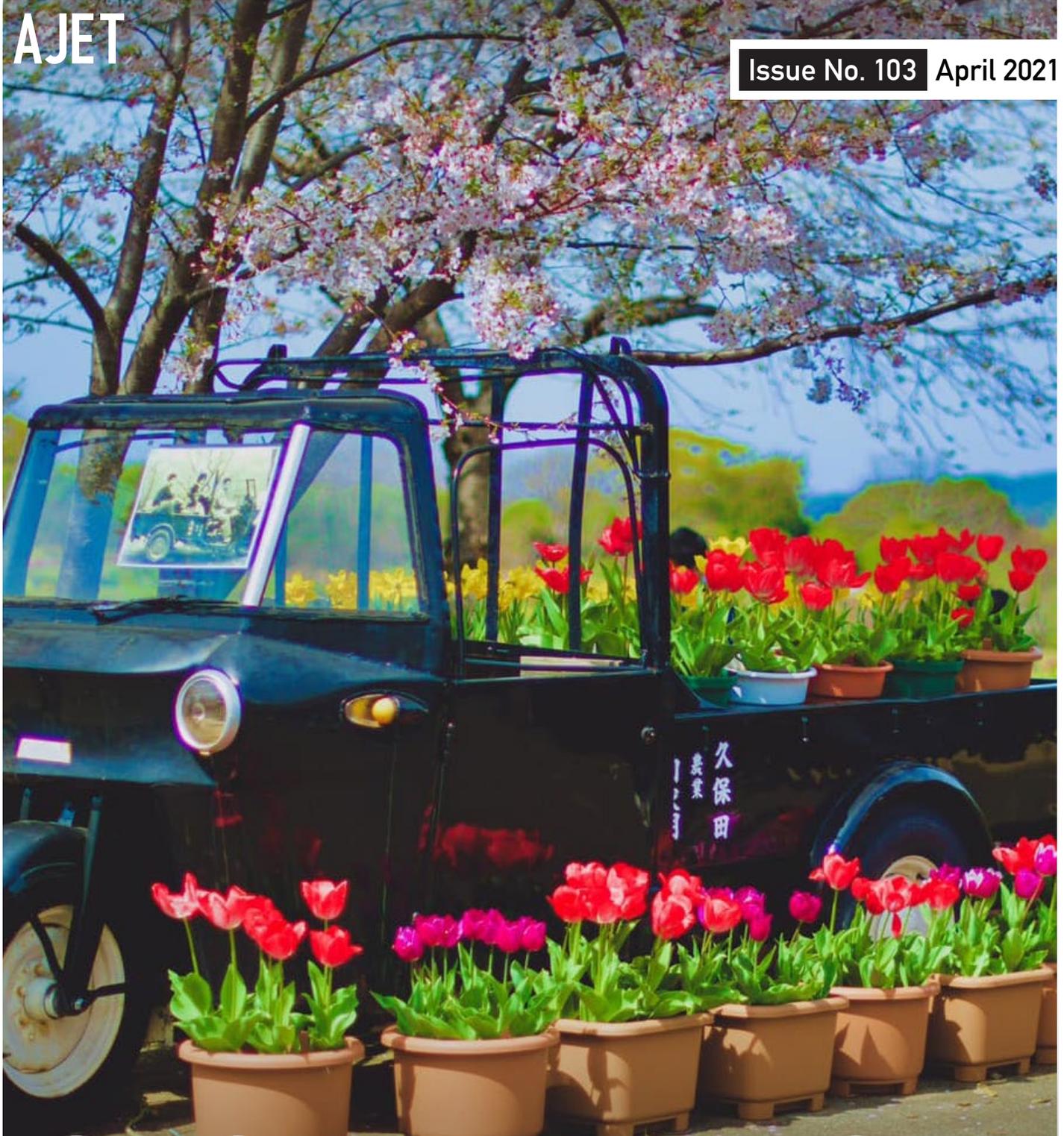




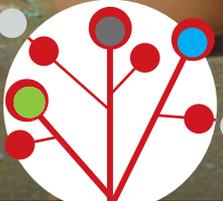
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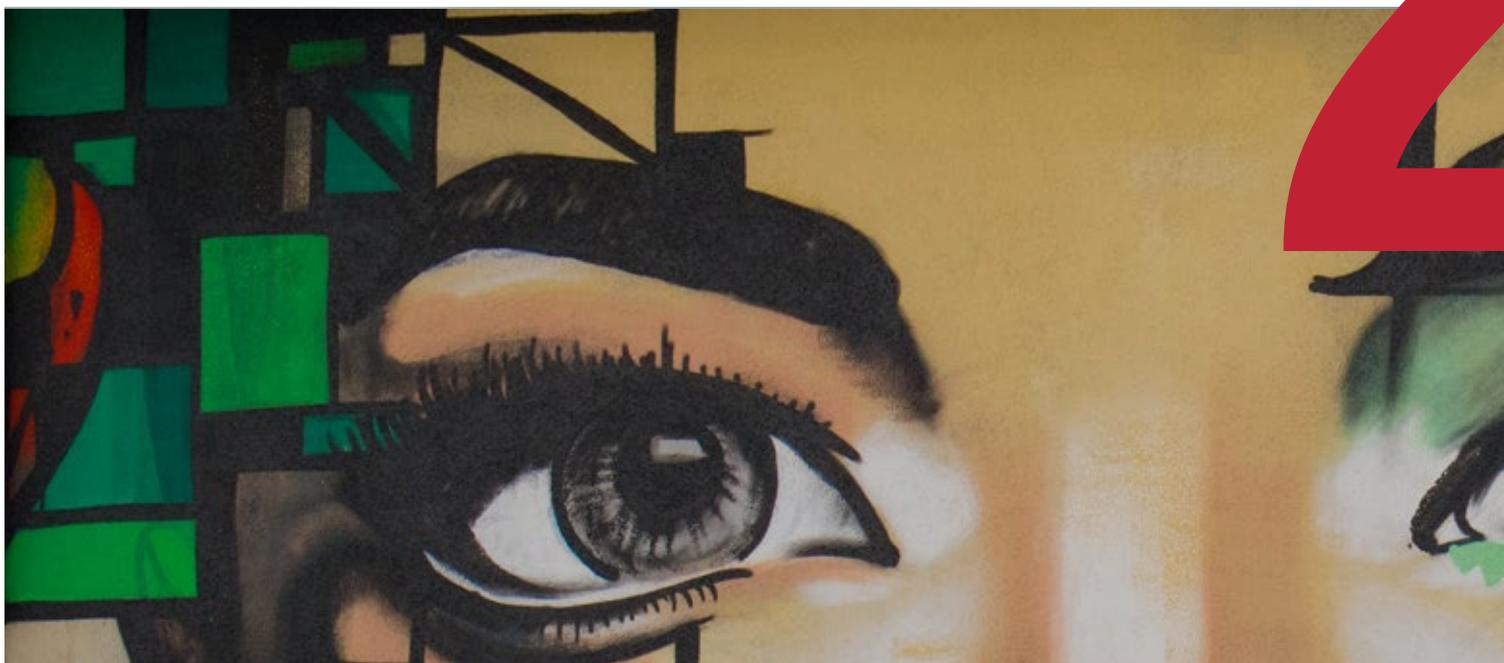
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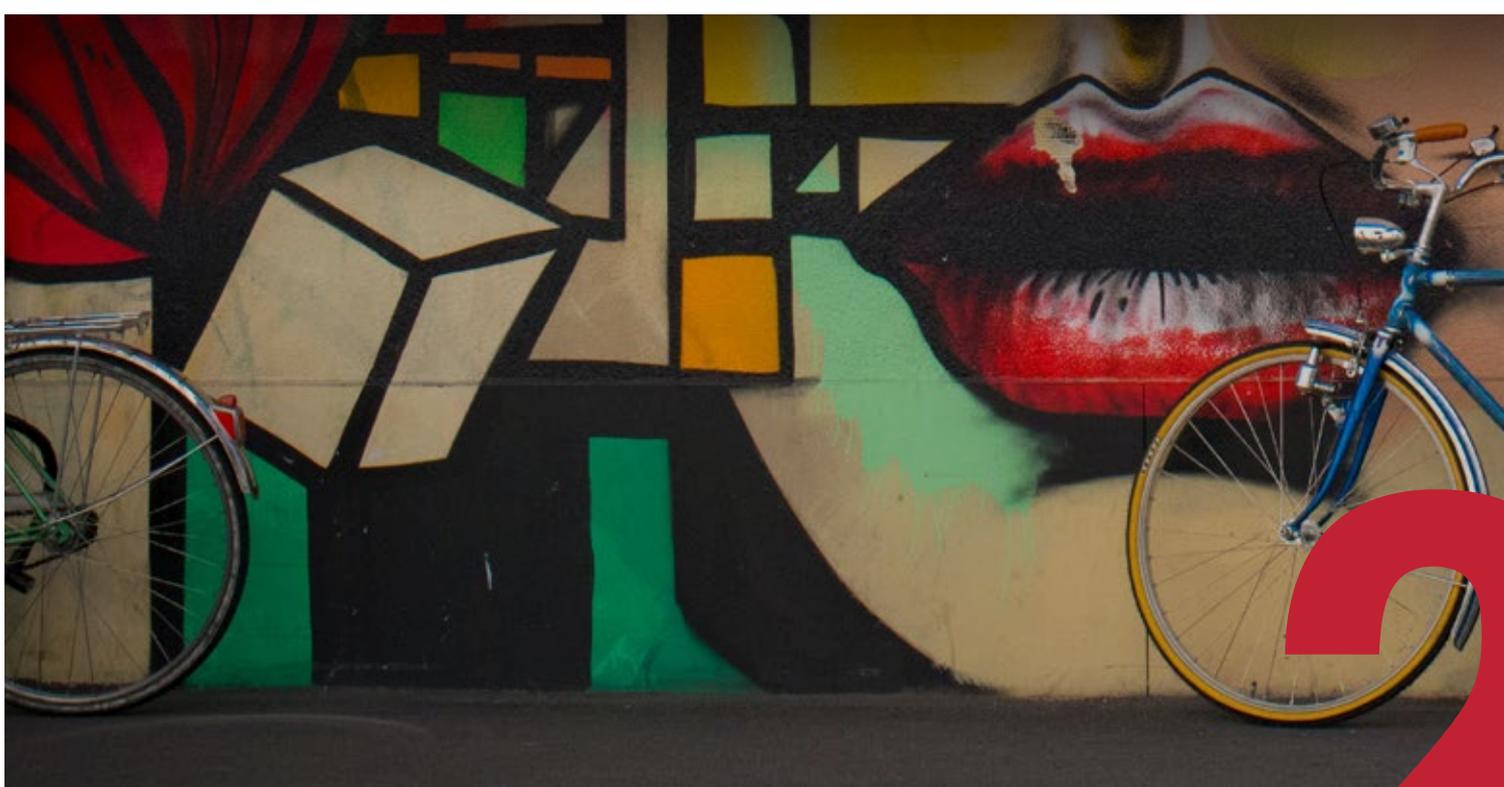
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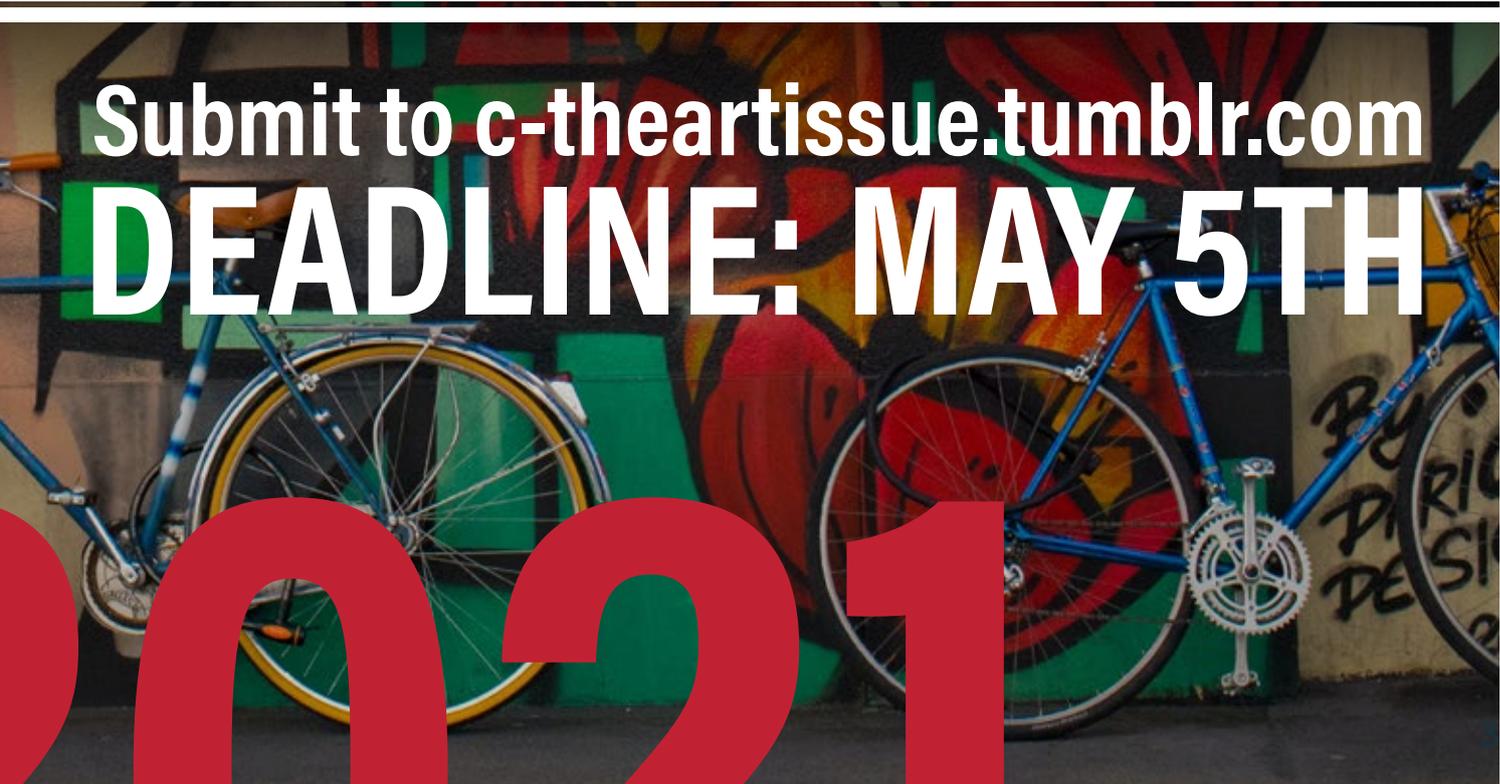
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2021

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by Lisa Paper

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Hello everyone!

It's time for the most magical time of year in Japan: *sakura* season. A time when Japan looks like the beloved scenes from almost all anime. It's impossible not to be mesmerized by the show that nature puts on during spring time, particularly the *sakura-fubuki* (桜吹雪), aka the cherry blossom snowstorm that will happen later on in May. As I currently reside in the southern hemisphere, I will be appreciating the final weeks of being able to go to the beach and long hours of sunshine. But I will be admiring all the sakura snaps from Instagram.

Last month we collaborated with another online magazine called TRAM (Totally Random Ass Magazine) based in Toyama. TRAM republished one of our sports articles "Naomi Osaka: From Love All to Ace" as well as other amazing articles from Japan-based contributors. Check out the full winter issue [here](#). One of the things I dig about TRAM is that it's a lot more eclectic than CONNECT. I love their shorter, punchier pieces. It's been rad to learn more about a similar magazine in Japan! Thanks to Ian for this opportunity.

My top picks for the April issue are: our own Assistant Designer, Rhiannon, shares her knowledge about the history of Ishioka Eiko's costume design and its presence in foreign films and more in "A Look Back At The Costume Designs of Ishioka Eiko"; Japan seems like a country where homelessness is virtually nonexistent, but upon second glance it is not the homelessness we are used to in the west, read more in "Hiding in Plain Sight: Homelessness in Tōkyō"; our own Culture Section Editor, Alice, writes a piece about the Tōhoku disaster and the cultural impacts of this massive historical event in "Expressing the inexpressible: 10 Years of Cultural Responses to the 3.11 Disaster"; our own Sports Editor, Kayla (yes, another staff piece this month!), reviews a fascinating book about sixty years of baseball and how it is so much more than a sport to Japan in "Baseball, Olympics, Yakuza, and COVID: A Review of Robert Whiting's *Tōkyō Junkie*".

That's all from me! I look forward to our *final* regular issue of **CONNECT** for 2021 next month before we have our best issue of the year: The Art Issue! Check out the [Tumblr](#) for all the information about submissions for this year.

Alice R.

Alice Ridley
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Alice Ridley

"Just as books are read one word at a time, roads are taken one step at a time." — Xinran, *Sky Burial: An Epic Love Story of Tibet*

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"Trying to define yourself is like trying to bite your own teeth." — Alan Watts

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"I got a nose for white supremacy, and he smells like bleach." — Angela Abar (*Sister Night*), *The Watchmen*

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This year, too, the flowers bloom.
— Ikimonogakari, "Sakura"

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"Be Happy" — my favorite, most patronizing water bottle, also bought at Daiso

Day Bulger

"A little consideration, a little thought for others, makes all the difference." — Eeyore, "Winnie The Pooh"

Natalie Andrews

"I'll take a potato chip...and eat it!" — Light Yagami, "Death Note"

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"There are many people who misunderstand what fiction is. They'll say, 'Fiction is a bunch of lies.' I would say fiction is actually one of the best ways for finding the truth." — Amy Tan

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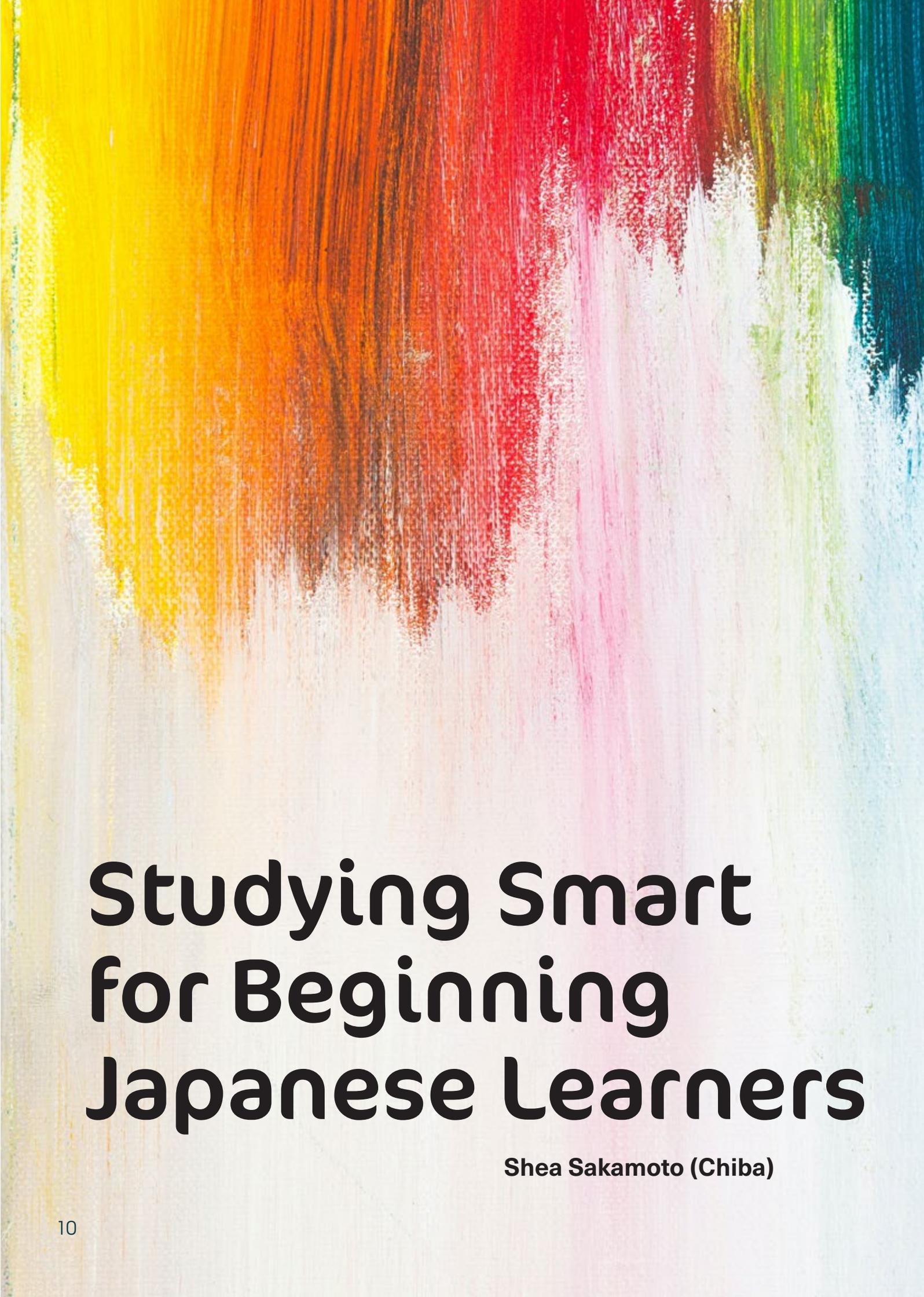
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Studying Smart for Beginning Japanese Learners

Shea Sakamoto (Chiba)



How do you make the most out of your Japanese language learning while in Japan as an Assistant Language Teacher (ALT)? Well, the quick answer is to study every day. With a basic textbook on hand, learning Japanese can seem like a straightforward concept, but, as you progress into your studies you will feel the need to use better learning tools and techniques.

When living in Japan, you are likely to get a lot of speaking and listening practice. However, when it comes to vocabulary-building, learning

kanji, and memorizing grammar concepts, it is best practice to find ways to solidify what you've learned. Anyone who tells you you will get a hang of those things through "osmosis" either is a savant or has never seriously studied a foreign language before.

According to America's [Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center \(DLI\)](#) and [Foreign Service Institute \(FSI\)](#), both of which train U.S. government employees with comprehensive immersion classes, Japanese is the single most difficult major language on earth for English speakers. The FSI estimates 2,200 classroom hours of guided study to reach general professional proficiency. In contrast, Spanish would only take around 600 classroom hours to reach the same level.

Unless you are planning to live in Japan long term, one to five years can zoom by without you realizing. There will eventually come a time where immersion and having native speakers around you is no longer an option. If you want to take full advantage of this opportunity, here are a few ways to **study smart**.

Total Beginner Level

Cover the Basics

If you are someone like me who moved to Japan with zero Japanese skills, the first thing that you should do is learn *kana*. Knowing part of the writing system and phonetics is crucial. Japanese is a phonetic language and having a grasp of hiragana and katakana is exactly where you should start. Not only is this a good foundation for the language, but it is also very helpful to know how to properly pronounce the names of your students and colleagues, even if you can't say a lot else.

[Tofugu](#) has a free and easy guide that makes use of mnemonics for [hiragana](#) and [katakana](#). Alternatively, if you would like more of a gamified version of learning, [Dr. Moku's Mnemonics](#) has both lite and paid apps. I remember using Dr. Moku years ago and was delighted to find that I memorized both hiragana and katakana *in a day*.

If you would like to practice your handwriting, Happy Lilac has free various printable [hiragana](#) and [katakana](#) worksheets.

Pick Your Foundation

Fortunately, there are various ways to learn Japanese. You can choose from websites, YouTube videos, online courses, textbooks, and language apps, all of which are excellent sources of basic information. Pick what you think suits your learning style and experiment with a few different ones to see what you like best.

[Team Japanese](#) has compiled [an ultimate list of Japanese learning resources for 2021](#) that is worth checking out.

Turn Lessons into Study Materials

Every ALT experience is unique, and I had the chance to be the main teacher in my co-teaching team for four out of my five years with the job. This experience has forced me to learn what I taught in Japanese while I prepared for my lessons so that I could properly review my students and check for understanding. I could also better support the homeroom teachers I worked with by knowing exactly what I was teaching.

There was a year that I taught in junior high school and my Japanese Teachers of English (JTEs) only utilized me around 60% of the time. When I wasn't teaching but had to be in class, I tried my best to decipher what the teachers were saying in Japanese and jotted them down as if I were also a student. Taking notes of certain phrases and keywords has helped bridge the communication gap with lesson planning and other work-related discussions with Japanese teachers (which makes for awesome speaking practice as well).

High-Beginner Level

Learn Kanji Early On

To read Japanese fluently, a student must be able to understand at least 2,000 kanji. There is also an official list called the *jōyō kanji* (常用漢字, meaning “regular-use kanji”) that contain 2,136 kanji that all Japanese children learn by the end of secondary school. If you are planning to take the Japanese Language Proficiency Test (JLPT) exams, learning kanji as early as possible is a good idea. You can use [the JLPT lists](#) as your guide, starting with N5 and working your way up. My biggest regret is not learning kanji earlier because it feels inefficient having to learn words twice (first in *romaji*/hiragana then in kanji).

Additionally, the sooner you learn kanji, the earlier you’ll notice it all around you thanks to [the Baader-Meinhof phenomenon](#). Also known as the Frequency Illusion, this experience is when something you recently learned suddenly appears “everywhere.” This occurs because increased awareness of something creates the illusion that it is appearing more often.

Implement a Spaced Repetition System (SRS)

Spaced repetition is a technique for efficient memorization, which uses a repeated review of content following a schedule determined by a spaced repetition algorithm to improve long-term retention that is often used with flashcards. Newly introduced and more difficult flashcards are shown more frequently, while it shows older and less difficult flashcards less frequently in order to exploit [the psychological spacing effect](#).

Utilizing a spaced repetition system (SRS) is a good way to learn a lot of vocabulary efficiently. Because an SRS will adjust cards you review based on your performance, you develop a better memory. The go-to SRS system is [Anki](#) because it is free and there are hundreds of user-created decks available for use.

If you would rather not go through the hurdles of learning how to set-up Anki to best suit your learning, there are a few other options for pre-made decks such from other sites such as:

- [WaniKani](#)
- [Torii SRS](#)
- [iKnow](#)
- [Bunpro](#)
- [Memrise](#)
- [Kitsun](#) (Community Decks)

Consider Sentence Mining

Sentence Mining is the act of collecting sample sentences from your studies and putting them into your SRS. By studying words and sentences that come directly from your own content that you have created, you are focusing your study on what is most relevant to you.

If you search around the web, you would find that people usually recommend any native audio or text source for sentence mining. Since you will handpick which words and sentences to learn yourself, you will have a stronger connection to them.

So, how do you sentence mine?

1. Find sentences that contain examples of the grammar or vocabulary concept you wish to learn.
2. Input these sentences into an SRS program.
3. Study until you understand all kanji, grammar and vocabulary as it's used in the sentence.

Again, this all can be set up with Anki. There's a great video on this from [BritVsJapan](#). On my end, I have been doing this with Kitsun by using their [Integrated Dictionaries](#) feature. If I hear my colleagues say a term a lot that I am unfamiliar with, I look that up and put it on my study deck. I also utilize their [Reading Assistance Tool](#) to parse native text and instantly make flashcards.

Immerse Yourself

A [study](#) published by Georgetown University Medical Center in 2011 suggests immersion learning may be more effective than only learning with more traditional classroom methods because of how our brains process grammar. Being in an environment where you are constantly exposed to the language forces you to learn more.

Stevi, a Japanese language learner, achieved basic fluency in Japanese and passed the JLPT N1 in just over 18 months through immersion. He talks about it in this highly motivating [YouTube interview](#).

Hopefully, these tips will give you some momentum as you begin your Japanese language learning journey. As long as you plan around your goals and set a daily habit, you will start seeing ways to seamlessly integrate your language learning routine into your daily life!

Shea is a licensed Japanese public elementary school teacher, M.Ed. in TESOL student, and a Japanese language learner from Los Angeles, California, U.S. In her free time, she likes to write about her teaching and language learning experiences on [PenPenPenguin](#). You can follow her on Instagram [@penpenpenguin.jp](#)

PROVERB OF THE MONTH

Lara Yi (Incoming JET)

隣の芝生は青い

TONARI NO SHIBAFU HA AOI

The meaning of *tonari no shibafu ha aoi* is that the grass is always greener on the other side.

PROVERB BREAKDOWN (1)

隣 / となり / tonari / the other side

芝生 / しばふ / shibafu / grass

青い / あおい / aoi / green or blue

SOURCES

1. <https://bit.ly/30BFSKn>

How the Squeeze Got **Squeeze**

Deconstructing the Market Event of the Year

Derek Hurst (Nagano)

Gamestop. Wall Street bets. Short squeeze. I'd bet money that, before January of this year, you'd probably not paid much attention to these terms, if you had heard of them at all. January changed all that. In case you missed it, the markets bore witness to one of the most monumental events in history when a group of enthusiastic retail traders, encouraged by dreams of eye-watering profits (and perhaps pure boredom) engineered a once-in-a-decade short squeeze on one of the most heavily-shortened companies in the world. Although the squeeze has now ended, the effects are still being felt, and will probably reverberate for years, if not decades to come. And, there's still the chance that the squeeze isn't totally squeeze after all. The question is: what exactly happened, and what does it all mean?

For those who don't know what the heck a short squeeze or shorting is, let me give a basic rundown. One of the methods of making money in the markets is by "shorting" a company, whereby (typically) institutional investors borrow stock from a holder at a set price and then immediately sell at the market price, hoping that by the time expiration on their loan rolls around, the price of the underlying asset will have depreciated to the point where they can pocket the difference when purchasing the stock back. Think of it this way: you borrow a car from your friend and immediately sell it at market value to someone else (don't worry, your friend has like 50 of this model car). In order to borrow the car, you have to put up about half the value of the car up front,

and you have to pay your friend a monthly fee. You enter into this seemingly insane arrangement because you have a feeling that the price of this model car is going to crash in the next few months, at which point you will be able to buy the car back at a steep discount, while pocketing the difference. You've made money, your friend has made money (from the fees you've paid him) and you return the car to its owner. That's basically short-selling.

What happened in January is that a group of retail traders congregating on the now-famous [WallStreetBets](#), a subforum on the popular site Reddit, started buying up every share they could of GameStop, hoping to drive the price up the company higher. This would force the investors who had shorted the stock (mostly hedge funds) to put up more collateral to cover their bets, which would further drive the price up. Think back to our car example: you have to pay 50% of the price of the car up front as collateral and have to pay an ongoing fee. If the price of that car suddenly increases, you have to bolster your collateral obligation in order to remain on good terms with your friend who's loaning you his ride. The problem is, the higher the price of the car goes, the more you have to put up to cover yourself, which in turn drives the price of the car even higher. This is what occurred with GameStop.

Last year, certain traders had identified GameStop as being one of the most heavily-shortened companies on the market, and predicted that this could lead to a short squeeze, in which

the price of the shares could be forced upwards by a flurry of buying. Regardless of their reasons for doing it, retail traders, for almost two, brief days of trading, succeeded in their goal: GameStop rocketed from less than 20 US dollars a share to a high of 347 US dollars a share over the course of less than a week. (1) Many of the traders with “diamond hands” as they call it, held their shares hoping that the squeeze would continue to the moon and beyond, while others sold at the height anticipating a steep crash. Alas, it was the later scenario that occurred. GameStop plummeted back down to around 50 US dollars a share within a few days, wiping out hundreds of thousands, and in some cases, millions of dollars worth of gains. The squeeze got squeeze...or did it? As of this writing (March 12th), GME is back up in the 200 dollar range, and traders are anticipating further short-term spikes.

Regardless of what happens, what this scenario showed us is that retail traders, armed with access to freely available information and accessible investing platforms (like Robinhood [http://bit.ly/3qJCVCh]), are now able to identify and take advantage of a situation that even a few years ago would have been impossible for anyone but a large hedge fund to do. Usually it is the big boys, duking it out and drawing blood (often at the expense of regular people’s pensions and 401ks) who cause these black-swan events. That’s no longer the case. Wall Street behemoths have realized that the little guy now has access to the same tools they do, and more importantly, are far more capable of dealing crushing blows to their once-unassailable positions. At the very least, this will lead to more transparency within the famously opaque finance industry.

While short-selling is not illegal, its morality can be debated, as big players shorting smaller, struggling companies like GameStop is often more than enough to utterly ruin those smaller companies. Shorting is in many ways an abhorrent investment tactic that underscores the crippling power large market players have on Wall Street today, and why so many are understandably infuriated at the perceived privilege and callousness of hedge funds. The same organizations who largely caused the 2008 housing crisis have finally gotten a dose of their own medicine, and while none of those hedge funds have gone bankrupt as a result of January’s events, (as many hoped they would), this brush with ruin should serve as a sobering reminder that in the 21st century, big players are no longer able to get away with the same shenanigans that have served them so well in the past.

Derek Hurst lives in Nagano prefecture and has been writing about business and finance for several years. Having studied economics in college, he came to Japan in 2008. He now spends his free time rock climbing, hiking and biking.

Sources:

1. <https://bloom.bg/3lUaGjp>



RIDE. RELAX. REPEAT.

COMBINING BIKING AND LUXURY IN RURAL JAPAN

Rob McManmon (Gunma) interviewed by Derek Hurst (Nagano)

Forging something from scratch is never a simple endeavor, but for Rob McManmon, building a business comes as easily as breathing. As a serial entrepreneur who founded everything from phone-repair businesses to a bike resale outfit in his early years, coming to Japan and building a biking company was simply the next logical step. After graduating from the Eastman School of Music in upstate New York, he came to Ōta, Gunma Prefecture in 2003 and began teaching music at Kokusai Gakuen Academy. Still the mountains and handlebars continued to call to him, and he soon pivoted away from the classroom to focus on the open road. Heading up Bike Tour Japan, Rob now leads a passionate group of tour guides from their offices in Kiryū City.

GIVE ME AN OVERVIEW OF WHAT YOU DO.

We lead “off the beaten path” cycling tours that center around premium stays and accommodations. That means we don’t focus on the typical tourist areas like Tōkyō, Ōsaka, and Kyōto. We want to show people the side of Japan that is often neglected by the typical tour packages. This country has so much rugged, natural beauty, and we feel the best way to present that to people is on the saddle of a bike. After beautiful rides through the Japanese countryside during the day we unwind and indulge in the exquisite luxury of traditional Japanese inns at night.

HOW DID YOU GET STARTED WITH BUSINESS?

During my time teaching at Gunma Kokusai, I spent a lot of time exploring the nature surrounding me on my bike. I enjoyed the teaching but it wasn’t where my passion truly lay. I’d often ride for hours to new places on the weekends and then return to Ōta on the train. After returning to the U.S., I spent time in California leading bike tours there. So I learned a bit about the business and thought I might be able to replicate something similar back in Japan. The thing was, I found myself constantly dreaming about Japan and the nature there, and I just couldn’t shake it. That’s how Bike Tour Japan was born.

WHAT KIND OF EFFECT HAS COVID-19 HAD ON YOUR WORK?

Covid really changed our timeframes and what we now consider reasonable growth. Though we’ve had to push some of our more ambitious plans back, we plan to start expanding to other areas in Japan, even as far as Hokkaido. We are also planning to launch ski bike tours soon. They are hybrid tours where we’d offer 4 days of world-class skiing in Nagano followed by 4 days of biking back in warm Gunma. There’s a lot in the pipeline at the moment, and we’re confident that once things return to normal we’ll be able to launch these initiatives.





WHAT DO THE NEXT FIVE TO TEN YEARS LOOK LIKE?

COVID really changed our timeframes and what we now consider reasonable growth. Though we've had to push some of our more ambitious plans back, we might start expanding to other areas in Japan, even as far as Hokkaidō. We are also looking into ski bike tours that are hybrid tours at the moment, where we'd offer four days of world-class skiing in Nagano followed by four days of biking back in Gunma. There's a lot in the pipeline at the moment, and we're confident that once things return to normal we'll be able to launch some of these initiatives.

WHAT'S SOMETHING THAT WOULD SURPRISE PEOPLE ABOUT YOUR WORK?

During a normal year, I spend literally 120 full-days on a bicycle. That's one third of the year outside, on a bike and doing what I love doing. But I love every minute of it. Not just the riding, but the planning & guiding as well. For every single itinerary I have spent literally dozens of hours planning and looking at maps to determine what the best routes and ryokans would weave the perfect trip.

ANY WORDS OF ADVICE FOR PEOPLE LOOKING TO BREAK INTO YOUR INDUSTRY?

It's incredibly important to find a niche, especially in Japan. Believe it or not, the adventure-tourism industry is actually a very mature one in Japan, so anything that sets you apart will be of benefit. For us, our niche is nature plus luxury. Also, it's super important to leverage what you've already got. I started small and looked at what I already had in terms of inventory and assets. We did eventually partner with a local company, but I never actively sought outside funding. You want to be able to retain control of the business, and learn how to scale organically. Also, I'd try getting some experience doing smaller ventures before breaking into Japan. You've got to have an idea of what you're getting into; entrepreneurship isn't for the faint of heart. Still, if you can manage to find that niche and grow sustainably, you'll definitely succeed.

Rob McManmon is the founder of Bike Tour Japan. He is driven by curiosity and the desire to create unforgettable cycling trips for BTJ guests. He loves surprising travelers with unique and immersive experiences that exist just outside the international hubs of Tōkyō, Kyōto, Ōsaka and Hiroshima. In addition to creating intimate adventures throughout Japan, Rob also previously worked with Duvine Cycling in Northern California. When he is off the bike, he enjoys teaching classical guitar to students around the world.

ARTS AND CULTURE

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"Through the experience of the Great East Japan Earthquake, something has been lost, and something has been found. The veil has been lifted from the eyes of the world, and our sense of values has been renewed." — Kimura Saeko (Literary Critic)

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"By and large, jazz has always been like the kind of a man you wouldn't want your daughter to associate with." — Duke Ellington

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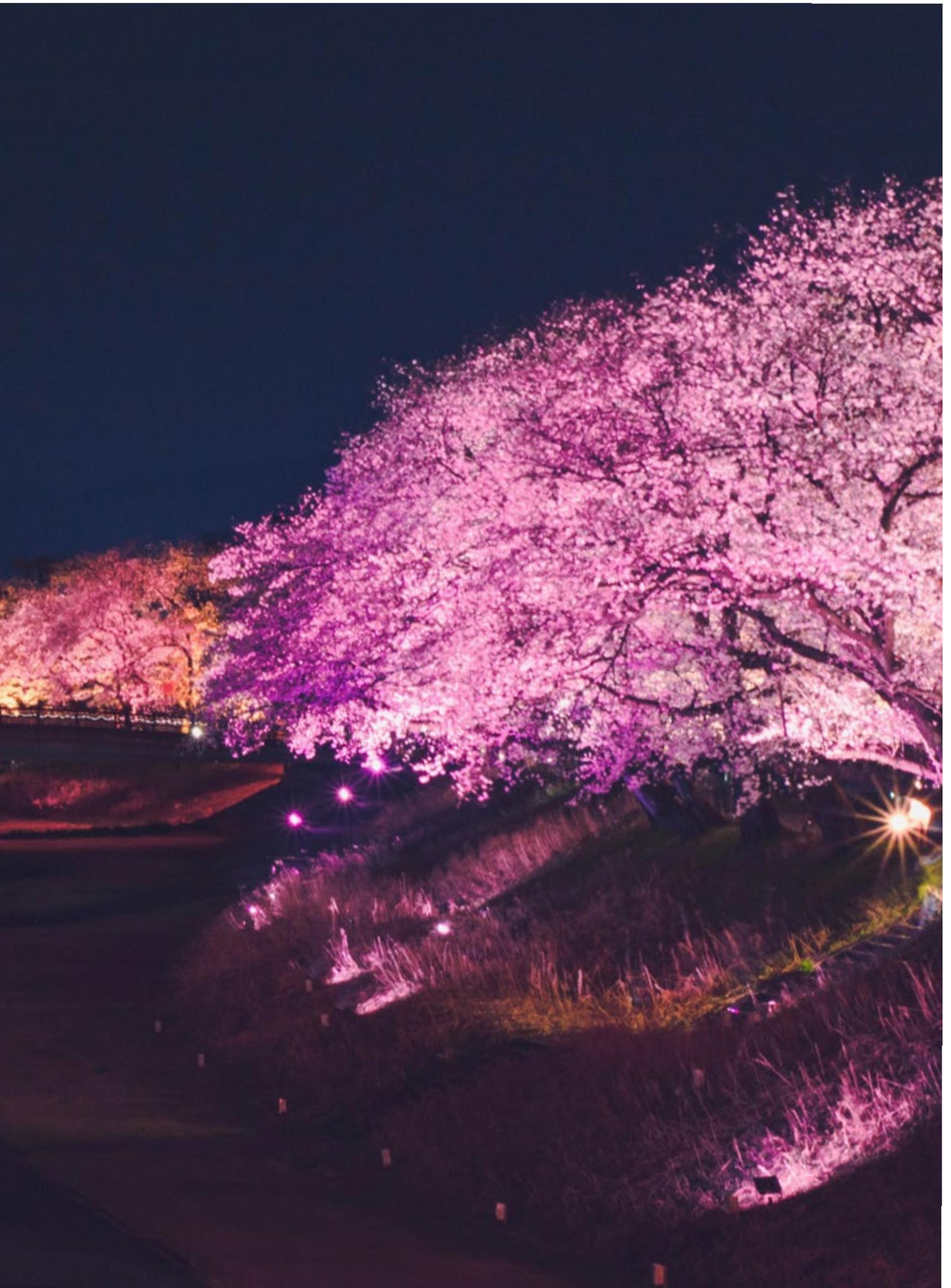
"People run from rain but sit in bathtubs full of water." — Charles Bukowski

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Jessica Craven

"Art is longing. You never arrive but keep going in hope that you will." — Anselm Kiefer





SHOP LOCAL WITH

PRMAL

A Beautiful Choice.



PRMAL PRMAL

Go Fukushima (Tōkyō)

In this month's spotlight on the many talented designers and makers in Japan's fashion and beauty industries, we caught up with Go Fukushima, the Founder and CEO of [PRMAL](#)—an ethical fine jewelry brand with a mission to make jewelry a more planet and people friendly industry.

PRMAL has a distinctively delicate style that works to showcase their sustainably grown diamonds. That's right, *grown*. Their diamonds are grown in a lab, using carbon chips as seeds, to avoid areas of conflict and unsafe working conditions that often come with naturally mined stones. In alignment with these ethical values, they also donate a percentage of their sales to forest conservation.

Intrigued, we spoke to Fukushima about ethicality, influences, and Buddhism. . .

WHAT INSPIRED THE ECO-FRIENDLY AND ETHICAL VALUES OF PRMAL?

I have been active in the jewelry industry for about 10 years. In Europe and the U.S., jewelry is integrated into daily life, but in Japan, it is still second to fashion.

My family business is diamond wholesaling, and I wanted to make jewelry more accessible and lower the threshold for diamonds. Not many people are involved in the diamond industry in Japan, and market competition causes less work, which can sometimes lead to decisions that are not rational for the consumer side. Since the business is still mainly based on middlemen margins, the end price is naturally high.

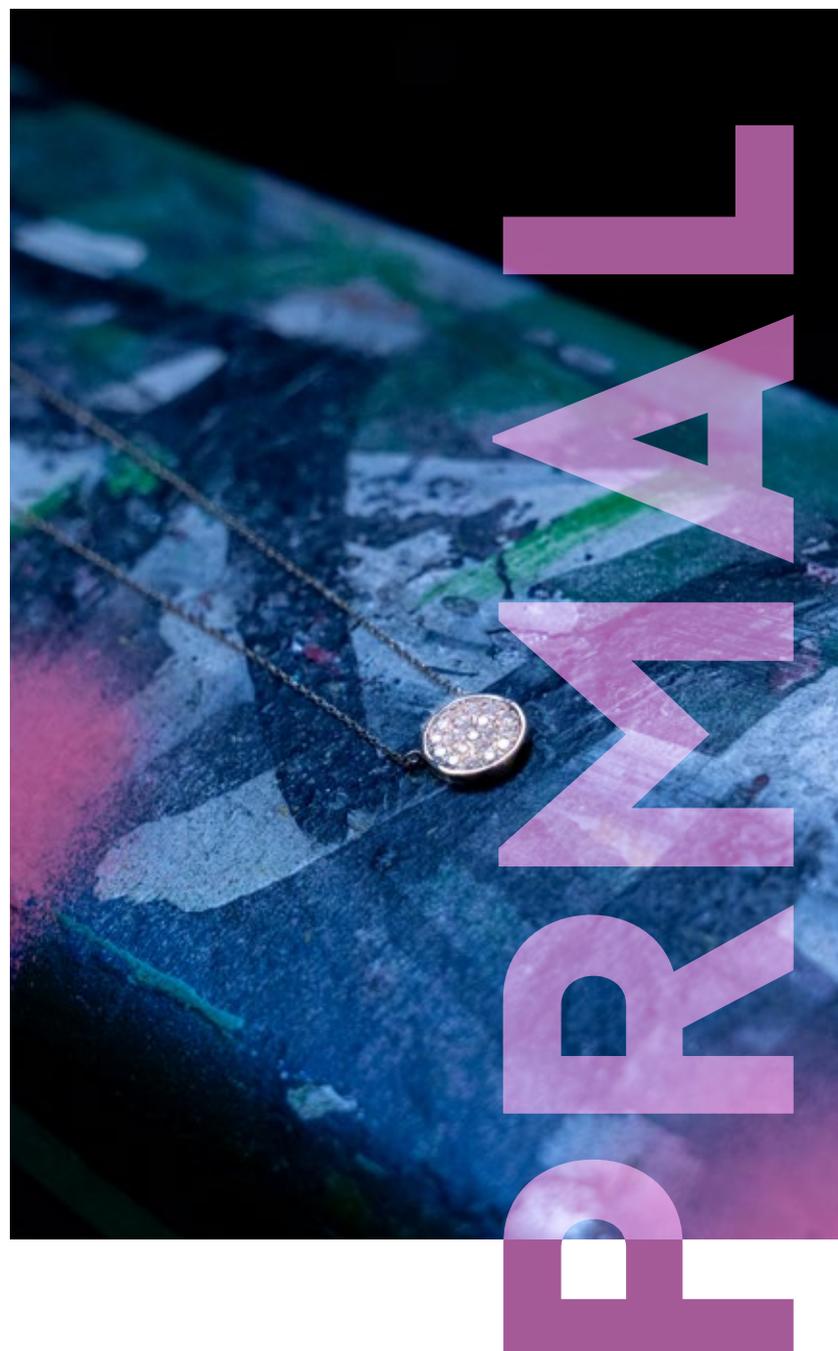
I thought I could solve the industry's problems by choosing the direct to consumer system, which is gaining a lot of attention right now. So, I came together with my friend, who is an IT engineer, and we hit it off and launched the brand together!

WHO ARE YOUR BIGGEST INFLUENCES WHEN IT COMES TO JEWELRY DESIGN?

I don't have any particular influences, though I am mainly inspired by architecture and interior design.

When I go abroad, my hobby is to parade around the city all day and take pictures, and I notice many things when I decide to take pictures. For example, if you look closely at cobblestones, manholes, walls, etc., you will notice that they are surprisingly well designed. I take pictures of these small things, get ideas from them, and incorporate them into small pieces of jewelry.

I would like to be a person who can support the beauty and intention of a person by thinking first of all how to make the jewelry more gorgeous and beautiful when worn.







DOES JAPANESE DESIGN INFLUENCE PRMAL'S CONCEPTS?

In Japan, Buddhism is deeply rooted, and I feel that Zen values, in particular, are widely spread. This has a great influence on the concept of "Premium Minimalism," which is the origin of our brand name, PRMAL.

One of the most distinctive aspects of Zen is its emphasis on the value of "Lose".

Let's say you describe Gain's value as "acquiring things you don't have, which leads to wealth", Lose's value is to "become wealthy by letting go of things you don't need". Our jewelry design is also influenced by Lose's value.

We try to use simple materials to enhance the beauty of the jewelry from the inside out, rather than trying to express richness by using too many diamonds or precious metals.

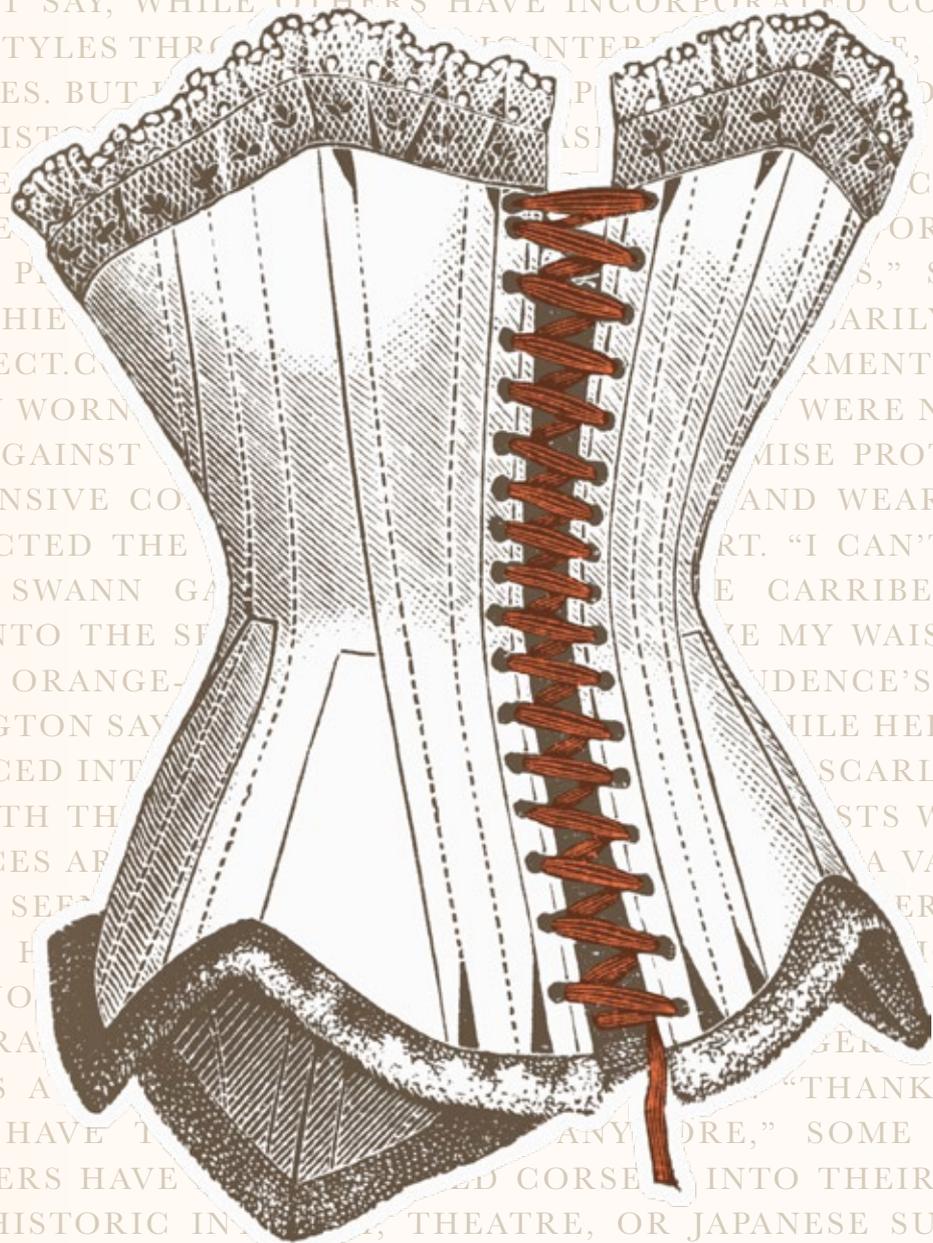
Go Fukushima is the Founder and CEO of PRMAL inc. After graduating from the Faculty of Economics at Keio University, he joined a consulting firm in Tokyo, focussing on the development of cost strategies for a number of foreign luxury brands. Since leaving, he launched a jewelry brand with more than 10 stores, including overseas. In 2016, he opened a jewelry boutique in Ginza, Tokyo. He is also active as a photographer and videographer, shooting music videos and weddings.



CORSETS

BY WOMEN, FOR WOMEN

Emily Rich (Yamagata 2017-2020)



"I CAN'T BREATHE!" ELIZABETH SWANN GASPS IN PIRATES OF THE CARRIBEAN, BEFORE FAINTING INTO THE SEA. "I WAS ABLE TO SQUEEZE MY WAIST INTO THE SIZE OF AN ORANGE AND A HALF WHEN I WAS PRUDENCE'S AGE," LADY FEATHERINGTON SAYS IN NETFLIX BRIDGERTON, WHILE HER DAUGHTER IS TIGHTLACED INTO A CORSET. RAIN IN TITANIC AND SCARLETT O'HARA IN GONE WITH THE WIND GLUT ON TO THEIR BEDPOSTS WHILE THEIR CORSET LACES ARE PULLED TIGHT. EVERYONE HAS SEEN A VARIATION OF THIS SCENE, BEING A PART OF SHIFTED ORGANS, OR OTHERWISE HEARD ABOUT THE HORRORS OF THIS "MEDIEVAL TORTURE DEVICE", WHICH, FUNNILY ENOUGH, DOESN'T YET EXIST DURING THE MEIDEVAL PERIOD. CONTEMPORARIES OUTSIDE OF FASHION HISTORY EAGERLY CORRELATE CORSETS AS A SYMBOL OF WOMEN'S OPPRESSION. "THANK GOODNESS, WE DON'T HAVE TO WEAR CORSETS ANYMORE," SOME MIGHT SAY, WHILE OTHERS HAVE INCORPORATED CORSETS INTO THEIR LIFESTYLES THROUGH HISTORIC INFLUENCE, THEATRE, OR JAPANESE SUBCULTURES. BUT HOW DO THESE INTERPRETATIONS OF CORSETRY ADD UP TO THE HISTORICAL REALITY? EVERY FASHION PERIOD HAS A DESIRABLE SILHOUETTE, AND FASHION AS A WHOLE OPERATES TO ACHIEVE THAT SILHOUETTE IN HOW GARMENTS ARE CONSTRUCTED AND WORN. CORSETS, AND THEIR PREDECESSOR, 16TH-18TH CENTURY "STAYS," SHAPED THE BODY TO ACHIEVE THAT SILHOUETTE. "CORSETS, COMMONLY HOW SOME GARMENTS AND WERE ORIGINALLY WORN, WERE NEVER WORN DIRECTLY AGAINST THE SKIN. INSTEAD, THEY WERE NEVER WORN MORE EXPENSIVE COUCHES AND WEAR AND TEAR, AND PROTECTED THE SKIN FROM THE ELEMENTS. "I CAN'T BREATHE!" ELIZABETH SWANN GASPS IN PIRATES OF THE CARRIBEAN, BEFORE FAINTING INTO THE SEA. "I WAS ABLE TO SQUEEZE MY WAIST INTO THE SIZE OF AN ORANGE- FEATHERINGTON SAYS IN NETFLIX BRIDGERTON, WHILE HER DAUGHTER IS TIGHTLACED INTO A CORSET. RAIN IN TITANIC AND SCARLETT O'HARA IN GONE WITH THE WIND GLUT ON TO THEIR BEDPOSTS WHILE THEIR CORSET LACES ARE PULLED TIGHT. EVERYONE HAS SEEN A VARIATION OF THIS SCENE, BEING OTHERWISE HEARD ABOUT THE HORRORS OF THIS "MEDIEVAL TORTURE DEVICE", WHICH, FUNNILY ENOUGH, DOESN'T YET EXIST DURING THE MEIDEVAL PERIOD. CONTEMPORARIES OUTSIDE OF FASHION HISTORY EAGERLY CORRELATE CORSETS AS A SYMBOL OF WOMEN'S OPPRESSION. "THANK GOODNESS, WE DON'T HAVE TO WEAR CORSETS ANYMORE," SOME MIGHT SAY, WHILE OTHERS HAVE INCORPORATED CORSETS INTO THEIR LIFESTYLES THROUGH HISTORIC INFLUENCE, THEATRE, OR JAPANESE SUBCULTURES. BUT HOW DO THESE INTERPRETATIONS OF CORSETRY ADD UP TO THE HISTORICAL REALITY? EVERY FASHION PERIOD HAS A DESIRABLE SILHOUETTE, AND FASHION AS A WHOLE OPERATES TO ACHIEVE THAT SILHOUETTE IN HOW GARMENTS ARE CONSTRUCTED AND WORN. CORSETS,

"I can't breathe!" Elizabeth Swann gasps in *Pirates of the Caribbean*, before fainting into the sea. "I was able to squeeze my waist into the size of an orange-and-a-half when I was Prudence's age," Lady Featherington says in Netflix's *Bridgerton*, while her daughter is tightlaced into a corset. Rose in *Titanic* and Scarlett O'Hara in *Gone With The Wind* clutch onto their bedposts while their corset laces are pulled tight.

Everyone has seen a variation of this scene, seen a diagram of shifted organs, or otherwise heard about the horrors of this "medieval torture device", which, funnily enough, didn't yet exist during the medieval period. Contemporaries outside of fashion history eagerly correlate corsets as a symbol of women's oppression. "Thank goodness, we don't have to wear corsets anymore," some might say, while others have incorporated corsets into their lifestyles through historic interest, theatre, or Japanese subcultures. But how do these interpretations of corsetry add up to the historical reality?

How were corsets used in the Victorian era?

Every fashion period has a desirable silhouette, and fashion as a whole operates to achieve that silhouette in how garments are constructed and worn. Corsets, and their predecessor, 16th-18th century "stays," shaped the body to achieve that silhouette, but not necessarily how some might expect.



Corsets and stays were undergarments and were originally worn over a shift or chemise. They were never worn directly against the skin. The shift or chemise protected the more expensive corset or stays from dirt and wear and tear, and protected the wearer from discomfort.

They served many functions, including providing support for the bust and the back. They're what people were wearing before bras. They also supported multiple layers of clothing—whalebone or steel boning evenly distributed the weight of petticoats, hoop skirts, and heavy skirts or dresses across the torso instead of focusing that weight in the same area of the waistline. Think about layering up your clothes during the winter. Underwear, wool tights, shorts, a slip, a skirt. Maybe even more layers, depending on your preferences. All those layers add up and can create a very uncomfortable and tight waistline. The decades in which corsets and stays were used had even more layers of clothes, throughout all seasons. Corsets and stays eliminate that problem by distributing the pressure evenly throughout the structure provided by boning.

Most importantly, to help achieve a fashionable silhouette, they kept the front of the torso flat or curved according to the decade's preference, and shaped the waist closer to an hourglass figure. And yes, some women, in order to have a more dramatic figure, tightlaced their corsets for special occasions. (More on this later!)

Illusion is the name of the game

The job of creating the preferred silhouette did not lie exclusively with the corset or stays, however. Women did not need a physically small waist to be fashionable, they only needed to appear to have one. They could do this in a number of ways, which changed and developed throughout the years. Petticoats or hoop skirts accentuated the hips. "Bum rolls" and bustle skirts made butts look larger. Bust bodices and wide collars made the upper torso appear larger. Padding could be used

elsewhere as well, to stuff the bust area or pad out hips and shoulders. Meanwhile, the corset cinched the waist just slightly, and with the padding found elsewhere in clothing, the waist did indeed appear to be quite small.

Additionally, women of all sizes wore corsets for support and to create a more elegant figure, and corsets could be purchased and tailored in all sizes. All waist measurements were not expected to be the same, because each body is different. In fact, maternity corsets also existed for pregnant women, and were designed to make room for growing baby bumps.

The images we have of women posing in corsets or illustrated fashion plates are not everyday women. They're models, or drawings of unreal women meant to convince the viewer to buy a product, in the same way companies use tiny models and Photoshop today. Even the poses women used to show off their corsets are illusions to a smaller waist. People today know the best angle for selfies, and historical women knew the best angles for their waists. All images of fashion, especially corsets, should be approached with a critical eye, and the question, "Who produced this image, and why?"

"I can't breathe!"

Tightlacing, sadly, is not a myth. It was not the common practice nor the purpose for corsets and stays. The primary purpose was structural support, and working women wore corsets and stays, just the same as fashionable well-to-do ladies. Corsets were most often laced to the wearer's comfort level. They were worn loosely, allowing for easy breathing and ease of movement. Women participated in sports, scrubbed floors, danced, and ran. . .all while wearing their corsets and stays.

The idea that tightlacing was expected for corset wearers is easy to disprove when we think about how women were still expected to do everything they would do normally. The click-bait articles we see are largely anomalies that focus on a practice that was popular for only a short time, by a select few women.

With that understanding, some women did

choose to tightlace their corsets, especially for special events or occasions. It's unfortunate that tightlacing is the narrative used so often to define corsetry, but it's important to remember that every era and society has an ideal body image, and there are always a small group of people who are willing to do whatever it takes to achieve that image. It is not limited only to Victorian women tight lacing their corsets.

Celebrating the corset and the women who designed them

Corsets and women's fashion were largely designed and manufactured by women. The invention of what we now know as the Victorian corset is often credited to a woman, Madam Roxey Ann Caplin.



Madam Caplin was a renowned corset-maker, and a speaker and author about women's health. Her corsets were awarded medals at the 1851 Great Exhibition. In 1856 she wrote her first book, titled, *Corsets and clothing, constructed in accordance with the physiological laws of the human body*. Her corset designs were based on support and comfort for the female figure, as well as accentuating natural beauty.

In 1843, *Court Magazine* commented on her work, saying, "Madame Caplin has made the manufacture of Corsets a complete study, embracing at once the several designs of anatomy, geometry, drawing and mechanics ... the artist may be traced in all, and her system of measurement is at once perfect and infallible."

Madam Caplin is one of many women who were involved in the design and manufacture of corsets and women's fashion. When we think about the history and purpose of corsets, it's vitally important to remember that corsets were made by women, for women.

Why do corsets and stays have such a negative image?

Fashion was one of the few industries that relied on women. Throughout history, men have been critical of women's fashion, satirizing it as frivolous or silly. Hoop skirts and bonnets were similarly made fun of and satirized.

Throughout the 1890s and early 20th century, women were becoming more vocal and more active, and the women's suffrage movement was at its strongest. Men were eager to criticize or discredit women, often based on their appearance, and that extended to how they expressed themselves through fashion. Corsets, a garment women relied on for support, were easy to criticize.

Doctors claimed that corsets were bad for women's health, and began circulating the myth that corsets shifted organs and ribs, without any substantial evidence to back up those claims. Satirical comics featured grim reapers hovering behind women as they laced their corsets. Newspaper editorials (written almost exclusively by men) attempted to speak out against corset wearing as a frivolous and harmful practice and derided women for subjecting themselves to this torture.

These are the narratives that have survived. Narratives like this are supported by actresses who comment on their costumed corsets which are often ill-fitting or worn incorrectly and by click-bait articles about past and present women who practice extreme tightlacing as a lifestyle statement.

These negative stereotypes have impacted our understanding, but there are wonderful narratives about corsets to remember as well.

Corsets in Japan

During the Meiji period of Japanese history, Western European culture influenced Japan towards industrialization, importing Western style, technology, and fashion. The imperial family in particular acted as a role model, and dressed in Western fashion to showcase Japan's adoption of Western culture, and to encourage others to do the same.

It caught on for the upper class first, and men and women began wearing Western clothing when they went out in public or for formal events. Sadly, when corsets were imported into Japan, they brought preexisting stigma with them.



Predictably, there was concern from foreign doctors when it was initially suggested that women in court officially adopt Western fashion. Dr. Erwin Baelz shared his concerns with the Japanese Prime Minister, Ito Hirobumi, further propagating popular myths about corsets at the time. He later wrote about their meeting, stating, "I urged strongly against it for the reasons that Western clothing is unsuitable [...] and wearing a corset would be harmful to the ladies."

After the corset

When corsets eventually went out of style, the girdle took its place, another support-based shapewear undergarment which was worn up through the 1960s. The girdle, like the corset, supported the figure, acted as fashionable shapewear, and helped women achieve the desired hourglass figure.

As feminism continued to grow in the 20th century, mindsets about undergarments were changing. The classic feminist trope of "bra burning" is perhaps best illustrated by the protest against the Miss America pageant of 1968, when articles of "forced femininity" were thrown into the Freedom Trash Can and burned. These items included girdles, bras, high heels, Playboy magazine, false eyelashes, and yes, corsets. This and other "bra burning" events have further shaped the idea that women are inherently restricted and oppressed by their undergarments.

Women should be admired for standing up for their own gender expression, but it's worth noting that all people express their gender differently. Some prefer to go braless. Some prefer to wear a corset.

In contemporary settings, we can see corsets in theatre, fashion runways, and Japanese subcultures. Lolita fashion is inspired by Victorian and Rococo styles and motifs. Corsets can be an element of a Lolita coordinate, particularly in Gothic or Aristocrat Lolita, and are often worn on the outside, instead of inside as an undergarment. Steampunk also features corsets, as a fashion and aesthetic that takes its inspiration from the 19th-century Industrial Revolution. In Steampunk fashion, corsets are again typically worn as an outer garment.

Other fashions and aesthetics that sometimes incorporate corsetry are historybounding, cottagecore, and visual kei. In the context of these subcultures wearing a corset is seen as self-expression and creates ties to their communities and interests.

Many historical women found that their self-expression was aided by wearing corsets or stays. Women, and everybody else, across every era, has the right to choose how they dress and how they express themselves. Bras, girdles, corsets, and stays are not inherently restrictive or anti-feminist. The expression of femininity is available to anyone, and although corsets or bras are not everyone's preference, they are a part of women's history and fashion history. They supported women, were designed by women, and were enjoyed by women.

Interested in trying a corset?

If the history of corset wearing has tickled your fancy and you're interested in buying a corset while living in Japan, there are a few options from abroad with available international shipping.

The companies I recommend focus on historical reproduction, and their corsets are designed for comfortable everyday wear for historical reenactors, theatrical purposes, and enthusiasts. They are not designed for waist training or tightlacing and focus instead on period accuracy.

The most important thing to remember when wearing a corset is that if it hurts to wear it, it doesn't fit or something is wrong. A corset should fit your body measurements as closely as possible, following your natural shape!

[Red Threaded](#) offers both ready-to-ship corsets and custom/bespoke corsets. (Note: their custom option is on hold due to COVID-19.) Their website includes detailed guides on how to measure yourself to find your size, and how to wear your corset.

[Period Corsets](#) also offers ready-to-ship and custom/bespoke corsets. They specify on their website that they offer virtual fittings, which is certainly helpful for customers in Japan!

Historical corsets are expensive and an investment. They are worth their price if you're interested in the look, but if you are looking for cheaper options that have the style of a corset but not necessarily the structural support, you might want to consider alternative fashion brands that cater to the Steampunk or Lolita subcultures. Both feature corsets in a cheaper price range.

[WunderWelt](#) is a trusted online retailer for Lolita fashion, and you can browse several brands at once. They ship domestically in Japan and internationally.

If you choose to express yourself through corsetry, I hope it is as rewarding an experience for you as it has been for me!

Emily was a JET for three years on the coast of Yamagata, in Sakata City. She is now pursuing her library career. In her free time, she enjoys learning about her favorite topics: Robin Hood mythos, fashion history, women's history, and lesbian history.

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6



THE MUSICAL FUSION OF LOS YOYOUIRIS

● **Alex Elliott (Tōkyō)**
and **Adam Smith (Tōkyō)**
interviewed by **Lisa Paper (Tōkyō)**

Photos by **Kyoko Obayashi**



Note: This interview was conducted on February 21st, 2021. It has been edited for length and clarity.

Los Yoyoguiris is a Tōkyō-based three person acoustic band that plays a mix of latin-inspired music, pop, rock, and recently, jazz. They sing a linguistically diverse set of music in English, French, Spanish, Portuguese, and a bit of Japanese. Adam and Alex play guitar and contribute vocals, and Ross plays percussion, handpan, and even Tibetan singing bowls. Oli, one of the band's original co-founders, has since returned to England. Mostly performing in pubs and local venues, they enjoy crowd participation and encourage the audience to clap, sing, and dance along. The name was inspired in equal part by the Spanish word for *gaijin*, “*guiiri*,” and Yoyogi park in Tōkyō, where the band was formed.

Hearing their internationally fun and catchy music, one may wonder, how do three gaijin make it onto the Tōkyō music scene, and what's that like in the middle of a pandemic? Alex and Adam answered these questions, and more, while strumming their guitars in Yoyogi park.

LISA: HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN PLAYING IN TŌKYŌ? HOW DID YOU GET STARTED HERE?

ADAM: We've been playing in Tōkyō since about the summer of 2015. So, five and a half years, we could say. Alex joined a year and a half ago. As to how we got started, actually, I was at a picnic in Yoyogi park (*dramatic pause as we all look around*) run by a Meetup group. I brought my guitar to the Meetup event and Oli, the guy I started the band with, he walked up and joined the picnic. It turns out that he played guitar too, and he asked me if I wanted to start a band. Then we started to play at open mic nights and did a few shows, and that's how we got started.

LISA: IS IT DIFFICULT BREAKING INTO THE MUSIC SCENE IN TŌKYŌ? HOW HAVE YOU ESTABLISHED YOURSELVES?

ALEX: I'd actually say that it's not too hard to break into the “gaijin music” scene here. If we were in say, NYC, it would be way harder. Same goes for London. You can be so talented and experienced and never be heard in places like that, because it's so competitive there. There's fewer people coming from all over the world to break into the scene here in Tōkyō. In terms of playing anywhere else, to earn a living at it is going to be hard.





LISA: WHAT INSPIRES YOU TO PERFORM YOUR SET?

ADAM: One, it's fun for us. We like music from all over the world, and we like to play different kinds of songs. And two, we want to appeal to a wide audience. The music is also inspired by places in the world that some of the band members have lived and travelled in. (Example: Spain.)

LISA: IS YOUR AUDIENCE MOSTLY JAPANESE, OR DO YOU MOSTLY PLAY FOR OTHER EXPATS?

ADAM/ALEX: It's a good mix of both I think, probably half and half. We only have two Japanese songs in our set at the moment, but we try to choose Western songs that Japanese people know, so that people feel included, no matter where they're from.

LISA: DO YOU WRITE SOME OF YOUR OWN MATERIAL?

ADAM: We do mostly covers, but we've written one song recently. It's called "Helios," and it's on [YouTube](#) and on our [website](#). The percussionist, Ross, actually plays the handpan in our music video for that song.

LISA: AS PART OF AN INCREASINGLY DIVERSE MUSIC SCENE, TŌKYŌ HAS DRAWN MUSICIANS FROM ALL OVER. DO YOU THINK LIVING IN JAPAN HAS CHANGED YOUR STYLE OVER TIME?

ALEX: Well, we knew we had to include Japanese songs in our music.

ADAM: So, we included one of the most famous Japanese pop songs in history, called "[Ue Wo Muite Arukou.](#)" Even my Dad knows that song, can you believe that? Because it was number one in the charts back in like 1970 or something.

We always want to play to the audience. We like to try to please the audience. So it's important that everyone has a good time. And the audience responded really well when we played it. When we performed it at What the Dickens, they loved it! The whole hall was singing along. It really reminds me of why I play music.

ALEX: Yeah, there's nothing like getting everyone in the audience singing, dancing, and having a good time. Audience participation is so great, there's nothing like having forty or fifty people singing together. It's such a great feeling.





LOS Y YOYOG UIRIS



LISA: WHO ARE SOME OF THE MOST INFLUENTIAL MUSICIANS YOU'VE DISCOVERED IN JAPAN? HAVE THEY SHAPED ANY OF YOUR MUSIC?

ALEX: Well, I saw Los Yoyoguiris perform when I wasn't yet in the band, and I was like, I wanna do that. So, I joined. (*Laughing.*)

But in terms of other bands in the Tōkyō music scene, Gypsy Unite were massively formative. They're a band with a Japanese, an Italian, and a French musical artist, and they all play guitar amazingly well. They're massively talented! We were very influenced by their style. Gypsy Unite, they play a lot of jazz. We were more pop before, and we started playing a lot more jazz because we started to hang out with them here in the park and play together often. And if the weather's fine, we'll play for like 10 hours. We have a bit more free time due to the pandemic.

LISA: HOW HAS COVID IMPACTED YOUR PERFORMANCES AND THE MUSIC VENUES YOU PLAY IN?

ALEX: It's had a massive impact.

ADAM: This isn't a good time to try to be a professional musician, there's no insurance if work falls through.

ALEX: Agreed.

ADAM: Most venues are not operating, or having any acts, if at all. Some live houses have closed down. Since the pandemic, we've only played at one venue, and during the state of emergency, the shows have to start and finish earlier than usual. And, there are fewer people at the shows. 37

And, we feel like we don't want to cause a superspreader event at any of our shows. So, we're not publicizing anything we're doing very much, because we don't want to spread the virus. But, we did play in Hakuba.

ALEX: We were getting depressed with all the Christmas events getting cancelled, and out of the blue, someone asked if we'd like to play an event at a ski resort for 10 days. We played a gig every night at the ski resort, and it was amazing.

ADAM: We would not have gotten that if it weren't for the pandemic, because usually, they bring in people from overseas. The organizer in Hakuba recommended us, so that's what really got us the gig, so maybe that's the silver lining of all of this.

ALEX: Snowboard all day, jump in an onsen, play a gig, it was fun. It was great. We hope to go back and play again there. That kind of changed our style as well, it was mostly background music there, and jazz. So now, we're inspired to play more jazz for fun. When you're outside of Tōkyō as well, it feels less crowded. It feels more relaxed, and we had epic amounts of snow. It was an excellent time to practice background jazz music, a very different venue from a noisy pub where you want to encourage audience participation and have people sing along. So, it was a great opportunity to practice more jazz.

LISA: WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU HAVE FOR ANY ASPIRING MUSICIANS LIVING IN THE EXPAT COMMUNITY IN JAPAN?

ALEX: Go to the live house events, either the open mic gigs, or, any event, really. You don't need to meet someone, you can look for them online on Facebook and get connected to the Tōkyō music scene online. We often see people joining Tōkyō music groups for foreigners. Open mics are the best way to get started in person though. You just need to go to one, and it will all snowball from there, and, don't be shy! Say hi, it's a good bunch of people in the Tōkyō music scene. People are always there for one another, people always go to other people's gigs, it's like a big and supportive family.

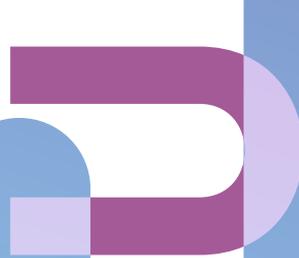
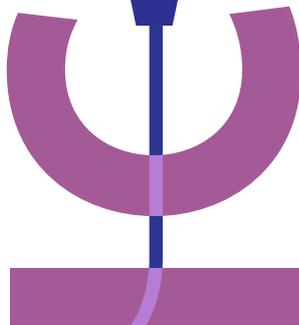
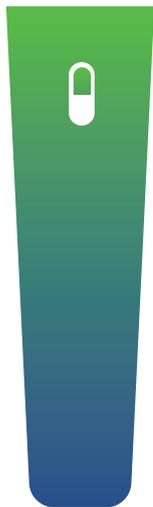
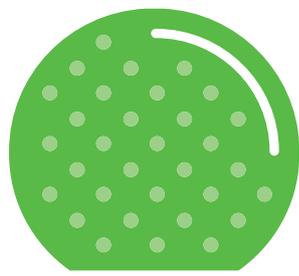
LISA: WHAT'S YOUR FAVORITE PART ABOUT PLAYING IN TŌKYŌ?

ADAM: I think for me, it's feeling like a part of a community, because as a foreigner in Tōkyō, especially as a person who doesn't speak Japanese, it can be hard to meet people and make new friends. So being a part of the live music scene can be a great way to be part of a supportive community and meet people.

ALEX: Even before this band, all of my closest friends have come from music backgrounds, and Tōkyō is no different.

ADAM: And it's fun, and yeah, Tōkyō is no different from any other welcoming music community. So, we're very happy that we can be here and perform.





LISA: WHAT'S YOUR FAVORITE SONG TO PERFORM AT THE MOMENT?

ADAM: It's always the newest song. (*Laughing*) For Alex, it's probably the *Friends* theme song.

ALEX: We learned the *Friends* theme, and I love it! It's such a good song, Japanese people know it, and I always watched it with my dad when I was a kid, so it makes me feel happy and nostalgic.

ADAM: It's a happy song, and we can both play the lead parts together, and the audience loves it and always claps. (*Claps the *Friends* clap.*)

It's such a cool song if there's a bunch of people and they all clap together. I like songs that have audience participation and songs in which people can easily join in.

I also enjoy playing anything by the band Rodrigo y Gabriela, a lot of our videos on our YouTube channel are of their songs. We've learned more of their songs than anyone else, they're Latin rock instrumental, but very upbeat and very fun (to play.)

LISA: WHERE CAN PEOPLE COME SUPPORT THE BAND/ LISTEN TO YOUR MUSIC?

ADAM: What the Dickens, in Ebisu. We're so grateful to have them stay open during these tough times, and it's one of the best places to see free live bands in Tōkyō. It's a great place to meet other musicians. The food is also delicious. Events are on our [website](#) and we also have a [Facebook page](#) with gig dates and times.

LISA: WHAT FUTURE PROJECTS DO YOU HAVE COMING UP?

ADAM: We are learning a difficult song at the moment, and we're working on playing more challenging jazz songs.

ALEX: Ever since we started playing jazz, we're trying to push ourselves to find harder songs to play, odd rhythms, songs with lots of chords, different tonalities, etc.

ADAM: Our project is always becoming better musicians—an ongoing project.

We also have just put out a new video which we filmed in the deepest train station in Japan, in Gunma prefecture. We worked on it for months and making the video was a lot of fun. It's called "[Hanuman](#)," it's a cover of a Rodrigo y Gabriela song. We feature both the cajón drums and the guitar in that video. The video has us haunting the station, which is quite eerie, like apparitions.

LISA: Did you dress up as ghosts?

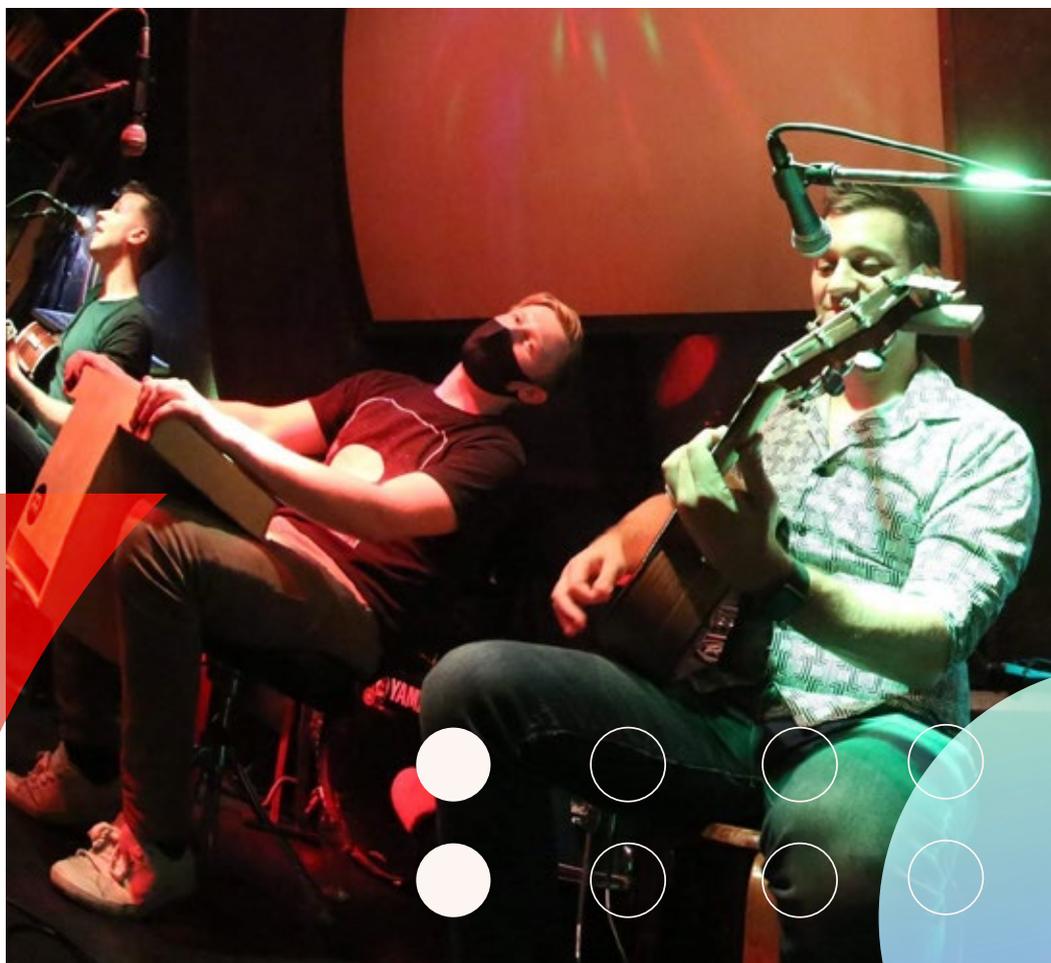
ADAM/ALEX: (*Laughing*) No . . . but we did dress up for something else!

ADAM: A recent project we did was to celebrate *Super Mario*'s 35th birthday, so we filmed a Mario themed video with our bandmate in London (Oli). We did a quarantine style, split screen video collaboration with him, of the Mario theme song. Ross dressed up for it, he wore the Mario hat and did a Mario jump, it was great. You can find it on [YouTube](#).

A lot of our projects since the pandemic have been music videos, because we've had less shows to do, so we've channeled a lot of our energy into making music videos. Ross is super talented and he makes music videos for a living for his own YouTube channels. He has one of the top [instructional cajón music channels](#) on YouTube. We've been able to make professional quality vids because of his experience and knowledge of how to use the video equipment.

LISA: THAT STATION SOUNDS COOL. HOW DID YOU FIND OUT ABOUT IT?

ADAM: I was staying nearby to go hiking, and I'd read about this station in a *Lonely Planet* guidebook. And it's like 500 steps down underground, and there are only about 15 passengers per day in the deepest station in Japan. It's called Doai Station, in Gunma. I visited there, and I was blown away, it's such a cool place, it's really photogenic. It feels like it's abandoned. It's very atmospheric and feels haunted, so I kept it in the back of my mind. When we were talking about shooting the music video, we thought this station would fit the mood of the song perfectly, and decided to film it there.





LIKED THE ARTICLE, CURIOUS ABOUT THE MUSIC? YOU CAN CHECK OUT THE BAND'S WORK HERE:

[Facebook](#)

[Website](#)

[Band Youtube Channel](#)

[Ross's Youtube Channel](#)



LISA: WELL, THAT ABOUT WRAPS THINGS UP. ANYTHING YOU'D LIKE TO ADD?

ADAM/ALEX: We're grateful to Kyoko for taking our band photos. She documents the international band scene in Tōkyō. We're grateful to John and Hiromi at What The Dickens in Ebisu for giving musicians in Tōkyō like us a stage to perform on and for giving music fans here a warm and welcoming place to see free live music. We are, personally, very grateful to two former JETs and fantastic folks, Taryn and John, for getting us on at Hakuba.

Alex Elliott came to Tōkyō from London in 2011 in search of reliable and timely transit systems. He also plays guitar and sings.

Adam Smith wears many hats by day and a guitar by night. Originally from Virginia, he has been based in Tōkyō since 2014.

Ross McCallum is an Australian cajón player and YouTuber best known for using fast finger-tapping techniques and adapting the instrument to many modern styles of music. His channel on YouTube is one of the most popular destinations online for cajón learners. Ross is also a frequent collaborator with other artists & musicians around the world.

Lisa Paper is a Tōkyō JET and returned Peace Corps volunteer. This is her third contribution to CONNECT magazine.

**APRIL REVIEW
RECOMMEND**

**APRIL REVIEW
RECOMMENDA**



NEWS AND ENTERTAINMENT NEWS AND ENTERTAINMENT

RECOMMENDED VIDEO GAME: *Control Ultimate Edition*

Nathan Post (Saitama)

One of the best action games of 2019 is back in the news again, thanks to *Control Ultimate Edition's* recent (re)release on PS5 and Xbox Series X and subsequent free distribution via PlayStation Plus and Xbox GamePass.

Like many, I missed *Control's* initial release on consoles and PC two years ago, but the game's substantial technical upgrades on current-gen systems and included DLC packs make this the perfect time to visit (or revisit) this crazy title.

Control's main draw has to be its *X-Files*-y world of secret government organizations and interdimensional cosmic shenanigans. *Control* is firmly planted within the "new weird" genre of fiction, and it certainly is weird!

You play as Jesse Faden, who is led by a mysterious being to the HQ of a secret government agency, known as the Federal Bureau of Control, in search of her abducted brother. The entirety of the game takes place within "The Oldest House," a mysterious skyscraper in New York City that can only be seen by those who know where to look for it. The innards of the building seem to stretch beyond their physical bounds and include all manner of dimensional anomalies and strange happenings.

Through an odd twist of cosmic intervention, Jesse is selected to become the new director of the Bureau and must save it and its employees from The Hiss, a malicious invading force from another dimension that's turning employees into monsters.

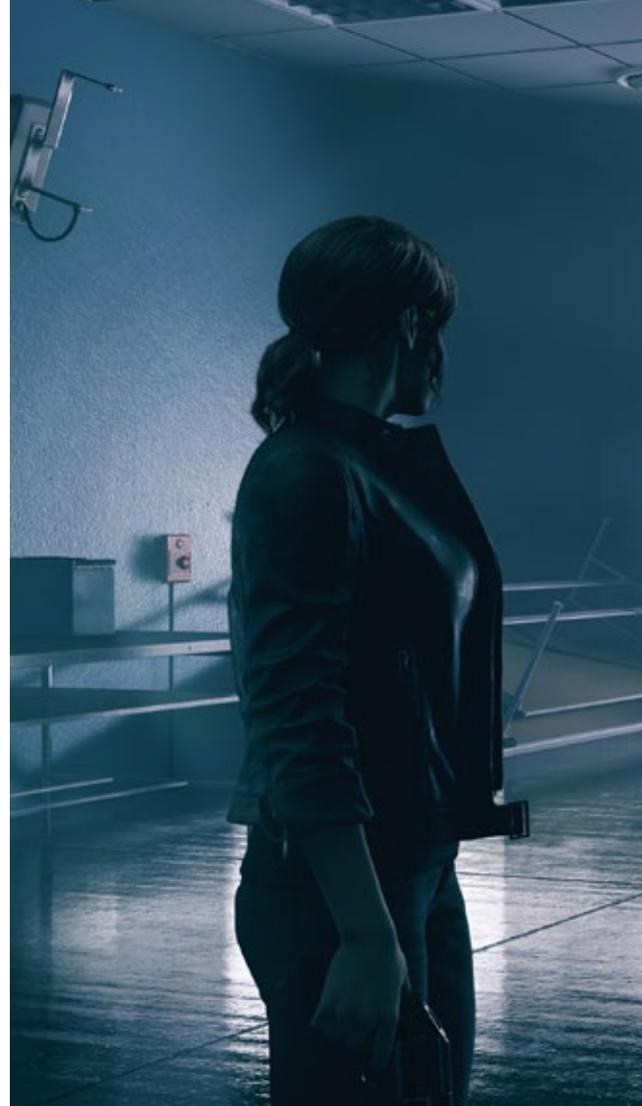
Control's story is all over the place and intentionally leaves plenty ambiguous, but its greatest asset is that it feels like a tiny window into a massive world of governmental conspiracy and interdimensional drama. This could easily be the third entry in a series, the way the lore is set up, but it's a stand-alone title that invites the player to revel in this sense of mystery.

From a gameplay perspective, *Control* has an interesting mix of superhero and Metroidvania elements. In addition to her transforming gun, Jesse has the ability to psychically rip objects from the ground and launch them at targets, create a shield of floating debris, levitate around, and more. She feels like a character from a game like *Infamous* or *Prototype*, but instead of wreaking superpowered havoc across an open world like in those games, almost all of The Oldest House is indoors. In typical Metroidvania fashion, you explore a sprawling map of interlinked rooms and corridors that open up to you more and more over time as you gain new movement and traversal powers. It mixes up both genres in fun ways that are new and exciting.

To touch on the technical aspects of the game, *Control Ultimate* now runs at a buttery 60 FPS at 1440p. It also gives you the option to enable a ray tracing mode with better visuals and lighting effects at the cost of halving the frame rate to 30 FPS. In addition, the destruction physics in *Control* are simply a marvel. There are no predetermined ways something will break or fall apart; it all happens dynamically depending on how you interact with it. The result is that every time you rip a chunk out of the wall or lift a desk into the air to fling at a group of enemies, the destruction is different and satisfying in a new way.

It all comes together into a package that fans of action games and *X-Files*-style mystery should not pass up. It's also an excellent technical showpiece for the PS5 and Xbox Series X if you've managed to get one of those for yourself. The fact that it was recently added as a free title on PlayStation Plus and Xbox Game Pass only sweetens the deal. All you've got to lose is time, and it's definitely some of the best time you can spend on the new systems right now.

*Nathan Post is a former JET from California who now works for Gumi as a professional game translator. Recently he's been enjoying his lockdown pretending to be a samurai in **Ghost of Tsushima** on PS5 (and around his apartment).*





A PRILLPREVIEWSD AND RECOMMENDATIONS



RECOMMENDED ALBUM:

DOKU-EN-KAI by toe

Ryon Morrin (Hokkaidō)

Released: March 5, 2021

For well over 12 months, music venues have remained quiet, empty spaces, closed to performers and patrons alike. While the pandemic is gradually winding down across the globe, the thought of standing in the middle of a dense crowd for a prolonged period of time remains unsettling. Returning to the live music scene of old will take time. Experimental rock veterans toe



独演会

toe

from tokyo / EST. 2000

"DOKU-EN-KAI"

Exclusive Show SUMMER 2019

Le Poisson Rouge / New York City

*In The Round Show

testamentary occasional eudaemonism™



recognize the desire to pack a room and scream with strangers to the opening notes of your favorite song. They've given fans the next best thing with *DOKU-EN-KAI*, a live album with video recorded in New York City on their 2019 tour.

toe's music draws from elements of post-rock, math-rock, and jazz and is known for intricate riffs and complex rhythms. The Tokyo-based quartet are also masters of melody who write unforgettable three to five-minute epics filled with emotional peaks and valleys. Over their tour-heavy 20-year career, toe has earned a reputation as a must-see live act, and with good reason. The passion on *DOKU-EN-KAI* is tangible, and their energy radiates throughout the room.

15 tracks and 85 minutes long, *DOKU-EN-KAI* is packed with popular songs as well as some older, lesser-known gems. Highlights include the lead-in, "Etude of Solitude," a medium-energy track that preps the crowd for the faster-paced "I Dance Alone," which is deceptively calm at its start. It's a prime example of toe's ability to progressively build up to a world-shattering crescendo that gently drifts back into a satisfying calm. On "孤独の発明" (*Kodoku no Hatsumei*), bright, twinkly dual guitars weave a beautifully sad story.

In the latter half, "Esoteric" shows toe in their most aggressive and raw form. Opening with a blistering drum solo, they charge into a groove designed for movement, finishing with a feedback-laden guitar solo. After the most intense climax of the evening comes to a close, they trade electric for acoustic on "Two Moons." Soothingly warm chords fill the air alongside brightly chiming bells as the atmosphere switches from mosh-worthy to mellow.

DOKU-EN-KAI is a deeply satisfying experience that feels like a relic from a past life despite being recorded less than two years ago. Packed venues and ticket stubs aren't back yet, but they live on in the form of toe's latest release.

You can stream the full concert video or listen to the album on [Bandcamp](#).

Select tracks from *DOKU-EN-KAI* are also available for streaming on Spotify.

Ryon Morrin is a second-year Assistant Language Teacher from Boise, Idaho, U.S. living in Shintotsukawa, Hokkaidō, a small farming town known for its high-quality rice and beautiful scenic views. He's a writer, a traveler, and a lover of live music.

APRIL RELEASES

Rachel Fagundes (Okayama)

MOVIES

April 1

- Monkey King: A Hero's Journey to the West (2021)

April 2

- The Swordsman (2020)
- Herself (2020)
- Gekijōban: Signal (2021)

April 9

- Palm Springs (2020)
- Ammonite (2020)
- Freaky (2020)
- 21 Bridges (2019)
- Dreamland (2019)
- The Bad Guys: The Movie (2019)
- Sisters in Arms (2019)
- House in the Fields (2017)

April 13

- Demon Skin (PC)

April 16

- Ava (2020)
- Proxima (2019)
- Meitantei Conan: Hiroyuki no dangan (2021)

April 20

- Paranoid: Everything Wipe from the Beginning (2021)

April 23

- The War with Grandpa (2020)
- Spree (2020)
- Rurouni Kenshin: Final Chapter Part I - The Final (2021)
- The Booksellers (2019)
- Caught in the Net (2020)
- Crayon Shin-chan: Shrouded in Mystery! The Flowers of Tenkazu Academy (2021)
- Gekijōban Bang Dream! Episode of Roselia: Promise (2021)
- Calypso Rose: Lioness of the Jungle (2011)

April 24

- Heimat is a Space in Time (2019)

April 29

- Gekijō-ban Porisu × Senshi rabupatorina! ~ Kaito kara no chosen! Rabu de papatto taiho seyo!~ (2021)
- Mashin Sentai Kiramager vs Ryusoulger (2021)
- Funny Bunny (2021)

April 30

- The Beach Bum (2019)

GAMES

April 1

- Outriders (PC, PS4, PS5, Xbox One, Xbox Series X, Stadia)

April 6

- Star Wars Republic Commando (PS4, Switch)
- Oddworld: Soulstorm (PC, PS4, PS5)
- Lost Words: Beyond the Page (PC, PS4, Xbox One, Switch)

April 8

- Before Your Eyes (PC)
- Cozy Grove (PC, PS4, PS5, Xbox One, Xbox Series X/S)

April 9

- Say No More (PC, Switch, iOS)

April 14

- Forgotten Fields (PC)

April 15

- Ashwalkers (PC)
- Godstrike (PC, Switch)
- Shadow Man: Remastered (PC)
- SaGa Frontier Remastered (PC, PS4, Switch, iOS, Android)

April 20

- MLB: The Show 21 (PS4, PS5, Xbox One, Xbox Series X/S)
- Maskmaker (PC VR, PSVR)

April 22

- MotoGP 21 (PC, PS4, PS5, Xbox One, Xbox Series X/S, Switch)
- Atelier Mysterious Trilogy Deluxe Pack (PC, PS4, Switch)

April 23

- Nier Replicant (PC, PS4, Xbox One)
- Judgement (PS5, Xbox Series X/S, Stadia)

April 28

- Second Extinction (Xbox One, Xbox Series X/S)
- El Shaddai: Ascension of the Metatron (PC)

April 29

- Insurmountable (PC)
- Total War: Rome Remastered (PC)
- Legend of Keepers (PC, Switch, Stadia)

April 30

- Returnal (PS5)
- New Pokemon Snap (Switch)

April - Unannounced Date

- Century: Age of Ashes – Steam Early Access (PC)

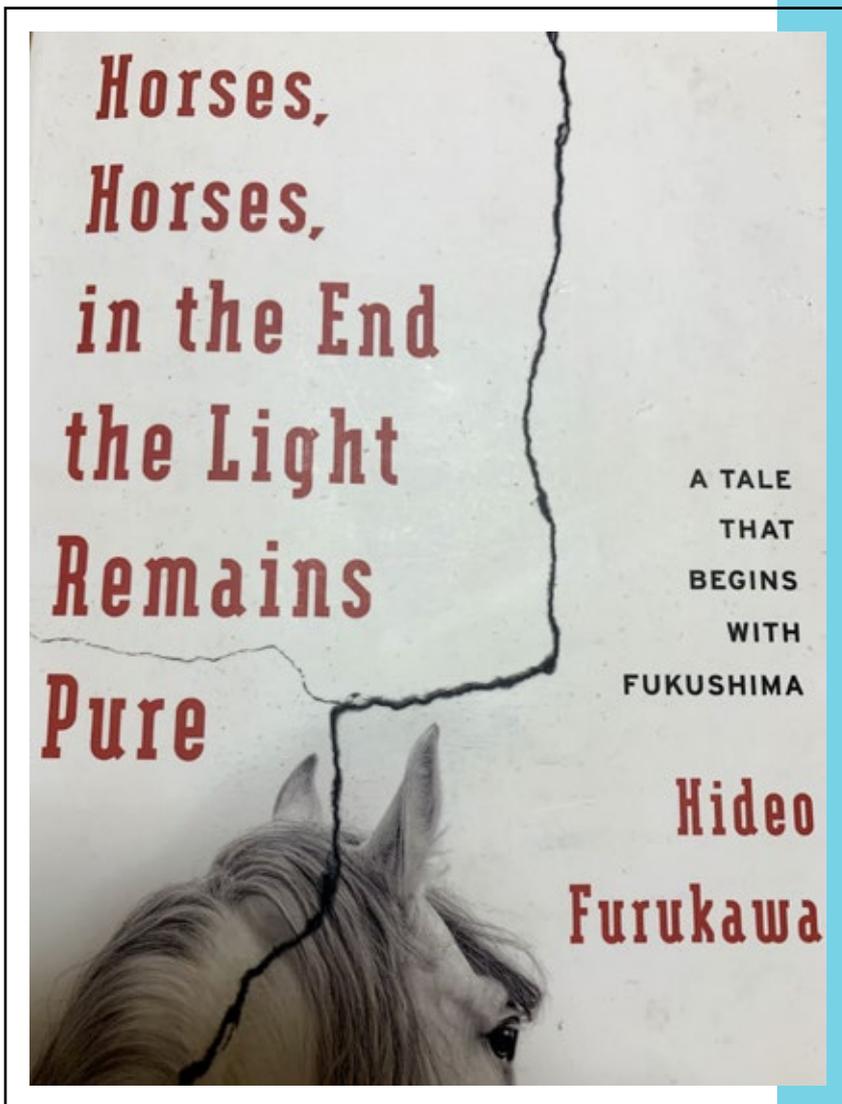
Sources:

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

<https://www.vg247.com/2021/03/25/video-game-release-dates-2021/>

Expressing the Inexpressible:

10 Years of Cultural Responses to the 3.11 Disaster



"If I were to express the sensation in a phrase, it was as though 'time had been extinguished'. More concretely, consciousness of the date, or the day of the week, was lost. I think I can put a name to it: 'spirited away time.'" — Furukawa Hideo, *Horses, Horses, in the End the Light Remains Pure*

Alice French (Yamagata)

In the passage to the left, Fukushima-born author Furukawa Hideo attempts to put into words his experience of the days and weeks following the Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami, which struck the east coast of Japan's Tōhoku region on 11th March 2011. In the chaos that followed what has come to be known as '3.11,' Furukawa recalls experiencing "seven days like half a year, three months like a few seconds," as he struggles to come to terms with post-disaster reality.

Ten years on, and the scale of the damage caused by the 3.11 disaster is still just as difficult to process. We now know that the magnitude 9.0 quake, along with the devastating tsunami that it triggered, resulted in more than 18,000 deaths, with roughly 2,500 people still missing. Whole communities along the coastline of Tōhoku's Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima prefectures were wiped out by the 40-metre high tsunami waves. More than 80,000 people were evacuated from the environs of Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant, which was sent into meltdown by the tsunami, and some 5,000 people still remain displaced from the area. (1) 3.11 was the most damaging natural disaster to strike Japan in modern memory.

However, statistics only tell part of the story. The impact of 3.11 extends far beyond the loss of property and human life. The disaster occupies a unique position in Japanese history because it happened during the media age. The waves of the tsunami, and the destruction they brought with them, were broadcast in real-time on television sets all over Japan. News crews from every corner of the country flooded the disaster zone, and Japanese news outlets and social media platforms were saturated with 3.11-related information for weeks and months afterwards.

Thus, although it goes without saying that the eastern Tōhoku region was by far the worst hit, 3.11 was a disaster experienced by the nation of Japan as a whole, together. It left the population with what literary scholar Linda Flores refers to as “cultural trauma”: an inability to process the sheer scale of the damage, and fear for what the disaster would mean for the future of Japan. (2) This feeling of impossibility and incredibility is well summarised by Furukawa’s experience of “spirited-away time.”

One of the results of this cultural trauma was the establishment of a new, “post-3.11,” genre of Japanese literature, music, and art. Over the past decade, artists and authors alike have used this genre to somehow express the inexpressible loss incurred by Japan at the hands of the disaster, as well as critique the government’s response to it. On the tenth anniversary of 3.11, it seems fitting to take a look at some of the best cultural works that have come out of this movement so far.

Literature



Horses, Horses, in the End the Light Remains Pure (Hideo Furukawa, translated by Doug Slaymaker)

As you may have gathered already, I am a big fan of Furukawa, and his novella about the aftermath of 3.11 was actually the first work of Japanese literature I ever read. *Horses, Horses* is an intertextual muddle of Furukawa’s first-person stream of consciousness and the history of Tōhoku, told through the eyes of the wild horses of Sōma, a town located within the evacuation zone of Fukushima Daiichi. A Fukushima native and advocate for Tōhoku rights, Furukawa uses his prose to highlight the injustice of what he considers to be the sacrifice of Tōhoku at the hands of Tōkyo and the central government.

Horses, Horses is available on Amazon Japan [here](#).

Kamisama 2011

(Kawakami Hiromi, translated by Ted Goossen)

Kawakami wrote her original short story, *Kamisama* (“*God Bless You*”) in 1993. It is the tale of a nameless, human protagonist who is invited on a short stroll by a “bear god” that has recently moved in next door. The plot is very simple (if a little absurd): the two characters take a walk by the river, have a picnic, hug, and then part ways. *Kamisama 2011* is Kawakami’s reimagining of the story in a post-3.11 context. The story is almost identical, except the narrative is peppered with references to the Fukushima nuclear disaster: protective clothing, Geiger counters, the “incident.” The changes are subtle, and that is exactly the point. The 2011 version is a poignant reminder that, post-3.11, even the most everyday activities, such as taking a walk by the river, have been fundamentally, and irreversibly, changed. The story also offers an ecocritical approach to the dangers of nuclear power, and a reminder of the interdependence between man and nature.

You can read both *Kamisama* and *Kamisama 2011* [here](#).

Tokyo Ueno Station

(Yu Miri, translated by Morgan Giles)

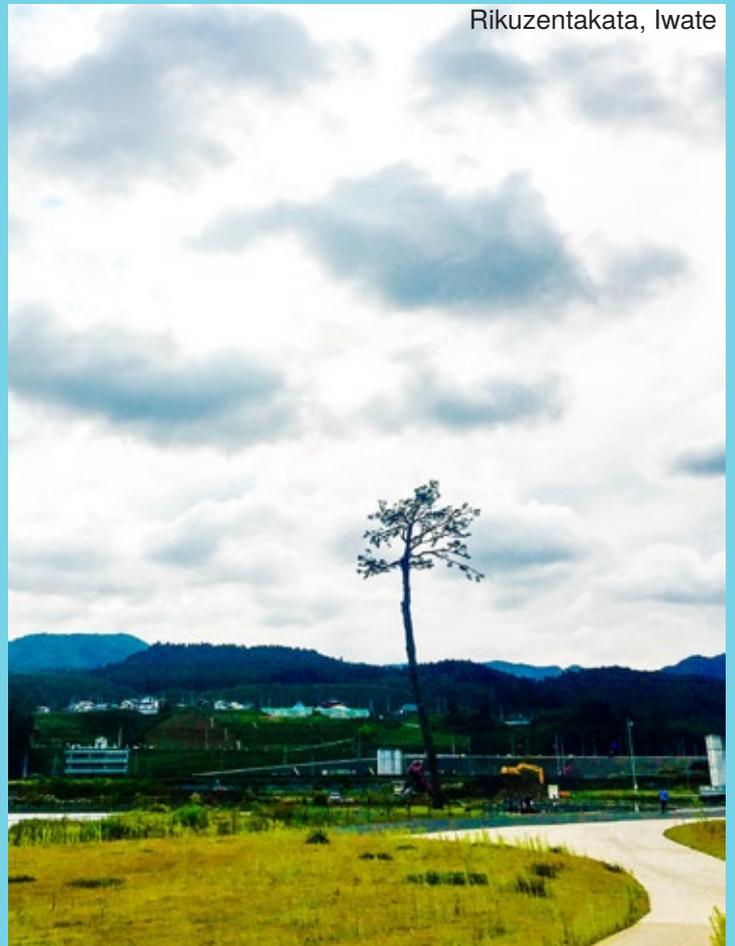
For an insight into the long-term societal impact of 3.11, I highly recommend this 2019 novel from *zainichi* Korean author Yū Miri. Although not written specifically about the disaster, the story shows just how far-reaching the impact of the 3.11 was, ultimately linking it to the large homeless community in Tōkyō’s Ueno Park. The tale follows the life of Kazu, from family man in his native Fukushima, to labourer in Tōkyō’s 1964 Olympics to, following 3.11, homeless outside Ueno Station. Similarly to Furukawa’s *Horses, Horses*, this story highlights the Japanese government’s neglect of Tōhoku’s residents in favour of economic progress for Tōkyō, emphasising the endless struggle between the collective and the individual that underpins much of modern Japanese society. It also touches on the anger felt by many at the government’s decision to host the 2020 Olympics, at a time when many disaster victims were still without homes.

Tokyo Ueno Station is available on Amazon Japan [here](#).



Art made out of grass by local university students, which spells out the character for 'inoru' (to pray).

Rikuzentakata, Iwate



Rikuzentakata, Iwate

The 'miracle pine tree' which was the only tree left standing after the tsunami.

Art and Photography

Kazuma Obara

Photojournalist Kazuma Obara was the first photographer to publish work from inside the Fukushima Daiichi Power Plant, in his 2012 photobook *Reset Beyond Fukushima*. His work focuses on the forgotten victims of the disaster, namely the power plant workers and their families. Obara travelled into the evacuation zone soon after the disaster to meet and photograph employees of Fukushima Daiichi who were working at the time of the meltdown, and find out how the disaster had impacted them personally. The result is a series of strikingly raw portraits, which serve to personalise the disaster, as well as offering a rare insight into the internal goings-on of a nuclear power plant. Obara's use of overexposure to represent radiation in his photographs is also very impactful; his "Exposure" project, based around Chernobyl, is also well worth looking up.

You can find out more about Kazuma Obara's work [here](#).

Reborn-Art Festival

The coastal town of Ishinomaki in Miyagi Prefecture accounted for almost 20% of all deaths caused by 3.11. The town's infrastructure was obliterated by the tsunami, and most survivors either lost a loved one, or know someone who did. In order to commemorate the lives lost and look forward to a brighter future for the town, Reborn-Art Festival was launched in 2017. The festival features works of art from both Japanese and international artists, including a striking sculpture of a white deer, which looks out across the sea, seemingly searching for missing tsunami victims. The second festival was held in 2019, and also featured music and local food. The next festival is scheduled to be held in 2022, and you can find out more about it [here](#).



Music

Fukushima Youth Sinfonietta

There have been many, many musical tributes to 3.11, and it's incredibly difficult to choose just one to mention here. However, a project that touched me especially was the Fukushima Youth Sinfonietta, which was founded in the wake of the disaster. It is an orchestra made up of school students from Fukushima Prefecture, with the aim of showcasing the healing power of music and bringing the community together after the suffering of 3.11. Not only does the group's story offer some well-needed hope and positivity within the post-3.11 cultural movement, I think orchestral music also holds a special kind of power when it comes to expressing emotion, whether that be grief or hope. The Youth Sinfonietta has released a special video in memory of the ten year anniversary of 3.11, which you can view [here](#).

Of course, these picks are only a very small selection of the vast number of cultural works that have come out of 3.11 in Japan. The post-3.11 genre is constantly growing and evolving and, during this tenth anniversary year, I would urge everyone to take some time to explore it.

1. Kingston, J. (2012). *Natural Disaster and Nuclear Crisis in Japan. Response and recovery after Japan's 3/11*. Abingdon: Routledge.

2. Flores, L. (2017). 'Matrices of Time, Space and Text: Intertextuality and Trauma in Two 3.11 Narratives', *Japan Review*, 31, pp. 141-169.

Alice French is a second-year Coordinator for International Relations (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 or skiing on one of Yamagata's many mountains.

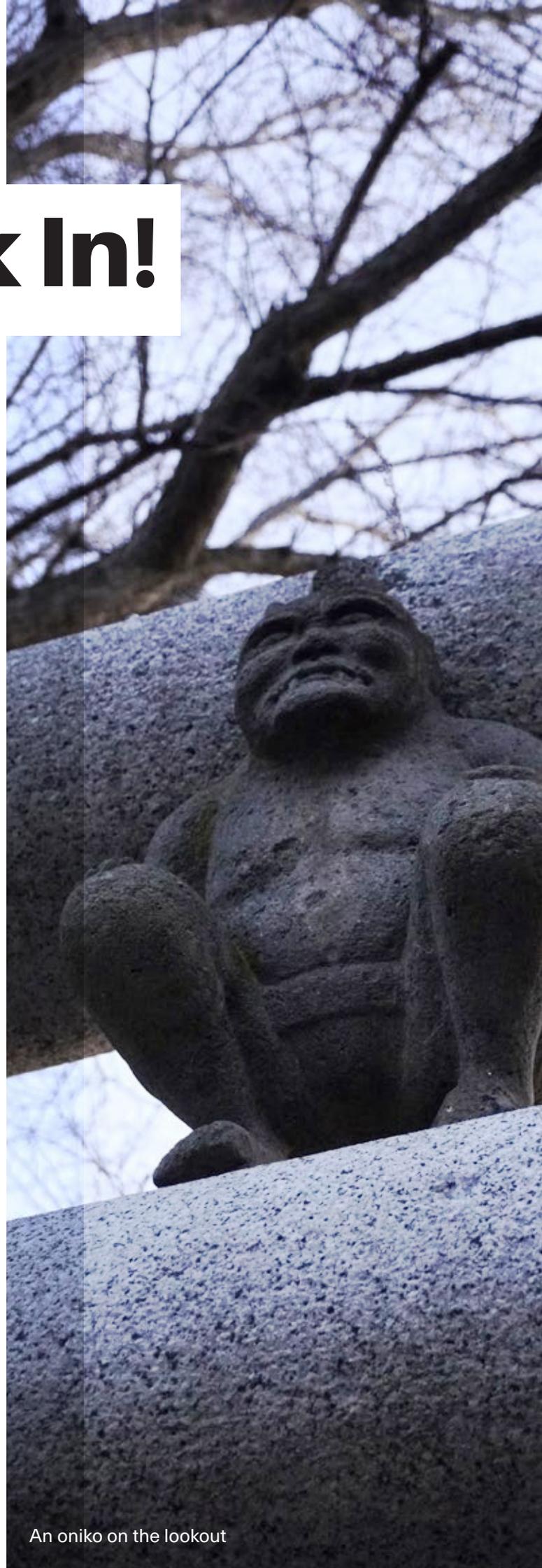
Oni In! Luck In!

The Villages that Love these
Misunderstood Ogres

Clarissa Combe (Aomori)

Even if you have only very limited knowledge of Japanese folklore and legend, you have likely come across *oni*: ogre-like creatures that are the ubiquitous foe to every hapless protagonist. With sharp horns protruding from their brightly-coloured bulbous heads, ratty loincloths, and a menacing club always on hand, it's no wonder stories about oni have been used to terrify Japanese children into obedience since ancient times. In Akita, every February, the terrifying *namahage* oni descend from the mountains to scold children for being lazy or naughty. Meanwhile, on Setsubun each year, yells of "Oni out! Luck in!" can be heard from Japanese households across the country as children throw beans out of their front door, or at parents disguised as oni. Setsubun takes place on February 3 each year and marks the beginning of spring in the old Japanese calendar. The ritual of throwing beans is known as *mamemaki*, and Japanese people believe it purifies the home, driving away evil spirits that bring misfortune and poor health.

However, if you travel just a little further north from Akita to the Tsugaru region of Aomori Prefecture, oni have a very different reputation. Rather than being feared as harbingers of evil, oni are revered by the locals, with some houses even shouting "Oni in! Luck in!" on Setsubun instead. There are various shrines dedicated to the *yōkai* (collective term for spirits in Japanese folklore), and several place names in the region owe their origins to legends about the oni of Mount Iwaki.



The Kindly Oni of Onizawa

The village of Onizawa is now part of the city of Hirosaki, but as the name suggests, it still retains a unique connection to oni folklore. Long ago, legend has it that a villager named Yajuro befriended an oni from Mount Iwaki, and the two would often play and wrestle together. Yajuro would bring the oni food, and in turn, the oni would share his advice and wisdom like an older brother. One day, Yajuro told the oni about how he was having difficulty irrigating his rice paddies due to a water shortage, and hearing this, the oni built a canal overnight on the condition that no one watched him work. Unfortunately, Yajuro's wife happened to witness him building the canal, and so the oni disappeared, never to be seen again. The only proof of his good deed was the tools he abandoned as he fled. From then onwards, the village came to be known as Onizawa.

To honour his great deed, the locals built a shrine in which they enshrined the hoe and chisel he left behind, and these tools can still be seen today. The shrine is called Ki Shrine, which is written using the kanji for oni, 鬼, without the small horn-shaped stroke at the top. They chose to omit this stroke to symbolise how he was kind-hearted and not evil like the oni of most legends.

In addition to the shrine, there are two other spots related to this tale. In the middle of the apple orchards surrounding Ki Shrine stands a tall oak tree called "the oni's seat." The branches form a perfect oni-sized bench where, locals say, Yajuro and his oni friend would while away the hours chatting. Go a little further, and you'll also find "the oni's sumō ring" where the two would wrestle.



Kuraokami Shrine, Goshogawara



The Cunning Oni of Tokoshinai

Although oni are revered in the Tsugaru region, this does not mean the locals see them as purely benevolent neighbours. Their respect for oni mirrors that which they have for nature—they are seen as god-like creatures that can be both harsh and giving, threatening and friendly. They can provide just as easily as they can take away. The darker side of this balancing act is evident in the legend surrounding the origin of the name of the village of Tokoshinai.

Folklore has it that many hundreds of years ago, a local blacksmith with a beautiful daughter was troubled as he had no sons to inherit his business. Hoping to find both a suitable heir and husband for his daughter, he declared, “I will marry my daughter to any man who can forge ten swords in one night.” Men from far and wide came to the village to accept his challenge, but they all failed. One day, a mysterious, gangly man appeared to try his hand at the challenge on the condition that no one watched him as he worked. He claimed he was unable to concentrate while being watched. The blacksmith was moved by his passion, for he himself became similarly absorbed in

his craft when working, so promised to follow the man’s wishes.

Unwilling to marry a man she had never met, the blacksmith’s daughter secretly peeked at the man from the shadows and was horrified to discover a towering red creature forging the sword with flames bursting from his own mouth. The mysterious stranger was an oni. She watched in shock until dawn when the weary oni settled down for a short rest before the sun rose. Quickly, she grabbed one of the swords and hid it in her room in a desperate attempt to avoid her horrid fate.

In the morning, the oni brought the swords to the blacksmith and counted them out one by one. After he counted to nine and there were no more, he roared, “There aren’t ten swords,” and ran away

into the mountains, never to return. In Japanese, “ten swords” can be phrased as “tokoshi” and “nai” means “there are no,” so the words the oni yelled were “tokoshi nai!” His parting words sound exactly like the village’s current name: Tokoshinai. The shrine in this village is called Ganki Shrine, which also contains the character for oni in the name.

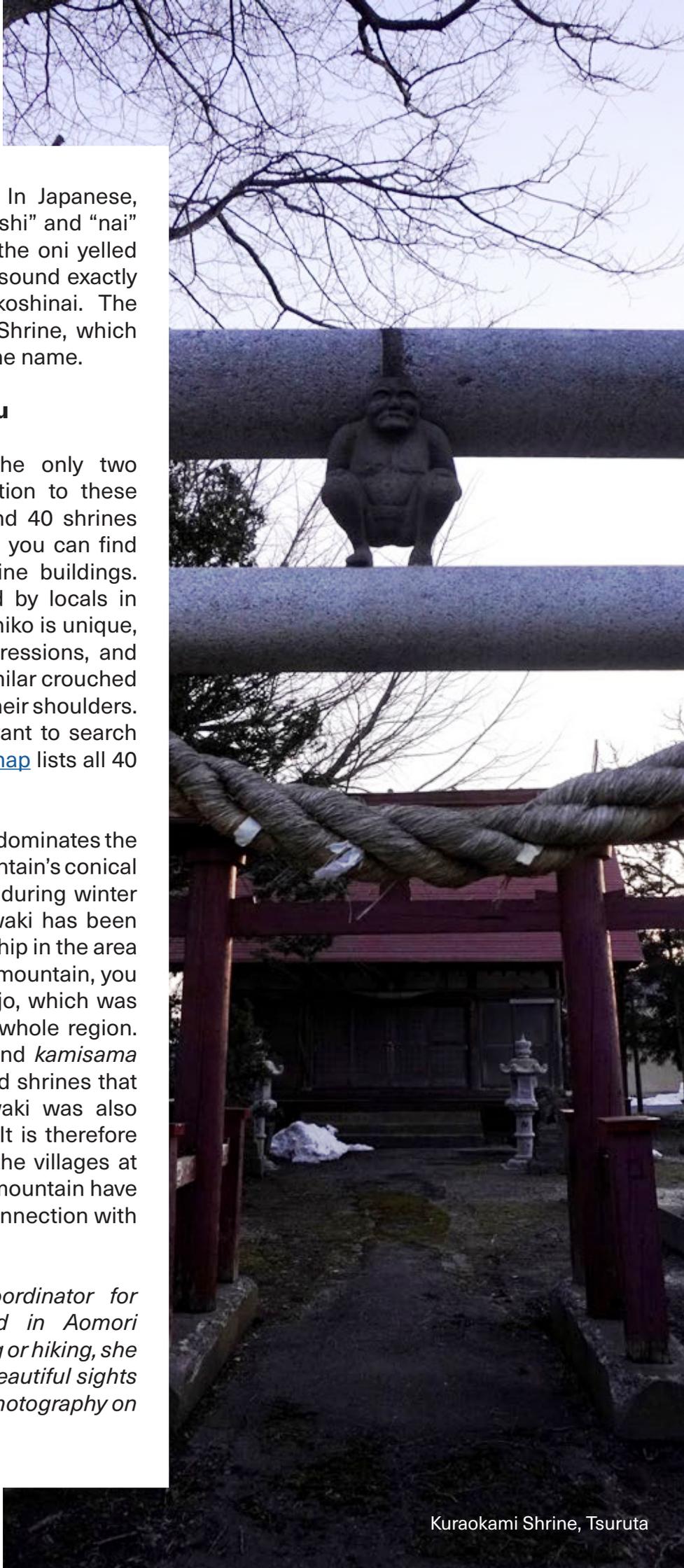
Find all 40 Oniko Shrines in Tsugaru

Tokoshinai and Onizawa are not the only two villages that have a special connection to these misunderstood yōkai; there are around 40 shrines throughout the Tsugaru region where you can find *oniko* hidden on *torii* gates and shrine buildings. Oniko is a term of endearment used by locals in Tsugaru when referring to oni. Each oniko is unique, with different skin colours, facial expressions, and loincloth fashion, but they all sit in a similar crouched position, supporting the torii gates on their shoulders.

If you happen to be in Aomori and want to search out these unique shrines, this [handy map](#) lists all 40 oniko shrines in the region.

Mount Iwaki is a towering volcano that dominates the horizon of the Tsugaru region. The mountain’s conical shape and snow-capped appearance during winter inspired its nickname Tsugaru-Fuji. Iwaki has been an important centre for mountain worship in the area for hundreds of years. Halfway up the mountain, you can find the remnants of Akakura Reijo, which was once the largest sacred place in the whole region. Female shamans known as *gomiso* and *kamisama* used to train in the numerous huts and shrines that pepper the mountainside. Mount Iwaki was also seen as the home of oni at the time. It is therefore no surprise that the people living in the villages at the foot of this imposing and spiritual mountain have developed such a unique and close connection with its principal inhabitants.

Clarissa Combe is a third-year Coordinator for International Relations (CIR) placed in Aomori Prefecture. When she’s not horse-riding or hiking, she likes to travel and take photos of the beautiful sights of rural Japan. You can find her travel photography on Instagram at [@ontheedgeofforever](#).



Shikhambri Avasthi

ARTIST SPOTLIGHT



Shikhambri Avasthi (Ōsaka) interviewed by Jessica Craven (Saitama)

This month's featured artist has allowed her passion to carry her life down a bit more of an unconventional path! After her son was born a few years ago, Shikhambri Avasthi left her full-time corporate job, moved to Japan, and is living her dream of being an artist. She is already having a fair amount of commercial success, and she has also become a member of Women Artists Born Global Network (WABGNET), an organization with the mission to help empower women artists globally.

Rigulio Graak, the Founder of WABGNET, describes her work rather poetically:

“Watching Shikhambri paint the sea makes me think of the two Oceans, (the) Indian Ocean and (the) Pacific Ocean mixing. There is something hypnotic in the movement and flow—true passion. Everything else is stripped to minimal; only the canvas and the painting mediums stay.”

“Watching Shikhambri paint the sea makes me think of the two Oceans, (the) Indian Ocean and (the) Pacific Ocean mixing. There is something hypnotic in the movement and flow—true passion. Everything else is stripped to minimal; only the canvas and the painting mediums stay.

Certainly you can see the influences of both India and Japan in her color palette, linework, and references to natural elements. It's as if both countries merge together as one in her artwork like two waves crashing against and eventually flowing into each other. Read on to see her describe how she arrived at this point in her own words.

"Wave"





Though spontaneous, I think I look for rich texture, natural vibrancy, and depth. I love painting layer over layer, creating depth, and want my viewers to look up close and look for their own stories inside the painting.

J: Where are you from, how long have you been in Japan, and what made you decide to come here?

S: I am from New Delhi, India and I came to Japan in 2018 with my husband and now 2-year-old son. I was working as a Human Resource Manager with a lifestyle retail chain in India. In July of 2018, my son was born and at the same time my husband got an opportunity to work as an IT consultant for Universal Studios Japan. We took a leap of faith and moved to this beautiful country that is full of opportunities and a rich culture.

J: Tell us about your artwork.

S: I am an abstract artist and work in mixed media. I love building up from thin to thick paint, starting with drips and splashes of paint. This process helps me understand my intentions and build up my mood or thoughts.

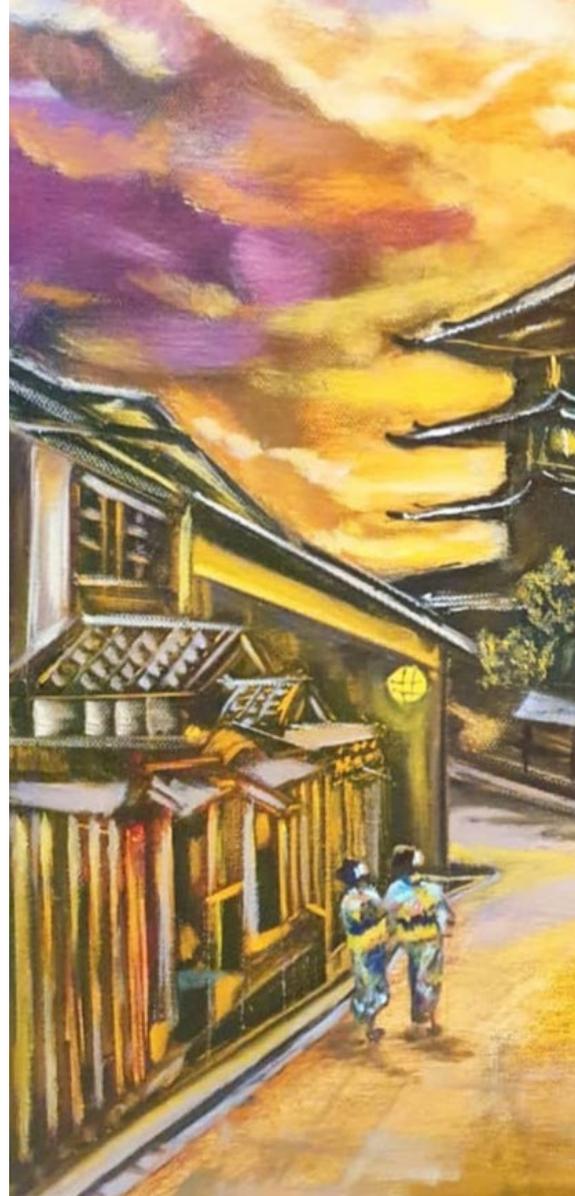
This style and medium syncs well with my own personal motto of “being in the moment and going with the flow in life.” While painting, I start with limited planning, allowing the painting to naturally take shape. My approach is to revel in the unknown. Painting in the moment, each brushstroke defines the next. That’s how I like to live my life, being fully alive for each and every moment. My painting process is full of curiosities rather than fears . . . I nurture it with the belief that it is going to be a remarkable piece that can connect and speak to its viewers.

Though spontaneous, I think I look for rich texture, natural vibrancy, and depth. I love painting layer over layer, creating depth, and want my viewers to look up close and look for their own stories inside the painting.

J: Where do you look for inspiration?

S: My artwork is majorly inspired by the depths of the sea, the fluidity of its waves, and the beauty of flowers around me. These are some special symbols that are very close to my heart. They inspire me to be bold, to be free, and to be purposeful.

There are some other things which I am sure are a source of inspiration to many artists like me—a good podcast, my favorite music, the sunset and sunrise . . . traveling with family, watching my son grow . . . sitting by the lake, walking on the beach, sitting quietly and pausing for a moment. These help get my creative juices flowing.



Soon I realized I needed to identify my own voice and inner voice. I was fortunate to sign up for the Mastery program at the Institute.



“Nihon: The Sun's Origin”



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unique art style
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itute in the U.S.



“Country Garden”

J: Do you have a “formal” art education, or how did you learn how to paint?

S: I always found myself painting since my childhood. I received my initial understanding of colors, pencils, and strokes from my mom and dad. They thoroughly encouraged me to draw and paint whatever and however I wanted to. I participated in many art competitions during my school years under the guidance of my parents. Winning an art award in school was such a big and positive motivation. I remember having a 24-colored pencil set back then when specific art supplies were not so easily available in my town, and my dad asked his friend in the US who was coming for a holiday to India to bring a 36-colored pencil set.

While art was always running through my blood, as I grew up I explored various art lessons and techniques through watching YouTube, buying art lessons provided by experts on Udemy, and learning from seasoned artists.

Finally, during my maternity leave, I had enough time on my hands and I dedicated it all to painting. I was painting everything from portraits to landscapes, using pencil, charcoal, oil, acrylic, and so on.

Soon I realized the need to identify my own unique art style and inner voice, and I was so fortunate to sign up for a year-long Mastery program with Milan Art Institute in the U.S. They really help me understand my inner calling, temperament, and personality. That's how I discovered that I love painting abstracts the most. Abstract art comes so naturally to me, making my art look effortless, and it is meaningful to me.

J: How has being in Japan influenced or changed your art or yourself? (Also, how has your color palette changed since coming here?)

S: I am extremely touched by the vibrant colors and scenic beauty in Japan. Nature in every season in Japan brings about inspiring beauty. Whenever I see a beautiful flower, waterfall, or mountain during my travels, I capture it on my camera.

In addition, I have experienced a smooth transition of all four seasons in Japan that deeply inspired me to be mindful of color stories, color transitions, and gentle shifts on the canvas.

J: Have you ever exhibited artwork in Japan or abroad? (If so, where?)

S: Yes, I have participated in various group and solo art exhibitions, both virtual and onsite. I am always seeking new opportunities to meet new people and to keep myself surrounded by art in any way.

Here is an overview of my exhibitions so far in Japan:

December, 2019

Solo Art Show at YOLO Base, Ōsaka

April 4-14, 2020

Group Art Exhibition in ART & Selection Gallery, Nakazaki, Ōsaka

June 1-30, 2020

Solo Art Show in Lingua world café, Ōsaka

January 8, 2021

NEXT group art exhibition at Igu_mzart gallery, Ōsaka (My painting "Singing Joy" won the People's Choice award in this exhibition.)

February 12, 2021

Virtual Art Exhibition with WABGNET, an organization that aims at empowering women.

I am a registered artist with a renowned rental art company, Casie, in Japan. Around 20 of my paintings are distributed by Casie. A few of them have already been sold and the rest are displayed as rental property at various locations across Japan.

Along with this, I have done quite a few pieces for friends or as commissions through customers both in Japan and abroad. I love recording someone's dreams, stories, and thoughts onto the canvas. I also believe that



"Spring Up"

original art can be owned by anyone who wants it at an affordable price, especially in the current era.

My next art exhibition is a group exhibition in Hyōgo Prefectural Museum of Art in July.

J: Is there anything else you want people to know?

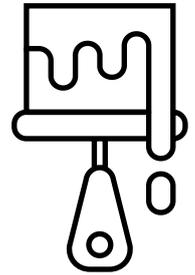
S: Yes, I have a message: I feel it's really important to discover the purpose of your life . . . the bigger objective . . . something that always keeps you curious and hopeful. Art gives me true happiness, and so all of my free time is dedicated to art and creative living. Being in Japan has proved to be icing on the cake, as I love its beauty,



warmth, and culture. A part of Japan will always stay alive in my art no matter where I head next.

You can find my art and connect with me on my Instagram page [@Shikhambri](#).

Shikhambri Avasti is an abstract artist from India living in Japan. After the birth of her son in 2018, she left her full-time corporate job and decided to pursue her dream of being an artist. Though her work is minimal and spontaneous, it is rich in texture and exudes natural vibrancy and depth. Her other hobbies include underwater diving, and she finds a lot of her inspiration in the sea. You can see more of her art on her Instagram page [here](#).



*Jessica is a fourth-year American JET from Arkansas state now living in Saitama. She is the art section editor for **CONNECT**. On weekends she enjoys hiking in remote areas of Saitama or taking day-trips to Tōkyō. When not adventuring, she can be found reading or creating her own artwork, which can be seen on her Instagram [@jessica_craven_art](#).*

Painting of plum blossoms





Inimitably Eiko

A Look Back At
The Costume Designs
of Ishioka Eiko

Rhiannon Haseltine (Hyōgo)

There are two common themes to the work of Ishioka Eiko: “big” and “red.” This is, of course, a massive oversimplification of her decades of legendary design work. In her early graphic design through to her later costumework, Eiko (as she preferred to be called) favoured boldness and intensity. She aimed, too, for timelessness—not in the sense of classic simplicity or minimalism, but in evoking both the future and past at once. Her ingenuity suggested a future not yet known; her use of the grotesque and erotic appealed to the most primitive parts of human emotion. And then there was the red, her signature colour—one a collaborator described to be as “strong, intense, [and] brilliant”[1] as Eiko herself. In a world that so often teaches women to make themselves small and unheard, Eiko and her work have commanded attention and space from the start.



"Can West Wear East?" Promotional Poster on the Mot Art Museum Website found [here](#).

A Life in Four Chapters

Eiko, born in Tōkyō in 1938, began her career in graphic design at cosmetic giant Shiseido in the 1960s. Her father, otherwise encouraging of her creativity, had strongly discouraged it; being a graphic designer himself, he understood the hostility she would face as a woman. Indeed, Eiko had to insist even in her interview that she receive equal treatment to her male colleagues. Young women at the time were seeing a sudden increase in their power as consumers, and Eiko's ad campaigns called to this newfound independence; empowering women who had been brought up "to listen rather than speak"[2] to see themselves as the directors of their own lives and experiences.

The women Eiko featured in her campaigns were, invariably, "big, big, big"[2] in both presence and visual impact, frequently nude, and emblazoned with slogans like "Girls Be Ambitious!" and "Don't Stare at the Naked; Be Naked"[1]. She was known to feature models from India, Morocco, and Kenya, presenting a striking new ideal of beauty to a country notorious for its exaltation of porcelain-white skin.

A favoured muse of Eiko's was American actress Faye Dunaway, pictured here in the 1979 poster "Can West Wear East?," produced for department store Parco. Dunaway, clad in robes of shiny, silvery satin and an exaggerated headdress reminiscent of a nun's cornette, stands (with wing-like seraphic, voluminous sleeves) between

two young Japanese children. The little girls, Eiko's nieces, have eyes daubed with red shadow and wear long, full red skirts tied at the chest that call to mind the *hakama* trousers worn by *miko* (shrine maidens). The effect is heavily evocative of religious iconography—a dreamlike image seeming simultaneously futuristic and primal. This seamless blend of western and eastern cultural motifs with archetypal imagery can be seen time and time again through Eiko's work.



Free-use image of Ishioka Eiko found on Wikipedia

Can West Wear East?

Fearful of becoming stuck in a creative rut, Eiko left Japan for Manhattan in 1980;—a 15-month hiatus followed before she turned her attention to the cinematic and theatrical worlds of production and costume design. Between budgets, practicalities, and conflicting creative visions—not to mention the pressures from above to not stray too far from the profitability of safe, mainstream ideas—design for film and theatre is usually an exercise in compromise. Director Francis Ford Coppola, who worked with Eiko on *Bram Stoker's Dracula* (1992), wrote: "When you make a movie, you don't get exactly what you want—you never do—you get percentages[.] Except for Eiko. She got what she wanted." [1]

Eiko's unyielding determination to realize her design ideas exactly as she envisioned them only made her more desirable to collaborate with. She was sought out time after time specifically for her uniquely surreal artistic vision; director Tarsem Singh stated that he "fell down on [his] knees" to get her to work with him. [1]

The themes of eroticism and spirituality evident in Eiko's earlier work were also infused in her costume designs, from the gothic sexuality and decadence of *Bram Stoker's Dracula* to the ominous Pagan mysticism of opera *Der Ring des Nibelungen* (*The Ring of Nibelung, or The Ring Cycle*). She played with gender, cultural influences, and the human body itself, and also liberally incorporated animal motifs, historical elements, and references to other artistic works, seeking to visualize those most primal and visceral parts of the human psyche and experience. Her costumes reflected this even in their construction—being sometimes impractically heavy or otherwise uncomfortable to wear but always serving to represent the character's psychology. Jennifer Lopez, while filming Singh's *The Cell* (2000), requested that the hard plastic collar Eiko had designed for her be made more comfortable, only for Eiko to respond, "No—you're supposed to be tortured." [1] And although safe in practicality,

Eiko's spiked, angular costumes for the Cirque du Soleil acrobatic show *Varekai* (2002) were designed to provoke a sense of fear and danger in the audience.

"It was sometimes difficult for actors to wear Eiko's costumes[.] They were heavy and constricting, and it could take three people to carry a coat. But look at the film in the end."
-Tarsem Singh, 2012. [1]

If it was a risk to hire "a weirdo outsider with no roots in the business" [1], as Coppola described Eiko, it was certainly one that paid off. Eiko's innovation and unique imagination were handsomely rewarded, first in 1992 with an Academy Award for Costume Design (*Bram Stoker's Dracula*), then in 1998 with two Tony Awards for Stage and Costume Design (*M. Butterfly*), and finally with a posthumous Academy Award nomination in 2012 for Costume Design (*Mirror Mirror*). Even those projects that proved less popular with audiences and critics could not be faulted on the basis of Eiko's work—notorious Broadway failure *Spider-man: Turn Off The Dark* (2011) still saw praise for her surreal, sculptural costume design.

Blood, Sweat, and Tears

Analysing Eiko's entire body of costume work in-depth would fill this entire issue of **CONNECT**, so let's focus on the two films that earned her the attention of the Academy: *Bram Stoker's Dracula* and *Mirror Mirror*.

Bram Stoker's Dracula, conceptualized by Coppola as "an opera with sex and violence" [3], took its sartorial influences primarily from Victorian garb—but by no means exclusively. This is evident in perhaps the most famous costume of the movie: the sumptuous, billowing scarlet cloak worn by Dracula (played by Gary Oldman). With gold phoenix and dragon embroidery on silk of Eiko's signature red, the dynastic Chinese inspiration is clear. The rich fabric and trailing length exude power, wealth,



“It was sometimes difficult for actors to wear Eiko’s costumes[.] They were heavy and constricting, and it could take three people to carry a coat. But look at the film in the end.”

— **Tarsem Singh**, 2012.

and sensuality, and—of course—the bloody colour evokes vampirism without resorting to more well-worn costume tropes.

Another particularly enduring image from the movie is that of Lucy's (Sadie Frost), post-vampiric transformation. Her enormous lace collar calls immediately to mind a frill-necked lizard's mid-threat display, evoking ideas of danger and cold bloodedness. She wears what had been her pre-transformation wedding dress—a shapeless, lacy bohemian gown. Pre-transformation Lucy is a flighty, flirty socialite, quite in violation of Victorian social norms. Her seductive nature is represented with sheer fabrics, bare shoulders, and even cleavage—gasp, shock, *quelle horreur*. . . . Her later fate is hinted at with reptilian touches, such as the embroidered snakes patterning one of her gowns.

Flipping to the other side of the Madonna-whore coin, Winona Ryder's Mina is the poster child for Victorian femininity—a pure and innocent ingenue clad in soft greens and leafy motifs. Given that she is the (spoiler alert) reincarnation of Dracula's centuries-lost love Elisabeta, the crown of acanthus leaves she wears in one scene is a nice touch, as acanthus symbolizes immortality and eternal life.

Mirror Mirror, in stark contrast, has the timeless fantasy feel of “a true fairytale”[3], a delightful mix of eras. Costume elements were chosen not for historical accuracy but instead for establishing character. Snow White (Lily Collins) appears first in pastel colours and festooned with flowers, the bust-flattening 16th century bodice and 19th century poofy sleeves serving to emphasize her innocence and childlike nature. This is further emphasized later in her ballgown of purest white with angelic wings and a swan headdress.

The swan imagery works primarily to underscore the contrast between the understated elegance of Snow White and the extravagant vanity of the evil Queen Clementianna (Julia Roberts). The Queen's crimson ballgown features silvery peacock motifs and an absurd feathered collar. Her costumes throughout the





movie pull mostly upon the fashions of Tudor and Elizabethan nobility, with huge collars, voluminous sleeves, and skirts up to eight feet in diameter. As it was throughout history, this ostentatiousness is a demonstration of immense power and wealth—a silent message to potential enemies that the Queen is not one to be trifled with.

Timeless, Original, Revolutionary

In both her graphic design and costume design, Eiko viewed art's purpose as not for its own sake but for the visual communication of a message. Eiko described it as "a language to convey oneself."^[4] Nevertheless, collaboration, rather than limiting her self-expression, opened new avenues for the realization of her vivid ideas.

Eiko died, before the release of *Mirror Mirror*, of pancreatic cancer at age 73. Singh reported her as being seriously ill during filming, but no less intense and dedicated for it: "Her work kept her alive—it was her reason for being."^[1]

Eiko recounted once being told by a male designer that she was only famous because she was a woman in a male-dominated field, implying that her work was otherwise insignificant. ^[1] The body of work she left behind proves this statement laughably false. Her bold, visceral design language was inimitable, going far beyond anything expected or safe. She made her big, red mark on the design world, and it's one that won't be forgotten.

Sources

1. <http://bit.ly/2ONhZwT>
2. <http://bit.ly/3csmLb9>
3. <http://bit.ly/38yJxgi>
4. <https://bit.ly/2NcAJoS>

Rhiannon recently returned to her hometown of York, UK, after spending 2.5 years on the JET Program. She has a degree in Costume Design & Making, a fact that still surprises her given how bad she is at sewing. She enjoys traumatizing herself with horror movies and misses Sushiro more than words can say.

Top photograph: Photo found on Mot Art Museum website - Eiko Ishioka, Costume design for the movie *Mirror Mirror* (Directed by Tarsem Singh, 2012) ©2012-2020 UV RML NL Assets LLC. All Rights Reserved.

Bottom photograph: Photo found on Mot Art Museum website - Eiko Ishioka, Costume design for the movie, *Mirror Mirror* (Directed by Tarsem Singh, 2012) ©2012-2020 UV RML NL Assets LLC. All Rights Reserved.

LIFESTYLE

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"Disasters are an opportunity for the worst of humanity. And the best." — A.G. Riddle

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"We tell ourselves stories in order to live."
— Joan Didion

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WHOLESOME TALES FROM JAPAN



Foreign Residents tell their Stories

Clare Braganza (Fukushima)

Some of the authors in this piece have chosen to shorten or omit their names for privacy reasons.

Life abroad is hard, particularly these days. Culture shock and homesickness can rear their heads any time and be a drain on our

wellbeing. That is why this article is devoted only to the positive. From search parties in school to receiving an umbrella from a stranger, foreign residents in Japan have sent us their most heartwarming stories. Read on for little doses of happiness.



WARM ACTS OF WINTER

Anonymous (Gunma 2015-2020)

Gunma gets ridiculously cold in the winter. So much so that the hallways of the school might as well be freezers. During my first winter in Japan, I was conducting speaking tests out in the hall (so not to disrupt the class). I casually mentioned to my Japanese Teacher of English (JTE) it was pretty cold out there.

Fast forward to lunch time, I stayed back in a classroom to discuss lessons with another coworker. Little did I know, my absence from the teacher's room was quickly noticed. The JTE from before mentioned that I had said I was cold . . . this apparently caused the PE teacher to worry that I was in some far corner of the school dying of hypothermia. So he led a search party through the school for me. Five minutes later, I meander back into the teacher's room and everyone is surprised and relieved that I'm not dead. They had to call the search party back over the intercom. Embarrassing for me, but also super heartwarming that they cared so much for my well-being.

Anonymous (Niigata)

During the first week of January there was a major snowstorm that left my town covered in over a meter of snow overnight. While I was struggling to dig my car out, a neighbor who just finished clearing her car came over and helped me with mine. She spent over 20 minutes helping me shovel snow and made sure I was able to safely drive out afterwards.

Kirsty (Saitama)

I am not used to snow; it doesn't snow where I am from. So when I was confronted with my first serious snowfall here, I had a lot of trouble trying to walk in the snow.

The next day the snow had begun to melt and ice over and was even more difficult. I was slowly, gingerly inching along a path to school, clinging to a rail on the side. An elderly Japanese woman saw me and asked "*daijōbu?*" (Are you OK?). I gave a quiet *daijōbu* back. She looked harder and asked a little harder "*daijōbu?*" I nodded and said quietly "*daijōbu.*" She shook her head, held out her hand flat and said "*chotto matte*" (Please wait). She then gave me a lesson on how to walk safely in the snow and ice. She understood I was very much not *daijōbu* despite what I'd told her and was insistent on helping me. And yes, I got to school safely, in part thanks to her.

Yaroslava Timoshenko (Ishikawa 2014-2016)

I was up in the mountains with some friends in the winter and forgot to turn off my car's lights before going exploring (I had them on because we'd been going through a series of tunnels). Coming back in the early evening, I found my car's battery dead. It was getting colder and darker, and we were about two hours from home. Luckily, I found a small restaurant and, although it was closed for the day, the owner called her son to drive down and help us and gave us some snacks while we waited. Really turned around a possibly dire situation!

GIFT GIVING

Joe Ashley Hardy (Fukushima)

The *inaka/tokai* (rural/urban) divide is real. Whenever my work schedule shows my inaka school is coming up, I know to be ready with small gifts such as biscuits or tea bags, as I almost always leave with a surplus of goods. From leftover *kyūshoku* (lunch) to homegrown fruits and veg, something is usually left by my desk with a nice little note of “持って帰ってね〜” (Take it home). It is a trade relationship that we have maintained for over two years, and I always leave with a smile noting how peculiar a situation it is.

Jo Dennis (Kumamoto)

I teach a friend of mine English after work once a week for “free.” I say “free” since she insists on bringing over gifts every once in a while to pay for her lessons, like an arm’s length of ginger root, a pink turtleneck sweater, or a kilo of rice.

Sharré Bakker (Nagasaki 2017-2018)

When I was in Nagasaki, the local landscaper would always greet me as I passed on my way to work. One time he mentioned he liked Ghibli and I told him I did as well. The following week he gave me a little Ghibli-themed gift bag. <3

Sara Atwood (Hyōgo)

One day, I decided to walk home instead of taking the bus. It had been cloudy all day, but I hoped the rain would hold out. Unfortunately it didn’t. When I was walking up a hill, a tiny old man with an umbrella was walking down. He approached me, asking if I understood Japanese. When I said “a little,” he proceeded to tell me he would give me an umbrella. He asked me to follow him to his house just around the corner, which surprised me at first. But as he was quite small, elderly, and had a limp, I felt pretty safe.

We walked to his house, which was as he said, literally around the corner. It only took about a minute, but he still somehow managed to chat all about his grandkids on the way. When we got to his house, he rang the doorbell so his wife could meet us. He asked her to bring me their brand new vinyl umbrella. They told me to keep it and to be careful not to catch a cold. They were incredibly cute. I still use that umbrella. They didn’t tell me their names at the time, but thanks to the hanko stamp on the handle, I know I am indebted to the Fujimotos.



Annelise Wilp (Saitama 2018-2020)

The school nurse invited me and some other Assistant Language Teachers for dinner at her parents' house. It was some of the most delicious food I've had in Japan—nothing beats homemade! It was great to see an elderly couple so interested in foreigners. When we left, the *ojiisan* (older man) gave us some vegetables from his garden. This night was one of my most special memories in Japan.

Jennifer (Kōchi)

I work at an agricultural school. When the pandemic first got bad and they shut down classes in April 2020, the students couldn't come and plant the crops they needed for their classes, which have a specific planting and harvesting schedule. So all the teachers got together, even those with absolutely no agricultural experience or knowledge, and pitched in. We put on our old clothes, got some boots, gloves and sunscreen, and got to work! I learned how to use a hoe, turn soil, plant and harvest crops, and even tend to some flowers. My favorite was planting corn. After spending a day in the hot sun, we were wiping sweat and our arms were drooping, but we felt so accomplished! We all had *nabe* out of a huge pot. When it came time to harvest and sell the crops later on, we each got some for free. It really helped me appreciate teamwork, agricultural knowledge, and the way our food is made. It was also a great bonding experience that I'd never have had if school hadn't been closed. I'll never forget it! If they need any extra hands this year, I'd love to help out.

Anonymous (Kyōto 2014-15)

This is outside of my prefecture, but I was temporarily on the island of Amami, and the inclusivity here is something I've never experienced in Kyōto. I joined a fitness club and couldn't even go that regularly due to work time constraints, but they made the effort to invite me to one of their houses for a Christmas gathering, which meant a lot because I was new to the island and honestly felt kind of lonely during the holiday season. Their treatment of me didn't change despite/because I'm a foreigner, and I felt very . . . at home, on this island. They say you get back what you put into the universe, and I would say on this island (of Amami), and perhaps the rest of Japan as well, it's very true.

Meg Luedtke (Fukui)

Occasionally I go out and get treated to a meal by one of my JTEs and her daughter to help her practice English for college. Because of my specific dietary needs, it can be a bit difficult to find restaurants for me to eat at, but through a series of connections we have found one place that's quickly become a favorite of mine, whether I go there with co-workers, friends, or by myself. The place is a small curry shop in the neighboring city. Over my multiple visits I've made, I've gotten to know the owner pretty well. He has always been very kind and accommodating to me and of my diet, going out of his way to make special batches of rice or curry that is just for me. He's even taken to calling me "Princess Megan" when I walk in the door, born out of a joke we had due to my pretty limited diet needs. He often will send me a Line just to check in, wish me happy holidays, or invite me to the various BBQs and wine bars happening in the city. He's kinda become like my local Japanese grandpa. 😊

COMMUNITY SPIRIT

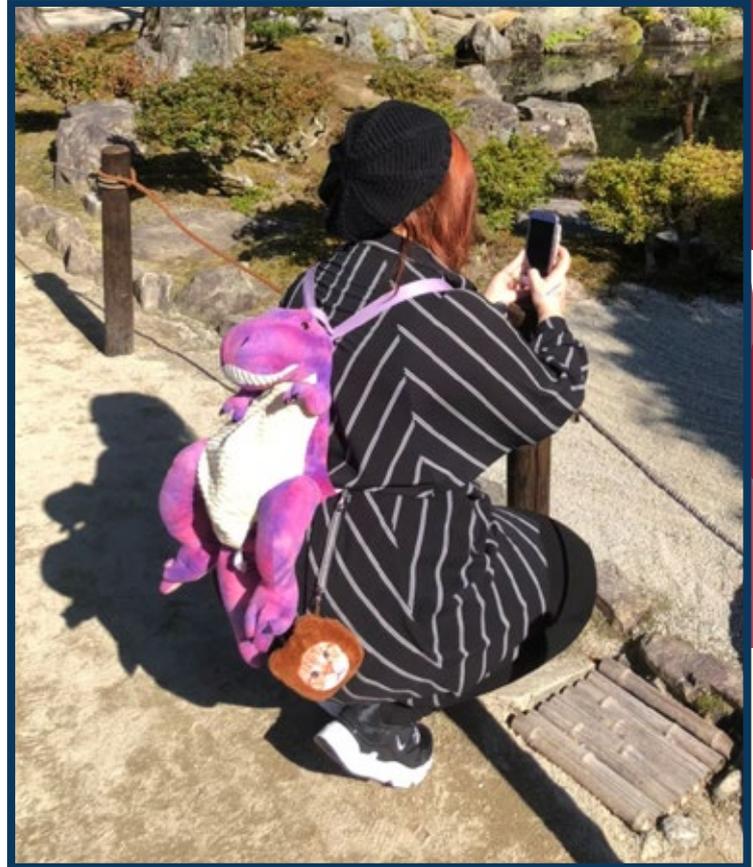
Katie Sampaio (Saitama)

I have a backpack that is in the shape of a dinosaur that has a huge grin! When I wear him, I will now and again feel a little tug. When I look, it's always a little old lady that comments how cute it is. The looks on their faces are the best! It also happens with kids! I've literally been followed by little ones in stores because they can't get enough of my bag! Bart the dinosaur is on **Instagram**.

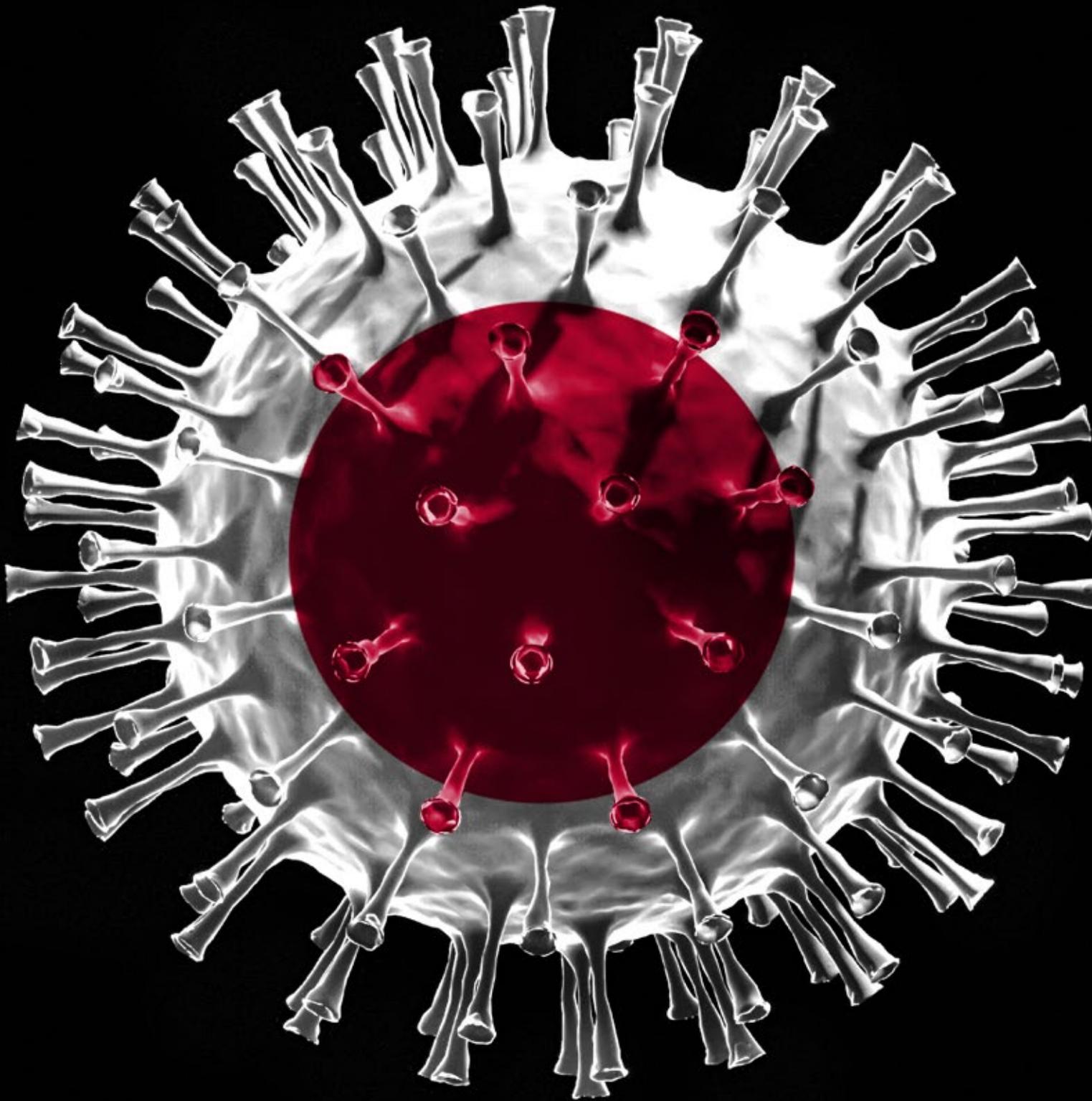
Rowan Upstone (Gunma)

When I first arrived in Japan, everything was disorganized. I'd never been to Japan, so I figured I should at least see the place before starting work. This was just in case I hated it and wanted to bail. I decided on seeing Tōkyō and Sendai. To avoid taking all my possessions to Sendai, I figured I'd use Kuroneko (a shipping company) to send my stuff to Gunma ahead of me.

When I arrived at a local *conbini* (convenience store) asking them in broken Japanese for directions to the Kuroneko office, they asked me what I wanted to do. After explaining, the clerk left his post, walked me back to my accommodation, took one of my very heavy bags, took it to the local Kuroneko office and helped me fill out the paperwork all without prompting. I was just expecting directions and didn't even ask for anything more. I was so grateful for that. Gave me a great impression of Japan and Lawsons from week one.



*Clare is a second-year JET in the inaka of Fukushima, but she's originally from England. When not editing **CONNECT's** Wellness section, she spends her days reading fantasy books, writing stories, and hiking up mountains in northern Japan. You can follow her travels and own tales of positivity [here](#).*



EARLY BIRD GETS THE WORST

CATCHING SUSPECTED COVID-19 DURING JAPAN'S FIRST WAVE

“Robin” interviewed by Clare Braganza, *CONNECT*'s Wellness Editor

The names of some subjects in this piece have been changed for privacy reasons.

Most of us have lived with the realities of COVID-19 for over a year now. With almost 500,000 cases in Japan to date (1), many prefectures have introduced preventative measures, helplines, and increased testing centres. But a year ago, Japan was less prepared. For an American couple who live and work in Japan, when one of them developed symptoms in March 2020, they found that access to testing and healthcare was far from easy. This is an interview with Robin, whose husband “Peter” suffered from an illness a professional suspected was COVID-19 and is still recovering a year later.

Just as the first wave of cases began in Japan, Peter developed the telltale symptoms and followed protocol.

“Our company had already put in place a checklist to list symptoms and a tracking chart we could fill out,” Robin tells me. “So we were required to take four to five days off at the first sign of symptoms (stuck cough, fever, trouble breathing).” From there, she says it felt like running “headfirst into a brick wall.”

When Peter’s symptoms didn’t abate and he lost his sense of taste as well, their company contacted the health

center on their behalf. “We had heard we might be shipped off to a quarantine location immediately,” Robin says, “so we packed our bags and waited.” But the health center gave a frustrating response (paraphrased from their translator): “You have all the symptoms, but if you don’t have it for real and we send you to the test center, you’re sure to catch it, so it’s better for you to stay home and not be tested.”

"YOU HAVE ALL THE SYMPTOMS, BUT IF YOU DON'T HAVE IT FOR REAL AND WE SEND YOU TO THE TEST CENTER, YOU'RE SURE TO CATCH IT, SO IT'S BETTER FOR YOU TO STAY HOME AND NOT BE TESTED."

Even though Peter couldn’t be tested, his symptoms were severe enough that they sought hospital treatment. Again, they met difficulty. “We were told we should go to the local hospital if it was unbearable without treatment, but but because of his symptoms, we couldn’t go inside. In fact, they said Peter

should get a PCR test, but after calling our work to check [. . .] this, once again, we were told that he couldn’t be tested. There was also some confusion,” Robin continues. “It seemed like they were saying Peter needed a doctor’s recommendation to be tested. Meanwhile, the doctor was saying he wouldn’t see Peter without a test!” Although the doctors were doing their best with what they had, without a test, Peter couldn’t see them.

In the end, the hospital gave them some medication and left Peter to recover at home. Robin describes how they could only get a few days' medicine at a time, "so I had to drive Peter to the hospital, sit him in the parking lot, and go in on his behalf." Peter had to be there so they would accept his insurance card, so the staff had to come out to the parking lot to see him. Although the staff were patient and kind, Robin notes that taking Peter out during recovery "was probably a terrible thing to do." At times, "he literally could barely stand."

Japan is a developed country with a high standard of healthcare (2), so why did it fail Peter? In hindsight, Robin explains how "the biggest problem was logistics. At the time, there was one test center [and] the location was kept a secret." There were helplines at local hospitals, "but all three [. . .] simply referred us to the other hospitals."

WHEN WE REALIZED THIS, WE STARTED TO DESPAIR."

Later, she says how "it would have been better if testing had been available sooner at all major hospitals." These days, test centers are openly advertised at Robin's local hospitals, but last April, the health system wasn't prepared.

The other problem was "Peter's chest X-ray. There was no scarring, so they constantly said that was 'proof' he was COVID-free, even though at the time, descriptions of the virus's manifestation were known to widely vary. It was like they got hung up on this one 'rule' and decided nothing else need apply." Robin describes their fear of passing it onto their schools. "We work with really

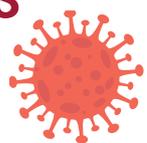
little kids. If the city hadn't shut down, they could have been at risk if Peter or I were forced to go back to work or lose our positions." Fortunately, schools were closed at this time.

Two weeks later, Peter was deemed non-contagious and allowed a breathing test, then a sputum test. Sputum tests check for bronchitis and whooping cough, but it detected neither. The doctor "expected that whatever was still making him sick was embedded in the lung tissue and not the bronchial tubes [. . .] but there was no way to test without a biopsy." At that time, the PCR test wasn't readily offered to people once their two weeks of suspected COVID-19 were up, so in the end, the doctor said (in Japanese): "It's best if we say it's whooping cough because if your coworkers think you had COVID-19, it will only mean trouble for you." Robin notes that whooping cough would explain why she had no symptoms, but without a test, whether Peter had whooping cough or COVID-19 remains unknown.

It wasn't over. When Peter eventually returned to work, "he nearly collapsed.

IT TURNED OUT HE'D BROKEN HIS BREASTBONE AND RIBS FROM ALL THE COUGHING.

The school didn't want him to call an ambulance from the school (so the kids wouldn't panic) and sent him to the apartment with a coworker, who was





kind enough to drive us [to the hospital].” Once again, receiving treatment wasn’t simple. “The doctor at the ER thought Peter had had a heart attack, and after he was stabilized, suggested Peter not eat ‘karaage’ [fried chicken], which was a bit insulting. The doctor hadn’t even looked at the X-ray.” Robin had to push her husband in his wheelchair around the hospital to get a second opinion from another doctor. This doctor “was able to get a chest brace to hold the ribs and breastbone in place to heal.”

The illness left Peter with cough asthma (asthma triggered by various irritants, such as pollen during hay fever season), and the lack of a PCR test just made things harder. “Even if there was relief aid to someone

with the virus,” Robin says, “we can’t prove anything.” It also means that some doctors treat his condition with scepticism. Peter “had trouble breathing one day and went to the local doctor. [He told him] it was all ‘psychosomatic’ and therefore [. . .] all in his head.”

In the aftermath, Peter also began suffering from PTSD. Robin says that he gets “panic attacks when something triggers the memory. Sometimes, we can’t even figure out what the trigger is, so we’ve had to hire a counselor online to try to fix the problem. [. . .] I never know when something’s going to lay him out on the floor unable to breathe. He can’t even watch a movie or read a book if it makes his heart race.”



Their quality of life is not like it was before, and they are in the difficult position of being contract workers. “One of our managers basically told Peter at his annual review that [he] had to ‘not so much as sniffle’ for the rest of the year, because the collapse at the school had convinced the Board of Education that he was somehow not up to snuff,” Robin says. “The manager wasn’t mean about it, but it really made me wish I could call up a union or something. Even if the manager didn’t think of it as a threat,

it pretty much sounded like the [Board of Education] wanted Peter to be a superhero and work himself to death to ‘prove’ he [wouldn’t] get sick again.”

If you are worried about ending up in a similar situation to Robin’s husband, she has some advice:

1. Network: “What helped the most was our local coordinator and our local friends. We had fellow Assistant Language Teachers (ALTs) willing to do



grocery trips for us, and having someone go with you to the doctor who speaks Japanese makes a world of a difference.” Also, express interest to coworkers ahead of time: “Oh, I’ve been thinking of seeing a dentist, etc.”

2. Plan for the language barrier: “Getting a referral to a larger hospital is best because there’s more likely to be someone who speaks English or other foreign languages, but the International Center in our city has volunteers who can come with enough advance notice, so I recommend ALTs look for those kinds of resources ahead of any emergency.”

3. Be prepared for disrespect: “Brace yourself for a GP who might be a jerk. Don’t act like a jerk too, but be super polite and get

some Japanese under your belt and, whenever possible, bring a Japanese ally who can speak up for you. When we were trying to find an English-speaking GP to recommend a psychologist, for example, the doctor we found told Peter to ‘go back home if you’re so stressed out.’ Don’t be shocked if this happens to you.” (There are, of course, some lovely doctors, too. Robin says that many doctors and support staff were helpful and understanding.)

4. Prepare beforehand: “Websites like this **multilingual medical questionnaire** and **Dr. Passport** are great resources to have on hand. Printing out a bilingual medical form and filling it in before you arrive is super helpful to the front desk staff, especially if you’re not used to visiting hospitals.”

A year on from the first development of Peter’s symptoms, Robin reflects on how precarious his situation was. “I don’t know what Peter would have done if he was here alone. [He] was told not to call an ambulance. What would he have done if he couldn’t breathe? At times, he could barely talk!” The most infuriating part: “the excuse that, ‘Well, you have all the symptoms, but we don’t want to test you because you could catch the virus.’” Even if everyone was doing their best, “while logistics got in the way, [. . .] that kind of reasoning just seems like reckless disregard for someone’s safety. You read about the virus getting worse after four or five days and going from 0 to death in 48 hours. What would we have done if Peter had had that condition?”

“There weren’t enough resources in place, and there wasn’t enough care given to the variety of [possible] symptoms. With a deadly virus, there should have been no room for error. Better safe than sorry.”

SOURCES

1. **Japan Coronavirus: 438,956** [Worldometer](#)
2. **16 Pros and Cons of the Japanese Healthcare System**

*Clare is a second-year JET in Fukushima and the Wellness Editor of **CONNECT**.*

Omoroi Life:

Connecting Through Sports

An Interview with George Borden

George Borden (Ōsaka) interviewed by Kayla Francis (Tōkyō)

Photos: Omoroi Life

Omoroi Life's goal is for people to be able to meet others, make friends, have fun, and enjoy life!

Here at **CONNECT**, we understand how difficult it can be to settle in Japan, especially if you do not speak Japanese. Luckily, there are many organisations out there that are committed to making socialising that little bit easier. For everyone lucky enough to be living in Ōsaka, Omoroi Life is worth checking out. We interviewed the organiser George Borden to find out everything you need to know about Ōsaka's best-kept secret.

K: How would you describe Omoroi Life? What's the story behind the name?

G: Omoroi Life's goal is for people to be able to meet others, make friends,

have fun, and enjoy life! Unfortunately, there is not such an interesting story behind the name. One day, I asked my Japanese co-worker if there is an interesting word that describes something "fun" in Japanese. Being born and raised "Ōsaka-jin," he immediately replied, "*omoroi*". . . it snowballed from there.

K: When was it started and why?

G: I guess Omoroi Life is basically just shaped after my own personality and interests. I LOVE playing sports, traveling, eating good food, meeting cool and interesting people, etc. I was transferred down from Tōkyō about five years ago, but wanted to play sports and meet new people. In Tōkyō, I was quite active in basketball, futsal and rock climbing . . . but unfortunately, when I came to Ōsaka, I could not find any groups, so I simply decided to do it myself. It started with trying to gather people to play futsal, but when folks continually showed interest and were continually asking if I "offered other sports". . . it gradually grew into what it is today.



omoroï life

“90% of our current members originally joined by themselves...”





“Always a great time, hosted by a great dude who always tries to include everyone.”

— Dan (USA) — basketball member

“Omoroi Life is the best way to have fun and be healthy during your stay in Japan!”

— Marcelo (Brazil) — futsal member



“Through this group, you can make friends of various nationalities and ages.”

— Haruka (Japan) — volleyball member



K: What kind of events do you host?

G: We offer a large variety of sports-related events (at various levels of play), but we also offer Language Cafes, Social Events, as well as Food and Drinking Tours. Unfortunately, due to the corona situation, we have paused all events except for sports.

K: What sports events do you host?

G: Currently, our primary sports are badminton, basketball, futsal, table tennis, and volleyball, but routinely, we offer other sports, such as dodgeball, yoga, ultimate frisbee, etc. . . .

K: How long are the events?

G: Sports events are typically three hours long.

K: What is the typical capacity of each event?

G: Most events are mid-sized (about 15 to 30 players). We want to accommodate as many people as possible, but at the same time, allow enough “playing time” for each individual.

K: Can novices join?

G: Of course, we welcome everyone (all levels)! We also have some more experienced players who kindly are willing to offer advice and assistance to anyone in need.

K: Do people come by themselves?

G: Most definitely! Actually, maybe around 90% of our current members originally joined by themselves, but then quickly made friends and continue to join to this day.

K: I notice that you only have sports events currently running. Is this due to COVID-19?

G: Yes. It’s been difficult during this time, as we assume it has been for all types of social groups and businesses. But following the Ōsaka City guidelines, gyms are still accessible to the public, so we still offer sports.

K: How does your organisation stay safe from COVID-19?

G: Of course, we are advising all participants to follow standard disease prevention guidelines (ie. hand sanitation, wearing masks, refrain from participating if feeling ill, etc). We also have reduced the maximum occupancy numbers for each event.

K: Who runs the events? (Volunteers or paid professionals?)

G: I guess the best answer for this question is like-minded sports enthusiasts. All of the organizers love their sport and help out when they can.

K: How many volunteers/people do you have working for you?

G: Currently, we have about 10 sports managers who lead and run our sports events.

K: What are the costs? I saw that there's no membership fee, but members pay at the door. What is the average price?

G: Yah, we want to make sport as easily accessible as possible to everyone (ranging from beginners and more advanced players). In addition, we aim to not be an exclusive or closed circle/group . . . so everyone is welcome. On average, one three-hour sports session will cost about 500 yen/participant.

K: What would you like to say to people who are still a little hesitant about joining?

G: Please do not worry, we want to make sports accessible to everyone. Wanting to try something new, trying to get in shape or just meet new friends . . . together, let's be healthy and have fun!

K: What are your future plans for the organisation?

G: We would like to offer more sports and events, but given the current situation, we may need to put things on hold for a bit. We actually were thinking of expanding into Tōkyō,

but then corona happened . . . maybe after it's all over. . . .

K: Do you have any advice for people starting their own organisation in Japan?

G: Love what you are doing and the product you are offering!

To get involved or find out more about Omoroi Life, check out their [website](#).

Originally from California, George Borden now works as an architectural planner for a Japanese company in Ōsaka, but in his spare time, he is also the founder and head of Omoroi Life. He loves the outdoors, being active, has been a longtime sports enthusiast, and loves to share his passion for sports with those around him.

*Kayla Francis is a Tōkyō JET from London, UK. She is also **CONNECT**'s Sports Editor. When she is not cooking and eating too much, she can be found reading or staring at her yoga mat.*



“We want to make sport as easily accessible as possible to everyone (ranging from beginners and more advanced players).”

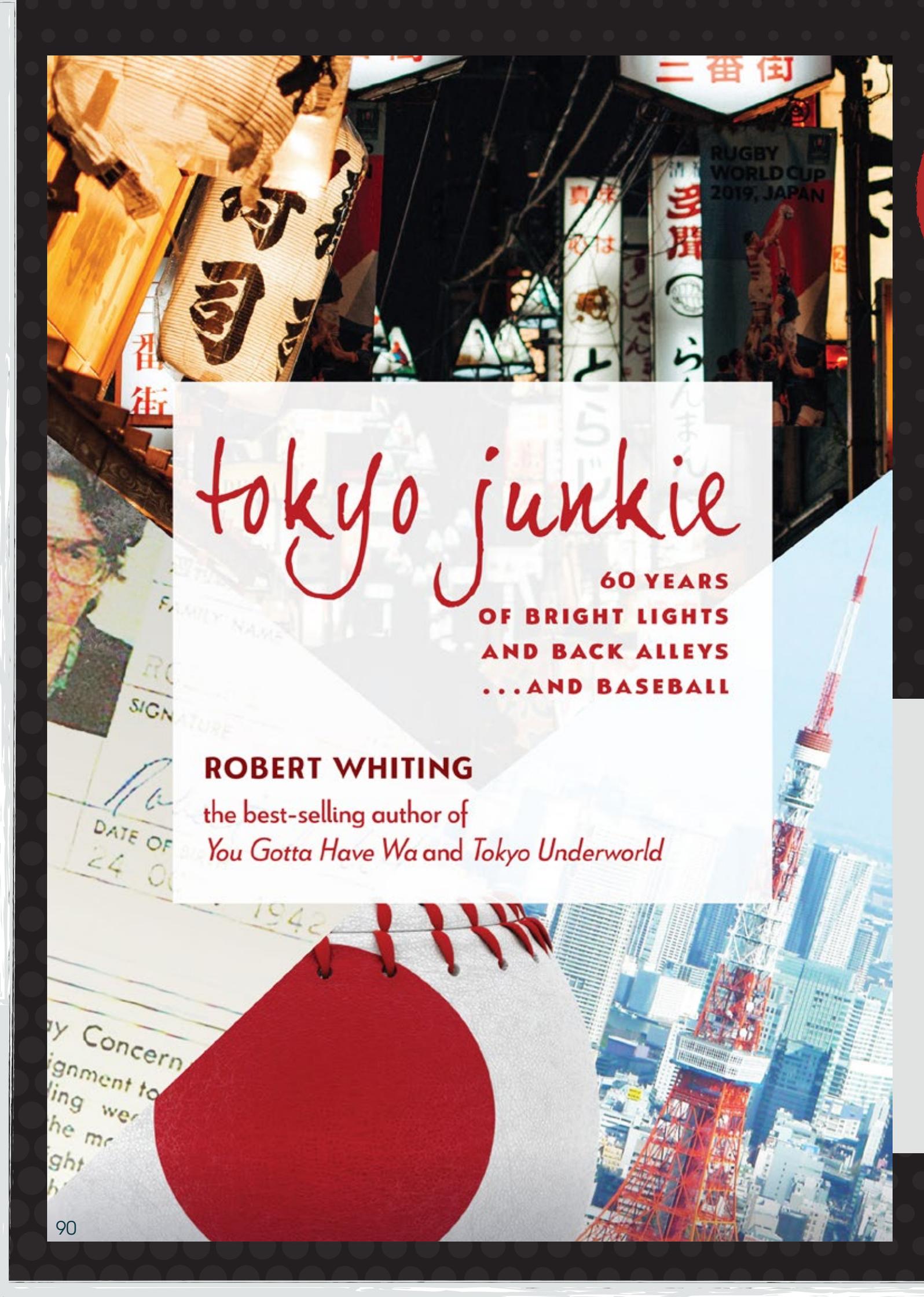
In addition, we aim to not be an exclusive or closed circle/group . . . so everyone is welcome.



On average, one three-hour sports session will cost about 500 yen/participant.”



George Borden



tokyo junkie

**60 YEARS
OF BRIGHT LIGHTS
AND BACK ALLEYS
...AND BASEBALL**

ROBERT WHITING

the best-selling author of
You Gotta Have Wa and *Tokyo Underworld*



I first stumbled across Robert Whiting's work when I visited a bachelor pad in the middle of Yoyogi. *Tokyo Underworld* lay lonely on the coffee table, its spine indicating that it had never been read. Unable to resist any book, I found myself reading it every time I went there—an unread book is, after all, the worst kind of crime. Detailing the criminal underbelly of Tōkyō after the occupation in WW2, *Tokyo Underworld* gripped me from the start. It read like a seductive James Bond novel but more thrilling—why? Because everything is true. It's sexy, action-packed, morbid and sometimes downright dirty. Long after I stopped visiting that apartment I thought about that book—alas, that's the fate of all the books I never get to finish.

When I got the opportunity to read *Tokyo Junkie*, Whiting's memoir on living in Tōkyō for the past 60 years, I was excited but also a little hesitant. Would it be anywhere near as interesting as *Tokyo Underworld*? Who exactly is Robert Whiting and why should we be interested in his life?

Robert Whiting is a very successful journalist and author whose work has noticeably been featured in *The Japan Times*, *The New York Times*, *Sports Illustrated*, *Smithsonian*, *Newsweek*, *U.S. News and World Report*, *Time*, and many other celebrated publications(1). His book *You Gotta Have Wa* (on baseball in Japan) reached fame both in Japan and internationally. He has written on various topics, including sports, Tōkyō nightlife, and crime. He is also one of the only Western writers to regularly write in a Japanese column.

Baseball, Olympics, Yakuza and COVID:

A REVIEW OF ROBERT WHITING'S *TOKYO JUNKIE*

Kayla Francis (Tōkyō)

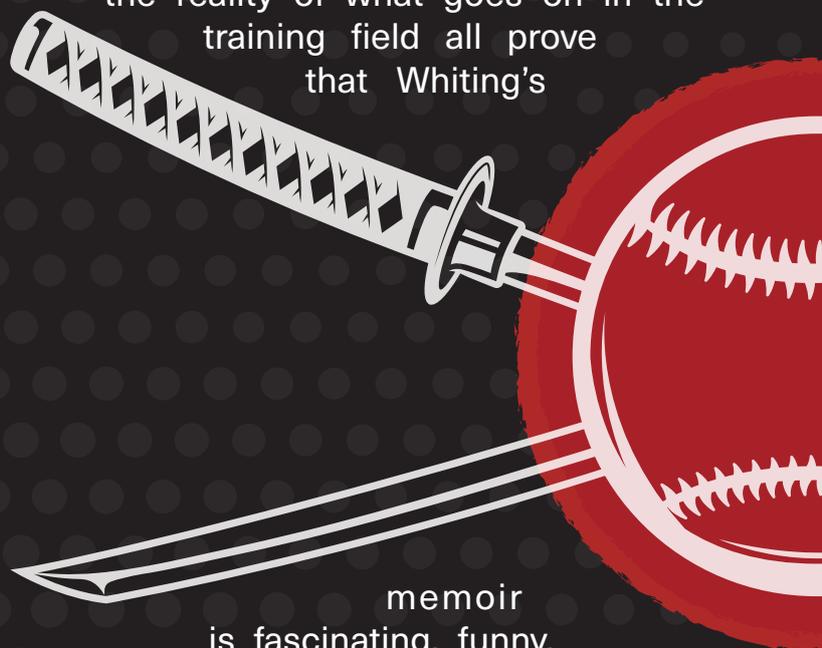
If you loved anything written by the late Anthony Bourdain, notably *Kitchen Confidential* then you will probably love this. Whiting does a great job of making his life beguiling, even in some of the most unfortunate circumstances you can't help but wish to be in the adventure with him. His memoir takes you on a journey into how he got the jobs he had and his experience living in Tōkyō during the 1964 Olympics, the economic boom, the following crash, and up to the coronavirus today.

Whiting has been noticeably remarkable for his work on documenting the impact that the 1964 Tōkyō Olympics had on Japan(2). Not just in regards to the economy (though it had a very large impact indeed) but also concerning the culture and mindset of Japan. It was highly fascinating reading the accounts of the 1964 Olympics because so much of it is also relevant today.

I was lucky enough to move here a year before the Olympics were expected to be held (before it was inevitably postponed) which meant a lot of buildings were being built and opened to celebrate and account for the huge influx of expected tourists. Shibuya noticeably changed with the opening of Shibuya Scramble Square and Miyashita Park.

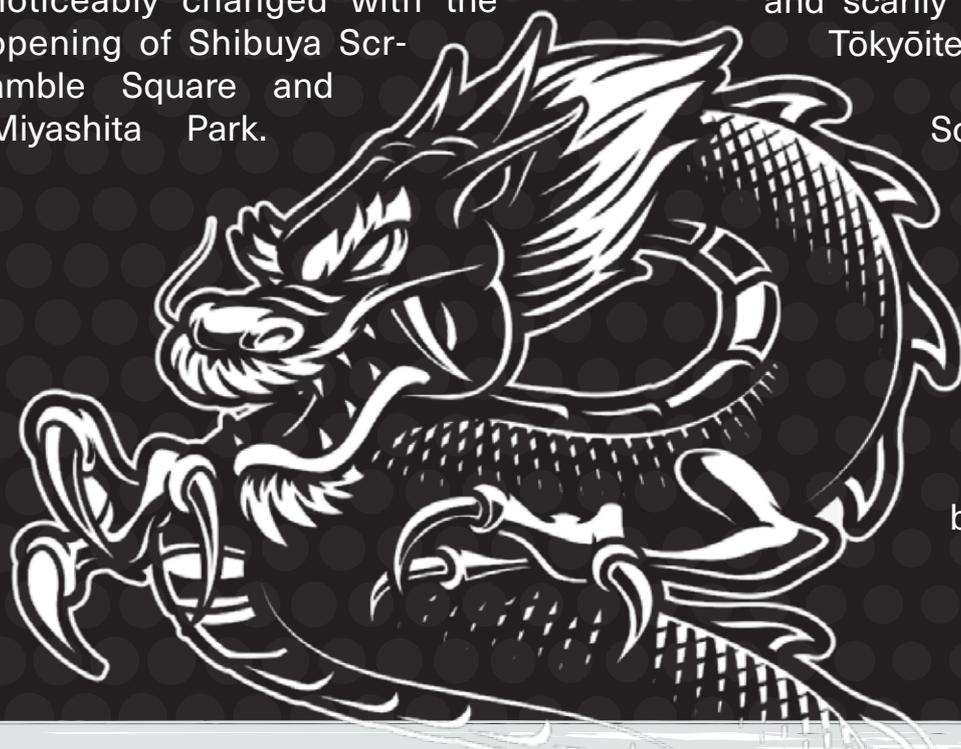
When the memoir reaches the 2020 games themselves it exposes the reality, "Right from the start preparations were plagued by embarrassing cost overruns, ineffective leadership, finger-pointing at all levels, and widespread doubts that a seemingly inept government would have everything ready in time."

Whiting's accounts of interviewing prominent athletes (such as Daryl Spencer, Clyde Wright, Richard Beyer "the Destroyer", Reggie Smith, and many more), the issues the athletes faced living in Tōkyō, the trouble Whiting went through to tell their stories and the reality of what goes on in the training field all prove that Whiting's

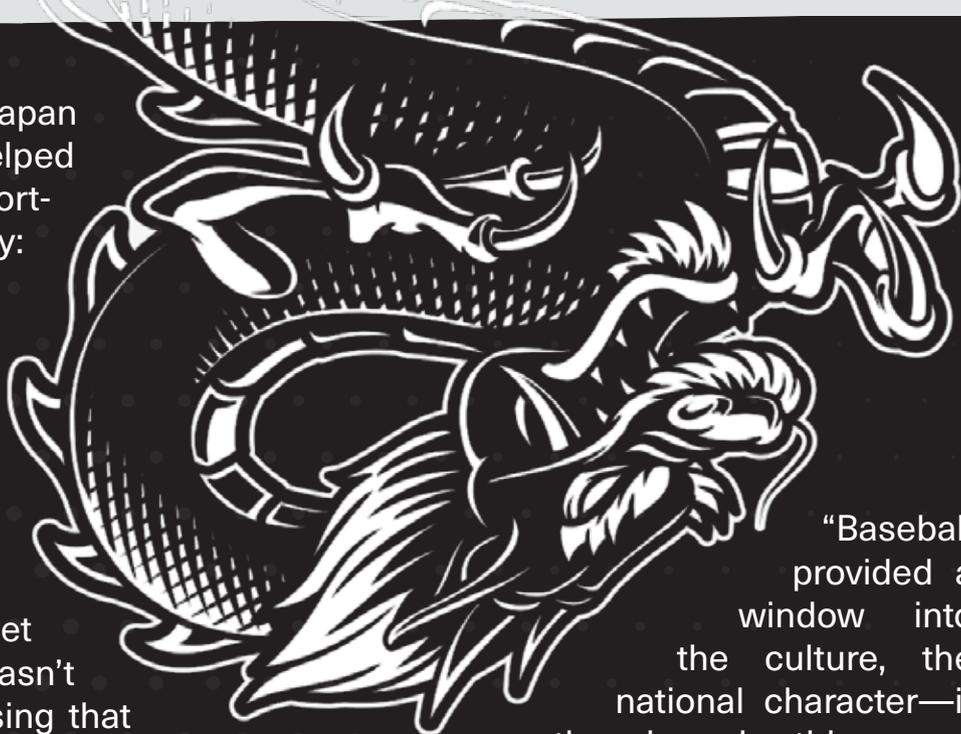


memoir is fascinating, funny, and scarily relevant to modern Tōkyōites.

So what has this book got to do with baseball? As well as being an acclaimed sports journalist and the author of *You Gotta Have Wa*, a book considered a "definitive text on Japanese culture seen through the lens of sport"(3), for Whiting, it was baseball that "gave [him his]



first true connection to Japan and its people” and it helped the book with its most important aspect, its relatability: “Japanese baseball . . . was the only thing I could remotely understand on Japanese television. Many of the words were English derivatives: *sutoraiku* (strike), *boru* (ball), *kabu* (curve), *homu ran* (home run) . . . etc. You get the idea.” What foreigner hasn’t gotten excited upon realising that they understand katakana words?



“Baseball provided a window into the culture, the national character—if there is such a thing—and on the values and assumptions that divide the Japanese version of the game from ours.”

“Baseball became a symbol of Japan’s determination to catch up with the more industrially advanced West, using the same model of dedication, or *magokoro* as they called it, and discipline.”

By watching baseball and baseball-related animes, Whiting was able to find a sense of belonging in Tōkyō, “For a large chunk of the population, watching the Major League games in the early morning—as early, sometimes as 4 or 5 a.m.—before going to work became the norm. Some twenty-five million people watched Ichiro break the single-season hits record in 2003.”

This doesn’t mean that it was a walk in the ‘ball’ park—often, it was far from it. Whiting uses his book to showcase the issues of corruption and racism that are still prevalent in modern-day Tōkyō. I was completely oblivious to the challenges that journalists in Japan face.



This is emphasised by his obsession for *Kyojin no Hoshi* which he watched “every Saturday evening.” Though Whiting had “mixed emotions” about the series, it helped steer his mindset away from American baseball, “as the Japanese said, there was beauty in suffering and in *Kyojin no Hoshi* the suffering was so beautiful—because of the love behind it—that it made you want to cry.”

It is also through baseball that Whiting cleverly dissects both American and Japanese culture.

“Under the Giant’s restrictive system, players were not allowed to do sit-down interviews with reporters without explicit permission from the front office, or without a substantial fee paid to the team for the privilege. It was a notable departure from the way things were done in the United States.”

This is nothing compared to the political corruption within the sports industry and the government that Whiting also discusses in his memoir.

This doesn’t mean that I agree with everything he writes. Whiting often discusses how easy it is for foreign men to get involved with Japanese women; while this is a stereotype stemming from the fetishisation of Asian women and the male gaze, there are times when he rightly states that, “Today’s more independent and liberated women might understandably take offence at the above account, related here solely in the interest of accurate reporting.” However, this has very little to do with reporting and everything to do with the fact that sex, well—it still sells. After all, why else would you need to tell us about the “young females in hot pants” selling Kirin beer at baseball games?

That aside, *Tokyo Junkie* doesn’t just serve as a memoir, it’s witty, shocking, entertaining and educational. This is the kind of book that you can read repeatedly and still learn something new about Tōkyō. After reading it, I also caught myself staring at the older generation on my daily commute. The book gave me an appreciation for them and their untold stories. I found myself wondering who they had been before they donned their corporate suits and decided to lead a traditional life.

Despite his unbelievably large body of work, it doesn’t seem like we’ve heard the last of Robert Whiting.

“More importantly, work keeps coming over the transom and there are many more subjects that lure me on to explore and write about. Life here is a continual reminder that there is still much left for me to do.”

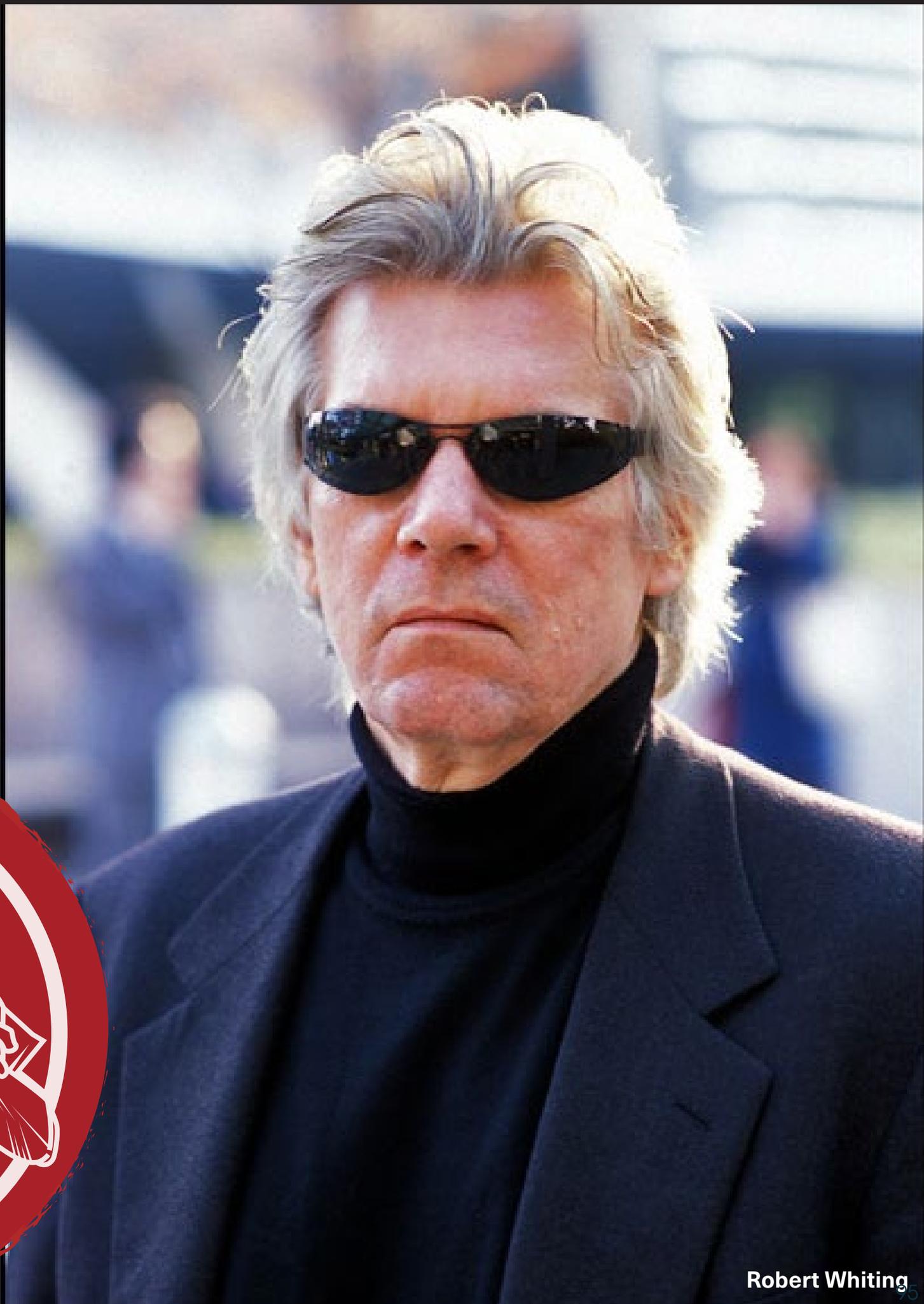
I look forward to his next book.

***Tokyo Junkie* will be available from April 20, 2021.**

*Kayla Francis is a Tōkyō JET from London, UK. She is also **CONNECT**’s Sports Editor. When she is not cooking and eating too much, she can be found reading or staring at her yoga mat.*

1. **Source 1**
2. **Source 2**
3. **Source 3**





Robert Whiting ⁵

COMMUNITY AND TRAVEL

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When the winds of change blow, some people build walls and others build windmills.” — Anonymous

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*“You’re really good at jazzing.” — Joe Gardner,
“Soul”*

COMMUNITY AND TRAVEL DESIGNER

Nate Ryman



ANIME PILGRIMAGES: OLD AND NEW TRAVEL CULTURE IN JAPAN

Nathalie Pascaru (Tōkyō)
Photos: Rebecca Aō (Tōkyō)

Illustrations: Kottor.art @ Freepik (1,2)
Sustainableart @ Freepik (3)

The term anime pilgrimage is being used more and more when talking about purposeful travel to a location linked to a particular type of Japanese media. The name “anime pilgrimage” here implies that these pilgrimages are only inspired by anime, but anime pilgrimages involve visiting sites depicted in various media linked to *otaku* culture, such as anime, manga, video games, and any other pertaining forms of media.

TRAVEL CULTURE IN ANCIENT JAPAN

In order to further understand this peculiar type of travel and the motivations behind it, it is useful to look at the history of travel habits in Japan. The obvious place to start is, of course, with the representative word for journeys in historic Japan: *tabi*. The prevalence of *tabi no bunka* (culture of travel) is intrinsically linked with literature. Travelogues and travel writings were a significant part of classical Japanese literature that were not only seen as entertainment but also were used as travel guides to a certain extent. Travel records such as diaries (*nikki*) like the *Tosa Nikki* or tales (*monogatari*) like the *Ise Monogatari* from the Heian Period are some of the oldest examples of this type of writing.

The travelogue format reached its peak in the Edo Period (1600-1868). With travel becoming more readily available



Sunshine City in Ikebukuro saw a lot of fights between Shizuo and Izaya in *Durarara!!*



through the construction of national roads, many more poets began publishing their literary journeys. They would follow a specific format of first giving a geographical description, then giving more specific details about the roads before finally illustrating the feelings of the author through the use of poems. The inclusion of poems made travel mostly about the individual and the human experience of discovering oneself through the journey. Through changing someone's circumstances and environment, the *tabi* provided an opportunity for the individual to look at oneself without the stress, weight, and duties of their everyday mundane life.

Before travel became a leisure activity, the two main purposes were, fittingly, going on pilgrimages and visiting hot springs, with the former being the main reason for people to depart on a journey. While the term pilgrimage implies religious intent, some were merely initiated with the purpose of visiting beautiful locations, most of which happened to pertain to religious institutions as well. Some of those pilgrimages included several stops like the 88 temples of the Shikoku Pilgrimage or the 33 holy sites of Kannon in the Western Provinces, while others were simply one specific location like a holy mountain.

Pilgrimages were also paramount in developing and building modern Japan since a great number of contemporary urban centres were created and thrived as settlements to accommodate pilgrims along the road. And though the term *tabi* traditionally refers to a journey made on foot, and despite the existence of the more contemporary word *ryokō* (travel, trip), the word *tabi* is still widely used in the modern-day, especially when referring to journeys with pilgrimage-like undertones.

The term pilgrimage, as it is used above and as we usually know it, suggests a type of travel inspired by faith and religion. Okamoto Ryosuke defines a religious pilgrimage as "a journey to see where saints or originators of religions were born or buried, places that had a connection with those persons during their lives, or spots linked to gods and spirits." (1) In other words: a journey to any sacred site. He further points out the massive secularisation of society that came alongside modernisation, bringing with it an increase of pilgrimages with non-religious undertones. Some even follow

traditional pilgrimage routes but without religious faith as the motivation behind the journey. Sacred places can now be born from beliefs unrelated to religion, but most are related to something deeply personal and spiritual. One such place is Washinomiya Shrine, a Shintō shrine that became a sacred place for some individuals not because of religious reasons but because it appeared in the opening of the anime *Lucky Star*, becoming thereafter an anime pilgrimage site.

ANIME PILGRIMAGES AS A SECULAR REPLACEMENT

This finally brings us to our main topic of anime pilgrimages, what they are, and why fans are eager to visit them. The term “anime pilgrimage” comes from the fans themselves who use the term *seichi junrei* (literally “pilgrimages to sacred sites”) to describe their visits to anime-related sites. The sacred sites (*seichi*) depicted in anime and other media are the primary destinations for anime pilgrimages and,

The famous staircase from *Your Name* in Yotsuya



thus, for the fans. The most common motivation behind this sort of travel is simply the desire to visit the location that served as the setting for a story that the fans enjoyed and the wish to interact with it. It can also be a way for the fans to personally experience the story through active and physical participation and interaction with the site's environment.

But how do fans find out about the location to begin with? Most often, unless the location is directly advertised by the copyright holding company that the media belongs to, it is the fans themselves who actively look for it. This type of fan, often called a "pioneer," actively researches locations featured in the anime by using landmarks, outstanding geographical features, road signs, and map applications, such as Google Street View. This type of fan behaviour has a specific name: *butai tanbō* or "scene hunting". Once the scene hunters have successfully located a pilgrimage site, they create travel guides for fellow fans to enjoy and post them on social media, leading to a bigger wave of anime pilgrims making their way to the newly found site.

As mentioned above, the main goal of visiting an anime pilgrimage site is to interact with it in one way or another. There are, of course, dozens of different ways to do



so, but some common behaviours include scene recreation, which usually entails recreating a scene by taking a picture at the same exact angle as in the anime; leaving mementoes at the location, the most common being notebooks filled with drawings and messages; live updates on social media; cosplaying; or simply interacting with other anime pilgrims or local residents.

There are many famous anime pilgrimage sites; the most famous one may be the Akihabara district itself, as it is the ultimate pilgrimage destination just due to the

sheer amount of anime-related merchandise found there. In Tōkyō alone, there are dozens of locations that are associated with some form of otaku media, thus becoming pilgrimage destinations. Fans of the manga/anime *Durarara!!* can head to Ikebukuro, those of *Steins;Gate* to Akihabara, for the movie *Your Name* locations can be found around Shinjuku and Yotsuya, and Azabu-jūban is the perfect destination for *Sailor Moon* fans. For locations outside of Tōkyō, Hakone is famous for being a pilgrimage site for *Evangelion*, with the area holding regular events for fans; Toyosato in Shiga Prefecture is the setting of *K-On!*; and Obihiro in Hokkaidō is the backdrop for *Silver Spoon*.

One of the most studied pilgrimage sites is the Washimiya District of Kuki City in Saitama Prefecture. It is the setting of the extremely popular *Lucky Star* franchise, a manga/anime that follows the daily life of a group of young female friends. The anime quickly reached peak success in 2007, mostly due to its slice-of-life genre.



Welcome to the holy place
of 「Your Name。」 !
欢迎来到「您的名字。」的圣地！
환영해 「너의 이름은」 성지에!!

The opening song features a couple of local landmarks, such as Washinomiya Shrine and a tea house, that quickly became popular with fans as pilgrimage sites. With an agreement passed between the local Commerce and Industry Association and the rights holder Kadokawa, the local municipality was able to start selling *Lucky Star* merchandise, which proved to be very popular with the visiting fans and an advantageous business for the city.

Anime pilgrimages offer fans a unique way to experience and interact with the media they feel connected to while at the same time providing an opportunity for local municipalities to revitalise their economy, particularly in the case of pilgrimage sites located in rural areas. The success of a media location depends highly on the cooperation between the fans, the local municipality, and the copyright holders, creating a highly dynamic relationship. As Japan is a country with a high prevalence of polymedial texts (in which core meaning is found across multiple media platforms), it is the perfect location for an abundance of media tourism destinations, whether they are related to anime, literature, films, or dramas.

SOURCES

1. R. Okamoto, 2019, *Pilgrimages in the Secular Age: from El Camino to Anime*, p. 24.

Nathalie Pascaru is a specialist in media travel with an interest in helping destinations, media owners, and marketers utilise Japanese texts and spaces to promote real-world engagement with media. An alumnus of the University of Oxford and Waseda University, she is an avid traveler and an amateur film photography enthusiast. Photography page: @totheedgeofnight

The Untouched Beauty of **Tōhoku**

A Photography Showcase

Clarissa Combe (Aomori)

Photos provided by multiple contributors

10 years ago on March 11, 2011, tragedy struck the eastern coast of the Tōhoku region as a 9.1 magnitude earthquake triggered a devastating tsunami that swept inland from Aomori down to Fukushima. Towns along the coast of Miyagi and Iwate prefectures were decimated, and people all across eastern Fukushima had to evacuate after the meltdown at the Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant. 15,899 people died with 2,529 more still missing. Over the past 10 years, the region has tried to move forwards and rebuild whilst commemorating the many precious lives lost to the disaster. But rebuilding hasn't been easy. Certain areas of Fukushima are still under evacuation orders, and although tsunami-hit towns are being rebuilt, residents who left 10 years ago have started new lives elsewhere and are reluctant to return. There is a long road to recovery ahead, but the people of Tōhoku have and continue to show resilience and unparalleled strength of will as they meet the challenges of rebuilding head-on.

Even before the events of 2011, Tōhoku has been one of the least-travelled regions of Japan since ancient times when the area was known as *Michinoku*, meaning ‘the land beyond the road’. After 2011, tourism in the region dropped significantly, and once the number of domestic and foreign tourists finally started increasing over the past five or so years, the COVID-19 pandemic struck. Even now, if you look up Fukushima Prefecture online, you will find numerous articles about the fallout from the nuclear disaster before any information about the many beautiful destinations Fukushima has to offer. The wonder of Tōhoku is still unknown and waiting to be discovered.

This showcase aims to highlight the unique beauty and culture of the Tōhoku region and its people. I hope that it inspires you to make the journey north to the land beyond the road once it is safe to travel again.

Contributors:

- Alice French (Yamagata)
- Asthrea Camilon (Aomori)
- Charlene Poon (Hiroshima)
- Clarissa Combe (Aomori)
- Dianne Yett (Gunma)
- Goh Qiu Ting (Hyōgo 2018-2020)
- Jessica Craven (Saitama)
- Linka Wade (Gunma)
- Peter Davies (Aomori)
- Rembert Dean (Miyagi)
- Rachel Faguendes (Okayama)
- Tessa Calvin (Aomori)

Akita



Kanto Matsuri (Rachel Fagundes)



Oga Peninsula (Rachel Fagundes)



Kanto Matsuri (Rachel Fagundes)



The hydrangeas at Unshoji Temple in summer



Lake Tazawa (Charlene Poon)



Summer (Asthrea Camilon)



Lake Tazawa (Jessica Craven)

Aomori



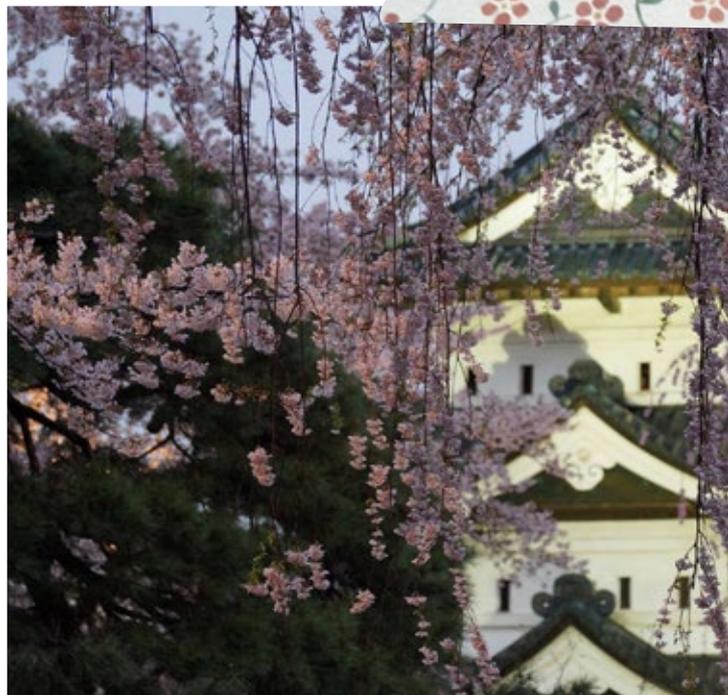
Snow on Shirahama Beach, Hachinohe (Peter Davies)



Nakano Momijiyama in fall,



Hachinohe (Peter Davies)



The cherry blossoms at Hirosaki Castle



Kuroishi (Asthrea Camilon)



Mount Hakkoda in fall (Tessa Calvin)



(Clarissa Combe)



Goshogawara Tachineputa (Clarissa Combe)

Fukushima



Goshikinuma Nature Trail (Clarissa Combe)



Tsu



Local crafts on sale at Ōuchi-juku (Goh Qiu Ting)



Inside



uruga Castle (Charlene Poon)



Kokeshi dolls at Tsuchiyu Onsen (Goh Qiu Ting)



Pasaedo Temple (Clarissa Combe)



Nihonmatsu Monument (Dianne Yett)

Iwate



The Sannoiwa Rocks, Miyako (Clarissa Combe)



Nedali Nature Trail near



Jodogahama Beach,



An ancient lava flow in Hachimantai (Clarissa Combe)



Morioka Race



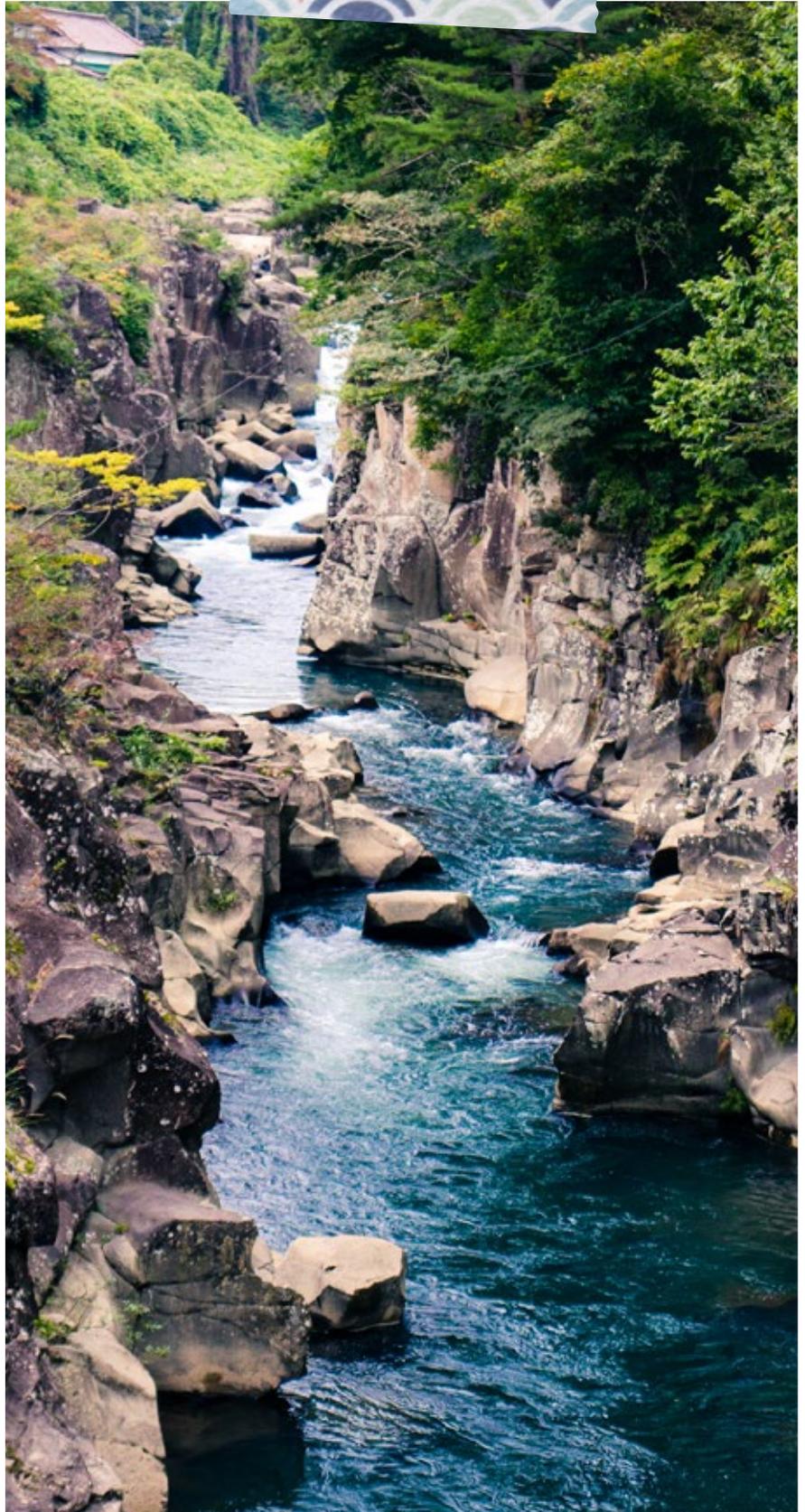
r Fudai Village (Tessa Calvin)



Miyako (Clarissa Combe)



course (Linka Wade)

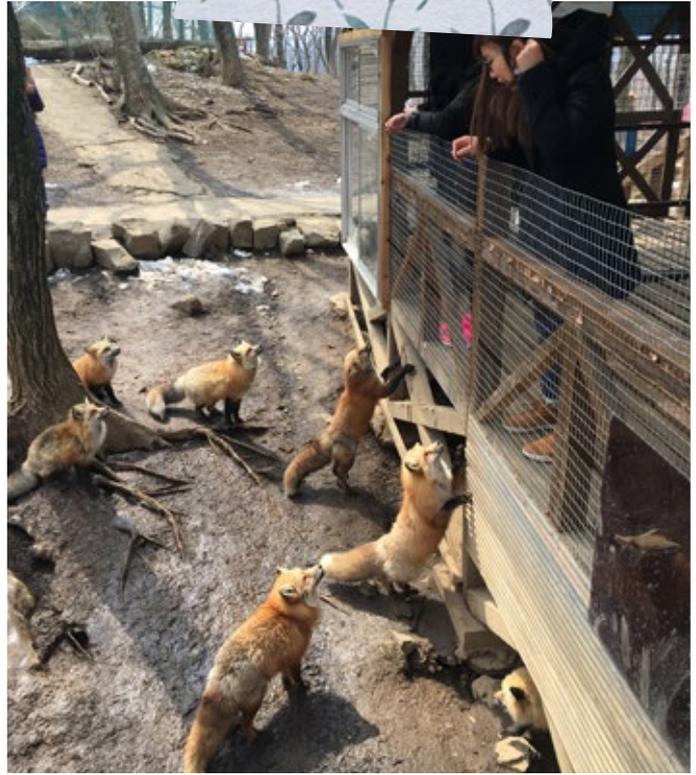


Genbikei Gorge, Ichinoseki (Linka Wade)

Miyagi



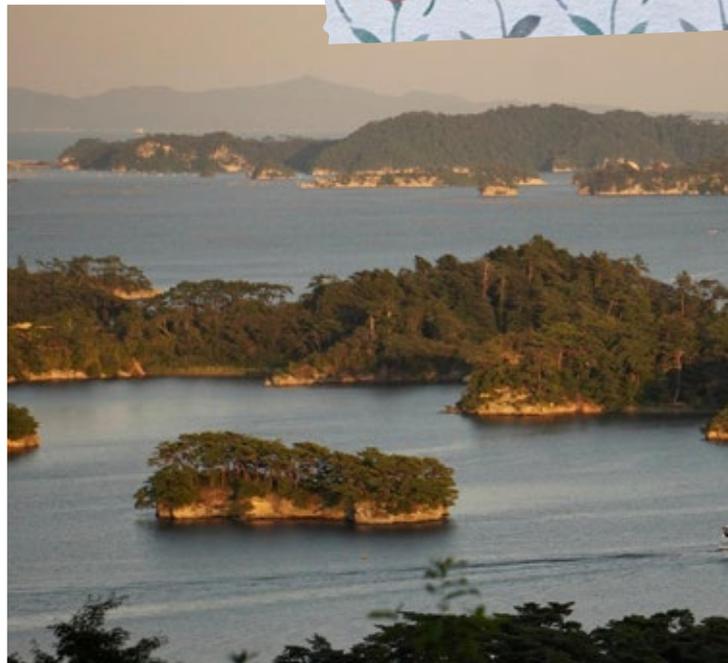
Sendai Loople Bus (Linka Wade)



Zao Fox Village (Charlene Poon)



Zuihoden, Sendai (Linka Wade)



Sunset at Matsushima Bay (Clarissa)



A fireworks show to celebrate the completion of the final bridge connecting the Sanriku Expressway in March 2021. This bridge is an emblem of rebuilding efforts for locals in Kesennuma (Rembert Dean)



(Clarissa Combe)

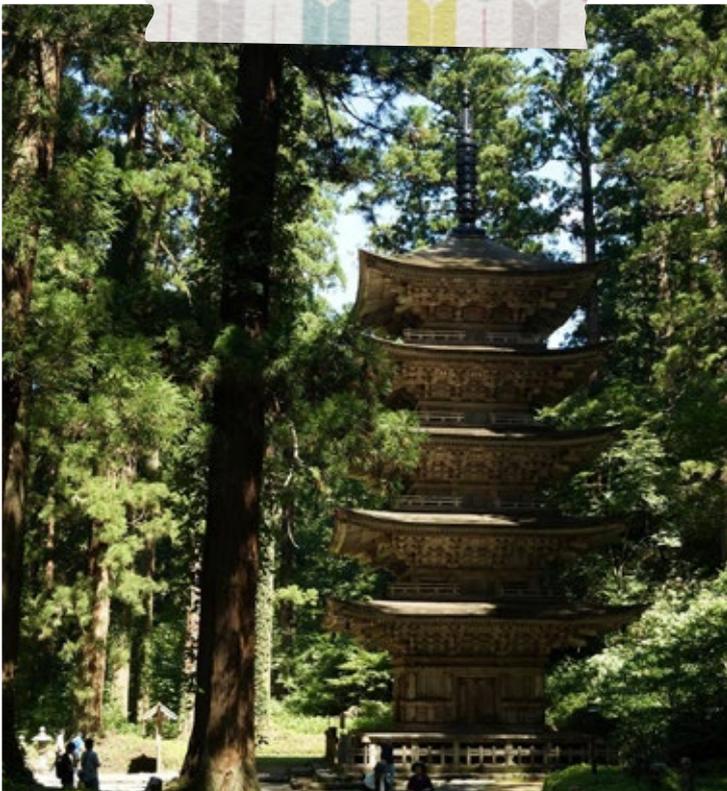


Paying respects at Shiogama Shrine (Clarissa Combe)

Yamagata



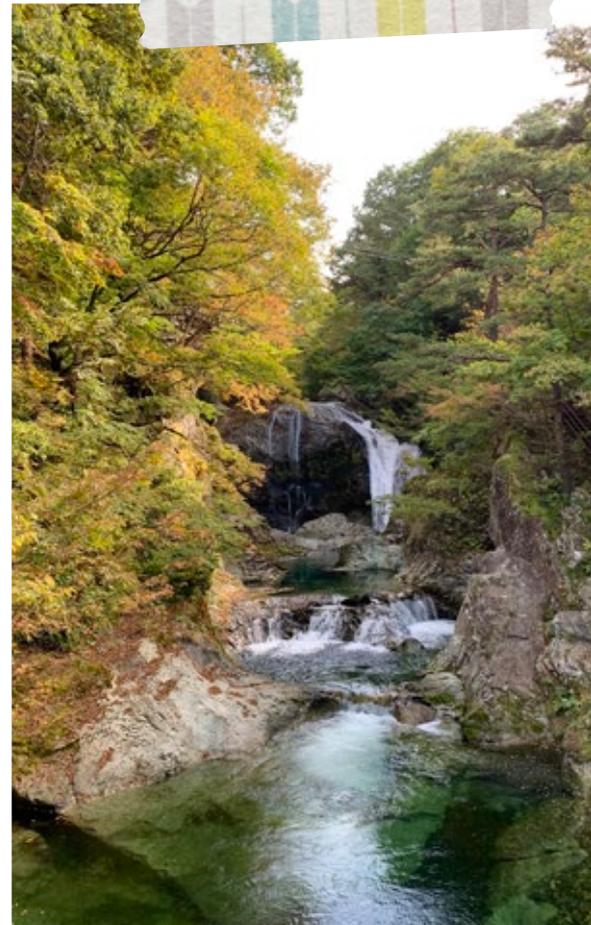
Risshakuji Temple, Yamadera (Clarissa Combe)



Mount Haguro (Clarissa Combe)



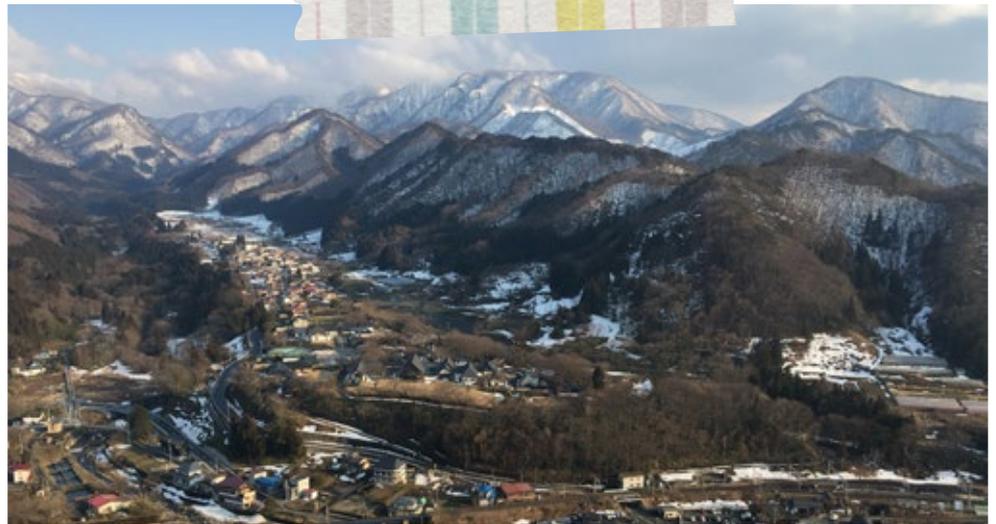
Okama Crater, Zao (Goh)



Sekiyama Waterfall, Higashine (Alice Fre)



Qiu Ting)



The view from Risshakuji Temple, Yamadera (Charlene Poon)



French)



Ginzan Onsen (Alice French)

Clarissa Combe is a third-year Coordinator for International Relations working in Aomori City. Having lived in Tōhoku for almost three years now, she has fallen in love with the region and hopes that more and more people will come and visit once the pandemic is over. You can find her photography from around Tōhoku on Instagram at [@onthedgeofforever_](https://www.instagram.com/onthedgeofforever_).

A

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A



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TO REMEMBER

**REAL DATING ADVICE
FROM REAL PEOPLE**

We've all been there... you get a phone number from someone you're interested in but don't know what to send as the first text, where to set up a date, and even how fast you should respond. Add living in another country into the equation, and you have new variables to take into consideration. In lieu of White Day, we are going to interview two people who have lived extensively in Japan and can give down-to-earth dating advice while looking at cultural considerations.

Tell us a bit about yourself before we get into the questions

Alyssa: Hi everyone, I'm Alyssa! I'm Japanese-American and currently living the city life. However, I was originally born and raised in Ibaraki surrounded by beautiful nature. I love to stay active and very interested in fashion. To stay active I like to dance, sing, cook and work out. I'm also a sneakerhead who especially loves Vans and Converse. I probably need a bigger space in my room for my lovely sneakers haha. Anyways, I love to make people laugh or put a smile on their face. Back in college, my friends used to describe me as a jolly comedian when I imitate other people. Hopefully with my experience, I can share some awesome advice with you all!

Christian: Hi, I'm Christian. I'm New Zealand-Japanese and currently living in the Northern Fukuoka area. I was raised in Hiroshima and the Eastern Auckland area. I love tech as I'm currently studying computer science in my spare time. I also love going to the beach and catching some good waves. I want to be a software developer and develop systems that the people really need. I've had my fair share of dating experiences in my time living in Japan, and I'm thrilled to tell you all about it.

Let's start the questions off easy:

Best place for a first Date in Japan and why?

Alyssa: Hmm. . . there's so many good places in Japan so it's kind of hard to choose one best place. It's also hard because it depends on the season, area, person, etc. . . But I would say, one of the best and most common places to go is the zoo. Why? There are many reasons!

The zoo I went to before had an amusement park within the zoo, so I recommend finding a combination like this. Walking around watching, feeding, or even patting the animals will keep you busy and is fun. After spending time with the animals you can go straight to the amusement park! Getting on the rides will give you both extra excitement!

I'm not a huge fan of scary rides but it surely does make the atmosphere more fun by screaming. Haha

Stomach starts to talk? Getting hungry after the rides? Usually in places like this there are restaurants and some small cute cafes you both go to.

Take a seat, relax, and enjoy a meal with your date. That's the best timing to share good stories about the date so far and get a feel for the other person's personality. Knowing and learning about each other through the conversation. This date spot should give you lots of time to warm up to each other!

Christian: There are so many things you could do in Japan that would be fun, but the one I can't go mentioning without are Izakayas. Having some drinks and getting to know each other through some Izakaya style dishes have a little special place in my heart. There are so many great places, each with unique vibes and styles. Many people choose to stay in Japan for this experience. So, do some research, maybe through "Taberogu" to find an awesome place and you'll surely have a good time!



Lets step things up a little bit:

Is the best way to meet someone online, in person (direct approach), or introduction by a friend or family?

Alyssa: Except for an introduction by family, I experienced all of these scenarios.

Online is good but sometimes it could be scary and dangerous. In my opinion, meeting by a friend's introduction is the one of the best ways to meet someone.

The reason why I selected this is because it's more safe. There's trust between me and my friend, so my friend should know my type or ask my type before a date happens. Basically there's no way that my friend would introduce me to a weird person. Haha

Again, I've never experienced an introduction by my family. But if that happens, that shows they are serious about it. . .

Christian: I think each one has pros and cons.

You could get to know a lot of people very quickly online. But it might not be what you expect when you get to actually see them, and that might be kind of off-putting for some people.

I would say a good old direct approach is the way to go.

I like in-person approaches because it's just direct, sim-

ple, and they will probably remember you the next time you talk to them opposed to meeting someone online.

Alyssa: In messages, I would start with something casual

Getting more technical:

How would you want to be approached or how would you approach a person in public? Once you exchange information, how should the first couple of messages go?

like "Hello!" Haha.

Basically use some casual way to greet the person and begin the conversation. But in general, people would start with "*Hajimemashite*" and end the first message with "*Yoroshiku Onegaishimasu.*" Something like that would be the common way to start the first conversation.

Either way, the key is "Greeting."

After that I'll start with questions like "What did you do today?" or "What did you have for lunch?" It's not a special topic but very casual to answer it, so it should help the other person get comfortable with you.

In person, I notice what the person is wearing and say something nice. I'll give a compliment like "Nice jacket! Where's it from?" and make the conversation start with a good energy. By all means, there's no person who hates or avoids compliments. Compliments should make the person smile or help to open the conversation.

Christian: I really like it when someone compliments me on something. I love a thoughtful compliment, haha. When meeting someone, I just say hello and introduce myself! I like asking things like, "How do you spend your time other than study/work?" or "What are you interested in?" I feel like these questions let me know what kinds of things they are into and how I can relate to them.

So you're on the first date. What are good topics to talk about or what things do you pay attention to first on the date?

Alyssa: In this situation too, I would start with a compliment. I don't prepare to do this, but as soon as I see the person, the first thing I notice is their fashion. Why? It's very simple. Because I'm a fashion lover! I would probably start with fashion topics or something really simple.

For example:

A. *Isn't it nice weather today?*

B. *Yes, it is.*

A. *I really love the sun, especially in summer. My favorite thing to do is go hiking. What's your favorite thing to do?*

B. *Wow, that sounds fun! I like going to the beach.*

These are examples, but as you can see, it's important to find common interests to keep the conversation going and have fun!

Christian: I usually like to complement them on some-

thing and ease into topics like their hobbies or passions. I love hearing about what people are passionate about.

I always pay attention to what the other person cares about, their priorities, and what they want to achieve in the near future.

Okay, so you go on a first date and it's terrible. Maybe it's a catfish situation or the other person is talking about their ex the whole time. What do you do?[sub-heading]

Alyssa: Interesting question, but I have never experienced a catfish situation. If I was in this position, I think I would pull out of it, but not immediately. I'll take a little bit of time to figure this person out and get more details. But at the same time, I could be asking, "Who are you?"

To leave, I might say something like:

Me: *Ohh, I have a stomach-ache, let me use the bathroom really quick.*

The Guy: *Oh ok, I'll wait here*

Me: (once I'm back) *Sorry I don't feel good, I should go back home.*

That would be the end of it. If he wasn't my type, then I would be done. However, if he catches my interest, then this connection would continue. To be honest, this is my imagination, so in reality I don't know exactly what I would do.

Christian: Both are a total red alert for me, but I would

definitely make the most out of the situation. Whatever the situation is, adapting and making the most out of the time would be the priority for me.

Any final advice for our readers on dating in Japan?

Alyssa: The best advice is *Ganbatte kudasai!*

Put forth effort and focus on communicating a lot with the person. Even if it's boring, show interest. And if you communicate as much as I do, you'll start to learn how to enjoy the dating process more. I hope all this information will be helpful for you!

Christian: Even if it's not going the way you thought or would've wanted, just know there are a lot of fish in the sea and never rush into things. Take your time and let them know how you feel when you need to. Patience is key!



Alyssa is a fashion and sneaker enthusiast currently residing in Tokyō. In her free time she loves dancing and singing. She loves fitness and aspires to help others with their fitness journey.

Christian is a business student with a rich background being raised in Hiroshima and Auckland, New Zealand. He is currently studying to become a software developer in the Fukuoka area where he resides.





HIDING IN PLAIN SIGHT:
HOMELESSNESS IN TŌKYŌ

Lisa Paper (Tōkyō)

The coronavirus pandemic has created a number of noticeable changes around the world, and Tōkyō is no exception. Formerly packed late-night trains buzzing with laughter and camaraderie have largely quieted as 8 p.m. curfews have stunted the city's once famously busy nightlife scene. "Take-out" has become the new "dine-in," many companies have lessened the morning rush hour crowds as work-from-home initiatives have drastically reshaped the Japanese work culture, and some schools have opted to teach students from the comfort of their own homes. Amidst the chaos of sweeping societal changes, one important aspect of society may have been consistently overlooked: the issue of Tōkyō's homeless community.

Even before COVID-19 rocked the Tōkyō community, homelessness in Japan has been historically swept under the rug. Many who visit Japan even say that there doesn't seem to be **(1)** a visible homeless population. However, one late-night visit to Shinjuku Station will cure you of the notion that there's no homelessness in the city. As the last trains send Tōkyōites running through the station to catch their essential transfers, you'll find many citizens winding down for the evening, propping up ripped cardboard make-shift walls, rolling out sleeping bags, and counting collected yen coins in worn containers. The first time I sprinted through the station, intent on tapping my Pasma card on time, I almost stopped in my tracks as I took in a cardboard skyline of hastily-built sleeping arrangements. It hadn't occurred to me that the station, one of the busiest in the world by day, could transform into a safe place to land for an entire community of Japanese citizens by night. Homelessness had, until that point, remained hidden from plain sight from me for the first few weeks I'd lived in Japan.

“I almost stopped in my tracks as I took in a cardboard skyline of hastily-built sleeping arrangements”

The issue of homelessness in Japan can be a tough one to tackle as homelessness is considered “less visible” in the island nation than in many other countries. The widely-accepted image of Japan as a neat, prosperous, and orderly society can push many to avoid thinking about its own homeless community.

A densely-packed metropolis, there are an estimated three to five thousand **(1)** homeless Tōkyō citizens out of around 14 million residents in Japan's capital, less than one percent of the total population. Compared to a country such as the United States, a nation with a burgeoning wealth disparity and shocking urban homeless problem, this may seem like an insignificant number. In fact, the homeless population in Japan seems to be shrinking **(2)** year by year, with the largest

concentration of Japan's homeless living in the city of Ōsaka, followed by Tōkyō. This information may cause many to dismiss the issue, assuming that the problem is essentially solved. This would be a grave misconception.

The Borgen Project **(3)**, an international nonprofit organization dedicated to alleviating global poverty, argues that, though the numbers may appear to be low, these numbers may be significantly underreported. Homelessness in Japan is often considered significantly “under-researched,” especially since many people can be left uncounted due to the fact that some struggling working professionals find themselves camping overnight in budget capsule hotels, low-cost Internet cafes, and late-night establishments. Therefore, the problem may be broader than the numbers suggest at first glance. Even less visible are those who choose to shy away from packed places, such as train stations, to avoid judgement, instead camping in more remote places, such as along riverbanks. The Advocacy and Research Centre for Homelessness has also **(4)** criticized the reported numbers as not being accurate, estimating the true numbers could be up to two and a half times larger than those reported officially.

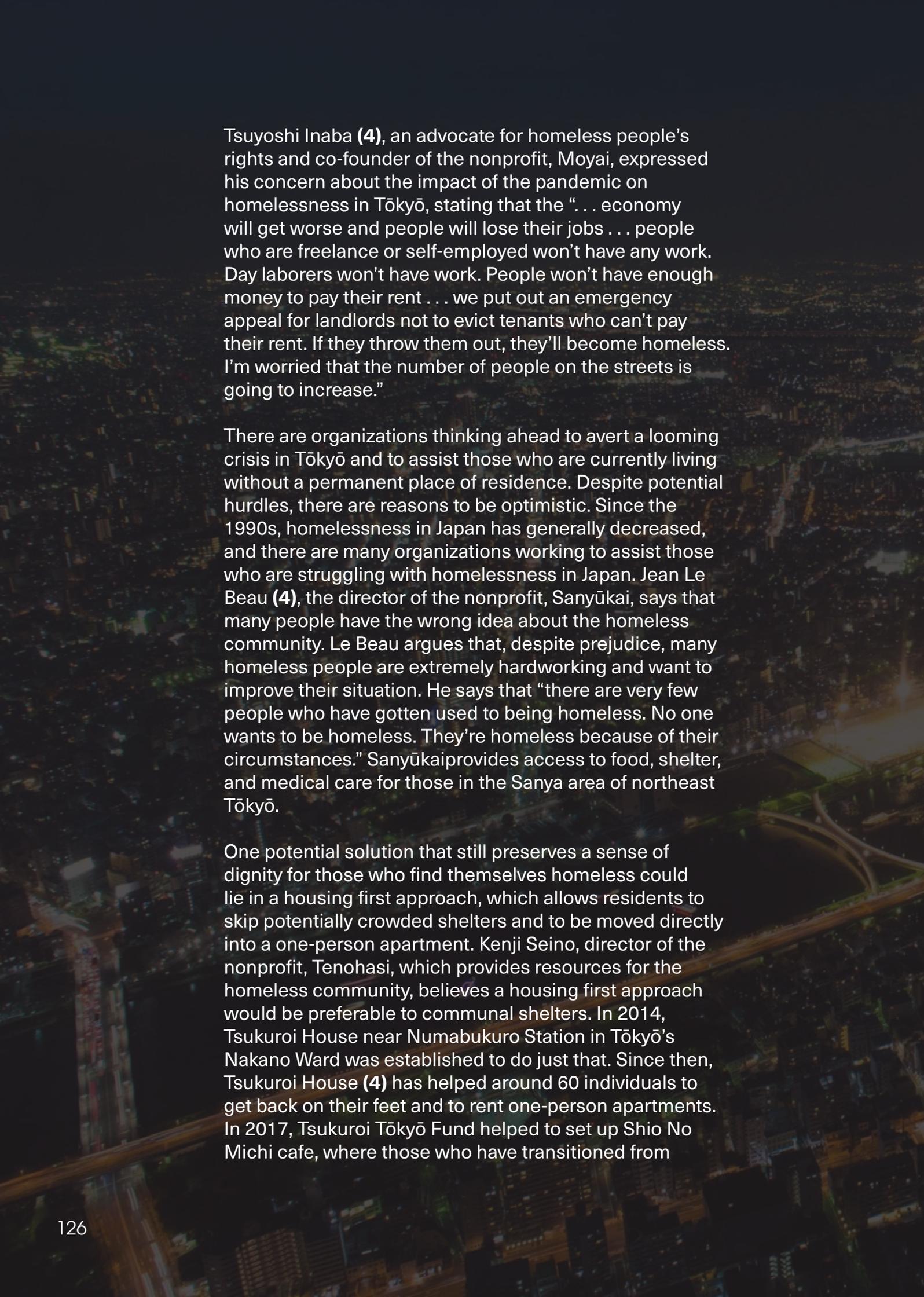
Compounding this potential underrepresentation, there is a growing concern that largely silent economic struggles, spurred on by increasing financial hardships due to the pandemic, may cause Japan to see an increase in homelessness over the course of the coming year. This is a huge issue since Tōkyō doesn't have the best track record when it comes to its treatment of the homeless community. Perhaps most famously, there was public outcry as the homeless community faced forced government evictions **(5)** ahead of the impending

“...almost half of Tōkyō's homeless population are elderly, making them more susceptible to COVID-19.”

crowded public spaces without offering what many felt were adequate alternatives. Culturally, the stigmas associated with homelessness in Japanese culture could also discourage those on the brink of extreme poverty in 2021 from seeking help. There is a general perception **(4)** in Japanese culture that homelessness equates to laziness (at best). This stigma can have damaging effects on these already vulnerable citizens, compounding mental health issues and making daily life even more of a struggle. This could, understandably, discourage those struggling with financial hardships from seeking out aid.

In addition to the usual struggles of living on the streets, the coronavirus pandemic is thought to be even more dangerous for the homeless community. This is due to a number of factors, including the potential for increased exposure. Additionally, many members of the homeless community lack access to health insurance. Though they are eligible to apply to be insured via welfare, the stigmas associated with homelessness can lead many ward offices to inadvertently discourage **(4)** the homeless from applying for assistance. This stigmatization and focus on the importance of self-reliance could prove very dangerous for the health and well-being of many. There are concerns that many shelters aren't set up to properly avoid viral outbreaks. Furthermore, a Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare survey in 2017 found that almost half of Tōkyō's homeless population are elderly, making them more susceptible to COVID-19[[pull-quote]]. Even with such stigmas, in May of 2020, public housing inquiries **(6)** exceeded 1,000 as residents hit hard by the pandemic found themselves suddenly without a home. Many Internet cafes shut down due to restrictions, narrowing overnight options. It is thought that up to 4,000 **(7)** residents used these cafes as a housing alternative. In a rush to mitigate damage, city officials launched a program to provide temporary accommodations via hotel rooms, and a sports hall was repurposed in Saitama for up to 200 residents. However, these measures are not a long-term solution, and the pandemic looks as if it could affect the economy for a number of years to come.





Tsuyoshi Inaba **(4)**, an advocate for homeless people's rights and co-founder of the nonprofit, Moyai, expressed his concern about the impact of the pandemic on homelessness in Tōkyō, stating that the “. . . economy will get worse and people will lose their jobs . . . people who are freelance or self-employed won't have any work. Day laborers won't have work. People won't have enough money to pay their rent . . . we put out an emergency appeal for landlords not to evict tenants who can't pay their rent. If they throw them out, they'll become homeless. I'm worried that the number of people on the streets is going to increase.”

There are organizations thinking ahead to avert a looming crisis in Tōkyō and to assist those who are currently living without a permanent place of residence. Despite potential hurdles, there are reasons to be optimistic. Since the 1990s, homelessness in Japan has generally decreased, and there are many organizations working to assist those who are struggling with homelessness in Japan. Jean Le Beau **(4)**, the director of the nonprofit, Sanyūkai, says that many people have the wrong idea about the homeless community. Le Beau argues that, despite prejudice, many homeless people are extremely hardworking and want to improve their situation. He says that “there are very few people who have gotten used to being homeless. No one wants to be homeless. They're homeless because of their circumstances.” Sanyūkai provides access to food, shelter, and medical care for those in the Sanya area of northeast Tōkyō.

One potential solution that still preserves a sense of dignity for those who find themselves homeless could lie in a housing first approach, which allows residents to skip potentially crowded shelters and to be moved directly into a one-person apartment. Kenji Seino, director of the nonprofit, Tenohasi, which provides resources for the homeless community, believes a housing first approach would be preferable to communal shelters. In 2014, Tsukuroi House near Numabukuro Station in Tōkyō's Nakano Ward was established to do just that. Since then, Tsukuroi House **(4)** has helped around 60 individuals to get back on their feet and to rent one-person apartments. In 2017, Tsukuroi Tōkyō Fund helped to set up Shio No Michi cafe, where those who have transitioned from

shelter life to living on their own in apartments can gather to make friends and find community support in one another. Jobs are also available at the cafe. One formerly homeless resident, Motonobu Watanabe, has said, “I never had a place that I could call home before or people that I belonged with . . . I was always on my own. Now, there are people who care about me.”

How can we make strides to make the city a more hospitable, empathetic, and kinder place to be in for those who are struggling with housing costs in a pandemic? It would seem the first step would be to increase the visibility of the issue of homelessness in Tōkyō. Until we acknowledge that there is a community in Tōkyō that could use support, one that appears to be hidden in plain sight, these issues will only continue. Let’s do what we can to destigmatize the issue of homelessness in Japan and continue to advocate for those who could use support the most in these uncertain times.

Lisa Paper is a Tōkyō JET and a returned Peace Corps volunteer. She studied English and Telecommunications at the University of Florida.

- 1) <https://bit.ly/3tOlnX4>
- 2) <https://bit.ly/3aaqSZw>
- 3) <https://bit.ly/3agEtP7>
- 4) <https://bit.ly/3qh7r6P>
- 5) <https://bit.ly/2N2kkn1>
- 6) <https://bit.ly/3rNftVv>
- 7) <https://bbc.in/3tRn4nE>

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CONTRIBUTING TO CONNECT



CONNECT is a magazine for the community in Japan, by the community in Japan. Everyone is welcome to write, no matter your experience or style! If you have an idea you want to see in these pages, reach out to our Head Editor, or any of our awesome section editors. We'll work with you to make it the best it can be and share it with our audience of thousands. Not every article needs to be an essay! We feature interviews, infographics, top-ten lists, recipes, photo spreads, travelogues, and more.

Contact the Head Editor of *CONNECT*, Alice Ridley, at connect.editor@ajet.net with your submissions, comments, and questions.

ARTICLES

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

SPOTLIGHT

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

PHOTOS

Members of the JET community contributed to the photos you see in this issue. If you're an aspiring photographer and want your work published, please get in contact with the lead designer, Meg Luedtke, at visualmedia.connect@ajet.net.

COMMENTS

Let us know what you think. Interact with us on Facebook, Twitter, and issuu.com.

CONTRIBUTORS PAGE

Have an article you want to share? Join our [Contributors Page](#) on Facebook to stay connected with our team so you can share your adventures whenever story strikes!



CONNECT WITH US

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

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