pasta](#) a go and it was *so tasty*. I didn't have Harissa paste, frankly not sure what it is, but the recipe said any chilli paste was fine so I used my trusty Korean *gochujang*. If you never have tried gochujang I highly recommend adding into dishes such as fried rice or soup etc as a chilli paste but don't forget to taste as you go because it's the reason why Korean food is notoriously **spicy**. Last month's sports section also persuaded me to start [working out from home](#) by Elise's recommendation of [Chloe Ting](#). The only downside to Chloe's videos is they are *not* Japanese apartment friendly, sorry downstairs neighbours. Chloe has created free online programs for folks to follow along at home to take the thinking out of working out. *Love it*. I completed the two week summer shred, which I was thrilled about, and have already begun a second program (Who am I? Haha). If you do give it a go please send me a message about your suffering to connect.editor@ajet.net and we can complain about how many up and down planks she includes.

Another thing to be absolutely pumped about was the New Zealand election outcome, which will go down in history as the first of its kind in fifty years. This year New Zealand had an incredible early voter turnout and I can attest that voting while abroad was a piece of cake. I'm so glad that we have Auntie Cindy (NZ's colloquial nickname for Prime Minister Jacinda Adern) for another three years. For the many Americans abroad voting this year I hope you have the same ecstatic feeling post election on November third.

My top picks from the November issue are "Gamers Convene Online for the 2020 Tokyo Game Show" where my old neighbour Nathan writes about the online version of TGS this year in it's new COVID-19 format; soccer stadiums in Tōkyō return half way back to normalcy "Masks & Empty Seats: Watching Football In the Age of COVID"; our culture editor Alice chats to the host of a podcast spotlighting feminism in Japan in "Smashing the Patriarchy, One Podcast at a Time"; our arts editor Jessica interviews an architect who has made a brilliant interactive puzzle of Hiroshima and why it's important in "Hiroshimagraphy"; for those who are looking to start an English board in school or for some new ideas check out a Scotsman's take on this in "Boring to Brilliant: Five Tips to Take Your English Board to the Next Level".

Final words from me is try out a face peel going into the colder months, Japan is the mecca for these. And don't forget to keep hydrating!



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Alice Ridley

*"Look, everyone! This is what hatred looks like!
This is what it does when it catches hold of you!
It's eating me alive, and very soon now it will kill
me! Fear and anger only make it grow faster!"*
— Prince Ashitaka (*Princess Mononoke*)

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*"Need control, need it now. I need to live a
thousand times."* — Joji, "MODUS"

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"I, I'm spread way too thin" — Dirty Heads,
"Spread Too Thin"

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*"I have decided to stick with love. Hate is too
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*"This is the time for listening. Understanding
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*"Autumn carries more gold in its pocket than all
the other seasons."* — Jim Bishop

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*"If you can do one thing, hone it to perfection.
Hone it to the utmost limit!"* — Zenitsu Agatsuma

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*"Choose how your nature shapes you. Embrace
it. Find the strength in it."* — N.K. Jemisin, *The
Inheritance Trilogy*

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"Please put the teapot down. In your hands it is a mighty weapon." — Sherlock Holmes, "Enola Holmes"

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Photo: Jezael Melgoza on Unsplash

Tiny Class Strats



Sarah Baughn (Ishikawa)

As many *inaka* Assistant Language Teachers could tell you, sometimes the typical Japanese class size isn't 30 students crammed in a room. Sometimes the average class size can be six kids. Or, maybe even three. Most ALTs, even maybe most Japanese Teachers of English,

aren't specifically trained to deal with such tiny class sizes, so I thought I would share some of the tips I've picked up in working with smaller classes. Most of these ideas aren't entirely my own invention.

Photo by Krzysztof Kowalik on Unsplash



Advantages of Small Classes

Small classes bring some unique challenges, but they also present cool opportunities for ALTs!

One of those opportunities is that the amount of one-on-one interaction between students and teachers allows for so much more speaking time. The students in my smaller classes tend to be the most confident in speaking in one-on-one situations because of the higher amount of practice time. There are many more opportunities for the students to speak English with the ALT or the JTE and get feedback as opposed to larger classes. (Speech contests are a different story though!)

It's also easier to work individually with your students on their strengths and weaknesses. If the students don't understand the grammar point you're working through, you'll know very quickly and be able to focus some more time on breaking it down.

Smaller classes also mean more tight-knit communities. In my one school that has more than 30 students, I don't know many of my students' names. However, in my smaller schools I know my students' names, their interests, how they personally feel about English, what BTS member is their favorite, etc. These individual relationships are not only rewarding to cultivate, but they're also one of the best ways to make sure that your students stay engaged. If all your students are going through a "*Kimetsu no Yaiba*" ("*Demon Sayer*") phase, then why not make examples or games that utilize those characters? Or you can feature your students in example sentences with their interests.

Disadvantages of Small Classes

Though true in larger classes as well, the attitudes of your students can make or break any lesson plan. In a class of four, this is true to an extreme. If one student of the four isn't going to cooperate with your activity, then that's 25% of the class that doesn't want to work with you. Also, sometimes kids have a bad day or may be absent from class, completely changing the dynamic. For smaller classes, the need to be flexible and having a back-up activity is important. Unlike in larger classes where the one inattentive student can be forgiven, smaller classes need to have more personally tailored class plans to maintain their interest.

In smaller schools, students aren't separated by English level, but by whoever happens to be in their year. Because of this, occasionally there will be a class with vastly different English abilities. In larger classes, other students can pitch in to help their friends who are struggling, but in smaller classes, it is up to the ALT to help close the skill gap. Though, on the positive side, because of the smaller class size, ALTs with smaller classes will have the time to focus on individual students more easily.

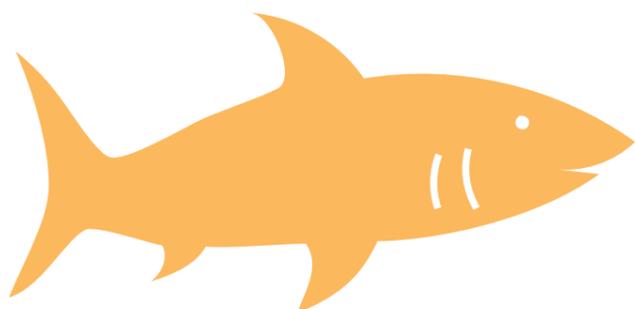
While you're able to focus on more individual students, the downside is that you can't fill class time with as many group activities. Group projects and team games especially require some modification. Jeopardy just isn't that engaging when it's two students. Many can be modified though, and I listed a few below that I've found worked well in smaller classes.



Activities for Tiny Classes

I'm not sure what everyone else learned in training, but most of the games and activities I learned about were for class sizes of at least ten students. I don't get to use them that often! When you have fewer than ten students, almost all games need to be changed and edited to fit your class. In my case, I usually try to design activities that will place all the students on the same team instead of against each other, with the English problems themselves being the competition.

Here are a few games I use with my tiny junior high school and upper elementary school classes:



Hot Seat: One student sits in front of the blackboard, facing away from the class and towards their peers. The ALT then writes an English word on the board, and the other students have to get the student in front to say the word by describing the word in English. For example, if the word is "apple," then the other students can say, "it's a red fruit." This game works best with second and third-year students, and typically requires at least a class of three to work well. If there's more than ten, then you can split it into two teams. Though this is typically a competition game, with a small enough class the students are usually entertained by the challenge of communicating the word alone. **Tip:** don't let them use gestures!

"Oh no, they're going to get eaten by a shark and this definitely isn't a child-friendly hangman game": This is my go-to game that I took from Magda Fuller. Thanks, Magda! To play this game, the ALT draws five stairsteps on a blackboard, places a magnet on the top step, and then draws an angry shark at the bottom. The ALT asks the students to give the magnet an English name so that they create some emotional attachment to this random magnet, and then from there the magnet trips and falls and will be in great danger if the students can't guess the right letters to spell the English word.

This game is good to use as a back-up for most occasions because you can just pull out the textbook and use vocabulary words from whatever unit they're currently studying. It's popular with my younger students because it's not too hard, and I make dramatic noises when they fail. My older ones enjoy the darker hypothetical peril their newfound magnet friend is in. If you have trouble-making boys who want to kill the poor magnet, make it fall more slowly so as not to ruin the other students' fun. This game does usually require at least two students, if not three, to keep it fun.

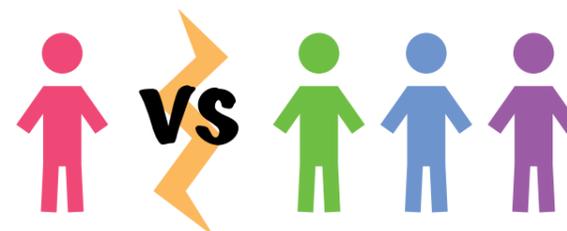


Karuta: The classic card matching game that can be played with any number of students, from one to 30. The ALT prints out two cards that match (or sentences that are split in half), flips them over and has students try to match the card. If playing with one student, the ALT can be the opponent. For a corona-friendly karuta experience, you can use fly swatters to slap the cards.

General Modification Advice:

Small School Staff Rooms: If you want to do an activity that requires presentations or asking English questions and you don't have enough kids for them to practice conversation, ask the staff room if your three students can come ask them some questions or do the presentation to the staff room! In my experience, the staff at small schools love to help out and use their own English to answer questions.

Teacher FIGHT: Many junior high school students would love to compete and win against their teachers. Modify activities so that you and your JTE can compete against your students, or alternatively have teams where the JTE and ALT compete against each other, leading their student teams to victory. Please do remember that you are going to have an advantage against your students and modify it accordingly! For example, give the ALT/JTE team much more difficult words than you would the students for a word race game where the students hear a word and then run to write it on the board.



One Minute Talking: Have the students pair off and talk for one minute about a topic! If you have less than four students, the JTE and ALT will also join the talking. After the minute, give students a chance to ask questions about how to say something in English or to correct any major mistakes (the point of the activity is to encourage confidence in talking though, so keep corrections to a minimum!). Then, swap partners! I usually aim for three rounds which is the max you can do with two students, a JTE, and an ALT. This activity works so much better with class sizes ten or under, because you can find the time to listen to all your students.

As you can see, many activities are still doable in tiny classes. Don't let a class size of three stop you from coming up with unique and engaging activities for your students. I owe so many of these ideas to other ALTs and JTEs that I've been blessed to work with. Feel free to steal and modify any activity listed in this article and let me know how they go!

In conclusion, don't fear tiny classes! They're different but also provide a unique opportunity to try new things.

Sarah Baughn is a second-year ALT living at the tip of the Noto Peninsula in Ishikawa. Among other things, she enjoys goshuin collecting, badly playing koto, and taking walks in the beautiful mountain/ocean nature combo of the Noto.

Boring to Brilliant:

Five Tips to Take Your English Board to the Next Level

Greg Hill (Gunma)

The stomach drop—a feeling most of us know all too well. Although it is a reaction usually reserved for the receipt of bad news (e.g. realising you forgot to visit the ATM before taking the toll road, finding out 7-Eleven is sold out of your go-to lunchtime onigiri, or asking for a McFlurry only to be told for the hundredth time that the ice-cream machine isn't working), new Assistant Language Teachers may also correlate this feeling with setting eyes on their empty English boards.

That vast, barren desert of wall screams out “Fill me!” but offers no suggestion as to just what it should be adorned with. When your Japanese Teacher of English requests you to come up with something, you try your best to muster up an enthusiastic response—a frank nod and a firm “Yes, no problem!”—but, when you land back at your desk, it's a frantic Google search for just what on Earth goes onto an English board.

If this feels all too familiar, you should look no further. Below are a few tips you can use to kick-start your imagination and get started on your English board!

1. Stick to what you know

In the wise words of my grandmother, “dae wit' ye dae best.” That's Scottish for “always stick to the path more travelled.” It's strong advice to focus on something you have plenty of experience and knowledge in, whether it be horse-riding, scuba diving, or B-horror movies. Use that knowledge to teach and inspire your students while also helping them get to know you a little better. For all you know, there might be a huge “Killer Klowns From Outer Space” fan in your third-grade conversation class—and that's a lifetime friendship waiting to happen.

But if you feel maybe your students won't respond to your own niche personal interests, the premier recommendation is to introduce your home country and culture. Students love to hear about foreign places, many so vastly different from Japan. I know from personal experience that reading about the retch-inducing ingredients of haggis has inspired a few students to ask me why on Earth do we eat that. And the answer is, because it is bloody delicious.

2. Or, stick to what you don't know

While adhering to what you know is always a safe option, it can be beneficial to stick your neck out and use your English board to educate both your students and yourself on something new. Take a look at a global event calendar ([HolidayInsight.com](https://www.holidayinsight.com) has a particularly thorough offering), and see if there's anything that stands out. For example, my September board covered Native American Day. Not only did it give me a good opportunity to learn about a cultures I was unfamiliar with, but it also educated my students on the hardships still faced by indigenous communities all over the world and how we can take action to uplift and preserve these ancient cultures and customs.

Sometimes the Japanese education system can feel monotonous, so highlighting important events and ideas typically outside the realms of public consciousness here in Japan can be a huge help. Broaden your students' minds as well as your own!



3. Seek inspiration anywhere

It's certainly daunting to see other ALTs' English board creations, but try to let it inspire you rather than intimidate you! Some people have plenty of free time during their workday to create elaborate displays that rival a Harrods Christmas window display, but that's not to say you can't create something spectacular on a tight schedule or a tight budget. Holidays are the best times to get creative: no students, no classes and most importantly, no interruptions. Swing by Daiso—that true treasure trove of economical crafting goods—and grab some markers, felt sheets and glitter, and get to work! Use these materials to create harmonious headers, mind-boggling maps or fascinating fact walls that will blow your students' socks off.

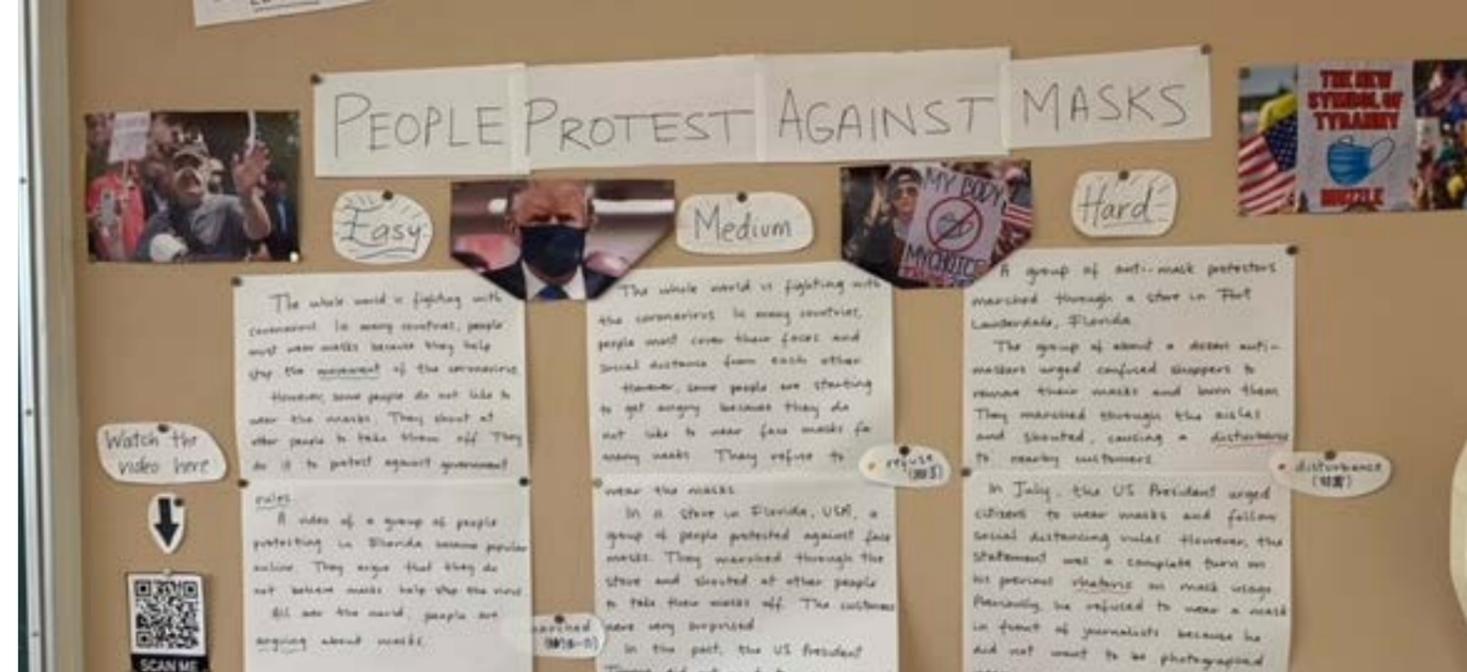
Learning English might be a serious subject, but that doesn't mean your board has to visually reflect that. Inject some colour and take some inspiration from your fellow ALTs to really deliver that knock-out display that will leave your JTEs gasping. Bright and eye-catching displays certainly give classrooms a much more welcoming feel.

4. Keep it relevant

Displays can often go stale after a few weeks, especially if they're based on particular events that are locked in on the calendar. For example, my own Tanabata display aged like milk as soon as the holiday had passed, and I woefully had to tear it down despite it being my best work! Keeping your board constantly updated can feel like a chore at times, and fresh ideas can be scarce.

Thankfully, there are so many curious and somewhat wacky 'International Day of...' variations that you can use to teach some interesting English phrases and get a laugh out of your students too. These work well as you wait for the months to pass between the old faithfuls like Halloween, Thanksgiving, and Easter. Adding references or designs inspired by new video games, albums, and movies are always good ideas and can help breathe new life into otherwise rote displays.

If you have plenty of space on your board, it can be a comical addition to give 'Name Your Car Day' a shout-out, perhaps even leaving a worksheet with photos of curious cars and getting your students to write potential names underneath. Or, use the opportunity to revise already-learned vocabulary by mentioning 'International Dessert Day,' and get your students to talk about their favourite custard creams and chocolate cakes. The possibilities are truly endless!



5. Know your audience

Most importantly, it is essential that you keep the difficulty level at a comfortable spot so that most students will feel confident in reading and answering anything you may present on your English board. However, don't dumb it down too much—students learn best when they're presented with a challenge.

A good way to test students' abilities is taking the same news article and displaying it in three levels of difficulty: easy, medium, and hard. In my senior high school, I have a wall which acts as a sort of school newspaper and highlights some news stories happening outside Japan that my students might find interesting.

I can sometimes find it a struggle to make my displays accessible to all skill levels, so to work around this, I'll use the level-up difficulty trick with a news article so most students are able to interact with whatever is on the wall. The easy version communicates the story using the most basic English, with lengthy definitions for any new or challenging words. As the difficulty increases, more complex words and sentence structures are added (while maintaining definitions of new words, albeit much briefer) so that students can scale up their reading ability and use the board as an opportunity to build confidence in their own skills.



And that's about all the advice I can offer. In terms of English boards, rules are made to be broken. At best, these suggestions can offer you solid ideas on what to do and where to go if you're staring into the void with zero inspiration, and at worst, they can present a very general guideline to help you get a head-start creating your own shrine to the English language.

As someone who has an entire English room to decorate and update, I've really had to get crafty with new ideas all the time. But if you're working with just a single wall or board, thankfully there won't be as much pressure. Always remember to keep your board a reflection of what makes English exciting! Variety is key, along with

interesting topics and eye-catching designs. So certainly aim high in terms of delivering innovation throughout the year, and well-thought-out displays that your students will love!

Best of luck!

Greg is a second-year JET living among onsen-goers and outdoor-lovers of Minakami, Gunma. Originally from Scotland, you can now find him enjoying Gunma's many hiking trails during summer and under his kotatsu fending off the bitter mountain frost in winter!

IDIOM OF THE MONTH

Lara Yi (Incoming JET)

さる き お
猿も木から落ちる

SARUMOKIKARAOCHIRU

The meaning of sarumokikaraochiru is that anyone can make a mistake, and can be translated into: even monkeys fall from trees.

IDIOM BREAKDOWN (1,2,3)

猿 / さる / saru / monkey, *noun*

も / mo / also or too, *particle*

木 / き / ki / tree, *noun*

から / kara / from, *particle*

落ちる / おちる / ochiru / to fall or drop, *verb*

EXAMPLE SENTENCES (4,5)

A: 信じられない。プロの選手があんなに簡単なショットをミスするなんて。
Shinjirarenai. Puro no senshu ga an'nani kantan'na shotto o misu suru nante.

B: 猿も木から落ちるって言うじゃん。
Sarumokikaraochiru tte iujan.

A: I can't believe it. How could a professional player miss such a simple shot?

B: Even monkeys fall from trees!

猿も木から落ちるですよ、用心なさいね。

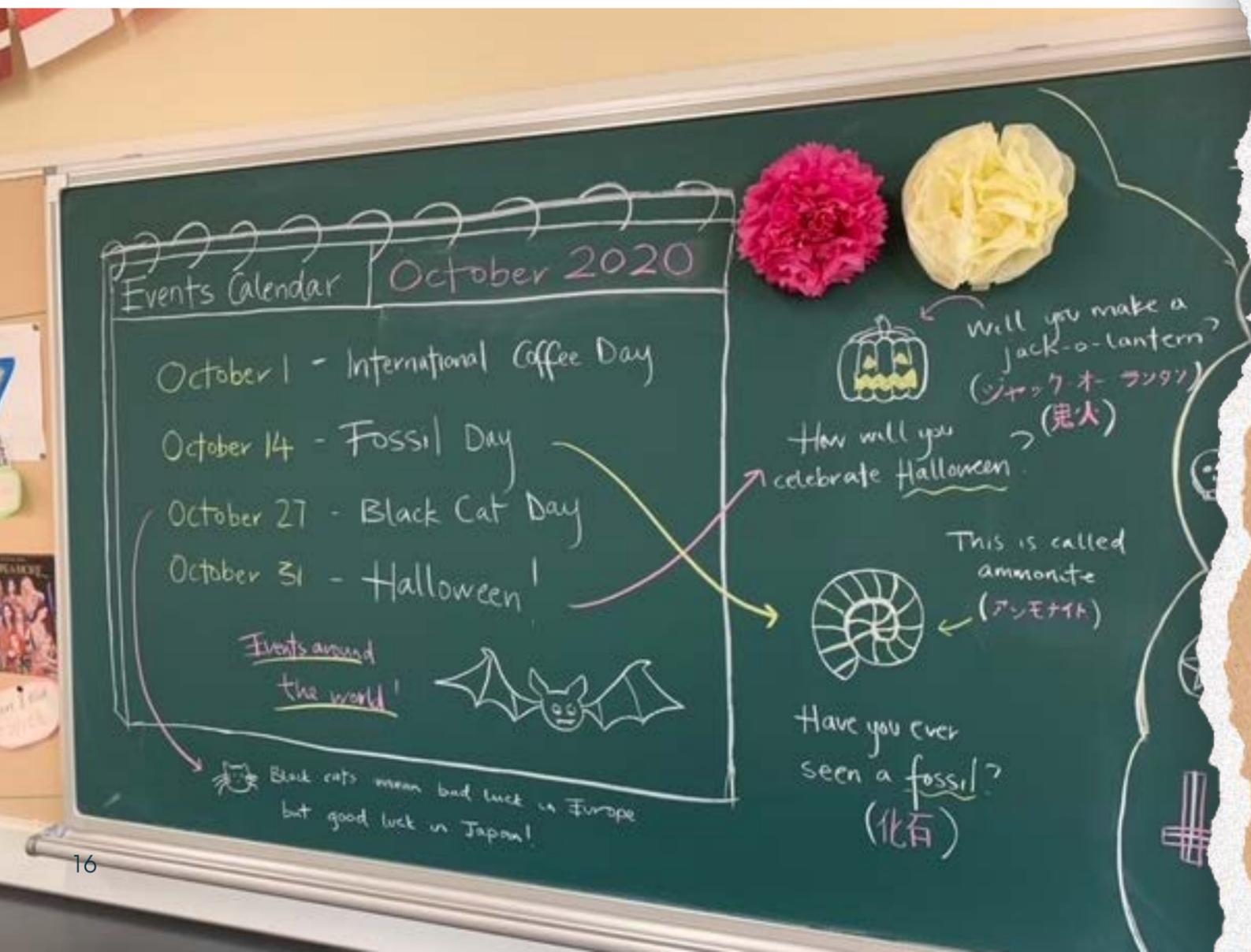
Sarumokikaraochirudesu yo, yōjin shi nasai ne.

Monkeys also fall from trees—be careful.



SOURCES

- <https://bit.ly/2H1ggji>
- <https://bit.ly/3IC1QW5>
- <https://bit.ly/2F1jdLn>
- <https://bit.ly/3jTOMuS>
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Making Your Yen Work for You

A Crash Course in Investing for International Residents

Derek Hurst (Nagano)



Photo by Scott Graham on Unsplash

Trust me, I get it.

The *furikomi* (bank transfer) has finally come through, you enter your PIN again for a withdrawal at the Lawson ATM, enter the amount, and exhale.

Your body is ready.

You reach down into the cash drawer as you listen to the sweet, sweet symphony of bills dispensing while images of *shōchū-fueled* karaoke nights and winter weekends snowboarding and *onsen* luxuriating rattle around your mind like bagged-popcorn kernels in a microwave. The smell of butter hits your nostrils as you wait patiently, intently watching the oiled bag rotate within. Your mouth waters as the droning hum of the microwave grows more excruciating by the second, until finally, mercifully, you hear that first **pop!**

Cash is now in hand. It's time to get this party started! Saving is for suckers, you're not retiring for decades (or ever, assuming we millennials/zoomers continue to get the ecological and financial shaft from our respective governments), and time's-a-wastin' here in the land of the rising sun.

The allure of YOLOing your entire paycheck, month after month, year after year on unfettered hedonism is a strong one, and sadly a trap that many Assistant Language Teachers (myself included, many moons past) fall into. Most of us have it in mind to spend a few years in *Nippon*, enjoy our last slice of true freedom and head back whence we've come to continue at grad school, start families and generally get back to cold, hard reality. Inevitably, most of us will ruthlessly squander these admittedly awesome years only to return to our homes like the prodigal sons and daughters we are, hats in hands, as our parents (hopefully) lovingly welcome us back into our old bedrooms.

People, it doesn't have to be this way. You can have your mochi and eat it too, as long as you're willing to take a few, simple steps.

I'm not talking about becoming a money minimalist, or subscribing to some misguided and ultimately self-defeating policy of rigid financial asceticism. We all know *that* person, you know, the one who never leaves their apartment and who has come to a grand total of one event since they arrived two years ago. They don't have a car,

subsist on ramen and white rice, and keep their room just warm enough during the winter months to avoid hypothermia because they're 'conscious' of their spending. That's not us, and there's no reason it has to be. In fact, if you play your cards right, **you're** going to be the one offering to buy everyone drinks at the *nijikai* (drinking party afterparty).

What I'm talking about is getting some skin in the game. What I'm talking about is investing.

I don't care who you are or where you're from —investing is something you can do. Saving is great, but you'll never build true wealth stuffing bills under the futon. If you want to grab your financial life by the horns, you've got to *invest*. You don't need a Ph.D in Quantitative Finance to leverage your money and have it work *for* you in the stock market. You don't need to be North American to make it work either (although I would highly recommend sticking to US-based equities because of their liquidity and value). So, how do we even start?

Step 1: Open a brokerage account in your home country. As long as you still have a permanent address there, you should be able to do it

relatively easily. Americans and Canadians have a somewhat easier time doing it, as we have more options in terms of brokerages, but it's still doable, no matter where you're from. [Interactive Brokers](#) are probably the oldest and best known US-based brokerages that allow non US residents to open accounts, but I would personally recommend [Robinhood](#) or [WeBull](#) as they offer free stocks at sign-up.

Step 2: Deposit at least 100,000 yen (using [TransferWise](#) or another remittance service) into your account. (Note: You will have to maintain a bank account back home for this to work, linking Japanese bank accounts to foreign brokerages is a huge headache).

Step 3: Invest in a broad market index-fund or exchange-traded fund (ETF) that follows a certain index (tickers SPY for S&P500, QQQ for Nasdaq, VTI for total market). I only recommend doing this to get your feet wet initially, eventually you will want to move away from broad-market funds. The reason for this is simple: buy-and-hold is great for people that don't want to deal with their money, and although it has historically outperformed active trading,



we're wanting to build a true *life* skill here. That means rolling our sleeves up. Investors who leave their money in index funds are like Americans who step off the plane at Charles-de-Gaulle and immediately head to McDonald's. Yes, it's true you're more likely to 'have a good vacation' if you go on a guided tour, but I guarantee it'll be a lot more memorable if you venture off the beaten path. Sure, you may come down with food poisoning at some point or end up getting lost in the rain, but you'll be a lot better off in the long run than the people who never strayed more than fifty meters from the air-conditioned comfort of the tour bus.

Step 4: Rinse and repeat until you feel comfortable enough with your chosen broker platform that you can start buying individual stocks. Remember, the point here is to build up your confidence. YouTube has thousands of hours of free content from smart people to get you started. They can help you through it. I'm not going to get into specific strategies today, but I will say that knowing the fundamentals of stock and option trading will put you in a much better place than 99% of your peers, if you're willing to put in the time to learn it. The reason for all of this is simple: building assets allows our money

to work for us, and the stock market is one of the ways that can happen. Using very conservative options trading strategies (covered calls/puts, wheeling, etc), you could easily be bringing in an extra 50,000 to 100,000 yen a month on top of what you earn from your contracting organization. Granted, it may take a bit of time to get up to that level (You'll want a 15,000 US dollar equivalent portfolio minimum to consistently make these kinds of returns), but it is more than doable.

Step 5: Consistently add to your portfolio and keep reinvesting your profits, ideally month after month and while you acclimate yourself to a slightly-reduced paycheck (aim for 30-50% of your monthly income going straight into your portfolio). After a few months you won't even feel like you're skimping anymore. Yes, it may mean, at least initially, only having eight plates at Kappa Sushi instead of 15, but your efforts will pay off in the long run. After a year of doing this, you will have learned more about investing than most people you know, and will have built up a surprisingly-large nest egg, which can then be used for fund further ventures, whether it be graduate school, starting your own business or even just staying and growing in the stock market. The sky's the limit, which brings us to our next point:

Step 6: Expand, and grow. Once you've got a good baseline, you can start branching out into other investment vehicles, such as real estate. You see, your whole thinking in regards to money needs to change. Up until now, you've been trading your time for yen. This has got to change if you ever want to move forward in your life. The overall goal here needs to be building and acquiring assets (as opposed to liabilities), diversifying your income streams and building wealth. There's no reason you can't do all of these things here in Japan (even getting into real estate is totally doable), but the key is that you actually *do* it. You've got to start somewhere.

In that famous scene in "Good Will Hunting", Ben Affleck affectionately tells a faltering Matt Damon: "Tomorrow, I'm gonna wake up and I'll be fifty, and I'll still be doin' this shit." Make no mistake, keep doing what you're doing now and you **will** wake up tomorrow and be fifty with nothing to show for it. While there's nothing inherently wrong with that, I just think you can do better, if you choose. Just like Matt Damon, you are sitting on that winning lottery ticket, right now, and you don't even realize it. I don't care who you are, where you're from. You can do this. A few simple steps now will set you up for a lifetime of success, freedom and wealth.

What I've presented here is a basic starting point. It's not meant to be the be-all-end-all. Like that bottle opener on your keychain, wherever you go in life, stock market investing is a tool you can bring with you and will come in handy at unexpected times. Knowing the basics of stock investing will lay the groundwork for true financial independence, and will help reorient your thinking towards money and your financial goals. The number one reason most people never start investing is because they think it's too hard, too complicated or too risky. I'm not saying it's risk-free by any means, but it is neither complicated nor is it exceedingly difficult. Investing, especially these days, with zero-commission brokers and free trades has never been simpler, so there is no excuse not to get started.

So, by all means, enjoy that popcorn. Enjoy the onsens, the ski weekends and the shōchū. For pity's sake, turn up the heat in December and be comfortable. Enjoy Japan. All I'm asking is before you head to the pachinko parlor and blow it all, pay *yourself* first.

Becoming a Mainstreet Mainstay in Nagano

The Story of Kamesei Inn

Derek Hurst (Nagano) interviewing Tyler Lynch (Nagano)

Five years ago, I came down to the onsen for a much-needed getaway weekend ahead of a job interview in south-central Nagano. Although I didn't end up landing the position, I will never forget the sense of calm and serenity I felt during my interview, in large part because of the amazing two days I had just enjoyed at a very particular and unique Japanese inn. My memories of the inn stayed with me, and five years later, almost to the day, (just before COVID-19 hit, incidentally) I flew back from Hawaii and returned to Chikuma again to interview for the same position, and, I made sure to stay at the exact place I did before (and, consequently, I also landed the job this time).

Nestled on a quiet street across the Chikuma River, Kamesei Inn stands out from the dozens of other hotels that line the streets of Chikuma, and for more reason than one. Located in Togura Kamiyamada Onsen (a district of Chikuma City in Central Nagano), Kamesei Inn is unique in that its proprietor, Tyler Lynch, is an American. Standing at 200 cm tall (6'6"), Tyler would stand out in most any crowd in which he found himself, especially in Japan. It's not just his height, however he has done what few other foreigners in Japan have managed to do: build a flourishing and vibrant business in the famously insular Japanese hot spring industry.



Give me an overview of what you do:

I run a traditional onsen ryokan along with some side businesses, such as a rental cycle/guided cycling and walking tours program, an Uber Eats-like deal for local restaurants, and selling the Seattle-style cookies I bake for our guests over the Internet.

How did you get started doing this? Running a traditional Japanese inn is pretty unique, being an American:

For the ryokan, the inn had been in my wife's family for several decades, and the mother-in-law wanted to retire but didn't have anyone to take over, so she talked about tearing it down and making a parking lot. Most of the inns nearby have replaced their wooden buildings with multi-story ferroconcrete boxes. Our inn still has the original wood building surrounding a central garden with passageways leading to semi-detached guest-rooms. If the inn had just been a concrete box, I wouldn't have been

sad to see it go. But I felt the wood buildings deserved to be around for at least another generation, so my wife and I sold our house and gave up our lives in Seattle to move back to Nagano and become innkeepers. The eco-tour side business is an attempt to take advantage of our town's rural setting and the cycling possibilities with the Chikuma River Bike Path and all the great hillclimb courses around. The restaurant delivery and cookie baking resulted from the COVID-induced downturn in our inn's business.

What has been the biggest joy of your work?

The biggest joy with running the inn has been being able to provide a place for guests to escape their hectic lives for a night and get back in touch with themselves. We often get thank you messages saying that staying at the inn let them recharge their bodies' batteries. I feel that providing that experience has become my calling.



find one that fits your passion, start out at the bottom offering to work with cleaning or as a room servant and gradually work your way up. Learning the art of *omotenashi* (Japanese-style hospitality) can be a life-long endeavor.

What's something about the business that would surprise most people?

Actually, running the inn is about 50% of my work. The other half, surprisingly, is all the work with the local ryokan association and the civic improvement work with the town and even the prefectural level.

Now, the elephant in the room: COVID. What has the effect of the pandemic been for you guys?

COVID has fundamentally changed our operation. Up until now, we'd been focused on trying to max out our room occupancy. Now, we're trying to provide a higher level of service to a fewer number of guests. For example, after I get this latest outdoor bath finished, the next project will be to add a private outdoor bath to one of the guest rooms. Overall, it's definitely been a challenge, but I'm hopeful for the future.

How about the biggest challenge?

The biggest challenge with the inn has been making the necessary improvements. The mother-in-law didn't have energy to do much-needed maintenance and updating. Since we've come, I've built three outdoor baths with a fourth in the works now, and we've renovated several of the guest rooms to make staying in them more comfortable. We'll never have all the modern comforts that the concrete boxes provide, so another challenge has been to choose our guests better, i.e., attract guests

that appreciate the classic ambience of an old-fashioned inn.

I imagine there are more than a few people who might find this kind of work appealing; tell me, what would be the advice you would give for foreigners looking to get into the hospitality industry?

For anyone who wants to get into the business of running a ryokan, there are innkeepers throughout the country whose children aren't interested in taking over and are faced with having to close their family-run inn. If you



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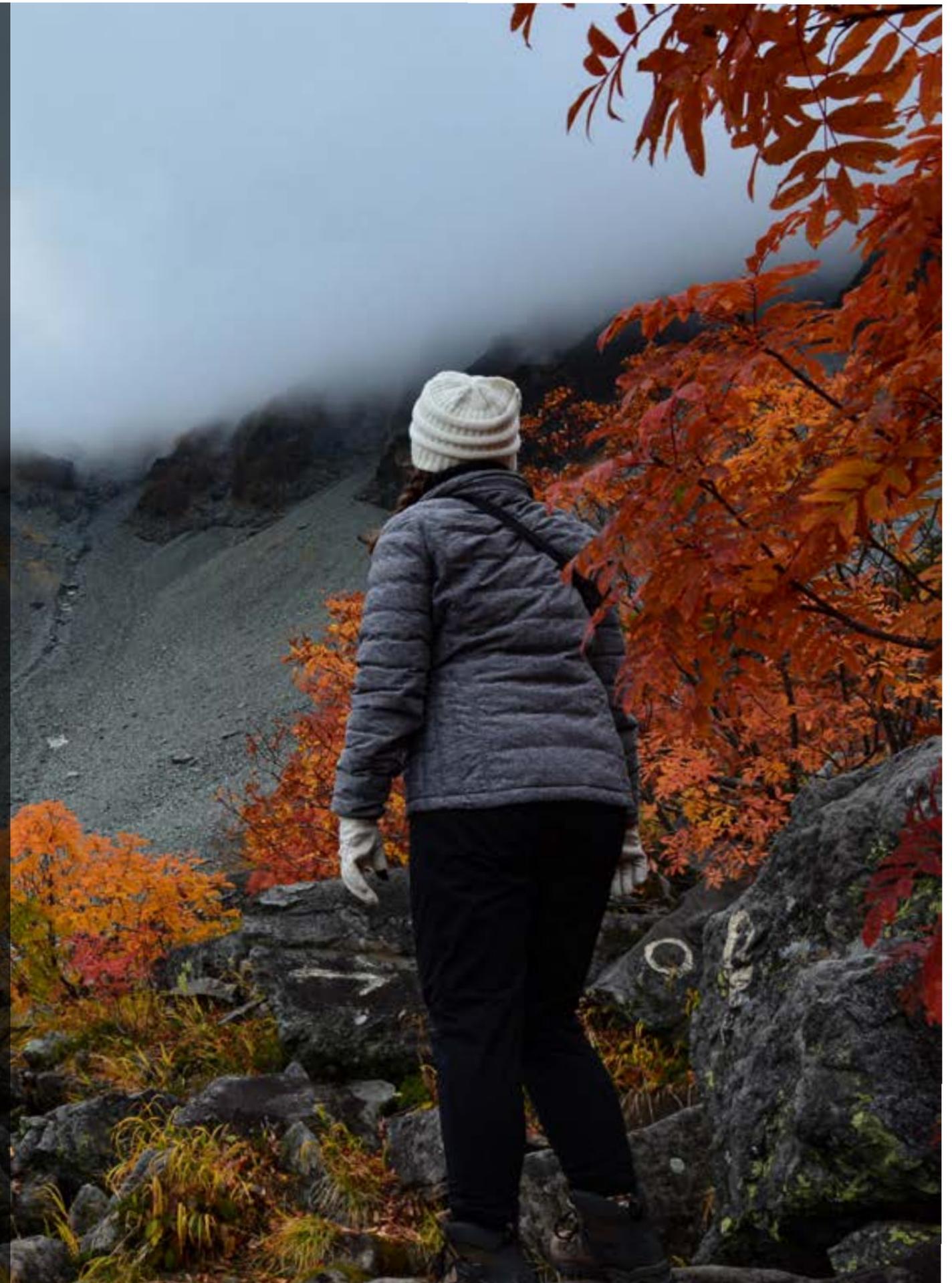
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Fashion, Foxes, and Furisode:

An Interview with Kimono Model Makiko Takayama

If you've lived in or visited Japan, you will have come across the kimono. Its familiar T-shaped fit, rectangular body, and matching *obi* are the national dress of Japan. To find out more about the garment and understand its contemporary usage, we spoke to accomplished kimono model, singer, and musician Makiko Takayama.



Modelling

Makiko began modelling kimonos six years ago, when Hitomi Mizoro, a licenced kimono dresser and the owner of Studio10 hair salon, requested that she model for her. Ms. Mizoro dresses, styles, and hairstyles for formal occasions requiring traditional Japanese dress, and holds the top certification required to do so. She and Makiko work together to showcase a wide variety of kimono styles for photoshoots, runway events, and competitions.

What kinds of kimono do you model?

Many kinds! I have had all situations. There is a kimono style called *furisode* that has extra-long sleeves, they are for unmarried women, like on 20th year coming-of-age celebrations. I've also modeled *tomesode*, the formal, black, short-sleeved kimono for married women. As well as *shiomuku* and *wataboshi* for weddings. I have worn *jūnihitoe*, the kimono of Heian period court ladies, like you see on *hinamatsuri* dolls. They are so heavy! I have experienced them all.

What are the photos used for? Are they in advertisements for shops that sell kimonos?

Yes. And for enjoying myself. I show them to my friends, my family and post them on my Instagram. Sometimes they are used for advertising and events. They are on posters to promote Ms. Mizoro's business, to show her skill in putting on kimonos and to show that she has experience in the styles of different eras. As well as events, and photobooks, and contests, and kimono parties.

What are kimono parties?

Kimono models and professional kimono dressers gather to show their skill. Me and Ms. Mizoro are one team. There are many, many teams from around Japan. It's a contest! Sometimes in Kyoto or at hot springs. And the most beautiful woman is chosen. And after, everyone eats delicious food and celebrates.

Styling

Speaking with Makiko, it became evident just how labor intensive putting on a kimono and achieving this traditional look can be.

When you're going to a photoshoot, how does your day start?

Early mornings, usually 5:00 am or 6:00 am. I have to eat a lot of food because I cannot eat in the kimonos and I need a lot of energy for the day. I cannot go to the restroom in the kimono, so I drink a lot of water in the morning and use the restroom before I am dressed.

It's too difficult with the long sleeves and all the layers?

Yes, always! So, they always say "restroom, restroom, restroom" before we begin!

So, you do the hair and make-up first?

The kimono underwear is the first layer. It is made from cotton, so it is very, very soft. I also wear *tabi* socks. Then they set my hair. It usually takes 30 minutes to 1 hour for my hair. Then it is time for make-up, which is not fashionable; it is very simple. The base is really important, to keep the skin looking beautiful for the long photoshoot.

So, they do base make-up and no bright colours?

Yes, that's right. It's just one person who does the make-up and the hair. After that, they layer the kimono and obi on top. It is so heavy!

About the hair, do you sometimes wear wigs?

Usually it is my natural hair.

Can you tell me about the hairstyle? Is it usually a traditional style, right?

I will tell you. First, you separate the centre. If you are doing a very old style, you use paper to hold the hair, as before they did not have hair ties. Pull forward the front sections of hair and

tie them back with the paper and wax. Separate into five sections. It's a strong method, that hurts. You use a lot of old-style wax called *bintsuke*. It's a very very heavy wax, with a not-good smell, but it keeps everything in place. *Maikos* (geisha in training) use this same wax in their hair and makeup. You place a tiny sponge in the hair to give it shape. It is pinned in and hair is wrapped around to create a large shape. Then it is sprayed and waxed to maintain the shape. Sometimes hair extensions are added in to make it thicker. Finally, beautiful ornaments are added into the hair to complete the look.



Jūnihitoe





How do you wash all the wax out?

Lots of cleansing shampoo!

Once everything is on, what happens?

They take photographs for one or two hours at many different locations. By lakes, or by *Shurakuen* in Tsuyama. Autumn settings are so beautiful.

Do you make all the decisions about how you pose and move?

Yes, the photographer does not say how to pose. When I first started, I didn't know how to pose. After I saw my pictures I was like "oh my gosh, they're not beautiful!" You can't be stiff like a ballerina or have your shoulders back. It will cause your kimono to gap in the front around your chest! Not good! The kimono should be smooth and flat. A long neck is good. A relaxed pose and long neck.

What happens after the photoshoot?

I go home so tired! It's very tiring, so I eat many foods after. I need a good sleep and a good bath!

Events

Part of Makiko's life as a kimono model involves attending competitions and runway events both in Japan and overseas. She recently visited Switzerland to take part in a runway show for [I.C.D.](#) (*L'Association Internationale des Maîtres Coiffeurs de Dames*), an international federation of high fashion hair stylists.

You were invited to come and model at an I.C.D. event in Switzerland! Tell us about that.

There were twelve people on the Japanese team. Our leader was Kouji Furukubo, a very famous hair stylist from Kyoto. He chose the fox wedding, a Japanese fairy tale, to be the runway theme for team Japan and our colors were all white or pastel. His wife, Taeko Furukubo, designed all the runway clothes for our show. I wore a *shiomuku*, a traditional shinto wedding dress, that had been re-imagined for my character and given subtle color.

So, you were the fox-bride, the main character from the Japanese team?

Yes. I wore a fox mask. I walked the runway with two men by my side holding lanterns. I had to stop and bow in the centre. They took my veil off to reveal the hair.

My face was made all white. A little bit on my hands too. I had to practice a lot how to turn my head and look graceful with the heavy hairstyle. I was so nervous, but it was so exciting. When I watched the video, I thought it was so amazing, really beautiful. I couldn't believe it was me!

I wore very high heels, so I was nervous of falling. I was worried about that. It was so scary. And the robes were so long and dragged on the ground, it was difficult to walk. You have to do tiny kicks to make the robe move in front of you to avoid tripping on the hems.



ICD hair and make up



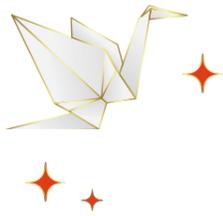
ICD rehearsal



ICD rehearsal



ICD group photo



Yukata by Junko Koshino

Inspiration

Although kimonos are not often worn in everyday life in modern Japan, Makiko still hopes that more people can enjoy them and appreciate their beauty.

Do you have a favourite kimono designer?

Junko Koshino. She makes, not kimonos but yukata, that are very colourful and vivid. Orange, white, navy. Altogether they look very beautiful. They are a “calculated beauty,” very carefully put together. It is precise. From every angle it looks beautiful, and it’s a very cool, modern Japanese look.

Though, usually in my modeling I am using antique kimonos, not modern designers. I don’t own them; they are supplied by Ms. Mizoro. Sometimes, I can input and change the style.

Are there any particular colours you like?

I like white because my skin is very white. In dark colours I wear more make-up, like smokey eyes. To give my face more colour. Stronger eyebrows and eyeshadow, but no fake eyelashes. A famous kimono teacher once said that you don’t need fake eyelashes because the natural look is more beautiful. Kimonos are simple so the makeup should be simple—that’s very good balance.

Do you ever wear traditional clothing when you’re not modelling?

Not often. Though, I wear yukata to festivals. I wear kimonos when I play music at kimono festivals. When I went to Kyoto with my friends, we rented cheap kimonos to wear around the beautiful places in Kyoto. It was a nice experience. But around my hometown I have no occasion to wear them. I want to wear them more often!

I also have a licence to dress people in tomesode kimonos, but I hardly use it. I need to practice!

Was it difficult to learn?

Yes, it is so difficult. You learn to put it on a mannequin first, so I have not tried on a human yet.

How did you get a licence?

Ms. Mizoro suggested it. I had to learn for three whole days of 8 hours each. There were many students and one teacher. On the last day there was a test, and I passed! I went with my younger brother, so he has a licence too. He’s very cool.

Amongst Japanese people, are people buying more kimonos or have people stopped buying new kimonos?

Every new season some people might want to buy a new kimono. Yet, it is expensive. Young men and women don’t have much interest in kimono, I think. They think it’s too old fashioned or they have no opportunity to wear it. The kimono is beautiful, but people have not had a chance to experience it.

Has modelling kimonos influenced your style?

Kimonos are simple so the makeup should be simple —that’s very good balance.



着物



It has not changed my style. It has just changed my posture! I know how to hold my body in a more beautiful way. To make my neck longer and my body look elegant.

Do you have any strong childhood memories of wearing a kimono or yukata?

I remember wearing a yukata to the Mimasaka fireworks festival when I was ten years old. It was a navy yukata with a dragonfly print. It was in a yukata contest for children at the festival, and I won! They gave me lots of juice as a prize! I wanted to wear traditional clothing more to get more juice.

Later, I won a grand prize for wearing yukata and playing guitar at a *tanabata* festival at my university. They chose the most beautiful man and woman at university. I am shy so I was so nervous. It was my first time playing the guitar in front of people. I was so nervous.

Obviously you did well, you won!

I think my face is so simple, small eyes, and very white, like an egg. Famous Japanese face. Like an *ukiyo-e*. A doll-like face, but I'm not a doll. Still, my face is good for kimono and yukata, it looks good with traditional clothing.

Is there anything else you want foreign people to know about kimonos?

The Japanese kimono has many ways to be worn. It has many meanings, which is very beautiful and complicated. The sleeves are beautiful and there are many traditional backgrounds to be experienced. Enjoy kimono! If you wear a kimono you will look very fresh and beautiful. Have good posture and feel beautiful inside and out. It is very feminine and graceful. They bring out your inner beauty, so they can be enjoyed in that way.

Makiko Takayama has been a kimono model since she was 20 years old. She is also active as a singer and ukulele musician. You can find her on [Instagram](#) and [YouTube](#).

*Rachel Fagundes is starting her 4th year on the JET program and is the entertainment editor for **CONNECT**. She likes fantasy, science fiction, and badly behaved cats.*

*Shannon Stocker is an incoming Assistant Language Teacher on the JET program and the Fashion & Beauty Editor for **CONNECT**.*



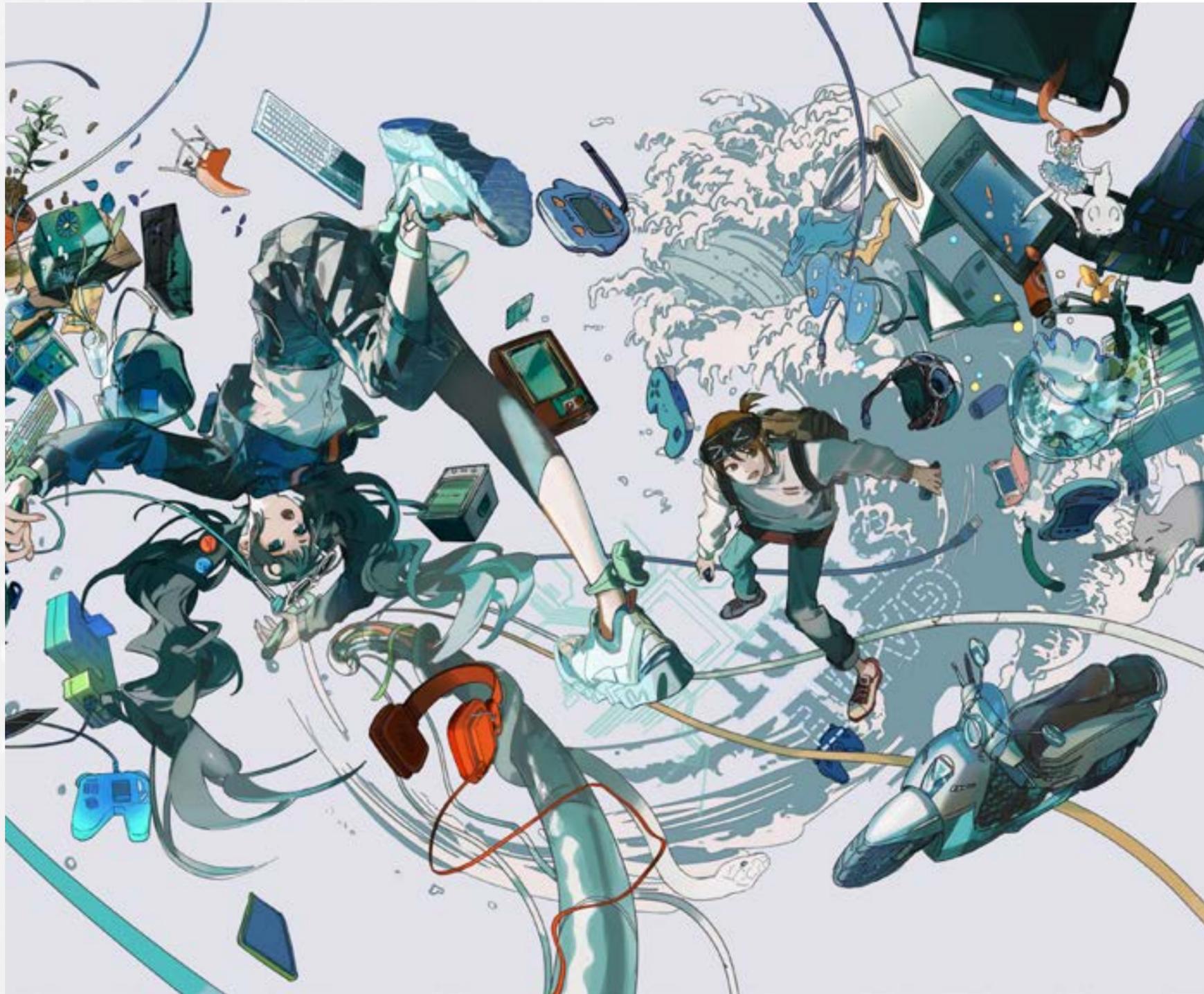
Makiko and Kouji Furukubo

Photos: Makiko Takayama
Art: Freepik

GAMERS CONVENE ONLINE FOR THE 2020 TOKYO GAME SHOW

Nathan Post (Gunma)

Ah, the comforts of home. No long lines or smelly otaku to distract you from the delights of the 2020 Tokyo Game Show. That's right; this year TGS was held entirely online due to the Novel Coronavirus pandemic and ongoing apocalypse that is the year 2020. But, uh, at least the games are good!



Though it was originally scheduled as a physical event, the planned press conferences and developer panels were instead streamed through the official TGS YouTube page, as well as the pages of various game publishers presenting at the event. While there were some inevitable technical difficulties, for the most part the streams went well without any 2020-grade catastrophes.

One of the added bonuses of this format was that developers were often responding and reacting to the comments sections of the stream in real time, so there was more interactivity between the fans and the presenters than in previous years. Some streams also had live interpretation layered over the Japanese speakers, avoiding the usual pauses at physical events.

As an online show, this year's TGS was devoid of much of the scale and spectacle of the floorshow of previous years, but as a result, the focus was squarely on the games. So, without further ado, let's discuss the online presentations and biggest and most interesting titles from TGS 2020.

Note that because this year's TGS was all online, you too can experience the joys of trolling through hours of video in search of tasty morsels of information! Just check out the Tokyo Game Show 2020 Online official YouTube page [here](#).

© TOKYO GAME SHOW 2020 ONLINE



Photos of the crowds at TOKYO GAME SHOW 2019



NIER

Square prioritized showing off **Nier Replicant**, a remake of the original **Nier** game. **Nier** flew under the radar when it first came out back in 2010, but Platinum Games' absolutely stunning follow-up, **Nier: Automata**, garnered enough critical acclaim and attention in 2017 to revive the series and inspire this remake of the original title.

During the stream, they showed off gameplay of **Nier Replicant** for the first time, and it indeed appears to be an enhanced and expanded version of the original—somewhere between a remaster and a remake. While maintaining the overall look and style of the original, it introduces expanded combat options to the title. This update brings it more in line with the fast-paced combat of **Automata**, which was more reminiscent of Japanese character-action titles like **Bayonetta** and **Devil May Cry**.

Square also teased a new title in the series, **Nier Reincarnation**, for smartphones, though without any real gameplay or details shown.

In the meantime, even if you don't know or care much about the series, **Nier: Automata** will absolutely change your mind, so give it a shot if you're at all interested in what Square is cooking up next. **Nier Replicant** will be released on April 24, 2021.





RESIDENT EVIL VILLAGE

Resident Evil Village—that’s Village as in 8—looks as promising as it does terrifying. After **Resident Evil VII**’s dramatic reinvention of the series in 2017, **Resident Evil Village** is carrying forward the first-person perspective, stronger emphasis on creeping horror elements, and even main character Ethan Winters of **VII** into the next mainline title.

While those aspects are similar to **VII**, **Village** is itself taking the series in a bold new direction. While **Resident Evil** has traditionally been a game about zombie/bio-monster outbreaks in mansions and cities, this is the first time ever that **Resident Evil** has tackled the gothic occult style of horror. And while Capcom has stated that there are still no mystical elements in the series (aside from the series’ age-old fantastical take on biological science and genetic engineering), the setting and tone really make it feel like you could come face to face with the spawn of Satan. The premise is that there is some sort of insane cult that has developed around worshipping these terrifying creatures who inhabit the village (and who are presumably still some sort of “bio organic weapon” or “B.O.W.,” as the series has traditionally called them).

During the stream, the developers emphasized the degree to which they’re focusing on the village itself as its own terrifying yet beautiful character. The visuals of the world and characters bring to mind games like **Bloodborne** and **Amnesia the Dark Descent**, which both emphasized that same style of gothic horror. They also talked about how the actual main character, Ethan Winters from **Resident Evil VII**, still has a story to tell, which is why they chose to bring him forward to the next game.

This is just speculation, but many fans have also noted the visual similarities between the kind of environmental resources Capcom is making for **Village**, and the kind of resources that would be required for the long-rumored **Resident Evil 4** remake. This, coupled with the fact that Capcom released their **Resident Evil 2** remake last year and **Resident Evil 3** remake this year, could imply that Capcom is gearing up for a 2022 release of a **Resident Evil 4** remake. Stay tuned over the coming year for more information on that front!

Resident Evil Village will be released in 2021 for the PlayStation 5, Xbox Series X, and PC. Capcom also noted during their presentation that they are working to bring the game to PlayStation 4 and Xbox One as well, though the team is still not sure if it will be possible.



MONSTER HUNTER RISE

Monster Hunter Rise is the next entry in the **Monster Hunter** series, this time for Nintendo Switch. While the Switch saw the release of **Monster Hunter Generations Ultimate** a few years back, that was a port of the Japanese 3DS game **Monster Hunter Double Cross**, rather than a title built for the ground up for the Switch itself.

The developers note that the “Rise” in the title is meant to represent the sense of verticality they are instilling in the game with the new map design and especially the introduction of the new Wirebug mechanic.

The Wirebug appears to be an evolution of the Clutch Claw grapple system from **Monster Hunter World**. This time, instead of just using your grapple to latch onto monsters and fixed points of the environment, you also have a little bug buddy who stays with you and acts as a grapple point anytime, anywhere—even in midair. This lets you perform all kinds of crazy actions like double jumping, air dodging, wallrunning, grappling up mountainsides, running straight up cliffs, and even swinging from midair. The Wirebug can also be used in conjunction with your weapons to allow for a variety of flashy acrobatic attacks.

The next big new system for **Monster Hunter Rise** is the Palamute, a dog companion of your very own. **Monster Hunter** has traditionally allowed the feline Palacos to join the hunts with you as a form of combat backup and support, but this time Palacos will focus on support, while the Palamutes will take on the combat role as well as a lot more.

For example, you’ll also be able to ride your Palamute to help you explore and traverse the environments, an evident evolution of the Raider Ride system from **Monster Hunter World: Iceborne**. In single player, you’ll be able to bring two animal companions with you, mixing and matching Palacos and Palamutes if you like. In multiplayer, each player will be able to bring just one companion. Note that before now, Palacos were not able to be used in hunts with more than two human players, so even that is a big upgrade. A full squad of four hunters and four animal companions charging into battle will be a sight to behold.

They also showed off some of the new monsters that will be appearing in **Rise** like the new title monster, Magnamalo, which is a menacing fanged wyvern, the birdlike Aknosom, the pack-hunting Great Izuchi, and the huge platypus-like chonk Tetranadon. There will also be many returning monsters.

Monster Hunter Rise appears to be building off of the foundations of **Monster Hunter World** in some really exciting and inventive ways, while also providing a more pick up and play experience with shorter hunts tailored for the Nintendo Switch’s portable nature. Look for **Monster Hunter Rise** on the Nintendo Switch on March 26th, 2021.



CYBERPUNK 2077

CD Projekt Red of **The Witcher** fame was back in force this year at TGS, bringing a wealth of new information about their next title. For starters, **Cyberpunk 2077** will be coming to PlayStation 5 and Xbox Series X in addition to current-gen systems and PC. Also, those who buy the game on PS4 or Xbox One X will also receive a free upgrade to the PS5 or Xbox Series X version. The next-gen versions of the game will deliver the same experience, but target higher resolutions and framerates.

It's probably not the most exciting detail for Western players, but this is also the first time they showed off the Japanese voices for the game. They sounded good, but anyone who would give up the opportunity to hear Keanu Reeves voicing his own character honestly needs to reevaluate their life decisions.

Next, the devs went over some details about character customization in their stream, showing how you can personalize main character V, play as a man or woman, and even choose the character's backstory from three different character factions (Nomad, Street Kid, and Corpo), changing how the game will play out.

There was also a short gameplay demonstration showing V's interactions with a group of thugs that could end in a variety of different ways depending on

the dialogue choices and mid-conversation actions the player chooses. Most of the gameplay demo was just cutscenes and character conversations, however, so it didn't give a very good look at how the exploration and combat will unfold.

It's worth noting that CD Projekt Red is currently embroiled in a controversy over its mandatory overtime or "crunch" for its workers in order to complete the game on time for release. The studio had previously promised it would put its employees' health first and not rely on toxic crunch culture to complete its game, but seeing as its employees are now working mandatory 6-day weeks, that turned out to be a lie. A variety of publications are taking notice and speaking up on behalf of the employees. The game itself is looking phenomenal, but it's important to weigh that against the labor that goes into it when you decide to buy a game.

The game comes out on November 19th this year.



MICROSOFT 2020 SHOWCASE

Microsoft's TGS stream felt much more like a press briefing than the developer-centric streams from the rest of TGS. Xbox Head Phil Spencer took to the virtual stage to deliver a slew of stats and numbers about their player base in Japan before switching to drumming up excitement for the upcoming Xbox Series X.

Microsoft chose to highlight its base of existing and announced titles rather than deliver any big surprises. They showed a lot of **Microsoft Flight Simulator** and **Minecraft**, then followed with trailers of many of the same games shown off earlier in the year, this time interspersed with commentary from Japanese studios. The titles shown off were **Balan Wonderworld**, **Samurai Shodown**, **Resident Evil Village**, **Pragmata**, **PuyoPuyo Tetris 2**, **Tetris Effect Connected**, **Bright Memory**, **R-Type Final 2**, and **RPG Time! The Legend of Wright**.

They closed out the show with a J-rock music video for the game **Scarlet Nexus**, which appears to be their big push into the anime-styled action/JRPG genre to help the Xbox Series X catch on in Japan. If you remember way back to **Blue Dragon** for the Xbox 360, that was also supposed to be Microsoft's big anime JRPG for the Japanese market, though Japan's memories of that game (or lack thereof) pretty much spoil how that story ended. **Scarlet Nexus** does look very slick though, so we'll see how that turns out when it launches.

SENSE OF WONDER NIGHT

As in previous years, TGS played host to the Sense of Wonder Night, an awards show which highlights games from independent studios that go above and beyond the norm to deliver a “sense of wonder.” There were eight finalists, which you can see in a highlight reel [here](#), but there are two titles that really stood apart from the pack for us.

Infini by Canadian game creator David Martin is



a super trippy psychedelic puzzle game where characters are personified concepts such as hope, war, technology, poetry, and fatality. It features a nonlinear story you'll have to piece together like a puzzle as you play the game. The gameplay has the character Hope infinitely falling in 2D, who you have to guide to the goal by avoiding obstacles, looping off the edges of the screen, zooming in, zooming out, falling into and out of the screen, and more. The visuals and design are very simple, but the sheer oddity of the game makes it worth seeing for yourself. **Infini** is available now on Steam.



Fight Crab is a new game from Japanese studio Calappa Games, featuring elaborate battles between larger than life . . . crabs. **Fight Crab** is a one-on-one fighting game that allows you to use the Nintendo Switch JoyCons' motion controls to move the arms of a crab and the shoulder buttons to pinch your opponent into submission. These crabs aren't messing around either. They can also use their claws to wield huge weapons like broadswords, chain blades, rocket fists, and more to attempt to flip over their crustacean enemy, winning the match. It's really an exercise in loosely controlled physics mayhem and hilarity reminiscent of something like **Goat Simulator** or **Octodad**, though in crabtacular fighting game form. **Fight Crab** is available now on Switch. Remember, the first rule of **Fight Crab** is: tell everyone you know about **Fight Crab**.

WRAP-UP

There was a lot to see at this year's TGS despite the ongoing collapse of civilization as we know it—so much to see, in fact, that this article only covers a sliver of what there was on display at the show. Check out the link at the beginning of the article for the full catalogue of official TGS streams and videos to get your own look into TGS 2020. And while this year's TGS was an overwhelming success considering current global circumstances, let's hope that things are normal enough next year to once again have a traditional show open to the adoring fans, BO and all.

Nathan Post is a former JET from California who worked at a variety of middle schools in Gunma between 2014 and 2019. He now works from home as a Japanese to English game translator. When he's not gaming, he can be found despairing at the state of the world in his head, drowning his sorrows at the local izakaya, or crying in his bathroom. He's recently been enjoying preparing for Hell on Earth by playing Hades on Nintendo Switch.

INTERVIEW WITH DJ SEAN SOPHIEA

Q: PLEASE TALK ABOUT WHAT MUSIC YOU LIKE TO PLAY! HOW WOULD YOU DEFINE YOUR DJING STYLE?

Probably a jack of all trades, master of none. I listen to a ton of music over a pretty wide variety of genres; funk, soul, jazz, hip-hop, disco, house, techno; the list is pretty endless. My main goal in whatever genre I'm playing in is to expose people to stuff that they may not have heard before, so playing a lot of deep, underground stuff although still never neglecting the classics while I'm at it. In terms of DJ style, my ultimate goal is to make everything flow as smoothly as possible, either by mixing or finding a throughline from one song to the next, be it through the drums, beats per minute, melody, mood, or any other musical aspect.

SEAN SOPHIEA (NIIGATA)
RACHEL FAGUNDES (OKAYAMA)

Q: YOU'VE BEEN DJING FOR OVER 15 YEARS NOW. HOW DID YOU FIRST GET STARTED?

A friend of a friend had a set of CDJs (CD turntables) that I got a chance to test out, and after that, I was hooked. A few years later, I bought a set of turntables for myself and started DJing at other people's houses whenever the opportunity presented itself. After moving to Japan, I hit the ground running and started looking for places to DJ and get involved in the DJ community.

Q: WHAT IS THE MUSIC SCENE LIKE IN NIIGATA? HOW DID YOU FIRST GET INVOLVED THERE?

It's very segmented. One of the cooler aspects of Niigata's music scene is that there's basically a scene for whatever your taste of music is. If you're into hip-hop, there's an event or place for that. If you're into house and disco, there's an event or place for that, too. Repeat this for basically every genre you can imagine. The one downside to this is that there's very little crossover, meaning that rarely will you see a house music party-goer over at a rock party, for example.

Not to toot my horn too much here, but that's actually what I did. From the get-go, I went to every single event that I knew about, regardless of genre: punk, techno, house, hip-hop; whatever. And being one of the few foreigners who would show up at these events made me instantly stand out for better or worse. Over time, as I started playing out with some of the more entrenched local DJs, I kind of organically infiltrated the local DJ scene.



Q: CAN YOU TELL ME ABOUT THE DIFFERENT DJ COLLECTIVES THAT PLAY TOGETHER?

I can't say this for certain if this is true all around Japan, but in Niigata, most events are organized and performed by a group of DJs rather than a single individual. The group will share a particular musical genre and style, and their group name is usually also the name of the regular (usually monthly) event they will throw. In most other countries the venue will hire a DJ and put only that person's name on the bill or flyer. Here, the DJ group has control over everything: the venue (which, once that's settled, it rarely changes), the schedule for when the party will take place, the style of music, and how many people will be in the group.

When the party takes place, depending on how many group members there are, a timetable will be decided, everyone gets around half an hour to an hour to play their set. This will continue until the end of the evening or the early morning. If there's any time left and if anyone is still alive (DJs or customers), there's a good chance for a back-to-back set, where anyone in the group who wants to participate will play a song or two until the venue finally kicks us out.

Q: PLEASE TELL ME ABOUT THE TWO GROUPS YOU ARE A PART OF.

One is Key of Life, a house and disco-focused DJ group of loosely six members that's been going for 15 or 16 years. I was invited to join that group about eight years ago by the lead organizer, DJ Honda, after we had done a bunch of shows together.

The other was a hip-hop-centric group called Natty, also roughly made up of about six or so members. Sadly though, this group is currently on indefinite hiatus due to COVID-19.

Q: CAN YOU TELL ME ABOUT THE DIFFERENT VENUES YOU PLAY AT?

Around town, I've done gigs everywhere: small bars and restaurants, gigantic warehouses, mid-sized clubs, and everything in between. Preference-wise though, I love doing small bar gigs the most since they tend to be a bit more personable, a bit more friendly, and it's a bit easier to gauge the audience's reaction.

Q: WHEN YOU'RE PLAYING FOR A PARTICULAR AUDIENCE, SAY, ONE THAT IS MORE ROCK-ORIENTED VERSUS ONE THAT IS EXPECTING HIP-HOP, DO YOU CHANGE YOUR STYLE AND SOUND TO FIT THE AUDIENCE? OR DO YOU HAVE A PARTICULAR BRAND OR SOUND THAT IS YOUR OWN THAT YOU BRING TO EVERY SHOW?

My sort of overarching ethos to any event that I do always starts with the question, "What can I do to stand out?" If it's a rock party, for example, maybe I'll bring some obscure covers to keep people on their toes. If it's a hip-hop focused event, I'll try to find some songs that everyone can get behind, even if they don't know what it is. There's always a bit of a balancing act because you never wanna go so obscure that you go over everyone's head, but at the same time, I don't wanna just play all the hits that everyone knows because a playlist can do that. It's a bit of a high-wire act of playing stuff that you want to share with the crowd; giving them things you think they should hear, but also giving them what they want to hear at the same time too. It doesn't always work, but it definitely keeps things interesting.



Q: HOW DO YOU CHOOSE WHAT TO PLAY NEXT? IS THERE A LOT OF PLANNING INVOLVED, OR IS IT MOSTLY IMPROVISATION?

There's always a lot of improvisation because I always like to switch gears if I feel like the audience isn't necessarily into what I'm playing. If I'm doing a gig, I'll usually pick records based on what I want to play at an event, but that's about as much planning as I put into it. The livestreams on my YouTube channel are a whole other can of worms; half the time, before I start streaming, I don't have a clue what I want to play or where I want to go with my music selections. But normally after about two or three tunes, I'll start remembering some songs that will work together, and from there I settle on sound for the stream. There's always a little eureka moment where one song is playing and it'll point me to the next I want to play. Those little moments are really what make DJing still fun for me after doing it for about 16 years.

Q: IN YOUR OPINION, WHAT MAKES A GREAT DJ?

Ultimately, at the end of the day, mixing skills—the ability to play two songs simultaneously and blend them into one—are great and definitely help you stand above the crowd of other DJs, but song selection is absolutely paramount to me. Having the spider sense to know exactly what song is perfect to play next is the most important thing. As an example, going back to DJ Honda, I invited him to play an event with me a few years back. Not knowing at all what he was going to play, the first song he picked was "My Sharona" by The Knack, and everyone went ballistic. No one told him to play that, he just knew that was the song that would set the party off. So, to me, you can have the most seamless transitions or could be the Jimi Hendrix of scratching, but if your song selection is boring, you're not gonna make it as a DJ.



Q: WHAT IS THE EXPERIENCE LIKE OF PLAYING FOR A LARGE AUDIENCE? WHAT DOES IT FEEL LIKE WHEN A SET IS GOING REALLY WELL?

Intimidating and exhilarating at the same time. Exhilarating that I found an audience for the type of music that I'm into. Intimidating because there's always that feeling that one wrong track could screw everything up.

Q: WHAT HAPPENS WHEN A SET IS GOING POORLY? HOW DO YOU GET AN AUDIENCE BACK?

It's absolutely soul-crushing. I'm not ashamed to admit that I've had gigs where I've completely cleared the dance floor by playing something that was either unagreeable or just too obscure. To your second question, theoretically you'd play something that everyone can get behind, be it a popular song of the time or a classic that everyone knows. Sadly though, usually when I've cleared the dance floor, there's no salvaging the situation.

Q: CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE MONETARY SIDE OF BEING A DJ IN JAPAN? HOW DO YOU WORK OUT CUTS WITH THE VENUES?

Most places in Japan work on a pay-to-play-like system referred to as "hakodai." Basically, the organizer of the event and the owner of the venue will negotiate a certain amount of money, say 20,000 yen, that the event has to raise for the venue. Whatever the door charge to attend the event, the venue keeps the first 20,000 yen raised (in addition to any money made in drinks and bar tab). If the event raises more than 20,000 yen, or whatever the agreed-upon hakodai, the event organizers get to keep the excess. But if they don't raise enough money to meet the hakodai, then the organizers have to pay the difference to the venue out of pocket.

The result is that almost no one supports themselves financially, full time, by being a DJ. There are a few very rare exceptions for the very top tier DJs, who usually get paid upfront.



Q: CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE EQUIPMENT INVOLVED?

Most venues have their own equipment with all the essentials: a DJ mixer, two turntables, and two CDJs. The equipment varies in condition, but all a DJ has to do is bring their own music—records, CDs, USBs, laptops, or whatever your preference may be.

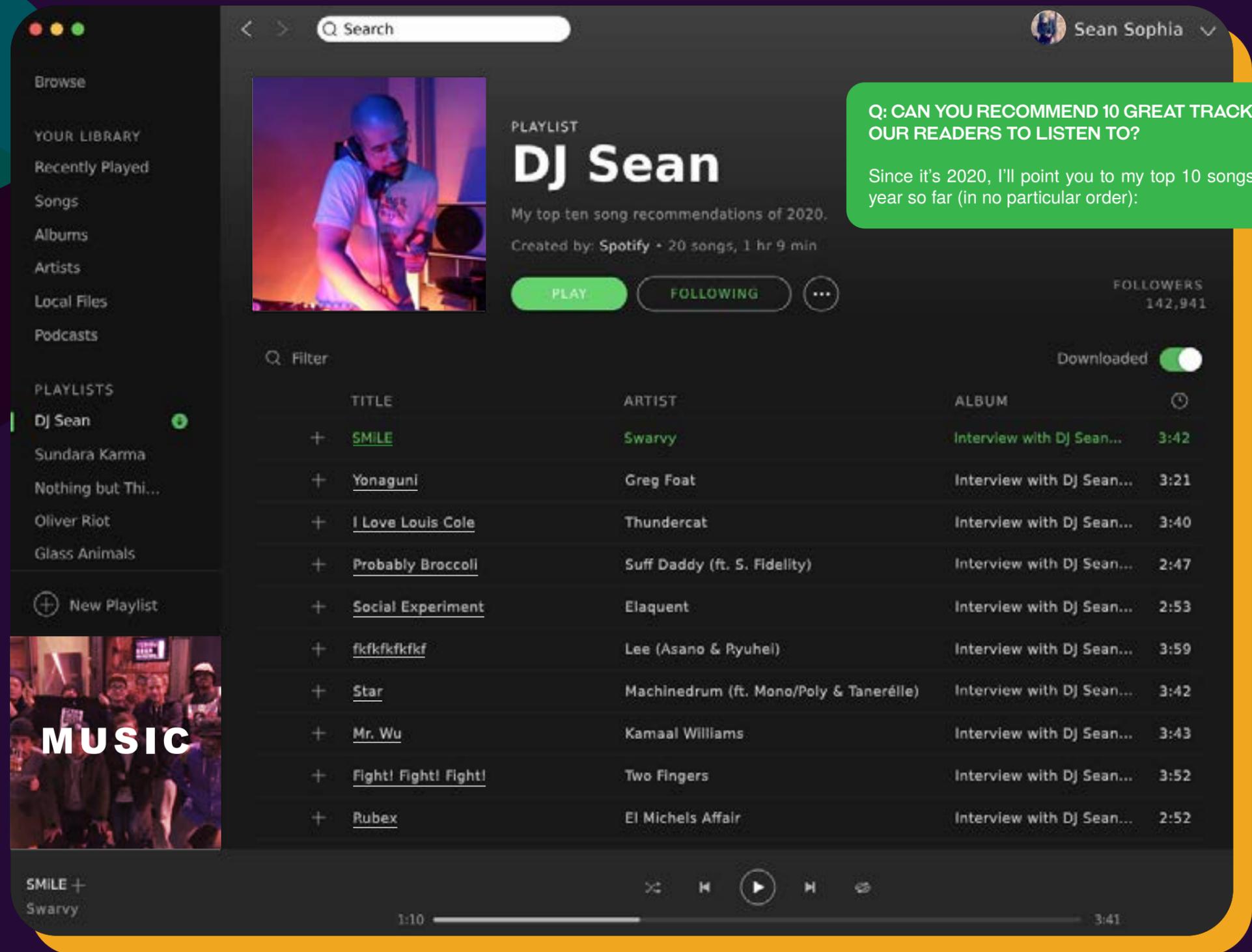
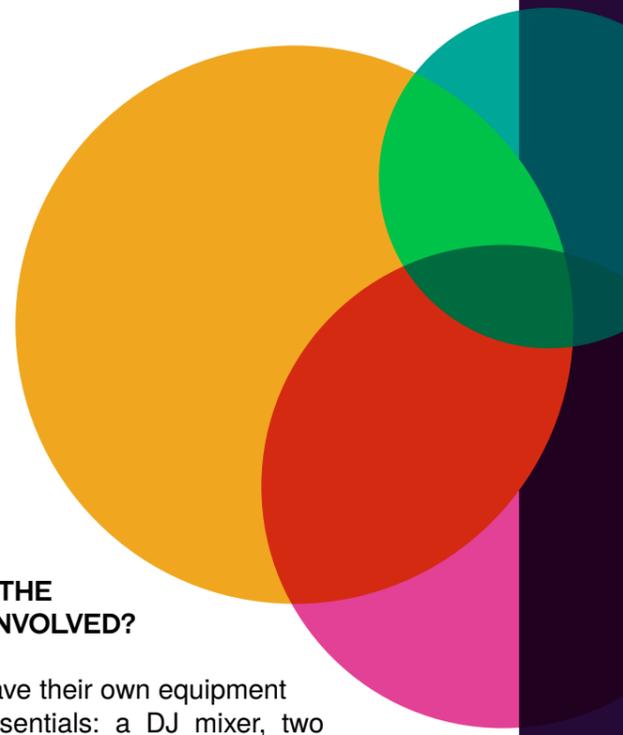
One interesting aspect of Niigata is that there are still a ton of DJs here who still play on vinyl, which the vinyl nerd in me loves.

Q: YOU ALSO HAVE A YOUTUBE CHANNEL. CAN YOU TELL US ABOUT THAT?

The YouTube channel is an extension of my WordPress blog that I started back in 2015. The blog I use for highlighting new and upcoming releases that have caught my attention, whereas I use the YouTube channel for a whole host of things: live streaming DJ sets, VLOGs talking about the new records I've been buying, recommendations, and occasionally doing historical deep dives into old, obscure records that I think are worth more attention. I try to get a new video uploaded once a week on Tuesdays, and the DJ livestreams, entitled "Live From The Record Room," I do every Sunday night at eight.

Q: WHAT FUTURE PROJECTS DO YOU HAVE COMING UP?

Mostly YouTube-related stuff: more mixes, more livestreams, more blog posts, more music-related stuff.



Q: CAN YOU RECOMMEND 10 GREAT TRACKS FOR OUR READERS TO LISTEN TO?
 Since it's 2020, I'll point you to my top 10 songs of the year so far (in no particular order):

*Sean Sophiea is a Chicago-born, Niigata-residing amateur DJ/record collector/music enthusiast of all genres. When he's not playing out locally, he can be found writing for his own [music blog](#) or talking about and playing music on his [YouTube channel](#), both titled *Raw Select Music*. That or obsessively buying new music to add to his ever-increasing record collection. You can also find him on [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#), and [Facebook](#).*

*Rachel Fagundes is a fourth-year JET and the entertainment editor for **CONNECT** Magazine. She likes fantasy, science fiction, and badly-behaved cats. She has been going through terrible withdrawals from Mexican food since moving to Japan from California and would gladly murder you for a burrito.*

NOVEMBER RELEASES

Rachel Fagundes (Okayama)

MOVIES

November 6

- My People, My Homeland (2020)
- Stockholm (2018)
- Play (2019)
- By Quantum Physics: A Nightlife Venture (2019)
- The Capote Tapes (2019)
- Co gai den tu hom qua (2017)

November 13

- Hillbilly Elegy (2020)
- Missing Link (2019)
- I Can Only Imagine (2018)
- Gundala (2019)
- Cyrano, My Love (2018)
- The Cave (2019)
- A Plastic Ocean (2016)
- Paw Patrol: Ready, Race, Rescue! (2019)
- Ip Man: Kung Fu Master (2019)
- Sakura (2020)
- The Poet and the Boy (2017)
- Looking for Magical DoReMi (2020)

November 14

- State Funeral (2019)
- Austerlitz (2016)

November 20

- Lux Æterna (2019)
- About Endlessness (2019)
- Abe (2019)
- Skyfire (2019)

- Remi, Nobody's Boy (2018)
- The Crossing (2018)

November 21

- Animal Crackers (2017)

November 27

- Mortal (2020)
- Waiting for Anya (2020)
- When Hitler Stole Pink Rabbit (2019)
- Saeng-il (2019)
- Kimi wa kanata (2020)

November 28

- Malibu Road (2020)
- Bacurau (2019)

GAMES

November 3

- Jurassic World Evolution: Complete Edition (Switch)

November 5

- Chicken Police (PC, PS4, Xbox One)

November 6

- Dirt 5 (PC, PS4, Xbox One, PS5, Xbox Series X/S)
- PAW Patrol: Mighty Pups Save Adventure Bay (PC, PS4, Xbox One, Switch)
- Need for Speed: Hot Pursuit Remastered (PC, PS4, Xbox One, Switch)

November 10

Xbox Series X/S console launch

- Bakugan: Champions of Vestroia (Switch)
- XIII Remake (PC, PS4, Xbox One, Switch)
- Destiny 2: Beyond Light expansion (PC, PS4, Xbox One, Stadia)
- Assassin's Creed Valhalla (PC, PS4, PS5, Xbox One, Xbox Series X, Stadia)
- The Falconeer (PC, Xbox One, Xbox Series X/S)
- Prodeus – Steam Early Access (PC)
- Devil May Cry 5: Special Edition (PS5, Xbox Series X/S)
- Yakuza: Like a Dragon (Yakuza 7) (PC, PS4, Xbox One, Xbox Series X)
- Planet Coaster: Console Edition (PS4, PS5, Xbox One, Xbox Series X/S)
- Observer: System Redux (PC, PS5, Xbox Series X)

November 12

PlayStation 5 console launch

(US, Japan, Canada, Mexico, Australia, New Zealand, South Korea)

- Spider-Man: Miles Morales (PS4, PS5)
- Godfall (PC, PS5)
- Demon's Souls (PS5)
- Sackboy: A Big Adventure (PS4, PS5)
- Bugsnax (PC, PS4, PS5)
- The Pathless (PC, PS4, PS5, Apple Arcade)

November 13

- Rune 2: Decapitation Edition (PC)
- Call of Duty: Black Ops Cold War (PC, PS4, Xbox One)
- Kingdom Hearts: Melody of Memory (PS4, Xbox One, Switch)
- Game & Watch: Super Mario Bros.

November 17

- Mars Horizon (PC, PS4, Xbox One, Switch)
- Mortal Kombat 11 Ultimate (PC, PS4, PS5, Xbox One, Xbox Series X/S, Switch, Stadia)
- Sniper Elite 4 (Switch)

November 20

- Hyrule Warriors: Age of Calamity (Switch)
- Katamari Damacy Reroll (PS4, Xbox One)

November 24

- World of Warcraft: Shadowlands (PC)
- Football Manager 2021 (PC)

November 26

- Spirit of the North: Enhanced Edition (PS5)

Sources:

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

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

Story 1

IT WAS AN ACCIDENT, I SWEAR . . .

My friend and I were planning an enormous road trip of Kyūshū. We used a mixture of AirBnb and Booking.com to find places to stay, and we didn't look into what we booked too closely. One of those places was a 'resort hotel' we found on Booking.com. The picture showed a grey and glass skyscraper and said breakfast was optional—a nice, no-fuss business hotel. Good enough for two nights in Kagoshima.

The red flags were raised when we found it in a deserted part of the dockyards, and tacky plastic camels and cacti greeted us as we drove inside. The lobby was dim except for a neon screen showing all the rooms available, and each floor had a theme: fantasy, city, ocean. I'd seen YouTube tours of love hotels, so I was now pretty certain we'd messed up. We were in a state of disbelief as we got our keys from an anonymous hand poking from under a screen, and said our usual friendly *konnichiwa*'s to a middle-aged couple that immediately hurried away. Even the cleaners quickly pretended they hadn't seen us. We should have been embarrassed, but we knew we hadn't booked it on purpose, so we proudly strolled up to our rooms.

They were huge. I had the Italian room, my friend the British one. The beds were king-sized and super comfy. The bathroom had an enormous bath, shower, and herb-scented shampoo and skin oils. There was a little box beside the bed with condoms, and the TV had adult channels. A control panel behind the bed controlled the lighting and music—for that romantic ambience—and we spent the evening playing cards and ordering food. It was fried, oily and not great, but the staff's confusion as they came in and saw two girls playing cards on the bed was pretty funny.

The biggest shock for me, though, was what I found beside the bed. I'd recently seen *Weathering with You* where the runaway kids hide in a love hotel and sing karaoke in their room, so when I found a microphone-looking device in plastic hooked onto the wall, I got naively excited for karaoke. My friend had to explain what it was: a device used for pleasure, and not for your mouth. Scandalised, I tried not to think about it as I laid in my cloud-like bed. Somehow, I slept super well, but we still cancelled our second night and stayed in a trusty APS instead. We'd had enough shocks for one trip.

The lesson to be learnt from this: not all love hotels are called 'love hotels.' Some of them are 'resort hotels' called Kagoshima Intelligence.

Story 2

WAY TO KILL THE MOOD

I went to a love hotel when I was 19 with my partner at the time. It was a 1950s themed place with a modern console bed. We got the keys from a disembodied pair of hands, and it was all so weird and a bit of a mood killer. We had unsatisfying sex and then checked out very early in the morning. It was a fun experience and I'd recommend it for a laugh, but it wasn't exactly romantic.

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Fifty Shades of Weird?

Our readers tell us all about their experiences in the wacky and wonderful world of Japanese love hotels



Story 3

AN UNWELCOME SURPRISE

I knew what love hotels were supposedly meant to be like, but I had never used one myself, and with my boyfriend being thousands of miles away, I didn't see us trying one. He first came to visit me a few months into my first year here. During his stay, we decided to take a trip to Fukuoka to see his favourite Japanese band, Radwimps, live for our fourth anniversary. We booked a hotel only 20 minutes by bus from the concert hall with a massive room and breakfast included.

We found said hotel a short walk from a nearby train station and walked past a beautiful water feature at the entrance. A gorgeous piano stood in the lobby, and enormous flower arrangements greeted us at the front desk. We waited a few minutes for the concierge to appear to help us check-in, but no one came. All of a sudden, the phone on the customer's side of the check-in counter rang. I answered hesitantly and was immediately asked whether we were the Booking.com reservation. After confirming that we were, I was directed to the lobby's elevator which I was assured would open in a few seconds. True to the staff's word, the elevator did open, and my boyfriend, still smiling from ear to ear, ushered me inside with a chipper "come on, let's go see our room." I started to get a niggling feeling that something wasn't right, but painted on a smile for him.

The mysterious voice on the telephone had told us we could identify our room by the blinking red light above the door. As soon as the elevator doors opened, my boyfriend all but ran to the only doorway in the hall with a pulsating red light above it. It was unlocked.

As I explored the room, the reality of the situation started to set in. The payment system in the wall beside the door; the solitary slit of a window no wider than a foot; the ridiculously oversized bathtub complete with jacuzzi and light settings; the equally as massive bed facing a flat screen TV larger than any I'd seen in Japan before; even the hair straightener and curling iron beside the bathroom vanity. The last piece of the puzzle fell into place when I spied what lay on the bedside table, encased in a velvet drawstring bag: a

vibrator complete with a note asking patrons to use the provided condoms if they utilised the toy. I realised what kind of hotel we had booked and turned to face my boyfriend. I sat down slowly on the coffee table in front of him and asked him not to freak out. "Babe . . . this is a love hotel. We booked a love hotel by accident. That's why it was the only property left available."

To say my boyfriend freaked out is an understatement. He stood in the middle of the room, not touching anything, for an hour as he desperately searched the internet for a different hotel we could move to. I, on the other hand, had quickly made peace with the situation and had already drawn a bubble bath, complete with disco lights. My boyfriend was disgusted with it all and refused to even sleep on the bed without being fully clothed—including shoes. His sour mood ruined the entire trip. I'm pretty sure Radwimps was the only thing that saved our relationship that weekend.

Story 4

WELL WORTH A VISIT

When my girlfriend and I were searching for a place to stay in Kobe, we happened upon a 'resort hotel' that, after googling, was clearly a love hotel. After discussing it, and seeing the listed karaoke machine, big bath, king size bed and, most importantly, the cheap price, we decided it would be the best and most interesting option. When we arrived, the lobby was gorgeous, decorated with a chandelier. There was a chocolate fountain with various things to dip in it along with different kinds of bath salts. The room itself had a huge TV and an incredibly classy design. The whole situation definitely felt a bit strange, owing to a few of the more "unique" items you find in love hotels (i.e. a massage wand, the ability to buy bizarre costumes from your room, and condoms), but we had a great time watching movies and checking out all the weird things in the room over the course of our three-day stay. And we got free breakfast! It really wasn't a scary kinky sex dungeon place in the least. All things considered; it was a really cool experience that I'm glad I took a chance on.



Story 5

BUSINESS IS BUSINESS

For me, the most surprising thing about going to a love hotel was how nice the room actually was. The outside seemed pretty run-down so I was expecting the same of the room, but that was very much not the case. Most notable was how good the air conditioning was (it was late July). Other than being a tad ornate, it felt like a pretty nice room. Interestingly, they wouldn't let people only stay for a few hours if it's late at night. We arrived at around 2:00 a.m., and we had to pay until the morning. I don't know if that's to avoid having to kick out drunk naked people who have fallen asleep, or just shrewd business practices.

Story 6

WILL I BE STUCK HERE FOREVER?

It took me two years and the right partner to finally tick going to an *inaka* love hotel off my bucket list. Most people use love hotels for a convenient night of passion. However, my stay was actually quite a practical experience. It was silver week, an extremely popular holiday in Japan, so many hotels were fully booked in advance. We weren't going to let that get in the way of enjoying this long weekend, so we thought *fuck it* and started driving in the direction of our destination. On the drive, my partner read out some poorly translated information about love hotels found on Google Maps. We chose the tastefully named "Ice & Cream." Upon arrival, the room prices were clearly shown by the room number which was a nice touch, so there were no surprises. There was an option for a curtain to conceal our identity further but, as the famous quote goes, "Not my prefecture, not my problem!"

One *important* thing to remember about love hotels is that you cannot leave and come back. That is how they make money from food and drink. So remember to buy any alcohol and snacks beforehand if you wanna save some yennies. But do not fear! Most love hotels have a fully decked out menu to ensure you have all the comforts you need at the touch of a button. Our hotel even offered a wide range of medicines free of charge to make sure you were at peak performance. How thoughtful of them.

Once we made it into our room for the evening and the door closed behind us, a sudden wave of anxiety came over me. Were they going to lock the door behind us? How am I supposed to pay? I couldn't see any information about how to pay. What if I couldn't understand what they were saying to me and I would be trapped here forever? Then the phone rang . . . the dreaded phone call in Japanese. I picked up the phone and the anonymous female voice said a word I wasn't familiar with, which I parroted back to her, "Shi-ha-rai . . ." She picked up my confusion and asked if I was paying by card or cash. "*Genkin de!*" Phew. I placed my 10,000 yen note onto the tray by the door and watched as a silent hand gave back my change. It was over. I had survived the interaction. Now I could explore the room in peace, the highlight being a large bath, which could comfortably accommodate two people. A serious upgrade to my ancient bath at home. The room was massive and was fully kitted out with everything you could imagine.

After a comfortable sleep and a munch on some 7/11 breakfast, we departed at around 10:00 a.m. I would recommend setting an alarm as those windows are *completely* blocked out from natural sunshine. Nice way to earn some more yennies from customers oversleeping.

Overall, I would definitely stay at another love hotel overnight as it was a really unique experience and a must-do for anyone visiting Japan.

Thank you to everyone who submitted their stories. Do you have an entertaining tale to tell about Japanese love hotels? Email it to connect.culture@ajet.net and it might just appear online!

SMASHING THE PATRIARCHY, ONE PODCAST AT A TIME

Fahreen Budhwani, host of Super Smash Hoes podcast, talks to CONNECT's Culture Editor

Alice French (Yamagata)

The greatest plans are always those hatched over a late-night McDonald's . . . right? *Super Smash Hoes*, the feminist and social activist podcast hosted by law student Fahreen Budhwani, is certainly testament to this theory.

"I had always been a feminist, and always been aware that gender inequality existed, but it wasn't until I went to study in Japan that I really saw proper sexism in action," explains Fahreen, speaking from her home in London. "I was just frustrated by the gender inequality I was seeing and experiencing everyday in Japan. One night, after a night out in Roppongi, my friend and I were ranting about sexism together in McDonald's, and suddenly we just thought, 'Why don't we try and actually *do* something about this?'" And thus, Super Smash Hoes (henceforth, SSH) was born.

Fahreen first became interested in feminism in Japan after doing a year abroad at Sophia University, Tokyo, as part of her degree in International Politics at the University of Birmingham in the UK. Her year living in Tokyo inspired her to write her undergraduate thesis on Japan, which ensured that she was always keeping up to date with the Japanese feminist movement, even after moving back to England. She started SSH with a Japanese friend, Erika, last year, and the podcast is now on its 23rd episode. "The great thing about Japan is that everyone is so helpful and kind. So many people helped us get our name out there and invited us to events and stuff when we first started. The team at Tokyo Speaks (a Tokyo-based podcast that features voices from the international community) were especially supportive." Erika has recently stepped down as host owing to work commitments, but Fahreen is determined to keep SSH going alongside her studies.

The main aim of SSH is to "diversify the global feminist discourse." Each episode features a guest who is involved with feminism and/or social issues in Japan. Through providing these guests with an internationally-accessible platform (the podcast), Fahreen hopes to bring Japanese issues more to the forefront of the global discussion around feminism. "Feminism in the West, or feminism in general, is very euro-centric," she says. "Western feminist icons, such as the suffragettes, feature so heavily in feminist discourse, whereas Japanese figures, for example Yosano Akiko, are overlooked. This whitewashing of feminist history is something we need to change."

As Fahreen very eloquently explains, feminism (or feminism as we know it in Western terms) in Japan is often viewed as a Western import, and awareness of homegrown feminist activism is fairly low. "A lot of people in the West don't realise that there actually is a lot going on at the grassroots level of feminism in Japan. Japanese feminism doesn't need white saviours," she says. As SSH demonstrates, there is a lot that the West can learn from the Japanese feminist movement, both past and present. As Fahreen asserts, "it is hard to create global solidarity in feminism if you only know what's going on in your own country." Through listening to SSH, listeners can broaden their feminist horizons, and apply perspectives and techniques from the Japanese movement to their own feminist activities back home.

That being said, Fahreen is very aware of her own identity as *gaijin* within the Japanese feminist community, and the limitations that come with it. "I love Japanese culture and am very interested in it, but it's not my culture," she says. "I'm aware of the fact that I'm an outsider; I am not here to judge." Fahreen insists that the

**JAPANESE
FEMINISM
DOESN'T
NEED WHITE
SAVIOURS**



YUME MORIMOTO,
EDITOR OF B.G.U.



FAHREEN BUDHWANI,
HOST OF SUPER SMASH HOES





I THINK THAT INTERSECTIONALITY IS ESSENTIAL FOR THE FUTURE OF JAPAN.

Japanese feminist movement “does not need [her] voice,” and is very conscious not to try and “speak for Japanese women.” Instead, she hopes to act as a sort of middle-man (or, rather, middle-woman) between activists in Japan and the global feminist community: “my role is to provide the microphone for my guests, not to give my own opinions.”

So, for those of us who are less clued-up on feminism in Japan, where’s a good place to start? Fahreen suggests reading up on the Protection of Motherhood Debate (*bosei hogo ronsō*), a dispute between four Japanese feminists about the role of motherhood and the role it plays in women’s identity and social status, which came to the fore in the early

20th century. The debate showcases the diversity of feminist perspectives in Japan, and presents four different definitions of female empowerment, which can be applied to feminist discourse in any country.

If a more contemporary insight is what you’re after, any of SSH’s recent guests would be a great starting point. Fahreen’s personal favourite is Yume, Editor in Chief of *B.G.U* magazine. *B.G.U* is a queer and intersectional feminist zine based in Tokyo and published in both English and Japanese. Fahreen first met Yume whilst on her year abroad in 2017 and has been a fan ever since. “Yume is so intelligent and so dedicated to genuinely helping the queer and feminist community in Japan. As you will hear from our conversation on the podcast, she is able to take gender theories from the West and apply them to Japan without making them seem like an import, whilst acknowledging the limitations of using Western terms and theories in a Japanese context.” You can find Fahreen and Yume’s conversation on Episode 22 of SSH, and it really is a must-listen for anyone wanting to find out more about Japanese queer history and the contemporary experiences of the queer community in Japan. The absolutely fabulous *B.G.U* zine can be accessed [here](#).

When asked who would be her dream podcast guest, Fahreen answers that she would love to interview Shiori Ito, the journalist who made headlines for going public with her experience of sexual assault in 2017, and has since become a figurehead for Japan’s Me Too movement. “Shiori has been reduced to an assault victim by the media. Her name has become synonymous with Me Too, when she is so much more than that,” she elaborates. “It would be great to interview her not as a victim, but as the successful and influential journalist and amazing producer that she is. Her production company is female-centric, and I think we could have a really interesting discussion about that.” Let’s watch this space for SSH featuring Shiori Ito in the (hopefully not too distant) future!

The wide range of themes that feature on SSH, from periods, to sex education, to the gendered impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, demonstrates the diversity of social issues and perspectives in Japan. Fahreen is particularly passionate about “interrogating the idea of homogeneity” that is often associated with Japanese society. “If we believe that Japan is homogeneous in terms of ethnic identity, gender, sexual orientation etc., it is easy to think that Japanese feminism doesn’t need intersectionality,” she tells me. “But homogeneity is

a fallacy that protects the privileged elite. I think that intersectionality is essential for the future of Japan.”

So how can we get more involved in Japan’s increasingly intersectional feminist movement ourselves? Aside from listening to SSH (which is highly recommended), Fahreen suggests seeking out local and national activist groups via social media and finding like-minded activists and thinkers through those. Groups such as Tokyo Period, FEW Japan, Voice Up Japan and SpeakHer can all be found on Instagram and are brilliant places to start. For those wanting to go one step further and start a podcast yourself, Fahreen’s advice is “don’t think about it too much! You don’t need fancy microphones, just a laptop and something to record on. If there’s something you have a passion for and want to talk about, don’t worry about the logistics, just go for it.” It sounds like there is no excuse for anyone not to start a podcast and, if the success of SSH is anything to go by, it’s definitely worth taking the plunge!

Alice French is a second-year CIR from Cambridge, England, based at the Prefectural Office in Yamagata. When she is not singing in the shower or taking pictures of sunsets for Instagram, she can be found hiking one of Yamagata’s many mountains.

Fahreen Budhwani is currently studying for a Graduate Diploma in Law in London, having recently completed a Masters in Gender and Public Policy at London School of Economics. Super Smash Hoes is available for free on Spotify, Apple Podcasts, Anchor and Google Cast.

Actual map of Hiroshima City

HIROSHIMA GRAPHY

Interview with Michiaki Nishio

**MICHIAKI NISHIO (HIROSHIMA) INTERVIEWED
BY JESSICA CRAVEN (SAITAMA)**

The contemporary art scene in Japan, from the iconic spotted pumpkins of Yayoi Kusama to the futuristic photographs of Mariko Mori, is incredibly diverse. It is a far cry from the *ukiyo-e* woodblock prints of the nineteenth century that have captured the admiration of people all over the world and are synonymous with most people's idea of "Japanese art." In stark contrast to *ukiyo-e*'s highly effective minimalist design and relatable depictions of the lifestyle of Japan's common people, the contemporary art of Japan is often completely sensorially overwhelming and at times incredibly difficult to decipher. The contemporary art scene of one's own country is often baffling—that of a different culture, even more so. This is not a criticism so much as a recognition of widely-held opinion. After all, since the role of art is to challenge your ideas, it often isn't supposed to

be something that you get right away. Nevertheless, it can still be tiresome to many who are seeking clarity and a reminder of the beauty in our all too chaotic world.

One is much more likely to find the clever simplicity of traditional Japanese art in its contemporary architecture. Michiaki Nishio's project "Hiroshimagraphy" is an award-winning example of architecturally-inspired design that connects the past to the present, and helps us look toward the possibilities of the future.

"Hiroshimagraphy" is a symbol of the city of Hiroshima, Japan. It was designed by Michiaki Nishio (240design) and selected in the exhibition open call for design ideas to create a new "Hiroshima Brand" by Hiroshima City Museum of Contemporary Art.

This is the design of this identity, spreading the image of the new Hiroshima to the world through both people who live here and visitors to the city.

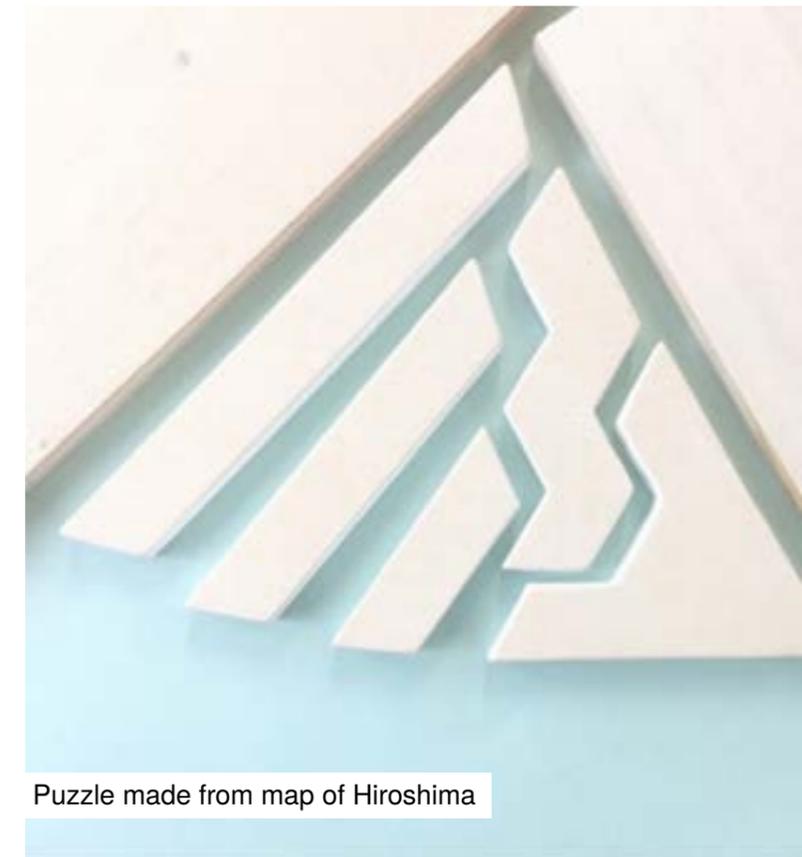
THE CONCEPT

The concept of "Hiroshimagraphy," in Michiaki Nishio's own words, is as follows:

"Hiroshima is a city of five islands floating in the flow of six rivers. Normally it is connected by many bridges. People are not so conscious of it, but it is also an identity hidden behind the city, which is often called the "city of the river." This is the design of this identity, spreading the image of the new Hiroshima to the world through both people who live here and visitors to the city.

We designed the geographical features (six rivers and five islands) of Hiroshima into simple geometric figures, and we produced the "Hiroshima Puzzle." This puzzle can make all alphabets and numbers, and some hiragana, katakana, and kanji as well. You can take a picture of the shape and letters you make, and then share it with the world with the hashtag #hiroshimagraphy or #ひろ島グラフィ."

I was fascinated by Michiaki's project, especially at how such a simple design can encourage many people to think about their environment, its geography, and how this shapes them. Because the puzzle is interactive, it empowers participants to reciprocally interact with the environment and think about how they can make the natural landscape harmonize with human necessities and design. This definitely



Puzzle made from map of Hiroshima





In fact, Hiroshima has so many rivers and they actually breathe.

seems to be the future in which architecture is heading due to the impact of climate change, and a natural strength of Japanese designers, whose traditional culture is so strongly tied to nature. I was able to interview Michiaki Nishio to get a fuller picture of his background and ideas. I hope it is as inspirational to you all as it was to me.

Q: What inspired you to become an architect?

A: I decided to become an architect just before I became a third year in high school. You know, most Japanese students have to decide the direction of their future by selecting their university. I thought that I wanted to be an artist or designer because that's been my passion since I was a baby (my mother told me I was calm as a child as long as I had a pencil and white paper). But my parents had worried that if I became an artist it may be difficult to earn money to live. . . . My father was a civil servant and strict person, so they couldn't imagine the life of an artist. However, my father had been working in the civil engineer field, and my mother used to create handmade clothes or sewing.

Then, I looked for an alternative way and found that architecture may be my field. I saw the TV commercial that used Antoni Gaudi's work. When I saw that I felt something was sparkling in my head. That's also creative work, and very similar to civil engineering, so finally my parents agreed with my decision to go to the university for architecture. After I entered the university, fortunately so many lectures and friends inspired me, so I get into architecture day by day, even now.

Q: What other architects and ideas influence you?

A: So many! However, Louis I Kahn is my biggest influence. Also, every professor and boss I've met were great advisors. Especially, two of my professors and one of my bosses. They taught me philosophical, historical, and aesthetic points of view. Those are the basis for my work even now.

Q: I noticed that you spend a lot of time enjoying the nature of Hiroshima. How do you think being in Hiroshima affects your ideas and work as a designer?

A: Yes, I feel the breath of my town. So many people in Hiroshima have the same feeling. In fact, Hiroshima has so many rivers and they actually breathe. You can feel nature very closely. It's a very refreshing place. Every day I commute across the city area, from west to east by bike. That definitely makes me feel refreshed. So it's like I'm able to be reborn every day, and my thoughts get clear. It's very nice to help me think creatively.

Q: When talking about the concept of Hiroshimagraphy in your video, you mention the past and present of Hiroshima. What do you think are some of the most important parts of Hiroshima's past? And what do you imagine its future to be like?

A: Well, first of all, I can't avoid telling you about the tragedy that the city experienced on August 6th in 1945. That's the crucial point of the history of the city, and everyone can learn so many things through learning what has happened here. I am also one of the second generation of *Hibakusha**. However, other than that crucial moment, we also have a good history before and after it happened. It's just one moment of this city. So I think I should present different aspects and values of this city and the environment equally. I hope Hiroshima can become a mecca of world peace. Also, I hope that the city will have good vibes of diversity and a place to explore how nature affects the city and its people.

Q: What do you think people can gain from learning more about the geography of Hiroshima?

A: As I said, the geometric features of the city are really worthy. Six rivers bring fresh air to the town in the morning from the mountainside, and in the afternoon from the seaside. It's just like a fresh breath passing through the city.

You know, the human body is made from seventy percent water, and the earth is also made of seventy percent water. Hiroshima is the city of water, and at the same time, the city of islands. So many bridges connect everything. Those aspects somehow describe society or human relationships themselves. It's a metaphor. The scenery is very poetic if you can see from that point of view.

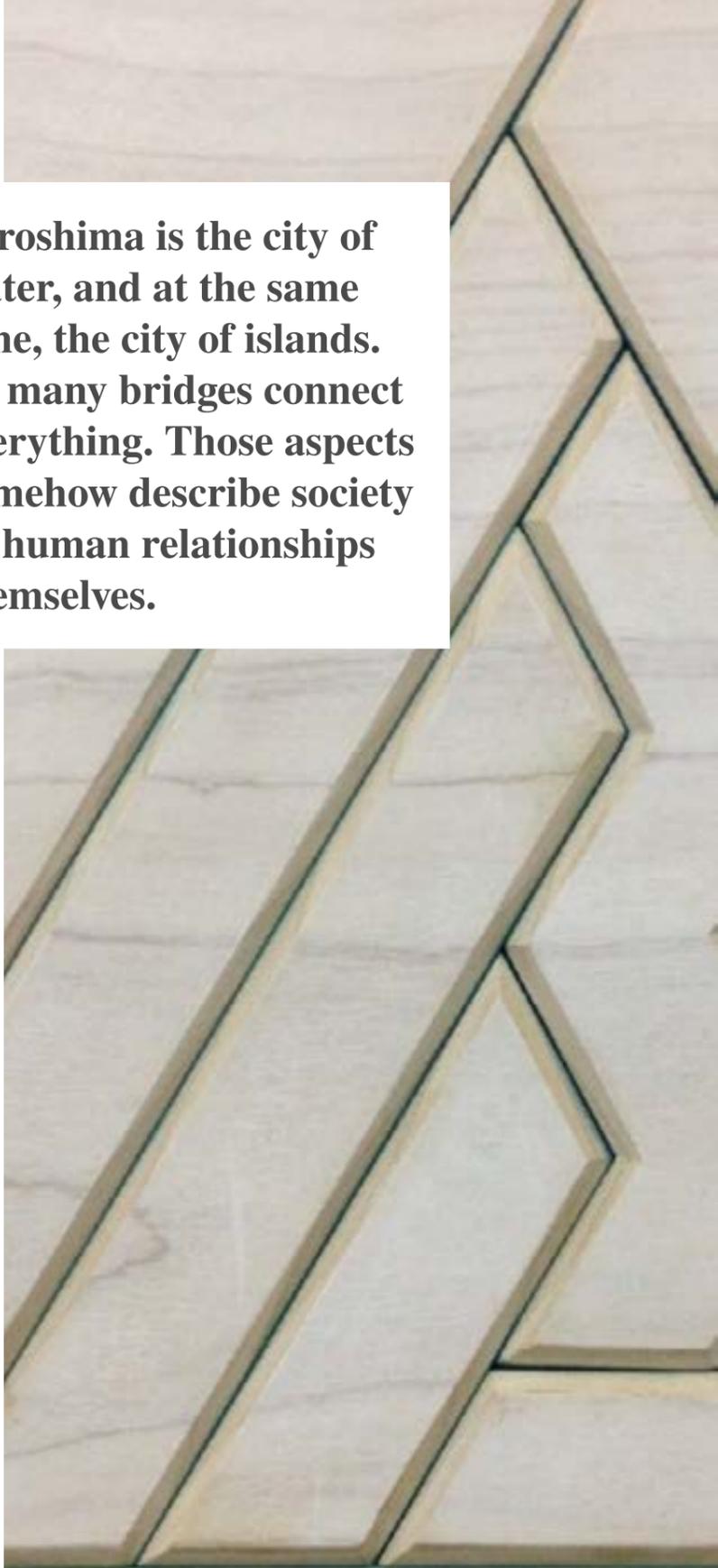
However, I guess it's not the only place you can feel like this, but you can find that way of viewing here. Then you could see the geography of your hometown and you could find a new aspect of your town. We are living with nature, living in history, living on the geography, and mother earth.

The "Hiroshimagraphy" puzzle can be downloaded and used for free from this [webpage](#) (for personal or educational use only). Official products can also be purchased from links on that webpage. Use the hashtag #hiroshimagraphy or #ひろ島グラフィ to post pictures of what you make or search for images of other people's creations. People have created the puzzle out of all sorts of materials, from wood to baked goods!

Michiaki Nishio is an architect and university lecturer in Hiroshima, Japan. He also enjoys cycling and practicing English conversation. He can be found on Instagram [@240design](#) and [Tumblr](#).

Jessica is a fourth-year American JET living in Saitama. On weekends she enjoys hiking in remote areas of Saitama or taking day-trips to Tokyo. When not adventuring, she can be found reading or creating her own artwork, which can be seen on her Instagram [@jessica_craven_art](#).

*Hibakusha is a Japanese word used to generally describe people who were affected by the 1945 atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

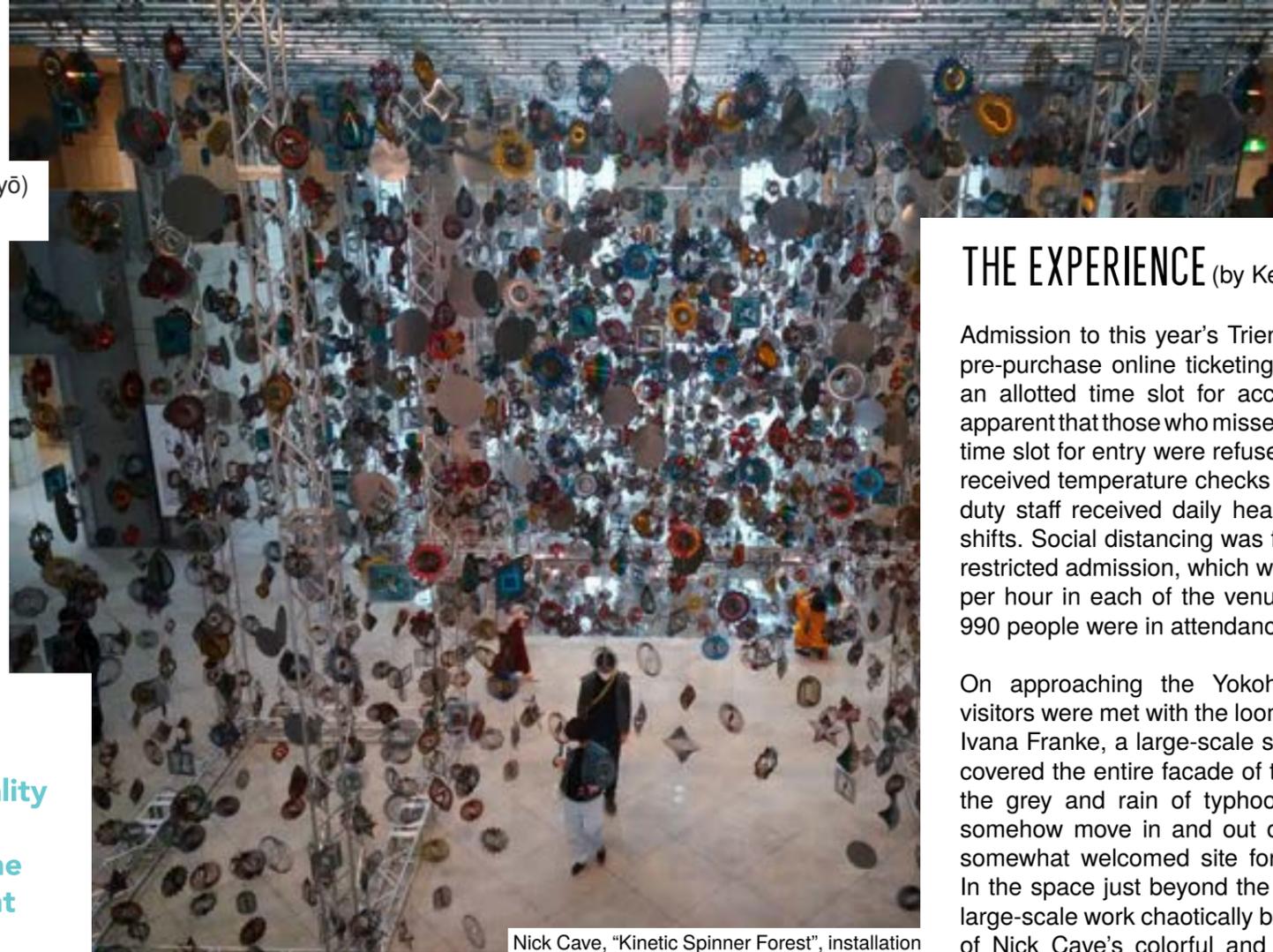


Hiroshima is the city of water, and at the same time, the city of islands. So many bridges connect everything. Those aspects somehow describe society or human relationships themselves.

AFTERGLOW

The Yokohama Triennale 2020

Kenneth Merrick (Tōkyō)
RJ McDonald (Tōkyō)



Nick Cave, "Kinetic Spinner Forest", installation

HISTORY AND CONCEPT (by Kenneth Merrick)

The Yokohama Triennale is an international, contemporary art exhibition and since 2001 has been held every three years. Like many large scale art events of its kind, ideas and conceptual frameworks are put forth for audience consideration—the implications of which can be experienced through a broad range of artworks by established and emerging artists.

A Triennale is not a unity that is searched for and consolidated, but a plurality of complexities, each drawing from and into the other, vibrating divergent and convergent lines.

AFTERGLOW, this year's Triennale, ran from July 17 until October 11 and featured the works of 67 artists and artist groups from over 30 countries. It was set across three sites: the Yokohama Museum of Art, Plot 48 (a temporary, repurposed space), and the NYK Maritime Museum. This year's iteration consisted of both a physical exhibition and "Episōdos" (Episodes), a series of events that shed light on various processes and outcomes which have been archived online. The Episōdos began in November 2019 in Yokohama, before the exhibition opened in July 2020, and occurred in various locations locally and abroad. About half of the artists involved this year exhibited their work in Japan for the first time.

Raqs Media Collective, a New Delhi based collective of three artists Jeebesh Bagchi, Monica Narula, and Shuddhabrata Sengupta were selected as this year's artistic directors. Since forming in the early 1990s, the collective have run the gamut of creative endeavours that includes art making, exhibition curation, art events, film, and publication work. In addition, Raqs Media Collective has shared its *Sourcebook* in print and digital formats—a trove of texts which provide insight into the sources they have deliberated over—which can be downloaded from the Yokohama Triennale website.

The Sourcebook brings together a range of texts that has formed the basis for their curatorial approach and investigation. It reveals a multitude of terms that are core to what Raqs Media Collective calls a "post-thematic move," in the sense that singular, overarching themes no longer resonate with the current moment. One statement puts forth, "This Sourcebook's gathering of sources embraces a formation of a milieu with notions of care, toxicity, auto-didacticism, friendship, luminosity, persistence, and radiance, all of which come together in a way that helps make sense of the now, in the now. A Triennale is not a unity that is searched for and consolidated, but a plurality of complexities, each drawing from and into the other, vibrating divergent and convergent lines. The Sourcebook registers this attitude and records this as the curatorial framework's awareness of itself. One source opens the door to another, and then another, and another."

It would be all too easy to label this year's directorial outlook as being lofty, dismissive, and out of focus in the face of a pandemic, economic downturn, political upheaval, and climate change.

THE EXPERIENCE (by Kenneth Merrick)

Admission to this year's Triennale was granted via a pre-purchase online ticketing system and came with an allotted time slot for access. It became quickly apparent that those who missed their allotted 30-minute time slot for entry were refused entry entirely. Visitors received temperature checks at the entrance and on-duty staff received daily health checks prior to their shifts. Social distancing was further encouraged by a restricted admission, which was limited to 140 visitors per hour in each of the venues, meaning that about 990 people were in attendance each day.

On approaching the Yokohama Museum of Art, visitors were met with the looming installation by artist Ivana Franke, a large-scale site-responsive work that covered the entire facade of the building. Set against the grey and rain of typhoon No.14, it seemed to somehow move in and out of view and made for a somewhat welcomed site for those seeking shelter. In the space just beyond the main entrance, another large-scale work chaotically burst into view in the form of Nick Cave's colorful and visually-rich installation that seemed to be the co-opted photo spot for visitors looking to attempt to capture an undeniably physical presence and experience.

Throughout the entire exhibition and multiple spaces, there were many works which deserved a more thorough consideration. However, with limited availability of time frames, the whole experience becomes akin to waiting in line shoulder to shoulder and trying to experience all the major rides at a theme park while rushing through and, in some cases, completely missing those works which, in a quiet and moving way, require more attention—something severely lacking in today's fondleslab-swiping audiences.

Granted, at times, the wall texts for each artist came off as being fractured and poetic and, in most cases, never really addressed the underlying concerns of the artist and work. It would be all too easy to label this year's directorial outlook as being lofty, dismissive, and out of focus in the face of a pandemic, economic downturn, political upheaval, and climate change. However, beyond the belief that art is most crucial in times of crisis, if such large-scale state and media funded art events are merely an exercise in getting

paying feet through the doors, then this approach of poetic and plural works well when taking into account the ideals of inclusivity, audience engagement, and fun.

There is something altogether challenging and wonderful when a variety of artworks are carefully and thoughtfully placed next to each other. New connections, relevances, and resonances are forged between the underlying concepts, the materials/media presented, and the artists themselves. From the bombastic, playful, and space-invading work of Eva Fàbregas that exudes the sensorial and relational, inviting a tactile response from those who encounter it . . . to the delicate, deliberate, and shrouded work of Takemura Kei, which calls forth the psychological and emotive nature that everyday objects can be imbued with . . . to the calming and resetting effects of Sarker Protick's bliss-inducing audio-visual work . . .

to the call to attention from the mixed media installation of Taus Makhacheva, which explores conditions of pre- and post-Sovietisation through commanding structures of defunct gymnastic equipment, proclamatory directives, and, at times, the presence of actual gymnasts . . . to the mysterious and dislocating work of Farah Al Qasimi that contends with postcolonial notions surrounding power and gender set amidst a cresively mind-boggling unempathetic world . . . to the shrimpy, speculative, and sensual installations of Tōkyō-based artist, Elena Knox.



Again, it is a hard task to define an across-the-board impression of the many works which are noteworthy and require more of the viewer than a casual glance. Interested and invested future audiences would perhaps require double the time and money otherwise thought attributable to such encounters at these types of events. However, being in a physical space alongside other people enjoying art may increasingly become a rare privilege if there is a move to make use of the digital platforms in a more prominent way. Recall that it was only a few months ago that many of the world's museums and galleries closed to the public entirely, many remaining so indefinitely. These uncertain times have forced the cultural torch holders at such institutions to ask, "Where to from here?" There are no doubt a raft of new and unpredictable problems that have and will arise among these questions surrounding authenticity, relevancy, sustainability . . . that each and their own must contend with.

Due to the obvious restrictions on travel, Raqs Media Collective and many of the artists were not able to attend, celebrate, and oversee the installation of the exhibition, the side effects of which take a toll on public programming and create difficult logistical issues. With an adaptive view that enables audiences to experience the artwork via physical and digital spaces and as one of the first large-scale international art events to be held since the onset of the pandemic, this year's Yokohama Triennale 2020 AFTERGLOW may provide a light for those to follow.



Taus Makhacheva, "Infinity of the Objective", gymnast

ANOTHER IMPRESSION (by RJ McDonald)

Being an avid art traveler, I have seen my fair share of Biennales and Triennales across the globe and came in with an expectation of what kind of art I looked forward to seeing. I will just start off by saying the Yokohama Triennale did not disappoint. This year, it was titled AFTERGLOW in relation to the unknowing sparks of light that come in and out of our lives daily. This amazing curatorial feat by Raqs Media Collective of New Delhi truly went above and beyond and filled Yokohama with engaging works all across the city. The art consisted of mostly large-scale works with varying degrees of interactivity. I was also impressed with the curatorial team for compiling artists from all over the globe, giving myself a firsthand experience into new artistic practices and regional discourses.

Some of the highlights were: American artist, Nick Cave's extensive piece, which uses movement to create an illuminating installation of visual trickery. It was the piece directly in the foyer that created a very strong introduction to what was lurking throughout Yokohama's art spaces. It was a truly pleasant surprise that I got to witness the newest video/installation by my favourite artist, Korakrit Arunanondchai his series, Painting with History in a Room Filled with People with Funny Names, this one being version four. The video work was a memorial to the artist's late grandmother, and the room was decorated in a way similar to a funeral ceremony, creating a somber and still space to reflect and appreciate.

In the former kitchen of a restaurant at the Yokohama Art Museum was an amazing installation created by Zhan Zhang Xu made entirely out of paper, creating a modern story using traditional Taiwanese funeral sculpture paper skills in an environment that goes beyond a white cube. There was also a massive installation grouping by a Nanjing/Tōkyō based collective, Printing Sounds, which was centered on the sexual desire/nature of shrimps, which was both playful and contemplative at the same time. It was also interactive and voyeuristic, probing a significant amount of humour and critical theory in a way I have never seen before. This piece was in PLOT 47, which is an old, community centre turned art gallery, and it was a joy to see the collective use every corner of the space, including a washroom.

My only critique of the exhibition would be that, almost exclusively, all the works were placed indoors. I would have loved for the public spaces of the city to have also been converted into the realm of AFTERGLOW.

There were only three works I remember experiencing outside: a series of free-forming sculptures by Risa Sato, an interactive

swinging fence by Joyce Ho, and a wooden geometric pavilion by an architectural team called Farming Architects (An Viet Dung & An Thanh Nhan). Overall, this was by far one of the better-curated exhibitions I have had the pleasure of seeing since moving to Japan. AFTERGLOW showcased a feeling of innovation that invigorated the gaze and left viewers with a feeling of rejuvenation and awe. Especially in an era of art when it feels like everything that can be done has been done, it is invigorating to know that not all is done just yet.

Kenneth Merrick is a New Zealand artist now based in Tōkyō. His work pulls from the flotsam and jetsam of audio and visual culture, extending across a range of media and materials. He has exhibited work in a number of group and solo exhibitions.

RJ McDonald is American, but has lived and travelled throughout various countries, including Canada, Australia, and Vietnam. He is now located in Tōkyō. He holds a Bachelors of Art in Photography from Canada and a Master's of Art in Cultural Studies from the University of Sydney, Canada.

LIFESTYLE



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"Having examined three thousand haiku poems—two persimmons." — Masaoka Shiki

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"There should be no room in your life for regret. If in the moment of doing you felt clarity, you felt certainty, then why feel regret later?" — Yaa Gyasi, "Homegoing"

LIFESTYLE DESIGNER

Rhiannon Haseltine



All About the Healing Sauna

Sheila Mulherin (Hokkaidō)

The sauna—a short history

In Japan, most *onsen* (hot springs) and *sentō* (public baths) are equipped with saunas: a place to sweat, relax, and socialize. Whenever I look for an onsen or sentō to visit, I always check if a sauna is available as well.

Sauna was imported into Japan from Finland, a country which boasts a wonderful elaborate sauna culture. From 1999-2010, the city of Heinola, Finland hosted sauna contests, intended to be joyous and playful. The competition stopped forever after one death and one near-death occurred in 2010. The unfortunate participant who had met

an early death had applied local anesthetic cream on his skin and took strong painkillers, against the rules presented by the organizers for everyone's health and safety. At this specific competition, the sauna temperature was 110 degrees Celsius, the most extreme sauna in the competition's history. The contestant who survived suffered severe burns

and was in a medically induced coma for six weeks. The organizers saw no feasible way to bring back the joyous playful atmosphere with a clean, safe competition, hence the cancellation forever. This is tragic and unfortunate. I would have enjoyed trying it once in its heyday—I didn't know this competition existed when I lived within a short flight's distance!



Sauna arrived in Japan in the 1950s. At the Olympics in Melbourne, Australia, Finnish Olympic athletes introduced the idea to Ujitoshi Konomi, a businessman and sports shooter. He returned to Japan and built Japan's first sauna at his sentō in Tōkyō, and soon they spread around Tōkyō and other major cities. Most saunas in Japan are dry and electrical, with the temperature hovering around 90-95 degrees Celsius. Some offer a second sauna

room, averaging 60-75 degrees Celsius. They are indoors, in gender-separated areas near the washing and indoor bathing areas. No bathing suits are allowed, everyone wears their birthday suit. The seating is wide like stadium seating, with large mats and the staff change out throughout the day. A sand hourglass timer, a 12-minute timer or an electronic clock keeps the time for you. Japanese saunas often provide a TV as well, with options to flip through the channels and acquaint yourself with daytime Japanese television. Some saunas play pleasant piano music and the atmosphere is quiet and peaceful. Often the sauna goers are regulars who live in the area, know each other and will chat. They may strike a conversation with you as well! Don't be shy, have a chat and get to know each other. Once there was a game or quiz show on the TV, and everyone was watching it silently. I understood the questions and started shouting out the answers, and the others smiled, agreed with me and joined in, opening up to conversation.

My first sauna experiences

As a teenager, I attended a Native American sweat lodge in western Massachusetts. I wore a long dress, as the tradition in Native American sweat lodges goes. We all went into a dome with hot rocks, and a sweat lodge leader sang prayers and sprinkled herbs on the rocks which burned and made me cough. Naïve of the discomfort the sauna experience can bring, I fled at the first moment my heart beat out of my chest and sweat spurted out of my pores. I wished I lasted the whole time like my friend did. Her fingers and toes swelled. I imagine they stayed in the sweat lodge for no more than 30 minutes. Everyone ate strawberries at the end. My friend's little brother had passed out in there, and the staff patted him awake and helped him out. His fingers and toes had also swollen, and he loved the experience.

My first proper sauna experience occurred in a small tourist town in Austria. The moment I opened the door and the heat engulfed me, I screamed and ran away dramatically. My friend exclaimed I reminded her of a comedy act. The others recommended I take a shower before coming in. This time I lasted longer. Information was posted in German with a series of pictures to demonstrate how to use the sauna. I understood and took in the information as my sauna routine, which I've stuck with ever since.

The "Aufguss"

The *Aufguss* is a wonderful sauna tradition in German-speaking countries, which I haven't encountered in Japan yet. The sauna room was packed every time I went. A staff member comes in and props open the door, fanning in fresh air with her towel. She closes the door and pours essential oils on the hot rocks, creating a strong refreshing scent in the room. After the scent builds for some time, she fans the scent around the room with her towel, followed by flicking her towel to fan the scent at each individual in the sauna room. Imagine Florida or Okinawa in the summer, but pleasant smelling and refreshing. The first few times I did it, I felt pressure to survive the whole 25 minutes. Opening the door during the *Aufguss* is discouraged, for the refreshing aromatic air escapes. The session finishes after 20-25 minutes and everyone files out to wash off and dunk in the cold pools. It's a unique experience I miss from that region of the world. Japan imported the sauna from Europe, so in time I think they'll import the *Aufguss* as well, if not already.

Sauna 101

Saunas benefit your health and sense of wellbeing in many ways.

1. They dilate your blood vessels, relieve muscle soreness after exertion, speed recovery and relieve mild cold and seasonal allergy symptoms.
2. The sauna builds endurance, heat tolerance, and immunity.
3. Sweating proves a detoxifying invigorating experience. Your skin will glow after, since blood flow to the skin increases.
4. Do not go in if you have a fever or a contagious illness!
5. Exit the sauna if you feel faint or dizzy. There should be a big red emergency button on the wall, in case something happens, but let's not push yourself so hard you create an emergency!
6. Make sure you've already eaten at least one hearty meal the day you go to the sauna, but not immediately before going. The body works hard to regulate body temperature and stay cool in the sauna, so fuel up beforehand!

A suggested sauna routine

To prepare for the onsen, pack your washing gear, two towels, a change of clothes, a big water bottle and a snack. Some onsen washing areas are equipped with shampoo, body wash, and a pumice stone callus remover. If not, you may bring your own or purchase them at reception.

Wash up before going into the sauna. Bring in your own little towel to put on your head or cover the front of your body. If you're unsure what to do, follow the other sauna users' lead.

In Austria, you lay your own towel where you sit, but in Japan people sit on large yellow mats provided, not on their own towel. I feel more hygienic putting my bare bum on my own towel rather than on a communal mat, even though staff change them regularly. The temperature is so high most, if not all germs die, anyway.

Sweat in the sauna for a maximum of 20 minutes. Building to 20 minutes proves challenging the first (several, no, many) times. In Austria and Germany, proper cafes are right inside the rest area in the spa, and I took advantage of them. Caffeine helped me feel alert and less faint in the sauna. In most cases, the heart rate goes up, but the body slows. Breathe deep and pay attention to your body's reaction, you'll find it's a relaxing calming experience. If space allows, feel free to stretch or lay down.

After surviving a maximum of 20 minutes in the sauna, shower or splash off your sweat before dunking in the cold pool. I stay in the cold pool as long as possible, afterwards I sit on the ledge and soak my legs to my knees longer. Soaking in the cold pool proves a godsend for relieving swelling, inflammation, and pain in the legs after exertion from hiking, running, skiing, and so on.

Relax awhile, drinking lots of water or your favorite beverage. Get a drink from the vending machine if one is appealing (not alcohol! 90% of sauna-related deaths in the world involve alcohol). After you've rested, rehydrated and feel back to normal, repeat the sauna for up to 20 minutes, rinsing off and dunking in the cold pool again, a total of 3 times.

I aim to make my total sauna time one hour. It's possible to sweat out a pint of water after a short time in the sauna, so keep guzzling water, about 2-4 cups per sauna session.

Recommended saunas in Japan

One sauna stands out to me in Japan: Spa World in Ōsaka, which has an assortment of saunas. They include a salt sauna, Finnish sauna, sauna with benches made of Japanese cypress, a Mexican sauna called a *temazcal*, a honey sauna, and a steam sauna with aromas that change monthly. The hot springs come in two themes: Asian and European.

Teine Honoka onsen in Sapporo is equipped with two sauna rooms, onsens and linens to wear if you'd fancy the restaurant or arcade games in the facility. There is a steam room as well. Steam rooms stay at a lower temperature than saunas, but have much more moisture in the air, which helps clear allergies and mild cold symptoms and is less strenuous for the body. I worry about germs though, since the usual steam room temperature of 43 degrees Celsius isn't hot enough to kill most bacteria.

Other saunas I enjoy are at upscale onsen hotels, such as Prince Hotel (a famous Japanese chain hotel) where the onsens you soak in afterwards have pure rejuvenating healing spring waters, as well as a nice view. The saunas tend to be larger as well, with large soft mats to sit on.

Small traditional retro onsens prove satisfying as well, such as Ebeotsu Onsen in Takikawa and Takasago Onsen in Asahikawa. At Takasago Onsen, note the electric bath, the *denki furo*, in which the handrail vibrates, and dipping your toe in the water will produce a surprising little zap! I couldn't partake in it, but it has its fans.

Many sentō have a traditional retro feel as well, but often a chlorine smell in the air. The tap water lacks the reinvigorating healing benefits hot spring water provides, but I'll go at least once to experience it, and for

the location's convenience as well. Sentō are ubiquitous in cities, residential and rural areas. Some onsens and sentō have a hot stone sauna, where the temperature is lower than the usual sauna, but you still sweat quite a bit! Linens are provided to wear in the hot stone sauna room, which may be gender-separated or mixed. You lay down on a smooth hot stone in a warm room. Hotels with hot stone sauna include Niseko Alpen Hotel, North King in Engaru, and Yuraku in Niigata.

Find your own sauna!

The Japanese pronounce "sauna" closer to German sauna, as in, "sow-na," like the female pig "sow." Ask your local tourist information, or check the internet or Google Maps for onsens and sentō in your area. See if they're equipped with a sauna that's open. Nowadays, saunas may have closed due to the virus, so call ahead and ask "Kyō, sauna wa daijōbu desu ka?" They may open, but with a restriction to the number of people who can use the sauna at one time, or fewer mats to avoid crowding. Don't be shy! Go and enjoy improved health and a sense of wellbeing at the sauna!

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

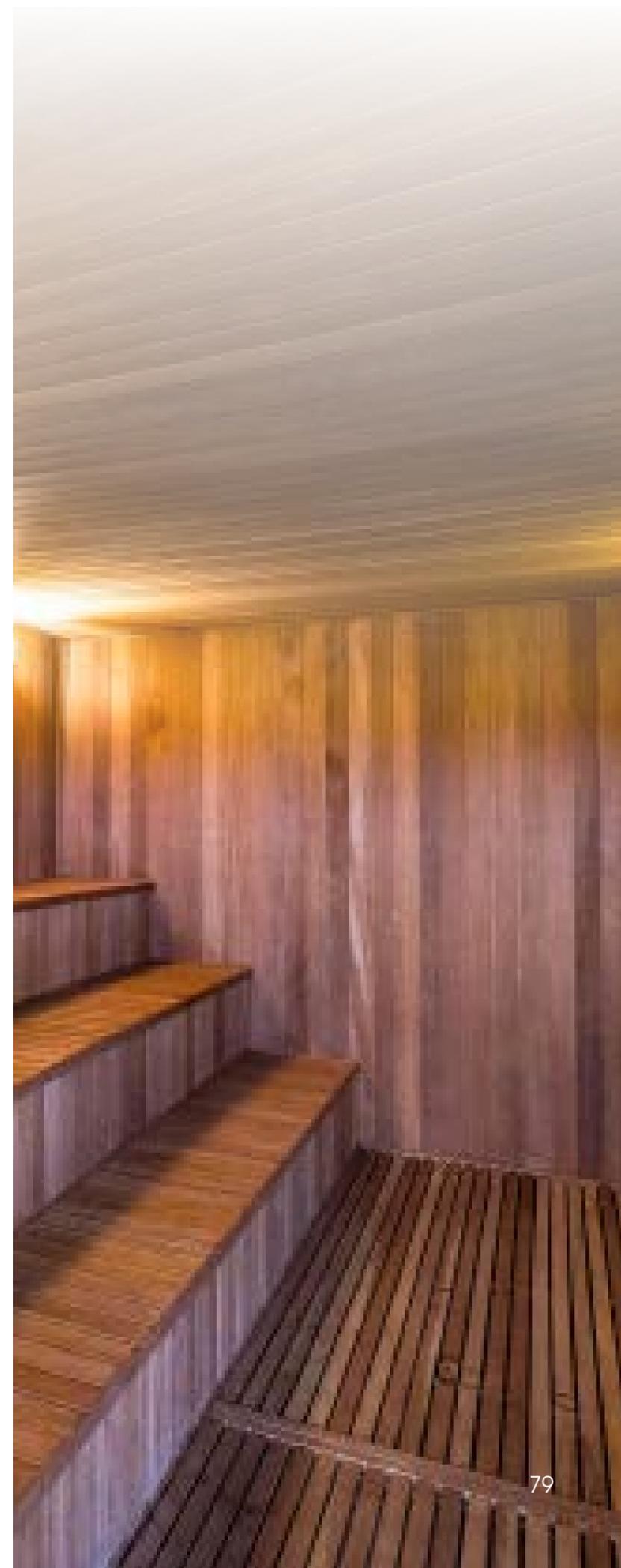
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Navigating the OBGYN in Japan

Abbie (Nagasaki)

Illustration: Freepik

Photo: freedom_life on Freepik

Going to an obstetrician-gynecologist (OBGYN) can be a daunting experience at the best of times, let alone in Japan, where language barriers and cultural differences can heighten the anxiety. I survived the experience, though, and you can too! Read on for what to expect at a Japanese OBGYN clinic, some tips for making the experience easier, and a quick rundown of your birth control options in Japan.

After putting it off for five years, I finally went to the OBGYN in Japan. I'd like to say it was because I finally overcame feeling awkward about having such an intimate area examined. Actually, I finally drummed up the courage to phone and make an appointment because of necessity. In August, I realised that my birth control, the contraceptive implant, was due to run out, and I already knew I couldn't get it renewed in Japan. Thanks to corona, my plans of going home for Christmas and getting my implant replaced then wasn't going to happen. Even hopping over to Korea was ruled out. Corona left me with little choice but to change to a birth control that Japan does have. After some research, it turns out my decision would be easy as there are only two readily available options in Japan, the pill or the intrauterine device (IUD), and most doctors are reluctant to prescribe the IUD to women who have not had children.

So, I reluctantly made an appointment with Yasuhi, an OBGYN that came highly recommended by various ALTs in my prefecture of Nagasaki.



D-Day

The appointment was actually way easier than I thought it would be. The secretaries and nurses couldn't speak much English, but they were very friendly and used simple Japanese, so I managed fine with my N5 Japanese and Google Translate.

After handing over my *zairyū* (residence) and insurance cards and filling in a new patient form, I had a brief discussion with a nurse about getting the pill, and she



also noted my height, weight, and blood pressure. It seems like you have your weight and blood pressure measured at every appointment, as indicators of your health.

I was then introduced to a doctor, who could speak English really well, who would do the pap smear and ultrasound. This bit, while still the most awkward part of the whole appointment, wasn't as bad as I thought it would be. The doctor was very professional throughout and kept me updated on what she was about to do, what she was doing, and regularly asked me to confirm I wasn't in pain or too much discomfort. I was surprised by a couple of differences to my experiences at OBGYN appointments in the UK, though. For example, the chair. When you first sit in it, it's similar to sitting in a chair at a hairdressers. The difference comes when the chair is raised up and laid back, as your legs will be raised up high and spread wide by the leg parts of the chair. This surprised me but didn't bother me, but I know a few friends who would feel highly uncomfortable having their legs forced open in such a way. If this will be an issue, please discuss this with your doctor. If they are a good doctor, they will take your concerns seriously and come up with a solution. If they don't, they are a bad doctor and you should feel no guilt from leaving and finding a different clinic. There was also a curtain that fell across my waist and so kept me from seeing the doctor and the nurse and what they were doing. It didn't bother me, but again, if this would make you uncomfortable, please tell your doctor you want the curtain held back, and again, if they are a decent doctor, I'm sure they would oblige.

Lastly, we had a detailed conversation about the pill, and she suggested I try Favoir, the cheapest pill available in Japan and the only one covered by insurance.

The nurse who had assisted the doctor then escorted me to another room, where she gave me a pack of pills and other information associated with it. Some of the information she gave me included the negative side effects of the pill to look out for and who to contact if I experienced any. It was very thorough.

Then, all that was left was to collect my zairyū and insurance cards and pay my bill. I was really worried it was going to be expensive as, being from the UK, I was used to my check-ups and birth control being free (Thank you NHS!). However, my check-up only cost 3,750 yen and the one pack of pills, 2,750 yen.

A Month Later

When I went back again a month later, I again saw a nurse who noted my weight and blood pressure. I then saw a different doctor who could also speak English well. I had an ultrasound again to check if my ovary was still enlarged, and this required me to only unbutton my jeans and pull up my top. After the ultrasound, the doctor informed me that the ovary was a normal size (pew) and that my pap smear results had the all-clear (yay). We then discussed my month on the pill. The only negative side effects I'd had were that I had been spotting for the entire month and had felt a bit more emotional. She reassured me this was common and the spotting should stop when I started the second month of pills (which it did). As I was happy to continue on the pill and she was confident I wasn't suffering any serious ill effects, she gave me three months' worth and a reminder to contact them if I had any concerns. Then, it was back out to the waiting room to collect my insurance card and pay my bill. This time, the appointment itself cost only 380 yen, and the three packs of pills cost 8,250 yen.

Corona left me with
little choice...

...but to change
to a birth control
that Japan does have.



Final Thoughts

Overall, I found my visits much more pleasant than I had been expecting. I felt listened to and respected by all the staff the entire time, and I feel immensely reassured to now have a clinic I trust and can go to if I have any concerns regarding my reproductive health. I would rather have my implant renewed than continue with the pill, however. I feel like my emotions have been more extreme since starting the pill, and I worry about missing a dose as I regularly forget to take it on time, but the pill will do until I can get my implant replaced.

Tips and Advice

My advice for OBGYN clinics is to go to a clinic recommended by someone you know, especially a foreign friend. While only the doctors could speak English, the nurses and secretaries at Yasuhi were very comfortable interacting with me, and that calmed my nerves a lot.

1. You must take your insurance card, if you have one, and hand it to them at every appointment.
2. You will also need to show your zairyū card or passport and relevant visa the first time you go.
3. Wear comfortable clothes that are easy to remove and put back on.
4. I highly recommend having Google Translate or another app handy to help with any translating.

Birth Control Options in Japan

The IUD. The copper IUD and hormonal IUD (Mirena) are available in Japan. They are expensive at 50,000 yen to 150,000 yen and are not covered by health insurance but can be used for between three and five years. Some doctors in Japan are very reluctant to give the IUD to someone who has not had children, so you may have to try a few clinics.

The Pill (of which there are various types). You must get a prescription (though it is now possible to do this online through Japan Healthcare Info) and the price will vary depending on the brand of pill. Favoir is the cheapest and the only one partly covered by insurance, costing around 2,750 yen per months' worth. While it is possible to get more than three months' worth, most clinics won't prescribe more, and you can't get insurance cover on more than three months' worth.

Plan B/Emergency Contraceptive Pill. Currently only available with a doctor's prescription, it costs around 10,000 yen and must be taken within three days of sexual intercourse. There is a push to make Plan B available without a prescription, and it has been reported the government is debating the issue, but no timeline has been set.

Useful Japanese Phrases

Is Dr. _____ in today? *Kyō wa, (Doctor's name) sensei ga imasu ka?*

Is there anyone who understands English? *Eigo ga wakaru hito wa imasu ka?*

I'd like to make an appointment. *Yoyaku shitai desu.*

I have a pain here. *Koko ga itai desu.*

I'm not feeling well and cannot go to school. *Chōshi ga warui node, gakkō ni ikemasen.*

physical check up *kenkō shindan* (健康診断)

obstetrics and gynecology *sanfujin-ka* (産婦人科)

uterus *shikyū* (子宮)

vagina *chitsu* (膣)

menstrual cramps *seiritsu* (生理痛)

menstrual irregularity *seiri fujun* (生理不順)

yeast infection *chitsu kanjida shō* (膣カンジダ症)

vaginal discharge *orimono* (おりもの)

venereal disease / STD *seibyō* (性病)

hemorrhage *fusei-shukketsu* (不正出血)

morning after pill *mōningu afutā piru* (モーニングアフターピル)

pregnancy *ninshin* (妊娠)

contraception *hinin* (避妊)

Yasuhi Women's Health Clinic, recommended OBGYN in Nagasaki.

For a useful article with a list of clinics that provide the Plan B pill, see [here](#).

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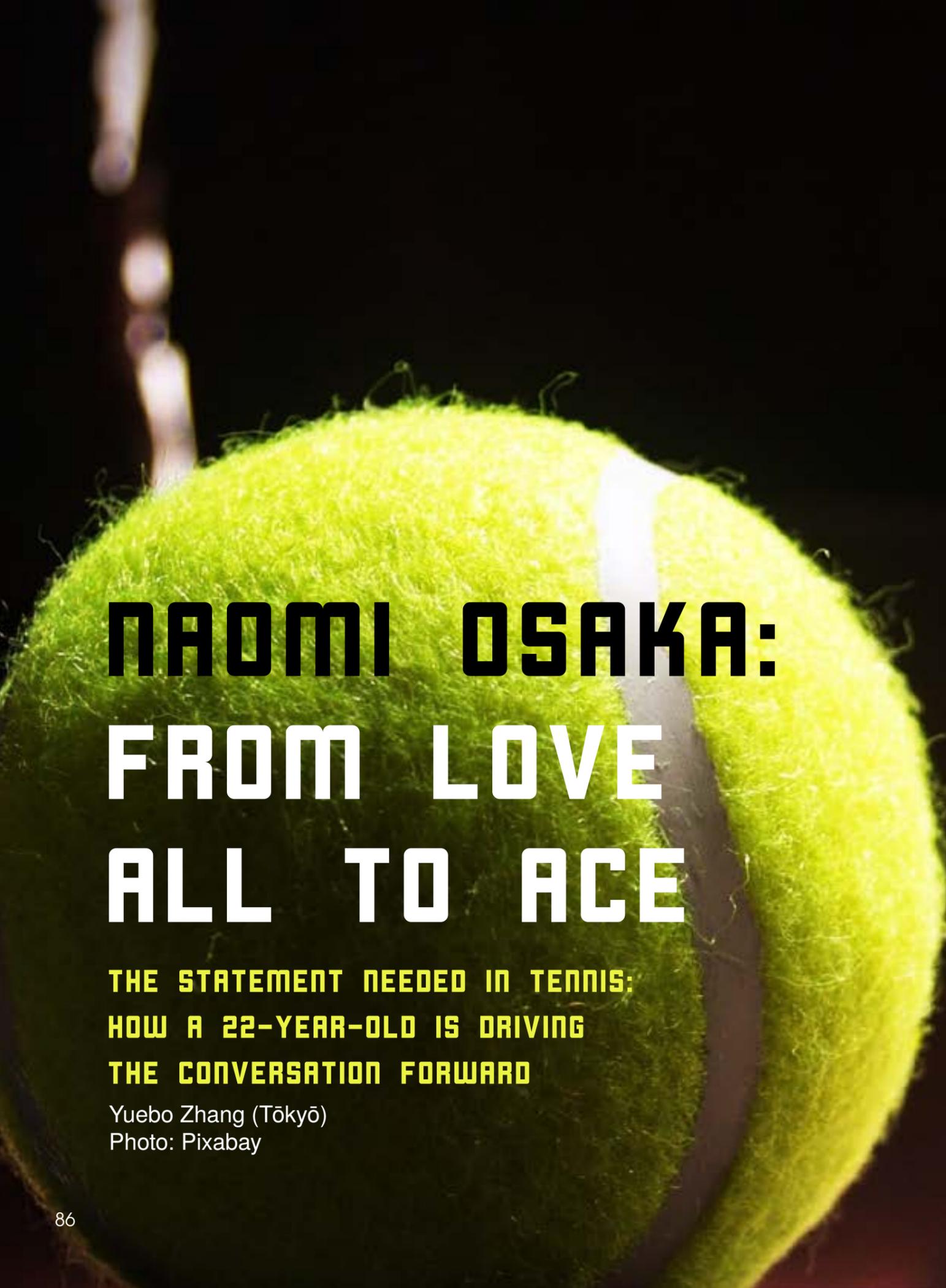
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Abbie is a British ALT living in Nagasaki Prefecture.



NAOMI OSAKA: FROM LOVE ALL TO ACE

**THE STATEMENT NEEDED IN TENNIS:
HOW A 22-YEAR-OLD IS DRIVING
THE CONVERSATION FORWARD**

Yuebo Zhang (Tōkyō)
Photo: Pixabay

Naomi Osaka, the 22 year-old two-time Grand Slam champion, announced through her social media that she was withdrawing from the Western and Southern Open semi-finals one day after the shooting of Jacob Blake on August 27, 2020. The boycott from Osaka followed strikes by several players and teams from the National Basketball Association, Women's National Basketball Association, Major League Baseball, and Major League Soccer.

"[. . .] before I am a[n] athlete, I am a black woman. And as a black woman, I feel as though there are much more important matters at hand that need immediate attention, rather than watching me play tennis. [. . .] Watching the continued genocide of Black people at the hand of the police is honestly making me sick to my stomach," Osaka posted on Twitter on August 27th.

Although Osaka would later take to the court and compete against Elise Mertens the following day on the 28th, her decision jolted the sports world. Osaka's decision was particularly notable because it was a choice made by an individual. Contrasting Osaka's decision to those of the teams in the NBA and WNBA, there are no close teammates for her to deliberate and consult with. The people who agree with and support her are, really, her employees, and she alone has authority over her destiny. This choice to withdraw is deafening in such isolation.

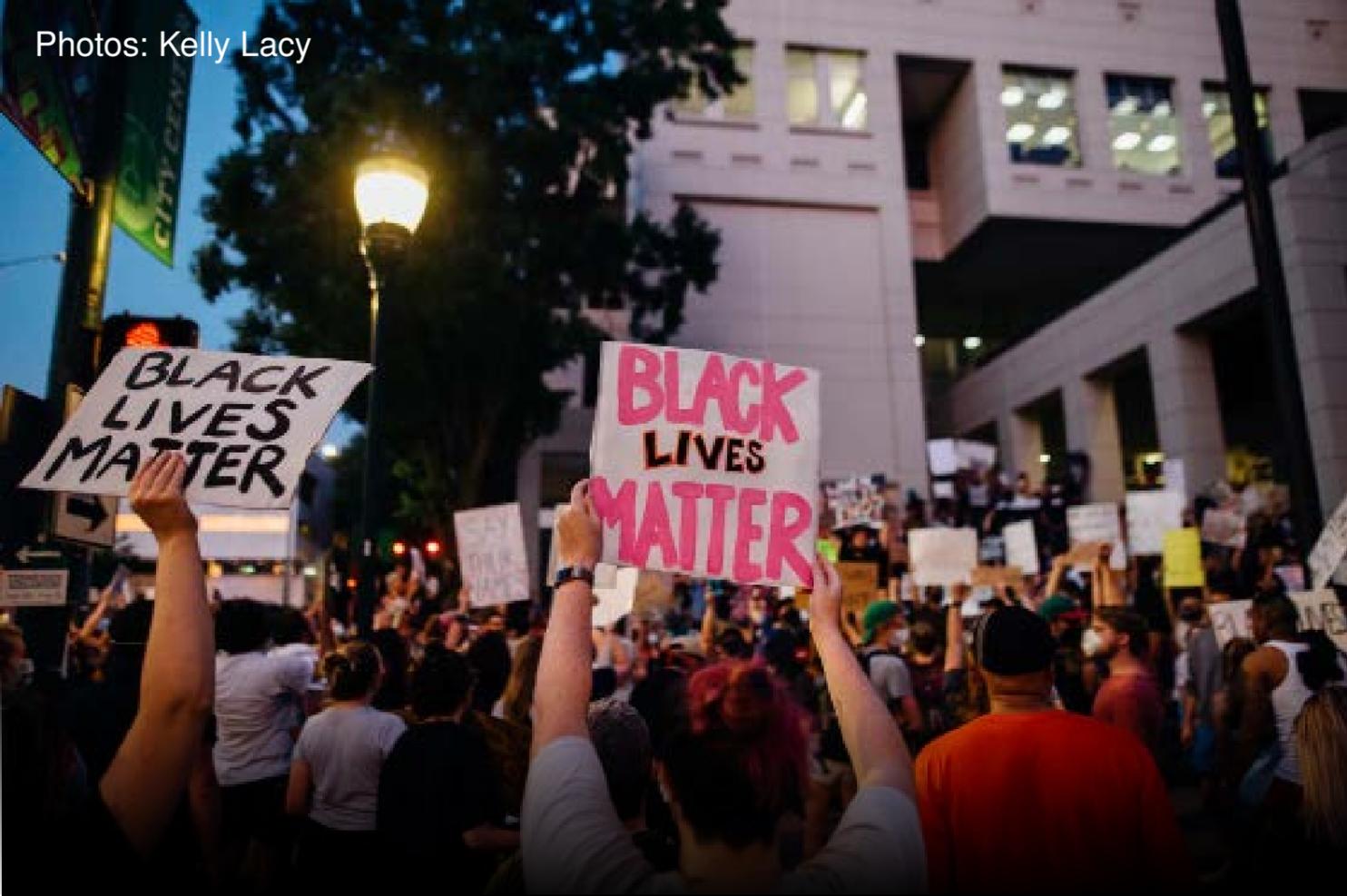
After Osaka's announcement through Twitter and numerous meetings with the Women's Tennis Association and the Western & Southern Open organisers, a compromise was reached where the tournament would be "pausing tournament play" and rescheduling all the matches that would've been played on Thursday the 27th, for Friday the 28th.

"After my announcement and lengthy consultation with the WTA and USTA, I have agreed at their request to play on Friday," said Osaka. "They offered to postpone all matches until Friday and in my mind that brings more attention to the movement. I want to thank the WTA and the Tournament for their support."

This statement was a direct answer to Osaka's Tweet of, "[. . .] I don't expect anything drastic to happen with me not playing, but if I can get a conversation started in a majority white sport I consider that a step in the right direction."

Fast forward to the matches for the US Open, Osaka wore seven different masks for the seven rounds of the tournament. On each mask were the names of Black Americans whose deaths were caused by police violence and systemic racism.

The seven masks bore the names of Breonna Taylor, Elijah McClain, Ahmaud Arbery, Trayvon Martin, George Floyd, Philando Castle, and Tamir Rice, in order of appearance, not importance.



INTERSECTIONALITY IN AN EVER GLOBALIZING WORLD

Despite originating in the United States, the Black Lives Matter movement has become a globalized phenomenon. In urban areas such as Tōkyō and Ōsaka, there have been multiple marches supporting BLM and raising awareness. The movement has also found a place in Japan's sports scene, where a growing number of athletes are biracial.

Washington Wizards forward Rui Hachimura, of Japanese and Beninese heritage, shared accounts of being racially discriminated against when growing up in Toyama Prefecture in the Kansai region when he spoke with ESPN's Marc Spears for an article last year.

Hachimura recounted tales of being told: "You're Black. Go away."

In June, Tōhoku Rakuten Golden Eagles outfielder Louis Okoye, of Nigerian and Japanese heritage, uploaded an emotional message to Twitter recounting his experiences of discrimination in Japan.

In the post, Okoye wrote about a time in kindergarten when he felt embarrassed. The children laughed at him as he used a "brown" crayon to color in his father's face.

"I would look out from the balcony of our home and think, if I jumped off and was born again, maybe I can come back as a normal Japanese person," wrote Okoye.

Former professional basketball player Jō Kurino, in an interview with the Japan Times, shared similar sentiments with Okoye about growing up in Japan with a Black parent.

"I'm not surprised since I've had [similar] experiences, too. I got the tail end of racism. There's been times where I got off the bus and kids yelled at me [. . .] I've had rocks thrown at me," said Kurino.

Kurino recounted stories of being picked on by not only other students but also by coaches. He said he's seen Japanese coaches who wholeheartedly believe that biracial kids, especially those coming from Black heritage, should be differentiated from their monoracial peers simply because biracial players are seen as athletically superior.

Kurino, of American and Japanese heritage, is currently working as an assistant coach for the Shinshu Brave Warriors in the B. League. When Kurino played in the Japanese pro leagues, he was played as a power forward. Compared to other players in the same role, who average between 203 cm and 208 cm tall, he was only 195 cm.

"If a kid is a guard by size, for some reason they just assume that the kid is athletic—they'll make him play inside. [. . .] When

you look at a lot of *hāfu* kids here, their size are clearly guard but for some reason, the coaches always thinks that African American kids must play inside or they are stronger, or whatever, like that," Kurino said.

This way of thinking is not only detrimental to mixed kids but also reduces the confidence and opportunities for ethnically Japanese kids as well. This is often a by-product that is not talked about and generally ignored. One player that Kurino mentioned during the interview was Yūdai Baba, who played for the Texas Legends of the G League the previous season. Baba is known for his exceptional athleticism and proves the point that you don't have to be multiracial to be remarkable.



ONLY TIME CAN TELL, BUT IT CAN'T COME SOON ENOUGH

This discrimination is also present amongst the media, said Kohei Kawashima, a professor of Sport Sciences at Waseda University.

During an interview with the Japan Times in early July, Kawashima said: “For example, those reporters say that a majority of their readers root more for monoracial Japanese like [track sprinter Yoshihide Kiryū. And when athletes like [half-Jamaican] Aska Cambridge or [half-Ghanaian Abdul Hakim] Sani-Brown win, there would be different reactions.”

Both Kurino and Kawashima agree that this problem is “deep[ly]-rooted” and only time would be able to change these beliefs.

“I would like to see those prejudices gradually dwindle with more instances where these [multiracial athletes] achieve success. We have to keep pushing,” Kurino declared.

The actions and words of Osaka remind us that we cannot be bystanders in such an interconnected and globalized world. We’ve already seen how loud Osaka has been; it wouldn’t be a surprise to see more from her in the future.

Naomi Osaka is born to a Japanese mother and a Haitian father in Japan. She’s lived and trained in the United States since she was three years old. Osaka’s WTA Tour debut at the 2014 Stanford Classics saw the defeat of the former US Open champion Samantha Stosur. At 16 years old, she came to prominence with that win, and two years later, she would go on to visit her first WTA final at the 2016 Pan Pacific Open in Japan. In the 2018 US Open, Osaka brought down the 23-time Grand Slam singles champion Serena Williams to claim the title of the first Japanese player to win a Grand Slam.

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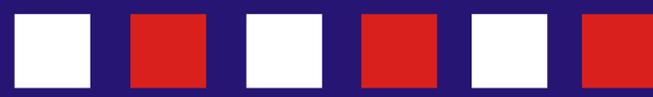
Yuebo (Joby) Zhang is a second-year ALT from America living in Tōkyō. His favorite spots are the small shops found in the back alleys from the likes of Nakameguro, Omotesandō, and Ebisu. Since graduating from university and working at his parents’ restaurant for two years, he’s delighted to be living in such a foodie metropolis.



Masks & Empty Seats:

Watching Football In the Age of COVID

Niall Devine (Tōkyō)



The last time I wrote for *CONNECT*, it was about the **communal joy of watching football**. There's honestly nothing better than watching your side score a last-minute winner and then proceeding to scream, lose your shit, and hug the nearest twelve strangers around you. That honestly feels like a lifetime ago.

The last time I went to watch a 'normal' game was back in February, to watch FC Tokyo play Perth Glory in the Asian Champions League. That was nine months ago. What a weird year.

Absent were 30,000 people singing 'You'll Never Walk Alone' before kick-off, replaced with fans holding their scarves aloft while they played the song over the speakers.



One conversation that sticks out from that night is someone suggesting that Shanghai Shenhua (the Chinese team in FC Tokyo's group) would be disqualified because of safety concerns.

When COVID-19 hit in March, there had only been one round of matches played, but because of safety concerns, the next round kept getting pushed back, and further back, and even further back.

An announcement in May told us that the games would finally kick off in July, and a later press conference told us that fans would be allowed to attend baseball and football games, but attendance would be capped at 5,000, and there would be no away fans.



Unsurprisingly, the games sold out quickly, so the first game I actually managed to get to wasn't until August. A 3-0 thrashing of Shonan Bellmare at Ajinomoto Stadium, but it was nice to be physically in a stadium watching football.

It was very different, though. Absent were 30,000 people singing 'You'll Never Walk Alone' before kick-off, replaced with fans holding their scarves aloft while they played the song over the speakers.

Ours was the noise and numbers of the ultras. For the whole game, they would sing, jump, and wave flags at an intense level, which was now substituted by 5,000 people golf clapping each time there was a decent tackle or some good build-up play.

Admittedly, this all sounds rather gloomy, but it was surprisingly nice. Because of social distancing measures, the two seats on either side of you were empty as well as the rows in front and behind you. I've never had so much room at a football game.

Like most places in Tōkyō, masks were mandatory as well—so much so that FC Tokyo's mascot, Dorompa, had a mask on too.

Even though fans weren't allowed to make much noise, every close chance or goal had people standing to their feet and cheering, as if an automated reaction, quickly followed by people sitting back down when they realised they shouldn't do that. I was also guilty of this several times.

At this point in time, though, I'm very thankful to be able to watch games in a stadium with other people. Especially when other countries are not so fortunate. When I spoke to my dad, who is back in the U.K., he told me that he is not able to go to a stadium at all, and it doesn't look like fans will be let back in for a good while yet.

In recent weeks, the J-League has announced a reduction in safety measures. Stadiums can now be filled to 50% capacity, and drums are now allowed back into stadiums to add more atmosphere. For now, there's still no singing or shouting allowed, booze is still banned, and the masks still must stay on.

Anything for a day out at the football, though.



*Niall Devine is a third-year ALT based in Tōkyō who hates writing in the third person. He is fond of sport, board games, vegetarian food, and noisy music. Follow him on **Instagram** or **Twitter**. Or don't. I'm not your dad.*

COMMUNITY AND TRAVEL



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Cameron Peagler

"Never regret something, because at one point everything you did was exactly what you wanted to do. And sometimes that's the hardest thing to realize."

— Kid Cudi

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Clarissa Combe

"Be yourself; everyone else is already taken."

— Oscar Wilde

COMMUNITY AND TRAVEL DESIGNER

Nate Ryman



DAY JAPAN'S TOP

Imagine it's 2010; there is no pandemic, the idea of Trump being president is only a farfetched joke on "The Simpsons," and the world is obsessed with anthropomorphising countries due to a bizarre anime called "Hetalia." Looking back now, the "Hetalia" phase of human cultural history seems like a fever dream. Without diving too deep into the various flawed characters, there was one key issue in the characterisation of Japan that warrants addressing here. An anthropomorphised Japan without a Type A personality is inherently flawed. This is the country of lists. If there is something that could be ranked, then Japan has made a ranking. From the 'top places to view the autumn foliage reflected on the surface of water' to simpler lists of 'top 100 sunsets' and 'top 100 soundscapes,' every tourism destination features on some ranking or another. Japan loves making lists, and everyone loves to complete them.

Clarissa Combe (Aomori)



THREE VIEWS NIGHT

However, amongst the swathes of obscure rankings, several key tourism rankings stand above them all. These are the 'Top Three' rankings of quintessential types of tourist destinations, such as Japanese gardens, onsens, and castles. Two particularly popular rankings are the Three Views of Japan, or *Nihon Sankei*, and the Three Major Night Views of Japan, or *Nihon Sandai Yakei*. *Nihon Sankei* is attributed to the scholar Hayashi Gahō in 1643, so the Japanese love for lists is not a modern phenomenon. There's no better way to impress your Japanese colleagues than by knowing these rankings, or even better: being able to say you've seen all six views.

NIHON SANKEI

MATSUSHIMA BAY

A short 40-minute train ride from Sendai Station, Matsushima Bay is dotted with over 200 small islands covered in verdant pine trees. Gazing out across the bay is like viewing the world inverted as the sea becomes a sky filled with fluffy green clouds. When the famous poet Matsuo Bashō travelled around Tōhoku writing his travelogue “Oku no Hosomichi”, he was so overwhelmed by the beauty of Matsushima that he was unable to compose haiku or even sleep. While most views are famed for their ability to inspire artistic awe, a view so beautiful it leaves even the most eloquent poet speechless must be experienced first-hand.

The easiest and most popular way to enjoy the scenery is by taking one of the hourly cruise trips around the bay, weaving between islands and past small fishing boats. If you are prone to seasickness, two of the islands closer to the shore are accessible on foot via picturesque red bridges. These bright red bridges also provide a great focal point for scenic photographs of the bay from one of the Four Panoramic Views of Matsushima (*Shitaikan*): the magnificent view, the elegant view, the grand view, and the spiritual view. With so many lists of top views within lists of top views, perhaps “Inception” was the more apt cultural comparison for the Japanese love for lists.



MIYAJIMA

The image of Itsukushima Shrine’s solitary *torii* gate rising from the bay of Miyajima in Hiroshima transcends the Nihon Sankei ranking. It is easily one of the most famous views in the world and one of the first images that will pop into people’s minds when they imagine Japan. The bright red gate contrasts with the deep blue waters and luscious greenery on the island in the background, resulting in a composition that has even the most amateur of photographers reaching for their phones. At high tide, the torii gate seems to float above the waves, and at low tide, you can walk up to the base from the shore. Although the island’s official name is Itsukushima, it is more commonly known as Miyajima, or Shrine Island, since the image of this floating torii gate has become synonymous with the island in people’s minds.

AMANOHASHIDATE

Located in northern Kyōto Prefecture, Amanohashidate is overshadowed by the unfaltering popularity of the city of Kyōto, but with the impressive name 'Bridge to Heaven,' it is well worth the side trip from Japan's old capital. Amanohashidate is the name given to the three-kilometre-long sandbar that spans Miyazu Bay since it is said to resemble a bridge to heaven when seen from up high. If you have trouble imagining this heavenly bridge, try looking at the view upside down through your legs. It might open your eyes, or maybe just give you a slight headrush. While the view itself is traditionally enjoyed upside down from the viewpoints on either side, you can also walk and cycle along the length of the sandbar. With pine trees lining the path on both sides, the walk to the heavenly realm is surprisingly short and tranquil.



NIHON SANDAI YAKEI

KŌBE

While Kōbe and Ōsaka are two separate cities with distinct personalities and cultures, they are both a part of one continuous urban area that stretches around Ōsaka Bay. This never-ending chain of cities transforms into an ocean of lights after sundown, as the pitch-black Seto Inland Sea hugs the glowing mass of humanity that starts in Hyōgo Prefecture and ends in Wakayama. Of the three night views in this ranking, the view of Ōsaka Bay from Kōbe's Maya Mountains is the most vast. It is impossible to capture in one photograph without using panorama mode. Perhaps the overwhelming scale of this view is the reason why it was chosen for this ranking. There are a few ropeways and cable cars throughout Kōbe, but the view from Mount Rokkō is the most accessible and popular. With several cafes and restaurants overlooking the gorgeous view, it is the perfect place to relax and take in the endless skyline.

HAKODATE

Located in southern Hokkaidō, the unique shape of Hakodate's peninsula creates a breathtaking spectacle at night. As with the view in Kōbe, the dark sea on both sides of the peninsula enhances the sparkling view so that the city lights come together to look like a large misshapen vase or a bridge to heaven, similar to Amanohashidate. The view is also easily accessible. It only takes three minutes to reach the viewpoint on Mount Hakodate by ropeway, but due to the view's popularity, you'll probably spend much longer waiting in line. Besides the observation deck, there are several souvenir shops at the top where you can buy a memento of your trip.



NAGASAKI

The night views in Kōbe and Hakodate spread out from the base of the mountain with their shape largely determined by the coastline. In Nagasaki, however, the lights extend outwards from the natural harbour at the centre of the city with the surrounding slopes deciding their path, so the edges resemble small tendrils reaching out in all directions like a large twinkling paint splat. You can enjoy the view from the viewpoint at the top of Mount Inasa, which is also accessible by ropeway. Besides the outdoor observation deck, there is also a glass-domed observatory at the top with 360-degree views of the city.

All of these views are so effortlessly breathtaking that it's impossible to take a bad photograph. Not only can you impress your Japanese co-workers with your knowledge, but you can also amaze your friends and family back home with your professional level photographs. So get into the Japanese list-loving spirit and head out to catch the six best views in Japan.

Clarissa Combe is a third-year CIR originally from the UK who now hails from Aomori in northern Tōhoku. Now that autumn has finally arrived, she's spending her days hiking in the mountains and eating ramen.



JAPAN'S TOP 3 CASTLES

... OR ARE THEY?



Kirsty Broderick (Saitama)

Japan has many lists of “top threes”, such as the top three mountains, the top three Chinatowns, and the top three ramen dishes. The top three castle list, however, is somewhat controversial. The original list was created by Ogyū Sorai, a Confucian philosopher in the 17th and 18th centuries. This list is based on design principles. The castles Ogyū chose are Nagoya Castle, Ōsaka Castle, and Kumamoto Castle. This list omits what is arguably the most well-known Japanese castle today, Himeji Castle. Modern lists often swap one or two of the castles chosen by Ogyū for Himeji Castle and/or Matsumoto Castle.



NAGOYA CASTLE

NAGOYA, AICHI

Nagoya Castle, like most Japanese castles, is a reconstruction. The original castle was completed in 1615 by the shōgun, Tokugawa Ieyasu. The castle used to be operated as a military facility and was destroyed in a World War II bombing. It was the first castle to be named a National Treasure and is also recognised as a National Historic Site. The castle was rebuilt, and ongoing restoration work continues to this day, with the aim of being as historically accurate as possible. Fortunately, there are detailed historic records which aid this work. Nagoya Castle is known for its beautiful golden tiger-fish, *shachihoko*, that rest on the corners of the roof.

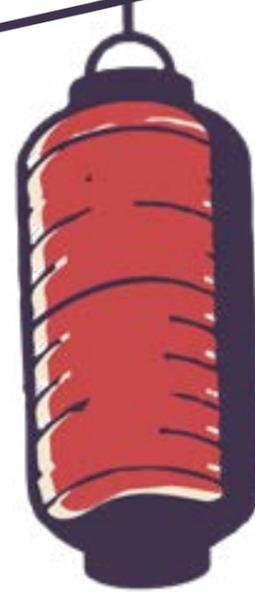
ŌSAKA CASTLE

ŌSAKA CITY, ŌSAKA

Ōsaka Castle has been rebuilt several times with the current castle being the third version. The original castle was built by Hideyoshi Toyotomi in 1583. In 1615, the castle was destroyed in the Summer War of Ōsaka. It was then rebuilt by the Tokugawa Shōgunate after which the main tower was hit by lightning and burnt down in 1665. The Tokugawa Shōgunate held the remainder of the castle buildings until 1868 when they lost power, and the castle was once again completely destroyed. In 1931, the main tower was rebuilt for the third time, and this is the current main tower. Ōsaka Castle is set in a beautiful park and surrounded by a moat. Despite how the castle has been ravaged by war and fire, a few structures do date back to the Edo period, including the moat and surrounding stone walls. The castle site has been designated a Special Historic Site by the Japanese government.



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KUMAMOTO CASTLE

KUMAMOTO, KUMAMOTO

Kumamoto Castle was built in 1607 by Katō Kiyomasa, the first *daimyō*, or feudal lord, of the castle. Like the previous castles mentioned, Kumamoto Castle is a reconstruction. During the Satsuma Rebellion in 1877, the castle towers and the Honmaru Goten Palace burnt down. Twelve years later in 1889, the remaining structures suffered further damage in an earthquake. In 1960, the large and small castle towers were rebuilt, and in 1998, work began on reconstructing the rest of the castle.

In 2016, there was another large earthquake in Kumamoto which caused significant structural damage to the castle. Repair work is still ongoing today. In October 2019, the first stage of reconstruction was unveiled, with the public permitted to enter part of the castle. A second stage was due to be unveiled in Spring 2020 but has been delayed due to COVID-19. Part of the castle is now open to visitors on Sundays and public holidays, but the majority is still closed off. However, you can still walk around the grounds and view the castle from the outside. This castle, like the others, is a designated Special Historic Site.

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HIMEJI CASTLE

HIMEJI, HYOGO

Himeji Castle, though the most prominent Japanese castle today, is not on the original list. It does, however, often make it on to modern lists. Himeji castle is also known as the White Heron Castle because of its brilliant and reflective white colouring. It is one of only 12 wooden castles in Japan (most castles are concrete) and is also generally considered the best preserved. Himeji Castle was never destroyed by war or natural disasters, and while it has been renovated, it is still the original structure. The castle's construction dates back to the 1300s when samurai Akamatsu Norimura built a fortress on the site where Himeji Castle now stands. The fortress was made into a castle and enlarged by successive daimyō until 1609, those final alterations giving it the form it has today. Himeji Castle is a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

MATSUMOTO CASTLE

MATSUMOTO, NAGANO

Matsumoto Castle is sometimes called the Black Crow Castle due to the striking black exterior. Like Himeji Castle, it is considered an original historic structure rather than a reconstruction. The beginnings of the castle date to the early 16th century, and the building was completed around 1594. However, the structure we see today is the product of alterations and additions made in 1635.



Matsumoto Castle is the oldest five-tiered, six-storied castle remaining in Japan. Although it is an original castle, it is not as well preserved as Himeji Castle. Japanese castles are considered original if they have a keep built before the end of the feudal era (1868).

Matsumoto Castle has had significant renovations, including the rebuilding of the outer gates. During the Meiji Restoration, parts of the castle complex were moved and reused in other buildings within the city. While the major moats do remain, some moats were also filled in during this time. Despite these extensive changes, Matsumoto Castle retains the original feudal era keep and inner walls as well as the outer stonework. The castle is a National Treasure.



All five castles are historically significant and beautiful. They're all well worth a visit! However, a top-three list can only contain three. My picks are **Himeji Castle**, **Matsumoto Castle**, and finally, **Kumamoto Castle**.

Himeji is undoubtedly the most well-known Japanese castle. It is strikingly beautiful, almost shining in the sunlight with its white exterior. It is the best-preserved castle in Japan and is a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Matsumoto Castle is another original castle. Its black exterior is magnificent against the backdrop of a blue sky, Matsumoto city, and on a good day, the Japanese Alps. The garden around the castle is absolutely stunning as well.

Kumamoto Castle, while not an original castle, is still wonderful. It has become a symbol of resilience, as it is being rebuilt following the 2016 Kumamoto earthquake. It is an icon of the city, and sometimes you can find the cute Kumamon wandering nearby.



Kirsty Broderick is a fourth-year ALT, originally from New Zealand, now residing in Saitama. She dreams of travel and loves to explore. You can follow her adventures on Instagram.



Community Heros Spotlight:

Kyōto's International Girl Scouts

Erin Noxon (Kyōto) interviewed by Cameron Peagler (Yamaguchi)



This month, I had the pleasure of interviewing Erin Noxon. She is the troop leader of the Kyōto International Girl Scouts but also a community leader through other facets. Erin is the Program Chair of JALTCALL (the educational technology-based Special Interest Group of the Japan Association for Language Teaching). She is also a part of the board of the Learning Exchange for Global Associations and Connections (LEGACy) (a not-for-profit supporting study abroad program), works as a high school teacher, and is a consultant, just to name a few.

The Vision

Originally from America, Erin moved to Japan eight years ago. As a Girl Scout herself since the age of six, she naturally wanted to enroll her daughter into a Girl Scout troop around her home in Kyōto. Unfortunately, there was no international Girl Scout troop in her area. Using her innate skills as a leader, she decided to form the Kyōto International Girl Scouts following the policies needed to become an official USAGSO (USA Girl Scouts Overseas) troop. Immediately, her troop became a success, and many community members wanted their children to join. However, as a USAGSO rule, only children who are enrolled in an international school or have at least one parent who is from another country are allowed to join. Despite this, the Kyōto International Girl Scout troop has many members from various nationalities, whose ages range from 6-15. While not the same program, Erin's troop also performs joint operations with the Japanese branch of Girl Scouts in Kyōto.



Lifetime of Leadership

If you are unfamiliar with the Girl Scouts and what they do, let me refresh you on how awesome they are! Founded by Juliette Gordon Low in 1912, the Girl Scouts help promote courage, confidence, and character within their members. With these qualities, they help improve their communities, are advocates for the environment, establish sports clinics, and much more. Erin's troop is very active in the community, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. While taking into consideration precaution measures, this troop managed to find ways to support others. For example, they wrote encouraging letters to first responders, created signs to promote positivity during this trying time, and wrote a new song for people to wash their hands, too. Even their meetings were held virtually to help prevent the spread of COVID-19. Unfortunately, they still have not been able to meet in person yet, but they hope to soon, as long as it is safe. Before the pandemic broke out in Japan, Erin's troop was able to participate in World Think Day activities. This is a day when all Girl Scouts and Boy Scouts think about their fellow members around the world and the meaning of being a scout. This year's theme was "Think Global, Act Local." For this environmental awareness theme, Erin's troop created leaf rubbings with eco-friendly slogans, such as "Go Green Girls" and "Save Our Earth."

"... the Girl Scouts help promote courage, confidence, and character."

As you can see, the work Erin's troop does is not only fun, but also impactful. From environmental activism to celebrating the work of first responders, this group rocks! If you or anyone you know is interested in joining the Kyōto International Girl Scout Troop, please message Erin at eringirlscouts@gmail.com. She would be more than happy to welcome new members!

"... this group rocks!"



Cameron is a former registered nurse and national fencer. He loves promoting culture 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.

ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVISTS: PROTECTING JAPAN'S BEACHES



Beach Cleanup Overlooking
Fuji-san - 2020

Chit Lacson (Ehime)

WHERE ARE YOU CLEANING BEACHES AND WHAT WAS THE PROCESS LIKE?

We clean the beaches around the city and some of the islands around it. While Matsuyama has the conveniences of a city, it also enjoys the slow pace of the countryside because it consists of 30 beautiful islands (nine of those are inhabited). In summer the beaches are packed since most people take advantage of beautiful sunny days. After all the barbecue parties and fun, however, the amount of trash left behind is astounding. What should be a paradise becomes littered with plastic trash: pet bottles, bags, toys, and household items.

WHY DID YOU DECIDE TO HELP CLEAN BEACHES?

At first, I was invited by a friend to join her and her children in a local beach clean-up. It was initiated by a foreign national living in Matsuyama who has been doing it for a couple of years now. While I am already aware of the plastic pollution's immense harm not only to the marine ecosystem, this activity made me realize how serious this problem is. It's not only developing countries like the Philippines who are faced with this issue but the entire planet. During my first clean-up event, I realized how difficult it is and that it actually takes longer than I imagined. At one point, I tried picking up a plastic

bag and it broke into smaller pieces. This made it harder not only for me but for others to tidy the entire beach faster.

Aside from joining group clean-ups, I have also organized a few with my friends during our beach trips. Environmental activists around the world have been fighting this plastic pollution battle for so long now, and I feel like an individual person can't make a real difference. Sometimes I ask myself, "Why do I even bother? I'm not saving the world by taking part or initiating beach clean-ups." I think it is the right thing to do though and feel like I have the social responsibility to do so, especially because I consider myself a beach person and beaches have a special place in my heart. I think I can't claim to love something and not care about it, so I do this whenever and as much as I can.

ANY FINAL MESSAGE?

I think people should take plastic pollution seriously and have a sense of social responsibility, not only for our oceans but for the entire planet. I am hopeful that through our collective efforts, this article will help raise awareness and make people more invested in local clean-up efforts.

Chit is a third-year JET ALT from the Philippines living in Matsuyama. She enjoys anything outdoors and spends most of her free time running and chasing sunsets.

Cara De Sausmarez (Yamaguchi)

WHERE ARE YOU CLEANING BEACHES AND WHAT WAS THE PROCESS LIKE?

I am cleaning beaches with a group called For Fukouka's Sake, a fairly new organisation. The city sponsors us and provides bags to clean the beaches with. We spend several hours doing as much as we can. Unfortunately, due to COVID-19, we have not had a big clean in a while. However, if you check out "Rachel and Jun's" videos on YouTube, you will see more about the organisation and footage of me making a fool of myself. The founders of this organisation are a mix of foreign nationals and Japanese citizens who want to make a difference in the way Japan deals and thinks about plastic and other environmental problems. Sadly, a lot of Japanese recycling is perceived around the world (and in Japan) as a great system. It is, however, extremely flawed. The majority of Japan's plastic is burned just like the normal rubbish is. In the areas close to these plants, the air pollution is bad, and the effects on people's health are beginning to emerge. Yes, you learnt that complicated recycling system for nothing. You're welcome.

WHY DID YOU DECIDE TO HELP CLEAN BEACHES?

I have always been conscious of the environment. I spend my time trying to sign petitions and changing my diet to aid our planet as much as an individual can. I have always wanted to clean beaches.



While beach pollution is a problem in the UK, the currents don't push rubbish towards the region I live in. Because of this, there aren't organized groups to collect the trash that is left by people on beaches near me. Back home when I took my dogs for walks, I would always come home with a small bag of rubbish and do my part to help.

ANY FINAL MESSAGE?

Please remember that we can clean and try as individuals to do our part. I implore you to please try and use your voice to fight these large companies that make up over half of the pollution our earth suffers from. If we don't, we are merely showing up to an enormous earthquake with a dustpan and brush. We have been shown that one hundred companies make up 71% of the world's environmental problems. I am sure you can guess some of those companies. Using our voices as the consumer can make a large impact. That is why I am trying to educate myself on how to create change in these capitalist giants. Thanks for coming to my Ted Talk.

Cara is a second-year ALT living in Yamaguchi Prefecture. She is from the UK and has lived abroad a few times. She is a Hufflepuff, ENFJ, Capricorn, and themed pub-quiz champion. She cares a lot about the environment and has made many strides in making her individual footprint more eco-friendly. She is a published author and plans to write more in the future. She plans to write an eco-fi in the upcoming year.

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