

# AJET CONNECT

April 2012



## March Photo Contest Winner



Stephanie Stoner - Yasuda-Cho

This month's winners will be entered in the yearly Photo and Haiku winners, where they will be eligible to win a prize.

## Welcome to Connect

The monthly e-zine produced for JETs, by JETs, featuring the best news and articles from all over Japan. We are currently looking for writers, editors, photographers, and artists who want to create content for this national publication!

**We need YOU, the JET community, to get involved.**

Send us your short stories, news articles, photographs, comics... whatever it is that you do best...to [communications@ajet.net](mailto:communications@ajet.net).

**We're waiting to see what you've got!**

**Make your voice heard!**

## AJET Connect Workplace Safety Advisory System

**NSFW4**  
SEVERE RISK OF TRAUMA  
CANNOT EVER BE UN-SEEN

**NSFW3**  
MAY SURPRISE OR OFFEND EVEN  
SEASONED INTERNET VETERANS

**NSFW2**  
AS PORNOGRAPHIC AS ANY OF  
THOSE RIDICULOUS EVONY ADS

**NSFW1**  
SOME PAGES NOT SAFE FOR PEOPLE  
WITH SCREENS SEEN BY COWORKERS

**SFW**  
PROBABLY HARMLESS, SAFE  
FOR PEOPLE 50+ YEARS OLD

# INSIDE

## April 2012

- 02 The Prez
- 06 Life After JET
- 10 JET Effect
- 14 Culture Corner
- 22 Rosie
- 24 Sakura 2012
- 28 Out in Japan
- 30 AJET Volunteer
- 34 AJET Peer Support Group
- 36 Travel
- 47 AJET Books
- 50 Food
- 56 Workplace Tips
- 62 Haiku
- 68 Fashion and Beauty
- 72 Entertainment
- 81 Book Review
- 82 The Art of manliness
- 90 AJET Photo Contest

## Signup for AJET Connect

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AJET Connect?  
Then you can sign up **HERE!**



for JETs, by JETs

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As foreigners, whether you live in rural Japan or in its busiest cities, we are still by far a small minority. The Japanese government ministries set out, decades ago, to find a way to expose more of its citizens to foreign culture and different ways of thinking. What developed after years of planning and experimenting was the JET Programme.

In my humble opinion, **I believe the JET Programme has been the greatest investment of government time, money, and effort towards internationalization on many levels.** The ministries and countless other governments and organizations have worked together for over 25 years to give us the opportunity we are now experiencing to influence the future of our communities. Not just the communities we live and work in now, but also our future communities that we can influence based on our experience here and now.

I believe that this puts a great amount of responsibility in our laps. It is up to us to use this time responsibly. It would be easy to view your time as a JET as an extended vacation, or as a chance to go sight-seeing and have fun with very little stress or effort, because we're not "required" to go the extra mile in our workplaces. However, if we take that route, we not only rob our communities of all they could gain from our knowledge, we rob ourselves of the fulfillment that comes with helping our communities become better.

That said, do you remember what we were told our goals were as JETs in this Programme when we arrived in Tokyo for orientation?

- > Share our culture.
- > Advise schools on Foreign language education curriculum/methods.
- > Act as an assistant in classes.

When you first hear that, in a room surrounded by other foreigners, all ready to jump into this adventure together head-first, it's easy to say to yourself, "Yeah, I'm totally going to rock that!"

The reality is, when you get to your workplace, no one is waiting eagerly on your plans and ideas, and many of your co-workers don't even know why you're there or what the JET Programme is!

I've been advising new JETs for the past 4 of my 5 years, and I've experienced it myself. Some of you are in the worst-case-scenarios, underutilized, and not feeling of much more use than a potted plant. You may be stuck in classrooms, feeling like a tape-recorded and that you've said, "REPEAT AFTER ME!" for the bazillionth time! No one listens to you. You're largely ignored, and you certainly aren't consulted for your "vast experience from the western world!"

In my experience, most JETs aren't prepared for situations like these and don't know what to do about it. You may be sitting there in this exact situation, NOW, reading this and thinking that there's not

much that can be done about it. The Japanese have a saying "しょうがない" (shouganai), that essentially means nothing can be done about a situation.

I'm here to tell you now:

*There IS something you can do.*

**Unfortunately, many of us may find ourselves in situations and the burden of effort lies squarely on our shoulders.** So, we have to make some serious decisions about how we approach the situations, projects, and education initiatives we are tasked with.

We as JETs and guests in this country, are constantly confronted by situations where we KNOW from our experience in our own countries that there may be another way to do some things. That's not a broad swipe on Japanese culture or a jab that says "we do \_\_\_\_\_ better than this in our countries". It's just a fact, plain and simple fact which can easily be applied reversely in our home countries in some situations from what we've learned here.

It's up to us to find a way to influence our workplaces and those around us.

It's up to us to influence our workplaces for positive change and progression. You can do as many do (it's no secret) and sit at your desk day-after-day studying, reading, surfing the net and so on. OR, you can be proactive and speak your mind.

*If you don't like the way English classes are taught: Say Something.*

*If you want to plan more lessons or have more input: Say Something.*

*If you want to try a new internationalization initiative: Say Something.*

*If you don't feel integrated enough into your workplace: Say Something.*

*And don't just say it once. Say it again and again until you get your point across.*

In Japan they have a saying: "石の上にも3年"。(Isshi no ue ni mo san nen)

Literally, it means you should sit on top of a rock for three years before you see the result you want.

We can learn a lot from this saying. It often takes patience and time to get the results you want. Not just a cursory question and answer. I truly believe in my heart that if you believe in what you are asking for and it is right and good, if you persist, then you can succeed.

**In my time here I've been told "no" more times than I care to count.** I quickly learned that if I wanted things I believed in to actually come to fruition, it was up to me to make others understand that.





I've made small changes like move my desk around the teachers room, created an English room at my school, gone on school field trips, taught the lessons I wanted to teach.

I've also made BIG changes like creating a program to give Osaka JETs regional advisors when we lost our PA to budget cuts. I had a vision for better Skills Development Conferences, demanded an prefecture orientation for new JETs, and created a program that stopped JETs from getting swindled by their predecessors when they moved into their new apartments. At school, I even changed our English program at our school by asking to teach 1st year students full time and also give them a full-fledged phonics education!

**From all those experiences, and so many more I haven't mentioned, I can tell you that I was told NO the first time I asked in EVERY INSTANCE.**

**Anything that is truly worth doing**, is never easily accomplished. It is up to you to decide how to handle these situations. If you believe that being quiet and not speaking your mind so that you "fit in" more makes your life easier, or if you believe it's more important to follow Japanese cultural norms and keep harmony by not "being the nail that sticks out", that's your choice.

However, I'm telling you, here and now, this would be selling yourself short and at the same time, selling the ideals of the JET Programme short. JETS weren't brought here to be Japanese and . We were brought here to bring western culture into Japanese workplaces. We were brought here as westerners to interact in a Japanese workplace, so that they can learn from us and at the same time, we can learn from them!

There is a diplomatic, yet persistent way to argue for positive change. You may find yourself in a difficult situation where you know that you have the solution, but don't know how to approach suggesting it. Making simple changes that may seem obvious to us may also come along with hidden obstacles or roadblocks in Japan, but does that mean that we shouldn't say anything? Does it mean that no one will value your opinion if you make it heard?

Please don't get the wrong impression. What I'm talking about here is not being the "loud, angry, gaijin", who complains about everything around them! What I'm talking about, is taking the time to engage those around you in dialogues, and ultimately build relationships with them based on mutual respect. Because when you have a relationship of mutual respect as a foundation, others will be more likely to back up your voice on the changes you want.

Yes, as foreigners in Japan, our situations are often difficult to navigate and it's tough to be the odd one out, but this same adversity can also be gift for a better life for those in our newfound communities. Some may shut you out because you're foreign, but in my experience, others are more likely to make an extra effort to try to understand where you're coming from, because you're foreign.

I hope that you will all seriously consider what I've said here, the next time you are confronted with a situation that you know you have the answer to. In my past messages, I've told you how "we can help more, we can do more", but the ball is in your court to make that happen. How you proceed can help or even be life-changing for those around you (especially our young students).

I wish you the very best of luck in all that you set out to accomplish. I've learned a lot in five years, about this country, its culture, and about education. I

hope that you can use my experience effectively in your workplace so that together, we can do more to change the world and help it to become a better place.

Connect with you next month,  
Matthew Cook  
AJET Chairman



# LIFE AFTER JET





Photo by Alex Ferguson

tember 1997, and went on to sell over 50,000 copies. The follow-up, *How to Be a Canadian*, written with his brother Ian, has now sold 200,000 copies and won the CBA Libris Award for Non-Fiction Book of the Year. In 2002, Will Ferguson was shortlisted twice for the Stephen Leacock Medal for Humour: once for *Happiness* (aka. "Generica") and again for *How to Be a Canadian*. In 2005, he won his second Leacock Award for *Beauty Tips from Moose Jaw*. He was also awarded the Pierre Berton Award by Canada's National History Society.

Will took some time from his busy schedule to answer our Life After JET questions:

**Where are you from?**

I hail from the booming metropolis of Fort Vermilion in Canada's northwest, a town closer to the Arctic Circle than the American border.

**What years were you a JET?**

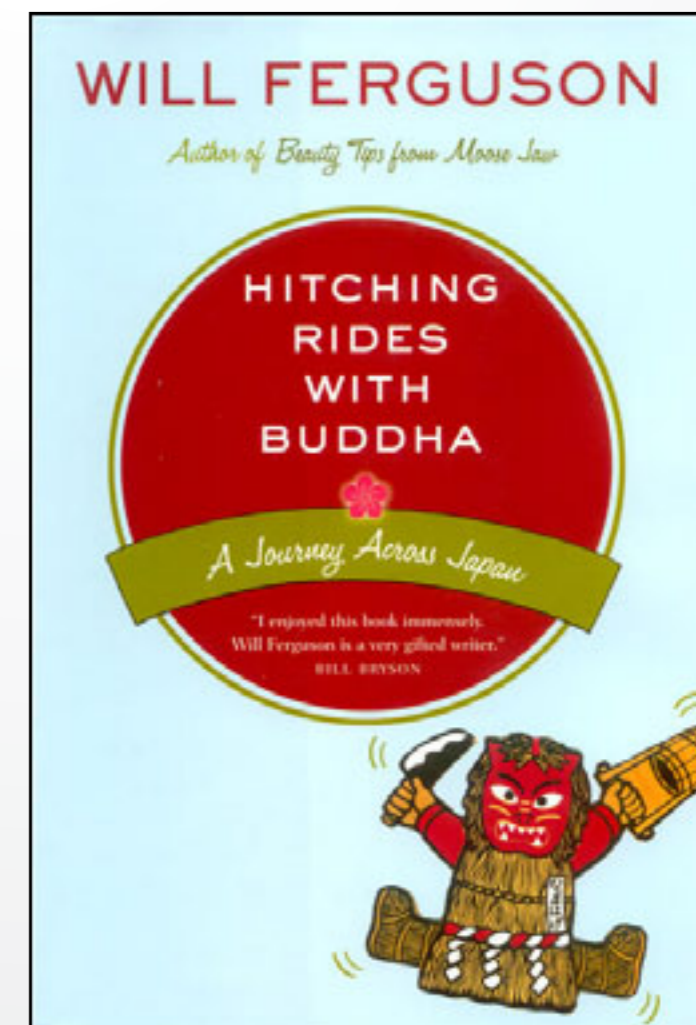
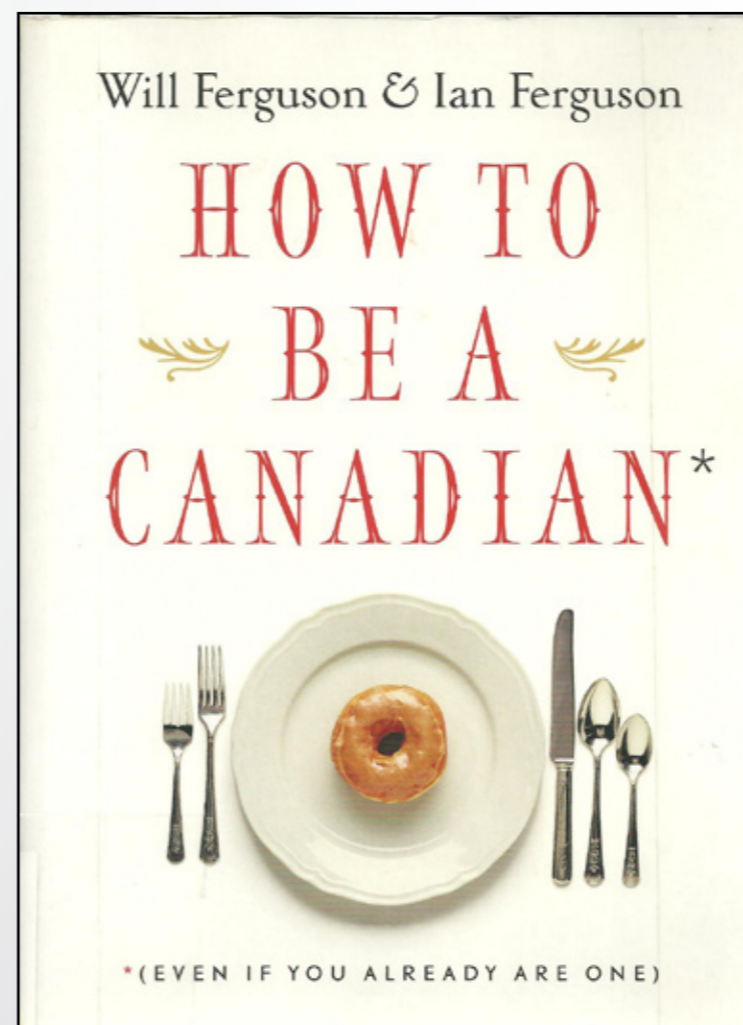
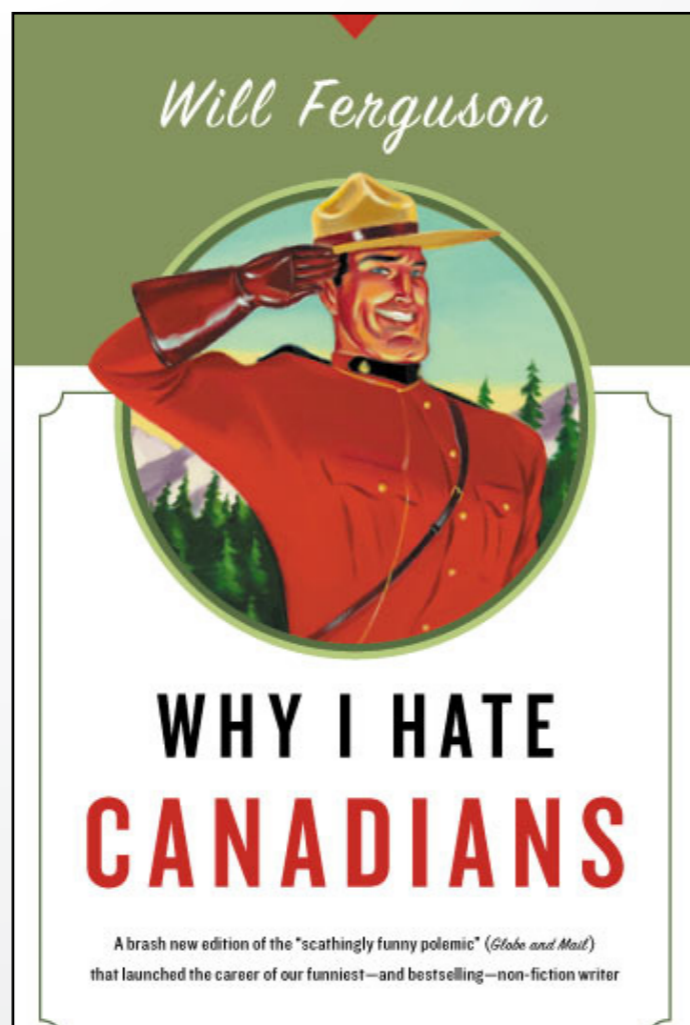
1990-1993 initially, followed by two years as a private English instructor with NEC, returning to Japan again in 1997-98.

**Life After JET**

Will Ferguson, author

Will Ferguson is a best-selling Canadian author and also a former JET. "I planned on staying one year to clear up some debts and get a break from film. I ended up staying five years and forgetting all about my original career plans." While in Asia, Will backpacked across Korea, Malaysia, Indonesia and mainland China, and became the first person ever to hitchhike the length of Japan, following Japan's "Cherry Blossom Front" as it moved north across the Japanese archipelago, from Cape Sata in the south, to Cape Soya in the north. Will's end-to-end journey across Japan is recounted in his book *Hitching Rides with Buddha* (released in the UK as *Hokkaido Highway Blues*, and reviewed in this issue of AJET Connect). Will also wrote a guidebook for backpackers and budget travellers entitled *The Hitchhiker's Guide to Japan*. Will and his wife Terumi were married in a Shinto ceremony in Kumamoto City in 1995.

After returning to Canada, Will began writing a newspaper column on Japanese culture and customs, titled "East Meets West". His publishing debut, *Why I Hate Canadians*, was released in Sep-



**Where were you placed?**

Kumamoto-ken, on the Amakusa Islands for two years and then in Minamata-shi after that.

**How did you go from being a JET to being a writer?**

My writing grew directly out of my time as a JET. On my days off I was constantly travelling the backroads of Japan, often by thumb. The first thing I ever had published was a travel piece I wrote for the *Daily Yomiuri* back in July 1995 about visiting a Shinto retreat near Matsushima.

**How has your time in Japan influenced your writing?**

It made me more observant, more appreciative of the often eccentric nature of different cultures. My first book, *Why I Hate Canadians*, came out of the reverse culture shock I experienced on returning to my home country after five years in Japan.

**What ties and connections have you maintained with Japan?**

My wife is Japanese, we were married in Kumamoto-shi in 1995 and we have two sons. My wife and kids go back to Japan every year for at least a few weeks, and I go back with them every second or third time. My Japanese language ability has really plummeted though, which is depressing.

**What would you say to a new JET going to Japan for the first time?**

Don't be in a rush to go to Thailand or Hong Kong or other points nearby. Spend time getting to know Japan too. Travel to the lesser known, lesser visited sides and you will be surprised and rewarded.

# Jet Effect

## ***Who will be the next JET to be featured in JET Effect?***

All over Japan, JETs like us are making a difference in their schools and in their communities, both here and in their home countries. We are a force for positive change and real international communication and connection - the JET Effect.

Recently, the JET Effect has featured JETs who: write newspaper articles for papers in Japan and America, building understanding on a local level between the two countries; organized a homestay in rural Japan for Canadian high school students; contribute regularly to JALT (the Japan Association of Language Teachers), which helps to make us better teachers; have taken up uncommon Japanese traditions and language and thrived as a living bridge between Japan and the west; have used filmmaking skills to create a documentary and fundraising website on behalf of a destroyed town in Tohoku. What they have in common is a passion for Japan and a desire to make a change for the better.

The JETs we are looking for demonstrate a dedication to making the most of their time on the JET Programme and making a positive change in their community. They may do that as a volunteer, a charity organizer, an active participant in special activities or events, or because they are in some way actively building rapport between Japan and other countries. We hope the JETs we feature will inspire others to action. If you know of (or are) a JET who fits this description, please contact us at [jeteffect@ajet.net](mailto:jeteffect@ajet.net).





## **JET Effect** Benjamin Martin

Hello, my name is Benjamin Martin and I am a fourth year ALT in Kumejima-cho, Okinawa. Before transferring to Kumejima, I spent three years on Kitadaito, a small island 320km east of Okinawa with a population of 550 people. Living on Kitadaito was a unique experience, with a combination of mainland Japanese and Okinawan culture. While I was there, I learned about Okinawan and Japanese Sumo, photography, Japanese, and participated in many cultural and social events. Now, on the other side of Okinawa Prefecture, I have been exploring new activities, and new ways to interact with my students.

While I was on Kitadaito, most of my evenings were taken up with various local activities, but I still had a lot of free time. One winter break I sprained my ankle playing badminton and had to stop all the sports I had been doing, which was the major form of entertainment out there. I had recently finished two short plays for my students to perform during the Cultural Festival, but had never attempted anything more. Still, the lack of activity sparked old ideas.

In university, I studied Japanese history and culture and had been especially drawn to two books by our teacher Gail Bernstein. She had written about her experiences in Japan and explored the history of the people around her, and thus the history of Japan. Yet, the thought of attempting non-fiction was daunting. I hit on two ideas. The first was writing a fictional story to promote interest in Japan. After all, I teach Japanese kids, but who is there to teach young westerners about Japan? To that end, I began a screenplay about a young western exchange student in Japan, a student who runs into modern versions of Japanese mythology. Soon after, the screenplay turned into a novel. My ankle healed, but I was hooked on writing.

My second idea sparked from another book I had read in school. Things Japanese was published in 1902 and was an early window into Japan for the West. Since I had read it, I had wanted to rewrite it for the modern world, yet it was daunting. I decided that if I were to modernize Things Japanese, perhaps I should choose a new medium as well. Every day I gained new insights and knowledge about Japan. I also enjoyed photography and the idea of a blog seemed a natural extension of my new hobby.

More Things Japanese quickly became an outlet to share my experiences and knowledge of Japan, and also promote international awareness. Working on MTJ has allowed me to connect with a broad community of people interested in Japan, but has also led to tighter local relationships. Participating in as many activities as possible, taking pictures, and blogging regularly help me connect with and learn about the local community while also providing those communities and events with needed PR to help support tourism. People now seek me out to tell me about events and, since they know I am curious, explain what is going on.

For others interested in sharing their experiences in Japan, I highly recommend starting a blog. It is an easy way to keep track of your experiences while also creating new opportunities to share with family, friends, and others. Writing also created new opportunities for me to interact with my students. I show them my websites and pictures, and occasionally write for story contests, or other class events. My story grew too. Eventually my students were able to read through an early copy I printed out through a self-publisher. What better way to get your students interested in reading than showing them a story inspired in part by them?

This fall my first novel is set to be published by Tuttle Publishing in America. I hope that young adults around the world enjoy it, and maybe even learn a little along the way. The JET Programme has been a wonderful experience and getting to share that



experience with people around the world is amazing. I look forward to new experiences, new sharing, and more in my new community.

Want more information on Japan? Visit <http://more-thingsjapanese.com>







## *culture corner*

### **April**

Sarah Jane Blenkhorn

Don't let the cold nights and mornings fool you. It's officially spring in the Land of the Rising Sun, and the beginning of a splendid season. By far the most popular symbol of spring is the cherry blossom, which holds a place deep in the heart of most Japanese and those others of us who call these islands home. The ephemeral cherry blossom, blooming for only two weeks in early April, is a poignant symbol of the brief blaze of youth. It was a symbol, too, of the samurai, who tended to have short, glorious lives. Beyond the symbols, it is breathtakingly beautiful to look at, so take this brief opportunity to enjoy the cherry blossoms with a picnic and good friends, making good memories.

This month, Rosie talks about ways to make your hanami more eco-friendly, while Jen Garcia shares her poetry on the season. There are lots of cultural events spanning the length of Japan in April, as the weather warms up, so please get out to see or take part in a few (thanks to Lisa Cross for the research). James Kemp, of AJET's Stonewall Special Interest Group, talks about the reality and possibilities being a gay JET presents in his article, "Out in Japan?" We take a look at our more literary JETs in JET Effect and Life After JET. Benjamin Martin, a current JET in Okinawa, talks about his path to getting his fiction published (his first novel will be published by Tuttle this fall) and Will Ferguson, a former JET and now a bestselling author in Canada, writes about how his experience in Japan helped him to become a writer. (Check out Christopher Barstow's review of his book, Hokkaido Highway Blues, in this issue). I introduce the fun and pleasure of yosakoi dancing in April's Culture Corner.

What's your experience of Japan? Do you want to share your stories or knowledge? What would you like to hear more about? We welcome you to submit your articles or ideas to AJET Connect at [communications@ajet.net](mailto:communications@ajet.net)

*Sarah Jane Blenkhorn is a second-year JET living in Shimane, near the Sea of Japan. She'll be spending her spring vacation showing her mum around Japan, then settling in to remember 480 new students' names...*

## Calendar of Cultural Events in April 2012

<b>Miyako odori</b> 1-30 April Kobu Kaburenjo Theatre, Kyoto	A highly-anticipated annual showcase of geiko (geisha) dances and music. A rare chance to see these skilled artists perform in public.
<b>Onbashira Festival</b> April/May (every 7 years) Suwa Taisha Shrine, Suwa, Nagano	Held once every seven years in the Year of the Tiger and Year of the Monkey (2004 was the latest) this amazing and sometimes dangerous festival takes place over the course of a month in April and May.
<b>Ose Matsuri</b> 4 April Ose Shrine, Shizuoka Prefecture	Unique festival in which men dressed in women's clothes dance a lively jig on board a boat afloat in the harbour which is festooned with flags and streamers.
<b>Matsuyama Haru Matsuri</b> 4-6 April Matsuyama, Ehime Prefecture	Spring celebrations incorporating the Matsuyama Castle festival and the Dogo Hot Springs festival.
<b>Zen Nihon Chindon</b> Concours 4-6 April Toyama City, Toyama Prefecture	An annual get together for Japan's remaining Chindon (professional 'musicians' employed to advertise new store openings). Noisy and fun festival in Toyama.
<b>Inuyama Matsuri</b> 5-6 April Inuyama, Aichi Prefecture	Annual parade of floats carrying centuries old, elaborately-made mechanical dolls in Inuyama 30 minutes outside Nagoya.
<b>Himesama douchu</b> 5-6 April Hosoe, Shizuoka Prefecture	Traditional dress parades featuring many women and girls in stunning kimono and full make-up accompanied by servants and attendants. Held annually on the first weekend of April.
<b>Katori Jingu Otaue-sai</b> 5-6 April Sawara, Chiba Prefecture	Rice planting festival accompanied by ritual song and dance. Coincides with cherry blossom season making the event all the more colourful. Held annually on the first Saturday and Sunday of April.
<b>Shingenko Matsuri</b> 5 April Kofu, Yamanashi Prefecture	Festival to honor Takeda Shingen, a famous warlord of the Sengoku Era and the founder of Kofu. The highlight of the festival is a parade recreating the Takeda Army with more than 1,500 local citizens dressed in authentic costume.
<b>Kambutsue Matsuri</b> 8 April Shitennoji, Tennoji, Osaka	April 8 is celebrated as the Buddha's birthday throughout Japan with a baptism ceremony where sweet tea - amacha - is poured over a statue of Buddha at Tennoji Temple in Osaka.
<b>Yasurai Matsuri</b> 11 April Imamiya Jinja, Kyoto	Festival dating back to a ninth century plague in Kyoto. Around 30 people dressed in period costume carry a decorated canopy with four "demons", when the procession stops spectators rush to get under the canopy to protect themselves from ill-health.

<b>Mino Festival</b> 12-13 April Mino, Gifu Prefecture	A parade of colourful hanamikoshi (flower floats) takes place on the first day followed by an evening of street-side comedy with teams of amateur comedians wheeling props around in carts and performing wherever they find an audience.
<b>Asanogawa Enyukai</b> 12-13 April Kanazawa, Ishikawa Prefecture	Festival to coincide with the blossoming of the cherry trees on the banks of the Asano river in Kanazawa. Traditional dances and other entertainments are held on a floating stage.
<b>Oh-chamori</b> 12-13 April Saidai-ji Temple, Nara	A 700-year-old tradition in which participants help each other drink tea from an oversized tea cup. Held annually on the 2nd Saturday and Sunday of April at Saidaiji Temple in Nara as well as on the second Sunday in October.
<b>Kasama Tsutsuji Matsuri</b> 12 April - 11 May Kasama, Ibaraki Prefecture	Azalea festival celebrating the blossoming of approximately 35,000 azalea trees. Attracts 3 million visitors annually.
<b>Kamakura Festival</b> 13-20 April Kamakura, Kanagawa Prefecture	Festival commemorating the establishment of a bakufu (shogunate) government at Kamakura in the late 12th century. Events including Shinto dances, yabusame (horseback archery) and mikoshi parades take place from the second to the third Sunday in April.
<b>Takayama Spring Festival</b> 14-15 April Takayama, Gifu Prefecture	Widely considered to be one of the three most beautiful festivals in all Japan. Rightly famous are the majestic festival floats on which intricately controlled marionettes perform for stunned audiences.
<b>Hikiyama Matsuri</b> 14-16 April Nagahama, Shiga Prefecture	Unique festival in which children perform kabuki plays on extravagantly decorated festival floats as they are pulled around the town of Nagahama on the shores of Lake Biwa.
<b>Nikko Yayoisai</b> 17 April Futaarasan Shrine, Nikko, Tochigi Prefecture	Gaily decorated mikoshi representing 13 neighbouring towns are paraded around historical Nikko.
<b>Hojo-e Matsuri</b> 17 April Kofukuji, Nara	Carp are released in to the Sarusaono Lake in the belief that suffering is also thrown away with the fish.
<b>Ushibuka Haiya Matsuri</b> 18-20 April Ushibuka, Kumamoto Prefecture	One of the liveliest dance festivals in Kyushu. Incorporates elements, brought over by boat from festivals from all over Japan.
<b>Okoshi Daiko Festival</b> 19-20 April Furukawa, Gifu Prefecture	On the first day, hundreds of men dressed only in loincloths fight to touch a wooden frame supporting a huge taiko drum which is being carried through the streets. On the second day is an elegant parade led by lion dancers and accompanied by traditional music.
<b>Ningen Shogi</b> 19-20 April Maizuru Koen, Tendo, Yamagata Prefecture	Top-ranking shogi (Japanese chess) players play games using people dressed in full traditional military garb as pieces. Held in the Maizuru Forest Park with views of Mt. Gassan in the background.

## Calendar of Cultural Events in April 2012

<b>Oiran Dochu</b> 20 April Bunsui, Niigata Prefecture	Annual procession featuring women in sumptuous period kimono and full make-up. Recreates the common Edo Period (1603-1867) sight of courtesans parading the streets with their attendants.
<b>Renge-mai (Lotus Dance)</b> 21 April Kokubun-ji, Saigo, Oki Islands, Shimane Prefecture	Performance of an ancient dance which first came to Okibun-ji Temple during the Nara Period (709-795 AD).
<b>Hirosaki Sakura Matsuri</b> 23 April - 5 May Hirosaki, Aomori Prefecture	Celebrates the blossoming of the 5,000 cherry trees in the castle grounds with traditional events during the days and illuminations at night.
<b>Shinkosai</b> 25 April Matsuo Taisha Shrine, Kyoto	A thousand year old festival dedicated to the god of sake-brewing. There is a mikoshi procession and participants hold up masks of the deity on long sticks. Train from Kyoto Station on the Arashiyama line to Matsuo station.
<b>Nagasaki Tall Ships Festival</b> 25-29 April Nagasaki Harbour	Sailing festival with famous sailing boats representing Japan, China and Korea as well as European countries conduct manoeuvres in the harbour.
<b>Kamikochi Mountain Opening Festival</b> 27 April Kamikochi, Nagano Prefecture	Festival to mark the opening of the mountain climbing season in Kamikochi featuring ceremonies devoted to the safety of climbers and many entertainments.
<b>Togyu Taikai</b> 27 April (and 3-5 May) Tokunoshima Island, Kagoshima Prefecture	Traditional bullfighting event in which two bulls are pitted against each other in a test of strength. Unlike Spanish bullfighting, the animals are not wounded and are not killed.
<b>Hidaka Hibuse Matsuri</b> 28-29 April Mizusawa, Iwate Prefecture	Festive floats tour the town carrying about 40 child musicians playing flutes, drums and shamisen. Starts from Hidaka Shrine at 8.30 am and continues until 9pm. All in aid of praying for safety from fire.
<b>Uesugi Matsuri</b> 29 April - 3 May Yonezawa, Yamagata Prefecture	Musical parades, ceremonies and other festive events take over the whole town throughout the period.
<b>Arita Ceramics Fair</b> 29 April - 5 May Arita, Saga Prefecture	The largest ceramic fair in Japan. Hundreds of stalls line both sides of the main street in Arita selling a wide variety of pottery at bargain prices.

## Meet Me under the Cherry Tree

Jen Garcia

*You left me a note,  
To meet you under the cherry tree  
My heart pounds, my feet race!  
When I arrive you smile and turn to me.*

*"Hello beautiful," you say with ease.  
"Is there something you need?" I gasp, so suddenly sur-  
prised.  
"More like something to say," as he bends to one knee.  
I freeze in place. I couldn't even breathe.*

*"I've realized you are all I want and all I need.  
Let's start our own beginning, along with the cherry trees."  
A gust of wind sends petals whirling all about us  
And I know what they are trying to say.*

*"Life is short, do not flee.  
Instead love, and live passionately."  
I lift my smiling countenance towards the sky,  
Ready to begin this new journey.*

Jen is a high school ALT in Tamba-shi, Hyogo-ken.  
When she's not changing her hair or nail color,  
she enjoys traveling and having fun, new experiences.



My team here in Matsue is quite small, including only about twelve people (including two enthusiastic foreigners), but some teams have more than one hundred members. Yosakoi dance styles range from graceful and smooth to frenetic and humorous. An enjoyable element of silliness and cheesiness underscores the fun of the dance.

Since its birth almost 60 years ago, yosakoi has increased in popularity and spread across Japan. Harajuku in Tokyo hosts a two-day festival, and Saitama, Hokkaido and Nagasaki all have large, well-established yosakoi festivals as well.

Watching the dances is great fun, and I suggest you get out and see some for yourself. But if you have a chance to get involved, I encourage you to do it! It's great fun, good exercise and an excellent way to meet people and get more involved in your community. やりましょう!

## 第58回よさこい祭り

2011年度最新版フォトアルバムUP

### ***Culture Corner*** ***Yosakoi***

Sarah Jane Blenkhorn

Just this afternoon, I danced for the second time with a group of yosakoi dancers from Shimadai, the local university, at the Tenjin shrine. The occasion was a festival to mark students' transition from elementary school to junior high school, or junior to senior high. The weather was grey with fits of rain, and the audience was subdued under their umbrellas, but we brought colour and high energy to the stage. In our split-toed shoes, scarlet pantaloons, black t-shirts, black and white patterned happi, and vivid red eye make-up, we made quite a picture. Holding aloft our giant flag on its 15-foot pole, we kicked, jumped and pirouetted together to the pulsing beat.

Japan has a long history of dancing, of course. Traditional dances include the slow, sustained movements of elegant dances once performed in the court of the Emperor (you can still see this style performed, especially in Kyoto), the showy and stylized performances found in kabuki, and the earthy folk dances of the common people, performed at festivals especially in summer. Of the latter, perhaps the Bon Odori is the most famous.

Although yosakoi is most closely related to the people's folk dances, it is a relatively new style, having originated in Kochi in the 1950s. It is related

to Tokushima's famous Awa Odori, which in turn derived from Buddhist and harvest festival dances. The music is a combination of traditional melodies and very modern beats, and the dance is joyful and energetic. A team of dancers will perform together in bright costumes, such as happi or yukata. The most distinctive feature of the dance is probably the naruko, a pair of wooden clappers which are snapped to make a clacking noise (naruko were originally used to scare birds away from crops).

The original festival is the Yosakoi Matsuri, held in Kochi from August 9th to August 12th. The main rules for the festival competition are that the naruko must be used, and at least part of the original music from 1954 must be included at some point in the dance. Other than that, groups are free to create their own choreography and music.





**Rosie**  
A Word to the Wise

Dear Rosie,  
I've been here (in Japan) a while, and I've enjoyed a few hanamis in my time. It's a great custom and a great afternoon with my friends. However, one thing that always shocks me is HOW MUCH GARBAGE cherry blossom viewing produces. Hanami-goers always leave behind piles and piles of trash bags full of plastic and cans. Sorry about the rant, but I think it's...  
**TOO MUCH WASTE!**

Dear "Too Much Waste,"  
I understand your frustration with the hanami season. While we're out celebrating the beauty of the Earth and the changing of the seasons, we're also doing it harm by producing and leaving extra trash where we go to view the flowers in bloom.

But you're in luck! There are ways to continue your hanami parties without creating too much waste in the process.

Instead of using disposable plastics and paper, let's resort back to cloth, lacquer boxes and drinking from canisters that can all be packed up, washed and reused. You can make your own lunches with

friends, or do a potluck style hanami where everyone brings one dish. Bring teas and alcoholic beverages in reusable bottles. Buy in bulk glass bottles that can be recycled and refilled without having to be melted down.

To carry everything, consider various sizes of furoshiki, Japanese wrapping cloths. They come in all shapes, sizes and patterns, and can be used over and over again. If you don't already own one and don't want to buy some, you can use almost any kind of cloth for this purpose.

Carry everything with you to the hanami site in these cloth wraps and reusable containers, and then when you're ready to pack up and go home there is no waste or trash. Simply bundle it up again and wash it to use again later.

Now not only are we viewing cherry, plum and peach blossoms as in the Japanese tradition, but we're also using eco-friendly and classic means to do so.

Enjoy your environmentally friendly and traditional hanami parties of 2012!

Always,  
Rosie

Here are some websites that I find useful for learning how to fold furoshiki into interesting and convenient shapes and patterns.

*Furoshiki.com* – An amazing step-by-step guide for furoshiki folding.

<http://furoshiki.com/techniques>

At [www.eng.go.jp](http://www.eng.go.jp), a diagram on ways to fold furoshiki, posted by a Japanese governmental organization for environmentalism and sustainability. The diagram is also downloadable as a pdf. <http://www.env.go.jp/en/focus/attach/060403-5.html>

Some various furoshiki lovers' blogs with pictures and instructions:

<http://www.diy-life.com/2007/10/15/diy-definitions-furoshiki-multi-use-wrapping-cloths/>

<http://art-maddie.blogspot.jp/2011/08/wrapping-techniques-furoshiki.html>

<http://www.ohcrafts.net/gifts-furoshiki-gift-wrapping.php>

Even American Apparel is selling them! <http://store.americanapparel.net/multibrand-furoshiki.html>

Happy folding!

**From Anthony Russo in Takachiho Town, Miyazaki Prefecture.**

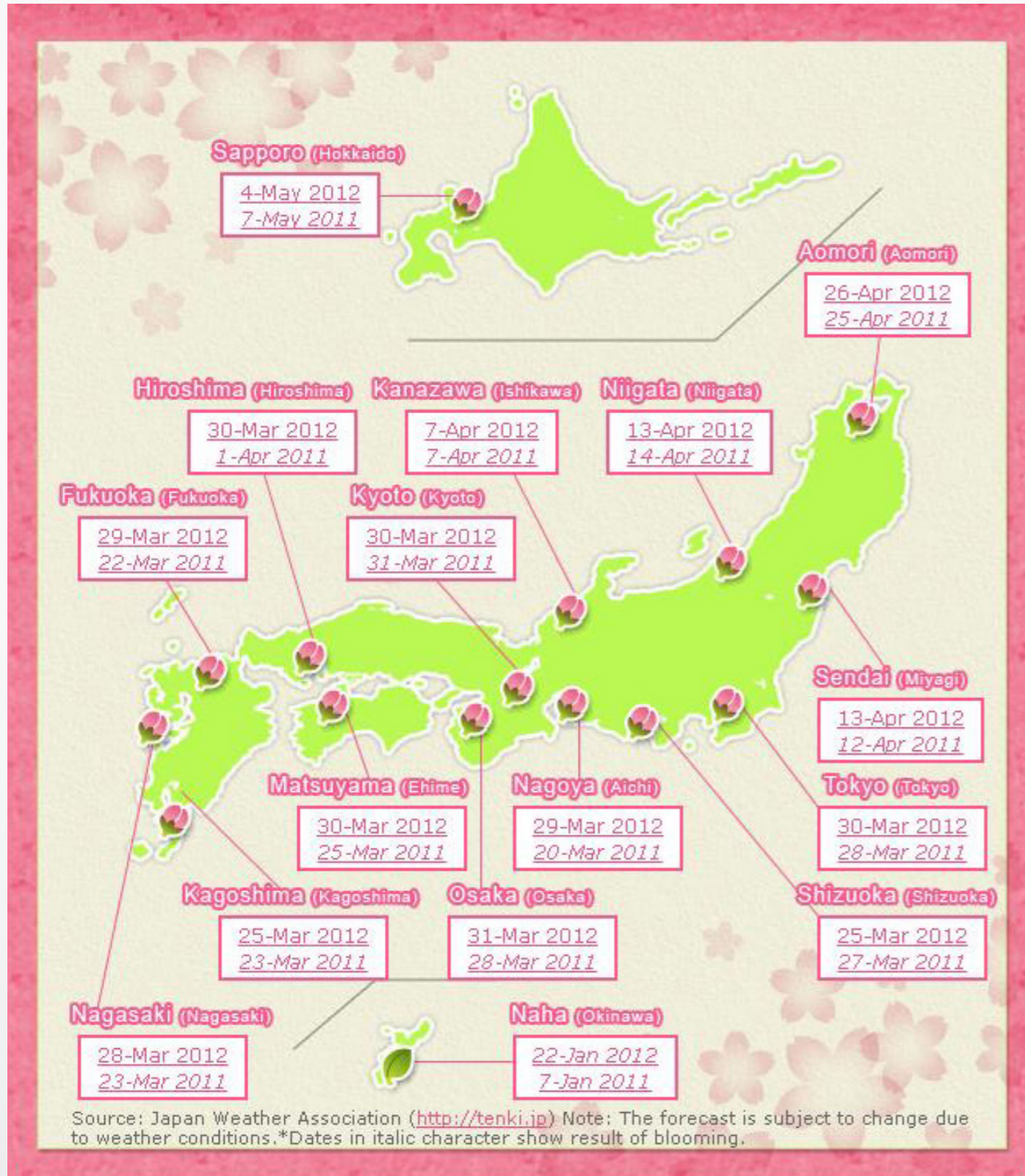
Want to feel 'super'? Takachiho Town in Miyazaki Prefecture is well known for its breathtaking gorge and ancient shrines. But did you know about the existence of the old train station, no longer in service? For a nominal fee, you can ride a 'super-cart' that lets you ride a portion of the obsolete line. Make history come alive again while taking in the surrounding sights and scenery!

Thank you, Anthony Russo, for sharing your story and photo with us! I hope that your discovery encourages others to visit your home in Takachiho, Miyazaki. Any other blurbs and photos of great finds around Japan are welcome for next month's column as well so please feel free to send in more stories!

Great find Anthony!  
Best,  
Rosie



# Sakura 2012



Source  
Japan Weather Association (<http://tenki.jp>)

Note  
The forecast is subject to change due to weather conditions.

Hokkaido	Forecast of first bloom	Forecast of full bloom
Sapporo (Hokkaido)	4-May-12	8-May-12
Muroran (Hokkaido)	7-May-12	11-May-12
Hakodate (Hokkaido)	2-May-12	6-May-12
Tohoku	Forecast of first bloom	Forecast of full bloom
Aomori (Aomori)	26-Apr-12	30-Apr-12
Akita (Akita )	19-Apr-12	24-Apr-12
Morioka (Iwate)	23-Apr-12	27-Apr-12
Yamagata (Yamagata )	16-Apr-12	21-Apr-12
Sendai (Miyagi)	13-Apr-12	18-Apr-12
Fukushima (Fukushima )	11-Apr-12	15-Apr-12
Kanto/Koshin	Forecast of first bloom	Forecast of full bloom
Tokyo (Tokyo)	30-Mar-12	6-Apr-12
Choshi (Chiba)	31-Mar-12	9-Apr-12
Yokohama (Kanagawa)	31-Mar-12	7-Apr-12
Mito (Ibaraki)	5-Apr-12	10-Apr-12
Utsunomiya (Tochigi)	5-Apr-12	11-Apr-12
Maebashi (Gunma)	4-Apr-12	9-Apr-12
Kumagaya (Saitama)	2-Apr-12	8-Apr-12
Nagano (Nagano )	13-Apr-12	17-Apr-12
Kofu (Yamanashi)	29-Mar-12	4-Apr-12
Hokuriku	Forecast of first bloom	Forecast of full bloom
Niigata (Niigata)	13-Apr-12	17-Apr-12
Toyama (Toyama )	8-Apr-12	12-Apr-12
Kanazawa (Ishikawa)	7-Apr-12	12-Apr-12
Fukui (Fukui )	7-Apr-12	12-Apr-12
Tokai	Forecast of first bloom	Forecast of full bloom
Nagoya (Aichi)	29-Mar-12	5-Apr-12
Shizuoka (Shizuoka)	25-Mar-12	3-Apr-12
Gifu (Gifu )	29-Mar-12	5-Apr-12
Tsu (Mie)	30-Mar-12	6-Apr-12
Kinki	Forecast of first bloom	Forecast of full bloom
Osaka (Osaka)	31-Mar-12	7-Apr-12
Hikone (Shiga)	5-Apr-12	11-Apr-12
Kyoto (Kyoto)	30-Mar-12	6-Apr-12
Maizuru (Kyoto)	7-Apr-12	12-Apr-12
Kobe (Hyogo)	31-Mar-12	7-Apr-12
Nara (Nara )	31-Mar-12	6-Apr-12
Wakayama (Wakayama )	28-Mar-12	5-Apr-12

Chugoku	Forecast of first bloom	Forecast of full bloom
Hiroshima (Hiroshima)	30-Mar-12	7-Apr-12
Okayama (Okayama)	2-Apr-12	9-Apr-12
Matsue (Shimane)	4-Apr-12	11-Apr-12
Tottori (Tottori)	5-Apr-12	11-Apr-12
Shimonoseki (Yamaguchi)	2-Apr-12	10-Apr-12
Shikoku	Forecast of first bloom	Forecast of full bloom
Takamatsu (Kagawa)	2-Apr-12	9-Apr-12
Tokushima (Tokushima)	1-Apr-12	8-Apr-12
Matsuyama (Ehime)	30-Mar-12	8-Apr-12
Kochi (Kochi)	22-Mar-12	30-Mar-12
Kyushu	Forecast of first bloom	Forecast of full bloom
Fukuoka (Fukuoka)	29-Mar-12	6-Apr-12
Oita (Oita)	28-Mar-12	6-Apr-12
Nagasaki (Nagasaki)	28-Mar-12	6-Apr-12
Saga (Saga)	28-Mar-12	6-Apr-12
Kumamoto (Kumamoto)	25-Mar-12	2-Apr-12
Miyazaki (Miyazaki)	23-Mar-12	2-Apr-12
Kagoshima (Kagoshima)	25-Mar-12	4-Apr-12
Okinawa	Forecast of first bloom	Forecast of full bloom
Naha (Okinawa)	22-Jan-12	6-Feb-12

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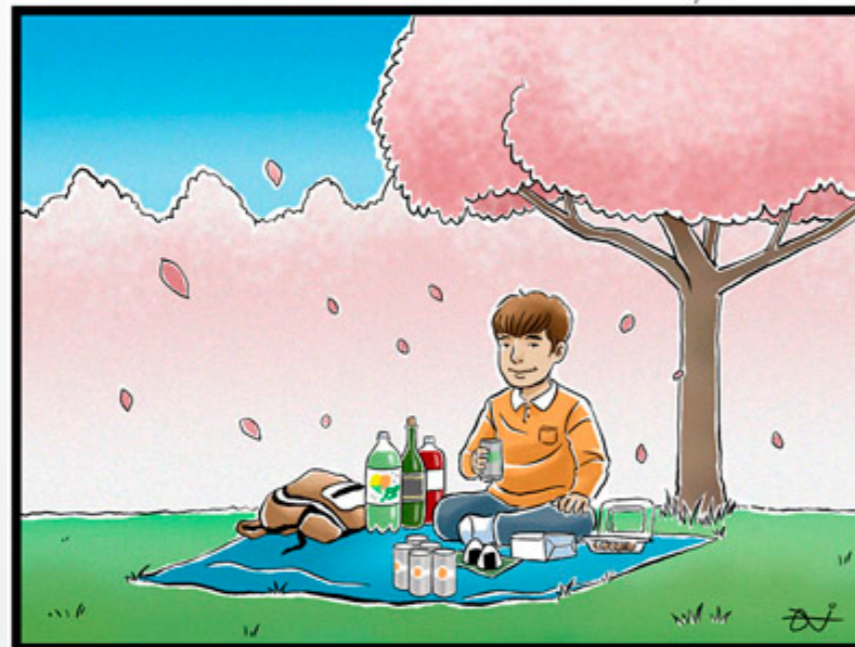
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## Life After the B.O.E.

by David Namisato



### A JET MOMENT

Your supervisor giving you the wrong date and location for the office hanami picnic turns out to be a blessing in disguise.

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## Out in Japan?

James Kemp

August. Amid fortresses of favourite brand toiletries and more boxes of English tea than underwear, there's one last thing to pack for my morning flight to Tokyo. I consider it for a moment. It's been so long that I can't really remember what it looks like. Three years, in fact. Nevertheless, I manage to reluctantly conjure it up and stash it away. At least it won't affect my already-sighing baggage allowance ("Yes Mum, those three-tonne iPod speakers are an essential."). And, who knows, maybe I won't need it.

It's a situation which many soon-to-be JETs have found themselves in. Coming from years of being openly gay at home, reacquainting oneself with the confines of The Closet can be a strange experience. Unsurprisingly, then, it's natural for JETs to want to find a way out. But the motivation to do so isn't always entirely self-driven. Lauren, a second-year JET, has experienced what it's like to come out to her co-workers, and is now considering coming out to her students, too. "I want to show an example of a teacher being out and show that a person can be gay and proud", she says; in doing so, Lauren hopes that she'll be able to encourage her students to question their own beliefs on homosexuality. Sean, a first-year JET in rural Shikoku, also places the emphasis on his students: "When you come out to someone who's old, they're not really going to change, they'll either accept you or they won't... but with kids, I still think you have a real chance to change them for the future." If the JET Programme really is about grassroots international exchange, all these JETs ask is that they be allowed to do exactly what it is they're being paid for.

Of course, exchange is inherently a two-way process: JETs may want to share part of themselves at work, but they must be prepared to confront part of Japan in the process. And it's in this domain that the Golden Cornerstone of the JET programme- 'Every Situation Is Different' – rings true. Jarryd, a first year ALT in Osaka, received hand-written letters from his students asking "Are you gay?" ("All spelt wrong...it was hilarious"). Confirming both his staff and students' suspicions was a revelation: "they thought it was the best thing ever! My teachers couldn't wait to come out gay clubbing with me!" At the other end of the spectrum, Sean recalls the aftershocks of an intimate, post-enkai moment shared with a bisexual JTE: "Now he won't talk to me... and I don't think anybody will ever know about it; most of the time he completely ignores me."

Somewhere in the mire between these two extremes,

however, it seems that, for many JETs, even the most meticulously planned coming out has, ultimately, materialised into something of a non-event. Although Lauren admits that her relationship with her JTE felt "strained" and "a little bit distant" immediately after leaving her closet behind, she confesses that, "the reaction to it was honestly not nearly as bad as I was dreading. I thought rumours would be flying everywhere and my students would know right away... sure, the men stopped chatting me up at enkais, but it seemed liked nothing really happened." Josiah's story is the same: "They didn't seem that upset or surprised, really, and nobody asked that many questions. It's pretty much remained the same since".

Such apparent indifference may be something of a surprise in a nation where it appears homosexuality is otherwise invisible. The absence of any legal sanctions — or protections — is just one facet of this invisibility. Flick through the channels on your Japanese TV, and you'll see (or rather, won't see) another: the media in Japan has an astounding lack of established gay role models. When Jarryd eventually did make it out gay clubbing with his JTEs, their reaction spoke for itself: "A lot of them were like, "I didn't even know this existed!" They just didn't even know that gay people existed in Japan." Little surprise then, that when Alex, a bisexual ALT and Stonewall activist, came out, she found that she was "the first person they'd ever met that was queer". The truth is, as Alex herself puts it: in Japan, it's seldom that one meets "queer people who want to be vocal". And when the voice of the Japanese gay community barely rises above a whisper, it's no surprise that many within Japanese society claim to be unaware of its existence entirely. Even at national "pride" events, such as those hosted in Osaka last October, Alex recalls that many chose to march "covering their faces...or in the 'no photography' section". For an event predicated on the notion of "pride", such behaviour seems, at best, baffling - and, at worst, undermining of the very purpose for which such events exist in the first place.

For an explanation, one must look to the insurmountable Japanese penchant for privacy. According to Alex, the reason why such outward 'pride' is not desired is simply because "most people...just keep their private lives private... One even thought things were better in Japan because there isn't any violence towards homosexual individuals here and no one cares so long as you keep your romantic life private." But rather than such behaviour being endemic to Japan's LGBT community alone, it appears that 'closetedness' is simply the Japanese way, gay or straight. "I taught with a JTE for an entire year before realising he was married and

had two teenage kids", Joe, an ALT in the Kyushuu inaka, says; "...of all the teachers I've ever worked with, their personal life is rarely, if ever, talked about." And it's not just in relation to personal matters that such humbleness will arise – compliment any Japanese person on their English, for example, and you'll be knocked back with a wave of the hands and an embarrassed rebuttal. In the context of LGBT rights, then, such a desire for privacy should not be conflated with a desire against political action in itself. The fact that Japanese people are attending pride events in Tokyo and Osaka shows a real grassroots desire for change. That they are doing so in ways inconspicuous does not detract from that desire, but is merely a manifestation of the unique Japanese character.

That said, there's no denying that such an absence of outward pride is stifling the gay rights movement in Japan, both internally and externally. On the individual level, Alex recalls meeting "a lesbian couple that had no idea there were lesbian events in Hiroshima". If the very people who would be a part of Japan's LGBT community aren't even aware of its existence, one may question how a real group identity can ever be expected to form: this is the internal problem. The external problem, then, is a consequence of this: if there's no group identity, there's no mobility, and if a group can't be mobilised, change will never ripple throughout the wider echelons of society. It's here that JETs are ideally placed to help sow the seeds for real grassroots development. Occupying a position outside of the Japanese group-based culture may, for once, be an advantage. After all, it is those within the group who have the most to lose by coming out. To come out as gay is to be different, and to be different is to risk exclusion from the group. But for foreigners, as Joe puts it, "They don't expect us to follow their cultural norms and they kind of expect us to be different anyway because we're foreign... so I think that being foreign and gay goes down a little bit easier than being Japanese and gay."

This being so, it may just be that it is Japan's foreign community that is capable of providing the kind of gay role models which the Japanese media is currently lacking. (This may be taken ironically, considering that historically, the foreign community played a not-insignificant role in helping cultivate homophobia in Japan during the Meiji Restoration\*). When Joe tried to look for an inspirational gay figure on TV, he found nothing but "silly clown-like folks". Sean, too, recalls that, "the only [gay media personality] I've ever seen... is this one guy who was incredibly effeminate and only used feminine forms in Japanese. So if you were a gay Japanese person trying to deal with coming out and

you saw all these images on TV, you might think, 'If I come out, are people going to expect me to speak like that, and put on a wig and wear lipstick?'" Although such shallow, one-dimensional portrayals of gay people may be taken as evidence of latent homophobia, they may equally represent a nation whose views on homosexuality are still in something of a formative stage. Josiah believes that "Japanese people might be "homophobic" because they think it's the status quo and it's cool to be homophobic, but once they're confronted on it they don't hold those values very deeply; they're just surprised, and very curious." It's something which Alex found when she came out to her co-workers. Taking issue with one co-worker's characterisation of her bisexuality, Alex found that he had nothing further to say: "he just looked away... he didn't want to talk about it anymore". The prejudice is there, certainly, but the manner in which it is held is less imposing and more kneejerk than the way many anti-gay rights vocalists in the West operate. It may be that this is explicable purely by the fact that the Japanese are an inherently more passive nation; but, if Josiah is correct, then just maybe the prejudice faced is more malleable than first anticipated.

Whether to tackle such prejudice head-on or not is a decision only the individual can make; but coming out is not the only means by which to express oneself. Another way, for us as teachers, may be almost too obvious: classroom education. Sharon, a second year ALT, isn't out at work, but still manages to "throw cultural insights into classes: '...you know gay people can get married in these countries'"; with that, she hopes to show her students that she's comfortable with that. Lauren, too, believes it's possible to stand for gay rights without her students necessarily knowing that she's gay: "If they talk about marriage I can always say 'partner' instead of 'husband' or 'wife'... and I try to ask them what they feel about gay people in general and do my best to make them question their beliefs."

The options at a JET's disposal are as varied as the Golden Cornerstone of the JET Programme would have you believe. Out or in, the scope for change remains. And, for all the unpredictability which this cornerstone instils, one truism still triumphs: yes, the JET contract is finite, but the virtue of courage is enduring... and, when one dares to exercise it, has the power to inspire a change for future generations and beyond.

*James Kemp currently serves as the Stonewall AJET Leader for Block 5, and welcomes those with thoughts or feedback to contact him at [jkemp90@hotmail.com](mailto:jkemp90@hotmail.com)*

*\*[www.seekjapan.jp/article-1/812/the+beautiful+way](http://www.seekjapan.jp/article-1/812/the+beautiful+way)*





## ***The Start of a Beautiful Season***

Winter is finally over, and the weather is slowly beginning to get warmer. Soon you'll be able to emerge from under your kotatsu to go outside and enjoy the lovely spring weather!

Spring brings plenty of things to look forward to in Japan. My favourite has to be hanami: drinking together with your friends on a tarp, under the cherry blossoms of the local park. It's the kind of thing that would get you arrested back home, but you're free to enjoy it in Japan, so make sure you make the most of it!

Another thing you should make the most of (and I know we keep saying this) is the many volunteering opportunities that being in Japan brings. There really is no better way to connect with the people in your local community, in another prefecture, or even in another country. People really appreciate the time and effort you put into helping. You'll have experiences and make friends that you'll never forget.

This month we have a couple of articles to let you know how you can get started with volunteering and to inspire that volunteering spirit within you. Even if you feel like you're 'not the kind of person' that does this volunteering stuff, we hope that these articles show you that anyone can volunteer, and have a great time doing it.

*If you want to contact us for information about these articles, or to contribute an article of your own, please email either Melody at [melodywong1@gmail.com](mailto:melodywong1@gmail.com) or Matt at [sanoramen@gmail.com](mailto:sanoramen@gmail.com).*

*Enjoy the start of spring, the hanami and the cherry blossoms. Happy volunteering!*

*Melody Wong and Matt Thompson*

# volunteering



## A Little Spark to Volunteer

Melody Wong

The JET year is more than halfway over and you're looking back at your time wondering, "Did I make a difference in the classrooms? Have I made an impact in my schools, my little Japanese community, or even the country of Japan? Should I find something meaningful to do while I'm in here?"

Now that you've worked out most of the kinks of living in Japan, I bet you're wondering, "What are some ways I can help beyond school or work?" Okay- maybe you aren't quite thinking that, but I am going to do my best to convince you that you will!

There are so many ways you can give back to your community, especially being here in Japan. The biggest of all is without a doubt by giving your time to the disaster relief efforts in Tohoku. In the February issue of AJET Connect, there were many articles featuring volunteer efforts in Ishinomaki, and beyond. It's Not Just Mud and Red Cross Japan are just a few of the groups you can reach out to if you want to help.

On a smaller scale, seeking out local volunteer opportunities is a great benefit. In Okayama prefecture, for example, a group of JETs come together to volunteer their time to visit with kids in orphanages. Such a small gesture can mean the world to children. Local events such as cleaning parks and community areas on community trash days, tree planting, teaching eikaiwa classes, and spending time in convalescent homes can make more of a difference than you might think.

If your time is scarce, your money can do wonders. The media have stopped publicizing so many stories about the disasters in Japan and rarely do they even publicize small community events, but it doesn't mean that help isn't still needed. A measly 100 yen, less than the price of a soft drink or pair of gloves from Daiso, could make a world of a difference. There are websites that allow you to transfer money safely to your desired NGO organization.

So, go out there, you totally awesome JETs, and make a difference in our community. After all, for another couple of months or years, this is your community just as much as it is your Japanese neighbours. So make your mark the way you do in your classes, and volunteer!



## Volunteering Where To Begin

Bridget Rudd

After the events of March 11, 2011, many people wanted to support Japan and Tohoku as much as possible. But, with a catastrophic 9.0 earthquake, an unfathomable tsunami, and a nuclear crisis, the average person could not even know where to begin.

My first volunteer efforts for Tohoku were made through writing. I wrote in English, I wrote in Japanese - I just wrote. My hand hurt from how much I wrote, but I knew that someone would, somehow, benefit from my letters. And I was right. I've gotten over 100 letters back from displaced children, with whom I have kept in contact.

My city sponsored a one-day trip to Shichigahama, Miyagi, at the end of September. Before that, I'd already been up north with a couple of friends, delivering fruit, vegetables, and letters. In terms of sight and smell, I knew what to expect. However, Shichigahama was my first experience of actually clearing away debris. At the first place we cleaned, the owners cleaned with us. There were tears in their eyes each time one of us found a picture, a candlestick, or any memento. At the end of the three hours, they thanked us all so profusely. The mother was such a lovely woman, and I like to hug people, so I hugged her before we left. It was a nice, long embrace - it was comfort to both of us.

Bear in mind, before we had even gotten to the

first site, the Shichigahama volunteer manager said "Keep in mind that people passed away here. Please don't take pictures without consulting the owners, should they be there. If not, please consult me."

After the first house, I was feeling confident. I laughed with new friends at lunch, who made fun of my ability to eat ramen without slurping.

When we arrived at the second house, I was extremely surprised that it was only about 400 meters from the ocean. The leader told us that we needed to clear weeds. He wasn't sure that any house would be rebuilt there. So, I went to work, digging, and clearing weeds. I was prepared to find debris, of which there were none. But, the weeds had grown over baby clothes, plates, and family pictures. As I found these things, that marked the lives of people who seemed accomplished and remarkable, the only question that filled my head was "did they make it?" I couldn't bring myself to ask the leader. I'm not sure that he would have told me, anyway. No matter what transpired for that family on March 11, 2011, they will be in my heart forever. But, I hope every single day that they made it.

Volunteer work is a great way to give back to society, and there are opportunities in small communities, as well. Check with local authorities to learn what is available. Food banks, literacy tutoring, and mentoring programs are important and quite common. For an international experience, I recommend Habitat for Humanity Global Village, though with GV, my destinations were Thailand and India. Habitat for Humanity has been highly involved in earthquake and tsunami relief, so please check [www.habitat.org/intl/ap/103.aspx](http://www.habitat.org/intl/ap/103.aspx) for more information.

*Bridget Rudd has been a JET ALT in Tochigi, Prefecture, for the past four years. Originally from Wyoming, USA, she has lived all over the USA and is dialectically confused by having done so. Her hobbies include volunteer work, studying languages, cooking, traveling, writing pen pal letters, and trying to escape "Touch hands!" from her elementary school students during the flu season.*



# AJET PEER SUPPORT GROUP



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to help others

The AJET Peer Support Group, the JET community's anonymous listening and referral service, is currently recruiting new members for the 2012-2013 JET Year.

Re-contracting JETs interested in volunteering several nights per month to the service may get further information, or request an application form, by contacting Volunteer Coordinator Hal Edmonson at >>> [psgapplications@gmail.com](mailto:psgapplications@gmail.com). Applications will be distributed until March 30, 2012. JETs of all backgrounds and experience levels are encouraged to apply!

## About AJET PSG

AJET PSG is a confidential and anonymous resource provided by JETs, for JETs. Our volunteers are trained to actively listen and support callers, and put them in touch with the appropriate resources.

AJET PSG operates from 8 p.m. to 7 a.m. 365 days a year, and is the only overnight support service designed to serve JETs nationwide. Contact us at 050-5534-5566, or check out our website at [www.ajet.net/psg](http://www.ajet.net/psg)

## Who we're looking for

Any re-contracting JET (ALT or CIR) is eligible to volunteer with AJET PSG. We seek attentive, open-minded and dedicated volunteers with an interest assisting other JETs around the country, and a

willingness to learn AJET PSG's way of doing so in the particular context of the JET community.

AJET PSG Volunteers are NOT counselors, but peers who train to be an effective resource for other JETs. As such, prior training in psychology or counseling, or service in support roles such as a Resident Assistant or a PA may be somewhat helpful, but are absolutely not required. All selected volunteers will undergo approximately 25 hours of training and role-play exercises to understand AJET PSG's specific mission and techniques.

Finally, since we are a telephone-based service, all prospective volunteers must have consistent home internet service. A landline telephone is also quite helpful, but not required.

## Time Commitment

Flexible. Members typically volunteer one to two evenings each month to man the AJET PSG phone line. Volunteers must be available at least ten evenings each month (including two weekend nights), from which their shifts will be assigned.

Additionally, successful applicants will take part in mandatory training sessions throughout mid-May and June.





# TRAVEL

## **March Showers to April Flowers**

Amelia Hagen

First and foremost, I hope you have found your perfect spot in Japan to enjoy hanami this spring. My favorite spots are Himeji Castle in Hyogo and Nishi Park in Fukuoka. I also hoped you ALTs have been able to get some R&R throughout your spring vacation. Though you probably had more free time during this break or may have just returned from a fun adventure, this month's travel section may make you pine for Golden Week already.

The Kanto area of Japan is not simply home to the big cities of Tokyo and Yokohama. It lays claim to historical and natural beauty as well. You might be thinking, 'Yeah, I know Nikko!' but the April edition of Connect is about to reveal an interesting piece of history with you via a park in Ibaraki. Read on for how to spend a history-filled and action-packed holiday around Vietnam. Feeling frustrated with airfares lately? Lastly, I share some advice on getting cheaper tickets in 'The 411 on Finding Cheap(er) Flights'.

On another note, many friends and friends of friends have inquired about Couchsurfing or have asked about places to stay within the AJET Block Groups on Facebook. Here's another suggestion: Join the AJET-sponsored Couchsurfing group, Tatami Timeshare. If you're not already a member, all you have to do is sign-up for Couchsurfing at [couchsurfing.com](http://couchsurfing.com) (it's free) and search for the Tatami Timeshare group. I think it's fair to assume that JETs are usually open to hosting fellow JETs more than complete strangers. This is also obviously a great way to meet JETs from other parts of Japan!

If you have any suggestions for what you'd like to see in the AJET Connect Travel Section, feel free to give me a shout at [block10@ajet.net](mailto:block10@ajet.net). We are always looking for new pieces as well so share your travel wisdom with us! Enjoy the rest of the sakura and see you again in May.

*Amelia Hagen is a fourth-year ALT in the home of Ayumi Hamasaki, also known as Fukuoka Prefecture. When she is not traveling to the far ends of the earth, she enjoys chodo-ing, or paying with exact change, fist-bumping Hello Kitty at Oita's Harmonyland, and searching for the next jetset bargain. Amelia is the former President of Fukuoka AJET.*



## ***The 411 on Finding Cheap(er) Flights***

Amelia Hagen

It might be an understatement to say that I'm a travel buff. Named after the most famous female pilot in history and the daughter of a former pilot, I was born with a nasty case of wanderlust. Fast forward to today on the JET Programme and I can tell you that I've spent every hour of nenkyu over my four years of nenkyu travelling both around Japan and overseas. This has prompted countless hours of research, especially when it comes to getting at those cheaper flights. Thinking of taking a trip abroad during summer vacation? The following flight search tips might come in handy....

### **1 Get your travel search engine on.**

Shy away from travel agent sites such as Travelocity, Expedia, and Orbitz but still search for flights using as many search engines as you can. These flight search sites are supported by the airlines themselves and rarely quote the lowest fares possible. They often don't list LCCs because the LCCs do not want to pay the site a booking commission. Notice all of the ads on these sites? They make their money from these ads, not your booking. Instead try Vayama or Skyscanner. Skyscanner also allows you to select your home airport and then can run a search for the cheapest flights to anywhere from that airport.

### **2 Mailing lists and email alerts are a must.**

Two years ago, a JET friend scored a round trip ticket from Kansai to Tel Aviv for only 80,000 Yen in December/January. And this included a long stopover in Istanbul. This incredible deal was the result of an email alert she got from kayak.com after inputting her preferred travel dates, home airport, and destination. If you sign-up for an airfare mailing list on Kayak, you may get an email a day about destinations you don't care about and then out of the blue, you might find that golden ticket. It never hurts.

### **3 Book early.**

Yes, many of my friends thought I was crazy when I booked my August flights to America back in January. Why so early? No. 1 Travel explained on their website that EVA Air was going to increase their fuel surcharge on airline tickets booked after February 1. Since this airline had ideal flight schedules to and from Seattle, I was sold and purchased my ticket before that 'deadline'. Airline fees change all of the time – it's helpful to be aware of what's going on in the airline industry. Booking early is especially crucial when booking around major holidays, such as Christmas and New Year's. I waited a week too long last year and because I did not have flexible travel dates, I paid about 15,000 Yen more. Previously, travellers could get the best fares six to eight weeks before departure. However, airline fees have gone up seven times in the past year so I recommend that you book as soon as you know you can go.

### **4 Know your price.**

Do your homework and figure out how much you should be paying for your desired flights. Factor in the time of year, specific travel dates, the airline, and any special events that might be going on there. Keep in mind that though you may want to pay a certain price, the fares on some routes remain the same throughout the year. For example, every time I've searched for round trip flights between Hong Kong and Fukuoka on Cathay Pacific, the fare comes to about 50-55,000 Yen.

### **5 Flexible travel dates!**

OK, I'll admit that I usually don't have flexible travel dates but I suggest you do. If you have flexible travel dates, you can indicate this when searching for flights. The range is typically three days before and after your preferred departure and return dates. This might reveal that it's \$100 USD cheaper, for example, to fly on Thursday evening, instead of, say, Friday. You should also note that airline ticket prices do fluctuate a bit during the average week. However, they tend to be slightly cheaper on Tuesday and Wednesday nights.

### **6 LCCs**

If you don't know what LCC stands for, here it is – Low Cost Carrier aka budget airline. LCCs will get you to your destination without the frills. For these tickets, you'll most likely need to search their individual airline websites as they often do not come up within aggregate flight search engines. LCCs also tend to fly into secondary airports rather than the major airport of a metropolitan area. London Heathrow too expensive? Try searching flights to Gatwick. Last year, an ALT friend of mine was having trouble getting his desired flights to Denpasar, Bali. I suggested flying to Kuala Lumpur, LCC Air Asia's hub, and then buying a separate round trip ticket on Air Asia to Bali. If you hit the sales right, that will only cost you about \$50 USD.

### **7 Try alternative routes/airports.**

In line with the last recommendation, be open to flying in and out of other airports outside of your final destination. This can result in an additional stopover and a chance to explore a new city. When researching flights a few years ago to Fiji, I assumed I would have to go through Australia or New Zealand. I stumbled upon a super cheap round trip ticket between Hong Kong and Fiji



and used it as an opportunity to check out nearby Hong Kong's neighbor, Macau, on the way to Fiji. Another popular, cheaper option among many JETs is to fly through Taipei to Bangkok on EVA Air, take a long layover to see Taipei, and then head on to Bangkok. Sure, you won't have that direct Thai Air flight to Bangkok but you will get time to check out Taipei 101. For those Americans out there, you can even apply this alternative route theory to US flight searches. When flights to San Francisco are out of the question, jetBlue flights to nearby San Jose can be a viable option.

### 8 Frequent Flier Programs (FFPs)

Join the frequent flyer program of any airline you decide to fly. Understand how the program works and how you can earn miles. I know some folks who charge everything to their card to earn as many miles as possible. This works for some but not all. Also pay attention to the airline alliances. I joined Qantas's FFP, just in case, four years ago before I went to Australia. This has now proven wise since I have had to fly Cathay Pacific and Japan Airlines, two of Qantas's One World Alliance partners, several times in the last few years. Hence, I've been able to rack up more miles flying within the same airline alliance. There are 'FFP experts' who actually get paid to hold seminars coaching people on how to best utilize FFPs to their advantage. Seen the movie, "Up in the Air"? This is your chance to do as George Clooney would.

### 9 Flight Fox

Don't feel like going through the hassle of finding your own cheap flight? Now you can create a 'contest' on the brand-new flightfox.com by detailing your preferred departure dates, total travel time, stopover airports, destinations, etc. Then, travel hackers compete to find the cheapest flight for you that abides by your given guidelines. Within a few days, you'll be presented with the top four 'bids' (cheapest flights) found by these travel hackers, you pick the one you want, and you pay the winning travel hacker \$29 USD. If you're



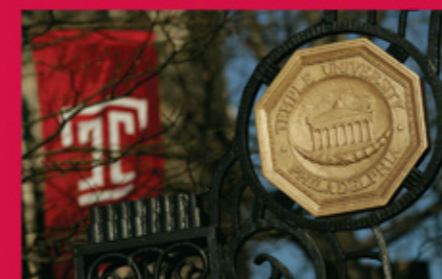
particularly good at discovering cheap flights and know the tricks already, consider signing-up to be a travel hacker – anyone can do it!

That about does it for my tips for finding cheaper airlines fares. Oh! It also pays to check out the international version of an airline's website. Not only does this sometimes lead to cheaper fares on the major airlines, it rings true for LCCs such as JetStar and Cebu Pacific too. Though this month's article focused on international flights, stay tuned for the May edition of AJET Connect in which I'll discuss LCCs in Japan.

*Amelia Hagen is a fourth-year ALT in the home of Ayumi Hamasaki, also known as Fukuoka Prefecture. When she is not traveling to the far ends of the earth, she enjoys chodo-ing, or paying with exact change, fist-bumping Hello Kitty at Oita's Harmonyland, and searching for the next jetset bargain. Amelia is the former President of Fukuoka AJET.*

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## **The Park Built for Battle**

Elysse Hurtado

If you have been a tourist in Japan, or lived here for any length of time, you have probably heard of the Three Great Gardens of Japan. Okayama City is home to Kourakuen, Kanazawa in Ishikawa has Kenrokuen, and Mito in Ibaraki lays claim to the expansive Kairakuen. Each one has their own different layout and selection of flora, but behind Kairakuen's beauty lies a twist: beyond simply pleasing the eye, Kairakuen was built for battle.

Opened in 1842 by the ninth lord of Mito, Noriaki Tokugawa, it was overtly intended to be a place for the local citizens to relax and rejuvenate themselves. The name itself is built from the characters for 'everyone', 'relax' and 'park', chosen to indicate that, unlike most other parks constructed by nobles, this park was to be open to the public (albeit only on certain days of the month). Situated near the newly opened Kodokan Learning Institute, it was designed to enable students to come after their lessons and enjoy the beauty and views as a way of relieving stress and maintaining both physical and mental health. As part of this overall sense of balance, the park itself was organised so that half of it consisted of flowering trees and shrubs, while the other half was made up of the dark, soothing green of bamboo and other vegetation, similar to a yin-yang symbol.

It serves this purpose beautifully. Its location on the crest of a hill gives Kairakuen a commanding view of the surrounding area, and even on a rainy day, the sight of Lake Senba seen from above, framed by the raindrop-laced branches of a majestic Japanese pine, is worth braving the weather. Though the famous plum trees, of which there are over 3,000 in 100 different varieties, were not blossoming yet when I visited, the bamboo forests were even more dramatic thanks to the darker surroundings. Thankfully, the lovely Kobuntei villa is finally open to the public again after a long reconstruction due to damage from last year's earthquake, providing yet another attraction within the park that should not be missed.

However, what really fascinates the visitor is the duality invested in every inch of the celebrated space. According to our wonderfully animated volunteer guide, part of the reason this park was built was due to Lord Noriaki Tokugawa's concern over the English take-over of Hong Kong after the Opium Wars, and his desire to prepare Mito for any potential invasions of its own. To this end, Kairakuen was designed so it could be used as a fort, with each element carefully chosen for its combat usage as well as its aesthetic properties.

For example, the bush clover covering the ground between the plum trees was not simply an alterna-

tive to grass; bush clover was a main feed source for horses, and thus necessary to maintain a cavalry in case of war. Not only that, when allowed to grow tall enough, it could be used to build makeshift walls and fences for shelter or defense. The fruit of the plum trees, all 3,000 of them, would be enough to provide a necessary source of energy and sustenance for the fighters, whether eaten raw or as the traditional Japanese pickled plum. The nearby bamboo grass garden was planted to provide raw material for weaving baskets to contain things, or simply to wrap food in order to preserve it. The bamboo forests had their separate but conjoined uses; the thinner, straighter bamboo trees were used for making arrows, while the thicker, stouter bamboo variety was perfect for bows. As an additional piece of trivia, the bamboo planted for use in bows is a special variety brought in from Kyoto, the very same species picked by Thomas Edison to provide the longest-living filament for his first commercial light bulbs.



Even the view has been commandeered for defensive ends. Near the aforementioned pines lie some carefully chosen flat rocks; a small square one for playing shogi, (Japanese chess) and a large, rectangular one for playing the traditional stringed koto as a musical accompaniment. Of course, on the surface this seems like an idyllic way to spend a day, but it was really intended as a disguised watchtower. As it overlooks the main road into Mito, which itself is sandwiched between Lake Senba and its nearby tributary, people were stationed here to monitor any activity by opposing forces, and were equipped with a large cannon to delay their progress. Every element is the perfect combination of aesthetic and practical value.

As the final touch, adjoining the park is Tokiwa Shrine, which is a picturesque repository of traditional Japanese Shinto structures and regalia. Though we weren't told as much, it seems logical that this would also be a part of the plan, though it came much later. Either way, it rounds off the sense of duality by completing the contrast between society and spirituality, this life and the next.

When the plum trees finally started to blossom and cover the towering hills and rolling greens with pinks, whites, and yellows, I knew there was a hidden strength inside every branch and bough. Unlike most parks, Kairakuen offers a much more interesting backstory to enjoy as you stroll through the scenic avenues and spring flowers. Celebrating its 170th anniversary this year, and fully restored and revitalized after the earthquake, Kairakuen lives up easily to its designation as one of the Three Great Gardens of Japan.

If you would like a guided tour of the area, there are volunteer 'History Advisors' who are more than happy to regale you with the stories and legends, and some can even do so in English, Korean, or other languages (please check and reserve in advance).



*Elysse Hurtado is a first year CIR living in Ibaraki, where she fills all her newfound free time with books and writing and cooking and basically anything creative. Current projects include teaching herself Chinese, crocheting a random stuffed animal, a series of short stories on her blog, and travelling as much as possible. Elysse misses having a social life very, very much. You can visit her blog at <http://wanderingbluesky.wordpress.com/>.*



## ***Vietnam, Land of Dragons***

CJ Stearns

From its mountainous north to its southernmost tip, Vietnam stretches like a great, long, sleeping dragon. The South China Sea laps at its side, bringing sustenance and life at the best of times and capricious weather at the worst. Inside the heart of dragon-like Vietnam lives a people with a spirit just as strong.

In July of last year, Boyfriend and I took a tour of Southeast Asia, starting with this once controversial but now burgeoning country. While there are many trips one can take in Vietnam, depending on what your interests are – be it shopping, partying, hitting the beach or hiking - we took the one that held the most interest for me: a tour of Vietnamese history and culture.

The trip began in the capital of Hanoi - a beautiful city. Though it grows bigger every year, Hanoi still retains its French colonial charm and architecture. It bursts with museums and parks, and the downtown area is easy enough to get around in by foot in most cases.

Hanoi has a few very interesting historical wartime sites. First, there is the fabled Hanoi Hilton, or Hoa Lo Prison as it is known in Vietnam, which was built by the French during their occupation of the country. Though perhaps we in the West know it for its role in the Vietnamese-American War, one

can learn some interesting history from the colonial era, and the unfortunate fates of Vietnamese freedom fighters during that time. There is a small section detailing its use during the war, though the exhibits are rather obvious propaganda. (An interesting note - they claim to have Senator John McCain's flight suit from when he was shot down on display.)

The other major wartime site that shouldn't be missed is the Ho Chi Minh Mausoleum. Inside a stark cement building rests the body of the beloved leader, preserved Lenin-style (against his wishes, but what can you do). It's free to go inside and say hello. You might as well – you'll be seeing his face everywhere during your stay, all across Vietnam. However for a couple of months at the end of the year his body is taken to Russia (no joke) for some maintenance, so check the schedule before you pay a visit.

While Hanoi is a lovely place to visit on its own, it is also a well-known jumping-off point for nearby sites. One can take a short trip up to the northern mountain village of Sapa, known for its lush rice terraces and access to Vietnamese cultural minorities. Hanoi is also the best place to set off for the famed UNESCO World Heritage site Ha Long Bay.

Ah, Ha Long Bay. It is considered one of the wonders of the world, and in my opinion it's the number one place one must see in Vietnam. The name Ha Long means "Bay of Descending Dragons" which is fitting, as the karst formations of the bay jut out

of the water like jagged teeth. There are many things to do in the bay, and most two or three day package tours will give you the opportunity to try all of the following: hiking, swimming, kayaking and even biking (if you make it to Cat Ba Island, the only inhabited island inside the bay itself). There are also tours of floating fishing villages and trips to large caves hidden in the karsts of the bay. Most overnight boat prices are very fair for what you get. I highly recommend taking the time to get out to the bay – it's something you'll never forget!

Leaving the north by train (traveling third class with the locals provides wonderful opportunities to meet some lovely people) we made our way down to historical Hue (Who-ay) and the DMZ (Demilitarized Zone). Hue is a treasure trove of history and culture. There are pagodas and tombs of emperors, culminating in the Imperial Citadel, in the heart of the city. Much of it has been destroyed, first during fights with the French, then again during the Tet Offensive in 1968, when some parts of the sprawling complex were leveled by bombs. However other parts remain in pristine condition. Restoration work is under way, though it may be a while before it can get close to its former glory.

From Hue one can take a tour of the former DMZ – the area between North and South Vietnam. Great package tours can be purchased from Hue – but they start early and take all day, so this one is only for history buffs. Some highlights include the old Khe Sanh Combat Base and the Vinh Moc Tunnels, where a whole village lived (and hid from bombs) for two and a half years. These tunnels are very much like their more famous counterpart in the Saigon area – Cu Chi – but are better preserved.



For a less depressing venture in the middle of the country, there is Hoi An. It's a charming little town known for great shopping, quaint streets and good opportunities to get tailor-made clothes. It's

perfect for a rest. Our favorite place to eat and chat was the Sun Shine restaurant, located right across from a Lonely Planet-recommended eatery, and unfortunately ignored because of it. Pay them a visit and let them treat you right! Also make sure to see the lovely Japanese Covered Bridge.

A short trip from Hoi An is the World Heritage site of My Son (me-sun). My Son was built by the





Hindu-influenced Cham Empire between 200 and 1700AD before it was taken over by the Vietnamese. It is sometimes called the “Ankor Wat of Vietnam” but this name is hardly fair to either place. My Son is small and by no means comparable to the size and grandeur of Ankor Wat, though it is historically very interesting nonetheless (Champa did take Ankor Wat over once, you know). The temple complex was, like many other places in Vietnam, heavily bombed during the war, but many of the buildings and their mysterious masonry still remain.

Finally, we reached the tail end of the dragon – busy, bustling, noisy, exciting Saigon, or as it is officially known, Ho Chi Minh City. There are endless things to do and see in this city, but as we were there for history, there was no better place to go than the War Remnants Museum and the Reunification Palace. The museum is a hard one to visit (especially for Americans of course) so when you go, brace yourself. It is basically a display of human cruelty during the Vietnam War (little mention of any misdeeds done by North Vietnam, but so it goes). While deformed fetuses affected by Agent Orange sitting in jars and detailed accounts of tor-

ture may shock and grieve you, the museum is still very informative and worthwhile. From Saigon you can visit the aforementioned Cu Chi Tunnels or go down to the lush Mekong Delta to visit its famous floating markets.

Now before you pack your bags: a word to the wise. Vietnam is not exactly a safe country, especially for those of us who are used to the safety and comfort of Japan. Keep your things close and your eyes sharp. There are pickpockets of course, but don't count women out. In Hanoi, watch out for “students” asking for donations. Look out for taxis with meters that run too fast – get a price quoted before you get in. Never let your bags get stored out of sight. Many hotels (even Lonely Planet recommended ones, I hate to say) will let out your room while you are out for the day, and some of your things may be missing when you get back. I suggest using a handy device called a Pacsafe – it is like a wire mesh cage for your bags – no one can get into your luggage, and as they can be attached to solid things like bed posts and wardrobes, they can't be carried off either. All of these things are an unfortunate reality, but one you must

be ready for. Vietnam is a wonderful country to visit and well worth it, but like most third world countries, it has people in desperate need. Try to let your dollars go to them by supporting local business and enterprise and not through the unfortunate loss of your valuables. On a lighter note – my favorite thing about Vietnam: fresh fruit shakes. Enjoy many, and enjoy them often. I have had none better.

Vietnam has a long, interesting history and beautiful, divergent landscapes. You don't have to take the history-heavy route that we did to get a taste of Vietnamese culture. There are also beaches and islands, mountains and jungles to be explored. We spent two weeks there, but it could have easily stretched into a month, or even longer, and we would only have scratched the surface of what Vietnam has to offer. This summer, or perhaps even this Golden Week, why not give Vietnam a try?

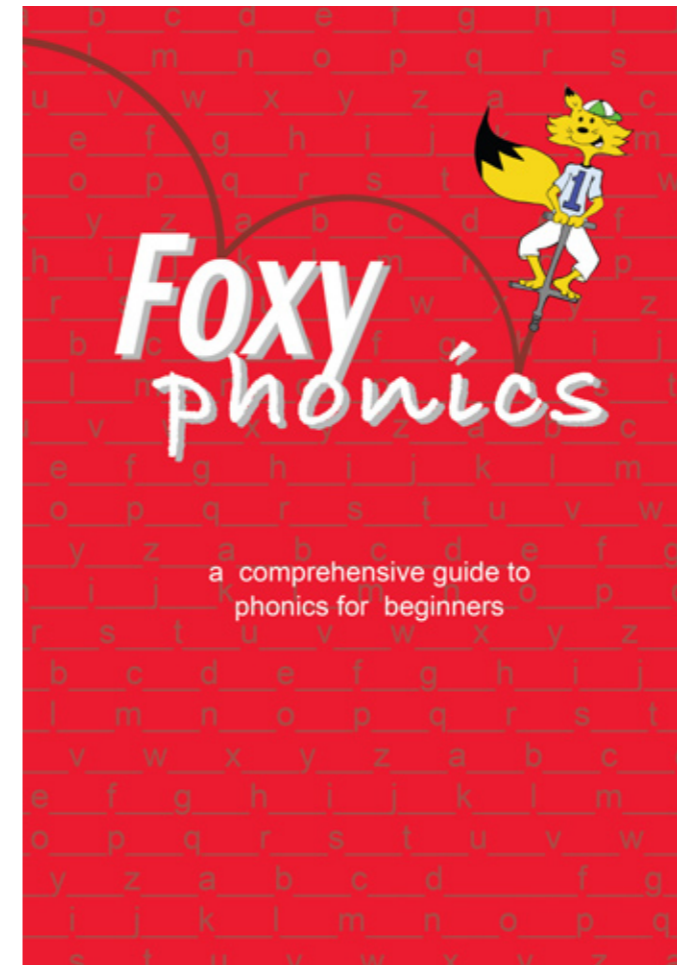
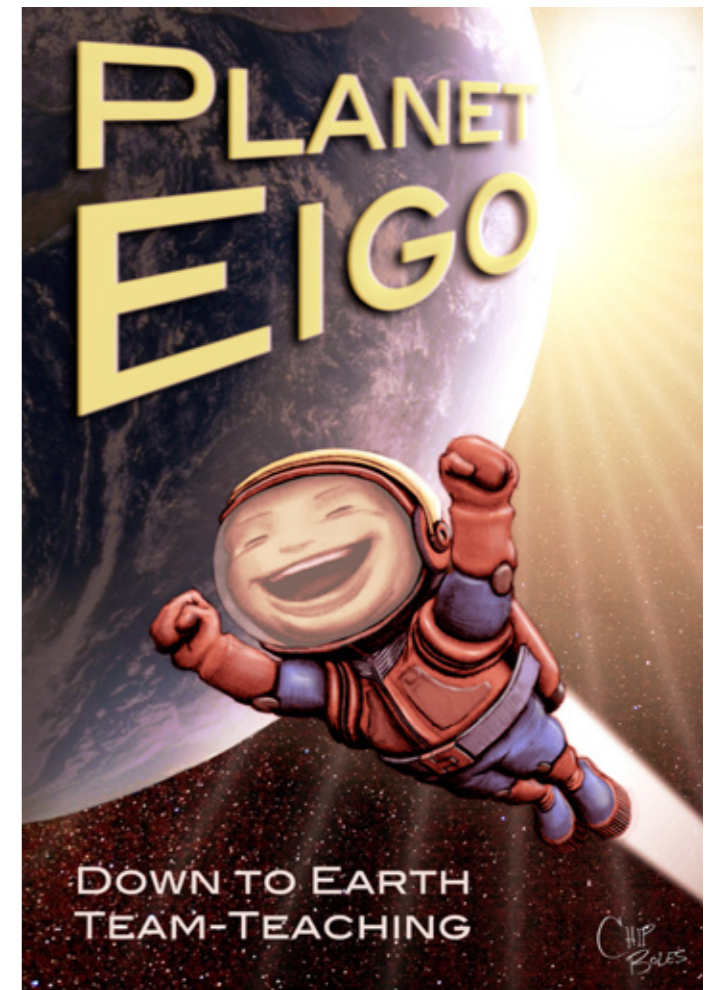


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**Foxy Phonics and Planet Eigo can be  
ordered via email [publications@ajet.net](mailto:publications@ajet.net)**

\* Plus shipping and packing

# AJET PHOTOGRAPHY CONTEST!

**Entries Close 25th April 2012**

Welcome to AJET Connect's monthly photography contest! Submissions relevant to the JET experience are welcomed from current JET Programme participants. Your submission will be featured in the NEXT issue where our readers can vote on their choice for the best photograph. The winning entries will be entered in the yearly AJET Photography Contest.

## **To Enter**

- 1\_ your name**
- 2\_ your mailing address**  
(this will not be published)
- 3\_ your JET number**  
(this will not be published)
- 4\_ a title and brief caption describing the scene**

Submissions should be original, high quality JPG files. Contestants may submit one photo each month. This contest is for JET participants only. Send your entries to [contest@ajet.net](mailto:contest@ajet.net). Current National AJET council members are not eligible to enter. In the case that you submit photographs where people are clearly featured, you must get permission from those featured before you submit their image.

### **Ownership/ Use Rights**

Photographers retain the rights to their photograph. By entering the contest, photographers agree to have their submitted photograph published in the AJET Connect magazine, displayed on the AJET website and posted on AJET Facebook sites. Photos will be credited to the author named in the entry form.



## ***Inspiration***

Simon Daly

The desire to cook can come from the most unlikely places. A scent, a sight, or a sound can be every bit as inspiring as a taste. Some may venture into the kitchen to recapture a memory, whereas others seek to be inventive. Anything that gets people cooking is good in my eyes. Even when depressed, surely baking a cake to wallow in is better than simply buying one. There are pitfalls, of course. One of the nice things about a lot of the comfort foods that we try to recreate is that they have been made for us in the past and culinary experiments have the potential to go awry.

I was recently lucky enough to be treated by a friend to my very first Chicago style deep-dish pizza. At great lengths he had made homemade Italian sausage as one of the many filling and somehow got hold of more mozzarella than I have seen before in Japan. To him it was a poor replication of the paradigm he had in mind. Those who partook in the meal, however, truly appreciated the effort that he had put in and that he had shared with us something that was special to him.

On the home front, I tried my hand at making a version of 'Sweet and Sour Pork,' a childhood treat and favourite of mine; for colour I decided it was a good idea to use Korean Gochu-jang (chilli paste). While I liked it and will make it again, next time I will have to revise the recipe so that it is less like straight hot sauce with pineapple chunks.

This month, Kelly and I went about finding inspiration in different ways. I chose to try to do a Japanese spin on a trend that has been about for a couple of years now. Kelly decided instead to share some of the lesser-known ingredients that she has come to rely upon over the past three years. If these (or anything else for that matter) help to get you into the kitchen, don't question it, just go with it and enjoy the fruits of your labour.



## An-velvet cake pops

Makes 24

Simon Daly

Cake pops have become popular over the past few years, but there is no need to take my word for it, as Google Trends will back me up (<http://www.google.com/trends/?q=cake+pop>). The general preparation method has been to make a cake, crumble it, mix it with icing, and form it into balls on sticks. It struck me a while back that there must be a better way to go about making them, but only earlier this month did I get around to trying my own spin on them. I have an electric takoyaki pan that I use on a regular basis, but I had never tried making anything sweet in it. You can see where I am going with this now, but rather than making the entire ball in one, I thought that making them in half-spheres and then filling them might be nice. In trying to mix the ideas of the colours of spring, Japanese ingredients and comfort food, I created a monster. Not a bad monster, but if you decide to make this recipe, think ahead of time about who you will share them with so you do not eat them all yourself.

Red velvet cake seemed like a good place to start. Besides the rich red colour of the cake, what sets it apart from many cakes is that it uses oil in place of butter. This is good for us in two ways. First, it means the cake is lower in saturated fat than a regular cake, and secondly, you do not have search your local supermarket in vain for large amounts of butter. Red Velvet is usually quite a light cake and I thought incorporating some bean paste into it would help it hold its shape. As an is sweet, I also omitted a measure of sugar that would be in a more traditional recipe. From there, like nearly all "cake pops," chocolate dipping seemed by far the best way to finish them.

For this recipe I recommend using an electric takoyaki pan and preferably one with a lid (although kitchen foil would do too). The recipe itself is incredibly simple and does not even require baking: perfect for those of you without an oven.

### Dry ingredients

- > 2.5 cups plain white flour
- > 1 cup sugar
- > 1 teaspoon baking powder
- > ½ teaspoon salt
- > 2 teaspoons red food colour powder

### Wet ingredients

- > 1 cup milk
- > 2 eggs
- > 1 ½ cups canola oil
- > ½ cup "koshian" (strained bean paste)
- > 1 teaspoon of white vinegar

### To finish

- > ¼ cup Koshian
- > 300 grams white chocolate
- > ½ teaspoon red food colour powder
- > 24 Popsicle sticks or short chopsticks



### Method

Measure out all dry ingredients into a large mixing bowl and stir to combine. In another bowl, measure all of the wet ingredients and mix well. Make sure to mix the vinegar in last so it does not curdle the milk. Using a rubber scraper, add the wet ingredients to the dry and mix well.

Heat your takoyaki pan to low (140 degrees) and with a tablespoon fill the moulds to just below level to allow room for rising. I found that with the oil in the recipe I did not need to add extra oil to the pan and this omission also kept the cakes from browning too much. Cover the pan with the lid and leave to cook for 7-10 minutes or until slightly raised and set (by which I mean no longer liquid). With a skewer carefully remove the cakes from the pan and leave to cool on a rack flat side down so as not to dent the round side. Repeat until all of the mixture is cooked.

In a microwave safe bowl (or bain-marie) carefully melt your chocolate. In the microwave, use no longer than 30 second bursts and stir often. Once melted, mix in your colour and the pops are ready to be assembled.

Take a half round cake and place a ¼ teaspoon of an on it. Holding gently to the round side of another half, dip the flat side into your chocolate, then gently sandwich the two halves together to make a ball, place on a plate and refrigerate till set together. Repeat the process for the rest of your balls.

If your chocolate has begun to reset, melt it again gently. Take a Popsicle stick and gently place a ball onto it and then coat it with chocolate. Leave the pops to set standing up. I found that a box with a hole punched in the side of it was best for this, but you could also stand them in a tall glass with a plate underneath to catch dripping chocolate. Leave to set, and eat with friends.

*Simon Daly is a third year ALT in Engaru, near the Okhotsk coast of Hokkaido where he lives with his wife and children. Simon attended culinary school and has worked in award winning hotels and restaurants in his home country of New Zealand as well as in the UK. He is the former president of the Hokkaido chapter of AJET.*





## More Than Just Soy Sauce

### New Tastes for Your Japanese Kitchen

Shoyu. Mirin. Dashi. If I ask any Japanese chef what ingredients are in a dish I've just eaten, nine times out of ten, it seems, this is what I am told. Soy sauce, the sweet cooking wine mirin, and dashi, a stock made from dried fish and kelp, are the founding flavors of Japanese cuisine. But the pervasiveness of these three ingredients does little to explain the aisles upon aisles of unfamiliar items at the supermarket. Even at our run-of-the-mill local shop, the shelves and bins are stocked with endless varieties of citrus, roots, greens, fish and fungi.

After nearly three years in Japan, my kitchen has become well acquainted with Japan's culinary heavy-hitters. In addition to the trio above, I cook regularly with a number of common Japanese ingredients: negi (green onion), miso (fermented soybean paste – in stir fry, soups, or mixed with mayo and slathered on anything), ponzu (tangy citrus dipping sauce), daikon (a

versatile white radish), and assorted noodles. I have experimented with every kind of mushroom, sampled countless different potatoes, and explored the subtle differences in the varieties of tofu. But even for adventurous eaters, entire sections of the supermarket can remain largely uncharted territory.

Below are a handful of my favorite discoveries from the last few years. Ranging from common ginger root to seasonal delicacies, I would argue that these unique ingredients give Japanese food a depth and variety to rival any cuisine on the planet. Some are acquired tastes; a number are excellent additions to Western dishes; all are flavors that I will miss when I leave Japan. Soon enough, I will be searching for these items in the bland shelves of my American supermarket, wondering how I could have ever considered all mushrooms to be equal.

#### 1 Nira garlic chives

Roughly or finely chopped, nira adds a subtle garlic flavor to almost anything. Especially good added to stir fry

or soups, as a filling for dumplings, or on top of scrambled eggs.

#### 2 Mitsuha herb

Often called Japanese parsley, mitsuha has a refreshing, subtle, slightly bitter taste. A great addition to Japanese steamed egg dishes or salads, it also makes a good substitute for parsley in Italian dishes and coriander in salsas.

#### 3 Wasabi horseradish root

Green, paste-style "wasabi" is ubiquitous in Japan. But this condiment, a mix of Western horseradish, mustard, and green dye, is hardly true wasabi. Wasabi root (or the mountain wasabi pictured here) has a milder, earthier taste. It should be grated from the stem side, using a fine tooth grater, and used immediately. A great topping for meats, potatoes, and even pasta.

#### 4 Kaiware radish sprouts

These little sprouts come in different colors and sizes and have the fresh, peppery taste of rocket. They are excellent in salads or as a garnish.

#### 5 Shiso perilla leaves

Like many Japanese flavors, the taste of shiso has no comparison. It is often served as a digestive aid with sashimi, but packs a powerful punch in salads or dressings. It also makes a handy wrap for assorted meat or noodle fillings. The leaves vary from green to red to purple depending on the season.

#### 6 Nagaimo mountain yam

Nagaimo, or the closely related yamaimo, is one of Japan's neba neba foods: slimy and mucilaginous. But don't discount this yam for its association with natto! Grated or julienned and topped with a bit of soy sauce and seaweed flakes, it's a refreshing and healthy snack.

#### 7 Takenoko bamboo

Fresh takenoko is a delicacy in spring and, unless you're lucky enough to

pull the just emerging shoots from the ground, it requires a bit of preparation. The 5-7 inch long shoots available in stores are typically sold with rice bran and a dried chili, and should be prepared within a day of purchase. Boil the shoots, rice bran and chili for several hours and then trim away the husk. The sweet, tender shoots are worth the effort.

#### 8 Maitake hen-of-the-woods mushroom

Maitake are just one of Japan's many types of mushrooms. The mild-tasting, thin fronds are easily split and become slightly crispy when sautéed. Maitake are a versatile and delicious addition to stir fry, pasta, omelettes, lasagna, tempura - almost anything. I love to sauté them in butter, salt and pepper, and a little bit of cream and put them on toast.

#### 9 Yuzu citrus

Native to Asia, yuzu has a tangy complexity. Akin to a mandarin orange in flavor, the juice or zest is excellent in soups, dressings and sauces, as well as mixed into marinades or ground meatballs. Yuzu is also combined with hot chilis to make an irresistible, spicy paste (16 Yuzukosho – green or red variety) that adds a splash of flavor and color to anything on your table. Great for cocktails too, there are no limits to the uses of yuzu! Look for green skins in summer and yellow-orange in winter.

#### 10 Umeboshi sour pickled plum

Umeboshi are a Japanese staple condiment. Often used in onigiri (rice balls), umeboshi garnish almost every meal at our house. Packed with antioxidants and other nutrients, their sweet-sour flavor makes even a plain bowl of rice feel like a meal. It's worth splurging for more expensive, local umeboshi rather than the super-sour mass market brands.

#### 11 Kogomi ostrich ferns

Kogomi are a good introduction

into sansai, Japanese mountain vegetables. Most sansai are foraged seasonally, and include many ferns, herbs and even wild kiwi fruit. Kogomi have a green, earthy taste similar to asparagus and are delicious as tempura, or boiled and served with a yuzukosho and mayonnaise dipping sauce.

#### 12 Shishito small green pepper

A sweet, mild pepper often served grilled or stir fried whole and then topped with salt. Another variety, nanban peppers, are easy to find in summer and a perfect substitute for Thai chilis in curry or habañeros in salsa.

#### 13 Shoga ginger

Ginger is common in the West, but Japanese ginger offers a delicate, less fibrous alternative. This versatile ingredient can be used in anything from dressings and marinades, to desserts and drinks. In summer, try hiyayakko - a cold block of silken tofu, topped with a bit of soy sauce and scoop of freshly grated ginger.

#### 14 Renkon lotus root

This crunchy root has a nutty taste and provides satisfying texture in any meal. It can be thinly sliced and stir-fried or quickly pickled in some rice vinegar and added to salads. Put cut renkon into a bowl of water to prevent discoloration.

#### 15 Myoga young ginger

In the ginger family, these little buds are mild, fresh and slightly tart. They can be eaten raw or grilled and are especially delicious when minced and added to salads. Sliced cucumbers, myoga, rice vinegar, mirin and sesame seeds make a quick and easy side dish.

*Kelly Britton is a 3rd year ALT in Sapporo, Hokkaido. She likes eating, 90's R&B, and when couples wear matching clothes. Her husband has ridiculously great hair.*



# **WORKPLACE TIPS**



## ***Beyond the JET Programme***

### **Teaching English in Japan**

“Time flies when you’re having fun”, they say, and “all good things must come to an end.” Whatever expressions you choose to use, it’s a fact that we all will finish the JET Programme – after a year, or three, or five. When that time comes, some of us choose to remain in Japan and look for another job. Considering our JET Programme experience, the best option for many of us is to continue teaching English. But where? And how?

### **Staying at School**

The easiest option is to keep on teaching in schools as an employee of a private company. There are plenty of companies out there, such as Interac and Altia. The job is basically the same – teaching English to young learners – but you will find new restrictions regarding your employment. Some companies don’t allow for any team-teaching, designating the native English-speaking teacher – er, you – the main teacher in the classroom, which some contract ALTs find an obstacle to teaching or interacting with their schools. Others find free-

dom in their position as sole teacher. Taking on extra projects, even to be helpful, may be subject to approval by the company. Ask a lot of questions during your interview, as there are many rules and differences. The biggest difference, after your JET experience, is salary, insurance and taxes. The salary will be lower (approximately 250,000 yen per month). Interac also pays you only half your salary in December (winter break), and none at all in August (summer vacation). You may have to pay for your own insurance. You will also suddenly find yourself a taxpayer again. Nasty shock.

There are JETs, usually with prior teaching experience or an educational background, who are directly hired as individuals to teach at a school, but this is not an everyday occurrence. Those with Master’s degrees or better (and decent Japanese) could hope to find work in a university. Generally speaking, the better the school, the higher their standards in terms of your education and experience. Here’s where that teaching degree would come in handy.

### **Working for a Language School**

Language schools are another option. Once again, there are plenty out there, but do your research thoroughly before signing a contract with one. There are some pretty sketchy schools, and even well-established language schools can self-destruct – witness NOVA, which filed for bankruptcy in 2008, leaving thousands of students out of pocket for their tuition fees and foreign teachers stranded, penniless, and in some cases abruptly evicted from their apartments. NOVA’s troubles deeply affected consumer faith in English language schools, slashing enrolment numbers in language schools by over 50%.

What can you expect if you work at a language school? Your workday will probably start in the early afternoon and end late in the evening, so you might work from 1pm to 9pm. You will probably work on Saturdays. Small classes (1-10 students) is the norm, and you may have a number of private lessons. Classes may include grammar classes, conversation classes or children’s classes. The age range of students can be very wide. Some schools include or specialize in children’s classes, while others cater to adults. The students tend to be very interested in learning English, for a variety of reasons. University students and young adults often study English to pass tests like the STEP (Eiken) Test or the TOEIC. Some Japanese companies send their employees to learn English, and

may require certain TOEIC test scores for promotions. Plenty of housewives and retirees study languages as a hobby. Whatever reasons they have for learning, eikaiwa students are one of the great pleasures of working at a language school.

Language schools are businesses, and the eikaiwa industry is very competitive. With the downturn of the economy, people are less likely to spend their money on language learning. Therefore, should you work at an eikaiwa, you may find yourself handing out fliers on the street or in front of schools as well as conducting interviews, making small talk between classes, and ‘selling’ self-study materials to students. The job is not just about teaching. Some teachers at these schools find the ‘hard sell’ uncomfortable, or feel like they are expected to be an English mascot.

You can also expect a lower salary at a language school than you received as a JET (average salaries start at about 250,000 yen), but on the other hand, you may receive pay increases and bonuses. Your apartment may be set up for you and partially subsidized by your company, or you may be responsible for all costs. The company usually takes care of your visa paperwork and sponsors you. Before you sign, be aware of any restrictions. Some eikaiwas forbid their teachers from driving, for example, fearing any repercussions from an accident you might have.

One good rule of thumb is to check if the school you are applying to is a member of the Japan Association for the Promotion of Foreign Language Education (<http://www.zengaikyo.jp/English/index.html>), an organization considered the ‘Better Business Bureau of eikaiwas.’ While it can’t guarantee that you’ll have a good experience with a company, at least clear standards for quality education are in place. Some well-known examples of the 73 member companies are Berlitz, AEON, James English School and OWLS.

### **Opening Your Own School**

A number of enterprising ex-JETs opt to open their own schools, with widely varying degrees of success. Some of these ALT-run schools last only a short while, but others thrive and expand. Almost all of those ALTs, however, would agree that you’re not likely to get rich running your own language school in Japan.

One former JET purchased his language school from the previous owner, who wanted to return to

his home country. “I was planning to start my own school from scratch, but it was much cheaper to buy a small one...I decided to run my own company because I wanted to take more control over my future.”

He was tired of living from contract to contract, never knowing if he would be offered another year.

As for the difficulties of finding and keeping students, he comments, “Some teachers are VERY good, popular and/or lucky and get a lot of students with no problem, but most schools take at least 3 or 4 years to establish themselves. In the ‘80 & early ‘90s you could easily get students AND get them to pay you a lot of money to just sit and chat. Those gravy days are over! I’ve been at my school a year and a half and still make less than if I got a job working for another person. If you work for someone else you really don’t need to worry much about students joining or leaving. If you run your own school you have to constantly try to get new students and hope you get more than you lose.”

As for the pros and cons of working for himself, he says, “you meet a lot of people from different walks of life. Many of the students you teach actually WANT to learn. If you own your own school, do a great job, and more students join your school, you make more money. As a business owner you have a chance of eventually getting a permanent resident visa. If you ever hope to get a permanent resident visa (and aren’t married) you NEVER will get one being an ALT or an eikaiwa teacher.”

“I used to think it was impossible for a foreigner to own a business in Japan. That is not true. If you are not married to a Japanese citizen it is NOT easy to get a work visa to run your own business here, but it is possible. If you are hoping to make a lot of money running your own school, think again. Again, it is possible, but unlikely. It IS a way to get your foot in the door. Once you have your own school then perhaps you can expand it to do other things. Hire juku (cram school) teachers to teach other subjects. Start an import/export business. Whatever you can think of and have the talent to pull off, try it! Just don’t expect it to be easy.”



## Meet people in your field, and do “informational interviews”

Once you’ve researched your field, go out and meet individuals who are already in the role you may want. Networking events and associations are great to meet people, but it might be overwhelming (and a bit of a waiting game until the next event). More likely, you can create your own network. If it’s the above example of a high school counselor for university bound graduates, contact that university that offers certificate courses and ask them about the field. After building rapport, ask them if you can talk to

a graduate as research before joining the program. Or call high schools directly, ask for the person in that role, and say the same. Tell these people you are interested in their field, have done research, and still want to meet people who can give feedback on the reality of the job and how to get into the field. Ask them how they got started and current trends. Don’t ask for a real interview -yet.

## Once you have built a connection with someone you admire, then ask about openings

After you have create connections with people in your chosen field(s), thank them for meeting you, and tell them you will stay in touch. After a few weeks, tell people those people who most impressed you, “I’ve finished my research. I believe your field is one I may want to go into. Can I ask you about current roles and how to get started?”

## Be persistent and stick with it until you reach your goal

It may not be so easy to just step into the role but stay at it. Maybe you need to work at another job while you take that certificate course. Maybe you need to start as an assistant or do an internship and work part-time at night until you make it. Just stick with it.

*Eric Korpiel is from San Francisco Bay Area and his experiences include study abroad at Waseda University, as a JET in Iwate-ken, and education/recruiting management in Tokyo. Eric has visited 40+ countries but considers Japan his home.*

## Teaching Private

### Is it for you?

Adam Hacker

Working in Japan without the proper paperwork is near to impossible and is certainly not recommended. Teaching at a private English school, or eikaiwa, can be a great, flexible way to remain in Japan while you pursue your life’s goals. Most eikaiwa offer visa sponsorships as long as you commit to certain criteria. For example, you sign on for one year and are able to teach 40 hours per week. You will find everything from small, local companies set up by former JETs to large, corporate learning centers. And as a native speaker of English already living in Japan, you will always be in high demand.

Eikaiwa offer a hugely important service to the Japanese community. Most students you encounter will be under pressure to learn English because their career depends on it. They might be the only person in their office to speak English, or maybe the only one who cannot. English could be an opening door, or one that’s quickly closing. Companies like Uniqlo now hold all of their internal meetings in English, as their founder saw it as pivotal in gaining global success. Imagine the stress if you are not up to par! As more companies make the switch to English, demand for high quality lessons will be even greater.

The working hours are different. Many students will take lessons before or after work, which means most schools offer classes from 7:00am to 11:00pm. Teachers can work in what most know as ‘Flextime’. If you are a morning person, you can wake up early, teach from seven until twelve, leaving your afternoons free to explore. If you want to sleep in, hit the gym, and study Japanese, why not work from 5:00pm until closing? Each school will have their own requirements, but use these schedules to your advantage.

The clientele can also be fun to work with. If you are looking to increase your network of professionals in Japan, an eikaiwa will give you very close contact with a wide range of locals. Many schools offer small group or one-on-one lessons. While teaching part-time in Tokyo, I met company CEOs, fashion photographers, hip-hop stars, and TV actors. No matter where you hope to end up, it never hurts to make new contacts.

There is, however, a bit of caution I should give you. Teaching at an eikaiwa is not the JET Programme. Eikaiwa are for-profit institutions, which means a certain element of sales may work its way into your lesson plans. If you don’t have experience in the service industry or business, it may feel strange to feel involved in such a scheme. But teaching at an eikaiwa really is as much about customer service as it is learning.

Oddly enough, you will also make far less money. Allow with me to share with you my own experiences. My company paid teachers 1,500 Yen per lesson and it took a while – three to four months – to fully book my schedule of classes. You may be at your office from 5:00pm to 11:00pm, but if you only have four lessons, you will only receive 6,000 Yen for your efforts. My average monthly take home was only 200,000 Yen. For me, it was not about building a career off of teaching. I got to live in Shibuya, across from Yoyogi Park, and was able to work on international projects, meeting new people every day.

Like any major decision, I urge you to take a step back, and look at your motivations for staying in Japan. If you want to explore a city, rather than a farming community, then look at some of the bigger eikaiwa. Find out if they offer Japanese lessons or any other support services you may find helpful. Make sure your expectations are not set too high. If you want the freedom to explore Tokyo or Osaka, and can live on a modest budget, do your research and see which company is right for you. If you’d like to know more, do not hesitate to reach out.

*Adam Hacker is the founder of Shoto Consulting Group, working with new business start-ups and projects across the US, Japan, and Singapore. He spent one year living in Shimane as a JET ALT and afterwards, moved to Tokyo. His views here stem from working at a large eikaiwa in Tokyo and consulting on the launch of a small eikaiwa. He currently resides in New York City where he’s producing a TV pilot. You can follow him on Twitter - @hackerinJapan – or contact him at ahacker@shotocon.com.*

## Non-Teaching Roles in the Education Field

Eric Korpiel

JET’s sometimes express an interest in the education field as a next career step, but wish to consider roles other than teaching. Below are a few tips for getting started.

### Know what you want first

Find what specific area(s) of education is most appealing to you. Is it at the pre-school, primary, high school, or university level? Are you intrigued by study abroad, second language learning, special needs, physical education, counseling, or another aspect? What did you find the most rewarding as a student or do you currently find the most interesting?

Nobody can answer these questions for you. The answers are not based on “what’s available” or who is hiring. Until you know exactly what you want, it doesn’t make sense to ask what opportunities are out there.

### Research your particular field well

Once you have an idea of what you want (and it might be more than one idea), begin the task of intense research. For example, if you might want to be a high school counselor who talks to students about their university choices, find out if the field has a standard credential procedure. What certificate is necessary? Where do you get it? Can you start in the position while working on it? If you want to be an entrepreneur selling an educational technology device that helps speed up second-language acquisition, know what products are out there, how they are used, and what consumers think about them.



# THE AJET CONNECT MONTHLY HAIKU CONTEST

**Entries due April 25th, 2012**

Submissions should be original haiku accompanied by:

- 1\_ your name
- 2\_ your mailing address (this will not be published)
- 3\_ your JET number (this will not be published)
- 4\_ written in English or Japanese (if written in Japanese, your haiku must be accompanied by furigana and an English translation)

Contestants may submit one haiku (per category) each month. This contest is for JET participants only. Current National AJET council members are not eligible to enter.

**Send your entries to [contest@ajet.net](mailto:contest@ajet.net)**

Ownership/ Use Rights:

*Haiku authors retain the rights to their haiku. By entering the contest, the authors agree to have their submitted haiku published in the AJET Connect magazine, displayed on the AJET website and posted on AJET Facebook sites. Haiku will be credited to the author named in the entry form.*

**Create a haiku?  
and maybe even a few?  
don't mind if I do...**

**Whether you're an experienced poet,  
or have never written poetry before,  
let inspiration strike and send us  
your haiku! Every month we accept  
haikus from JETs across Japan.  
Readers can vote on the best, and  
the winning entry will be entered  
into the annual contest next spring!**

**Voting is underway now -  
please vote for your choice.**

**Start counting out the  
words and composing!**



## Increasing motivation through Identity

Dr. Olenka Bilash (obilash@ualberta.ca)  
University of Alberta

### JET Question

**I often feel that my high school students only experience a stilted form of English. The reading textbooks are demanding of academic English, which requires student attention. The oral communication books offer students practical language for everyday settings but too few opportunities to use it? How can I offer more authentic exposure to English?**

Before I provide some suggestions let me stress that in Japan and other Asian nations **textbooks play a significant role in education**. They are seen to create a fair ground for students as they progress through their formal education. While Westerners may find it sometimes disconcerting to learn that all students are on the same page of a textbook on the same day throughout a city or region, we must remember that all students write the same national exams and that these high stakes exams are developed in consultation with each approved textbook at every grade level. Furthermore, textbooks in Japan only receive national approval or sanction when they demonstrate that they have covered all content as prescribed in the national curriculum.

Under these conditions many students see English as a hurdle to jump over in order to pursue a future dream rather than as a medium of communication. Thus it can be disappointing sometimes not to sense student enthusiasm for learning English when we know all of the doors that it can open in their futures.

Students who are interested in a topic or phenomenon are said to identify with it. Identity towards something develops and transforms in a balance of five factors: time/exposure, agents of influence, personal choice, symbolic representations and connections, and feelings of belonging. The **feeling of belonging** to a group and connecting to one's self and others develop over time and through regular, frequent and meaningful exposure – from year to year of studying English or encountering people with English abilities. Parents, siblings, social status within society, events, and music or movie

stars are **agents of influence**, as are JETs. Their positive attitude, patience, encouragement, genki-ness, photos, stories and attitudes all contribute to student respect, interest and desire to emulate them. Over a period of nine years studying English, students may encounter three to nine different JETs; for some students you may be the only foreigners they meet during their school years so your potential to leave an impression and influence is high!

In Japan English is a compulsory subject so students do not really **choose** to study English; however, they can be given choices on projects, homework, participating in an English club or speech contest, or going on a group excursion to watch an English play or movie! And these are ways in which JETs' suggestions, organizational insights and quality time with students can exert another positive influence.

The biggest challenge to identity development in the high context culture of Japan relates to the **visible symbolic representations** associated with English. While students who belong to baseball teams are easily identifiable by their uniforms and bags of gear and students who belong to brass band club carry their instruments as symbols of their interest in this hobby, visible symbols of English identity are more difficult to create. English signs, logos, labels abound but signify national and capitalistic associations more than individual identity. From my observations, in Japan identity seems to be related to associations with foreigners. But, after a conversation with a foreigner (as an assignment or a happenstance occurrence), the student cannot display the good feeling for any duration of time! The challenge that English learning faces is the creation of symbols that mark and build visible identity toward English and an explicit community of shared practices. It is thus sometimes difficult to help students develop a strong identity with English; however, here are a few strategies that you might consider.

1. In the absence of a uniform, what objects might be publicly displayed in a positive manner? One teacher, Chiaki Sato, in Obihiro, Hokkaido, collaborated with his JET to create the exchange of 'Sato-money'. The teacher created paper money with his photo on it (could also be done with a photo of an ALT). When a student spoke English spontaneously or when not expected (in or out of class), he gave the student some 'Sato-money'. He also gave the money to his

ALT to reward students whenever they initiated a conversation with him/her in or out of school – in the evenings at a bus stop or on the weekend in a park or shopping mall. Every few months the students could cash in Sato-money for the opportunity to choose a song that the students would sing, or a free pencil with English words on it, thus creating some symbols of meaning for students.

2. Pictures are a great way to attract interest. If you are a photographer you might like to use a puppet-like "character" in your photos and create stories of his or her travels, somewhat like the gnome in the French film **Amélie**. For example, Yukako Asano in Asahikawa took a 20 cm souvenir toy – a moose dressed in a uniform of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police on their high school trip to Kyoto. Not only did students become curious about the moose during the trip, but were delighted to receive the picture story of "his" trip as a review and memory of key events. The teacher, school trip and moose became both agents of influence and symbols of identity.

3. Identity also increases with greater exposure and interest in a topic. For example, the more one likes computer gaming the more excited one becomes when new games are introduced and the more time is spent playing those games. We can increase the time spent with English and hence student identity by introducing youtube clips that might be watched at home, first as short mini homework or club assignments, and later as self-directed activities.

If you think that this might interest your students, consider the following criteria to help you select sites for use by your students :

- Is the language level of the site appropriate for your students ?
- Is the content appropriate for your students' age and interests? Do students have sufficient background knowledge to understand it?
  - Does the content build on what students already know? E.g. it could be interesting for them to learn about how Japan and Japanese ways are seen abroad, as in the BBC video clip of lunches for children: [www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-16069217](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-16069217)

- Is the site easy to navigate or explore? Are the links named in typical (and familiar) web-site language? Are there too many of them?
- Does the content of the site fit with and complement themes or contexts covered in the textbook?
- How much time would it take for students to do an activity on the site? (the shorter the better!)
- Is the site respectful of the values for Japanese youth and the expectations of teacher roles within Japanese society? Would teachers and parents approve of the site?
- Is there an advertisement that precedes or accompanies the site that may require an explanation?

The following types of sites might also assist you in selecting sites for students to visit.

### Pronunciation practice sites

[www.manythings.org/pp/](http://www.manythings.org/pp/)  
[www.manythings.org/e/pronunciation.html](http://www.manythings.org/e/pronunciation.html)  
[www.eslgold.com/pronunciation/sound\\_1.html](http://www.eslgold.com/pronunciation/sound_1.html)  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=CrIfQTOI97k](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CrIfQTOI97k)

### Practice hearing helpful high frequency vocabulary

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=H4v9F73tM4o&feature=related](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H4v9F73tM4o&feature=related)  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=5N3ZX9ymAd0&feature=related](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5N3ZX9ymAd0&feature=related)

### Story-like grammar practice

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=cmYgPHr60VU&feature=related](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cmYgPHr60VU&feature=related)

### Songs

The internet is a rich source of music and lyrics. Use youtube to find songs that fit the themes you are studying in class.

### Games

Many language games sites can be found by searching google using the following key words : English language games level \_\_\_\_ (beginner, intermediate, advanced)

## Videoclips

Storytelling is an engaging way of learning and using a language. Some languages offer video-stories that students (and their families) might enjoy. [www.learner.org/resources/series75.html?pop=yes&pid=395](http://www.learner.org/resources/series75.html?pop=yes&pid=395)

## News

You may also encourage students to explore news stations or newspapers. As a starting point, try the BBC news in photos: [www.bbc.co.uk/news/in\\_pictures/](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/in_pictures/) or the British Broadcasting Channel (BBC) as they offer daily news and analysis in forty languages.

## Advertisements

Do some comparative shopping by finding the prices of common items through on line flyers from familiar stores in your home country or multinational companies. For example, IKEA provides catalogues on line at their site in many countries. English learners can benefit from seeing how tastes and styles vary in different English-speaking countries...or other Western countries. Here are a few to examine:

[www.ikea.com/gb/en/](http://www.ikea.com/gb/en/)  
[www.ikea.com/au/en/](http://www.ikea.com/au/en/)  
[www.ikea.com/us/en/](http://www.ikea.com/us/en/)  
[www.ikea.com/jp/en/](http://www.ikea.com/jp/en/)  
[www.ikea.com/it/](http://www.ikea.com/it/)  
[www.ikea.com/ms/en\\_CA/FSL/index.html](http://www.ikea.com/ms/en_CA/FSL/index.html)  
[www.ikea.com/de/de/](http://www.ikea.com/de/de/)  
[www.ethosksa.com/ikea.com.sa/index.php?lang=ar](http://www.ethosksa.com/ikea.com.sa/index.php?lang=ar)  
[www.ikea.com/ru/](http://www.ikea.com/ru/)

## Authentic broadcasts

A variety of forms or video genres (through youtube) might provide informative, entertaining cultural homework. They especially appeal to students who need a challenge and to conversations relating to cultural similarities and differences. For example,

## Weather report

Which is presented in a very different style in English countries than in Japan)  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=WVdhmzFYuHA](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WVdhmzFYuHA)  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=OdcCMn5sbzM](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OdcCMn5sbzM)

## How to

Cooking  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dPMaid87Es0>

## How to

eg decorate a Christmas tree  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=SHbvBTSGwYM](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SHbvBTSGwYM)

## How to

eg wrap presents  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=duL\\_5LTWF2E&feature=related](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=duL_5LTWF2E&feature=related)

## Sports

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=BlqVvRh\\_cEY&feature=related](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BlqVvRh_cEY&feature=related)

## Human interest

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=tZ46Ot4\\_lLo&feature=related](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tZ46Ot4_lLo&feature=related)

## Translation

Translation sites are multiplying in and between many languages with varying degrees of effectiveness. To help students learn the benefits and risks of using these sites you might ask them to write a text in Japanese and enter it for translation. You could then discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the accuracy and clarity of the on line translation.

## Making appropriate tasks

Now that you have found some sites that you find interesting, it is time to plan the tasks that students will complete while exploring the site. It may be a good idea to start with short tasks to encourage curiosity and success and then expand into longer and more open ended tasks. Perhaps the following will spark some ideas for you:

1. Ask students to go to a site and listen-watch it for 1-2 minutes. (e.g. a pronunciation site, a short song or youtube clip)
2. You could provide students with a list of words and ask them to listen for them. They might also use the context to guess the meaning of (some of) the words.
3. Provide introductory guiding questions to help students explore some of the keys links on a website and learn how to navigate it in English. E.g. – Near the bottom right hand side of the article, you should see a speaker icon with the title "Listen and read" beside it. Click on the icon: Do you hear the article being read aloud?
4. Direct students to a specified website with photos and ask them to describe what they see. You might even ask them to select a favourite photo to describe in class. Students who also did this homework will know which photo was described; others who did not, may be encour-

aged to do so based on the brief sharing in class.

5. Referring to an English newspaper site (from your country, city or town) ask students to report on sports scores, team names or sport interests. This might be of special value with the 2012 London summer Olympic game results. Remember that the news changes daily so students should also report the date of their search. And you may have to check for news daily to confirm the accuracy of the homework.

With the content of textbooks in Japan being prescribed nationally and forming a critical part of national examinations, JETs can best inject more authenticity into English classes or English Clubs by being aware of the thematic and grammatical content students are studying and using it to select authentic resources and accompanying tasks for students. The investment of your time searching for such sites can be rewarded both by the increase in student interest and by exchanging tried and true urls based on specific grades (and even text books) with other JETs.

Take a picture of a friend with their face squished against glass.  
Assign to phone contact.  
IT'LL LOOK LIKE THEY'RE TRAPPED INSIDE YOUR PHONE.





# FASHION & BEAUTY

image via shutterstock.com

I've just come back from a long weekend in Kyoto - famously one of the most rewarding places in Japan for fashion and beauty aficionados. I spent the majority of my time taking city buses around various shrines and temples, browsing the tiny stores which sell jeweled hair slides, powdered aburatori-gami and wooden combs, and wandering through the historical alleyways of Pontocho and Gion. Over the course of my stay, I accidentally managed to run into about six geisha and their respective assistants - something I really wasn't expecting to happen.

For this month's issue of AJET Connect, I've chosen to write about the excellent Yojiya, seeing as I bought a selection of their products. Undeniably, they're an iconic Kyoto brand. Whenever I was downtown, I could always see a vast number of young women and girls carrying the pink paper bags printed with the distinctive Yojiya logo. Those who are interested in exploring Kyoto's mine of beauty resources may also want to try chidoriya, another renowned cosmetics company which is easy to source outside its home city and appears to have had a significant amount of international coverage (good for recommendations and ingredient lists). Incidentally, if you've ever wanted to try some of those facial treatments which are (in)famously made out of nightingale droppings, chidoriya is your chance. You'll be pleased to hear that these elixirs have been entirely purged of bacteria and that the traditional formula has been used by Japanese beauty queens and entertainers for years. They're also extremely effective on the skin, so it's worth pushing any potential (and unfounded) squeamishness to one side for the brightening benefits they'll bring you.

As you can tell, I've become somewhat preoccupied with skin care as we draw out of winter and into the fresh delicacy of spring. Heading down to Kyoto reminded me just how vital good maintenance is: it's warmer there than it is in Yamanashi, and in the winter, it's easy to let beauty routines slide (frozen pipes, anyone?). If you haven't begun to do so already, it's definitely time to start thinking about adding to your regime. On White Day, I attended an Arsoa skin clinic and was given a sample of their Queen Silver soap. Queen Silver (a fabulously diva-ish title) is a joy to use and leaves your face feeling truly nourished and cleansed: if you get the chance, snap up a bar. Begin protecting and priming your face in preparation for the strong sun we'll get later. Your skin will ultimately thank you for it.

*Annabella Massey is a first year UK ALT based in Yamanashi Prefecture.*



**Yojiya**  
cosmetics from Kyoto

I thought I'd take the opportunity this month to write about Yojiya, seeing as I've spent far too much recent time in their Gion branch wanting essentially everything. Founded in 1904, Yojiya is an established Kyoto makeup brand, particularly famous for their exquisite aburatorigami (oil blotting paper) made from beaten washi and flecks of gold leaf. Aburatorigami has been used faithfully by geisha and kabuki actors for centuries: the delicate paper effectively removes excess oil and shine from the face without disturbing the layer of makeup underneath. As my skin doesn't necessarily need this (though in retrospect, some aburatorigami may become indispensable in the height of the Yamanashi summer), there wasn't much point in buying one of these booklets (alas), as undeniably gorgeous as they are.

However, the Yojiya facial soap sheet packets come wrapped in a similar pretty envelope packaging (yes, I'm easily beguiled), can be used by everyone and are a must-have for skin-conscious travelers. Simply take one of the thin sheets of 'paper' out, wet in your hands and work it all into lather. This soap dissolves easily, is gentle enough for the face and saves carrying large bottles of cleanser round when you're exploring the nooks of Japan.

What else did I buy? Lots of presents to post back to the UK for friends, including rounds of yuzu soap, wrapped in flecked paper, and rice bran pouches



(a cleansing powder in a tiny cotton bag which can then be used as a face and body wash). A slightly pricey but highly potent yuzu lip balm. Oh, and dainty little long-stemmed mirrors with a gold leaf finish. These are irresistible: they come stamped with the Yojiya logo and are accompanied by their own slip bags so they won't get damaged in your purse. There's more I might go back for when I'm down again during the cherry blossom season: hydrating konyakku sponges (on a side note, these are seriously worth buying, whatever brand), gauzy handkerchiefs, brushes, and a huge range of nourishing creams and cosmetics.

Yojiya also have a number of cafes dotted around Kyoto. Try their signature green tea cappuccino and look out for their logo drawn into the foam. The majority of Yojiya stores are clustered in Kyoto, but if you didn't manage to make it there at any point during your time in Japan, you'll also find branches at Narita and Haneda airports.



# Life After the B.O.E.

## The Book



### Life After the B.O.E. is now a book!

With new art work, new comics, and some really old comics, too, Life After the B.O.E. the Book has everything you enjoyed about the webcomic plus more!

Life After the B.O.E. the Book is the perfect Holidays gift for the JET or JET alumnus in your life.

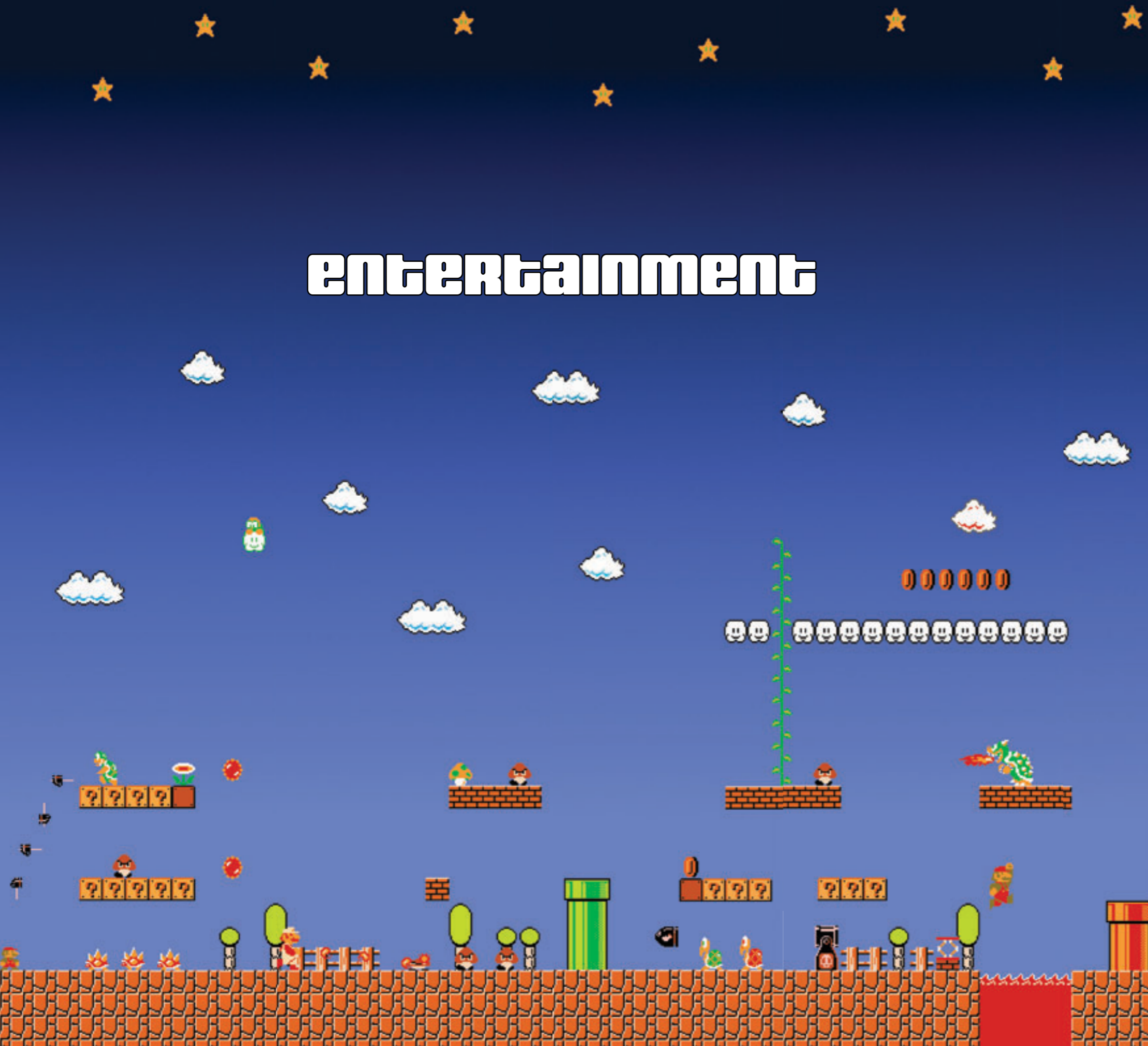
Available now at [Amazon.com](http://Amazon.com) and [CreateSpace](http://CreateSpace.com)!

ISBN-13: 978-1466340725

**David Namisato**



# entertainment



With the snow melting and the cherry blossom front racing up the country, spring has most definitely sprung. This also means that there is a new generation of ichinenseis in the classrooms and corridors of our schools and new opportunities to share something of our own cultures.

As a Brit, it's always intriguing to hear what reference points my students and colleagues alike have about my country. One elementary school student was shocked to realise that the Union Jack on her jumper was the national flag of my country. I thought it best not to tell her what the spiky green leaf that was placed above the flag meant, lest her impression be that her sensei was from the land of sensi.

However, it's not just the students that can be surprised by cross-cultural information exchange. Whilst discussing musical tastes, it was quite a revelation to hear that one of my conservative colleagues was a big fan of the Anglo-anarchist punk band the Sex Pistols. Another time, a student told me that I looked like a 'jeweller', which somewhat confused my bling-less self until much poking at my chin and some miming revealed to me that they meant the actor 'Jude Law'.

Whilst the Beatles remain ubiquitous in Japan amongst all generations, the new era of British music has struggled to compete with domestic acts. Londoner Adele may have conquered most of the world with her albums '19' and '21', but her successes over here were much more modest by comparison. Likewise, dubstep, grime and all of the other urban musical genres to emerge from the UK in recent years are as popular in Japan as insulation and central heating.

This month, we have part two of our guide to J-Pop to arm you with information about the biggest Japanese music artists to impress your students with. However, it might also be worth introducing a little of our own country's musical styling's into the classroom to give students an insight into an alternative world that they might not otherwise be exposed to. Probably best to draw the line at the Sex Pistols though...

*Chris Barstow is a first year ALT in Yamagata Prefecture. He looks as much like Jude Law as Sid Vicious does.*



## Your guide to Japanese pop culture

### Music - Part 2

Amanda Horton

Ok, we covered the cheesy boy-band side of J-pop pretty well in the last issue. Hopefully, your extraordinary display of Johnny's trivia managed to win over the female students, prompting them to giggle a lot whilst choruses of "すごい" chased you down the corridor. This time I'm going to branch away from Johnny's and do a quick run through of other influential pop artists in Japan.



### Utada Hikaru (宇多田ヒカル)

#### Information

One singer practically everybody knows is Utada Hikaru, and for good reason. She is amazingly talented and is one of the most influential singers in the world. Born in New York, Utada is fluent in both English and Japanese, and frequently sings in both. She is well-known to gamers for the Kingdom Hearts theme songs, to drama lovers for "Flavour of Life" from Hana Yori Dango 2, and to US clubbers for "Devil Inside". An accomplished musician and composer, she moved to Japan in 1997 and her debut album, *First Love*, is the highest selling album in Japan's history. Her style is always changing based on her mood and influences at the time, so it's hard to pin down, but therein lies her appeal (well, that and her awesome voice, and great melodies, and ... I digress). The fluidity of her music means that she'll never become boring to listen to, but it does mean she takes a lot of time over each album. Currently, she is on hiatus to travel, do volunteer work, and write new material.

#### Amanda's Top Songs

English – "Simple and Clean"  
Japanese – "Flavour of Life"



### Masaharu Fukuyama (福山 雅治)

#### Aka

*Masha, Masha-nii, Fuku-chan.*

#### Information

The bestselling male artist in Japan, his low, deep voice is very distinctive. He steadily gained popularity after his debut in 1990 and has since become absolutely huge, musically speaking. Everyone knows who he is. He is also a talented musician and composes his own songs. He doesn't confine himself to genre, which is why he is so successful. His beautiful, heart-felt lyrics deserve most of the credit though, as when he sings, he really lays bare his soul. In fact it is his stunning lyrics that really warm me to Masha and I (and many others) think he is a genius in this regard. An award-winning actor as well, he has appeared in numerous films and TV shows. In fact, he is in such high demand that it took NHK 3 attempts and 6 months to convince him to play the protagonist in *Ryomaden*.

#### Amanda's Top Songs

"Koufukuron" (幸福論) – You don't need to understand Japanese to smile at this up-beat track. A great pick-me-up.



## AKB48

### Who are they?

*I'm not even going to bother with a list.*

### Information

AKB48 and all their spin-offs are EVERYWHERE! They are simply impossible to avoid - believe me, I've tried! You are almost guaranteed to find at least 5 huge fans in your class (unless you teach at an all-boys school, where it will be more like 3). They are the world's largest pop group, with a staggering 57 members at the moment, all neatly divided into identical little teams of 11. They perform daily in "Otaku's Heaven" (aka Akihabara/Akiba, Tokyo), though you need to win a lottery to get tickets. Frankly, I'm not a fan, but I could hardly write a guide to J-pop without including one of the top selling bands, could I? They are very poppy at first glance, with the scantily clad young girls prancing around for their teenage fan base. Many of AKB48's songs have darker undertones, though, and many of their lyrics are also inspirational, talking about finding courage in dark times. "So why aren't you a fan?" you ask? Well basically, every

song sounds the same. Really. Take out the lyrics and you'd be hard pressed to identify them. To be fair, they do have some good songs, hidden amongst the quagmire of generic trash. I think AKB48's biggest problem is their size; it's hard to develop a connection with any of the girls because it's difficult to even remember their names. Also, their managers are hard pressed to come up with original material for every team and still maintain a constant stream of releases, so 9 out of 10 times the song is mediocre at best. They seem more like a clique than a band, with fans voting in new members. In addition, shocking revelations keep them in the gossip columns, such as the fact that "Ideal" AKB48 member, Eguchi Aimi, was actually an artificial human created from the appearance of the other members. Still, they are irritatingly catchy, and incredibly successful, so I guess they're doing something right...

### Amanda's top song

"Aitakatta" (会いたかった) – Mostly because of karaoke nights, but it is their most recognised song.



## Ayumi Hamasaki (浜崎 あゆみ)

### Aka

*Ayu, The Empress of Pop*

### Information

You can't know J-pop without knowing Ayu. She is one of the biggest and most influential singers in Asia, as well as the most successful solo singer in Japan; think Madonna of the East. With the exception of last year, she has had a single topping the charts every year since 1999. Her voice is somewhat screechy (not really easy to listen to whilst relaxing in a bath), and she lacks the allure of other female artists. However, she writes all her own lyrics, which is really where her appeal lies, as it gives her music an emotional power that resonates whether you understand them or not. She is also constantly changing, which I see as a good thing as it makes every album refreshing to listen to, but might not appeal to some. Ayu is one of those who sets trends instead of following them, making her daring and a little over-the-top, but not in an extreme Lady Gaga kind of way.

Amanda's top song: Hard to choose, but I think "Moments", as it was the first song I heard.



## Kumi Koda (倅田 来未)

### Aka

*The Britney Spears of Japan.*

### Information

Born into a musical family, she admits that her school life was unhappy due to bullying, and thus, she developed an inferiority complex. When she debuted in 2000, she had a quiet, reserved and conservative image. By 2003, however, she had become more provocative and became known as a fashion trendsetter, starting trends such as ero-kawaii and ero-kakkoii. Her popularity continued to grow despite the controversy of her style, and she was the best-selling artist of 2006. Her style is mainly R&B, but she ranges into pop, hip-hop, dance, and electropop, so there is something for everyone (except rock fans, but J-Rock is a whole different kettle of fish.) Her songs often include taboo themes and sexuality and she is a strong advocate for freedom of expression and love. She married Kenji03 from the Rock group BACK-ON in December after announcing she was pregnant.

### Amanda's Top Song

"Real emotion/ 1000 no Kotoba" (Real Emotion/1000の言葉) – mainly because it was how I discovered Koda in Final Fantasy X-2





**Exile**

**Who are they?**

While not as bad as AKB48, they still have 14 members. The key ones are:

- Hiro – The leader*
- Atsushi – Main vocalist*
- Takahiro – Main vocalist*
- Nesmith – Performer*
- Shokichi – Performer*

**Information**

Starting off as J-Soul Brothers, they became Exile in 2001. The leader, Hiro, went to school with the

president of their label, proving that it's who you know that counts. Atsushi is greatly influenced by R&B, especially the likes of Boyz II Men, and it shows in his style. Due to this, their songs tend to vary between pop and R&B, with a bit of dance and house thrown in. In general, their earlier work is R&B and their later stuff is pop. However, I don't think they could ever transform into a true cheesy J-pop band, which is probably what makes them so good.

**Amanda's top song**

"Rising Sun"



**Miliyah Kato (加藤 ミリヤ)**

**Information**

Miliyah has a growing fan base within Japan, but has yet to really have an impact beyond its borders. A favourite with my students, she is heavily influenced by American hip-hop. Ironically, the only album on which she did not write most of the songs is the one which propelled her career forward, (Tokyo Star). Her music is a pop/hip hop hybrid, with some sad power ballads (including some which are downright depressing, but I like to embrace my emo side on occasion). She has also done a few duets with Shota Shimizu (another student favourite). Her songs are usually very catchy and frequently use sampling (especially in her earlier work). She often likes to use English phrases in her songs, and she appeals to girls as she is very bonnie, but not so staggeringly beautiful that she seems unattainable. Frequently the wrong lighting - and the wrong outfit - has shown her looking far from her best, but I love that as it makes her seem very real as a person. She is very talented as a singer and, despite the western feel to her music; she always includes at least one song that sounds distinctively Japanese.

**Amanda's Top Song**

"Lalala"

So there you have it, a quick rundown of some of the biggest names in Japan. Before you all start calling me a disgrace because I missed your favourite band, or worse, like a different song than you, please bear in mind that this is in no way a complete guide. I could probably write a book on J-pop, but it would probably be a very dull read. This isn't supposed to turn you into a J-pop otaku; it's supposed to give you a starting point. If you want to know more, ask your students. They are the best sources you will ever find, far better than me, as I actually aspire to have a life beyond fantasizing that MatsuJun (remember him from Arashi in Part 1?) will fall madly in love with me.

Where was I? Oh yeah, I guarantee\* this information will make you the coolest teacher in the school, so go forth and listen to the music.

\*There are no guarantees in life. Get over it.



**THE LEGEND SAYS THAT ONCE**

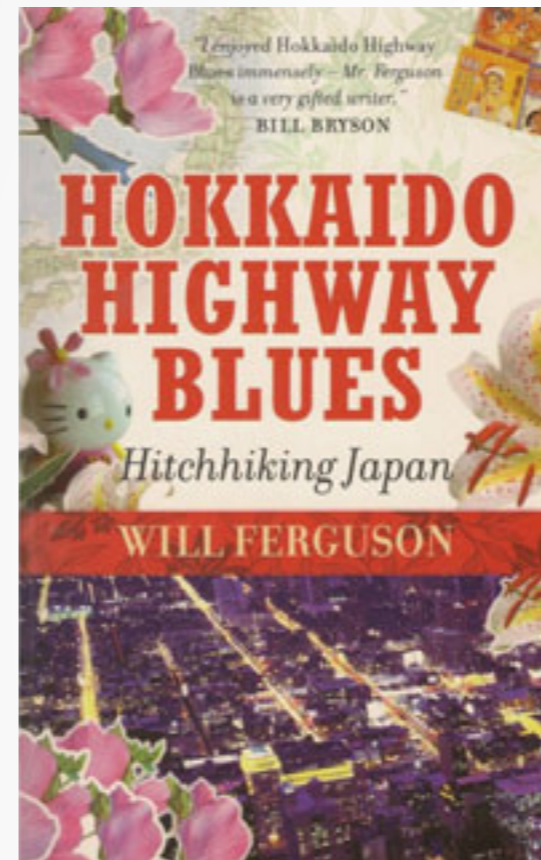


**THERE WERE MUSIC VIDEOS ON  
THIS CHANNEL**

**TELL US MORE**



**GRANDPA**



**Book Review**

**Hokkaido Highway Blues**

Chris Barstow

There are numerous travel books that are gushing love letters to Japan, waxing lyrical about the fascinating temples, dazzling landscapes and mysterious geishas. By contrast, Hokkaido Highway Blues reads more like a 'Dear John' letter as the author recounts the tale of his quirky quest through Japan in a rather more world-weary and cynical manner.

Whilst inebriated on cheap sake one night, Will Ferguson made a drunken bet to hitchhike the complete length of Japan solo. Recalling his journey from Cape Sata in Kyushu through Shikoku and Honshu up to the northern tip of Cape Soya in Hokkaido, Ferguson's travelogue wittily details the ups and downs of life on the road as he seeks to chase the spring cherry blossom front on its journey north.

Having spent several years in Japan prior to undertaking his journey, Canadian Ferguson has most definitely left the "Stage One" honeymoon period behind and has developed a love/hate relationship with his adopted homeland. His fascination with Japanese traditions is matched by his incomprehension of certain customs, whilst his appreciation of acts of kindness by strangers is balanced by his irritation towards the many gaijin-baiters that he meets.

Whilst his chosen method of transport isn't strictly legal in Japan, he surprisingly finds no shortage of good Samaritans who are willing to carry him from town to town. From the J-Pop loving pair of friends dreaming of a life overseas to the drunken truck drivers that he has to hide from on a ferry, Hokkaido Highway Blues details dozens of entertaining encounters with locals, who are often surprisingly keen to express intimate details of their lives to him. Amongst the most memorable is a zoology professor obsessed with monkeys who takes Ferguson on an entertaining detour to an island and exposes his latent fear of nature.

Whilst he is one of the driest raconteurs that you are likely to come across, Ferguson's tale is also occasionally touching. One quick encounter in Kanazawa turns into a meet-the-parents dinner invitation which then evolves into a night of an elderly man's drunken reminiscences about being prisoner of war, culminating in an emotional farewell that presents a softer side to the wise-cracking author.

There is also a reminder that amongst the beautiful spots, Japan also has its fair share of mundane urban glumness. Tales of afternoons spent trying in vain to thumb lifts in grey, rainy, featureless conurbations offer a counterpoint to the usual guide-book accounts of Japan's stunning natural features. In addition, Ferguson also tells of occasional barbed and ill-informed remarks from locals towards him, which contradict the usual stereotypes of Japanese politeness and hospitality.

Ferguson's book also exposes his personal foibles as he honestly recounts his bouts of loneliness and isolation during his quest. However, his humorous and self-deprecating writing style remains engaging and absorbing throughout. There are plenty of laugh-out-loud moments, but also a number of occasions where most JETs will find themselves nodding along in empathy at the various social faux pas and awkward encounters that the author describes.

With Ferguson's journey taking him along the roads less travelled, and most likely through a town or village near you, Hokkaido Highway Blues makes essential reading for any JET who is looking for an alternative Japanese travelogue.

Hokkaido Highway Blues, also published under the name Hitching Rides With Buddha, is available from Soho Press and Canongate U.S..



# THE ART OF MANLINESS

uncovering the lost art of being a man.

The Art of Manliness site is authored by husband and wife team, Brett and Kate McKay. It features articles on helping men be better husbands, better fathers, and better men. In their search to uncover the lost art of manliness, they look to the past to find examples of manliness in action. They analyze the lives of great men who knew what it meant to “man up” and hopefully learn from them. And they talk about the skills, manners, and principles that every man should know. Since beginning in January 2008, The Art of Manliness has already gained 100,000+ subscribers and continues to grow each week.

## **WHY THE ART OF MANLINESS?**

The idea for the Art of Manliness came about as Brett was standing in a Borders bookstore looking at the men’s magazines section. It seemed that the content in these magazines were continually going downhill, with more and more articles about sex and how to get six pack abs. Was this all there was to being a man?

And as he looked around at the men his age, it seemed that many were shirking responsibility and refusing to grow up. They had lost the confidence, focus, skills, and virtues that men of the past had embodied and were a little lost. The feminism movement did some great things, but it also made men confused about their role and no longer proud of the virtues of manliness. This, coupled with the fact that many men were raised without the influence of a good father, has left a generation adrift as to what it means to be an honorable, well-rounded man.

Talking about honorable manliness was to Brett a niche seemingly not covered on the web or elsewhere, so he decided to start The Art of Manliness to talk about all things manly- both the serious and the fun, but with the ultimate eye toward encouraging readers to be better husbands, fathers, brothers, men.

He doesn’t claim to have all the answers, nor claim that he’s an expert on all things manly. he started this blog not because he had all the answers to being a man, but because he wanted to explore the questions with other men.

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## 5 Steps to Upgrading Your Business Casual Clothing

Antonio via artofmanliness.com

Dressing for work used to be simple. Men typically donned a full suit and there were rules to dressing that were passed on from father to son. These dressing guidelines were reinforced by society and informative publications that educated men on dressing well.

Then things began to change—hats disappeared, jackets were left at home, and men’s magazines started focusing on fleeting fashion and designer clothing. Casual Fridays turned into casual weeks and somewhere along the way men forgot how to dress properly.

Let me be clear: You do not have to wear a three-piece suit to look great and conduct business; in fact, if you worked at a company like Patagonia or Google, this type of clothing could work against you. And really no particular set of clothing does justice to what it truly means to dress sharp. Dressing sharp goes beyond any article of clothing. Dressing sharp is about taking pride in what you wear and controlling what your image says to those with whom you’ve never spoken.

Light, pleated khakis a size too big paired with a baggy dress or polo shirt...walk into any office today and you’ll see men dressed in this new uniform of business casual. But what you wear to the office doesn’t have to be boring, frumpy, and Dilbert-esque.

This article outlines five guidelines that can take your business casual look from bland and unimaginative corporate-drone to smart and sharp go-getter. Whether you are managing a diner or selling commercial space in a retail center—you want others to view you as competent and trustworthy. And although the right clothing doesn’t guarantee you or your potential clients anything—it does set a good tone that you can build off of.



### Step 1 Get the Right Fit

Many outfits that do not look “sharp” are actually fine in terms of color and style. The problem is often fit. It’s the most overlooked way to improve a man’s wardrobe—and often the cheapest.

The point to understand about proper clothing fit is that your clothing should have a defined shape as it drapes over your body. Even if you’re a bigger guy, you want clothes that don’t billow and sag. It is a common misconception that loose clothing makes a large man look better or provides a higher degree of comfort. In fact, the opposite is true. Clothing that is too loose is made to fit a different body type and will restrict movement.

#### Clothing Length

Proper clothing length is the starting point of a good fit. Trousers should fall just far enough to “break” on your shoes: the cuff should rest slightly on the top of the shoe but not bundle up with excess cloth there. Jeans can be worn slightly longer as the bunching on a narrower cut spreads out better over the leg—but don’t be afraid to have them shortened and ask before purchasing if this is a service the store provides for free.

The waistband should rest comfortably right above your hips, around the natural waist (the narrowest point on your torso, usually). Jeans will fit lower at the trouser waist, as will many modern cut chinos and dress slacks. The lower cut is easy to pull off when your waist is smaller than your chest—once the reverse is true you need to seriously consider moving away from low-cut trousers as they will never stay up properly. Start thinking suspenders—they are a lot more practical and stylish than pulling up your pants every few minutes.

Shirt sleeves should extend far enough to cover your wrist bone when standing with your arms hanging down. Take a look at where the sleeve joins the shoulder too—that seam should fall neatly on the end of your body’s shoulder, not hanging down on your bicep. Jacket sleeves, if you wear one, should start in the same place and be just a touch shorter, so that a half-inch or so of shirt sleeve is visible beyond the cuff. Shirt length should be enough that you can tuck at least 2 inches in all around—less than that and your shirt will come un-tucked every time you stretch to grab something.

#### Clothing Tightness

If the length of your clothing is sufficient, the next step is to ensure the clothing fits well circumference-wise or at least close enough so that a tailor can adjust it. A man’s clothing should fit close to the body with just enough slack to let you move comfortably.

Understand that the vast majority of men in the United States are accustomed to wearing their clothing too large, so when they

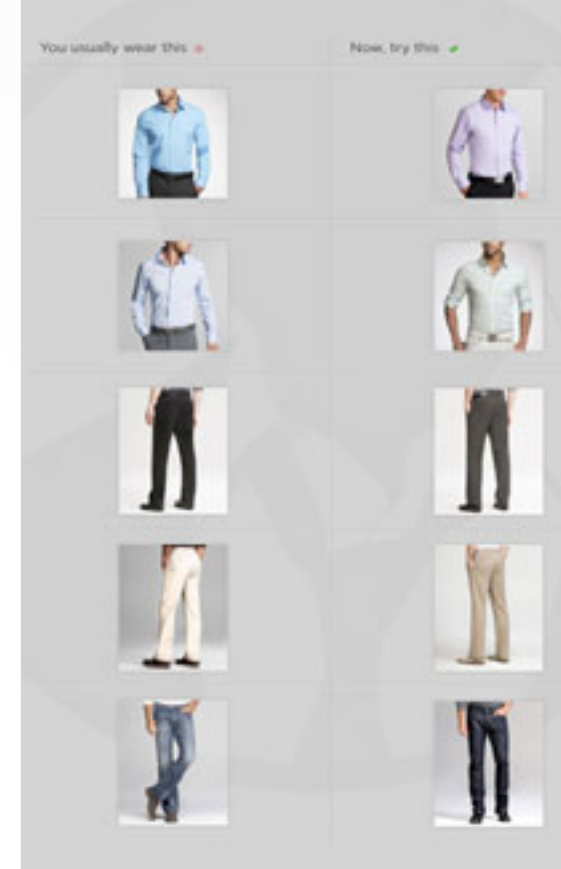
wear clothing that actually fits, it may initially feel restrictive. Proceed towards closer fitting clothing with caution and ask a trusted friend to give you straight advice and feedback. You’ll find that you can adjust to the new fit and improved appearance quickly.

Pay special attention to the “rise” in the trousers—the distance between the waistband and the crotch seam. If the seam that joins the legs is hanging a few inches below your actual crotch, you’re going to get a saggy look that translates straight to your thighs and your bottom.

When buying a shirt, make sure it fits you in the shoulders—this isn’t something you want to adjust, as the needed tailoring will often cost more than the shirt itself. Next look at the fabric in the torso—most of us will find that if the neck and sleeve length are right, the torso looks like a balloon. The easiest way to avoid swimming in fabric is to buy either a slim cut dress shirt or go custom. Another option, if the problem isn’t too bad (3 inches or less) is to have a seamstress dart the dress shirt—basically tucking in the fabric semi-permanently with stitching.

#### Adjusting Your Clothing

It’s nearly impossible to find off-the-rack menswear that fits perfectly. Take the time to find a tailor that you like and get to know him or her. Small adjustments to clothing (shortening sleeves, taking the waist of a shirt in some, etc.) are fairly inexpensive and will make all the difference in how you look. Getting rid of eye-grabbing extra fabric and saggy clothing is absolutely the best way a man can update his business casual style.



### Step 2 Improve Your Color Scheme

The “corporate drone” look is easy to spot: khaki trousers and a white or blue dress shirt. This combination is safe because it’s so common. However if you’re reading this, you’re likely not interested in looking like everyone else. So let’s discuss how small changes in color and pattern can separate you from the “Dilberts” at your office.

#### Shirt Colors

Start with the dress shirts. White and various shades of blue are the safe standbys we see 95% of men wear. Instead of these, try pastel colors in lavender, yellow, ecru, tan, or pink. These light canvases are easy to match with a wide variety of trousers, ties, and jackets and instantly set you apart in a crowd. But why stop there? Change the solid single-color look for a patterned shirt—stripes are fine for any business casual environment and checks are acceptable in many situations outside of conservative corporations, finance, and the legal profession.

### Trouser Color

Only light khakis in your wardrobe? Try a deeper brown, olive, or even summer white cotton. Or switch it up with a charcoal gray wool for a dressier look—lightweight wool for the warmer months and flannel in the fall and winter. For the more adventurous man, patterned trousers in a check or small pattern will add a punch of interest to a solid white or blue shirt.

Dark jeans—in a deep, un-faded indigo—may be acceptable in some workplaces, and if they are, they're a great addition to your wardrobe as they match almost anything. Keep your denim dark, free of distress, and well-fitted.

### Leather Accents

Your day-to-day office wear shouldn't be restricted to plain black dress shoes and a black belt. Consider a light, buttery brown pair of slip-ons to wear with lighter trousers, and reddish oxblood leather bluchers to wear with your charcoal grey flannel trousers.



### Step 3 Avoid Cheap Looking Clothing

Notice I'm not saying to avoid inexpensive clothing—there are many bargains to be had out there. But you want to avoid cheap clothing—clothing that contains poor quality fabrics that are uncomfortable, function

badly, and make you look like a time traveler from 1973.

### Fabric and Texture

A glance at the composition of the clothing is a good starting point. Anything that has a substantial amount of artificial fibers like polyester or rayon—more than 15% or so—is going to develop a slick, plastic-looking sheen over time. It's also a good sign that the manufacturer was cutting corners. A bit of man-made fiber in the blend, done properly, can strengthen a garment and help with wrinkle and stain-resistance. Large percentages—over 40%—point toward cost-saving measures.

Know the basic “feel” of the fabric that you're looking for. Wool garments can range from the coarse, hairy texture of rough tweed to a very smooth worsted finish or a soft, fluffy flannel. Cotton varies depending on thickness and the cotton used—it can be very thin and flimsy-feeling or quite heavy. Varying the textures of your fabrics can help keep your outfits unique from day to day. And, of course, you'll want thicker, coarser clothing for winter and very light, smooth fabric for summer clothes.

If you can, try the clothing on and see how it “drapes”—how the fabric hangs and moves where it isn't fitted around your body. Walk back and forth in front of a mirror and watch the trouser cuffs, or swing your arms around some to see how the shirt sleeves move. A very billowy, blousy fabric that shifts around at every movement is the sign of a thin, cheaply-made cloth. These tear easily, look saggy, and can even be so see-through that your undershirt will be visible in the right lighting.

### Manufacturing Details

Buttons and other fasteners are worth a quick look as well. If the button is plastic, and stitched on so loosely you can wiggle it up and down in the store, you're not buying a very good piece of clothing. Look at the stitching—is it a single line with 12+ stitches per inch or is it double stitched loosely at 8? Worse is a single loose stitch in areas that will be put under stress—expect these garments to maybe make it through one washing. You want business casual clothing that looks better 6 months after you've bought it—this gives you time to really become comfortable and confident in it.

It's worth taking this opportunity to draw your attention to shirt collars. The button-down collar is a solid, no-hassle choice, although a more sophisticated choice is the hidden button down collar or medium spread with removable collar stays. Both of these provide a more crisply-defined shape and look great without a necktie.

French cuffs are normally reserved for more formal occasions—I do have a friend though who uses them on all his shirts—without a tie—as his signature style. They show an attention to quality as the double cuff requires more fabric and is a feature not generally found on cheap shirts.



### Step 4 Learn to Layer Your Clothing

Layering your clothing is a learned skill. It requires an ability to combine colors, patterns, and fabric textures. The key to doing this right is to build an interchangeable men's wardrobe—you want to select core clothing pieces that work with each other in various combinations.

### Jackets

A jacket is the ultimate flexible outer layer as it can be dressy or casual, and even occasionally rumpled depending on the fabric and build. The classic men's sport coat gives you

the flattering shape of a suit (tucked at the waist, broad at the shoulders) without the formality. Unstructured and unlined jackets give you a more refined look without trapping in the heat.

The key to a good jacket is proper fit and timeless style. Avoid anything with a very specialized design or that is too fashion forward—a brightly-colored blazer in your alma mater's colors is great at alumni events, but it's going to stand out too much at work. Stick to earth tones or dark colors for business casual jackets.

Having a jacket lets you dress up or down very quickly when needed. You can add a tie and give your shoes a quick rub with your handkerchief to be ready for an important meeting on short notice, or you can leave the jacket on a chair and roll your sleeves up for an informal look. It's not a bad idea to have a neat, conservatively-styled jacket hanging in a closet at work. Finally, remember that a jacket does not always require a collared dress shirt. You can wear the same jacket over a sweater or even a dark-colored T-shirt.

### Sweaters

Properly selected sweaters will make the cold infinitely easier to dress for and are one of the most versatile layering assets in a business casual wardrobe. A man should seek out a mix of materials, thicknesses, and styles to make his sweater collection versatile. A thin cashmere crew-neck in a plain dark color is a reliable staple that works on its own or under jackets. Something thicker with a corded pattern makes for a comfortable layer of warmth in the coldest weather, and a V-neck in thin wool can be worn in both the spring and fall.

Sweaters can be worn over dress shirts (with or without a tie), over sport shirts and polos, under jackets, or on top of a comfortable long-sleeved T-shirt. If you're wearing the sweater with a collared shirt, you'll need a V-neck cut to keep from forcing the collar beneath your chin unnaturally.

### Vests

When it's too hot to wear a jacket, but you want to be a bit more dressed up than just a dress shirt and trousers, wearing a lightweight men's vest is a perfect compromise. The advantage of a vest is that it helps create a more streamlined look from a man's shoes to his head by eliminating the contrast point at the buckle (usually between a light shirt and dark trouser). Vests also allow extreme freedom of movement, and are a favorite of men who need to dress sharp while working at a quick pace.



## Step 5

### Pay Attention to the Details

An otherwise perfect business casual outfit can be ruined by being careless when it comes to the details. Keep your accessories simple and clean, and never underestimate the effect—both positive and negative—the small details can have on an otherwise strong personal presentation.

### Shoes

> The right shoe for the right outfit is key. A pair of balmoral oxfords are great for formal occasions, but look to bluchers, slip-ons, and boots for a business casual wardrobe.

> Know your men's footwear options—lace-ups are only one option, as depending on your situation you may find tassel loafers or Italian moccasins are an easy way to change the look of the same old dress shirt and pants. Leather slip-on double monkstraps are not only comfortable but dressy enough to wear with a light colored suit—they are a European classic few men ever discover.

> Black and dark brown are your classic shoe colors—they are flexible and relatively easy to match. If you're dressing up your day-to-day business casual look, however, look to add lighter browns, reddish oxbloods, and suede/white bucks/two-tone shoes. Leather tooling or "broguing" is perfect for business casual footwear.

•> Have enough pairs of shoes that you can let each one rest a few days between wears. This keeps the leather strong and supple by giving it time to expel excess moisture.

> Dust your shoes off when you remove them for the day. Smooth leather will need reasonably regular polishing, and an occasional conditioning with leather creams or oils is good for any leather product. Make sure you use a cream appropriate to the specific type of leather, however, and test it discreetly on the underside of the tongue or uppers to make sure it won't alter the coloring!

### Neckties and Pocket Squares

> In a business casual environment, neckties and pocket squares should be used to add variety, not uniformity, to your look.

> Consider tie materials beyond silk; woven ties and knit wools have a heavier presence and send a more relaxed signal. Always avoid

neckties made from synthetic materials. They tend to look artificially slick and shiny and don't age well.

> Wear a knot style that works with your collar. Wider collar spreads will need a thicker knot (the Windsor adds a good bit of bulk) while narrower collars do best with a smaller knot like the four-in-hand. Ensure you create a "dimple" just below the knot.

> Consider a bow-tie if you're confident; they more often than not draw smiles and positive feelings from people.

> Learn to properly match your tie with your dress shirt—this alone will prevent you from being the subject of more than a few office jokes.

> Pocket squares can be worn anytime you wear a jacket with a breast pocket—I love to wear them when I am not wearing a necktie as it adds a splash of color and signals that I have the confidence to dress as I please.

### Clothing Maintenance

> Dirty, wrinkled, or stained clothing should never be worn in a business casual environment. Period. Dress shirts, suits, jackets and trousers should all be hung up and make sure wool jackets hang on wide suit hangers, not on thin wire ones.

> Iron out the wrinkles in cotton; steam out bad wrinkling in wool. And only iron clean clothing—hot irons can press dirt into place permanently.

> Finally, wool suits and sweaters do not need to be dry cleaned after casual wear. Brush your wool clothing after every wear and hang it neatly in an area where it can breathe for 24 hours.

### Personal Grooming

Keep yourself as clean as your clothes. A good haircut, use of the proper hair product, and a clean shave makes a world of difference. Trim your nails and excess body hair if it extends beyond your nostrils or undershirt.





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