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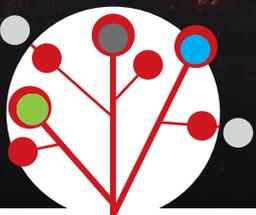
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LETTER FROM THE ASSISTANT EDITOR

いらっしやい! Welcome back everyone to another issue of CONNECT!

There is a new driver at the wheel this month, your Assistant Editor for CONNECT, it's me the secret sidekick, Damien! Alice is busy exchanging her labour for monetary compensation back home in New Zealand at the moment so you've got me this month, and what a month it is! I hope everyone had a relaxing and safe Golden Week and hopefully managed to find some time to do something they enjoy with people they care about. The sun is starting to show its face again and I for one am all for it! I know I'll regret saying that though when I inevitably stay out too long riding my bike along the riverside and return home looking redder than freshly cooked *kani*.

Our May issue is, sadly, our last normal issue of the year. We're not slacking off as we wind down to the end of our publishing run, though! Right now we're compiling all the fantastic submissions we've received for our Art Issue due out next month (keep your eye out for that, it's gonna be phenomenal). In the meantime, the May issue has more than enough quality material to keep you entertained. Shall we get into some of the choice reads?

To get you started, why not check out a fantastic interview conducted by last year's Sports Editor Rashaad Jordan. In "The Life of an Olympic Ambassador," Rashaad had the chance to interview three time Olympic medalist and Education First (EF) Tōkyō 2020 Olympic Project Ambassador DeeDee Trotter. It's an interesting and in-depth conversation that's made all the more enticing considering the still relatively unclear state of the Olympics right now!

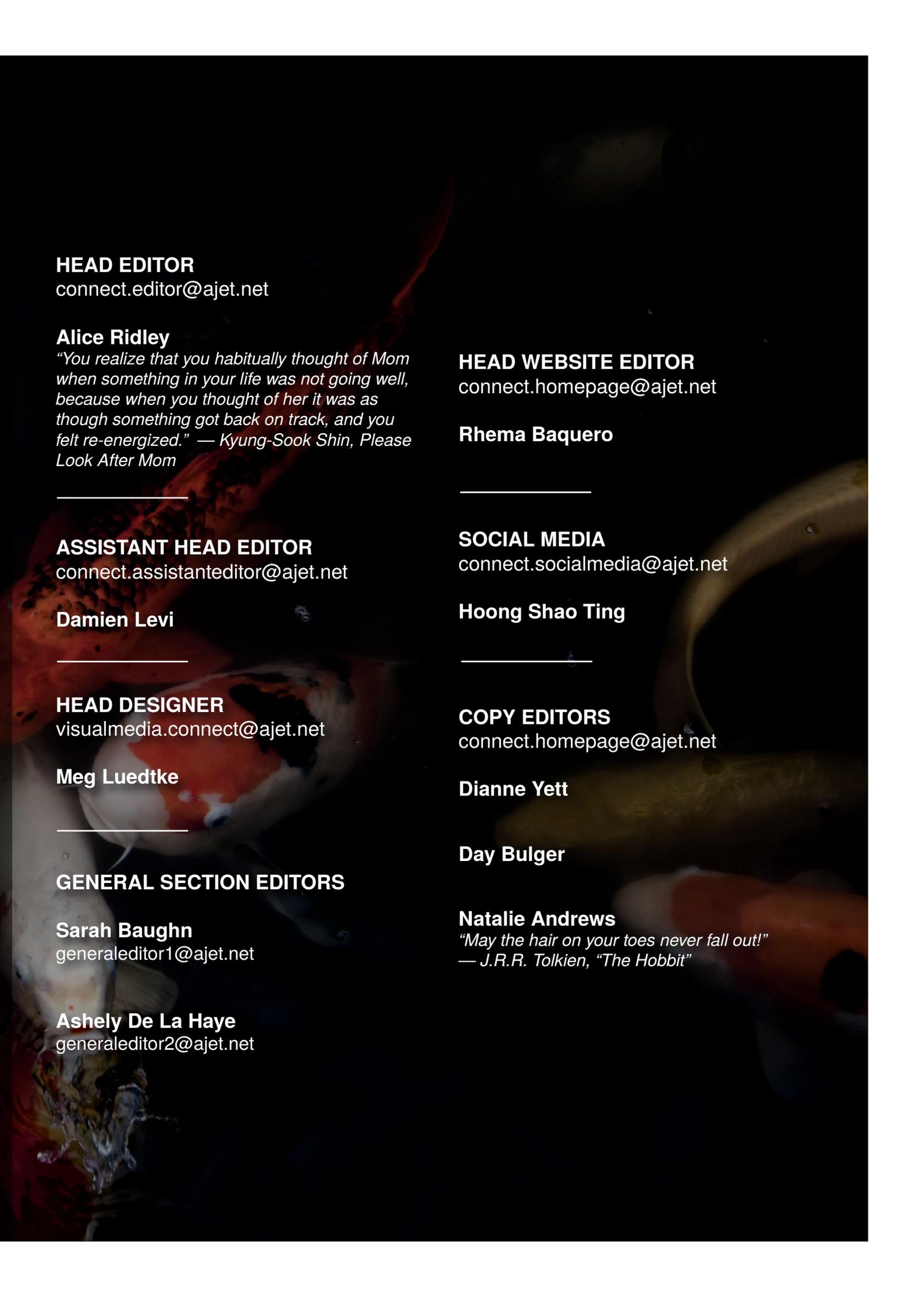
Our next pick is a must-read for anyone moving to Japan in the future who also happens to wear bras. Our Fashion & Beauty Editor Shannon has heard the horror stories of bra-buying in Japan, seen the posts on Facebook from despairing residents, and had to find out what the deal was for herself! Check out her findings, and tips from real-life bra-owners in "The Good, The Bad, and The Hopeful (Of Buying Bras in Japan)."

Next up, do you have ears and can hear? Then you've probably heard a podcast at least once in your life. In these times of quarantine and isolation, it feels like the medium has exploded with new podcasts popping up everywhere! If you and a mate have been thinking about getting one started yourself you don't want to skip over the Entertainment section's piece "A Beginner's Guide to Home Podcasting."

Last but not least, I have to include the Community section's piece "#ExperienceFukui." I'm sure not many of us can confidently say we know much about Fukui Prefecture. I'll be the first to admit that I couldn't point it out on a map for you. This piece compiled by several Fukui residents (including our own Head Designer Meg) is here to give you the low down on everything the prefecture has to offer, and why it shouldn't be an afterthought on your travel bucket list!

That's it for the month! It has been an absolute pleasure to provide you with the Letter from the (Assistant) Editor this month and I hope you all stay tuned for our Art Issue next month and then our final, retrospective issue in July! We'll be showcasing all the best articles from the last tumultuous 12 months, it's gonna be an interesting one for sure!

Damien Levi
Assistant Head Editor



HEAD EDITOR

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Alice Ridley

"You realize that you habitually thought of Mom when something in your life was not going well, because when you thought of her it was as though something got back on track, and you felt re-energized." — Kyung-Sook Shin, Please Look After Mom

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*"May the hair on your toes never fall out!"
— J.R.R. Tolkien, "The Hobbit"*

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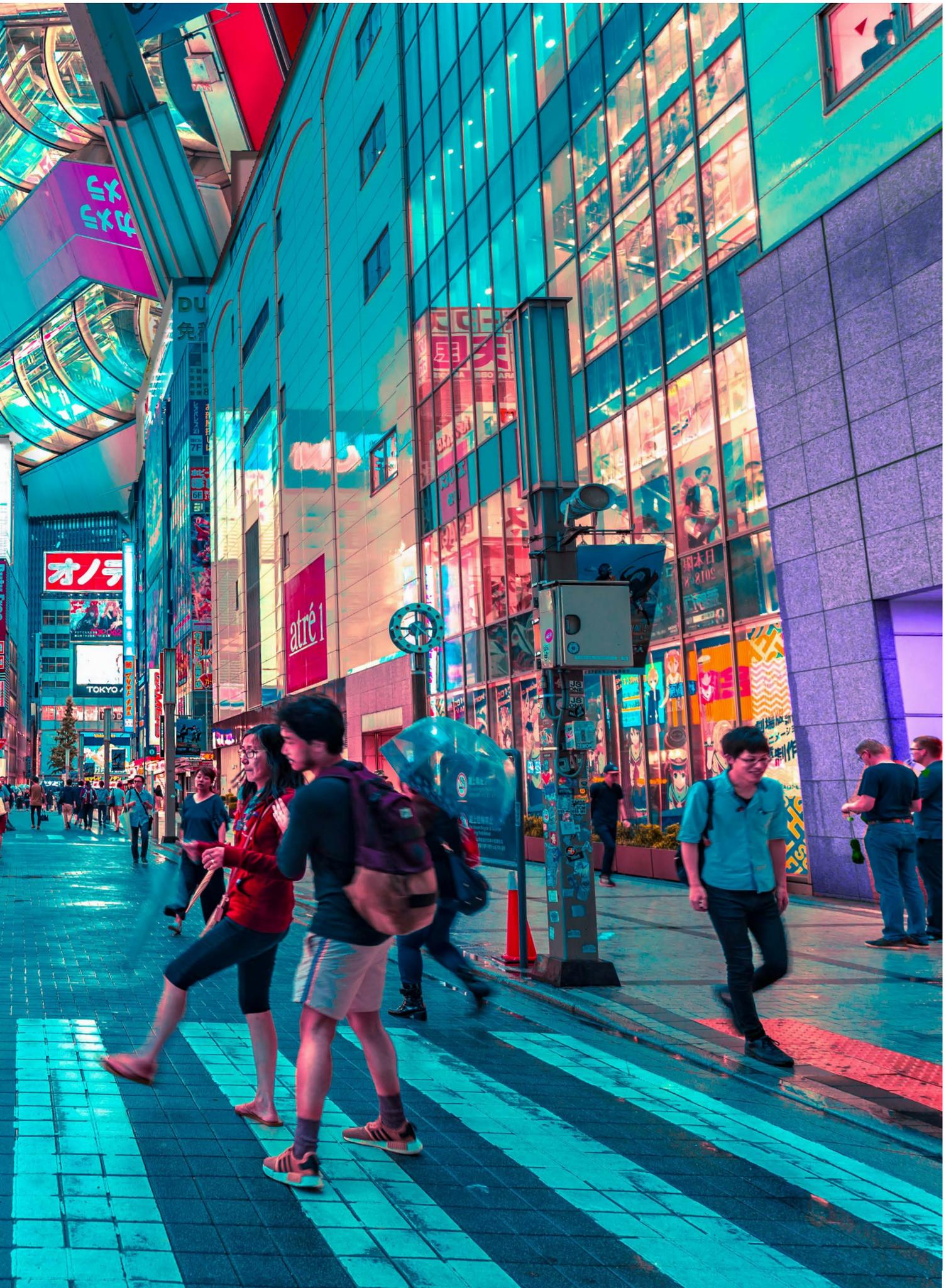
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"Fear is a friend who's misunderstood."
— John Mayer

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Meet the Ultimate SRS Study Platform, Kitsun.io

Shea Sakamoto (Chiba)

In the past four years that I've been studying Japanese and copying the study techniques of the people I look up to, what has been clear to me is that the more earnest a language learner is, the more essential [a spaced repetition software \(SRS\)](#) is in their independent study arsenal. Compared to frequently reading (and re-reading) notes and other learning materials, routinely going through a deck of words set up to make full use of [the spacing effect](#) is a faster and more efficient strategy to study vocabulary until you've memorized them.

SRS are computer programs modeled after [the evidence-based learning process](#) of using physical flashcards. I have first discovered its power and effectiveness through [WaniKani](#), a web app with a cult-like following that helps you learn most of the 2,000 jōyō kanji and almost 6,000 vocabulary words in as little as a year's time through a gamified SRS experience. However, after living and teaching in Japan for a while, I wanted a program that I could tailor to my lifestyle. While WaniKani has been a great foundation, there were things I would come across again and again in real life that I needed to learn sooner than [the Crabigator](#) would let me. With this, I turned to [Anki](#), which has regrettably made me want to throw my computer

out the window because of my lack of basic coding knowledge and my need for efficient yet still visually-appealing study materials. Even if it is a free product (with an iOS app for \$25 that can be substituted with [AnkiWeb](#)), it just made more sense to me to direct all the time and energy it took towards learning something new to my actual Japanese studies.

Luckily, I discovered [Kitsun.io](#). Kitsun, to me, is basically what Anki could have been initially if it weren't for the high learning curve. Kitsun is an SRS-based study platform that makes the process of creating personalized study decks uncomplicated while also pleasing you aesthetically and experientially. It's cheaper than [WaniKani](#), and is basically the smarter, cooler, and way better version of Anki. They have a 14-day trial, [different price plans](#) and [an annual lifetime sale](#) at the end of each year.

Incorporating Kitsun into my study routine has contributed to my motivation, flow, and overall ability to keep valuable knowledge. In fact, it is because of Kitsun that I have developed a habit of reading native Japanese material daily and have just recently read for 100 days straight—something that I have never done before (and never thought I could do).

Kitsun's Origin

Like a lot of people who started learning Japanese, Lucien Bos grew up playing Japanese RPGs, watching anime, and reading manga. After graduating from university, he immediately found a job as a full-time web developer, which gave him the opportunity to make his childhood dream of traveling to Japan a reality. From there, he became more serious in learning the language. As he was reaching the last few levels of WaniKani, he started looking for a service that had similar features, but there wasn't anything to his specific liking at the time. With his background in game design and a desire to hone his programming skills, it just made sense for him to make one himself.

The 29-year-old from the Netherlands shares, "My initial goal was to create something that's easy to use and looks pleasing, but can also offer very advanced options for people who love to customize their studies. Of course, my game design background would also come in very handy here, as gamification is an important part of keeping learners motivated."



In the three years since its conception, Kitsun's focus has been helping its users learn languages through immersion. Bos and his now team of seven have been hard at work to make consuming content in your target language as painless as possible by loading Kitsun with several practical features that help language learners learn their materials of choice.



Kitsun's Core Features

Dictionary Tool

With an integrated dictionary feature, creating a flashcard is as simple as a dictionary lookup. All you need to do is search for a word you'd like to learn, and with just a few clicks, it can add all the relevant information that you need to your card. I find this especially handy whenever I hear words I'm unfamiliar with when talking with Japanese people. Since the mobile site of Kitsun is easy to access, I just whip out my phone and add those to my deck to study for later.

Community Decks

Aside from having the ability of creating your own decks, Kitsun has a variety of original decks and user-made ones. Currently, there are decks for Japanese fiction, textbooks, JLPT words, and core vocabulary available. With a feedback system of sending suggestions and corrections back to deck creators, they are constantly improved and updated to ensure high-quality learning material.

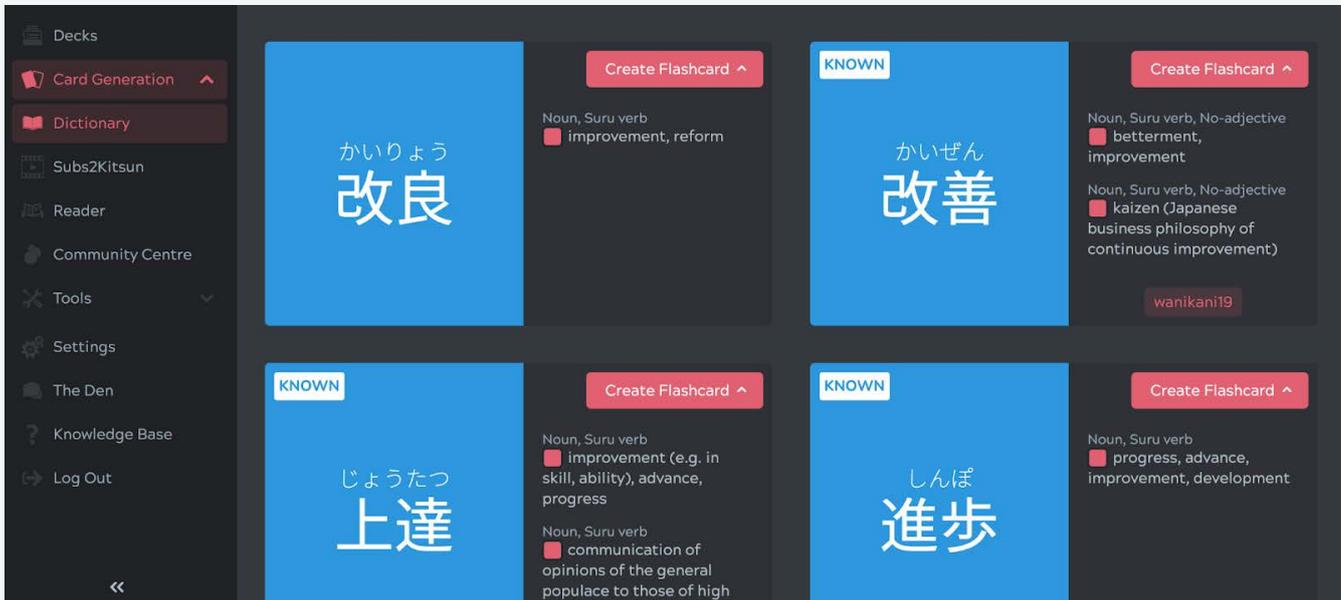
As someone currently going through *Tobira* in my spare time, I greatly appreciate that there is a deck available to help reinforce my learning. I can even pre-learn the words if I wish for a more seamless reading experience.

Reader

By copying and pasting any Japanese text or even complete books into Kitsun, the reader will parse it for you and give you information like definitions, parts of speech, frequency in text, and JLPT levels for vocabulary and kanji. Anything that you don't know can, of course, be added to a deck. To me, this is my most heavily used Kitsun feature, as it is perfect for [both intensive and extensive reading](#).

Subs2Kitsun

You can also make flashcards from watching your favorite movies, series, and other videos. This is an amazing (and again, painless) feature to have access to if you are trying to incorporate [Sentence Mining](#) into your study routine. There is something so satisfying about being able to watch something for entertainment purposes and still having the ability to turn it into a learning opportunity by instantly creating flashcards for newly encountered words and phrases at the same time.



Kitsun dark mode

Known Words System

By being able to keep track of the words that you already know, the Known Words System enables you to start new decks and easily filter them out. Used with the Reader, you will be able better gauge how easy or difficult the material is for your level. This allows me to choose which book is good for intensive or extensive reading and forces me to try a little harder to recall words when I know I've already learned them!

Kitsun's Community

With its growing community and fanbase reaching across the globe, Kitsun has also begun adding Russian, Korean, and Chinese content, which is perfect for aspiring polyglots. Their online forum, [The Den](#), as well as their [Discord server](#), is a friendly and supportive community of people passionate about language learning who are always happy to help you along your way by sharing resources, experience with language use, and developing your language learning skills. Whenever I get stuck trying to figure something out, I usually just pop in the server to ask for assistance and always get the help that I need.



Kitsun's Future

Kitsun's future looks promising, not only because a mobile app is already in the works, but because the team is also creating a knowledge base, helpful blog articles, and interactive tutorial widgets for its users. "Perhaps most exciting of them all," Bos shares, "are all the custom decks they are currently working on (and will continue to do so in the future). We plan on creating the ultimate decks to learn with for not just Japanese, but also other languages. We are starting with Japanese, Russian, Korean, and Chinese to begin with, and we have native speakers to help us with creating the content."

There are also things coming up such as a browser extension that will allow you to create flashcards from any website and add further gamification features. They are also planning on releasing a separate app focused on reading native Japanese material that will integrate Kitsun's Reader for books, texts, and manga. Looking forward to these features is really stirring the budding language geek in me as they seem set on finding ways of making learning enjoyable. If you are interested in a more detailed list of the developments that they have underway, a more detailed list can be found [here](#).

As Kitsun gets updated with more useful additional features and languages, it has the potential to be the only SRS program you'll ever need to study with. Whether you're coming in as a beginner or are someone more advanced, there will certainly be something that you can use to your benefit. Even [non-language learning such as STEM works well with SRS](#), so the possibilities of learning with Kitsun are endless. I even plan to use it to study my TESOL classes when I get the chance. And who knows—maybe once I get to a Japanese proficiency level I'm satisfied with, I may just pick up Spanish once it becomes available.

Shea is a licensed Japanese public elementary school teacher, M.Ed. in TESOL student, and a Japanese language learner from Los Angeles, California. 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](#)

IDIOM OF THE MONTH

Lara Yi (Incoming JET)

異体同心

ITAIDŌSHIN

The meaning of *itaidōshin* is similar to the English phrase “brother from another mother” and can be literally translated as “different body, same mind”.

IDIOM BREAKDOWN (I)

異 / い / i / different

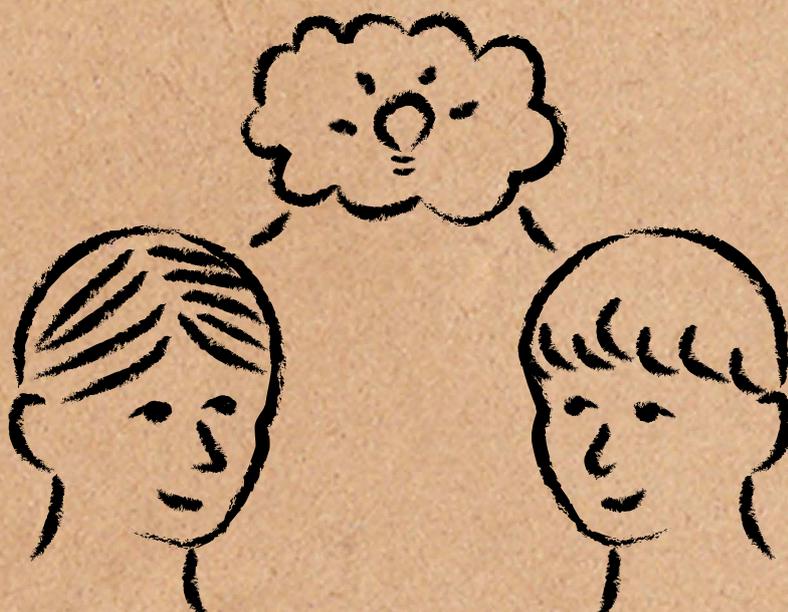
体 / たい / tai / body

同 / どう / dou / same

心 / しん / shin / heart or mind

SOURCES

1. <https://bit.ly/3uHGMSG>



Four Unconventional Digital Activities for an ESL Classroom

Angelina Kovalyova (Chiba)

Delivering great lessons in the times of emergency remote teaching is a challenge for many teachers, no matter the background. COVID-19 affected not only the mode of teaching/learning, pushing the studies online, but also greatly reduced many social aspects of learning, leaving students with the need to learn new skills in the digital world. Digital literacy has become a central concern for English as a Second Language (ESL) classrooms, pointing out to the fact that many students do not have enough digital literacy knowledge to be able to quickly adjust to remote learning. Therefore, this article will take a look at digital literacy and will offer four unconventional digital activities that teachers can use in their classrooms, whether remote or face-to-face, to be able to increase students' confidence in digital language-learning practice.

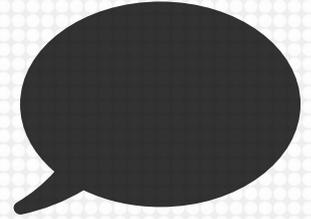
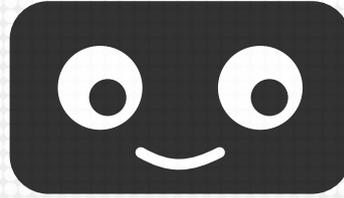
The definition of digital literacy has been evolving along with the changing landscape of education. The general notion is two-fold: students need to not only attain technical skills to be able to utilize and manage digital information, but also learn appropriate social practices for safe

digital communication (2). In their book "Digital Literacies," Hockly, Dudeney and Pegrum organize literacies into four categories in which digital literacies are focused on language, connections, information, and (re)design. Specifically, the language-focused area is concerned with texting literacy. The connections-focused area deals with participation in online communities such as social networks, blogs, etc. Information-focused literacies require students to know how to search and properly evaluate information. Finally, (re)design-focused literacies teach students to remix media content with the purpose of creating something new (1).

In order to support students in their digital language-learning journey, a teacher can introduce students to a few digital tools they can use. The following are four types of digital platforms that can be used alongside suggested digital literacies. However, while keeping these digital literacies in mind, it is important to note that language learning should remain at the forefront of any activity (2). Digital literacy skills merely help students practice language in a way that is relevant to the needs of the modern world.

Chatbots for texting practice

Language-focused literacy is not only about typing and finding the right words but also about following non-verbal and graphical cues. One way to let students safely practice recognizing these cues is by experiencing various communication situations, and chatbots are a great place for that. Chatbots are conversation applications run by AI, which can simulate real conversations with users. With chatbots, such as Mondly,



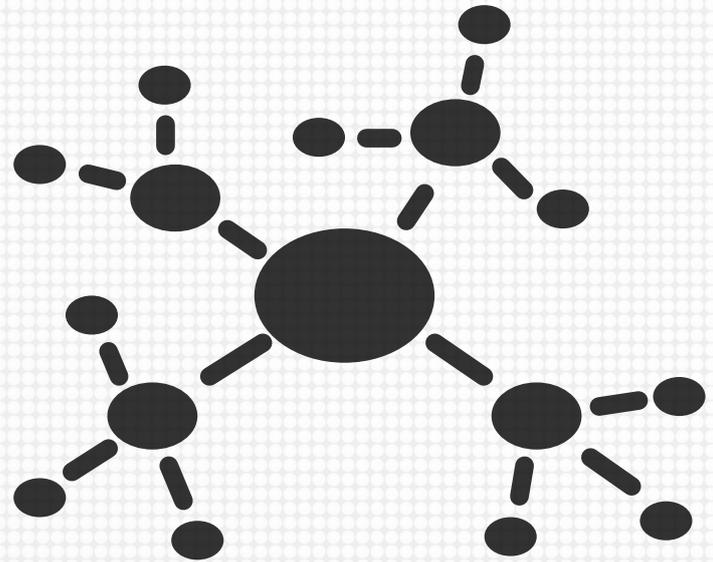
Andy, Memrise, etc., students can feel safe to make mistakes and practice real-life situations. Chatbots currently are not the most advanced technology, but they can provide a fresh twist on a conversation practice in an ESL classroom.

Framework of Digital Literacies

		First focus: Language	Second focus: Information	Third focus: Connections	Fourth focus: (Re-)design
increasing complexity ↓	*	Print Literacy Texting Literacy			
	**	Hypertext Literacy	Tagging Literacy		
	***	Multimedia Literacy	Search Literacy Information Literacy Filtering Literacy	Personal Literacy Network Literacy Participatory Literacy	
	****	Gaming Literacy Mobile Literacy		Intercultural Literacy	
	*****	Code Literacy			Remix Literacy

Video collaboration for building connections

Connections-focused area of digital literacy aims to enhance various skills related to participation, networking and personal expression. A great way to practice that is through a video discussion platform, such as Flipgrid. On this platform, a teacher can create a grid wall where students can upload videos and engage in discussions by posting new videos. In the age of Tiktok, Instagram Reels and Youtube, Flipgrid is a great place for safe expression and discussion, preparing students for real-life media engagement.



Speech-to-text applications for pronunciation practice

Knowing how to search for information and even more, how to discern the right information from the wrong requires critical thinking and ability to read and respond to visual cues. While a teacher can guide students to learn to select credible sources, students can at the same time work on their pronunciation. Many browsers and digital assistants support voice requests, and students can practice “googling” their requests by dictating the questions. If the pronunciation of a student contains a strong accent and impedes accurate search, a student can turn to additional pronunciation practice to speech-to-text applications, the most common of which is Voice Typing in Google Docs. The student can dictate a sentence to the application and pay attention to which words were mistranscribed. This practice will help the student identify pronunciation errors and help with the future information search.

Whiteboards for collaborative brainstorming

(Re)designing, the 4th area of digital literacy, is necessary for learning to successfully mix different types of media, brainstorming and creating new content. Whiteboard applications, such as Miro, Google Jamboard or Explain Everything, are good places for students to work on visual projects remotely or within the classroom. A teacher can have students do a group project in which students need to create a collage on a lesson topic and describe or discuss their choice using the collage on a digital whiteboard. Students will surely enjoy the creative element of a language-learning task.



As different digital tools are being discussed here, a teacher might object that in an ESL classroom there often isn't much time that can be dedicated to exploring new applications. The lesson time is short as it is, and teachers are often struggling to find enough time to even explain the materials they are required to deliver to students. One key moment to remember here is that digital tools should not be a priority in language learning but should only aid in language practice. However, students will need time to explore and understand how to use a new application before the actual language task is given. So, perhaps giving small tasks to perform in a chosen app throughout a few lessons could be a good strategy before the full language-related project is assigned. Additionally, it is always a good idea to choose applications or digital tools that students already know and feel comfortable with in order to reduce the cognitive load of having to perform a few tasks at once. To identify students' familiarity with a given digital tool or technique, a teacher can offer a written survey to the whole class or even ask one or two students to "investigate" their classmates' knowledge of the tool before the next lesson.

What is important to remember is that since we all live in a digital reality now, digital literacy is an essential skill which needs to be mastered regardless of a student's background. Educators need to be the first ones to help their students

adapt to this new reality so that the students feel empowered and comfortable to test their language in real-life situations without having to worry about understanding the language context.

Angelina is a TOEFL test instructor and a PhD student in an English Education program. She is a Ukrainian but has been living abroad half of her life, with Japan being a current home. She is always excited to talk about test-prep techniques, language learning and new applications that can help us learn languages efficiently. Drop a line or give her a follow at @lina.kovalyova on Instagram.

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Get On It! Why not to beg



Now is the best time in history to invest

Derek Hurst (Nagano)

Oh, I understand it better than anyone: the reluctance, the feeling of inadequacy. I have made the same excuses myself: The stock market is too complex. Almost everyone loses money there in the end. I don't have nearly enough savings to make a difference. I'll start saving for retirement *next* year, I mean, I still got time, don't I?

It's all a load of crock. Listen, the best time in the past two years to get started investing and putting your money to work would have been March 20, 2020, right at the bottom of the COVID-19 crash, when the Dow Jones, S&P 500 and Nasdaq lost a combined 80% of their value over the course of a few weeks. You'd have made an absolute killing over the past 10 months if you'd gotten started then, in the midst of the wreckage. We're talking double and even triple digit gains. But, if you missed it then, the second best time to start is right now.

In every way we are at the opposite end of the spectrum today: the market (as of the writing of this article on April 9, 2021) is at an all time high, way higher in fact than where it was before the crash. There's a real feeling, even among seasoned investors, that things are just too frothy right now and the exuberance is destined to lead to disappointment. That may very well be the case, but then again, no one knows the future. Just look at the hilarious disruption the Evergiven ship caused when it got itself lodged in the middle of the Suez back in April—no one could have seen that coming. The point I'm trying to make is no one knows what the future holds, but

what I do know now is that anyone who starts investing today will be better off than someone who doesn't. It's that simple.

Let me address some of the concerns I mentioned and show you why they don't hold water. First off: "The stock market is too complex." This is the biggie, and the most common misconception I hear from people. The stock market is not complex. It is multifaceted, but at the end of the day, it really is quite simple. People buy things and people sell things. That's it. There's thousands of different ways to go about it, but that's the gist. The difference is that today, it has never been easier to get started. Literally everything you need to know about trading and investing can be learned, for free, on YouTube. Zero-commission brokers, in the U.S. at least, are now the norm, meaning you don't have to pay a cent to make trades. Even in other places where zero-commission has yet to make inroads, commissions are comparatively cheap.

Compare this to 30 years ago, where 45 dollars per trade was considered phenomenal in terms of commission. Back then, trades could only be conducted over the telephone, which entailed calling your broker in New York, waiting on hold for several minutes and putting in your order. These days, things have been considerably simplified and improved, to say the least. What used to take at least an hour can now be done in literally seconds and for no cost. You can get started, right now, with 100 dollars and start investing.

Onto the second criticism: “Almost everyone loses money.” Look, it is true, at some point you will lose money investing in the stock market. Not every day is going to be a green one. But saying everyone loses money like it’s some profound revelation from the heavens is just disingenuous. It’s equivalent to saying everyone will get sick at some point so you might as well just stay inside and play it safe.

Well, I got news for you: you can get sick being inside as well, just like you can and will lose money by not investing. You see, there’s this little thing called inflation, which if you haven’t heard, is kind of a big deal in the financial world. It’s the silent force that erodes and consumes your money over time; the financial equivalent of a mouse sneaking into your cupboard at night and slowly devouring what it finds. If you leave your money sitting in a savings account, even if it is a high yield one, you are losing money compared to anyone who does even the most basic, passive investing. This is because, if your money is at least working for you in the markets, it is *earning* you more over time. In a savings, or worse still, a checking account, your money does literally nothing for you except lose its power over time. It’s like the battery in your iPhone--as the years wear on, it loses its charge. The same applies to your hard-earned savings.

The last two points are “I barely earn enough to save” and “I am still young and thus have enough time to wait until later to save”, and they are probably the most insidious and destructive of the misconceptions that exist in regards to personal finance. I’ve talked to a worrying amount of people and friends in my millennial generation that do not invest because they don’t think there’s any point. They use the same, tired excuses I just

mentioned, or even worse, say that the system is rigged against them or that it is inherently exploitative to invest in the stock market. I’m not saying Wall Street is perfect, but what I know is that you cannot change the system from the outside—if you want to shift things for the better, you’ve got to be in the game. Even if you’ve just a few hundred bucks to your name, that money could multiply ten times by the time you retire if you are just consistent in your investing. That’s doing the absolute bare minimum.

And, if you don’t want to be a part of the financial system because of some misplaced sense of justice, consider this: when you make a trade, buy a stock or sell an option, it doesn’t matter what color your skin is, what your sexual orientation is, what gender you identify as or what kind of neighborhood you grew up in. You never see the person on the other end, and they never see you. It could be a fluffy dog for all you know. The only thing that matters is if you’ve got the goods. Stock costs 140 dollars a share? Well, as long as you’ve got 140 bucks, business can be done.

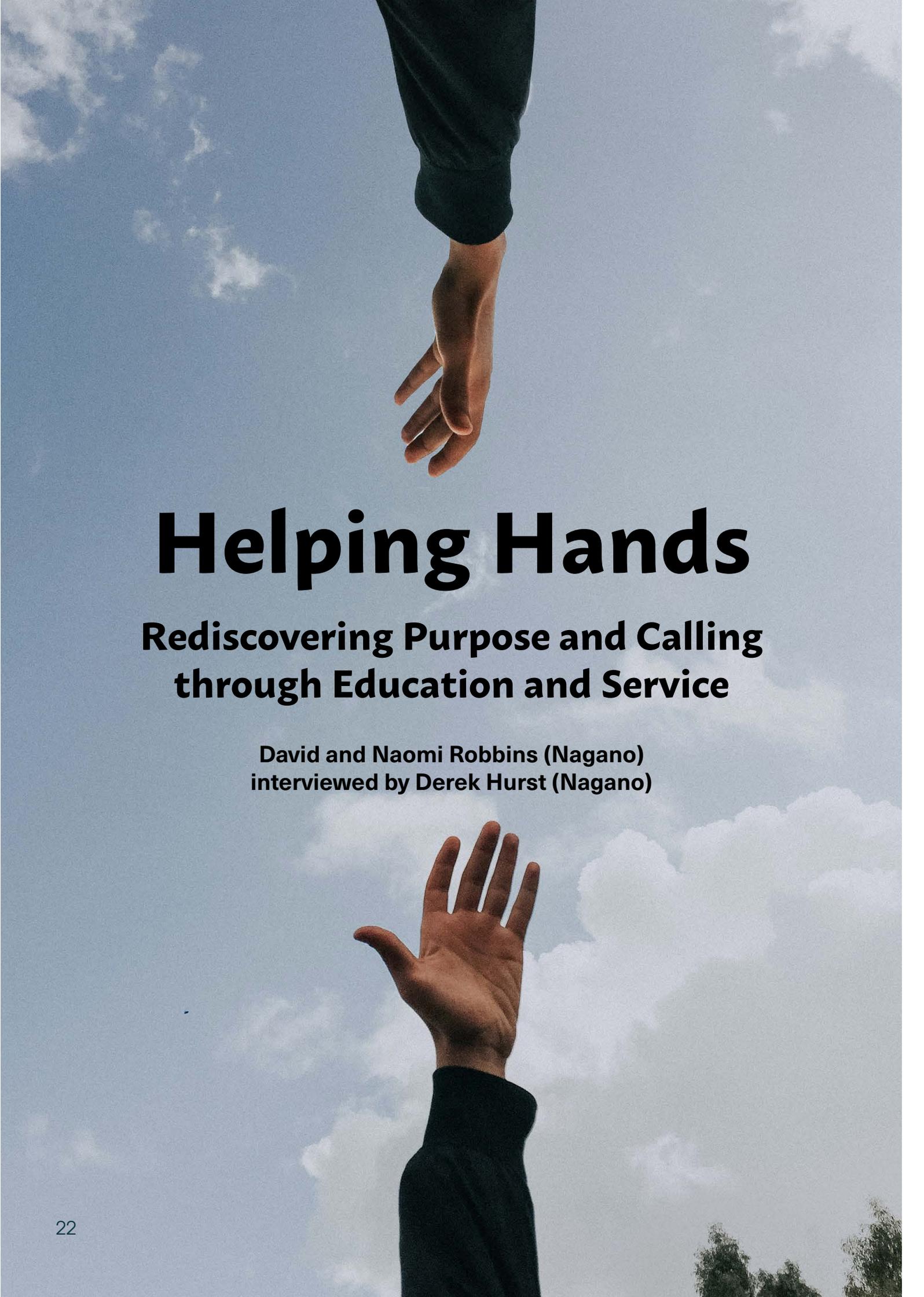
It’s not a stretch to say that the stock market is the most egalitarian institution that exists. At its core it’s pure mathematics. I know that can be a tough pill to swallow, and I can already hear the cries of skepticism. Just hear me out: when investing, no one cares who you are as long as you’ve got the money to complete the deal. And there’s real power in that: no one can deny you for who you are. No one is checking to see if you tick the “right” boxes. They don’t even care when your birthday is! The only thing that matters when you open up your trading app is if you got enough dough to cover. So, don’t you think it’s high time you get in on this? I would urge it. Investing and seeing your money grow over time is what empowers people

to take control of their lives, regardless of their backgrounds. There's nothing like logging in and seeing your account a little higher than it was the previous day; seeing that you've made money, on paper at least, while sleeping. There's no feeling quite like it, and there's absolutely no reason why you should delay starting on this journey a nanosecond longer. Get on it.

If you're interested in getting involved in the stock market from Japan, make sure you take a look at our November 2020 issue of **CONNECT** where I penned [a crash course article](#) for international residents wanting to invest their yen.

Derek Hurst is an investor and educator living in Nagano Prefecture. He has written several other pieces for CONNECT about the ways one can invest in the markets.



A photograph of two hands reaching towards each other against a blue sky with white clouds. One hand is at the top, reaching down, and the other is at the bottom, reaching up. Both hands are wearing dark sleeves.

Helping Hands

**Rediscovering Purpose and Calling
through Education and Service**

**David and Naomi Robbins (Nagano)
interviewed by Derek Hurst (Nagano)**

When they first came together to Japan in 1985, the country was at the height of the bubble economy and it seemed the only place it would be headed was up, up and up. It wasn't all peaches and roses however—finding English books were next to impossible, there was no Netflix or Amazon, and the overall proficiency of English for average people left much to be desired. It presented more of a problem for David, however, as he had never lived outside of his native Texas. For Naomi, however, coming back in the '80s was simply returning home. The daughter of missionaries, she lived in Japan until she was 18 and, after meeting David during college, returned to help fill in for her parents for their mission work. Japan and the world has changed much since then, but the spirit of service and education that brought them both here more than 20 years ago is still alive and well in their home and hearts, and expanding despite the pandemic that has caused so much turmoil.

Tell me what it is exactly that you do.

We have a company, Megulife, which basically has its hands in a lot of pots. We run a church in Chikuma City, as well as a wedding business. The education side of things is by far our biggest project going at the moment, which is running an international, English-only kindergarten in Chikuma.

You mean like a conversation school for kids?

Nope! The school is a fully-registered *Hoikuen*, just like any other regular preschool here in Japan. We run it under the umbrella of our company, Megulife, where the actual school is being run by our daughter and her husband. But it is a normal preschool like any other in Japan. The difference with ours is that 90% of the activities are done in English. Our teachers are all bilingual, and the only time Japanese is used is if there is a misunderstanding or the kids get into a scuffle.



**I've never heard of something like that;
I didn't even realize it was possible.**

You'd really be surprised by how much the Japanese government encourages these kinds of initiatives. The government has finally realized that they have a real labor shortage issue, and having young mothers completely removed from the workforce to care for young children is no longer feasible for the society. That's why they are so keen on childcare and preschools. In some cases the government will actually provide up to 90% of the funding required to get new kindergartens off the ground. As far as having it in English, we have been pleasantly surprised at the interest. Our school has actually been so successful that we're looking at expanding to babies; that is more of a daycare situation for very

young children. There's actually a fully-English kindergarten up in Sendai that consistently has a very long waiting list to get in. I think parents are looking for something different and more expansive for their children, and having an international environment is very attractive.

What's next for you guys then?

Well, like I said, the kindergarten is expanding, but the next big thing we are looking at is getting a retro-American coffee shop going. Again, our daughter is spearheading it, but we are acting as the guarantor and major partner. You could almost think of us as a venture capital firm. We used to be very involved in everything, but we're both getting older and looking at retirement, so



we're really looking to step back from day-to-day management and leave that to others. But that's the great thing about how we've managed to organize all of this: there is now a framework in place that allows us to hand things over smoothly. We still pastor full-time, but even that we are looking at handing over to our son-in-law, who will soon take up the reins at the church. What we would like to start doing is getting more involved with our local community and get an actual community center up and running. Our vision is to have a variety of workshops offered, everything from woodworking to cooking to flower arrangement. The emphasis would be family: workshops with your entire family. Of course, with COVID still raging, we're looking at starting it up no earlier than mid-2021, but we are both excited at the prospect.



What are some words of advice you would give to anyone looking to get into your line of work?

Well, our line of work is pretty broad, but I think the most important thing you can do is get your permanent residency as soon and as quickly as possible. In our case, we were able to do it through a friend's company, so we got ours relatively hassle-free compared to others, but having that permanent residency was an absolute golden ticket; it just expands what you are able to do so much. Once you have that PR, you're no longer locked into one specific industry, which then allows you to branch out and grow. The other thing that was absolutely invaluable that I would recommend any PR holder do is form your own holding company. Now, it takes a bit of time and paperwork, but once you have that, it gives you more legitimacy in the eyes of the government and regular people. The city and government especially are really keen to encourage new businesses and get them going, so there are a lot of incentive programs out there. Through our company, we were able to bring our daughter and her husband over and allowed them to create the English kindergarten. Part of it all is luck, absolutely. But the other part of it is using the system and leveraging where you can.

Derek Hurst has been in Japan since 2008 and currently works for the City of Chikuma as a public junior high school teacher.

David and Naomi Robbins live in Chikuma City and currently pastor their own church while managing their holding company, Megulife.

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Into a wild wolf
But hold me tight and fear me not
I am your own true love"
— Ballad of Tam Lin*

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*"Whenever someone creates something with
all of their heart, then that creation is given a
soul." — Hayao Miyazaki*



BUYING BRAS
IN JAPAN

The Good,
The Bad, and
The Hopeful

Shannon Stocker (Kobe)

I've heard the horror stories, I've trawled the Facebook groups, and now, I've compiled your anecdotes and advice to help us all through one particularly frustrating experience... buying bras.

I sent a survey around multiple Facebook groups to get the lowdown on your experiences of finding well-fitting bras in Japan. I heard back from people who are living all across the country who helped me to better understand what to expect when the underwiring of my favourite bra inevitably makes its great escape.

It wasn't surprising to hear that buying bras hasn't been a joyful day out for most people because it *never* is, but I was happy to find that there is light at the end of the tunnel. This article looks at authentic experiences and top tips from those who have struggled through so that we don't have to... Enjoy!

What We're Getting Ourselves Into

*Note: based on 32 individual responses

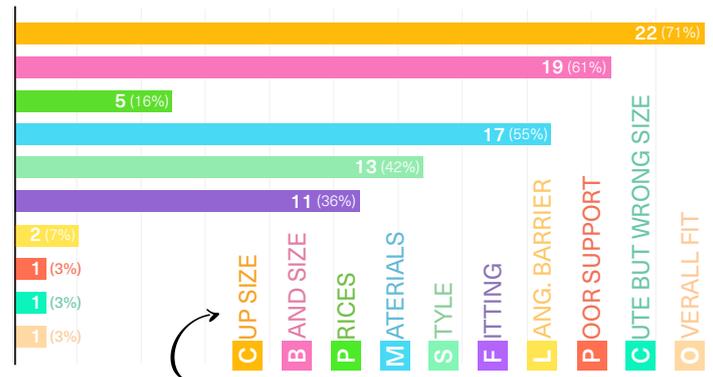
Having heard mostly horror stories (thank you, Reddit), I went into this expecting the worst, and, well, this is what I found instead...



HAVE YOU EVER STRUGGLED WHEN BUYING BRAS IN JAPAN?

While 25% of people had extremely difficult experiences with buying bras, and only one person had an extremely easy experience, the majority of responses fell somewhere in between. Not so bad!

WHAT DID YOU STRUGGLE WITH? (choose all that apply)



WHAT DID YOU STRUGGLE WITH MOST? (choose one)



The biggest struggle for everyone has been cup size, closely followed by band size. It's no surprise, as fitting is notoriously hard to get right, wherever you go.

DO YOU PREFER TO IMPORT YOUR BRAS? (NO PREFERENCE 3%)

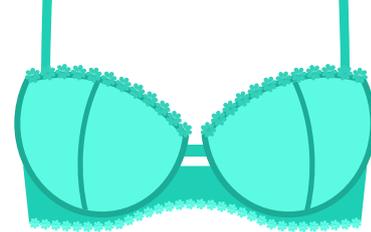


With that being said, 40% of people prefer to import their bras from outside of Japan. So, we found out exactly where it was that they shopped instead.

For US-based options, try Macy's, Nordstrom, or Maidenform. UK-based examples included Bravissimo, Marks and Spencer, and Next. If you prefer to buy from Australia, check out Triumph and Big Girls Don't Cry. A lot of people recommended Amazon and ASOS for easy international imports.

Though, if you want to shoot your shot in Japan like the majority of our respondents, just keep reading!

The Good



Ok, you need a new bra. Now what? Knowing where to look can be the biggest challenge. Here's some advice from our experts!

"If you're plus size, try and shop at Shimamura or online!" **Deanna (Nagasaki)**

"Rui Glamorous is a godsend for larger cup sizes." **Beth (Nara)**

"Glamour Princess" **Chey (Hyōgo)**

"Smileland" **Anonymous (Kyōto)**

"Shimamura, GU, Uniqlo, Re-J, Aeon Style" **Michelle (Akita)**

"Wacoal" **Anonymous (Tokushima)**

"H&M" **Anonymous (Hyōgo 2017-2020)**



"GAP" **Anonymous (Kanagawa)**

"Peach John is my recommendation. They have a lot of selection that isn't overly frilly." **Carrie (Tōkyō)**

"Honestly, Muji and Uniqlo have the most comfortable bras." **Whitney (Hyōgo)**

"There are a lot of shops that don't go past a D, so I'd recommend shopping at Peach John, aimfeel, and anywhere else that specifically provides larger sizes." **Maggie (Tōkyō)**

"Uniqlo's bras are the most comfortable bras I've ever worn. I wish I could get them in my home country. I'm still wearing them at home even though they're falling apart by this point." **Jessica (Ehime 2016-2019)**

The Bad

Now that you know where to go, what should you expect? To help prepare you for what you might encounter once you venture out to the lingerie stores, let's take a look at the experiences of people who have been there, done that, and got the bras!

While these individual experiences may give you some insight into what to expect, please be mindful that every scenario will be different. These anecdotes are intended to inform and forewarn, but please remember to be open-minded when approaching stores and their staff members; times are a-changin'!

"It can be difficult to find anything over a B cup and larger band sizes." **Anonymous (Tōkyō 2018-2019)**

"I have walked into a store where the woman started shaking her head, then started apologizing and shooing me out of the store 'cause there was nothing there for me." **Anonymous (Hyōgo 2019-2021)**



“A lot of popular Japanese brands have my cup and band size; however, the selection is either basic granny pantie style or over the top padding and ruffle.

Finding a full-coverage bra with no extra padding is near impossible. I already have large breasts—I don’t need a push-up bra.

I miss being able to try bras on before dropping a load of cash on them without the hassle of online returns.”

Julianne (Aichi)

“Japan uses a different scale than North America, but converting to your starting point is easy. Finding anything that fits, looks cute, and holds the girls up enough so you can run downstairs without causing a scandal—not so much.”

Anonymous (Kyōto)

“JP bras tend to be very lacy, frilly, colourful, and padded. Plain, T-shirt bras, especially for those of us who don’t fit into Uniqlo’s sizing, can be a bit harder to find. And I’ve yet to see an unmolded/unpadded bra here.”

Beth (Nara)

“I’ve had an extremely difficult time finding bras here. There is only one store I’ve ever seen with my bra size. And within that size, I generally have two tan options at ¥6000+ each.”

Danielle (Tokushima)

Decent bras cost almost 5000 yen a pair, and I don’t understand why. However, I wouldn’t say it’s a nightmare shopping for bras, but it is quite a tedious task.” **Anonymous (Kyōto)**

“I had a tough time till I started following “plus-sized” Japanese models and started to find smaller, online shops that catered to larger girls, larger band and cup sizes. Quality isn’t amazing, but I can buy decently-priced bras that I don’t care to wear out after a year.” **Chey (Hyōgo)**

“One thing that shocked me if you buy your bras at big chains like Uniqlo or even lingerie stores: they will have S, M, and L, but these sizes cover a range of ABC sizes and feel too tight for me, but too big for me if I go between the S and M. Also, so many bras have frilly prints, ruffles, and lace designs on them that it just makes it hard to find a decent-looking bra.

“I’m already plus size when it comes to bras, and, even back in the US, it was just easier for me to buy my bras on Amazon. When I was pregnant with my baby, my size and cup increased, and I was just at the very high end of what was available at the Wacoal physical store. The selection was very old lady-looking, the material was scratchy, and there was no thickness of material to conceal my perky tips. I ended up getting the equivalent size and cup on Amazon US of my go-to brand and make.”

Anonymous (Tōkyō)

“My wedding was in Japan. The bras I ordered from America to try under my wedding dress didn’t end up working well with my dress. In a panic, I went to the largest shopping mall in our prefecture to try to buy something that would work. The saleswoman tried her hardest, but there were no bras there that had a big enough cup size. She explained that none of the brands they carried even made the size I would need based on my measurements. For reference, I was not overweight; my cup size was just too big. I was able to have one of my wedding guests bring me something from America, but I was so afraid it might not fit right, and I wouldn’t be able to get something in Japan. I know there are Japanese women with larger boobs in Japan, so I find it kind of unreasonable that the largest mall in our prefecture would have nothing that would fit those women.”

Jen (Tokushima)

The Hopeful

Now for the good news! Forget the horror stories (for now). It's not all as bad as it seems. There are options out there, even if you face a road bump like the ones above. Here are some people who faced the music and came out on top. . . .

"I actually think that, once I realized to only shop at plus-size stores, buying bras became a normal experience. Even one better than in the USA. In the USA and many other countries, buying plus-size bras is a struggle because cup and band sizes can differ from brand to brand, and there are also no attractive bras. I think Japan has great bra stylists/designers.

The materials are the absolute best. I love how cute and detailed the bras are and appreciate the range in colors and aesthetic, even for plus-size bras (which usually only have plain designs in the West)." **Deanna (Nagasaki)**

"I've had plenty of bad experiences with sizing issues, but I have one notable good experience. I found bras with no wire at all, and no straps either. I haven't found anything like them in the USA, and they're the most comfortable things I've ever used." There's an example from Peach John [here](#). **Carrie (Tōkyō)**

"I'm a small size, so finding super cute bras is very easy. I wish the US had as many cheap, stylish lingerie-type bras as Japan does! Finding a plain bra of the same caliber as the lingerie styles seems impossible, so I buy those plain ones when I go back to the US. I've had some trouble understanding the measurements in Japan because it seems all over the place, and you can't know until you try on the bra." **Chey (Hyōgo)**

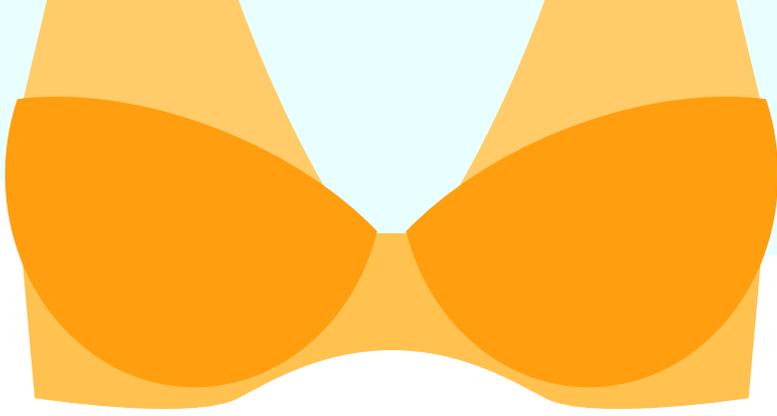
"My cup size is easy to find, but accuracy can vary with brands. Also, there's too much padding, but usually, you can remove those." **Joy (Hyōgo)**

"If you're petite and small-busted, there's really no need to spend more money buying foreign bras; you can find comfortable bras that fit well here." **Whitney (Hyōgo)**

"My size is hard enough to find in western brands (although getting easier), but it's almost non-existent in Japan and impossible to find in brick and mortar stores. There's one online brand that specifically caters for larger bust sizes called Rui Glamorous which I like. I can veeeery occasionally find my size on sites like ZozoTown and Nissen, but it'll usually be the largest cup size they offer. In terms of overall fit, I actually prefer the Japanese bras I have because I'm very short from shoulder to bust, so western bras are often too long in the underwire and straps, but Japanese bras are just right for me." **Beth (Nara)**

"Measurements were usually displayed or listed somewhere, so if I didn't feel like asking the shopkeeper for help, I'd go by the chart or tag and try it on myself. I really like buying bras from Japan because it's very cheap for adorable designs I can't find in the West. I can't speak for those with larger cup sizes, though." **Anonymous (Saitama)**

"Salespeople have always been very kind and polite when doing measurements. Language barrier wasn't much of an issue—I just Google translated, "I want to get measured," and everything went great. There was always plenty of privacy and at least a few cute sets of underwear available in my size!" **Maggie (Tōkyō)**



The Advice

Things might go wrong. No one ever said buying a bra was an easy task, but it can be made easier.

Keep in mind some valuable advice from those who have been in your position and came out the other side with a bra they love (or, at least, one that does the trick).

“Be honest—say it’s your first time buying a bra in Japan.” **Anonymous (Tokushima)**

“If your cup size is above a Japanese D, toss your band and cup size (converted of course) into Google and weigh your Japan-size options.” **Julianne (Aichi)**

“Be patient and go beyond your local mall.” **Carrie (Tōkyō)**

“Know how a good bra is supposed to fit. This way, you know what you should be looking for even if the sizes don’t seem to match what you expect them to match.” **Anonymous (Tōkyō)**

“You can find bras in unlikely places like Shimamura and Uniqlo!” **Anonymous (Fukuoka)**

“Go up two cup sizes, and start from there.” **Anonymous (Mie)**

“Always try it before you buy it!” **Joy (Hyōgo)**

“Target more towards lingerie stores if you want more choices and better fitting.” **Anonymous (Kyōto)**

“Get measured in person—otherwise, you won’t know what size you are at that particular store.” **Maggie (Tōkyō)**

“If the wire hasn’t snapped and the bra is in good condition but that pesky wire decided to sneak on out and greet the world, it doesn’t mean you have to trash the whole thing. Just shimmy it back inside, and learn how to patch fix over the hole it made. It will make your life so much easier and less stressful, especially if you buy abroad.” **Anonymous (Iwate)**

Shannon Stocker is our Fashion and Beauty Editor. She is a delayed JET Programme participant who is stuck in Liverpool, UK, for the time being. She fills her days with freelance writing gigs, watching way too much YouTube, and baking very delicious cakes.

Shop Local with **TAKE FIVE**

Tanaka Muneko (Toyama)

Note: All interview responses were originally in Japanese. They have been translated into English by Day Bulger.

This month we're spotlighting [TAKE FIVE](#), a family-run clothing shop in Toyama Prefecture. The shop has existed since 1987. It was founded by Teiji Takamoto, who continues to run the shop alongside his daughter Tanaka Muneko.

TAKE FIVE has a distinctively relaxed style. They select garments that focus on shape, personality and texture. Plus, many of the items on offer are unisex, offering a casual take on everyday looks that defy gender norms.

We spoke to Tanaka about what it's like working with family and how she chooses what to sell in store.

How do you and your father influence each other?

Since we both differ in age and gender, there is a wide range of customers who visit our store, and the two of us have lots of fun swapping ideas about various fashion coordination suggestions while serving our customers.

Has your personal style changed since you started working with your father in the shop?

I was touched by the designs and sensible craftsmanship of the "KAPITAL" brand that we carry here at our store, and I have replaced the natural clothing that I used to wear with KAPITAL's clothes, which are unique and naturally exciting to wear.



What draws you to select certain items to sell in your shop?

We choose our products based on design, sewing, and cost, while also staying on top of current fashion trends.

Some items that have caught my attention from the "KAPITAL" brand that we carry are the *Smile* and *Bone* collections, as well as the recently released *Century Denim* line, which uses the traditional mud-dyeing techniques of Japan's Amami Ōshima Island and is made through a very complicated thread-stitching process.



What inspires you and your father the most?

This profession enables me to meet people of all sorts of different ages and genders, and the conversations that I have with those people are my greatest inspiration.

Tanaka was born in Uozu City, Toyama Prefecture. After graduating from high school, Tanaka began working at TAKE FIVE.

Day is a second-year Assistant Language Teacher and Copy Editor for CONNECT. She is originally from Alberta, Canada, and currently resides in Annaka City, Gunma Prefecture. In her spare time, she adores cooking up tasty vegan treats, singing, playing the koto, and studying Japanese to her heart's content. In the future, she aspires to become a professional Japanese translator. You can follow all of her wild adventures by checking out her blog at [Dreamer by Day](#).

TAKE FIVE



A BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO



PODCASTING

Jonathan Combey (Tottori)

So you've moved to Japan, and there is so much happening around you! You want to be creative, maybe even join the legions of J-blogger's and vloggers, but how? Why not your own podcast!? It's a great way to be creative, practice speaking, and connect with people online. Who knows how many listeners you might get? Regardless, making a podcast is a wonderful creative outlet.

Understandably, microphones and audio can be super scary to begin with. However, you really don't need a hundred-dollar Blue Yeti microphone to start making a podcast. This article is going to give you a rundown of everything you need to make your own podcast, from picking a mic and making recording space, to editing your podcast and the software you need for that, through making your podcast available to the public via hosting sites. Sounds scary? It shouldn't! And if it does, I'm here to help you on every step. I've outlined easy access points for beginners and more advanced info for those wanting to add a little polish to their operation.

HI! IM
HERE TO
HELP.



MICROPHONES:

ENTRY LEVEL:

Your Phone (really)

So first, we need to look at what you're going to speak into. That is, of course, a microphone, and yes, your phone does contain a mic. It was once used to talk to people. The recording quality of your phone is very likely going to be the best quality microphone that most people have access to. It beats the innards out of any built-in computer mic or headset microphone.

But Jon, whenever I call my mum or friends, we always sound really bad. No one would want to listen to that!

Well, your phone is doing two things when you're making a call: one is recording your voice, the other is sending it hundreds, if not thousands, of miles away. If we only make it do the former, it tends to be a bit better quality. (Most phones will have some kind of built-in voice memo app). Another reason why your phone calls can sound so bad is that your dad probably isn't calling you from a sound booth. We'll cover how to make your own home sound booth a little later.

FORMIDABLE HOBBYIST:

USB Mic + Pop Shield / Mic Cover



If you want to invest in something a little more sophisticated, a decent USB microphone will set you back about 3000-6000 yen. Don't use a mic attached to a headset or anything overdesigned and branded for something overspecific like "streamers" or "gamers." They tend to be overpriced and not as good. I recommend the [Behringer C1-U USB Condenser Mic](#). It's a little more expensive than the rest, but it will last, and if you ever want to upgrade, it will still work fine as a travel mic. What you also need is a pop shield/mic cover. These stop your P's and B's from giving an audio flick to the listeners' ears. Most microphones you buy somewhere like Amazon will have suggested pop shields or covers for your microphone.

PROFESSIONAL WANNABE:

High-Quality USB Condenser Mic / XLR Microphone with Kit

Mics start to get expensive here. There are entire [articles](#) dedicated to just this topic, and I recommend you do your own research on what is right for you. The good-level USB and XLR microphones will cost anywhere from 15,000+ yen. XLR uses a different kind of cable that requires extra equipment (usually a mixing board and a power source) but is usually a little better quality. I personally prefer USB because they are easier to use. Regardless, what is most

important is that they are condenser microphones. The easiest way I can simplify what that means is they require an external source of electricity to give you better quality. The high-quality USB mics tend to have that all included, but with less quality and less ability to tweak the settings than an XLR microphone.

I personally use an [Audio-Technica AT2020 USB+](#).



RECORDING SPACE:

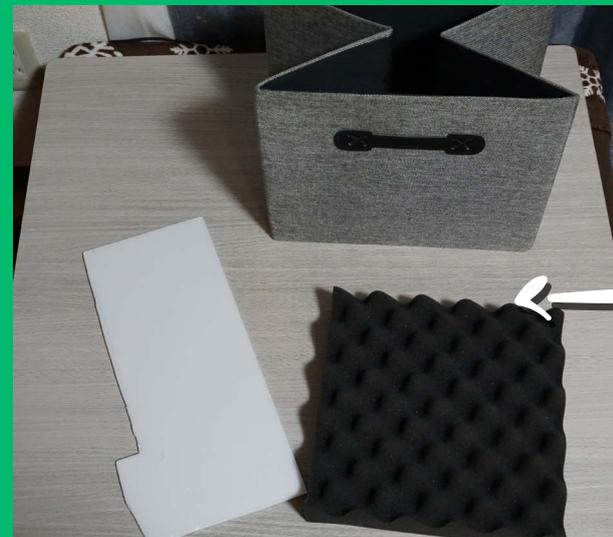
ENTRY LEVEL:

A Cupboard / Bedsheet



Your recording space is so important! Now pay attention; this is time for the science bit. Sound works in waves. So when you speak, imagine waves coming from your mouth like Banshee from X-Men. What happens when these waves hit hard surfaces like floors, walls, statues of David, is that they bounce off those surfaces, causing reverb and horrible sounds. So what you need to create a DIY sound booth is soft stuff, lots of soft stuff (like clothes and bedding). These soft things absorb the sound waves and stop them bouncing back and messing with your lovely recording. This is why you see that weird, black fabric and foam on sound booths for musicians and voice actors. They make it so your microphone only picks up the best sound waves coming directly from your mouth.

The best way to replicate this at home is simply using a place where you have lots of soft things already, like your closet or wardrobe. Standing amongst your coats and shirts will really improve what your voice sounds like. The most important place to have soft stuff is on the opposite side of the mic from yourself (because you're already soft, relatively speaking). If you don't have a semi-walk-in wardrobe, several towels or pieces of bedding strung up between chairs or opposite a sofa will help you considerably. Also, try to have a surface to place your phone on—we move our hands a lot while speaking, and you can hear that!





**HELLO
EVERYONE!**

FORMIDABLE HOBBYIST:
Cupboard or Adapted Box

Now, if you've made your closet nice and cosy, then there is no reason not to stay there as long as you're happy with the sound. But another alternative here is getting a cute little cardboard box that will fit your mic. Fill it with some towels or maybe, if you're super fancy, some of that [black sound foam](#). Now you have a cute little recording box. You can play around with how it sounds, but that box will absorb most of the bad sound, leaving only your beautiful voice. For a more permanent recording box, check the next section.



PROFESSIONAL WANNABE:

Nice Recording Box or Homemade Studio

This is what I personally use! What I did was take a collapsible box from Daiso and take some cardboard/art foam, cut them to size, and glue some soundproofing foam to it. Then, I just slotted them in my little box, and *boom*—a lovely, portable, soundproof mic cover. I just use this on top of my desk, but many people prefer to record standing. All these materials should set you back about 3000ish yen, and you can really hear the difference around your smooth, silky voice. However, in the long term, this space is up to you. By this stage, many people even start making their own home recording studios by covering whole walls with soundproofing foam. Experiment with things that work with your voice and what you are most comfortable with (physically and practically)!

GOLDEN RULE #1 (What not to do!) *Do Not Eat the Microphone*

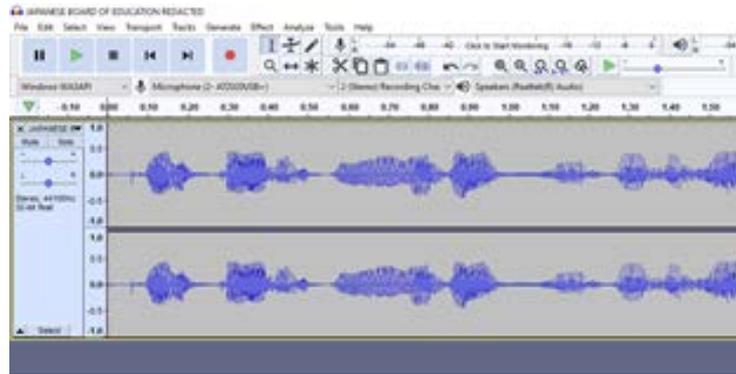
Musicians and voice actors might look really cool when they're close to the mic, but you don't need to do that! Mics are made to pick up sound, and if you get too close, you might knock the mic or mess up the recording in countless other ways. Each microphone will have different levels of sensitivity, and some have levels you can edit yourself, so finding that perfect distance that sounds best and is comfortable for you is part of the learning experience!



SOFTWARE:

ENTRY LEVEL:

Free Editing Stuff (GarageBand / Audacity)



Next, editing is a pain! But it's necessary to transform an hour of talking into a listenable 40 minutes! No one wants to listen to your *ums* and *ers*. Or that part where you forgot your notes or have to go to the loo. You don't have to edit out every *er* or *um*, but listening back to yourself is part of the learning experience. (I still don't like listening to my own voice, and I've been doing this for almost six years).

However, what software do you even use to do this editing? Well, for those using Apple devices, GarageBand is mostly for music, but it works just as well for the human instrument. For those on Windows, the best free editing software is something called Audacity. It has everything you need for basic podcasting and is what most amateur editors used when they first started. There are also many handy tutorials like [this one](#).

FORMIDABLE HOBBYIST:

Audacity (Not broken, don't fix it).

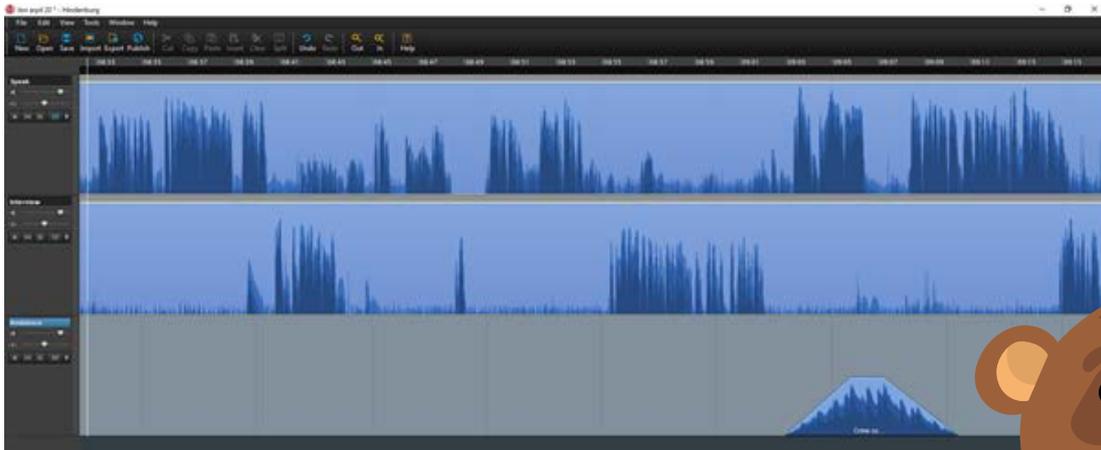
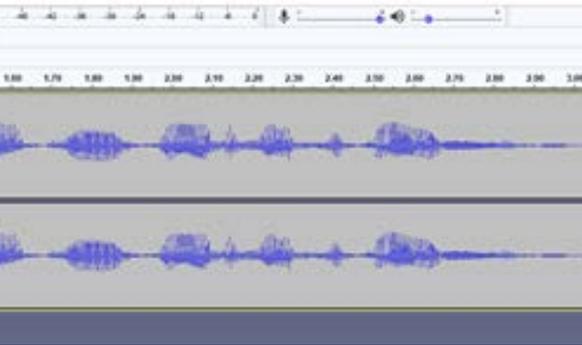
It's the perfect kind of software to start learning audio editing, and to be honest, I've used it for the past five years without complaint. You can also experiment with some free trials of software you like.



GOLDEN RULE #2 (What not to do!)

Copyright is a Thing!

Don't use other people's stuff with-out their permission! This sounds simple, but sometimes, it really isn't. Copyright is complicated, and fair use is a double-edged sword. I'm not saying you can't use sound clips to add to your points, but just be prepared for a mess if you didn't do your homework. Copyright is specifically important for music; radio stations and the like pay loads of fees so they can play different artist's music—you are not the exception!



PROFESSIONAL WANNABE:

Adobe Audition / Hindenburg / Logic Pro

Software also gets expensive here. I wouldn't personally recommend the Adobe Suite. It is the industry standard for a reason, but it also has the price tag to match. It's also only available as a subscription model, which means you're going to be shelling out tens of thousands of yen a year. I use an editing software called Hindenburg, which is specialised for voice recording and interviews because that's what I do! If you're a podcast that focuses more on travel or highlighting local music, different editing software will suit your needs. This software takes a little longer to learn, as there is just more you can do with it! However, it can raise the sound calibre by doing small things you weren't even aware of before. This more expensive software also usually comes with an avalanche of quality of life improvements and things to make editing easier, such as clipboards for jingles or automatic sound treatment. (Editing takes a lot of time, so this pays off in the long run!)



HOST:

ENTRY LEVEL:

YouTube

Now, how do you put your podcast online where people can listen to it? The simplest way to do so is using a platform like YouTube that, while not compatible with iTunes, is a very common place for people to listen to podcasts. All you need is to take your edited podcast and add a single picture or even black screen behind it, upload it to your YouTube account, and—boom! You have just made and uploaded a podcast.

FORMIDABLE HOBBYIST:

Anchor / BuzzSprout / Podbean / Spreaker

To make your podcast available on iTunes and Spotify, you must first upload it to a Hosting website. Now, there are numerous free (or free to start) hosts such as [Anchor](#) and [Podbean](#), but they all function the same way. Once a podcast is uploaded to a hosting website, it gives you a little link called an RSS feed. When you go to [iTunes](#), [Spotify](#), or other services' pages, it will ask for details about your podcast and your RSS feed, which you now have! It will take a couple of days for the companies to check your content is appropriate, but in the end, you are now with the big boys on the big scene. (They will even automatically update when you upload a new episode to your host—cool isn't it!?)

PRO-TIP *Thumbnails*

I would also really recommend some kind of thumbnail for your podcast. Perhaps an edited version of you and your co-host's face. Or something related. The visual is ironically quite important when sharing a podcast because people don't want to listen to something that doesn't look nice. (It's weird, but it makes sense if you think about it).

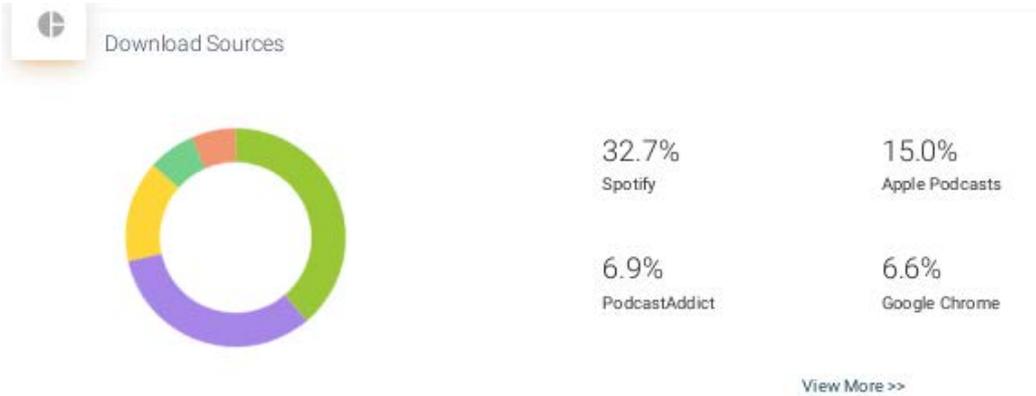
PROFESSIONAL WANNABE:

The same hosts from before, but now you pay them!

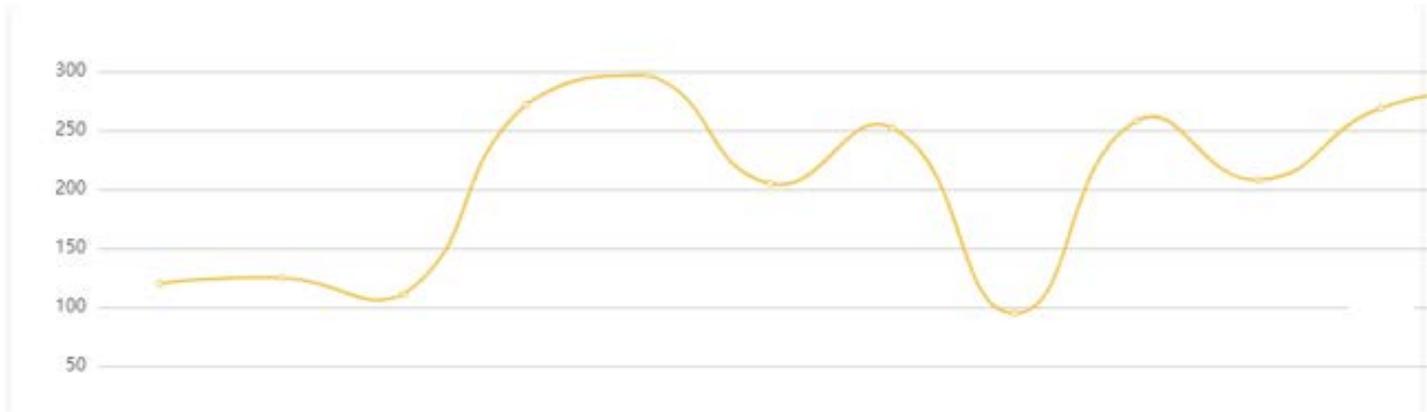
Finally, in terms of hosting, it's time to pay up. The big boys for this include Podbean and those listed above. They cost a high subscription fee, but they can be worth it. The one I use is around 15,000 yen a year, and for that, I have unlimited uploads, and it organises all my statistics for me.

I also have it set up so it auto-uploads my podcasts to my Facebook page, YouTube channel, and Twitter. It also automates the approval functions for applying for places on Spotify, iTunes, and Audible. This is the one step that costs the most, but if you're certain podcasting is what you want to do, it's definitely worth it.





These are examples of some statistics, such as download source percentages or listener graphs, that some hosts can offer you!



These are all the technical skills you should need to set up a podcast. Apart from, you know, the actual talking and doing stuff! Just remember that it's a fun hobby and, like anything else, you don't need to be great at it right away. You also don't need to start with professional tier equipment in order to tell

a good story or have a good podcast! Just start with whatever is easy and accessible to you, and have fun with it. Learning is part of the process, and no one starts out perfect, I promise. The only way to get better is to DO IT. The best time to have started was yesterday, and the second-best time to start is today! Happy podcasting!



Jon Combey is a podcaster and generally talkative British guy. In his second year in Japan, he hosts [Geeks & Gaijins](#), a podcast focusing on putting local news in Japan under an international (and silly) spotlight. He has been doing radio in some form for almost six years and, when he's not doing that, he's playing videogames and discovering obscure facts about history. Let him know your best weird history facts on Twitter @JonCombey.

IF YOU'RE INTERESTED, COME CHECK IT OUT!



Recommended Video Game: Spider-Man: Miles Morales

Nathan Post (Saitama)

It's been almost half a year now since the PS5 launched, but there are still relatively few flagship titles for the system. But of the ones that are out there, *Spider-Man: Miles Morales* is pulling more than its fair share of weight. This action-packed web of characters and drama is absolutely worth your time, money, and attention.

Back in Black

Spider-Man: Miles Morales puts its titular protagonist front and center this time around, and is positioned as a sort of mid-sized interquel between the prior PS4 *Spider-Man* game and whatever comes next for the series. It's about half the length of the original and available at a lower price point to match.

This game cribs a lot of gameplay elements from the prior title, but it also makes smart changes and cuts that drastically improve the experience. While the PS4 title got bogged down in distinctly unfun side character sequences, *Miles* swaps them out for more of the game's excellent freeform swinging and exhilarating combat encounters.

Family First

While the combat and swinging are better than ever, this game makes the greatest strides over its predecessor with its story. Miles and his family are an absolute delight to witness.

Peter is off on international business, leaving Miles to look after the city solo for the first time. It's his first big break as the new Spider-Man, but things quickly go sideways. A group of baddies led by someone calling herself The Tinkerer are looking to take down the powerful energy company Roxxon (that is also not exactly on the up and up). Miles finds himself trapped between these two sides, determined to resolve the conflict and end the threat of both.

This game pulls a lot of beats from the critically acclaimed *Spider-Man: Into the Spideverse* film and it works phenomenally. The character detail, facial animations, dialog, and voice acting all come together wonderfully for these characters. I was rooting for Miles and his family and friends the whole way through and tracked down every last quest and side mission just to see more of them interacting with each other.



Watch out for Spiders

As for the combat, *Miles Morales* keeps the fundamentals from its predecessor, but adds in the signature electricity and invisibility powers that make Miles his own (spider) man. The invisibility, in particular, is an excellent addition. In the last title, you could tackle encounters stealthily, but once you were spotted, that was it; you had to fight your way through to the end. Here, you can use Miles' invisibility to turn things back into a stealth encounter. The result is significantly more dynamic combat sequences that can shift from high action KO's to stealthy takedowns and back again multiple times in the same fight.

Also new are Miles' bio-electrical "Venom" powers, which he can use to chain electricity between enemies, stun them, launch them into the air, and more. The game also lets you use his webs as conductive cables for some inventive puzzle sequences.

Both powers are fun additions that expand things just enough to keep things new.

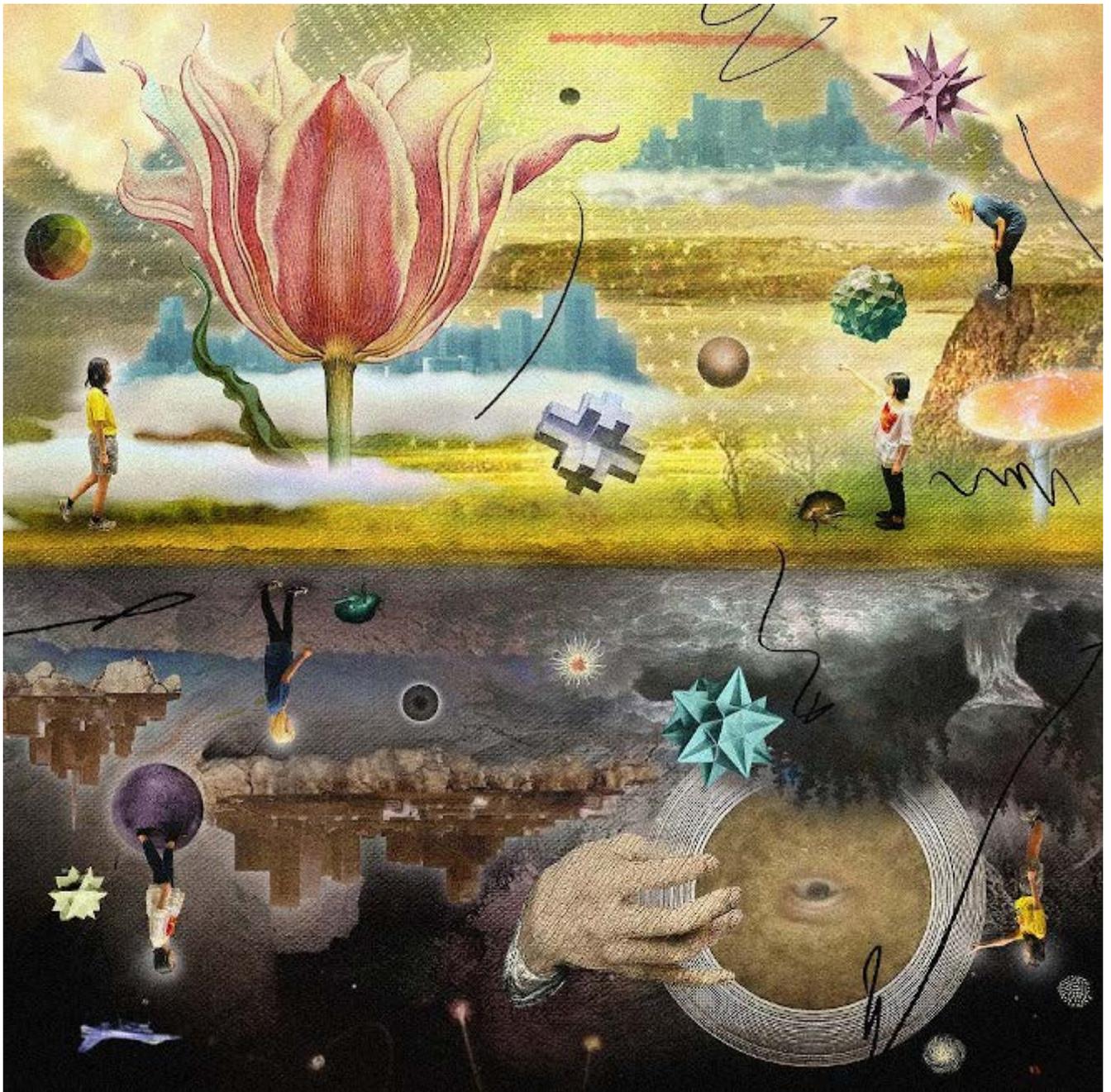


Summing it Up

Miles Morales builds on the foundation of the original and delivers a gripping tale of family and friendship while making smart changes to the formula to improve and streamline the game. *Miles* ultimately delivers an experience superior to its predecessor despite its shorter length and lower price point. If you're a fan of Marvel, superheroes, or just good ol' fashioned teen drama, you owe it to yourself to check out *Spider-Man: Miles Morales*.

Nathan Post is a former JET from California who now works as a professional game translator for Gumi in Tokyo. When he's not gaming, he can be found roaming the streets of Saitama in a virus-free plastic bubble.





Recommended Album:
the World by Regal Lily

Ryon Morrin (Hokkaidō)

Release date: April 7, 2021

On their latest EP, *the World*, indie/pop-rock trio Regal Lily explore new, wilder sounds. Experimentation is evident on each of the four tracks when compared with their previous releases. The underlying pop song structure remains, but they've allotted space for less conventional sounds which overlay the core of the songs. The result is satisfyingly familiar and intriguingly abstract at the same time.

In the past, Regal Lily has stuck by a fairly simple pop-rock sound softened by lo-fi indie tones throughout. *the World* showcases the band building bigger, more epic songs which travel from low to high energy and quiet to loud.

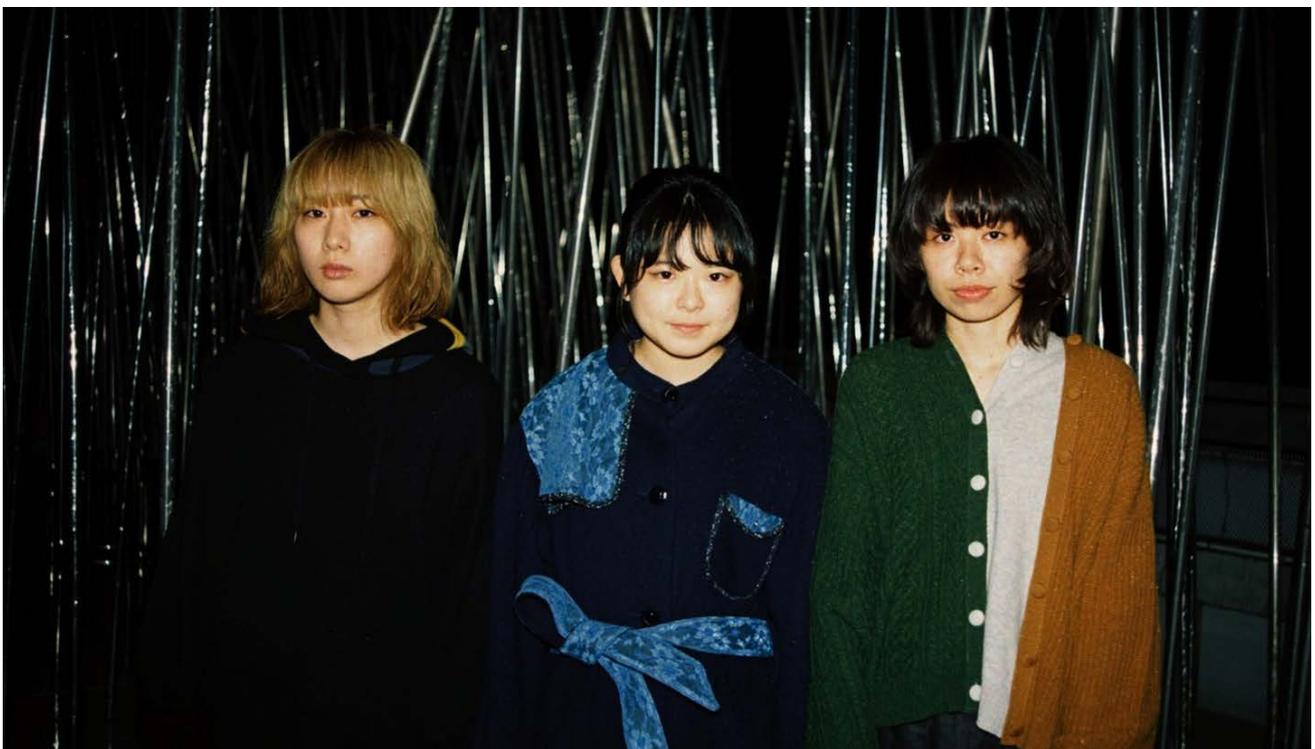
Just four songs and 14 minutes and 10 seconds, *the World* is a short EP with zero filler. The lead-in track, “東京” (Tōkyō), initially feels like a step into past works, but reveals it's post rock influence towards the end. Two-thirds of the way in, things get chaotic, the tone turns darker, and guitar and drums mix for a flurry of sound. “地獄” (*Jigoku*) relies on dissonance and speed to instill discomfort before a sudden switch to a happy and bright chorus. “天国” (*Tengoku*) kicks off with a mysterious flanged guitar riff backed by an odd rhythm that's hard to follow. However, it abruptly shifts into a standard four-chord rock song with an upbeat feeling that's easy to bob along to. Unexpected songwriting choices like

this have given Regal Lily's sound new life, avoiding the pitfall of re-releasing the same album. “天使と悪魔” (*Tenshi To Akuma*) is a softer, more emotional track that ends with a bang, and a suitable way to end the EP. It builds upon itself throughout and is constantly changing, making it difficult to anticipate where it will go next. The complexity is captivating; boredom is not a possibility.

Lyrically, these songs are ambiguous and somewhat cryptic. To the non-native speaker, the Japanese can be challenging to grasp, but are well worth the time to try or at least look up a translation. The music itself transcends the lyrics and for that reason, can still be appreciated by anyone who enjoys lively indie rock. As a whole, *the World* is a compact set of tracks that sounds massive despite the short run time. In just over 14 minutes, Regal Lily runs through peaks, valleys, warm days, and darker nights. The end result is an EP that's quite unpredictable and highly enjoyable. It's fair to say that Regal Lily has crafted something new here, and there's room to expand it even further.

You can stream *the World* on Spotify and Apple Music.

Ryon Morrin is a second-year Assistant Language Teacher from the U.S. living in Shintotsukawa, Hokkaidō. He's a writer, a traveler, and a lover of live music.



MAY REVIEWS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommended Novel:

Before the Coffee Gets Cold by Kawaguchi Toshikazu, translated by Geoffrey Trousselot

Damien Levi (Tōkyō)

A small, unassuming café on an unassuming Tōkyō street—an apt setting for this unassuming novel by playwright and author Kawaguchi Toshikazu. A story about time travel with seemingly arbitrary and specific rules, things left unsaid, and hopes for resolution. *Before the Coffee Gets Cold* is a story in four parts focusing on four different experiences of time travel in Cafe Funiculi Funicula.

Adapted from a stage play script and originally released in Japan in 2015, the novel saw success enough to receive an English translation in 2019. Since then it has gained popularity in foreign markets with a mixed-to-positive response. The premise is sweet and relatable: “What if you could go back in time and get a second chance with a loved one lost or a connection missed?”, a question that everyone has no doubt considered at least once in their lives. In Cafe Funiculi Funicula that’s possible by sitting in one specific seat. There are, however, many rules to abide by—the most important of which is that you must finish your business, and your coffee, before it gets cold. . . .

The premise is intriguing and Kawaguchi does a good job at weaving four stories together throughout the book. It’s a pleasant read, with even pacing that maintains your interest through each section while pushing the overarching story forward. Although the characters can feel a little superficial in their personalities and motivations, the way that they interact with each other, especially in context with the time travel feature, is what I believe had made this novel so popular.



ONS



Before the coffee gets cold

Occasionally the shift of medium from stage to book can be felt, unfortunately, with some characters feeling like they would shine better in the context of a play. The ghost woman stuck in the time travel seat throughout the story, for example, would be a fantastic role for an actor to bring to life.

Overall, the motivations for each character to time travel are compelling—one wants to confront a lover, one to speak with her husband who is battling dementia, one to see her sister one last time, and the final wants to meet her daughter. It's easy to find empathy for them and each vignette of the past feels like a secret shared with the reader.

In my personal experience, some Japanese-to-English novel translations can be overly complex in their language use, making them difficult to parse for casual readers. Whether this is a result of more literal translations or a desire to keep these works as close to the originals as possible, it is not a problem encountered in *Before the Coffee Gets Cold*. One could argue that the writing style is simplistic, but it is my opinion that this simplicity makes this novel more accessible and enjoyable.

The English translated version of *Before the Coffee Gets Cold* is available at any of your usual online book retailers. If you're *nihongo jouzu* (good at Japanese) I'm sure you can find the original text at any normal Japanese book store. Give it a read and let me know how it is in its original language!

*Damien is a third-year JET in Tōkyō and the Assistant Editor for **CONNECT**. He is embarking on a reading challenge in 2021, focusing on novels writing by BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and other People of Colour) writers.*

MAY RELEASES

Rachel Fagundes (Okayama)

MOVIES

May 7

- The Gentlemen (2019)
- Rogue (2020)
- Vanguard (2020)
- Mirai e no katachi (2021)

May 8

- Akaneiro ni yakareru (2021)
- Gekijouban Fate/Grand Order: Shinsei Entaku Ryouiki Camelot - Paladin; Agateram (2021)

May 12

- Kakegurui the Movie: Zettai Zetsumei Russian Roulette (2021)

May 14

- The Father (2020)
- The House by the Sea (2017)
- Ku! Kin-dza-dza (2013)
- Sidonia no kishi: Ai tsumugu hoshi (2021)

May 15

- Deadlock (1970)
- Gundermann (2018)

May 21

- Mission Possible (2021)
- The Rescue (2020)
- Mobile Suit Gundam: Hathaway (2021)
- Feral (2018)
- The Women (2021)
- Inochi no teishajō (2021)
- Wadaiko Girls (2021)

May 22

- God Exists, Her Name Is Petrunya (2019)

May 27

- Cruella (2021)

May 28

- Unhinged (2020)
- How to Be a Good Wife (2020)
- Amazing Grace (2018)
- Palma (2021)
- The Rose Maker (2020)
- Tomorrow's Dinner Table (2021)

GAMES

May 3

- Dragon Quest Builders 2 (Xbox One, Xbox Series X/S)

May 6

In-Highrisers (PC)

- Skate City (PC, PS4, PS5, Xbox One, Xbox Series X/S, Switch)

May 7

Resident Evil Village (PC, PS4, PS5, Xbox One, Xbox Series X/S, Stadia)

- Metro Exodus Enhanced Edition (PC)
- Flowing Lights (PC, Xbox One, Switch)
- PapeturaU (PC)

May 10

Hood: Outlaws & Legends (PC, PS4, PS5, Xbox One, Xbox Series X/S)

- Mad Devils (PC)

May 12

- Retro Machina (PC, PS4, Xbox One, Switch)
- Sherwood Extreme – Steam Early Access (PC)

May 13

- GetsuFumaDen: Undying Moon – Steam Early Access (PC)

May 14

- Mass Effect Legendary Edition (PC, PS4, Xbox One)
- Famicom Detective Club: The Missing Heir / Famicom Detective Club: The Girl Who Stands Behind (Switch)

May 18

- Days Gone (PC)
- Essays on Empathy (PC)
- Snowrunner (Switch, Steam)

May 19

- Elite Dangerous: Odyssey (PC)

May 20

- Of Bird and Cage (PC)
- Open Country (PC)
- Just Die Already (PC, PS4, PS5, Xbox One, Xbox Series X/S, Switch)
- The Longest Road on Earth (PC, iOS, Android)
- The Wild at Heart (PC, Xbox One)

May 21

- Miitopia (Switch)
- Kowloon High-School Chronicle (Switch)
- Rust Console Edition (PS4, Xbox One)
- Knockout City (PC, PS4, PS5, Xbox One, Xbox Series X/S, Switch)

May 25

- Biomutant (PC, PS4, Xbox One)
- Erica (PC)
- Capcom Arcade Stadium (PC, PS4, Xbox One)
- King of Seas (PC, PS4, Xbox One, Switch)
- Shin Megami Tensei 3 Nocturne HD Remaster (PC, PS4, Switch)
- Maneater (Switch)
- Weaving Tides (PC, Switch)

May 27

- Earth Defence Force: World Brothers (PC, PS4, Switch)
- Warhammer Age of Sigmar: Storm Ground (PC, PS4, Xbox One, Switch)
- MechWarrior 5: Mercenaries (Steam, Xbox Series X/S)

May 28

- World's End Club (Switch)
- Wonder Boy: Asha in Monster World (PS4, Switch)

Sources:

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

<https://www.vg247.com/2021/01/22/video-game-release-dates-2021/>

COSPLAY AND COVID



Interview of **Amadara Oguara** by
Rhema Baquero (Hyōgo)

THE CHALLENGES OF COSPLAYING DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Though cosplay, or character play, originated in America, many cosplayers worldwide look to Japan for inspiration when it comes to anime characters. Cosplay (the act of dressing up as a fictional character) is a labor of love and dedication, with many cosplayers spending hundreds of dollars and countless hours creating their look. In both Japan and America, convention halls and events are typically crowded with cosplayers, photographers, and spectators alike. But during the global COVID-19 pandemic, the landscape of cosplaying has changed. For Kyōto cosplayer Amadara O., 2020 forced her to find alternative avenues for cosplay.

How long have you been cosplaying for?

I've been cosplaying technically for 11 years now, but have been more proactive in the past 3 years.

What got you into cosplay?

My first anime convention, Sakura-Con 2009. I was a wee middle schooler, and a friend's parent took us for a day. I had no idea what cosplay was until then. I was like, "Wow, you can dress up as your favorite characters? And not just on Halloween?" It was awesome!

In more recent years, I've become more active in cosplay because Black cosplayers face a lot of discrimination in the community, and I want to fight that, as well as inspire other Black cosplayers and fans. I want to show that Black cosplayers slay and we deserve our space!

What cosplay events have you been to in Japan?

I've been to Anime Japan and Tokyo Game Show, as well as Halloween in Shibuya. However, these events were actually during my study abroad in Tokyo from 2016-2017, not since I started living and working here more recently. Unfortunately, as I got here

in mid-2019, it was the calm before the storm of COVID, and I'd planned to attend a lot of events in 2020 that ended up getting cancelled.

What has cosplay been like since 2020, aka in the age of COVID?

A lot more focus has been put on collaborating with other cosplayers online and doing challenges folks can participate in no matter their location, which is cool, as well as self-shooting your own cosplays and getting creative with indoor settings. In-person convention culture is definitely missed though---it's hard to replicate the social aspect of that. I really miss con photoshoots and large group cosplays.

How do you keep yourself safe in the COVID age?

I have asthma, so I've been refraining from attending events. Some events may tout the precautions they're taking for safety, but honestly, I don't think they'll be truly safe until vaccines have been rolled out and administered to much of the general population. Masks, hand sanitizer, and plastic partitions alone can only do so much.

What precautions have events taken to keep everyone safe?

From what I've seen of events in Japan, it's been capping attendance, taking temperatures upon entry, having hand sanitizer available, and using plastic partitions, and sometimes ventilation systems. Most of the larger and more famous events got cancelled and moved online though.

Describe your favorite cosplay that you have done in Japan.

I dressed up as Nezuko from *Kimetsu no Yaiba* for my elementary school students last year. I had pink contacts, the *zori*, and everything. Because we had to wear masks

at school, I wore a Tanjiro-pattern mask in lieu of the bamboo muzzle. At that time, I had long box braids in, so it was like including a bit of my own culture as a Black cosplayer as well. The students absolutely LOVED it and still talk about it to this day. At the end of the school year, so many of them wrote how they loved “Nezuko-sensei” and thought I looked very cute and beautiful and was “the real Nezuko.” They also had requests for more cosplay in the future---many wanted Shinobu (also from Kimetsu), and she’s been on my cosplay list anyways, so I hope I can deliver this year!

What are the differences between cosplaying in Japan and your home country?

For the events I’ve been to in Japan, it seemed that a lot of the cosplayers were professionals/popular influencers rather than just regular fans. The events also gave off more of a professional expo vibe than the “by the fans, for the fans” vibe that U.S. conventions typically have. At first, I didn’t feel confident cosplaying among that sort of crowd in Japan, though now I definitely would.

For conventions in Japan, you have to change into your cosplay at the venue using their provided changing rooms. You can’t come to the venue in cosplay. Personally, I prefer getting dressed up and doing my makeup in the comfort of my home. There are also a lot more rules around props (like type and size restrictions) and stricter dress codes (for example, wearing a leotard is considered showing too much at some events). These rules vary across events though; some are more lax than others.

One thing I will point out is that I feel less discriminatory vibes being a Black cosplayer in Japan compared to the U.S. It’s a very complicated issue I could write an essay about, but in short, there is a lot of racism and colorism in the cosplay community. Not saying that Japan is a perfect haven though, as I’ve seen Japanese cosplayers use blackface for darker-skinned characters

unfortunately too---as well as dark foundation marketed specifically for this purpose---and many shut down the conversation immediately when you try to educate them on why it is wrong. That is another issue itself.

In general, I’ve had great reception cosplaying any character, regardless of skin tone, and don’t feel the same racist scrutiny that I sometimes get in the U.S. for cosplaying certain characters. People see me as the character itself and not the “Black” and/or “inaccurate” version.

What advice do you have for cosplaying in Japan?

Enjoy yourself, cosplay whoever you want, and just make sure you are aware of the protocols for events that may be different from events in your home country, such as the use of changing rooms, specific photo areas, weapons/prop rules, and the amount of skin you can show. I’m sure many people will enjoy seeing your cosplay!

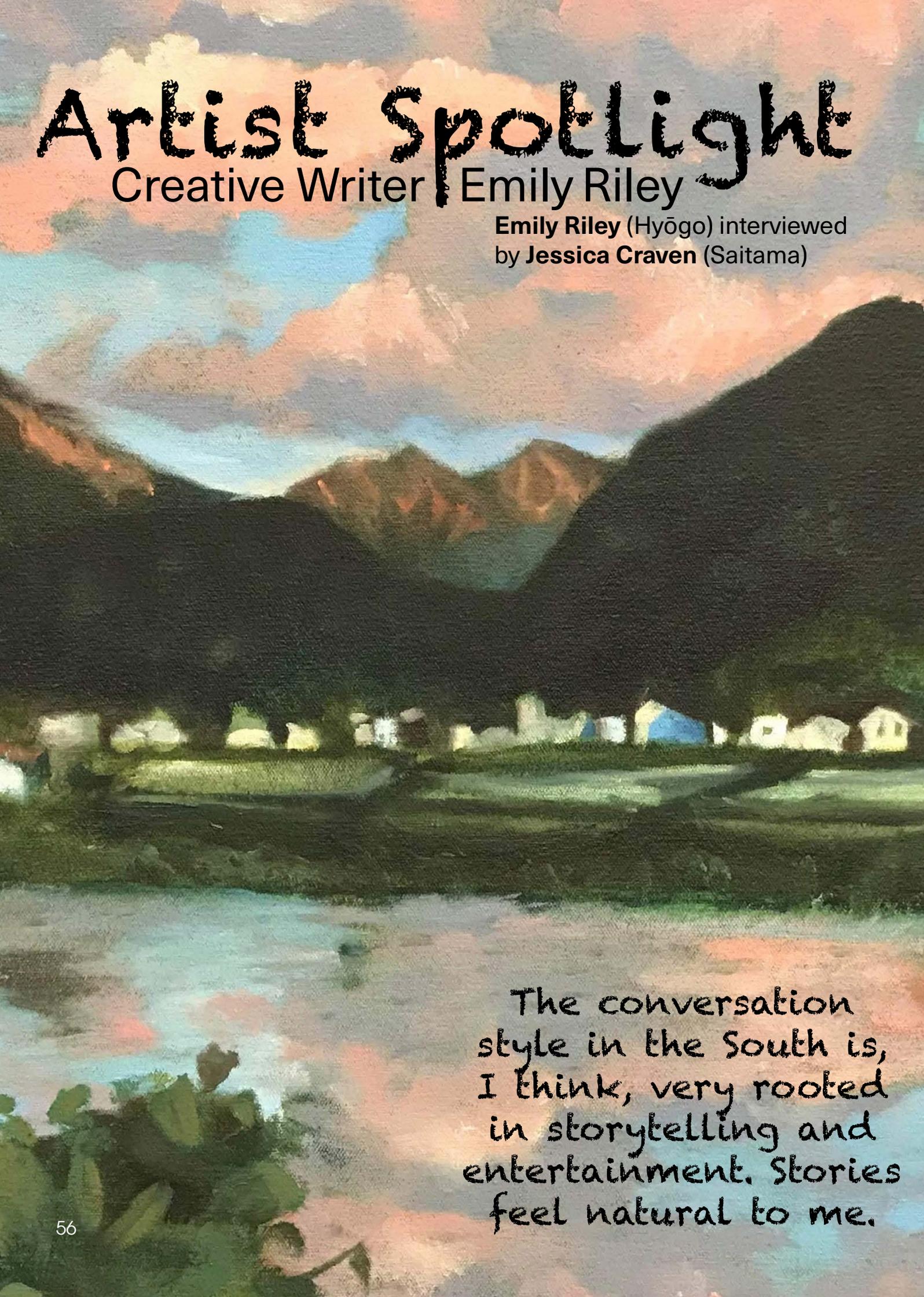
What advice do you have for cosplaying in Japan as COVID persists?

Stay safe, research event precautions and protocols, and only do what you feel comfortable with. Don’t feel pressured to attend events either. There are many ways to enjoy cosplay and be creative at home or close to home. Hopefully by this time next year, events can start returning at more of a normal capacity. Everyone misses cons and cosplaying together, but we just have to sit tight until things get better. We can do this!

Rhema Baquero is a third-year ALT from America, placed in the great port city of Kobe. In America, she is a certified teacher of Journalism, English and Technology. She can often be found in a coffee shop either reading, writing, drawing, or studying Japanese. After playing rugby at university and graduate school, she was excited to finally attend the Rugby World Cup in 2019.

Amadara Oguara is a second-year ALT from Seattle, WA, USA, living in the cultural heart of Kyoto. When she is not teaching or cosplaying, she enjoys music, shopping, travelling, adoring cats, and taking part in any opportunity to enjoy Japan's rich and beautiful culture. Coming from a racial background of Nigerian and Native American as well as holding a BA in International Relations, she is a huge proponent of diversity, cultural exchange, and education.



The background of the page is a painterly landscape painting. It depicts a valley with a river in the foreground, a small village with white buildings in the middle ground, and dark, forested mountains in the background. The sky is filled with soft, colorful clouds in shades of blue, pink, and orange, suggesting a sunset or sunrise. The overall style is impressionistic and textured.

Artist Spotlight

Creative Writer | Emily Riley

Emily Riley (Hyōgo) interviewed
by Jessica Craven (Saitama)

The conversation style in the South is, I think, very rooted in storytelling and entertainment. Stories feel natural to me.



For the May issue, I have interviewed former Hyōgo JET Programme alumnus Emily Riley. We have included one of her short stories based on her time in Japan for you to enjoy, as well as some of her paintings based on her experiences in Japan that feed into her writing.

J: Where are you from, and what were your experiences in Japan?

E: I'm from little old Arkansas. I studied abroad in Akita Prefecture in undergrad and then spent a year in Hyōgo on JET. Wherever I go, there have to be trees!

J: What have you been doing since you left Japan?

E: Now I'm in Iowa working toward an MFA in Creative Writing & Environment at ISU.

J: What got you interested in creative writing?

E: I have loved reading and writing since I can remember. Creative assignments in elementary were always my favorite, and I think a large part of it comes down to my mother, who always encouraged those things in me. I remember reading *Where The Red Fern Grows* with her as a kid, both of us balling our eyes out. Also, the conversation style in the South is, I think, very rooted in storytelling and entertainment. Stories feel natural to me.

J: Tell us more about your creative writing work.

E: I read all kinds of things but mostly write fiction, especially with fabulist or fantasy elements. My thesis project deals with culture, mythmaking, and gender dynamics in Bronze Age Greece, exploring the way those things still influence our world today. It's not uncommon for books in this vein to center on the gods, but I want to take a look at lesser-known characters as well—the slave women and prisoners of war, the ghosts of folklore, and so on. Writing nonfiction came as a pleasant surprise in one of my MFA classes, giving me a chance to reflect on my year on JET in a loose, memoir-like style, which I'll be sharing a little bit alongside this interview.

J: What sort of things inspire you?

E: Almost anything I can learn about can provide inspiration—other cultures, fantasy worlds, sea life, cooking, and more. I love color, and art has always

been a hobby that fed into writing, so I think I find a lot of inspiration there. Inspiration often comes in the form of a haunting—a feeling, scene, or character just won't leave me alone until I get it on the page.

J: How has your time in Japan influenced your writing or yourself?

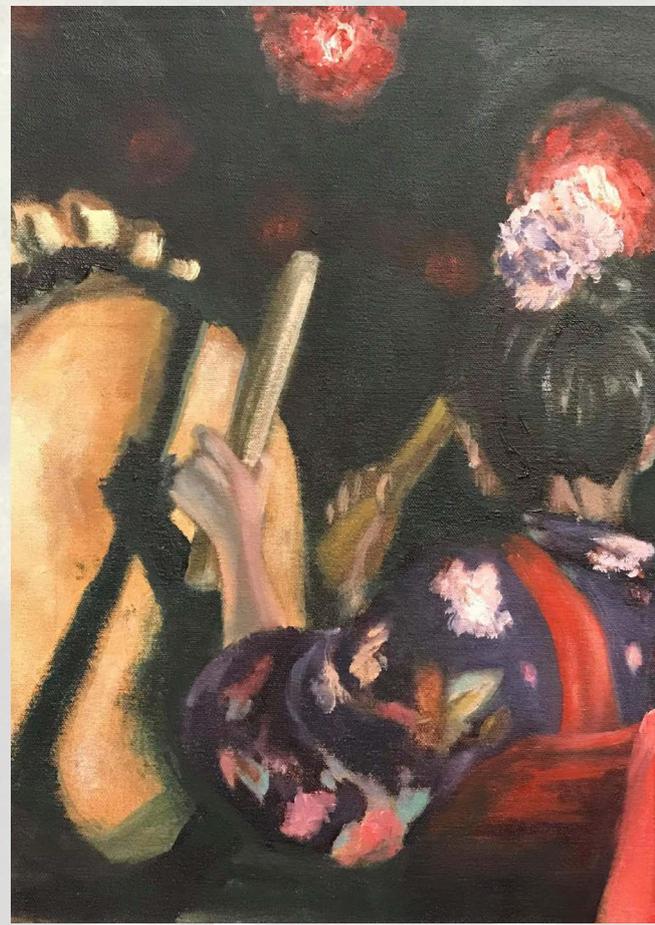
E: Though I avoided the common desk warming situation as an ALT, I also finally had enough time to just write after work, as well as go live a little. With the extra time, I could experiment with writing techniques, explore my process, and generate new material, and I didn't have to sacrifice sleep to do it. That lifestyle solidified for me an idea of the kind of life I want, making it easier to accept my desire to be a writer despite worries about financial security, day jobs, and more. Of course, a year abroad built my confidence in other ways. My JET experience was the first time I'd lived alone in a new city, and I finally learned to believe I was capable and competent. More importantly, it revitalized my sense of wonder, which is a huge part of my writing.

I think it's easy to feel like we know our world and the people in it, but there's a kind of apathy and arrogance in that mindset. When I travel, interactions with the people in town (Japanese and foreign alike) break down that mindset, reminding me how much I don't know. I always end up meeting at least one person unlike anyone else I've ever met, and that gives me hope. That new person is a beautiful part of this world I had overlooked or not anticipated, usually bringing with them a whole world of history, hobbies, knowledge, and more that I feel grateful to learn about and be part of. That effect is multiplied when living in a new place rather than being a tourist there. As cheesy as it may sound, the JET experience gave me strength, and I'm still drawing on it now to get through grad school!

J: What sort of themes or ideas does your work explore?

E: Themes of gender, family and found family, friendship, legacy, and recovery from trauma often pop up in my work. For me, these issues often link with ones of exploration, wonder, and discovery, which means I spend a lot of time worldbuilding. I want to make worlds people enjoy spending time in and introduce characters they can feel for. If someday my writing can help someone see a way forward where they couldn't before, I'll feel accomplished.

We have included one of Emily's flash stories based on her time in Japan for you to enjoy below. Perhaps you can relate.



I always end up meeting at least one person I've ever met, and that gives me hope. That new person is a beautiful part of this world I had overlooked or not anticipated, usually bringing with them a whole world of history, hobbies, knowledge, and more that I feel grateful to learn about and be part of.



There is No Central Heating in Nishi Chūgakkō

It's not often you can see heat. You might picture a flame or the coils of a stove burning brittle orange, but neither of those examples is exactly what I'm talking about. What you're really seeing is a flame or an oven coil. They're both hot, but they're not heat.

I was in junior high in the early 2000s, that era when stick-like hair and bony legs reigned. Each morning, I needed to make sure the straightener was hot enough before pressing my hair into form, so I'd raise the thing to my nose, thinking I could smell the heat. My friends laughed at me for that—you can't smell heat, they said.

But I know, without a doubt, that we feel it. It holds us in bed longer than we should stay on frigid mornings, strangles us in summer, and maybe (just maybe) tricks us into thinking we can smell it when it nears our noses.

It was the first day of school after the new year, the biggest holiday in Japan, and the students had gathered in straight lines along the gymnasium floor. It was in another junior high, but this time, I was an ALT attending the opening ceremony for the new semester. Most of us teachers were standing awkwardly around the side and back walls of the room like a bunch of bouncers, but a couple were walking around making sure everyone was in place. The sharpness of their motions and the strictness in their voices surprised me. These were the ones who laughed most loudly in the teacher's room when someone made a joke. Two girls in the back whispered to one another, twirling their skirts from side to side to muster up some heat, maybe. Despite the 30 or 40 degree Fahrenheit cold and all the knee socks in anime, no one wore anything higher than a crew sock except me. I had knee socks on under my pants because it was winter, and I was still shivering. There's no central heating in Nishi Chūgakkō.

Since they dealt with the same issue in classrooms, the students were mostly used to chilled fingers and toes, but that didn't stop them from scooting closer and closer to the space heaters placed around the gym once teachers turned their backs. A little heat was worth the reprimand and a swat back into place. Sometimes, the teachers looked annoyed, but I couldn't blame the students—I was wearing knee socks under my pants, after all. My too-short pants that were perfect for any other season. My capris that flared out slightly at the bottom instead of blending politely into my knee socks.



one person unlike anyone else I've
that new person is a beautiful part
not anticipated, usually bringing
y, hobbies, knowledge, and more
and be part of.



When the ceremony finally started, nobody made a peep. I imagined nothing would be worth the humiliation of disrupting the event and getting chewed out, and that was at least part of why all the students faced forward and mouthed along with the school's song. The teachers did, too, except for me. Except for two lines in the chorus, I still didn't know the words yet. Of course, the easiest way to tell if someone was actually singing was to watch for a little steam rolling out from their lips as though from a snoozing dragon, the puff changing direction with the shape of new syllables (and those are the motions I went through to pretend like I did know the words, the shape of "watermelon watermelon" filling the air). So. You can see breath in cold air, but that's not heat either.

Windows almost larger than cars lined the top of two tall, parallel walls. Higher even than the balcony on the gym's second floor. Great blocks of light fell from the set on the left, outlining row after row of heads in bright halos, which was still not heat. In the path of one of these light blocks rested one of the coveted space heaters.

The floor behind it danced. Something that I couldn't see cast a shadow. An invisible force vibrated and shifted, and it probably always is, without our knowing, an underground performer of this sort. When I looked closely, the very air around the heater danced. Something about the light reflected that movement.

And this, I thought as I rubbed my hands together, is seeing heat.

Emily Riley is a JET alumnus who was in Hyōgo prefecture from 2018-2019. She is a current student at Iowa State University pursuing an MFA in Creative Writing. In addition to reading and writing, her hobbies include art and travelling.

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Kabazaiku

The Traditional Sakura Woodworks of a Samurai Village

Jessica Craven (Saitama)

For all except perhaps those in the very northernmost part of Japan, the *sakura* have already bloomed, withered, and rained down upon us, marking the end of 2021's *hanami* season. If you haven't gotten enough of Japan's iconic pink blossoms for the year and wish to have a memento of the season that has passed, you may be interested to learn about a rare craft from Akita: *Kabazaiku*.

The term "Kabazaiku" is actually a bit misleading, as it literally means "birch craftsmanship [1]." However, the craft is nowadays practically synonymous with woodworking that is carved out of the bark of a cherry tree, making it a perfect souvenir for those enamored with Japan's most iconic flower. Although there are about five to seven different types of cherry blossom trees, only *yamazakura* wood is used in Kabazaiku due to its durability (3).



The craft has flourished in Kakunodate for over 200 years and was introduced to the area by a feudal lord of the Satake samurai family named Fujimura Hikoroku, who learned woodworking in the nearby region and began teaching it as a secondary vocation for low-ranking samurai. The Meiji Restoration (1868-1912) and its unification of Japan made the samurai and their way of life a thing of the past (1), so Kabazaiku became the primary occupation for some of them, and the craft really began to flourish. These families who continued the Kabazaiku production modernized distribution systems so that this one-of-a-kind handicraft became an icon of Kakunodate.

Kakunodate is often referred to as the “little Kyōto” of Tōhoku because of its well-preserved samurai residences and picturesque weeping cherry trees that drape over them in the spring. The town’s history of both samurai and sakura is exactly what has allowed the Kabazaiku to flourish, so they are the perfect icon of this romantic town.

The traditional Kabazaiku process involves scrupulous care and an attentiveness to nature comparable to that of a traditional farmer. The wood of cultivated yamazakura trees cannot be used because it is not tough enough (1), so the early samurai craftsmen went on a mission—this time searching for prime wild cherry trees instead of keeping their eyes out for enemies. They would scout the mountains of North Japan in the spring, when the blossoms are easier to spot, until they found yamazakura of a suitable age and strength. This practice has been passed down still to this day.

Once the appropriate wood is attained, the work only just begins. There are several traditional processes that are used depending on the shape of the product to be made and the level of polish desired for the finished product. Since tea containers are the most popular Kabazaiku product, I will describe the general process for creating cylinder-type containers.

First, the bark is stripped off the trunk with special tools and left to dry until all of the moisture is completely dried out. This usually takes about one year. Next, the rough surface of the bark is scraped off with a knife and glued onto wooden molds with an adhesive called *nikawa*(3). The surface is sanded with sharkskin to make it smooth and create intenser colors. Finally, it is polished with a cloth. Through this process, very little wood is wasted as it is only sanded down to the appropriate smoothness. A true master craftsman can also transform imperfections such as knots in the wood into feature elements of the design, so even the “undesirable” wood that is harvested is used. The complete process is also very environmentally-friendly, as experts remove the bark in a way that is not harmful to the tree. The yamazakura tree has an outer and inner layer of bark, so as long as only the outer layer is removed, it will not die and can regrow without suffering damage (3).



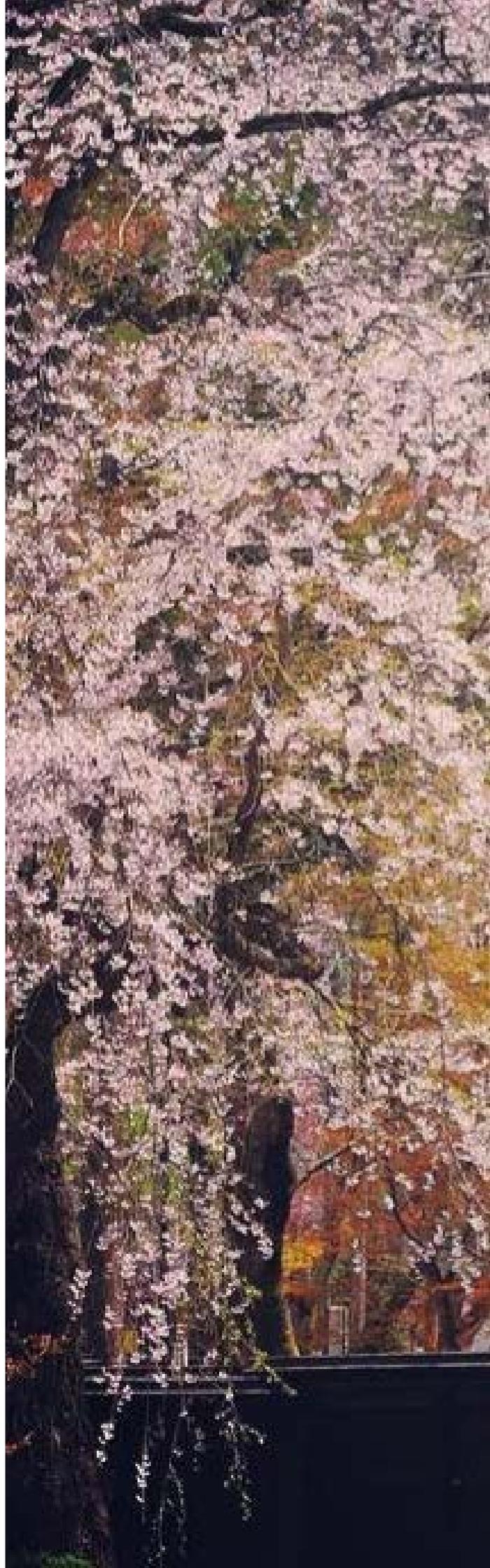
The final product is one of great technical finesse, since any minor slight of the hand against the wood's surface during the polishing process could tarnish or discolor it. The result of a master craftsman has a shiny dark red color that comes from a combination of the bark itself and the tree's sap, as well as the result of skillful polishing. Often, some areas of the outer bark are left rough or carved in a very intricate pattern, leaving a refined semblance of the texture of bark that we see in nature while still being functional. Decorations are usually added by gluing small bits of wood or paper onto the surface and varnishing them, often into the shape of delicate sakura petals. The yamazakura bark acts as a natural insulator against changes in humidity and is airtight, so Kabazaiku containers are ideal for the storage of tea or tobacco leaves.

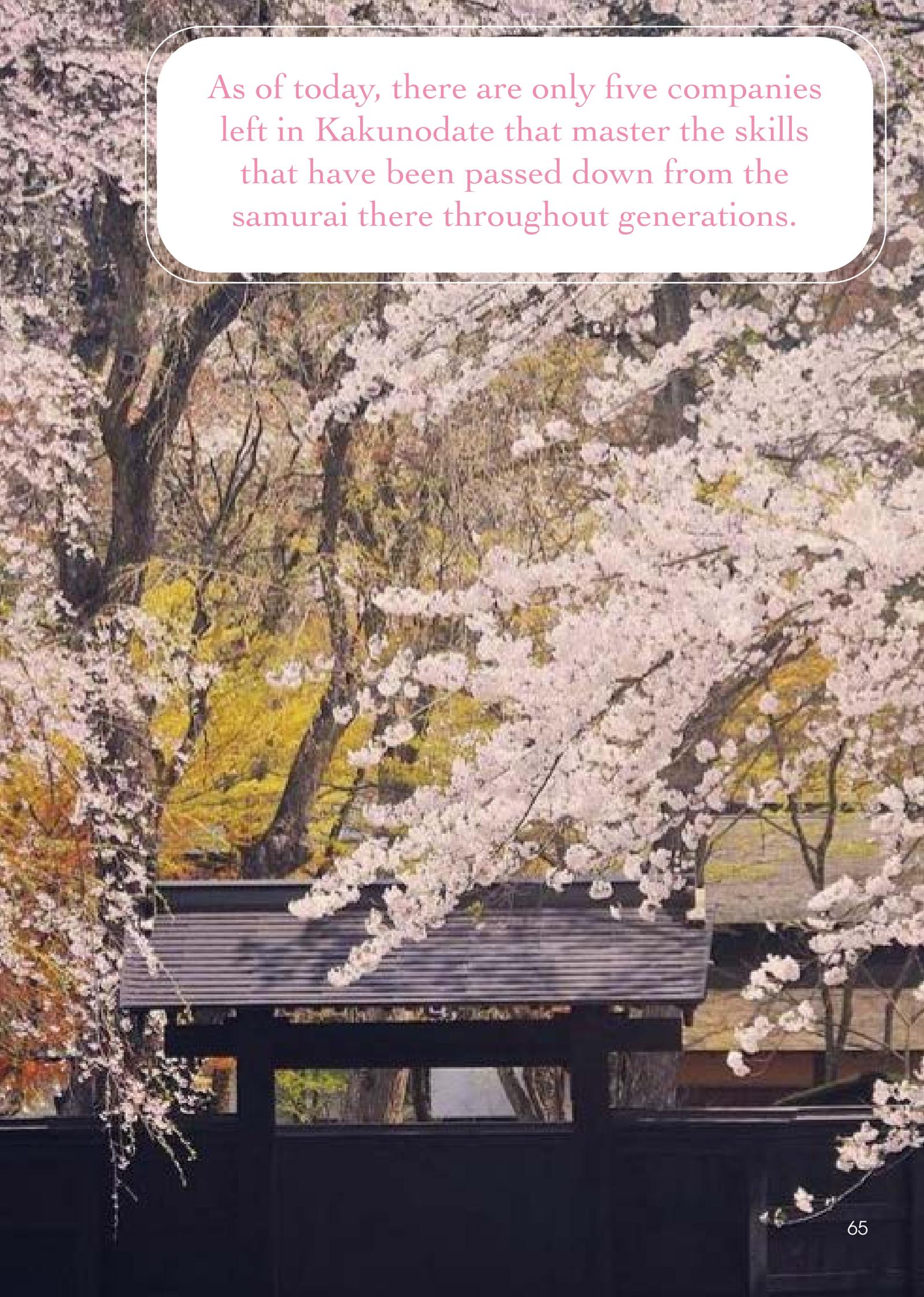
Although Kabazaiku is such a stunning craft, like many of the traditions in Akita, it is perhaps at some risk of being lost. Akita prefecture has the oldest population of all of Japan, and coincidentally the oldest population in the world and an overall population that is quickly shrinking. As of today, there are only five companies left in Kakunodate that master the skills that have been passed down from the samurai there throughout generations. Nevertheless, it does seem like Kabazaiku is one of Akita's traditions that will endure, as the products are increasingly popular with tourists. If you are able, I really hope you get the chance to buy some Kabazaiku products for yourself! I can't think of a handicraft more symbolic of Japan than something carved out of sakura wood, and your support must also help a local area and its traditions endure.

*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. Her first experience in Japan was as an exchange student at Akita International University, and her first trip within Japan was to Kakunodate. When not adventuring, she can be found reading or creating her own artwork, which can be seen on her Instagram [@jessica_craven_art](https://www.instagram.com/jessica_craven_art).*

Sources:

- (1) <https://bit.ly/3uNsgZF>
- (2) <https://bit.ly/3a4zEb4>
- (3) <https://bit.ly/2RkrPr6>





As of today, there are only five companies left in Kakunodate that master the skills that have been passed down from the samurai there throughout generations.

LIFESTYLE



WELLNESS EDITOR

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Clare Braganza

"I thought that spring must last forevermore; For I was young and loved, and it was May." — Vera Brittain

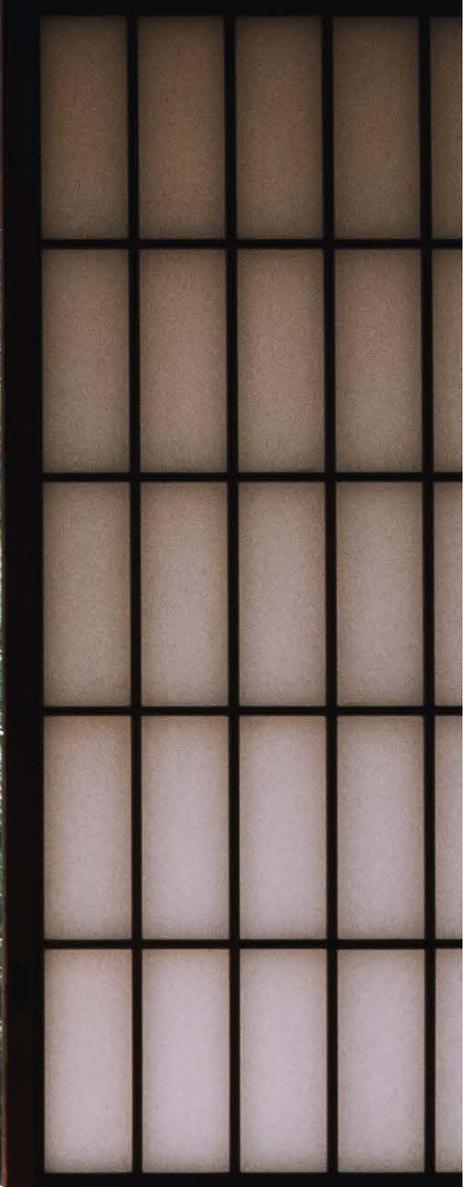
SPORTS EDITOR

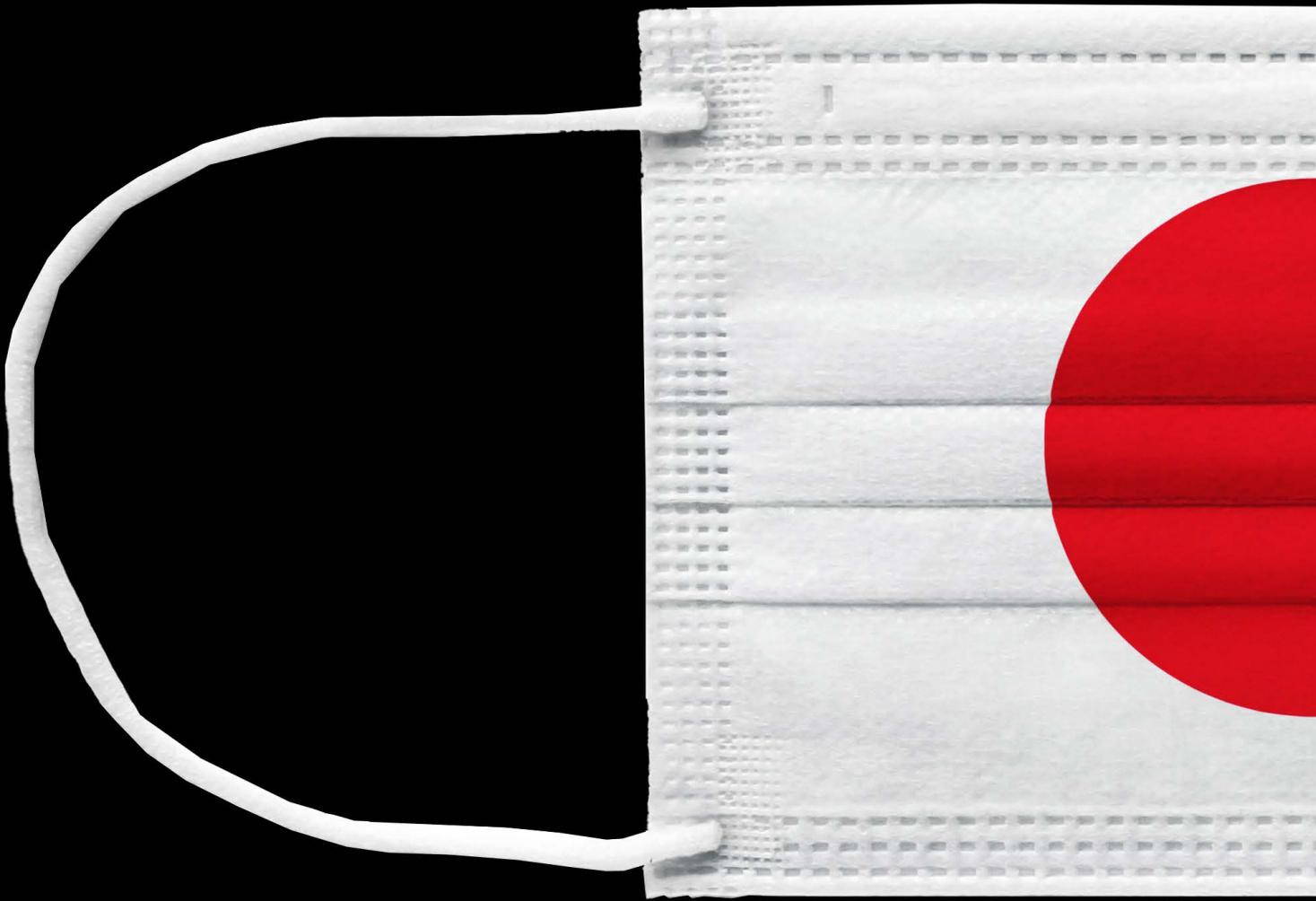
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SICKNESS AND THE SYSTEM

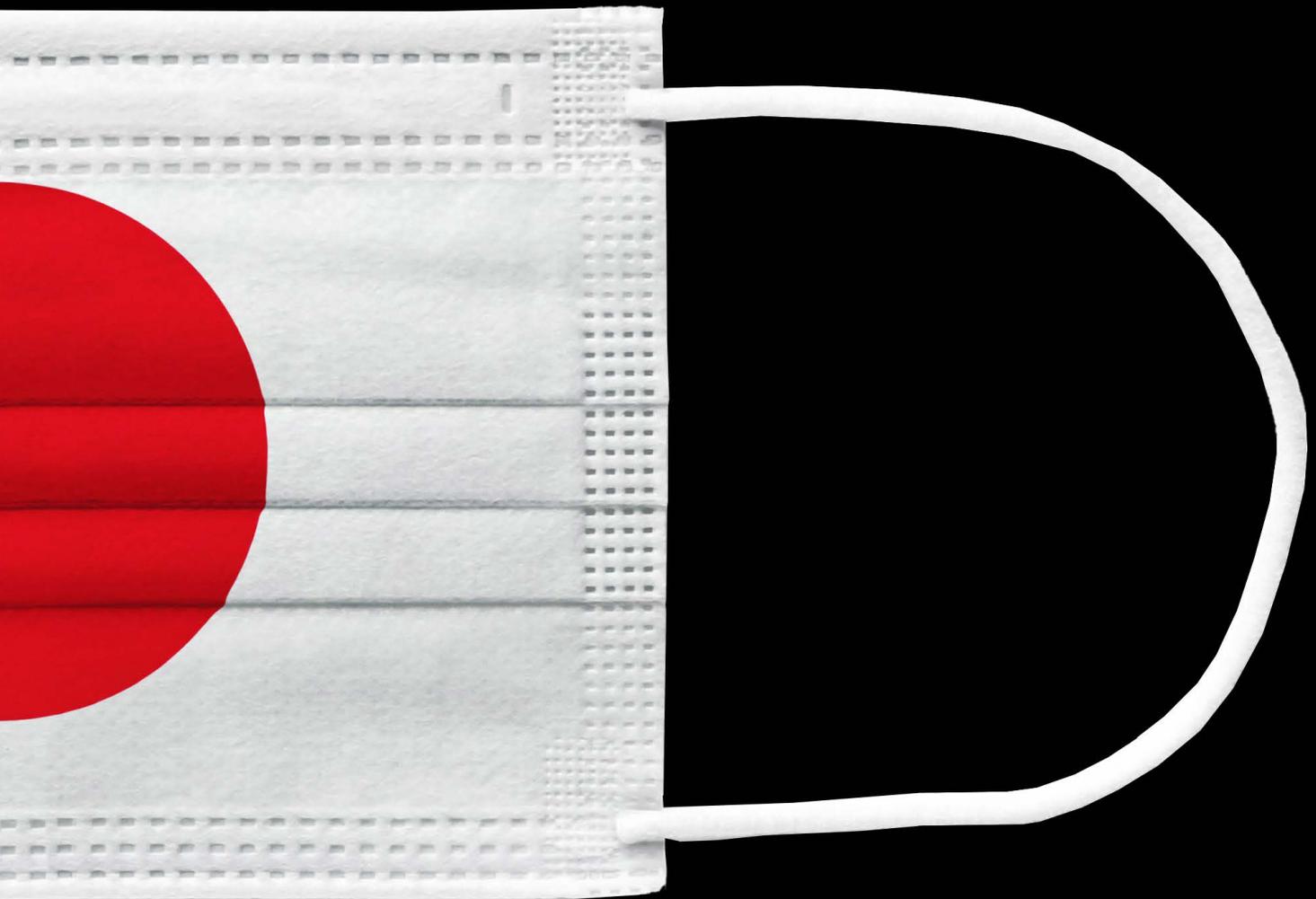
AN EXPERIENCE WITH JAPANESE
HEALTHCARE AND COVID-19

A. Doi

As an American, my first reaction to Japan's medical care was awe. I could get an appointment with my primary doctor in less than a week, or walk into any clinic in town and have an exam within the hour. Filling prescriptions took less than 10 minutes. And best of all, I never feared the cost—a

basic exam cost about the same as a mid-priced dinner. I gushed over it to my family back home.

Unfortunately, this system failed me horrifically when I needed it most. And for that, I nearly paid with my life.



In early March of 2020, worries about COVID-19 began to spread. I live deep in the countryside of Kyūshū, many hours away from the crowds in Tōkyō and Ōsaka, so worries were low at first. But one by one, cases trickled into my prefecture. Two cases. Four. Five. Each one crept a few train stations closer to my town. I began to get nervous. My schools were slow to close, but when they did, I was transferred to work full-time at my office in the BOE. With no lessons to plan I had no work to do, but go I must. I wasn't thrilled, but I was no exception—all the teachers in town were required to come to their offices and sit together, day after day, with nothing to do.

We all wore masks, were courteous about distance, and approached the situation with humor, but anxiety hung thick in the air.

Then on the first Friday of April, I developed a cough. By that evening I felt feverish. I rested at home for the whole weekend, but there was no improvement.

AND THEN ON SUNDAY, WORD CAME THAT THERE WAS A COVID-19 CASE IN MY TOWN.

THAT NIGHT, REALITY BURST THROUGH THE FOG WHEN PARAMEDICS ARRIVED IN FULL HAZMAT SUITS AND FACE SHIELDS TO PUT ME IN AN AMBULANCE.

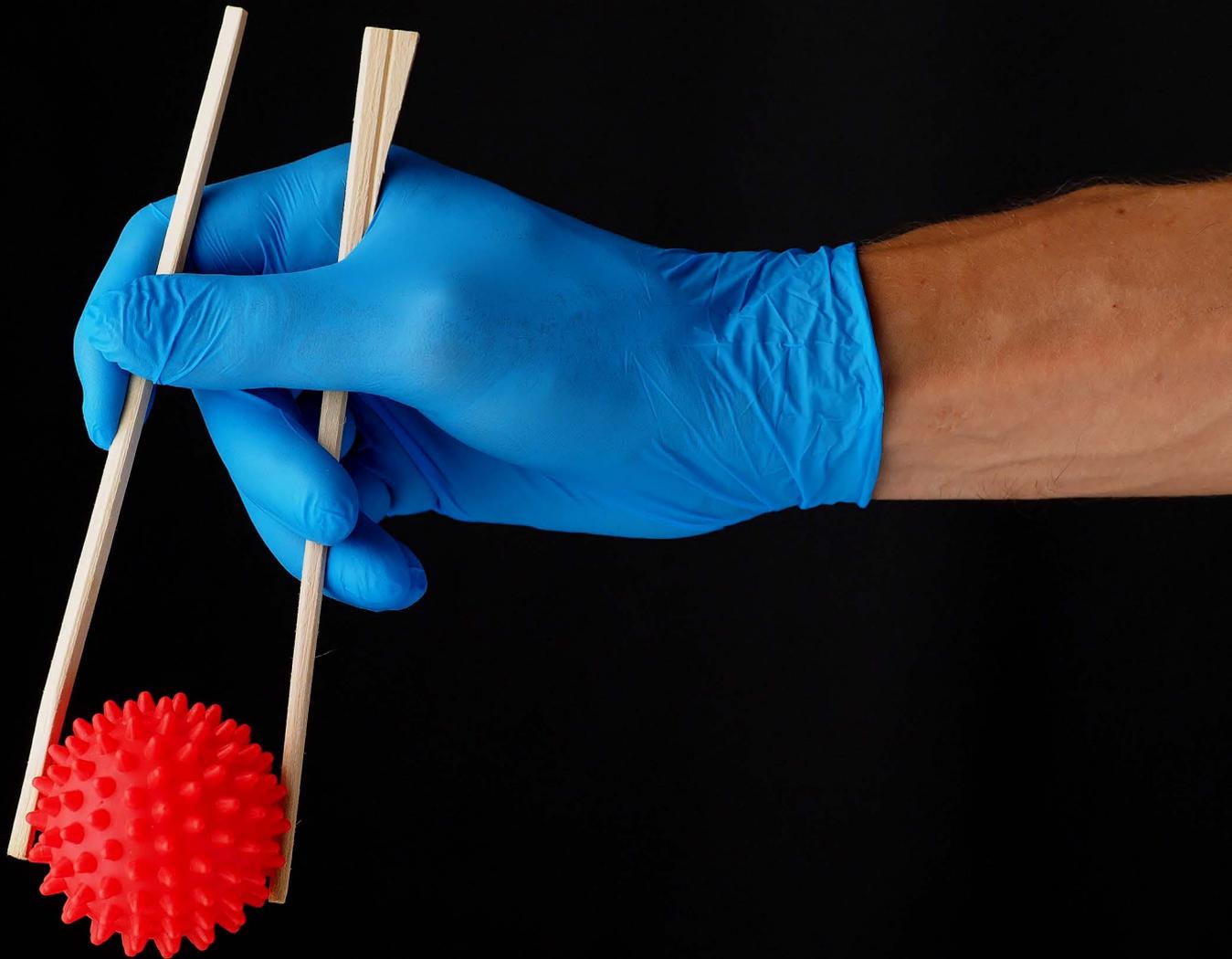
On Sunday evening I called my office about my symptoms. They quickly told me to stay home on Monday, and that my coworker would take me to a clinic. I painstakingly wrote a list of my symptoms using a kanji dictionary. Dry cough. Fever. Head and body aches. Stomach upset. It was like writing a checklist for COVID-19. This made me very anxious. I was 26 years old, so age was on my side. However, shortly before coming to Japan the previous year, I'd had a close brush with meningitis which left me in a wheelchair for a month. I wrote this down in detail, and explained my fears that I might have heightened vulnerability. However, the doctor didn't seem concerned. He did a five-minute exam and told me I had a cold, gave me cough suppressants, and sent me home. He said my three-day fever was not a concern because my lungs sounded clear. My office was more skeptical, and agreed to give me the rest of the week off.

By Friday, I couldn't get out of bed without coughing uncontrollably. My head throbbed. As the day wore on, I felt more and more tired and confused. When I went to the kitchen to make lunch, I found myself wandering around my kitchen in a half-drugged stupor because I couldn't remember why I was there. Something was very wrong. I messaged my coworker for help. He called the COVID-19 hotline and was put on hold. He found me a hotline for an English phone translator call center, so with its help I began calling the COVID-19 hotline too. After many hours, we finally got through and were told a local hospital could send an ambulance. By now it was such a struggle to think clearly that I wasn't afraid anymore. I just wanted to hang up and go to sleep. In fact, I did exactly that at one point, but my coworker sensed my decline and began messaging and calling me relentlessly, making me talk to him and urging me to hang on. All day long, he alternated between calling the hotline and calling me.

I was so scared that I started to cry. The paramedic who sat with me was asking questions in Japanese, and despite my relative fluency I was so distressed I could barely understand or answer. Thankfully I had brought my symptoms list, so I gave it to her and she took my information from there. She chatted with me kindly, trying to help me calm down and get my mind off the situation.

At the hospital, we were met with a full team of doctors and nurses. A new hospital-grade mask was strapped to my face as soon as I exited the ambulance, and I was rushed through a lung scan, an X-ray, and a blood test. Any clothing or belongings I removed for the scans were immediately put in plastic bags. Then I was placed in a small, air-filtered isolation chamber to wait for the bloodwork results.

When the doctor returned, my coworker called on the phone to help us translate. The doctor showed me the results of the blood test and explained that my white blood cell count was slightly elevated; however, he said that it could not prove definitively whether or not I had the new coronavirus. I was surprised and asked what he meant, because I had assumed the blood test was a test for COVID-19. It was not. It was a general blood panel. The doctor said that I should go home,



and that if my symptoms got worse, I should call them on Monday so they could do the COVID-19 test and possibly keep me at the hospital.

I was frustrated. I'd been feverish, coughing, and aching for a week now. How much worse must the illness become? But I was too exhausted to argue. I was prescribed a short course of antibiotics and given paperwork that asked me to self-quarantine for the next two weeks. This included instructions to separate myself from any family members in my own home, by isolating myself in a separate room, avoiding any physical contact, and wearing a mask even indoors. In short, I was instructed to behave like a positive case and cut myself off from my support group, but not given either a test or a doctor's note exempting

me from work. The hospital released me late that night. I had been told not to take the train, so a coworker needed to come and pick me up.

Saturday and Sunday passed in a blur. On Monday morning when I stood up and started coughing, my chest tightened and tickled ominously. It felt like the start of an asthma attack. I'd had asthma before, but not for years. The more I coughed, the tighter it got. I quickly went back to bed and called the English hotline. I explained that the hospital had told me to call on Monday for testing and admittance if my symptoms worsened, and the operator relayed my situation to the hospital.

**AFTER A LONG TIME ON HOLD,
THE HOSPITAL ANSWERED . . .**



...AND TOLD ME NOT TO COME BACK.

They explained that the doctor I had seen on Friday was only a part-time doctor who worked on weekends. The main doctor had reviewed my lung scan today, and concluded that since my lungs had looked healthy on Friday, I did not need a test. I explained that my lungs might have been fine on Friday, but today it was getting difficult to breathe. They politely repeated the doctor's verdict and that they would not see me. They also suggested that if I wanted to seek treatment at another hospital, I should call it first and then get a friend to drive me because I only qualified for an ambulance ride once.

At that point, I gave up.

I had barely eaten all weekend because I was too tired and confused to prepare food. Now, I was coughing too much to even

stand up. I messaged my office and my family, told them what had happened, and crawled into bed. I don't remember much after that.

Unbeknownst to me as I lay in a fog, my illness had sparked chaos in my office. The coworker who had driven me to the clinic and the coworker who had picked me up from the hospital had been placed on quarantine to wait for the results of my COVID-19 test. However, when the hospital told me it would not test me, they were called back to work. My other coworker who had helped me call the COVID-19 hotline called it again, but was put on hold. He called clinics and other hospitals, but was directed back to the COVID-19 hotline. He called the hospital I'd been taken to and unleashed a raging rant, telling them that I couldn't even feed myself anymore, and that their negligence was responsible for whatever fate awaited me now. They were apologetic and expressed surprise that I

was so ill (although I had told them earlier that same day), but did not offer any further help.

And so I slept on in my apartment. My coworkers and friends messaged every day to check on me, and took turns dropping by with food. By now I started coughing when I even rolled over, so I didn't get up at all except to bring the food from my door to my bed or to go to the bathroom. I couldn't even talk on the phone with my family because I coughed too much, so we texted whenever I was awake.

Days passed. One afternoon when I woke up, the fog seemed a bit less hazy. I checked my phone and realized it was the weekend. I had slept for more or less the entire week. On standing up, I found I could manage the walk to the bathroom without coughing as much. Over the next few days I slowly began sitting up and moving around my apartment for a short time each day, always mindful of my breathing and whether I was thinking clearly. The next weekend, I ventured outside and biked slowly around my apartment to see how I felt.

THE FRESH AIR WAS AMAZING AFTER THREE WEEKS IN BED, BUT WHEN I GOT HOME, I WAS EXHAUSTED AND SLEPT FOR TWO DAYS.

After that I was much more careful.

All in all, it took one week from the first symptoms until breathing became difficult. Then it was almost three more weeks before I could walk or bike for a short time without immediate relapse. Altogether, I spent about three full weeks on bed rest. At the end of the fourth week I still couldn't speak without coughing, but I could breathe fine and even manage to bike for short distances. I updated my office about the improvement, and that my coughing was almost gone. They asked me to return

to the office the next week.

Looking back on my experience, all I can say is that I was very lucky. I am incredibly lucky that my office took my symptoms seriously and sent me home for bed rest immediately, even when the clinic doctor denied the need. Some survivors of the new coronavirus have reported scarring of their lung tissue and long-term breathing problems, but I have avoided this—whether because my office immediately put me on bed rest so that I wouldn't strain my lungs, or because I am young and had very healthy lungs before, we may never know.

But most of all, I am incredibly lucky that my coworkers were so helpful, attentive, and even self-sacrificing in the way they exposed themselves to me with no hesitation, to make sure I received as much care as they could get me. Sadly, even when they fought their best on my behalf, the medical system still denied me care. It fell on them to nurse me well. It is no exaggeration to say that I owe them my life. If not for their constant calls and their visits with food, I could easily have starved in my apartment, too delirious and weak to make myself food.

If there is any lesson to be learned from my experience, it's that networking is critical at this time. Whether you are at risk or not, please consider discussing a buddy system with coworkers or friends—having an agreement with someone so they can be your advocate if you become ill, whether that means helping to call the hospital or dropping off groceries. Support your friends as well. Make sure they know that they can count on you for help. The Japanese medical system has served me well in most respects, but when worse went to worst, it was the care of friends that pulled me through. Physical isolation will help you stay healthy, but social isolation will not. We all need to stick together in these times. I promise that if you need help, whether we are strangers or best friends, you can reach out to me. And I hope that I can rely on you as well.

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A QUICK-START GUIDE FOR BEGINNERS

Michelle Maczka (Chiba)

Universal truths are fairly rare when it comes to experiences on the JET Program, but one thing is certain: when the sun rises high in the sky and the clock ticks past noon, rumbling tummies can be heard from Sapporo to Sasebo. Some of us have only to settle down in a classroom while carrying a tray of freshly prepared *kyūshoku* (school lunch) which, depending on the day's menu, may be highly anticipated or deeply feared.

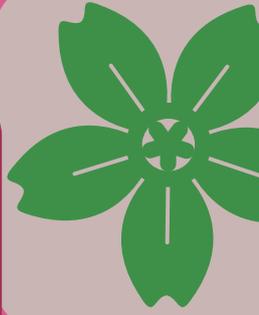
As a seafood hater, I had a love-hate relationship with these lunches during my tenure on JET. Whole fried fish, gritty clams, and seaweed graced my plate far too often for my liking. When I started teaching high school post-JET, I could finally eat anything I wanted! However, even convenience store *bentō* grew dull with time, and when I could no longer bring myself to eat another bite of soggy *karāge* or meat sauce pasta, I started packing a *bentō*.

My first ever *bentō* looked beautiful and garnered lots of praise from my co-workers, but it took me almost three hours to prepare and left me with a sinkful of dirty dishes. The next day, I made a completely different one, with slightly less dish washing and a time savings of 20 minutes. Suffice to say, I quickly gave up and resigned myself to cup noodles and mini salads again.

Miso cabbage stir fry; beni



ishoga (pickled ginger); julienned carrots with cumin and black pepper; kiriboshi daikon with carrot and fried tōfu; macaroni salad; black sesame over rice



I couldn't quite figure it out in those early days of my bentō attempts. I packed my supplies away and forgot about it until last year, when I started again in earnest. The impetus came from the most unlikely of places: my students' textbook. One of the first chapters was an overview of bentō and how it has spread and been adapted to local tastes around the world. Most of the students couldn't have cared less about the topic, but it was the spark I

needed to give it another shot.

The benefits of bentō are numerous and widespread, from money-saving, to maintaining a balanced diet, and even to posting that humble-brag on Facebook, so here is my Bentō 101 for you. Hopefully you'll be able to avoid the mistakes I made as a novice and develop a fun new hobby perfect for your lifestyle. Let's dig in!





Above: Nikujaga (simmered beef, potatoes, shirataki noodles, onions, and snow peas); spicy pickled cabbage; carrot slices in white miso dressing; sliced apple with peanut butter; camembert baby cheese; whole grain roll

Right: Chicken meatballs with thai sweet chili sauce; yellow peppers, chives, and bean sprouts in spicy oil; julienned carrots with cumin and black pepper; steamed green beans; black pepper mini cheese; rice with a mini pickled plum



Bentō Defined

If you ask anyone familiar with bentō-making to define what exactly a bentō is, you'll get a wide variety of responses. The most general definition will be along the lines of a container filled with several different dishes. Japanese cooking theory holds there to be five colors, five flavors, and five cooking methods. *Washoku* (Japanese-style) meals aim to include as many of these as possible, and it's also a good rule of thumb for bentō. This not only balances nutrition but also gives variation that satisfies us

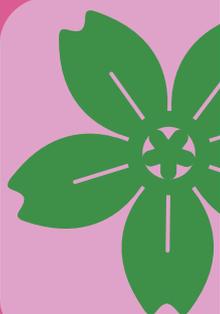
and, if I'm being perfectly honest, yields a beautiful photo to upload to social media.

There's really no wrong way to bentō and no need to confine it to just Japanese dishes either. In fact, these days Japanese bentō cookbooks include recipes for sandwiches, pastas, and even soups. There's also no reason to stress about how "homemade" your lunch is, as long as it works for you. I usually focus on



Left: Soy sauce riceballs with edamame and cheese bits; spicy pickled cabbage; carrot slices in white miso dressing; nikujaga (simmered beef, potatoes, shirataki noodles, onions, and snow peas)

Below: Braised pork belly over rice; mixed vegetable pickles; black sesame candied satsumaimo; spinach and carrot stir-fry; green beans with ground sesame dressing and flower-shaped carrot



cooking a main dish, a simple side dish, and then buy one or two things at the supermarket to round out my lunch. For example, if I made teriyaki chicken thighs as my main dish, I'd pair it with a cabbage and mushroom saute, then buy some daikon pickles and grapes from the store to finish it off.

The Box

What is a bentō without a bentō box? There are myriad options out there in every price, material, size, and color imaginable. But before we get ahead of ourselves, at its core, a bentō box is

just a container. Not much separates the fanciest, high-end *monbento* made in France from any old tupperware from your neighborhood Daiso. As a beginner, I had little idea which size would work best for me. Most bentō boxes are quoted in milliliter capacity. Generally speaking, aim for 600-800 mL; adjust accordingly if you have a big appetite or are a light eater.

Before buying a bentō box, do a week or two of test runs using containers you have on hand. You can find out their capacity by filling them with





Fried tōfu, mushroom, and carrot simmered in soy sauce and mirin; cabbage and ham slice saute; chicken meatballs in sesame ponzu sauce

Ribbon carrot and raisin salad; boiled salted broccoli; ham flowers; cheesy cream pasta with bacon, carrot, and onion



Pork, onion, and garlic stir fry; spicy sesame oil dressed greens; kiriboshi daikon with carrot and fried tōfu; sauteed green peppers with canned tuna





water from a measuring cup—just make sure you write it down somewhere. You can also pop over to the 100-yen shop and grab two or three differently-sized food storage containers, which should have their capacities written on the label.

If you're ready to invest in a fancier box, you should also consider the material. If you plan on eating your bentō without reheating it, you can choose any kind you like: wood, metal, or plastic. However, if you want to warm your lunch before eating, it limits your choice to plastic. In most cases, plastic bentō boxes should be reheatable in the microwave without their lids, and I recommend heating them for no longer than two to three minutes.

The Fillings

Browsing Pinterest or YouTube, it's far too easy to be drawn into the world of *kyaraben* and other complicated arrangements. Before you know it, you'll be up past midnight cooking or running out the door with a half-packed bentō. For first-timers, consider your cooking skill, available time, and clean-up motivation before committing to any recipe or menu. Re-creating Doraemon out of blue and white rice with *nori* cutouts for a face may look cute, but it's also time-consuming for little yield. The idea here is to pick just one recipe that's new or more time-intensive, and keep all other elements as uncomplicated as possible.

Basic bentō guidelines suggest half of a bentō be carbohydrates, one quarter a protein, and the remaining quarter reserved for one to two sides or accents like pickles, sliced fruit, or mini sausages. You might want to keep these guidelines in mind if you're

completely new to meal planning but don't feel restricted by them. Rather, use it as a basis for adapting bentō to your needs. Some people prefer to reduce carbs by subbing in shredded cabbage, while others may need half of their lunch to be protein to stay full until the end of the day.

This is also where a strategic store-bought side or plain old fruits and veggies can become your biggest allies. Mini tomatoes and steamed broccoli florets are often used to fill oddly-shaped spaces left behind after packing in other foods. Dishes that require the one-two punch of long preparation time and small amounts of many ingredients—I'm looking at you potato and macaroni salads—are something I almost always buy rather than make. If you time your purchases right, these premade sides will keep in your fridge for two to three days and can be used over multiple bentō. This actually ties into my next point.

Eat Twice But Cook Once

You've likely heard of batch cooking before, and luckily we can apply this to bentō too! Referred to in terms such as *tsukurioki* or *jobisai*, this technique saves both time and money. While just starting out and building up your repertoire, consider also simply making an extra portion or two at dinner to save for future bentō.

Before you haul off and quadruple your recipe, you should know that not every ingredient or dish yields well to this method. Some foods, like tōfu and eggs, are fairly sensitive. They have a relatively short shelf life once cooked, and their textures will change when frozen and reheated. Pickles keep five days or more in the fridge but can't be frozen.



When in doubt, try to eat up or freeze any recipes within two days. If you're also questioning whether you'll enjoy the food after a freeze and reheat cycle, start off by freezing just a portion or two to minimize waste in case the worst happens. Once I made the mistake of freezing, untested, a large batch of egg quiche—it was not pretty (or tasty).

If you try this system out yourself, here are just a few food safety tips. The biggest rule is to always have clean utensils and containers when portioning out food. Use a fresh pair of chopsticks or new spoon to pack each dish, or wipe them off well before touching a different food. Avoid directly touching or licking your utensil before putting it back into the container. It's also recommended to cool hot foods, such as rice, to room temperature before packing them alongside leftover cold foods to prevent bacteria growth. Above all, if you have any doubt about the freshness of the food, better to toss it than to risk it.

Final Touches

If you have an extra few minutes, you can add a bit of pizzazz to your lunch quite easily. Browsing the bentō supply aisle of stores will uncover a range of whimsical plastic picks, mini sauce

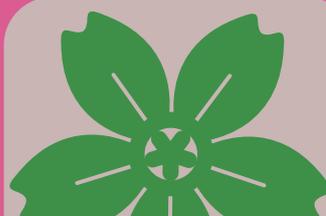
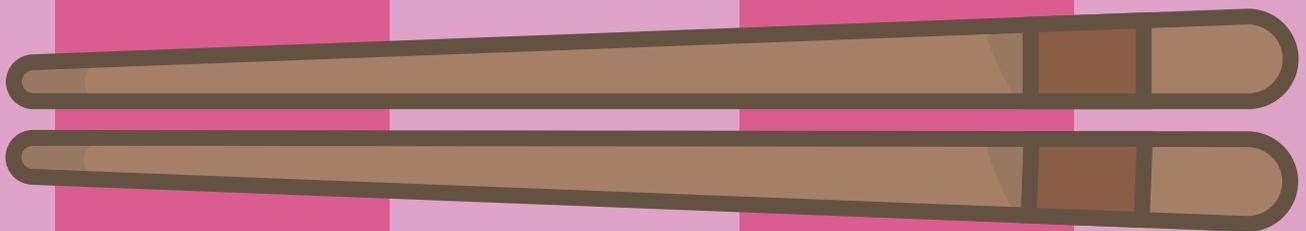
holders, shaped silicone containers, nori seaweed punches, and even hard boiled egg molds.

My go-to tools for that extra touch are shaped bentō punches, which look like tiny cookie cutters. I have them in flower and leaf designs as well as a bevy of holiday-themed ones too. Sliced carrot or cucumber, bell pepper halves, and even cheese make for perfect materials to cut out shapes to your heart's desire.

Want something even simpler than those ideas? Keep on hand black or white sesame seeds as well as some *furikake* seasoning. Just a quick sprinkle of these on rice can help add some amazing visual appeal with zero effort.

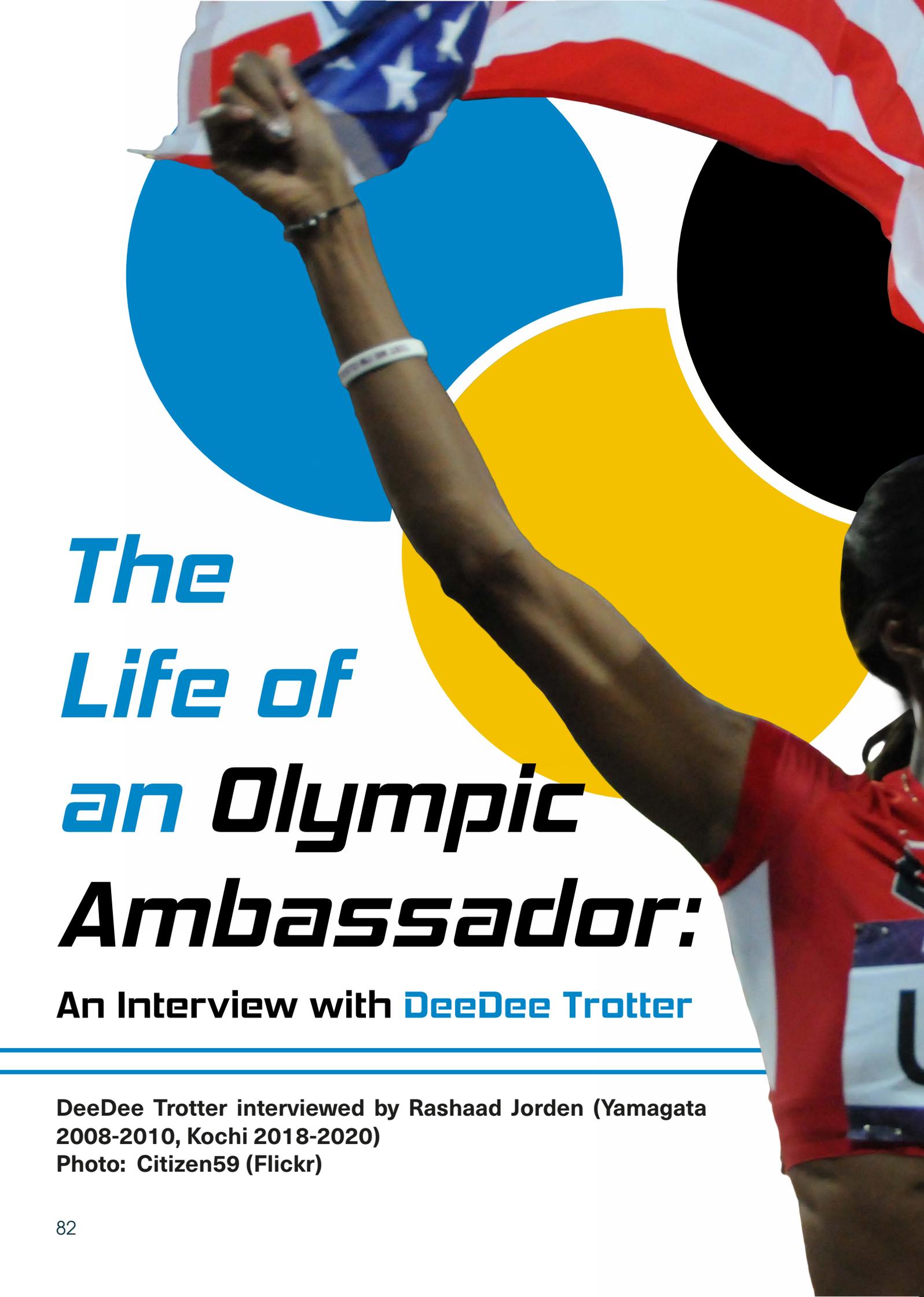
With that, you're now ready to craft your own delectable bentō. Above all, if it's tasty and satisfying, then you've done it right. Let's get cooking!

A Massachusetts native, Michelle came to Japan via JET in 2014 and spent two years in Murakami, Niigata before moving to Chiba. She enjoys searching out regional specialties and "B-kyū" gourmet restaurants with her spouse. She also likes sumo wrestling, board games, and studying kanji.



Three-color rice bowl with ground chicken meat; *benishoga* (pickled ginger); boiled edamame; and sliced omelet strips





The Life of an Olympic Ambassador:

An Interview with **DeeDee Trotter**

DeeDee Trotter interviewed by Rashaad Jordan (Yamagata
2008-2010, Kochi 2018-2020)

Photo: Citizen59 (Flickr)



“I can. I must. I will!”

DeeDee Trotter represented the United States at three Olympics (2004, 2008 and 2012) in track and field, earning three medals (gold in the 4x400-meter relay in 2004 and 2012 and a bronze in the 400-meter dash in 2012). Currently, she works as a motivational speaker and has visited [numerous schools in Japan](#). She is also an [Education First \(EF\) Tōkyō 2020 Olympic Project Ambassador](#).

I interviewed DeeDee Trotter in **March 2020**, prior to the Tōkyō 2020 Olympics postponement.

How did you become the EF Tōkyō 2020 Olympic Project Ambassador?

Back in 2016, EF was looking to hire an Olympic gold medalist. Someone from the EF office in Boston was a fan of mine and she had someone from EF offer me the job. At the time, I was not really interested in taking the position because I had several coaching offers on the table. But to be honest, I wasn't interested in coaching right out of track. I decided to take them up on the offer and within about six months, I moved to Switzerland, where I stayed for about a year and a half working remotely from the Zurich office. During that time with EF, I completed 128 events worldwide.

What does being the Olympic Project Ambassador entail?

It's really a fancy name for a brand ambassador. I do some brand ambassador recognition work for them. I've created the position to fit my skills and talents, which is basically motivational speaking. 95% of the time, I am doing

international motivational speaking work at schools, universities, and corporations. Most of the year [2019 and 2020 pre-COVID] was spent in Tōkyō because the Tōkyō office was really interested in making sure that Japanese residents had an opportunity to connect with the Olympic movement and what better way to do that than to introduce them to an Olympic gold medalist—and let their younger generation be inspired and motivated to not only engage in the Olympics but also to achieve their dreams and goals.

I am a full-time motivational speaker—that's my title when I speak of myself.

In your speeches, what has been the general message that you've conveyed to students?

My message is geared towards helping them understand how to use power. I help them see that powerful forces are at work all around them every day. They have to start

Pressure is power, positivity is power, confidence is power, progress is power, and belief is power.

Photo: Eckhard Pecher



recognizing that power is in their life and all they need to do is utilize it. I do that by explaining my pillars of power—which are pressure is power, positivity is power, confidence is power, progress is power, and belief is power. I use my story to highlight how these things became powerful forces in my life and that I'm not a super special individual. Every single person in this world has access to these forms of power. My story resonates with them.

By the time most people walk out of a session, they feel like they can use power in their life a lot

more efficiently. They also leave with a powerful motto that I've created, "I can. I must. I will!" This is the motto I've lived by. I started using this motto in 2011. It became the center of my power and the core of my motivation. I now instill that same motto into every person I talk to. That is what most people connect to.

What was your experience being in Ōsaka in 2007 for the World Championships like?

Ōsaka quickly and easily became one of my favorite places in the world.

It's not because Ōsaka was a super cool city or anything like that—it is a cool city, but that's not what compelled me to feel that way. I consider Japan to



be one of the top places to travel to in the world. I put Ōsaka on my list because of the people. Ōsaka has the nicest people in the world by far. I don't know why they're so friendly. I don't know why they're so happy. Whatever it is, it's memorable.

I've also ran in Yokohama and Tōkyō. As an EF ambassador, I've traveled to many cities—Nagoya, Kyoto, Sapporo, Okinawa, Fukuoka. I've lost count of all the cities I've been to at this point. I just love a culture that has such high respect for all the people, for the planet, their health, living creatures, etc.

[The Japanese] respect people's space and quiet. It's quite refreshing coming from the U.S. where everything is always kinda loud and hectic. It's kinda contradictory because Tōkyō is such an exciting city—13 million people. There's always a lot of things going on, but it's a cool balance of respect and quiet all tied into one place.

I read that Japan gave you your most interactive food experience. Do you have a favorite Japanese dish?

I'm a fan of yakitori but I would say my favorite dish is something that I had for the very first time in Sapporo: soup curry. I love that stuff and I dream about that meal. I'll make an extra trip, I'll ride a train for an hour if I have to. It's pretty popular in Sapporo. One of my friends told me it's a speciality there.

After your serious knee injury (Trotter underwent major surgery after the Beijing Olympics), did you have any concerns?

Yes, three years of concerns. I didn't bounce back from my surgery very quickly. It took three years of failure to actually come back from that injury. It was not a quick rebound. I lost every race I ran outdoors. I basically had no contract left and my back was against the wall. It was do or die, all or nothing. At that point, it was "You better find a new way to win" because the old way isn't working any more. So through some mental training—"I Can. I Must. I Will!"—and finding a new way to rebuild the confidence that I lost from all those years of losing—losing physically, losing mentally, losing emotionally and losing money and contracts.

You can believe everything it takes a little work, patience

A lot of loss occurred over those three years. Those losses take away from your confidence and your belief in yourself. You might be physically ready to run again but mentally, you're just trashed. So the biggest hurdle that a lot of athletes and people struggle to overcome is that they don't realize while they were going through a difficult time, their confidence takes a huge hit. You have to work on building that back up just as much as building your body. I had indirectly, unknowingly neglected the mental element of repairing

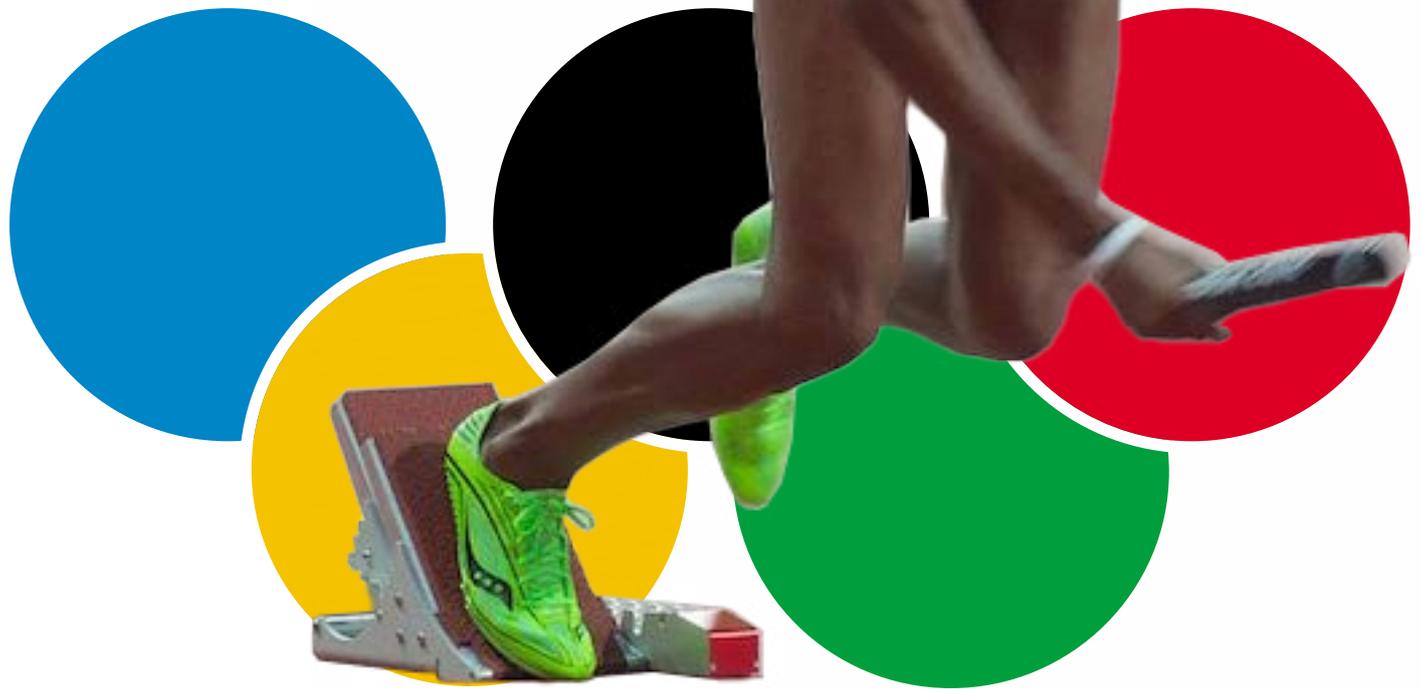
myself. In 2012, it became apparent to me—I was shown this gap and then, I was led to understand what it took to fill it. I put together a mental training strategy that allowed me to not only make the 2012 Olympic team when nobody thought I would ever make another team. I came back and I made the Olympic team, and on top of that, I won two medals at the 2012 Games when most people didn't expect me to be there.

Who helped you with the mental aspect of your career?

When I think back to that time frame, there weren't a lot of people who believed in me. When you have three years of losses under your belt, you don't really have a fan club. People were thinking I should retire. I had a few people that are never going anywhere—my coach, Caryl Smith

Gilbert, who is also the head coach and director of track and field at the University of Southern California. She's always been there. My brother Yohon Trotter is my undying fan. I could literally have one leg and one arm tied behind my back and he's like, "She's gonna win." He really doesn't do doubt—not when it comes to me, anyway. He is always there. But really, I built this mental regimen from my own personal experiences. I didn't know it but at the time, I was building the next stage of my life, which is motivational speaking. I was in a mindset of how do I get back to the old me when I was fearless and courageous.

**ng is possible but getting
ence, and determination.**





So the biggest hurdle that a lot of athletes and people struggle to overcome is that they don't realize while they were going through a difficult time, their confidence takes a huge hit.

You can believe everything is possible but getting it takes a little work, patience, and determination. So how do you get back to that mental state? I just started to relive every step I had taken and I really just can't help but express that the only way it could come about was through prayer and my belief in God because you pray for what you need and what I needed was a way to become mentally stronger. I really don't want to take credit for somehow having the ability to just come up with this amazing strategy that would ultimately be the stepping stone for life after track. I would like to think I was that clever but I also know I prayed for it.

What are you looking forward to most about the Tōkyō Olympics?

The thing I'm most curious about is on top of the 13.5 million people Tōkyō already has, is how we plan on cramming a few more in there. I'm really interested to see how Tōkyō hosts such a prestigious event.

Photo: Hampton University



If anyone can do it, they can do it. I think that's the thing that is most intriguing to me now.

As far as sports go, I'm obviously a little biased. I'm looking forward to track and field. And there's some new stuff that has come up, like surfing and some other events, which I think is pretty cool.

Finally, what has been your most memorable Japan experience?

I would say doing a workout session with the Navy Command Fitness Group. That was something I don't think I will ever forget. Being able to be Coach Trotter out there for all the Navy men and women. It was really awesome, and some of their families came to that workout session as well. The base track team was there, and it was a super day.

I won two medals at the 2012 Games when most people didn't expect me to be there.

Also, one day, we did a workout session at Ōsaka City Sumiegaoka Junior High School and I kinda correlated the message that I was telling [the students] about believing in themselves and speaking over negativity with positivity, while encouraging them with my motto "I Can. I Must. I Will!" And I took them into a fitness session that forced them to rely on the skillset and motivational message I taught them. They did extremely well. They made me so proud. I had to brag about them all over my [Instagram](#).

*Rashaad Jordan, who conducted this interview, was a two-time JET—first in Yamagata Prefecture from 2008 to 2010, and in Kōchi Prefecture from 2018 to 2020. During his JET experiences, he completed the Tōkyō Marathon in 2010 and the Kōchi Ryōma Marathon twice, 2019 and 2020. He also served as the General Sports Editor for **CONNECT** from September 2019 to July 2020.*

From the Black Hills to Mount Fuji

AN INTERVIEW WITH BILLY MILLS

Billy Mills interviewed by Rashaad Jordan
(Yamagata 2008-2010, Kochi 2018-2020)

Prior to entering the 1964 Olympics, Billy Mills was rather unheralded, but the native of South Dakota went on to produce one of the greatest upsets in Olympic track and field history, stunning world record holder Ron Clarke of Australia and defending champion Pyotr Bolotnikov of the Soviet Union to win gold in the 10,000-meter run. Mills set a then Olympic record to become the only American (to this point) to win gold in the event, a triumph that inspired the 1983 film *Running Brave*. Mills is the co-founder of Running Strong for American Indian Youth, an organization devoted to enhancing the lives

of Native Americans. In 2012, he was awarded the Presidential Citizens Medal by President Obama.

I had the privilege to interview Billy Mills in June 2020.

Was the 1964 Olympics the first time you visited Japan? If so, what excited you the most about coming to Japan for the Olympics?

It was the first time that I had ever been to Japan, and there were several things that excited me. When I was a little boy with my father on the reservation, we were driving. He's fiddling with the

I WAS FINDING PARALLELS BASED ON OUR P

A detailed illustration of a hand holding a medal. The hand is rendered in a realistic style with warm, golden-brown tones. The fingers are curled around a blue ribbon with red, white, and yellow stripes. A large, circular gold medal hangs from the ribbon. The background is a plain, light beige color.

PRAYER,

“WE ARE ALL RELATED.”



fiddling with the radio, trying to get a clearer reception. Then he said, “We made a big mistake. We did a terrible thing.” And I thought he meant us. I said, “What did we do, Daddy?”

He said, “We dropped a bomb on Japan. We should have given them a demonstration of the power [of the bomb]. We should not have dropped it.

We should have demonstrated in another way the power of the bombing and what it could do.”

“It could destroy the world,” he added.

I said, “When is that explosion going to reach us?”

He said, “It’s not. But we could build a bomb that could destroy the world.” And he quoted the most powerful prayer of my Lakota tribe. He made a reference to Japanese people being our relatives. He said, “We are all related.”

I grew up learning about World War II and learnt a bit about Japan before I went [to the 1964 Olympics].

The Black Hills, which is an extension of the Rocky Mountains in the United States, is—in our tribal area—the heart of everything that is. As I learned about Mt. Fuji, I thought, “That must be the heart of everything

that is to the Japanese people.” I was finding parallels based on our prayer, “We are all related.”

When we were flying into Japan for the very first time on Oct. 1, 1964, I could see Mt. Fuji, and I felt very comfortable spiritually; it was comforting that this must be the heart of everything that is for [Japanese] people.

Every Japanese citizen I saw, as our Lakota tribe teaches us to do, was humbling themselves to honor their family and their nation. If I could do that, I could honor the United States of America and then honor humanity globally.

It sounds like it was a very spiritual experience coming to Japan.

Going to Japan was very spiritual. Spiritual as in the story I mentioned, it was about honoring myself, honoring my tribal nation, and seeing the Japanese citizens honoring themselves and honoring their country. It was so powerful to me.

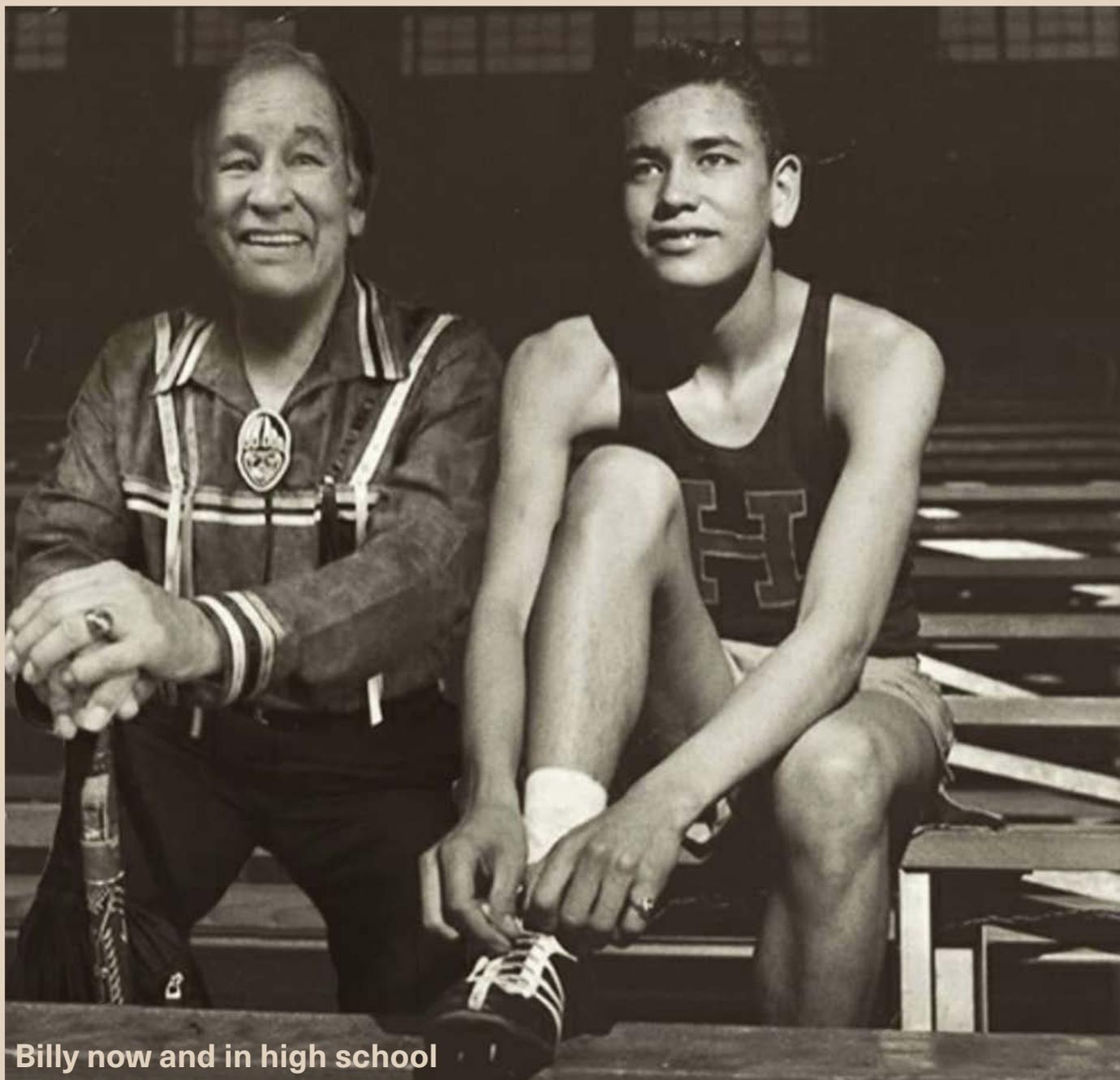
I went to the Olympic Games not to win a gold medal. I was struggling with racism in America. I came so close to taking my life in my junior year in college, and my Dad died when I was 12. [But] he told me, "Pick a dream. It will heal a broken soul." I had wrote down, "Olympic gold medal. 10,000-meter run." I used the Olympic Games as a journey to heal my broken soul. The 1964 Games allowed the citizens of Japan to dream, to help them heal on a global basis.

During my first week in Japan, I read about the young people that were born in Japan on the day of the two atomic bombs. The theme of the Olympic

I WANT TO PROMOTE GLOBAL UNITY, DIGNITY, CHARACTER, BEAUTY, GLOBAL DIVERSITY.



Photo: Bill Koplitz



Billy now and in high school

Games, representing the youth and the world as one, was enduring.

That was a spiritual experience reminding me that, “We are all related.” My wife and I use that experience in our life journey now. I want to promote global unity, dignity, character, beauty, global diversity. Not only the theme of the 1964 Tōkyō Olympic Games but also the future of humankind.

What were you feeling when you toed the starting line for the 10,000?

I would call it a spiritual feeling. I was using the Olympics as a catalyst to heal my broken soul. So I line up at the start of the race. I’m in the second row, probably lane eight. I was confident that the race and victory was mine if I chose to take it. I had to believe that I could perform beyond my capabilities.

I WAS USING THE OLYMPICS AS A CATALYST TO HEAL MY BROKEN SOUL.

My wife was 95 meters back up the track. Probably 30 seats up. I knew where she was when we walked to the starting line. She knew then what I was trying to do. She knew I wanted to win.

I debated during a 25-mile run six months earlier [about getting a loan to take her to Tokyo]. After I finished that run, it was like, “Yeah, I need her there to win.” [So] we borrowed the money from a bank. \$800 for a plane ticket and lodging at the Palace Hotel so she could be there with me.

Before the gun goes off, the thought of her 95 meters behind me crosses my mind and yes, I needed her. The victory was there. It was up to me to win.

Where did that confidence come from?

I think the confidence came out of high school. In my graduating year, I was the second-fastest two-miler in the nation and the fourth fastest miler. I did not know until Sept. 23, 1963 that I was hypoglycemic and type 2 diabetic. In high school, my coach said I was tired from not being rested. Not knowing anything medically, he started giving me honey before the races. The honey before the races kept my glucose level

up. In college the coach said, “We do things differently. We eat four-and-a-half hours before competition.” So every race I ran in college, I went low blood sugar.

The doctor diagnosed me 12 months before the Olympic Games and I realized if I could control [the hypoglycemia], rather than being marginally elite—running like the best in the world and faltering at the end—I could beat them.

The talent was there. I had to find out what was keeping that talent from blossoming. I only had one world record. I trained through my world record. I didn't rest. I wanted to compete in Europe against the Soviet Union. In July of '65, I wanted to go sub-27:40 in the 10k. No one had been under 28 minutes. Then [Australia's Ron] Clarke broke 28 minutes, but I was ready to beat it.

I got sick and couldn't compete. When I walked off the track on Aug. 12, 1965, I looked at my wife and said, “I will never be world-class again. It's too difficult running hypoglycemic, borderline type 2 diabetic.”

I quit running on Oct. 12, 1965. So in retrospect, I feel—if I was running today—with the talent that I had against the best in the world today, I think I could still have not one but several world records.

If I could have handled that hypoglycemia back in the '60s, I would

have been able to match Ron Clarke world record for world record. He had 18 of them. So I look upon my career as being number one, I healed a broken soul. That by far was the most powerful victory I had in my life.

It seems like healing a broken soul was more important than winning an Olympic gold medal.

Yes, and with probably about 80 meters to go, I knew I was going to win. My thought was, “I’m gonna win.” But following that was, “I may not get to the finish line first.” It meant I healed a broken soul. The journey, not the destination, is what empowers us.

It provided a healing process. And I was blessed because in the process I also happened to win a gold medal that no one else from the Western Hemisphere has won. But, healing a broken soul was by far the greater gift.

Far greater than healing the broken soul was the empowerment—spiritually and mentally—of Japan putting on the greatest Olympic Games in the history of the modern Olympic Games and what it did for the country. To me, that’s a miracle.

What were your impressions of Tōkyō as an Olympic host?

Tōkyō was the perfect host. Many countries have put on incredible Olympic Games, London, for example. The Japanese citizens were the perfect hosts; they went out of their way to

help me and my wife Patricia. They tried to answer any questions despite the language barrier. The restaurants we went into, the volunteers at the stadiums, the humbleness and the respect they showed to us. . . I have a hard time describing it. It came from their heart.

Other than your gold medal, do you have any other favorite memories of the 1964 Olympics?

I have several beautiful memories that come from the ‘64 Olympics. One of them was being introduced to sushi and a Japanese fruit. It’s like a huge apple, a juicy fruit. It’s yellowish and similar to an apple. It’s the size of a grapefruit and very sweet. That fruit helped me win the gold medal because as I ate it, my blood sugar stabilised.

Another memory had to do with a candy bar. I was going low blood sugar before the race started, and I was panicking. I was trying to find someone who could get me a Coca-Cola or a candy bar. I felt I needed something in my stomach rather than fluid. A Japanese man had a candy bar. That candy bar helped me win.

A couple of other beautiful memories. I was speaking at a conference on sport as a culture in 1984 or 1985, and they were showing the movie *Running Brave*. There was this young man standing there very politely with a young lady. He stopped me and said he was named after me. He and his fiancée were getting married and

going to America.

“We want to go across the United States by train, by bus just to see the heart of the country and when we get to California a month later, could we visit you?” he asked.

So my wife made arrangements for the young couple to visit us. Months go by and they visit us. As they are leaving Patricia asked, “Could you write your name down for us?” So he wrote his name.

Patricia said, “Well, what part is Billy?”

“My name’s not Billy,” he responded.

She said, “I thought you were named after Billy.”

He said, “Yes, I am. My father went to the Olympic Games—the 10,000-meter run—to watch the Japanese athlete

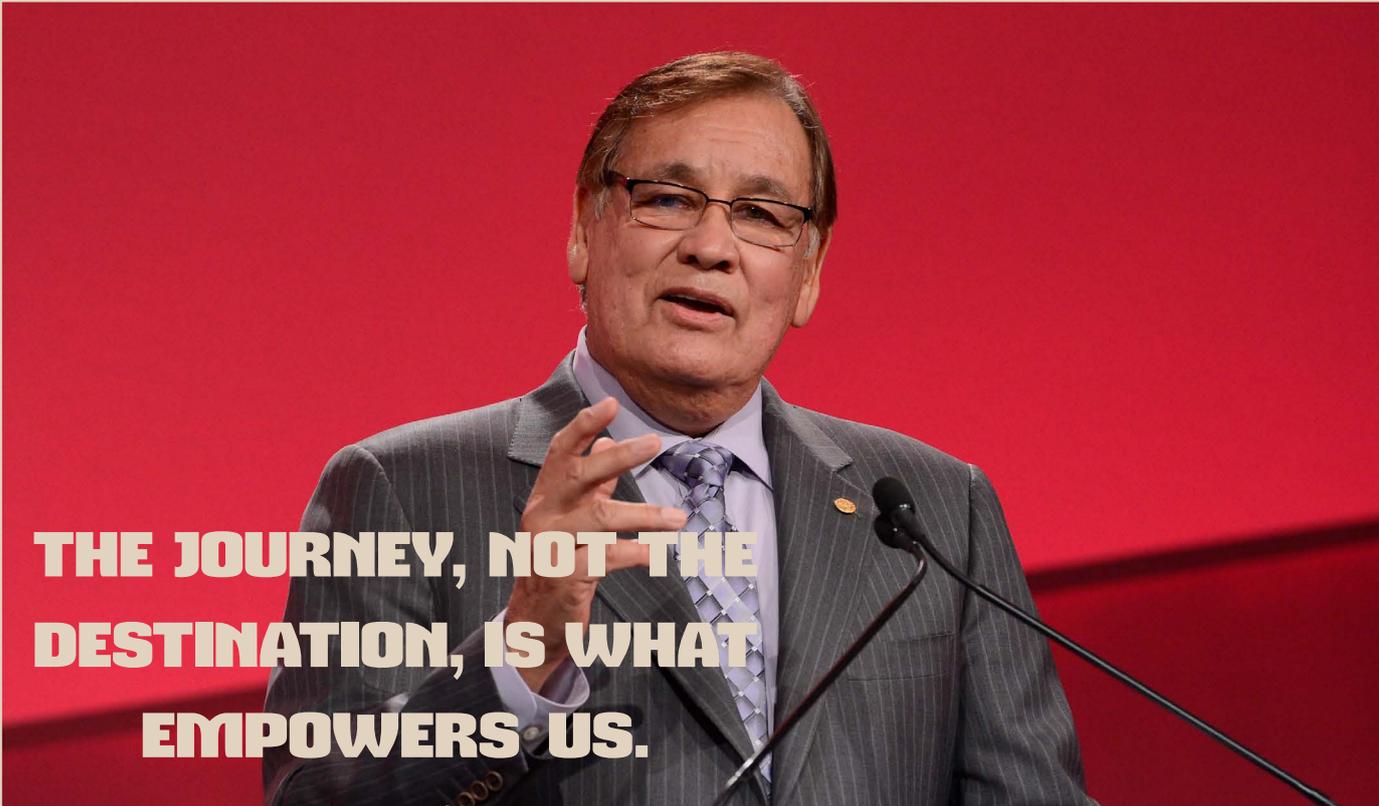
(Kokichi Tsuburaya) who finished back in sixth and my mother goes into labor. I was born during the 10,000-meter run. My father was so taken by how you won the race. He named me after you but my name is not Billy.”

My wife goes, “What’s your name?”

He said, “My name means ‘The Noble One.’”

That moment in time touched me.

*Rashaad Jordan was a two-time JET participant—first in Yamagata Prefecture from 2008 to 2010, and in Kochi Prefecture from 2018 to 2020. During his JET experiences, he completed the Tōkyō Marathon in 2010 and the Kochi Ryoma Marathon twice, 2019 and 2020. He also served as the sports editor for **CONNECT** from September 2019 to July 2020.*



**THE JOURNEY, NOT THE
DESTINATION, IS WHAT
EMPOWERS US.**

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"A sign of the times every time that I speak." — Lil Nas X, "Montero (Call Me by Your Name)"

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Exciting New Adventures Await in Okinawa:

Top Five Must-See Events During the Summer!

Monica Aguilar-Scion (Okinawa)

Haisai* (male) or *Hitai* (female), which means “Hello” in Uchinaaguchi, a Ryūkyūan language indigenous to Okinawa, and also welcome! *Menso~re!

The temperature is getting warmer, and the sun is also much brighter, which means one thing—it is nearly summer! So, get your sunscreen, bikini, and/or boardshorts ready for some summer fun in the Okinawan sun!

Okinawa Prefecture, formerly the Ryūkyū Kingdom, is so unique and easily distinguishable from mainland Japan in its culture, food, and traditions. Once you step foot on Okinawa, you may feel as if you’ve gone back in time or even to another country, which was the reality a few hundred years ago before the Meiji government annexed it as part of Japan in 1879.



The spectacular view from the Tokashiki Island Kubandaki Observation Deck

The Ryūkyū Kingdom was an independent nation that played a central role in maritime trade during the medieval period in East and Southeast Asia. And, tragically, during World War II, the entirety of Okinawa Prefecture became one of the bloodiest battlegrounds in the Pacific theater. Okinawa is now home to half of the 50,000 American troops and their families who are stationed in Japan under the security alliance with the United States. Because of its rich history, Okinawa has had and continues to have many outside influences that come from America, China, Japan, Korea, Southeast Asia, and elsewhere.

Throughout the world, Okinawa is also known as the “Hawaii of Japan.” This may be because of the beautiful, clear, turquoise-colored waters surrounding the Ryukyu Islands’ archipelago, its diverse history, and Okinawa’s special *Yuimaaru* spirit, which is similar to the Aloha spirit in Hawaii.

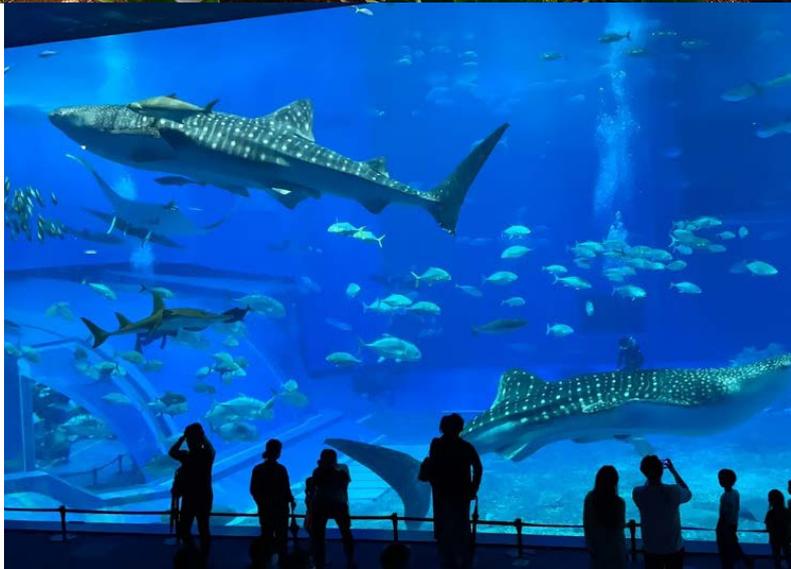
This article serves as a guide to what I believe are the very best summer festivals held in Okinawa each year, while also including useful tips and other recommended spots.



1. Ie Island Lily Festival

Iejima Lily Festival or *Yuri Matsuri* usually occurs during Golden Week, with the flowers in peak bloom during the first week of May. During the 10-day Golden Week in 2019, I had the opportunity to visit Ie Island, which is also known as the flower island, with my family and a couple of friends. As we stepped off of the shuttle bus at the Lily Festival, we were promptly greeted by the beautiful sight and smell of hundreds of thousands of pure white Easter Lilies against the backdrop of the East China Sea.

The festival features over one million lilies that blanket the island as far as the eyes can see. You can enjoy a leisurely walk along a path that goes towards the ocean, which features over 90 other various-colored lily varieties as well. There were a ton of food vendors, a children's bounce house, entertainment, and shaded seating areas for rest and dining. There were bags of Asiatic/Oriental Lily bulbs available for purchase near the shuttle bus waiting area to head back to the Ie Island Port, each costing around 500 yen per bag.



Other Significant Spots in the Northern Area of the Main Island of Okinawa

1. [Churaumi Aquarium](#)
2. [Bise Fukugi Tree Road in Motobu](#)
3. [Emi no Mise](#)
4. [Hedo Misaki](#)
5. [Kōri Ocean Tower on Kōri Island](#)
6. [Oceanic Cultural Museum](#)
7. [Yanbaru National Park](#)
8. [Tropical Dream Center](#)



2. Naha *Haarii* Dragon Boat Festival

The Dragon Boat Festival or *Haarii* is normally held over three days during the Golden Week holiday. The Dragon Boat tradition came from China and can be dated back to the 14th century AD. Racing the colorful dragon boats is believed to bring fertility, good health, happiness, prosperity, safe voyages, and wealth. The race begins at Naha port, goes out to sea, and then returns. It is a carnival-like atmosphere with music, *eisa* and other types of dance, and live entertainment! Be sure to stick around at the end of the third day for the fireworks!



Other Significant Spots in Central and Southern Areas of the Main Island of Okinawa

1. [Araha Beach](#)
2. [Azama Sun Sun Beach](#)
3. [Chura-Sun Beach](#)
4. [Fish Market Tomari Iyumachi](#)
5. [Fukushuen Garden Naha](#)
6. [Fumiya](#)
7. [Gangala Valley and Gangala Cave Café](#)
8. [Haebaru Cultural Museum](#)
9. [Kinjō Tetsuo Museum](#)
10. [Kira Kira Beach](#)
11. [Murasaki Mura](#)
12. [Ryūkyū Mura](#)
14. [Okinawa Peace Memorial Park](#)
15. [Okinawa World and Gyokusendō Cavern Shuri Castle](#)



3. Tug-of-War Festival

The Sunday before National Sports Day is usually when the annual Naha Tug-of-War event is held. This event is held to bring prosperity and health to Okinawa and its people. It is a popular event that attracts thousands of spectators and participants. The event happens on the Route 58 Kumoji Crossing. In 1997, the event was entered into the Guinness Book of World Records for being the largest tug-of-war



4. Orion Beer Festival

event in the world. The rope has a weight of 40 metric tons and is 200 meters long. On each side of the rope, there are approximately 15,000 participants. If you wish to participate, it is best to bring gloves since the straw is very rough and could cause some blistering. If you are lucky enough to score some rope, you can bring it home for some extra luck. It is tradition to shape the piece into a round wreath, decorate, and hang the piece high at the entrance of your home. Along with this event, there is a parade that happens before the event with lion dancing, fan dancing, and martial arts performances.

The Orion Beer Festival is a popular event with ages 20 and up and draws a crowd of nearly 300,000 visitors each year. It is held at the same time as the Okinawa Zentō Eisa Matsuri, so it is possible to go to both events on the same day. This beer festival is a symbol of Okinawan summers. Orion Beer is the perfect refreshment for the warm and humid Okinawan weather. At this event, you can enjoy live performances by some of Okinawa's greatest bands while sipping on fresh Orion Beer on tap or from the bottle! Don't forget to buy souvenirs as they will sell out fast!





5. Eisa Festivals

a. 10,000 Eisa Dancers Parade at Kokusai Dori

Every summer on Kokusai Dōri, a busy and lively shopping street in Naha, the 10,000 Eisa Dancers Parade is held. If you can find a good spot to sit or stand on the sidewalk, you will be able to witness many fun and creative eisa dance performances by people from all walks of life! Kokusai Dōri is filled with many restaurants and souvenir shops, so you can eat or shop before or after if you wish!

b. Tedako Summer Festival

The Urasoe Tedako Festival is a two-day festival held in Urasoe in the central part of the main island, a little north of Naha. There are various events in this festival, such as the Three Great Urasoe Kings Festival, Tedako Dance, Young Men's Eisa Performance, and Summer Young Festival. There are also many popular artists from Okinawa who perform at this event, and recently in 2019, Orange Range, Chuning Candy, and Shima Bananas appeared as guest artists! Do not forget to stay for the spectacular fireworks show at the end! I recommend bringing some of your favorite drinks, snacks, and a mat to sit on as well as cash to buy some festival food!



c. Okinawa Zentō Eisa Matsuri

Did you ever hear of *Obon*? Well, in Japan, it is a time when the spirits of loved ones who have passed return to the world of the living. The Okinawa Zentō Eisa Matsuri is a three-day dancing festival for Okinawans to gather and get ready to welcome their ancestors back home.





On the first day, there are eisa parades, on the second, a youth festival, and on the second and third day, there are more performances and an amazing fireworks and laser show! The festival is held at the Okinawa City Koza Sports Park. There are many food stands, so make sure you bring cash! You can also go next door to the Orion Beer Festival if you want to have some good old Okinawan brew.

I had the awesome opportunity to perform as a dancer with the Okinawa City International Association Eisa Team (OCIA) on the last day of the festival in 2019, and we had a fun and memorable time! It took many hours of practice, but it was worth it! So if you happen to be in Okinawa towards the end of August, don't forget to check out this gorgeous festival with traditional Ryūkyū dress, eisa drums, songs, sanshin, and dance!



d. Itoman Eisa Festival/Furusato Matsuri

The Itoman Eisa Festival/Furusato Matsuri is one of my family's favorite eisa festivals because the venue is located in a small tight-knit community in Itoman where everyone feels like a family. It is a two-day festival where they have eisa performances

by different youth groups, and there is also a children's festival which has games and prizes. Be sure to bring cash because there are also food vendors! At the end of both nights, there is a fireworks and laser show which always attracts a good crowd.

This guide is based on my experiences pre-pandemic, and unfortunately, many of these events have either been postponed until further notice, cancelled, or reduced in scale **due to the current and ongoing pandemic**. Please remember that there are many COVID-19 restrictions currently in place in Japan, so please follow the directions given by your prefecture regarding travel.



Helpful/Useful Information and Tips

Cash

Okinawa is still a very cash-based society. If you're planning on eating at local restaurants, chances are the majority of them will only accept cash. It's good to always have some cash on hand.

Heatstroke Prevention and Warning

Temperatures in Okinawa can become really hot, and coupled with the humidity, it can become dangerous. It is important to make sure to stay hydrated and take a rest when you feel tired. You can also take along some electrolyte chewable tablets to prevent dehydration. I also highly recommend checking out the [NHK Heatstroke Warning page](#) for Okinawa.

Transportation

On the main island of Okinawa, renting a car is the most recommended option because it gives you more freedom to travel when you want to and will save you a lot of time instead of waiting for a bus or taxi. **The Yui Rail** is the only public rail

system in Okinawa and can only be used within Naha and some parts of Urasoe. However, you can also use a bus or taxi in any crowded city area of Okinawa if not renting a car.

Enjoy your stay in Okinawa!

Monica Aguilar-Scion is from Mililani, Hawaii. She currently lives in Haebaru, Okinawa, with her husband, Jonathan, and 5-year-old son, Tristan. Her educational background is in Nursing and Music. She teaches at Haebaru Senior High School, Nanbu Commercial High School, and Yaese Special Needs School in the southern part of the main island of Okinawa. In her free time, she enjoys exploring new places with her family, playing classical or world music, volunteering, spending quality time with family and friends, and traveling. If you wish to get in contact with her, please email her at aguilarm@hawaii.edu. Instagram: [@hoshi57](#)



Dip Your Toes in the Water:
Amami Island

Yifen Jen (Kyōto)

The big island of Amami in Kagoshima, which America returned to Japanese rule in 1953, is an often overlooked traveler's paradise. Overshadowed by the larger island prefecture Okinawa down south and the artistic claim to fame of Yakushima to the north, Amami sits in between, quietly waiting for you to discover its wonders.

Why Amami? The relatively rural island is safe and feels free—free from the burdens of a bustling city destination. The vibe is relaxed, more carefree, but doesn't sacrifice the hospitality or eye for detail that Japan is so known for. Between the high-end resort [Miru Amami](#) that boasts individual villas and the guest house [Mi-man](#), which the owner and his wife hand-built, there is something for all travelers. I recommend a stay in both—one for the luxury island experience and the other to connect with local surfers. Both are located in Tatsugō-chō. While not the city center, it is perfect for lodging, as it is relatively close to the airport.

Wherever you choose to stay, renting a car is a must, as the island bus is cute but few and far between.



View from the restaurant at Miru Amami

From Tatsugō-chō, you have your choice of activities: from the scenic yet intimate Cape Ayamaru, beautiful both during the day and at night for stargazing, or Ōhama Beach, where you can enjoy a sprawling ocean view with your barbeque and, if lucky, some whales during the late winter season around January and February. There are also countless small beaches all within an hour's drive, if not half that.

Culinary enthusiasts can find *keihan*, a local dish with chicken stock over rice with various toppings, served in numerous restaurants, all with their own distinct signature styles—some with a lighter or deeper broth, or even with a ramen twist. As you can imagine, local shellfish and seafood are also a hit, and the adventurous eater will be able to find vegetables they might not see in their local supermarket.

Tip: you may see “shibi” on some menus—it’s the local word for Yellowfin tuna, and it is fantastic.

You can find it at most restaurants, but the newly opened Sake to Sakana Miyagawa (酒と肴みやがわ) serves it both beautifully as *sashimi* but also in a lightly-breaded and fried cutlet form. Those that have gotten used to ordering *nihonshu* (*sake*) with their dinner can also find a rare, rotating selection of sake here. If you are looking for something different, the drink of the island is *shōchū*.



Shibi Sashimi at Sake to Sakana Miyagawa

GUEST HOUSE BAR

AMAMI

ON AIR



MI-MAN 菴美
OPEN おめでとうございます
窪塚洋介 a.k.a. 丸 LINE

祝開店
塾長 隼人
今井



MI-MAN 菴美
OPEN おめでとうございます

御用の方はカウンター
左のインターホンを押
込んで下さい



Tomori Beach



More specifically, *kokutō shōchū*, or brown sugar shōchū. This distilled spirit tastes nothing like you would expect but will surprise and perhaps even delight any skeptic with its wide range of flavors. The crowd favorite shōchū bar on the island known for its wide range of kokutō shōchū is SAKE Kōbō Kokoro (SAKE工房心) located in the city of Naze, a half-hour drive from Tatsugō-chō.

So, why not stay in the city? For one—you are coming to get away from it all! You are coming to Amami to explore something different, to surf or SUP (stand-up paddleboard) or sunbathe to your heart's content. You are coming to discover that, even on grey days, the island is breathtakingly beautiful, as are the hearts of the people living here. Make sure to keep an open mind. Even on rainy days, you can see loads of fish on a scuba diving trip or shelter indoors and learn about the traditional dying or weaving of the island. The island demands you to slow down, to see something new. So what are you waiting for? Time to check out Amami this year.

Yifen has an avid curiosity about almost everything and loves to listen to people talk. She's been in Kyōto for seven years and is currently on the beautiful island of Amami. She is currently working on a Master's in OrgPsych and loves exploring and getting to know her community through food, drink, and sports. Connect with her on Instagram [@roxanne2332233](#); she'd love to help you explore the island!





#ExperienceFukui

**Stories about
Community
Experiences**

WHERE THE FUKUI?

Introduction by Meg Luedtke

(Finally finding a way to use this old joke that was told to me *over and over* again when announcing my JET placement. All in good fun, of course.)

On the western coast of Honshu, along the Sea of Japan, sits a relatively small and unassuming prefecture, one that most people probably don't know much about. Especially not tourists. Fukui doesn't have many of the big and loud claims to fame, like Harajuku's bustling streets or Fushimi Inari's sea of vermillion *torii*, which draws in foreign visitors from near and far. And until recently, Fukui didn't even have a shinkansen line (expected to open in 2022), which serves as a tourist's primary form of travel and the catalyst for exploring places they might not have visited otherwise. Needless to say, the little(ish), remote prefecture is probably off the radar for most visitors. But that's what makes it a bit of a hidden gem, tucked away in the countryside of Japan.



Fukui has many things to offer. An abundance of nature, lots of history, renowned seafood, beautiful coast lines, and a wide selection of traditional crafts such as pottery, knives, paper, and even glasses! So, how does Fukui try and drive tourism to such an "off the radar" prefecture?

In 2016, the prefecture's Department of Business, Industry, and Labor launched "Fukui Reporters," a program designed to bring foreign and Japanese residents together. Their goal is to promote and share the cuisine, sights, trades, and attraction of Fukui. Through the program reporters meet and learn from locals or receive community benefits, like discounted prices at tourist attractions or invitations to special events. Reporters can also participate in and provide feedback for moni-

tor tours, which are tours that local travel agencies hope to provide Fukui visitors in the future. In exchange for these benefits, a reporter agrees to the job of posting about their experiences on their social media to promote the prefecture and its culture. Reports can also post about their daily life like new foods they have tried, a new location they've discovered, or interesting events in their area. Together, all the reporters and the program coordinators use the hashtag [#Experience-Fukui](#) to share all of the wonderful things in Fukui!

So with all the technical description out of the way, here are three stories from different Fukui reporters about some amazing community experiences they had thanks to the program.

DRESSED TO IMPRESS: EXPERIENCING HEIAN ERA CLOTHING

Written by Nyssa | Instagram [@echizenmochi](https://www.instagram.com/echizenmochi)

My “Fukui Reporters” experience taught me that taking risks and just saying yes to experiences in Japan is well worth it. The email I received for my experience simply said we would get a free lunch and see Heian cosplay. Even though I had no idea what that entailed, I signed up immediately.

The process was far more involved than I had imagined: we were to be part of the cosplay. They designated our costumes, gave matching helmet-like human-hair wigs, and distributed each costume by height so each participant had something different. We were each then sent to our own team of customers to be dressed. My taller friend was able to wear the *jūnihitoe*, or, “12-layered kimono.” This kimono involves so much silk that the kimono can retain its shape even without a person inside! The woman in charge of the costumes explained that if a suitor was coming to visit a woman, but she had no interest in him,



she would escape from her robes leaving them behind as a decoy. I don't know how true that story is, but it sure is fun to think about.

My costume was no less tame despite its fewer layers. The style I wore, though I don't recall the name, was reserved for young women and girls who had not yet come of age. It had long trailing tails that were meant to symbolize a long life in a time when children often died very young. I was told that this style was popular with Murasaki Shikibu, author of *The Tale of Genji*. Rumor has it, she wore something very similar when she met a handsome young man who inspired her world-changing novel. This was written during the time she spent in Fukui, of course.

Though the silks were heavy, it wasn't uncomfortable to wear. I think I could easily get used to the lifestyle of a Heian court.

Once everyone was fully in costume, the news crew appeared and we were set free to take pictures as we pleased and answer some interview questions. I did my best to express, with my limited Japanese, how pleased I was to look like a Girl's Day doll. After about an hour we removed our costumes and wigs to enjoy some tea. We learned about the Fukui materials and craftsmanship of the teahouse as we enjoyed an informal tea ceremony. All in all, this experience was amazing and is why I still sign up for anything that will help me **#ExperienceFukui**.

**THIS EVENT WAS
BROADCAST
ON FUKUI TV!**



AN OVERNIGHT IN ECHIZEN

Written by Iram | Instagram [@iramiram1230](https://www.instagram.com/iramiram1230)

Many of you might not have heard of Fukui, but I promise, it's a lovely and charming place! It might be small, but there's so much here—delicious food, gorgeous nature, and a fascinating history. In this tour, I was able to experience all of this, along with the charms of Echizen City and Echizen Town.

Our day started with a quick tour of the Echizen Pottery Museum in which we learned a bit about the history of pottery in this area and its transformation throughout the

ages. Afterwards we had a bike tour throughout Echizen Town and had a chance to talk to three artisans. They told us about their craft and showed us some of their work. It's amazing how creative people can be! Later in the day, we had a chance to visit one of the oldest known kilns in Japan. It was a bit mind boggling how there are still remnants left after so many centuries.

Once we finished, it was time to check out the renovated old house we were lodging

in. Soon it was time for dinner, which was of course, delicious! We also tried some local produce cooked by a restaurant owner. What a happy evening it was!

The next morning, we took off on our electric bikes again and visited a roof tile factory. That sentence in itself might not sound very fascinating, but there is so much that goes into making the traditional Japanese roofs we see! We had a chance to learn about the tiles going from sand found in the area to the roofs.



Afterwards, we biked to a temple and had a walking tour of the town around it. There were many beautiful and delightful views in the area. Once the walking tour was completed, it was time for lunch at the temple. It was a vegetarian lunch made from local produce. It was scrumptious!

After lunch, we had a short tour of the temple. The back of the temple had a lot of Jizō statues. When asked why, the owner told us that decades ago, these statues used to be all around Echizen Town. However, once development started, they were in the way and the developers had to

throw them out. Her father started collecting all of the Jizō statues, and gave them a new home at the temple. A lovely story, isn't it?

The tour ended shortly afterwards, but what a fun experience it was. I'm so glad I had a chance to join and **#ExperienceFukui!**



A TASTE OF TAKEHAMA

Written by Leah | Instagram [@leapacrosstheworld](https://www.instagram.com/leapacrosstheworld) | YouTube: [Leap Across The World](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC...)

Settled in the deep south of Fukui along the Sea of Japan sits a small fishing village. At first glance Takahama may not seem like much but don't let its quiet appearance fool you—there is more than meets the eye. The stretch of golden beaches, sapphire waters, and an abundance of fresh seafood would lure in

any nature enthusiast. However, the real charm of Takahama is its residents.

The absolute best way to explore Takahama is by bike! The only way to feel connected to the community around you is to slowly explore the sights and talk with locals along the way. Starting at Wakasa Sta-

tion, I rented myself a bike for the day and rode towards the sea. Usually the main beach, Wakasa Beach, is crowded with beachgoers, but during the off season it's nearly empty. This allows for the perfect opportunity to search the shore for sea glass commonly found in the area. I bottled a few pieces of bright blue and faded green sea glass to take home before continuing my leisurely ride through the town.

Weaving around corners and stopping in local shops, the town's charm gradually revealed itself to me. First, with the liquor store whose owner writes his daily thoughts out on a board outside the shop. Second, at a mochi shop operated by an elderly woman and her son that was once visited by the Emperor of Japan. Then at a [kamaboko](#) shop, which created a new canned variety of kamaboko to make up for the loss of business due to COVID-19. And lastly, at a small local bakery that sells the most delicious triangle-shaped pastry, which practically oozes gooey and warm cream cheese.





However, the most noteworthy part of my whole tour of Takahama was experiencing its rich fishing culture—Takahama is a fishing town, after all! With a basket of the day's catch fresh off the fishing port and a fillet knife in hand, I was taught the variety of ways in which fish is prepared in the region by a group of very able and friendly women. Some of the most popular methods were cutting and splaying fish to soak in soy sauce before cooking and making a fish kabob. They used three different kinds of fish with marinades and skewered each of them on a stick. Once the fish had been cut and marinated, it was ready to be cooked and eaten! Because the weather outside was perfect for a barbeque, everyone gathered outside to enjoy all our hard work.

To finish off a near perfect day, I trekked up a nearby mountain to discover an old local shrine. I had arrived at the shrine just as golden hour was approaching so the wooden structure was bathed in a heavenly glow (which seemed eerily appropriate). At the edge of the shrine stood a tall archway that made for the perfect window to view the town from. As I stared down at Takahama below me, I could think of no better way to end my Takahama tour.

#ExperienceFukui

To see more awesome things in Fukui, check out the official [#ExperienceFukui](#) hashtag on [Facebook](#), [YouTube](#), and [Instagram](#).

Meg is the Head Designer for CONNECT and a second-year JET living and enjoying her life in Fukui. She enjoys spending her free time playing games, binging the odd anime or two, and going out on little photography excursions. You can read about her own Fukui experiences on her instagram [FukuiFinds](#).

Nyssa Giangregorio is a 5th year JET ALT staying in Fukui for a 6th. She is greatly food motivated and interested in the traditional clothing and music of Japan.

Iram Amin is a Fukui ALT who is enjoying her time in Japan.

Leah Burkett is a 3rd year JET ALT who enjoys venturing off the beaten path and jumps at the opportunity for a good adventure.

African and African Diaspora Heritage Celebration in Kagoshima





In partnership with the International Friendship Center of Kagoshima (Friendship Center), Stephen Macharia and I hosted the first African and African Diaspora Heritage Celebration (AADHC) in Kagoshima City. As two Black American ALTs, we wanted to celebrate Black History Month in our hometown in Japan.

Planning started in October when I contacted the Friendship Center and pitched the idea. The Friendship Center showed immediate interest in the idea and was eager to get it off the ground.

The first event was a 2-hour symposium that consisted of “Meet & Greets,” poster displays of prominent figures in history,

children story time, and more. Guest presenters for the Meet & Greets were people who have ties to Haiti, Kenya, Guyana, and the United States. Presenters offered attendees a snapshot of each country’s history, language, food, and music. Poster displays summarizing the contributions of several prominent figures such as Toussaint Louverture, Wangari Maathai, Kamala Harris, and Damon from Guyana were also displayed around the venue. All posters were written in both English and Japanese in an effort to make the information as accessible as possible. Attendees were encouraged to walk around, read, and ask questions to learn more. The symposium wrapped up with a dramatic reading of



the popular children's book, *Anansi and the Pot of Beans*. The second and third events were movie nights. We screened the 2018 Oscar-winning animated film *Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse* and the 1988 Oscar-nominated film *Coming to America*, respectively. At both screenings, cultural commentary was provided to explain each film's contribution to Black culture.

Discussions and Q&A were followed by a raffle, where four lucky audience members won prizes related to the films. It was a fun way to reenergize the audience before closing out each night. Overall, the celebration was geared towards the local community, including school-aged children and their families.

However, due to COVID-19 and school restrictions, many students were not able to attend.

Despite the challenge of hosting an event during COVID-19, we were quite pleased with the program as a whole. Kagoshima is often described as a conservative place, especially when compared to other parts of Japan. But those who attended were eager to listen and learn about different cultures, experiences, and perspectives. As for the future of AADHC, we'll be hosting it again next year! So, if you happen to be in Kagoshima City next February, please come and join us!



Melissa is an ALT in Kagoshima Prefecture who moved to Japan nearly two years ago from Boston. She prides herself in being a curious and experience-hungry person who rarely says no to new opportunities. Since moving to Japan, she has visited 21 prefectures, danced in the 69th annual Ohara Festival in Kagoshima, joined the kyūdō team at one of her schools, and volunteered as a tourism ambassador for Kagoshima City. To learn more about her and see what she's up to, you can find her on Instagram at [phinding_phineus](https://www.instagram.com/phinding_phineus)



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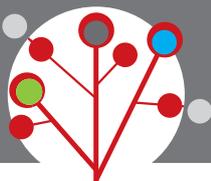
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Contact the Head Editor of *CONNECT*, Alice Ridley, at connect.editor@ajet.net with your submissions, comments, and questions.

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.

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