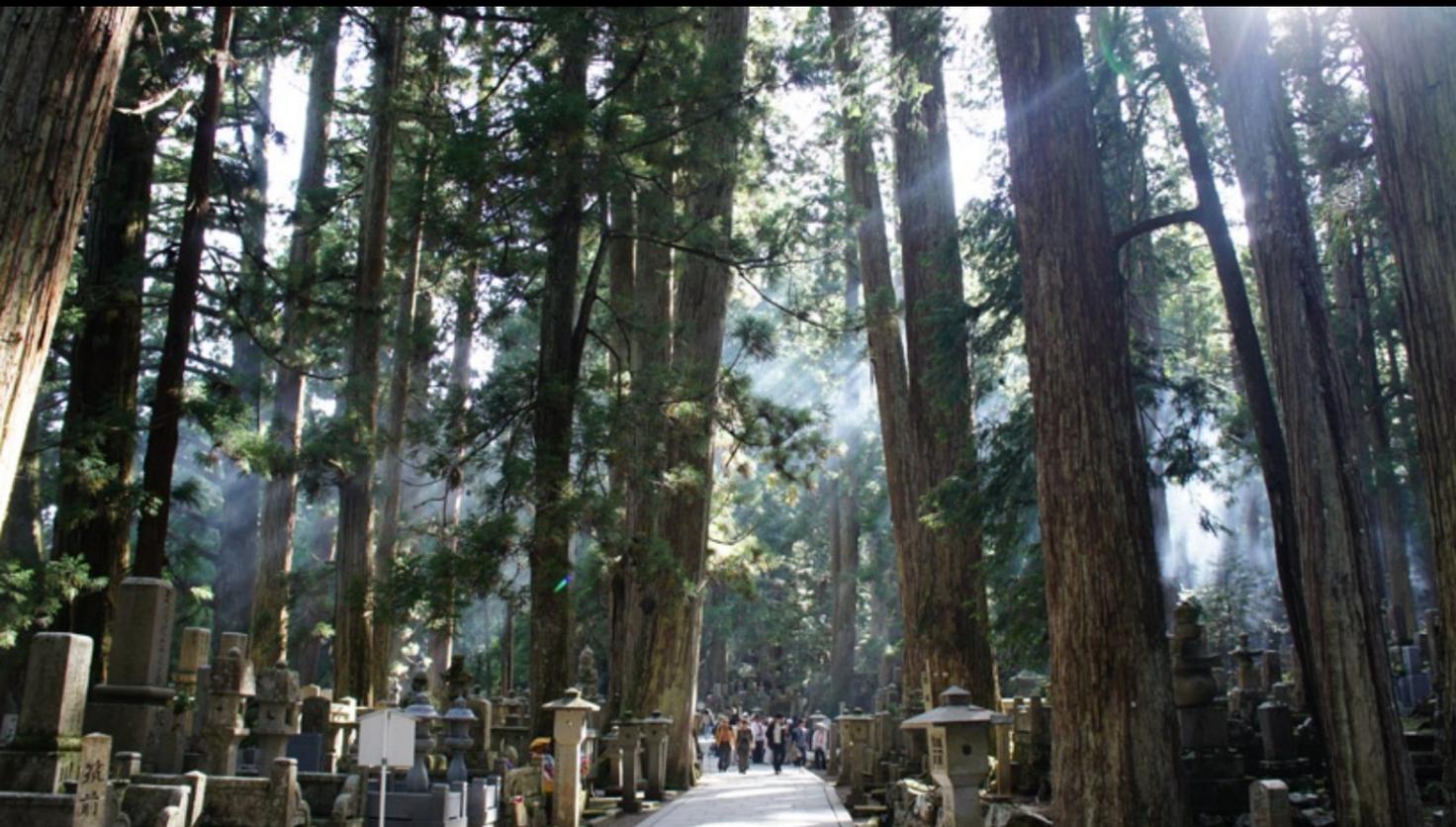


**AJET**  
**CONNECT**  
December 2011



*Merry  
Christmas*

## November Photo Contest Winner



Jennifer Garcia, Hyogo

Spirits guide you on this grave marked path to Okunoin at Kōyasan where Kōbō-Daishi Kūkai meditates in eternal meditation.

## November Haiku Contest Winners

PS3 Controller  
Every curve I know  
I push your buttons and play  
Let me turn you on

Mike Livesey

地下鉄か ちかてつか  
建物見える たてものみえる  
地下は嘘 ちかはうそ

Subway, eh  
I can see buildings  
subway my ass

By Lena LeRay

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

Interested in editing and volunteering? AJET Connect is looking for an editor for the Volunteering section. The editor is responsible for gathering and checking articles and writing short blurbs each month. The volunteering section includes articles and information on charities, fundraising and travelling abroad on humanitarian and other projects. If you're interested, please get in touch with us at [communications@ajet.net](mailto:communications@ajet.net) for more information.

## 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

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## Signup for AJET Connect

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for JETs, by JETs

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Following the two-day meeting, I traveled for my third time, to the disaster-stricken Tohoku region. This time, I was honored to be able to go with the JETAA delegates and current JETs from Akita with Paul Yoo (who graciously collaborated with and coordinated the Akita JETs!), to volunteer in the ongoing cleanup efforts in Rikuzentakata. It was in Rikuzentakata that the late Montgomery (Monty) Dickson was stationed as a JET until he was tragically swept away with thousands of

others in the March 11th tsunami.

## Greetings JETs

As I've mentioned in my messages to you in past months, exciting things have been happening recently regarding the JET Programme. Last month, I was invited to join the JET Alumni Association International's annual conference.

Myself and 16 delegates of JETAA International (JETAAi) met in Tokyo to discuss items ranging from improvements of the JET programme, to fundraising efforts for the tsunami-affected Tohoku area. The meeting was sponsored and attended by officials from the Center for Global Partnership, Japan Foundation, CLAIR and MoFA and was covered by NHK News and televised here in Japan. Some of us also had the opportunity to meet with government representatives from the ministries that run the JET Program.

I must say, I was extremely impressed with the former JETs I met there. Their level of professionalism, and exemplary commitment to furthering the objectives of the Programme, long after leaving Japan, was an inspiring reminder of the powerful bonds we as JETs have to this country.

I was given the opportunity to speak with JETAA representatives about how current JETs could assist with promoting the Programme. We discussed how important it was for JETs, both past and present, to share information with each other in order to contribute to a vibrant image of the Programme, and maximize our efforts towards rebuilding Japan.

It was quite a day. While a lot has changed in Tohoku since I first visited Ishinomaki, immediately following the earthquake, there's still a lot of work to be done. The ground near the sea is completely laid bare. Only outlines remain where buildings and homes used to be. The debris that was left after the tsunami, is stacked neatly in huge piles, systematically cleaned up by the government workers, self-defense forces, and volunteers. One of the most shocking images in my mind was of the abandoned cars that are now stacked on top of each other, around 10 meters or more high and lined up end-to-end for as far as you can see. It's great that they've all been collected, but it is a stark reminder of the sheer havoc wrought on this area and just how devastating it truly was.

We spent the day near the mountainside in one of the areas still being cleaned, where the debris was being sorted through. On a mound of dirt, mud, and debris we tried to separate items for cleanup. We stood on what used to be a house, or quite possibly houses, separating the burnable material from non-burnable metal and beams. Sometimes, digging through the dirt and mud became difficult, as our shovels couldn't pick up the remnants of curtains, tatami, or clothes. At those points we resorted to using our hands, every once in a while stumbling upon someone's belongings trapped in an airpocket, undiscovered, bordering on tears as we uncovered photo albums, junior high school student's uniforms, and children's toys, not know-

ing if there was someone even alive to claim them.

Afterward, we were honored to have a meeting with the mayor of Rikuzentakata, Futoshi Toba, who famously pleaded on YouTube to help his city and people with more supplies and relief. It was a moving time, where he told us of the loss of his own wife and home and friends, but how they would stay strong for their community and most importantly, their children. He implored us to think about how important it is for everyone to be there for their children, including his own.

Delegates from JET Alumni Association USA used this opportunity to present a donation to the Rikuzentakata Board of Education. The proceeds will aid several efforts, including a project that provides study rooms for students and another aimed at hiring a second JET to work in the town. JETAAi representatives plan to continue to fundraise and support the Tohoku region during the rebuilding. Current JETs are also doing their part by volunteering regularly in the area and undertaking creative initiatives to support the remaining residents. It is a strong testament to the grass-roots loyalty to Japan that is created via the government-run JET program.

Together, we are joined by many others with ties to the area, including the family of Taylor Anderson, another JET that was lost in the tsunami. The Andersons created the Taylor Anderson Memorial fund and are involved in several recovery projects in Ishinomaki, where Taylor was placed.

Going forward, AJET and JETAA chapters across the globe will begin a much closer partnership with each other. It was clear from this meeting that the JET Programme is an experience and opportunity that can connect us to each other, and to this country. I can't wait to share with you in the coming months some exciting projects that AJET and JETAA chapters have undertaken together.

Connect with you next month,

Matt



# 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).



# LIFE AFTER JET





This month features Jay Gould, who was a JET in the earliest days of the program as both an ALT and a CIR. Originally from Western Canada, he is currently back in Japan and his family lives trans-Pacific. He and his wife, Melinda, who was also a JET, have their own business in Osaka. Jay is a firm believer in the value of JET to its participants and has remained connected to the program in various ways since his stint more than two decades ago.

### **Where are you from?**

A small town called Nelson in British Columbia.

### **When and where were you a JET?**

I was on the program from 1988-91. 1988 was the first year for Canada to participate and was only the second or third year of the program. There were very few of us then – I think only about 500-600 in the whole country maybe and only about a dozen in Miyagi where I was posted. I was sent to a small town called Towa-cho at that time. It's now part of a larger amalgamated city called Tome-shi. Towa was the sister-city of a town close to Nelson and I think that may have been a factor in my being sent there – Miyagi was not one of my choices for postings, but I loved the place and stayed three years.

### **You mentioned you were both an ALT and a CIR. How did that happen?**

JET was a rougher dog in those days – we were all still feeling our way around a bit, trying to figure out what this program was and was going to be. When I say “we”, I mean everyone from the JETs on the ground right up to the folks at CLAIR and the Ministries. I was an ALT in my first year (called AETs then), but I was based at the city hall and made visits out to the schools only a couple days a week. My office wanted my help with their new sister-city program and a few other projects of an “international” type – these were the heady days of Kokusaika and there was lots of money and interest in internationalization. Anyway, in my second year, we managed to talk the Kencho into letting me convert to a CIR-type of position more officially. I still taught, but my focus was primarily on things international. I helped develop the sister-city project, produced a bi-monthly English-language newsletter about Towa and local Japanese culture which was sent to all Japanese embassies and consulates, and developed a high school exchange program between Miyagi and British Columbia, which was the largest and longest-lived Canadian endeavor of its kind. Kids and teachers from almost every school district in both states (or

province, in B.C.'s case) took part and the program lasted 14 years. I've remained connected to international education ever since.

### **So what are you doing now?**

A bit of a long and convoluted story, but directly linked to my time on JET. During my second JET year, I received a letter from the Ministry of Education in British Columbia, saying that they were contacting all B.C. JETs to ask their help in establishing school partnerships. I happened to have developed a working relationship with an assistant in the Miyagi Governor's Office (because JETs were highly-visible and fairly rare animals in those days) and we sold the Governor on the idea. I found out later that I had been the only one to respond to the Ministry's letter and things happened quickly. Within several months, the officialdom from both jurisdictions had signed agreements and the first kids arrived from Canada. I had used a connection from an old teacher friend of mine to have a school district near Vancouver be part of the first contingent and their Superintendent of Schools came over with the group. We hit it off and a couple of years later he turned around and offered me a job in his district back in Canada. I was married by then and my wife Melinda was expecting twins. We were already contemplating returning home anyway, so I agreed and said good-bye to JET and Japan in '91 – or so I thought.

I became the Coordinator of International Education for the district, supervising all district exchange programs and creating a fee-paying international student program – one of the first in B.C. – using my connections back in Japan to recruit my first clients. That went well for five years and on one trip back to Japan I came to Osaka to market the program to students at a private high school. They had their own study-abroad program and were looking for new partners in Canada. Shortly after my visit, I was astonished when they offered me the job of coordinating their Canada program for them. A bit of negotiation and soul-searching ensued, but Melinda and I decided it would be good for the family (and another adventure to boot), so I agreed and we came to Osaka. During my five years in that job, we started our own business on the side and it soon grew so big I was being stretched too thin, so I quit my job, got an entrepreneur's visa and became independent. We now own several language schools and preschools, as well as a small import business, and I consult on international education occasionally.

### **Did you think you would end up doing this?**

No, I did not. I'm not really the guy to go to for advice about career planning or anything like that. I just started something in an uncharacteristic burst of initiative 22 years ago and it kind of snow-balled. I simply put in my best effort at whatever I was doing at the time and made decisions about things as they came up. No real plan, except to keep my head up and never say No when presented with a challenge (even if I didn't have a clue how to start).

### **So your time on JET influenced your career and life.**

Most definitely! Everything I've done in the past 20 years is a direct result of my time on JET – an unbroken chain, both professionally and personally. Melinda was a JET as well and, though we knew each other slightly before coming to Japan, it was JET that brought us together. My JET experience has given me an interesting life full of experiences I'm certain I would not have had otherwise – traveling, meeting people, seeing amazing things – and I'm still doing it, even 20 years after JET.

### **Are you still connected with JET?**

Yes, though not as much now as in past years. In my second year on JET, I was the AJET Rep for Miyagi (Melinda was the rep for Yamaguchi – that's how we met) and following my return to Canada, I was the B.C. JET Alumni Rep for a couple of years. Then, after coming to Osaka in '96, I was the West Japan Alumni Rep for a year or so, though I have to admit I was not very active, having a bit of a full plate with my job, business and family. I'm still close with a few of my JET friends and stay in touch with a wider circle of alumni friends scattered across the world now. I cannot understate how important this has been at some points in my life. JET is a special program that recruits special people and you never know where your JET friends are going to end up – or you, for that matter. My own connection will likely continue, since two of our kids are now in university in Canada and we intend to recommend that they might try a stint on JET as CIRs after they finish. It's a big program and I'm always meeting new JETs, though our mutual JET experiences are quite different, I think, and I suppose they see me as something of a dinosaur. Still, I'll always bend their ears about what a positive impact JET can have on their lives, if they hang around to listen.

## Do you have any advice for current JETs about their post-JET lives?

Yes, and it really starts while they're still on JET. Everyone, no matter where they are, is constantly having opportunities come at them. As JETs, living and working in an interesting place, in high-profile jobs, we meet more than the usual number of opportunities to extend ourselves and make broader personal and professional connections. Most of the time, we're too busy with our heads down concentrating on what we're doing at the moment to see these opportunities sail past. Focus on your job, naturally, and do the best you can at all times, but also don't shy away from challenges and from maybe moving in new directions. Keep your head up and you'll see these things coming your way. They may seem small or peripheral at the time and it's your option whether or not you take advantage of them. I'm not saying that you have to be mercenary about it, running around schmoozing everyone and passing out business cards like confetti, just be alert enough to recognize opportunities when they come up. The few times in my life that I've done that, it's worked out pretty well. Easily the best decision of my life was when I agreed to run as AJET rep for Miyagi. I really didn't want to at first, as I felt underqualified to be an organizer and "leader", but some firm coaxing from the outgoing rep convinced me to try and I agreed. I was quite surprised when I won and, of course, ended up meeting the love of my life because of it. Incidentally, Melinda didn't want to be the rep for Yamaguchi either and only reluctantly agreed. You'll have to ask her whether or not she ultimately regrets that decision.

Lastly on this point, never underestimate the cachet that being on JET carries for you in your post-JET future. I know that now, many years on, there are a lot of JETs and others who have lived and worked in Japan and that we're not such exotic animals anymore, but JET is something special and a professional working-abroad experience still adds gravitas to a resume – especially if you've done something a bit weighty while on JET. If I can say this without sounding self-important or silly, we lead "bigger lives" here on JET; we occupy more visible positions in our communities, states and even nationally, than maybe some of the other ex-pats in Japan. It may not seem that way when you're the sixth or tenth JET your school has had and the job seems to be a bit routine sometimes, but it's true.

## You were posted in Miyagi. The Tohoku disaster must have struck quite close to home.

Yes, I can't adequately express my feelings about the whole thing. The town of Towa avoided the tsunami, being about 12 kms inland, but was knocked around in the earthquakes. Neighboring coastal towns I knew well, like Onagawa, Shizugawa and Kesenuma were devastated by the tsunami. Several people I knew there have still not been located. I was frantic for the first week, unable to get any word at all about Towa or anyplace, really, in that part of Miyagi. I was unable to watch the scenes on TV, as they took me directly back to my family's own experience with the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami. We were on vacation on Penang Island in Malaysia that Christmas and barely escaped

the waves, which inundated our beach village and destroyed hotels and restaurants virtually within meters of us. Scores were killed all around us and yet we made it through almost unscathed, grateful to have survived what we thought was a once-in-a-lifetime event. Then, to see it happening again to places and people I knew and loved here in Japan was a visceral shock.

I am lucky, though, in the sense that I was presented with the chance to do real things to help Tohoku people in the post-disaster months. I made connections with a couple of different volunteer groups here in Kansai – one of them being the local JET organization and the AJET National Chair Matt Cook – and was able to help out in a variety of ways. I got some of my own friends and students here involved to assist the relief efforts of these groups and I managed to participate in two trips to Tohoku myself with truckloads of donated supplies. We moved about 13 tons of goods ourselves those two trips and I also used an old JET friend (surprise, surprise) to get the FedEx company to donate air- and sea-shipping for a further 55 tons of goods donated from Germany. My friend (I should also say that she is the Godmother of our children) started as a high school ALT, then shifted to work in the CLAIR office during our time on JET and then on to FedEx in her post-JET life as their North Pacific Quality-Control Supervisor. She is now working independently, but put me in touch with her ex-colleagues in the FedEx European branch, who were only too happy to help. So my JET experience and contacts helped me do something quite substantial to help people in real need a full 20 years after I left the program. And so it goes on. JET just keeps coming back around to help me (and in this case, help a lot of others) in my post-program life.

## Any Thoughts on the Current JET Situation?

I am quite far removed from the day-to-day issues and commentary about the program, so I won't weigh in on things others are more qualified to speak about. I am aware, though, that it has been in the news off and on over the past two decades, being portrayed in increasingly unfavorable light as time passes and having its relevance questioned, but I think that's not giving the program its due. Japan has changed a lot in the past 25 years and some say that this has made JET into a white-elephant relic of Kokusaika, but they're forgetting that JET is partly responsible for many of the changes in Japanese education and general society in those

25 years. In the early years of JET, most of us were the first and only foreigners ever to visit our towns – I know I was. People were both fascinated and terrified by us. I know people who didn't last their first year on JET because they couldn't handle the scrutiny and sense of cultural isolation, not to mention the problems of acceptance. I had teenage boys who would burst into tears at my approach and adults who would just stare at me if I attempted to communicate and would follow me around the stores quite openly, attempting to see what I was buying. It was all very weird. Now, of course, thanks largely to JET, almost every person under 30 in Japan has at least been in a classroom with a native English teacher, if not interacted with them in some way. That has had a tremendous influence on the direction of people's thinking and therefore on the country as a whole. How could it not? It is important to note that one of the initial supporters and promoters of JET was the Sasakawa Peace Foundation, with the aim not specifically of improving Japanese English teaching approaches, but of familiarizing the people of Japan with the outside world and vice-versa. The best way to accomplish that was simply to put the children of this country face-to-face with foreigners on a scale not done anywhere else, nor at any other time in history.

As for the future, I think it is important for any entity to evolve and it's time for JET to do so in important ways if it's to continue to be relevant and do the life-changing work it's done in the past.





## *culture corner*

### ***December 2011***

Welcome to the holidays in Japan – a mixed bag of the old and the new, ancient traditions and the shiny trappings of a western Christmas. Before the last Halloween pumpkin tart has been devoured, you may find yourself wondering what country you're really in as you check seaweed prices while listening to Mariah wailing "All I want for Christmas is youuuuuuuuu...." for the umpteenth time.

Well, Japan has a knack for absorbing the customs of other countries and 'tweaking' them. Witness the written language, borrowed from the Chinese but split into three parts for 'ease of use'. Witness the spaceship-type device the Japanese have made of the Western toilet.

With this in mind, what are we to make of Christmas here? We have carols, plastic Christmas trees, food – well, chicken instead of turkey, cake instead of Christmas pudding (and yes, my family does make dark, rich Christmas pudding, which burns blue when splashed with brandy and set on fire, and is eaten with rum-laced hard sauce, but I digress...). Colonel Ojisan outside of KFC is wearing a Santa suit. Few Western holidays have been embraced like Christmas has. And if some people can't give a very accurate account of the Nativity, well, it's the same at home. And everyone knows Santa, but just try to explain Santa's elves to people. No, really, do it – it's fun.

My Canadian Christmas bears some similarities to the Japanese New Year's Day – special dishes, gifts, the family together, visits to a shrine or church, decorations of pine. And it makes sense to me. These long nights of winter are exactly the time when we want to cluster together out of love (or for warmth), stuff ourselves silly, remember the past and dream of the future. I think everybody wants that. Let's take a look at some of the New Year's traditions in Japan, and this year, if you're here, you can enjoy them yourself. Happy New Year!

*Sarah is a second-year ALT and the AJET Block 9 Rep, living in Matsue, Shimane. She still doesn't know what she's doing for the Christmas holidays. If you know where to find mulled apple cider in Japan, please get in touch with her right away!*

## Calendar of Cultural Events in December 2011

<b>December 2nd Oshiroi Matsuri, Fukuoka</b>	In this 400-year-old festival, oshiroi, a white paste made from rice flour and water is smeared on villagers' faces as a prayer for good harvests in the coming year.
<b>December 2nd-3rd Chichibu Yomatsuri, Chichibu shrine, Chichibu, Saitama Prefecture</b>	Famous night festival in which lantern-lit floats weighing more than 10-tons each are pulled through the town.
<b>December 3rd, Morotabune Shinji, Mihonoseki, Shimane Prefecture</b>	Action-packed Shinto ceremony in which teams of nine men board two boats in Miho Harbour and proceed to vigorously splash each other with cold sea water.
<b>December 3rd Takata no Inoko, Sakurai, Nara Prefecture</b>	Village youths carry food and torches in procession to offer to the gods for peace and good harvests.
<b>December 3rd-11th 43rd Tokyo Motor Show, Odaiba, Tokyo</b>	The Tokyo Motor Show is one of the world's top motor shows, taking place every two years. It introduces new cars, motorcycles and commercial vehicles for the total motor vehicle experience.
<b>December 9th-18th Arashiyama Hanatoro, Arashiyama, Kyoto Prefecture</b>	For ten days, more than five kilometers of streets around the town center and along the river are lit up by lanterns. Many temples and shrines in the area are illuminated and have special extended hours.
<b>December 13th &amp; 14th Gishi-sai, Sengakuji Temple, Takanawa, Minato-ku, Tokyo</b>	The Gishi-sai is a festival held at Sengakuji Temple, honoring the forty-seven loyal retainers in Akoh. It is also known as Akoh Gishi-sai.
<b>December 15th-18th Kasuga Wakamiya On-Matsuri, Wakamiya- jinja Shrine, Kasugano-cho, Nara City, Nara Prefecture</b>	The On-Matsuri is a festival held at Wakamiya-jinja Shrine which stands in the precincts of the Kasuga Taisha Grand Shrine. It was first organized in the 12th Century when an epidemic prevailed, and prayers were offered at this festival for the eradication of the plague and also for the blessing of a rich harvest.
<b>December 17th-19th Hagoita Ichi, Senso-ji Temple, Asakusa, Taito-ku, Tokyo</b>	Senso-ji Temple in Asakusa is one of the most famous sightseeing spots in Tokyo. The Hagoita-Ichi (Battledore Fair) is an annual fair held in its precincts at the end of the year.
<b>December 31st Okera-Mairi Festival, Yasaka-jinja Shrine, Gionmachi-Kitagawa, Higashiyama-ku, Kyoto City, Kyoto Prefecture</b>	Okera-Mairi is the name for the visits made to the Okera Matsuri festival from late at night on New Year's Eve to New Year's Day. This ritual is held at Yasaka-jinja Shrine, which is designated as an important cultural property of Kyoto.
<b>December 31st Oga no Namahage Festival, Throughout the Oga Peninsula, Oga City, Akita Prefecture</b>	This is an event passed down from ancient times around Oga City, Akita Prefecture. Namahage is the name of the strange deity resembling a demon, known as oni.

## On the First Day of Christmas...

Jen Garcia

Thanksgiving has just passed and we are now fully embracing the Christmas spirit. We've been here long enough to have had some good times and bad, some blessings and curses, love and hate in this place. So in honor of that, this is my rendition of a popular holiday song, 'The Twelve Days of Christmas.'

### 12. Days of Nenkyuu

SHS ALTs, like me, have twenty day of nenkyuu, but we don't have the other in-between semester breaks that other Elementary/JHS ALTs have. Finding that out was not one of my good times.

### 11. ALTs Nearby

I know ALTs with more and some with less fellow ALTs nearby. I know in my town, having people nearby to share my everyday life is great blessing.

### 10. Schools We Go To

This is crazy to me! I have two and can't remember everyone's names. However, most Elementary/JHS I've spoken to have no problem with this schedule.

### 9. Events Every Weekend

Between school happenings, JET events, and fellow ALT get-togethers, there's something going on every weekend. I love having these options and feeling like I'm part of a bigger community.

### 8. Hours of Sleep a Night

I wish! We always have a full day of work with some play thrown in, but somehow think it's still a good idea to stay up every night and party all weekend.

### 7. Trains to Get Home

I live out in the inaka (countryside) and find that at the end of the night, I am taking multiple trains, subways, buses, and vehicles to get myself home. It's tiresome.

### 6. Ways to Sort Trash

Burnables, Plastics, Glass, Cardboard, Trays, Pet Bottles – am I missing any?! This was something I really wasn't used to back home. I applaud the Japanese for being eco-friendly, but I hate doing it!

### 5. JTEs!!

I have more than this amount but this might be the average for some. Admit it, we all have JTEs that we love and others...not so much. Just always give your best effort. Both JTEs and students will appreciate it.

### 4. Classes Daily

For me, this is a busy day, but I know ALTs who usually have five to six classes a day. This is definitely one thing I'm thankful for! Good luck to all of you who go above and beyond!

### 3. Speech Contest Students

I'm pretty sure we all have been asked to help out with our school's speech contests. I helped students in both of my schools and really enjoyed seeing them motivated to improve their English.

### 2. School Festivals

Sports day and the cultural festival are awesome! Seeing everyone in a relaxed and fun atmosphere was a great bonding experience. I absolutely love this part of the Japanese school experience.

### And a home of our own in Japaaaaaaan!!

Little inaka town, Tamba-shi in Hyogo-ken, wasn't what I asked for in my JET application, but now I love it. We can all say that we have a second home, and for that we are truly blessed.

So there you have it! 'The Twelve Days of Christmas' - JET style! I tried to incorporate as many situations as possible but since there are many, I hope you can relate in some ways. During the holiday season, whatever you may be doing, take time to reflect on the sweet parts and recuperate from the stresses. But most importantly, remember how fortunate we are to be have been given the opportunity to give the gift of language to our students.

*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.*



# Customs of the Japanese New Year

Sarah Jane Blenkhorn

O-shogatsu (お正月) is the first month of the lunar year in the old calendar, but the word is more often used specifically for the first three days of the new year. The customs of this holiday season derive from times when the ancient people of Japan prayed for the favour of their gods and a fruitful year to come.

## The Decorations

The **kadomatsu** (門松), or 'gate pine' is traditionally placed on both sides of the door of houses and shops to welcome the god of the coming year. It consists of pine branches, symbolizing longevity, and three stalks of bamboo, which stand for virtue, faithfulness and healthy growth. Usually they will be put up prior to December 28, and removed around the first or second week of January. They are usually burned afterwards – some communities have bonfires where everyone can bring their decorations to be disposed of (this fire is sometimes used to cook the last of the season's rice cakes).

**Shime-kazari** (しめ飾り) are symbolic New Year decorations hung in various places to invite the god of the New Year. Simple ones, called wajime (輪じめ), are wreath-like circles of straw hung on cars and wells, or on the Shinto shelf-altar in the house. Other common elements of the shime-kazari are ferns, bitter oranges, dried kelp and small lobster (these are often artificial).

## The Food

**Mochi**, or rice cakes (餅), are dense, glutinous cakes of pounded rice eaten during the holidays. The traditional way of making mochi – a two-person job, with one person pounding cooked rice in a giant pestle, with a giant mallet, and the other quickly turning the rice and keeping it damp between blows – is very labour-intensive and dangerous to the fingers! Luckily now there are mochi-making machines to do the job, though some people say mochi made the old way tastes better.



Mochi is eaten in a variety of ways – fresh with soy sauce or sweet, nutty roasted soybean flour, in soups, grilled with nori (seaweed) – but it is most popular in zoni (雑煮), a hot New Year's soup, the other ingredients of which vary from place to place. Mochi is also used as a decoration. Two flat-bottomed, decorated rice cakes piled on each other, called kagami-mochi, are displayed in the house throughout the New Year holiday, then smashed and eaten. (A cautionary note: every year during the holidays, people – especially the elderly – die in Japan from choking on mochi, so eat it carefully!)

**O-sechi ryori** (おせち料理) are the dishes usually served over the O-shogatsu period. These dishes are prepared in advance and eaten cold, giving cooks a break from cooking over the holidays. Nowadays ordering some or all of your o-sechi dishes from a supermarket has become common. O-sechi is served in four-tiered lacquered boxes called jubako, and consists of various seafood, meat, vegetable, and pickled dishes, each with its symbolic meaning. For example, kuro-mame (black beans) suggests another word with the same pronunciation as mame, which means 'staying healthy'.

**O-toso** (おとそ) is a type of sweet sake that has been drunk on New Year's Day for over a thousand years. Spiced with medicinal herbs, it is meant to give protection against sickness and evil.

## The Holidays

### Omisoka (大みそか), or New Year's Eve

Unlike New Year's Eve in many Western countries, which is celebrated with fireworks, parties and revelry, the last night of the year in Japan tends to be a quiet family affair. Hot buckwheat noodles, called toshikoshi soba ('year crossing noodles'), are eaten before midnight to confer longevity. Many people stay up to watch the 'Red and White Song Battle', an annual competition between the top male and female singers.

Japanese temples ring their bells 108 times on New Year's Eve or early on New Year's Day, representing driving away the 108 sins of the world and starting the year fresh.

**Ganjitsu** (元日), or New Year's Day, is a peaceful time. On this day, families receive nengajo, or New Year's cards, usually in the form of postcards. Many people create their own designs, which often feature the animals of the Chinese zodiac. Otoshidama (お年玉) is money given to children on New Year's Day by various relatives. Hatsumode is the first visit of the year to a shrine or temple. People go to pray for good fortune in the coming year. Many people buy hamaya, which are good luck charms in the form of wooden arrows considered to be swift carriers of good fortune.

If you happen to stay in Japan for New Year's, I hope you can experience a real Japanese O-shogatsu. Have a happy New Year! 良いお年を!



## Earthquakes: Can you be TOO Prepared

Dana Vielmetti

I was in a hotel room over Spring Break in Florida when I turned on the TV and saw the images from the March 11 earthquake and tsunami. It was some of the first coverage, and it was hard to tell how bad things would actually end up. Horrifically bad, it turned out, and as radiation concerns mounted on top of everything else I had a feeling I wouldn't be doing the JET Program this year after all.

When the program continued as planned and I was accepted I prayed to be assigned somewhere far away from the disaster. Imagine my relief when I was placed in Kochi, one of the farthest prefectures away from it all. That relief turned to panic on the second day of Tokyo Orientation, when I received my big orange booklet on preparing for the "inevitable" Nankai Earthquake. Unbeknownst to me before I arrived, the Nankai Earthquake happens in the Pacific Ocean almost directly offshore from Kochi every 100-150 years. There is something like an 80% chance that it will occur again in the next 30 years. The orientation booklet contained terrifying pictures, inundation level charts, and, morbidly, specific death estimates per area. The place where I live is predicted to sink almost 2 meters and be consumed with water, even before the tsunami comes. Obviously all of Japan is prone to earthquakes, but Kochi City is one of the most dangerous areas to live due to its proximity to the

ocean, abundance of old buildings, and isolation from the rest of the country in case of emergency.

As an anxious person who has never lived in a natural disaster-prone area, I spent my first weeks here consumed by fear. I asked everyone I met for earthquake tips and information. I made evacuation kits for home and school. I practiced running up the nearest mountain and freeway overpass. I counted the stories of the nearest apartment building at all times, calculating if it was high enough. There is a fine line between being prepared and being obsessive, and I think I was on the wrong side for a while. But having seen actual images of the worst in Fukushima, it was impossible to keep them out of my head.

Sometimes I think about what is scarier, Man or Nature. In my travels to other countries I have been mugged and held up at gunpoint. This could certainly happen in Japan as well, but for the most part I have virtually no fear of people here. Besides, the thing about people is they can potentially be reasoned with, and they can make a mistake. Fate, God, Chance, Nature—whatever you want to call it—can't be reasoned with. It is brutal and indiscriminate and shows no mercy.

The people of Kochi inspire me with their enjoyment of life under threat of imminent disaster. It is a heavy mental burden to live with. Some nights I am still kept awake with anxiety. The beauty of this place also holds great dangers. But the ability to keep living, to carry on, to embrace life in the face of impending doom, is admirable. The Japanese people have done it for years, and it is why they will be able to rebuild and prosper after the devastation of March 11.

Mark Twain once said, "I have been through some terrible things in my life, some of which actually happened." A life lived in constant fear is no life at all. If the Nankai happens while I am here, I am about as prepared as I can be. If it doesn't, I don't want to have spent my whole time in Japan pessimistically braced for the worst. The truth is, life is really one big disaster waiting to happen, wherever I am. Death is inevitable, so fear of it doesn't have to control me. Life in Kochi is truly teaching me to appreciate each day and to live in the present, because the future is unpredictable.



## Rosie A Word to the Wise

**Rosie, maybe you can give me some ideas. Christmas is coming soon, but I'm trying to save my money (big trips and plans for the new year will be expensive!). While I like to give presents as much as anybody, I just don't have a lot of extra cash. Any brilliant ideas? December on a Dime**

Dear "December on a dime,"

While we are continuing through hard economic times, I can understand your difficulty in finding the perfect gift(s) for friends and loved ones during this holiday season. Here are a few ideas that will spare your wallet, and hopefully make your special "him" or "her" beam with holiday cheer!

Consider gifts that come from the heart, as opposed to ones that are pre-made and store bought. There are many useful blogs and magazine articles out there already written about how to save money. They also include specific ideas of what kinds of things you can make. Try the following keywords in your next online search; "DIY Christmas gifts," "DIY holiday gifts," "Make your own gifts," and "save money this holiday season."

Of the ideas that I saw, my favorites include doing something nice for someone, making them homemade meals, and donating to a charity in their name.

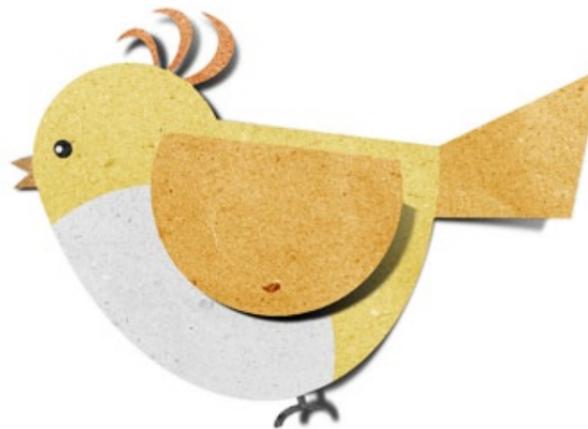
Another idea is to look into this website, "Alternative Gift Registry" at [www.alternativegiftregistry.org](http://www.alternativegiftregistry.org). An individual, company, group, or party can register on this website and type in all of the things they would like in place of gifts. These can include ideas like donations, volunteering, and simple tasks that are specific to the company or person who created the registry.

I think my most successful homemade gift has been a coupon book. It had coupons like (1) free 30-minute massage, (1) shogi lesson, (2) cooking lessons, and more. It cost me nothing to make because I used all recycled materials. I think that this kind of gift, tailored to the personality of the receiver, is more valuable than a quick and easy purchase. Your friends and family will notice the time you put into your homemade gifts, and will appreciate your effort. Maybe you'll even be voted best gift-giver of the year!

Good luck, and don't forget to be creative! Share your holiday gift ideas with us next month in January's AJET Connect by e-mailing your photos and stories to [communications@AJET.net](mailto:communications@AJET.net).

Happy holidays,  
Rosie





# volunteering

## **Volunteering December**

AJET would like to announce an opportunity to help raise money for the organizations Peaceboat and Living Dreams and their ongoing rebuilding work in Tohoku.

JETAABC is now accepting photographs taken in Tohoku to feature in a photo exhibit and fundraiser, Changing Tides: A Collective Photo Exhibit of Tohoku. Changing Tides is a collection of pictures taken in Tohoku which celebrates the spirit and beauty of this region, while also commemorating the disasters of March 2011 and the ongoing rebuilding efforts. Photographs can be from any time period and should depict the beauty, culture and spirit of Tohoku.

Photographs that are selected will be displayed at the Nikkei Heritage Centre (Burnaby, Canada) from January 14th to March 11th and will be auctioned off at a closing fundraising silent auction event on February. Proceeds from the silent auction will go towards Peace Boat ([www.peaceboat.org](http://www.peaceboat.org)) and Living Dreams ([www.livingdreams.jp](http://www.livingdreams.jp)) to support their ongoing work in the affected areas of Tohoku.

**To submit your entry, please submit the following information:**

- > Name (first, last)
- > JET location, and years on JET (if applicable, otherwise, location only)
- > Photo submissions should be titled: firstlastname\_phototitle.jpg
- > Deadline for submission is December 8th.
- > Please submit your photos to Emi at [social@jetaabc.ca](mailto:social@jetaabc.ca)
- > Applicants will be informed later in December if their photograph is chosen.



## Making Kids Smile!

Sifton Anipare

**My name is Sifton Anipare, and I'm a third-year Hyogo ALT from Toronto, Canada. This is my second time living in Japan. I worked with kids at an eikaiwa in 2007, and after my first two months working at a high school (where everyone points and yells "KOWAI" as I'd go home to my men-only apartment building complete with resident prowler!) I knew I needed the genki element back in my life!**

The easiest part was actually finding an orphanage (thank you Google). Then came what I thought would be the hardest part: the first visit. Halloween was an easy theme to use – lots of game ideas, a perfect excuse to bring candy and dress up as characters kids like – but still, I was absolutely terrified. I had already proven to the orphanage that I couldn't speak Japanese. But I went in there with my ningyou costume and Hello Kitty ears held high, and everything turned out great. All we did was enjoy each other's company, JETs and kids alike. Even the staff played with us! The kids were some of the friendliest people I have ever met. One of them asked to touch me and stroked my cheek.

I felt accepted – and in Japan! It was a fantastic feeling, let me tell you.

After every visit the orphanage manager leads all the kids in thanking us for coming. We take group photos together, and she tells us "please come back anytime." Since October 2009 we've had Halloween parties, a Christmas toy drive, a matsuri (complete with shaved ice, food stands and yukata!), and a mochitsuki party, just to name a few. We even made the local news!



I think (read: know) the hardest part of Smile Kids Japan will be saying goodbye to the kids. I've watched them grow up for three years. I remember the really young ones who would just sit down and cry in the middle of an activity; now they're walking and talking. The older ones are in junior high but they run back from the club activities in time to see us. The experience I've had with this group was the best part of JET for me, and I would love to know that others are spreading the smiles all over Hyogo when I go back to working for The Man. The memories will console me for many years to come, so it's all good. ^\_\_\_\_\_^

The orphanage we visit is full of friendly smiling faces who really do appreciate that people are coming just to spend time with them. Some children will likely stay there until they graduate high school, and then they have to get jobs and find their own apartments. Some were dropped off by their parents one day and haven't seen them since. All of them are sweet, bright kids who appreciate the love and excitement you bring into their lives. They might not be able to tell you in English, but your orphanage will love it every time you take time from your own weekend to be with them and they will miss you every time you go. If you're thinking

about starting your own Smile Kids group: do it. Just do it! Even if you hate organizing things and you think no one else will want to join and you can't speak Japanese. Get in touch with a few friends and drag them with you; odds are you're all waiting for someone else to start something! Google 児童施設 if you haven't already and start searching. These kids are WAITING for you!





## 2011 Saga Charity Christmas Party

The Saga Charity Christmas Party is an annual event held in Saga city around Christmas time, with the aim of raising money for local charities and promoting international relations. This year will be the 22nd year the party has taken place; it was originally started by a group of foreigners living in Saga, along with some Japanese people, as a way of giving back to the Saga community. Today, the party is still run completely by volunteers – both Japanese people and foreigners living in and around Saga. The money we raise this year will be donated to the Seikaen Orphanage in Saga city, where it will be used for books, computers, sports supplies and other educational materials for the children. Last year we donated 500,000 yen to the same orphanage, and to date the Party Project has raised and donated over 15 million yen to various charities in and around Saga. The party is a great event where Japanese and foreigners can mingle, make new friends, see and hear fantastic live entertainment on stage and eat a variety of delicious foods (included free in the entry ticket price), all in a delightful Christmas party setting. There will be a variety of games and activities for everyone to participate in, from kids through to adults. For the kids, some of the most popular attractions include face painting, a craft corner, and of course Santa's corner, where all kids will receive a present. Guests can also purchase drinks at the party at very reasonable prices!

Saga Charity Christmas is run completely by volunteers, so that all proceeds can be donated to charity. There is a board of directors for the party who decide the direction and content of the party, but we need many, many volunteers to assist us both in the preparation stages and on the night –

for example, cooking and serving food, working behind the bar, running games and attractions such as face painting, ring toss and being Santa! All live performers on the night also kindly donate their time and energy to the party.

ANYONE can join the Charity Christmas Party! There is something for everyone at the party, so it is a great opportunity for families to come together and enjoy the Christmas spirit with other Japanese people and foreigners alike. Each year we expect about 500 guests at the party, usually people from in and around the Saga area, but tickets are limited, so don't miss out! This year we have also decided to specially invite some disadvantaged students from a school in Fukuoka prefecture (for free) so that they too may have the opportunity to experience a fun and exciting Christmas Party.

In addition to the party being run completely by volunteers, we also ask many businesses and community places to support us by displaying our posters or handing out promotional flyers, and we ask for a lot of donations for the party. This year, we hope that we can get as many donations as possible, so that we can limit our costs and donate as much money as possible to the orphanage. We are still looking for more donations at this stage, including food ingredients, food serving platters/trays, drinks, game/lottery prizes (adults and children), small presents for children, and materials to make decorations.

If you know anyone who might be able to help with collecting or providing donations, would like to volunteer your time for the party, want to buy a ticket, or just want some more information (in English or Japanese), please contact [info@sagaccp.com](mailto:info@sagaccp.com)

We need as much help as we can get to make this year's the best Charity Christmas Party yet!! Please come along and help us in whatever way you can!

Event details are as follows: December 17th from 6-9pm Saga Bunkakaikan (Culture Events Hall) in Saga city <http://g.co/maps/fcqqk> Tickets for the party are 2,000yen in advance, or 2,500yen at the door; 500yen for elementary school students.

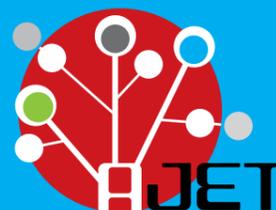
**Special thanks must go to Koichi and Mairi Araki for continuing to promote and support this valuable community event over the course of many years.**

# AJET PEER SUPPORT GROUP

**050-5534-5566**, is an English listening & referral service which operates on the principles of confidentiality and anonymity. We are open to all JET Programme participants every night of the year, from 8PM to 7AM. Our volunteers are all current JET Programme participants, trained for AJET PSG.



Regardless of what's troubling you - whether you've had a bad day at work, need to see a doctor at 3AM or just want to speak English with someone - the volunteers at AJET PSG are available to listen.



# JETs Riding Across Cambodia

Simon Shone

Cambodia: famous for its natural beauty and cuisine, but infamous for the atrocities of its past and the current levels of aid required to help in recovery. Landmines, and other unexploded ordinances are littered throughout the country; the shadow of the Khmer Rouge rule from 1975 – 1979 still lingers in the background. Now, Cambodia is in development mode, with many local villages and towns still dependent on international financial and human aid.

What do you know about Cambodia? Besides being a warm country in Southeast Asia, the home of the famous Angkor Wat temple, and a country with a history of massive killings that went on during the infamous reign Khmer Rouge, it's also home to a great NGO called PEPY.

'PEPY' (Promoting Education, emPowering Youth), is a charitable organisation that is dedicated to increasing the capacity of the local populations to further develop their own communities. Working alongside organisations and local government structures, the focus is on the education and empowerment of youth. This isn't a specific 'teach English' charity, but one that seeks to re-affirm the national identity and culture of Cambodia.

The NGO, PEPY Cambodia, is partnered to a tourism branch called PEPY Tours. This is also a leading organization in the way of Responsible Tourism. Responsible tourism is a form of tourism that minimizes environmental and social impacts and tries to improve the overall economic and educational condition of residents. It also aims at educating tourists and provides meaningful connections with local people. Instead of staying in hotels the whole time, we'll be sometimes be staying with people, and instead of cars, we'll sometimes be riding bicycles!

PEPY's tours guide visitors through not only the Siem Reap region, home to the amazing Angkor Wat temple and beautiful villages, but also to museums remembering the minefields remaining from the civil wars. It is worth mentioning that whilst most of the minefields have been cleared, there are areas that remain dangerous with mines and other forms of ammunition. PEPY's guided tours seek to raise awareness of the situation faced by local villages and communities as they look to live life as best they can.

Our group is made up of JETs from all over Hyogo: Emily, Kameron, Miriam, Nohea (from the USA), Katie (Canada) and myself (New Zealand) and will be lucky enough to spend a large part of our Christmas and New Year holidays touring and learning about and through PEPY's tours.

Our trip will be a 6 day trip beginning in the Siem Reap area. Highlights will include Angkor Wat and the surrounding temples, Khmer architecture, dedicated landmine museums, and participate in a home-stay with rural families in Cambodia. Our itinerary sees us take in the natural beauty of the country side, famous temples and ruins and generally gain an appreciation for Cambodia and her people. Equally, if not more importantly, we also get to see firsthand where the fundraised money goes. Visits with families and businesses allow us to comprehend what PEPY does for and how they help in Cambodia.

The costs associated with the trip are in two parts. The tour itself (food, accommodation, bicycles, guides and so-on) is taken care of by us participants, but the second part is the fundraising, financial part. The money raised goes directly to PEPY Cambodia's programs in education and clean water efforts. The idea behind fundraising is both that tourists leave behind money that continues to do good after they have returned home, and also that the process itself of raising the money thus broadens awareness in the home country of the traveller to Cambodia. We Hyogo-based Cambodia-bound JETs have already begun fundraising in our respective parts of Hyogo, with eikaiwa classes, clothing sales, music concerts, Thanksgiving dinners, and even getting in on the world famous 'Movember' events. Several group members also took part in the semi-annual Himeji PEPY bike ride, visiting local sites and admiring the autumnal colours all whilst

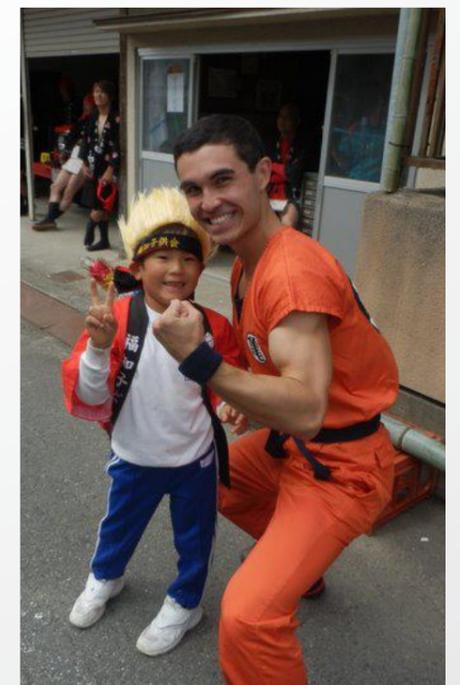
raising money for PEPY in Cambodia. However, as is the way with fundraising, we always appreciate more help as we work towards our financial goal of \$2400 USD that we will donate to the organization alongside our own tour.

Seldom does one get to fundraise, donate, and then go and see first hand how their contributions are used to help the chosen cause. This PEPY Bicycle Tour, as well as the generosity of others in helping donate, allows exactly that.

Please help us achieve our goal to contribute and experience the work of PEPY in Cambodia.

## Here's how you can help!

1. Go to our website at [www.indiegogo.com/JETs-Riding-Across-Cambodia](http://www.indiegogo.com/JETs-Riding-Across-Cambodia) to make a donation and learn more about our project and goals.
2. Come to a fundraiser in a neighbourhood near you! You can contact us through facebook or our website to find out when they are!
3. Go on a PEPY ride yourself and spread the word!





# TRAVEL

## **December Travel**

Amelia Hagen

December doesn't just mean colder temperatures throughout Japan – it means the holidays are almost here! Getting excited for your winter escape out of Japan? This month, there's an exciting adventure along the eastern coast of Australia that will whet your holiday appetite even more. AJET also brings you the story of a nostalgic journey through Wuzhen, China that will make you forget you are only a few hours away from the Shanghai metropolis. For those staying in Japan this holiday season and interested in heading for slightly warmer weather, follow one JET as he conquers the island of Kyushu in just over a week.

As a special treat, we have compiled a list of must-do's for spending those winter holidays in The Land of the Rising Sun. Compliments of JETs from across Japan, here are 15 ways to live it up here....

1. Go to a big city where more things remain open.
2. Check out the holiday illuminations – especially Kobe's.
3. See the Emperor at the Imperial Palace on New Year's Day.
4. Food? Savor osechi ryori, ozoni, and sweet sake.
5. Attend a big music concert!
6. Soak in an onsen surrounded by snow and monkeys.
7. Scoop up a fukubukuro (surprise lucky bag) on New Year's Day.
8. Catch the first sunrise of the new year.
9. Go shrine and temple shopping.
10. Treat other friends in town to a mega-Christmas party.
11. Take in hopefully snowy Miyajima and Hiroshima.
12. Celebrate New Year's with a Japanese family!
13. Order a ham or turkey from a foreign food website.
14. Hit the slopes up north.
15. Laugh at the 24 hour comedy special on New Year's Day.

Whether you are spending your holiday on a beach in Thailand, on the slopes of Hakuba, or nestled under the kotatsu, we wish you a safe and happy holiday season. We look forward to catching up with you again in 2012!



## ONCE UPON A CHINA

Elysse Hurtado

One short bus ride from Shanghai and you can find yourself in the middle of what some call 'the real China'. In search of this mysterious quantity I went with some friends to the small country town of Wuzhen in the bitter, steel-grey cold of a January morning.

Even on the hour-long bus ride itself it was easy to get a feel for the vast gap between the China of big cities like Shanghai and the China just outside those glittering streets. Rows of worn concrete houses with scattered scraps of peeling red paint, their windows and balconies filled with colorful laundry but with no other outward signs of life were scattered among the large winter fields. One slight discovery was the realization that there were far fewer power lines and signage than I had been used to back home.

Upon pulling up to the tiny bus terminal at Wuzhen the differences became even clearer. Next door was a building that was half-rubble, seemingly left to decay, and the town itself was very small and close to the ground. A large billboard next to the terminal declared 'Once came to Wuzhen, never leave again', which seemed that much more amusingly ominous in the chilly glare of the mid-winter sun.

When getting a lift to our rooms for the night we passed through narrow streets lined with buildings that seemingly doubled as living quarters and shops. Locals wore long tubes of padded fabric over the sleeves of their winter coats for added warmth, even indoors, as there was almost no heating of any kind. Our hosts were friendly and welcoming, quickly showing us to a room with three beds where the bathroom was separated only by a thin wall and lined with windows that faced onto the street. It took awhile to find the right way to pull the curtains so that neither our fellow occupants nor the residents of the apartments across the street would get an unexpected show.

From there we headed for the main attraction of the town, and our reason for choosing it: the old canal. Wuzhen is one of many cities in the Chi-

nese countryside that is famous for being built on and around a canal, and enjoys quite a touristic following for the rustic beauty of the preserved areas. Wuzhen's canal district was divided into two sections, the old and the new. Together we chose to visit the old section first, and after paying admission we strolled down the cobbled walkway lining the canal and became absorbed in the peaceful allure of the almost motionless waters and their reflections of the intriguing wooden houses beside them.

The houses themselves were remarkable not only for their fascinating architectural flourishes and old-movie type flair, but also because they were still actually inhabited, for the most part. The houses were built on supports rooted into the canal itself, and had doors exiting right into it, for ease of transport via the romantically featured wooden boats. In the windows, clothes and meat alike were hung to dry in the crisp January air, and worn sneakers and brooms lined the foot-length narrow decks.

Displays of the old-fashioned, elaborately carved wooden beds used in older days, goods made of the locally-dyed blue and white patterned cloth, hot dumplings sold by vendors, and the graceful movement of the willow trees on the banks all combined to create quite a picturesque atmosphere, despite the bitter cold.

Eventually we succumbed to our desire for warmth and made our way back to the rooms, while locals did double-takes or walked back around for a better look at my obviously foreign face. After a quick home-made dinner in the tiny room next door that was used as a restaurant we headed to the newer section of the canal. This was completely a tourist trap, with quaint cafes and lit-up pagodas, music and couples, but still quite attractive under the light of the full moon.



Even after only being there one day and night it was easy to fall into the much more relaxed pace of life in Wuzhen. Other than the occasional car or drunken reveler there was very little noise, and everyone came across as very warm and upfront. Even in the daytime the streets outside of the tourist areas were quite calm, and the sweets sold by the early-morning vendors were just as delicious and filling as their steaming aroma promised.

All in all it was a nice getaway from the crowding and faceless anonymity of the bustling streets of Shanghai, and it would be nice to visit the countryside again in a season when physical discomfort wouldn't be able to override the aesthetic appeal. Whether it could fully be considered 'the real China' or not would depend on your point of view I suppose, but getting a glimpse at the life of the everyday folk was a wonderful window on a different aspect of a country that is still somewhat a mystery to outsiders.

*Elysse Hurtado is a first year CIR living in Ibaraki, where she fills all her new-found 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.*



## ***SOUTH FOR THE WINTER***

CJ Stearns

**“Well, are you getting in?”  
the tour guide asked.**

**“Yeah...give me a minute,”**

**I answered her.**

Three sharks circled the boat. I stared at them through the snorkel gear strapped to my face, down off the side of the boat. I had traveled hundreds of miles, crossed deserts, navigated cities, and endured blistering heat and terrifying floods to get here: the teal blue waters of the Great Barrier Reef, only to jump into the water with three (visible) black-tipped sharks. Well, I thought, when in Australia...

I stood up on my unwieldy, flipper-clad feet, and took a leap.

I had the great idea of escaping the winter cold of west Japan a few days before Christmas last year. What better place to go than the southern hemi-

sphere? A friend of mine lives in Melbourne, Victoria, on the southeast coast of the continent. I called him up and we agreed: a south to north, east coast road trip over the New Year sounded just about right. He would take us about halfway, to Brisbane, the capital of Queensland, and then we (the boyfriend and I) would make the rest of the way to Cairns and the Great Barrier Reef on our own.

We weren't in the country more than two hours before we saw a herd of kangaroos, just outside of my friend's family house. They grazed like deer and bounded away into the bush, tails bouncing. Thrilled, we headed into the city to see what other surprises awaited us.

Small yet cosmopolitan, bustling yet neighborly: Melbourne has to be my favorite city in Australia. It may have been the excellent tour we received from a local, but it gave me a homey feeling, much like Portland, Oregon. Downtown Melbourne is covered in art, be it performance, paintings or music. The locals are friendly (of course), the museums are free, and the food is great. We took a trip to a great strawberry farm nestled among the vineyards that surround the outskirts of the city, and had the best strawberry ice cream I've ever had!

We spent Christmas with my friend's family in Australian style: mounds of food, a movie about Ned Kelly, and a game of cricket (my first) in the summer sunshine.

After Christmas we started out on our trip. Heading through a town with an amusing name - Wagga Wagga - we began our hiking and camping. Only 50km west of Sydney is the magnificent Blue Mountains National Park. If you want hiking, caves and waterfalls, this UNESCO World Heritage site is the place to go on the east coast. They are called the "Blue" Mountains not for the color of the rock, but the characteristic blue haze that wraps around them. There are nature walks to be taken in Jamison Valley, home to the Three Sisters rock formation and Wentworth Falls, with plenty of wildlife. Or you can make your way to the Jenolan Caves; the oldest discovered open caves in the world.

Taking our time to enjoy the Australian sunshine, we made our way to the famous Sydney. We went to the museum, at the time showing a collection of the ancient Chinese Terracotta Warriors, and afterward, the harbour, where we took the obligatory pictures of the Opera House and watched a group of people climb to the top of Harbour Bridge. Our time there was unfortunately short. If I could go back, it would be to Sydney first (despite my Melbourne friend's protests - there is a rivalry there), because even upon first look it seems like a city that has everything - street to street it could be mistaken for so many other cities worldwide.

Another place worth noting is the town of Dorrigo, on the way from Sydney to Brisbane. It is a small town seemingly forgotten by time, still sporting original colonial architecture, and sitting along "Waterfall Way", surrounded by beautiful fields and a series of breath-taking waterfalls. It is also home to a strange and unique railroad museum, with car after car of classic trains lying in a random field outside of town, waiting to be shown off.

About 540km (340 mi) north of Sydney is the stunning coastal city of Coff's Harbour. It has a natural reef and a corresponding diving culture, not to mention surfing, but that is pretty common anywhere on the Australian coastline. The town itself is small, laidback and charming. It could trick you into thinking you were somewhere near Santa Cruz, California, if it weren't for those accents!

We spent the New Year in another coastal town, Byron Bay, the easternmost point of Australia, and said goodbye to my friend in Brisbane, the capital of sunny Queensland. However, from there, our troubles began. In January of 2011, Queensland was not so sunny. For those of us who may have forgotten (the Tohoku quake and tsunami rightfully stole the show for the year, if not the decade), there was a huge natural disaster in Queensland. The Queensland floods of 2010-2011 had brought rain to the east coast of Australia after a decade and a half of drought. A lot of rain. After the ground absorbed all it could, the water began to flood unprepared cities and towns. Afterwards, the floods were calculated to have displaced thou-





So we did. Back in Brisbane, too tired to care, we bought airline tickets to Cairns and (eventually) our flight back to Japan. Getting a bird's eye-view of the floods, we laughed at ourselves. They stretched as far as the eye could see.

Arriving at Cairns in relief, we settled into our hostel and prepared for a snorkeling trip to the Great Barrier Reef. Though Cairns too, was having...wetter weather than usual, it was still up and run-

sands of civilians, caused over \$1 billion Australian dollars in damage and killed at least 35 people, though many remain missing. At their height, the floods were about the size of France and Germany combined, and flooded downtown Brisbane.

We arrived in Brisbane and rented our own car just before the water hit the proverbial fan. The agent at the rental car company warned us of the floods, but at that point no one knew how big they were, or were going to get. He told us of the best route to Cairns that he knew of. It would take us far away from the flooded coast by a long detour through the Outback, but that was fine by us.

All was well, though rather wet, as we made our way through Toowoomba and Goondiwindi, and out to the little town of St. George. We were tired from the eight-hour drive as we approached St. George around midnight. The sky was dark, and thunderclouds had rolled in, lightning flashing what seemed like everywhere. And when we got there – it was empty. People had fled with their belongings, lights were off, and those remaining were wandering town, drunk and singing. The river on the edge of town had already begun to flood.

The police officer on duty told us that all roads out of St. George were closed save one – the one we had just come down. And that road would be closed as well, within the hour. If we didn't want to spend the next two weeks in a flooded town in the middle of Australian nowhere, we had to get out. Now.

ing. It is probably the most charming little town in Australia. It is nothing but friendliness and fun, and it too has its share of natural wonders (other than the Reef). Resting in Australia's tropical north, Cairns boasts Daintree and Wooroonooran National Parks, among others. The town itself has its own natural beauty – a large tree growing next to the town library is home to a large population of bats – and they all fly out at dusk for a spectacular show.

Finally, we made it to the Great Barrier Reef. We took a tour on a little sailboat out to Green Island, famous for its sea turtle population. We swam with the turtles and sharks, and watched clown and parrotfish make their way through bright anemones and coral. It was beautiful and exciting, though sad. It is a natural wonder that is quickly disappearing. It faces enormous pressure from pollution, over-fishing, and climate change. Many sections of reef have begun to die off. The farm run-off from the Queensland floods did not help. If anything as bright and wonderful as we expect is to be seen, it will only now be in the outer reef. Go and see it while you still have the chance.

In my opinion, Australia has much to offer any kind of traveler, and that's only the east coast! It's without a doubt a place I'll have to return to. Right now the wonderful people of Queensland could use some tourist cash, so if you want adventure or just some time to relax, get out of the winter cold and head to Australia for Christmas!

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**David Namisato**





# Kyushu in 8 Days

Joe Mignano

Active volcanoes, ancient shrines and temples, legendary food, verdant landscapes, picturesque onsen, cosmopolitan cities: Kyushu is basically a microcosm of all of the best things you get to discover while exploring Japan as a traveler.

But if you're tight on precious *nenkyu* days, like I was when I decided to take a solo, 8-day trip around Kyushu last summer, what shouldn't you miss? While, of course, any good trip should be planned around the spots that interest you most, here (with the benefit of some extra-helpful 20/20 hindsight), is the non-stop, whirlwind itinerary that took me to some of Kyushu's most unique and wonderful places.

## Day 1 Hakata Ramen in Fukuoka

However you get yourself to the island, there's a good chance you'll find yourself in Fukuoka first. After six hours of traveling through southern Honshu from a one-day prelude in Hiroshima, I found myself in the heart of a bustling, shiny, modern city. Fukuoka, located on the northern shore of Kyushu, is the 7th largest city in Japan, and is arguably one of its most handsome metropolises. Indeed, Fukuoka was recently ranked 14th amongst the World's Most Livable Cities. I was surprised, walking through the downtown Tenjin area, at how much green space I saw. It's a city that's hard to feel uncomfortable in.

But I didn't come to Fukuoka for the parks. No stop in this city is complete until you've experienced Fukuoka's world-famous Hakata tonkotsu ramen. Hundreds of tiny stalls dot the streets selling their own take on the city specialty. Don't leave without trying a bowl!

## Day 2 Volcano-scaling at Aso-san and Kurokawa Onsen

From Fukuoka, I made my way to Kumamoto Prefecture. Aso-san is the name of a giant volcano that is not only at the heart of Kyushu, but in the center of a giant, ancient super-crater with a circumference of nearly 120 kilometers. It is the biggest active volcanic caldera in the world—big enough to contain the entire city of Aso.

At the center of the caldera are the five peaks that make up the volcanically active part of Aso. I was stunned by the greenness of this place. The inner mountains are utterly coated in grasses and plants that make you think you might be in New Zealand. The main attraction, however, is Mt. Naka, a bubbling volcanic peak that is still so active, visitors are often evacuated more than once a day to avoid overexposure to toxic gases.

During my stay at Aso, I made the goal to climb the caldera's largest peak, Mt. Taka (appropriately)—just remember, unlike me, to

wear sunscreen! The peak offers incredible views of the surrounding crater. My only regret here was not having rented a car to fully explore the area at my leisure.

After a long morning of climbing, I was ready to relax, so I decided to head to the nearby village of Kurokawa Onsen for a relaxing afternoon soaking in an onsen. Kurokawa Onsen is the quintessential onsen village. Built along a serene little river, it's home to over 24 ryokan each with its own onsen, almost all of which are also open to day-trippers. People often spend full days walking from ryokan to ryokan to bathe. Sadly, I only had time to fully enjoy one, but the experience was unforgettable.

## Day 3 Climbing Waterfalls in Saga

From Kurokawa Onsen, I made my way back to Fukuoka so that I could get myself to my next destination the following morning: Saga Station. There I met up with a group of JETs, whom I'd never met before this day, who happily took me under their wing for the day as we made our way to another remote mountain town. Nan-



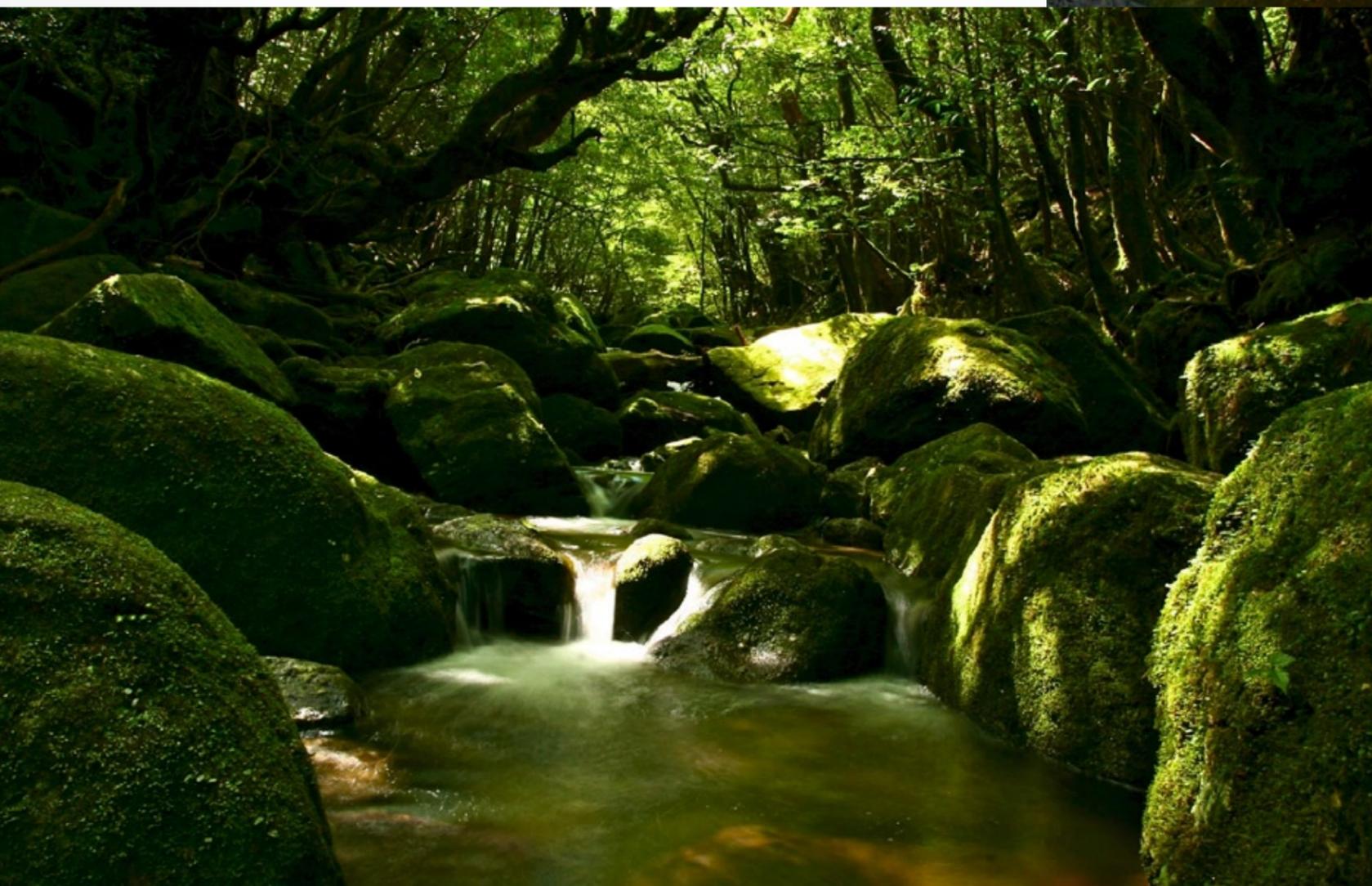
ayama, Saga is home to an event that captured my imagination from the first time I'd heard of it back in a dimly lit conference room at the Keio Plaza Hotel in Shinjuku in my first week in Japan. The event: jump into a river with over a thousand other orange life vest-clad adventurers, and climb upstream to the top of the day's course. Along the way, you climb up rocks and ropes to pull yourself over waterfalls, through rapids, and even over a cliff, all the while surrounded by throngs of excited, jolly people. I can't thank the wonderful JETs in Saga and Kyushu AJET for helping me hunt down and even physically arrive at this event. It easily became one of my favorite experiences in Japan.

### **Day 4-6** **The Perfect Forests of Yakushima**

Though I wish I could have lingered with my new Saga friends, I instead had to rush back to Fukuoka to catch a night

bus to Kagoshima, where I then caught a morning ferry to the island of Yakushima. Yakushima is a gem in the ocean. The island is most famous for protecting the remnants of ancient, pristine forests, and is the home of the biggest Cryptomeria (or sugi) trees in the world. Its forests have been designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1993.

After satisfying my summer vacation desires with some snorkeling and beach bumming, I woke myself up at 4:30 A.M. on my second day there and made it by dawn to Shiratani Unsuikyo, one of Yakushima's most beautiful forest preserves. With a pair of companions I'd met at my hostel the day before, I found myself walking through what felt like the archetype for all other forests in the world. A perfect quiet, tiny streams carving out paths and filling pools, moss coating every rock, tree and crevice, deer calmly strolling along their ways. The forest is so perfect, in



fact, that Studio Ghibli animators used it as their inspiration for the wooded backgrounds of Princess Mononoke. For me, it was a piece of heaven.

### **Day 7-8** **Cool History and Hot Sand Baths in Kagoshima**

For the final leg of my whirlwind adventure, I found myself back in Kagoshima. Kagoshima is a city with a fascinating history, which, fortunately for tourists, it seems very proud of. Even secretly during the Edo period's time of forced seclusion from the outside countries, Kagoshima has maintained contact with outside countries, which greatly influenced the city's culture. It's a laid back city now, resting in the shadow of another great iconic Kyushu volcano named Sakurajima, omnipresent just across the bay.

During my stay, I decided to take one important day trip to the southern town of Ibusuki. Ibusuki is the home of a

unique onsen tradition in Japan. Instead of bathing in hot water, visitors don a yukata and lay down in geothermally heated sand. A gaggle of old ladies then rushes to your side with small shovels and proceeds to bury you to your neck in the hot sand. While claustrophobic for some, I found myself incredibly reenergized afterwards. I had plenty of energy to savor my last views of Sakurajima in the distance as night fell on my last day in Kyushu.

While my excursion through Kyushu may feel a bit rushed to some, I look back at this trip with few regrets and some of my favorite memories of my time in Japan so far. Kyushu is a wonderland, and I imagine even living there, one would be hard pressed to experience everything it has to offer. I truly hope I find myself there again.

Joe Mignano is a 2nd year ALT living in Nasushiobara, Tochigi.

# AJET PHOTOGRAPHY CONTEST!

**Entries Close 15 January 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.



## The Turducken and the Sponge

I've ordered a turducken. The excitement in my house is positively palpable. As I await the delivery of this Rolls Royce of mystery meats I sit and ponder. What does "Thanksgiving" mean to me? Or perhaps more pertinently, why is it that I have so wholeheartedly embraced a holiday which is neither my own nor of the country in which I reside? Perhaps most pressingly, how on earth will I fit this eight-kilogram monstrosity into my undersized oven?

The answer to the first two questions is actually quite simple. I believe that giving thanks is important and having already had our first snow of the season, I would like to break bread with a group of friends who have become my extended family here before the driving becomes too much more treacherous. It is important to me because it is important to those I care about. I realize I should probably be talking about food for December, but in writing this introduction I have come to the realization that the sentiments of the holiday season can be broadly applied.

What is perhaps more interesting than my newfound love of spiced pies and oversized fowl is how it has helped me in my work. One of the curious aspects of living in Japan is how speakers of English are also expected to be windows into the varied cultures of the "West" and even more broadly, the varied cultures of the world, as they exist outside Japan. If you have spent any time trying to fathom how to engage students in the new elementary school curriculum, then you will know what I am talking about.

Whether you personally celebrate them or not the festivities that mark the end of the year are an interesting lens through which to view the similarities and more often divergences between Japan and whence you came. My students were absolutely flabbergasted when I explained that a traditional Christmas fruitcake bore no resemblance to the strawberry topped, cream covered sponges prevalent here and even to compound things even further it was unfathomable to them that a cake could be expected to last the entire holiday season. No matter how expert or novice a cook you are, you may be surprised at what a good conversation starter seasonal food can be.



## Winter Eggnog

Tim Jerding

**Makes 10 -12 small servings.**

Yesterday was the first snowfall of the season in Teshikaga (eastern Hokkaido). The smell outside enraptured me. And it's been this same smell every winter of my life—a combination of fresh snow, car exhaust, sunlight, and somewhere between cold enough to have snow and really really cold. I always forget about it, but then there it is. Like an unexpected appearance and hug from a loved one forgotten amongst my routinized thoughts. A moment of beauty such as this provides a feeling of comfort and ease not found in the day-to-day rules and requirements of society. I hope you're familiar with that feeling. It's really nice. That's typically the sentiment I express to myself when I come across this smell. "This is nice," I say to myself. Then, I may go drink a glass of eggnog. Here's a recipe:

### Ingredients

- 1/3 cup sugar
- 1 pint whole milk
- 1 cup heavy cream
- 1 teaspoon nutmeg
- 1 teaspoon cinnamon
- 1/2 teaspoon vanilla
- 4 eggs (separated)
- 3 ounces bourbon or rum/cognac combination (alcohol is optional and not necessary for deliciousness)

You'll need three bowls. First, separate the egg whites and egg yolks—each into their own bowl. Whip up the egg whites until they are stiff. In the other bowl, whip the egg yolks while slowly adding the sugar until the mixture is smooth and a pale yellow. Whip the heavy cream in the third bowl. Then, slowly add the milk, whipped cream, nutmeg, vanilla, and cinnamon to the egg yolk bowl while continuing to mix thoroughly. It's now time to add the egg whites. Fold them in gently until the mixture is nice and smooth. Next is the alcohol if you're so inclined. Chill in a cool place and consume. Happy winter.



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## Izakaya Tour

Kelly Britton

Imagine a restaurant where you feel completely at ease - one where you know exactly what to order; where the hum of conversation is just right; where you're welcomed warmly on a cold, winter night. From my experience in Japan, this place is, more often than not, an izakaya 居酒屋.

Traditionally a place to drink – the word izakaya comes from the Japanese characters “to stay” and “sake shop” – izakaya have evolved into one of the most common restaurant forms in Japan. They are often likened to “pubs,” an ill-conceived comparison, at least in America, where pubs are rarely more than grubby places proffering French fries and cheap beer. A better analogy might be to Spanish tapas: neighborhood bars serving small plates, a seasonal menu, and a good selection of alcohol. These days, izakaya can be found in a vast variety of styles and specialties – regional, haute cuisine, home-style, seafood, barbecue – and to suit almost any budget. They are ubiquitous, their familiar red lanterns shining like beacons of good-

will, from the dark alleyways of Tokyo to the furthest reaches of Hokkaido.

Before we moved to Japan, a chef friend bestowed upon us a gift for foodies, “Izakaya: the Japanese Pub Cookbook.” This book contains recipes from izakaya masters as well as listings for some well-regarded restaurants. So was born the Tokyo Izakaya Tour. Having just completed the third installment of this tour, I offer you five of my personal favorites along with further recommendations culled from magazines and the web. This list is by no means intended to be comprehensive – I would venture that there are tens of thousands of izakaya in Tokyo alone – but I hope that it illustrates the breadth of izakaya offerings and inspires you to go out and find that place, maybe just up the street from your apartment, where you feel entirely at home.

¥ under 2,000 yen/person  
 ¥¥ 2,000-3,000 yen/person  
 ¥¥¥ 3,000+ yen/person

*(includes 1 drink and seating charge)*



### Meat on a Stick

**Morimoto 森本** is not the kind of place you take a date - unless, like me, your date considers fluorescent lighting and raw chicken a bit romantic. Tucked almost under the north side of Shibuya station, Morimoto is a rapid fire, no-frills yakitori joint where you come to get meat on a stick. Specialties here include tori sashi 鳥刺, raw chicken breast served sashimi style with wasabi; tsukune つくね, grilled ground chicken patties seasoned with onion and citrus; and anago 穴子, conger eel, filleted live, then skewered and grilled. Packed with after-work salary men, the shop overtly discourages lingering. A haiku poem and sign bear the same message: enjoy the food and then move on. But enjoy the food you will, expertly prepared by Mr. Morimoto himself for almost 40 years. On most nights, you'll still find him behind the counter.

### 森本 (Morimoto) ¥

Hamanoue Bldg, 1F, Dogenzaka 2-7-4,  
 Shibuya-ku, Tokyo (near Shibuya Station)  
 (03) 3464-5233  
 Mon - Sat 4:30 pm - 10 pm (LO 9:40)



### A Cut Above

I had rounded this block of chic Aoyama more than once in search of **Maru 圓**. Finally, descending a narrow stairwell I saw a softly glowing sign, half-hidden on a landing. The door opened to reveal the perfect space: intimate, warmly lit, a long heavy timber bar buzzing with conversation. Then my heart sank - not one, but two tables of gaijin. Unlike a number of izakaya, Maru not only welcomes foreigners, it actually encourages them. In fact, Maru is premised on the idea that the pleasures of food are open to everyone.

This openness is not the only factor to set Maru apart from many izakaya - its sophisticated decor, level of service, and refined cuisine all suggest an almost entirely different class of restaurant. But the menu and staff are unpretentious and the small dishes are clearly meant to be shared. Laughter hangs lightly over the bar and tables, everyone, even the staff seems to be having a good time. Highlights from the meal included irodori mame sarada 彩り豆サラダ, a salad of persimmon, beans and endive; wagyu misozuke sumiaburi 黒毛和牛味噌漬炭炙り, Kyoto-style beef preserved in miso; agedofu no kani ankake 揚げ豆腐の蟹あんかけ, fried tofu and crab in ginger soup; and kujidori sumiaburi 九重鶏炭炙り, charcoal grilled chicken with citrus and pepper. Despite the posh location and foreign clientele, Maru is anything but inauthentic. Rather it's a rare gem, a contemporary izakaya where incomparable attention is still given to taste and experience, made even better because everyone is welcome.

### 圓 (Maru) ¥¥¥

Aoyama KT Bldg, B1F, Jingumae 5-50-8,  
 Shibuya-ku, Tokyo (near Omotesando Station)  
 (03) 6418-5572  
 Mon-Sat 6 pm - 2 am (LO 12:30)  
 Sun 6 pm - 12 am (LO 11:30)



### The Tokyo Classic

**Shinsuke's** シンスケ owners have been in the sake business for eleven generations and the restaurant lies within Tokyo's old shitamachi district of Ueno, so I was admittedly confused by the katakana on the sign out front. As it turns out, this dichotomy represents Shinsuke perfectly. Though family-run and fiercely traditional – thanks to a promise made by the original owner, it has served the same sake since 1924 – Shinsuke's focus is on quality, a feat that requires due diligence in the modern world. Shinsuke's menu offers many old family recipes like iwashi no ganseki-age いわしの岩石揚げ, deep fried sardine "rocks" based on an Edo-era dish, and maguro nuta まぐらぬた, an izakaya favorite of sashimi-grade tuna tossed in miso dressing. But you'll also find some surprising twists, for example, kitsune rakureto きつねラクレット, a deep-fried tofu pocked stuffed with hot raclette cheese, a fine substitution for those craving American comfort food.

To endure as long as Shinsuke, an establishment must adapt, a fact not lost on its proprietors, who now use primarily local organic produce and meticulously source line-caught fish. But seated at the counter, where the single long-standing brand of sake flows freely and matronly waitresses laugh with regulars, one is struck by the way this izakaya defies classification. Modern and traditional, flexible and yet immutable, Shinsuke combines past and present seamlessly, not unlike the city of Tokyo itself.

#### シンスケ (Shinsuke) ¥¥

Yushima 3-31-5, Bunkyo-ku, Tokyo  
(near Yushima, Ueno-Okachimachi,  
and Uenohirokoji Stations)  
(03) 3832-0469  
Mon – Fri 5 pm – 10 pm (LO 9:30)  
Sat 5 pm – 9:30 pm (LO 9:00)



### Edo Throwback

On a winding side street of Kagurazaka, not far from Waseda University, I found **Isedou** 伊勢藤. It is a testament to Isedou's extraordinary atmosphere that even the Japanese friend, a Tokyo native, who accompanied me there had never been anywhere like it. Near the outer edge of Edo castle, newly-hip Kagurazaka was once renowned for its geisha houses and traditional ryotei restaurants, some of which remain today. To leave the main street, bustling with university students and French bistros, is to enter a world frozen in time. In these narrow, barely lit alleyways, are a handful of izakaya and other establishments that are, by all appearances, ancient.

You won't find many choices at Isedou – one type of sake and a short list of traditional snacks – and its proprietors are reserved rather than welcoming. Any lack in variety is more than made up for in history, the kind that many come to Japan expecting and are disappointed never to find. At Isedou you can taste, in small hesitant bites, food that my Japanese companion hadn't seen since her grandmother's house as a child: dishes like inago 稲子, whole locusts boiled in soy sauce and sugar, and eihire エイヒレ, dried sting-ray fin, which becomes sweeter as it's chewed. Lower your voice to match the hushed tone of the room, wrap your palm around a smooth ceramic cup of sake, and feel the chill of the autumn air through the paper shoji. As a foreigner, you may be a bit uncomfortable at Isedou, but you will most certainly be transported.

#### 伊勢藤 (Isedou) ¥¥

Kagurazaka 4-2, Shinjuku-ku, Tokyo  
(near Kagurazaka and Iidabashi Stations)  
(03) 3260-6363  
Mon – Fri 5 pm – 9:30 pm (LO 8:30)



### Always a Winner

Almost every izakaya is worth a visit, but at only the best izakaya do you want to return again and again. For me, the criteria are easily defined: a lively but cozy environment, top-quality ingredients and preparation, and casual, affordable comfort. Of all the izakaya I've visited throughout Japan, none meets these criteria so wholly and effortlessly as **Fuku** ぷく. There is nothing overwhelmingly exotic about Fuku, a trait that plays a significant part in its appeal. Instead, simplicity, executed to near-perfection, reigns. Specializing in yakitori, Fuku uses only the finest, fresh, free-range chickens, and slow-grills them over a charcoal fire, resulting in succulent, flavorful meats regardless of the cut. Everything is better than good here: kashiwa 黄鶏, chicken thighs with green onion; sasami wasabi ささみわさび, rare breast meat with horseradish; ponpoji ぽんぼじ, chicken tail; and tebasaki 手羽先, exceptionally crispy wings served two at a time. Even the vegetables and side dishes are standouts and one shouldn't dine at Fuku without ordering skewers of niniku にんにく, garlic and eringi エリンギ, king trumpet mushrooms; or specialties like potato salad ポタトサラダ and piiman bekon ピーマンベーコン, green peppers wrapped in bacon, stuffed with cheese and then grilled until melted. On an otherwise deserted street, Fuku is still packed at 10 pm on a Sunday night. The sounds of happy people – young couples, friends, older parents and their stylish adult children – can be heard from outside the understated façade. Inside, the lights are low, draft beers dominate, and the warmth of the grill can be felt throughout the tiny room. Fuku is the best kind of neighborhood place, and if that neighborhood weren't a plane ride away in Tokyo, I'd probably be there almost every night.



#### ぷく (Fuku) ¥ - ¥¥

Nishihara 3-23-4, Shibuya-ku, Tokyo  
(near Yoyogi-Uehara Station)  
(03) 3485-3234  
Thurs – Tues 5:30 pm – 11:30 pm (LO 11:00)

*(Notes: Though they are not true izakaya, I have included those yakitori shops here that are similar in spirit. Special thanks to Mark Robinson, author of "Izakaya: The Japanese Pub Cookbook" and Robb Satterwhite, editor of Bento.com, both of whom are great resources for finding great food in Tokyo.)*





## Apple and Brown Sugar Glazed Pork Chops

Alyssa Markham

Cooking a holiday meal is a daunting task even when you have access to top of the line equipment and more space than you know what to do with. When you're cooking with what looks like a defective Easy Bake Oven and you have to co-opt the top of your washing machine because your kitchen is the size of a broom closet, well, you can imagine the added stress. In fact, cooking a decent winter feast can seem downright impossible given the resources most JETs have available to them, but not to worry! I have an amazing main course that is delicious, festive, and so easy you can make it in even the most barren of kitchens.

Traditionally, most people eat turkey, ham, or brisket for their holiday fare. This can prove a bit of a problem in Japan for two reasons. First of all, ordering these cuts from food import stores can be expensive. Of course, if you're in the midst of the winter blues and the only thing that you think will pull you out of it is buying a whole ham from Foreign Buy-

ers Club, then by all means, go ahead. However, even if you can afford to spend a chunk of your paycheck on meat, and even if you manage to get access to an oven, Japanese ovens tend to be so small that trying to cram a regular sized turkey or ham into one looks more like slapstick humor than haute cuisine.

A simple substitution is all you need to get that taste of home without resorting to a one-man recreation of the Three Stooges. For this recipe, we're using pork chops instead of ham. Using pork will provide a traditional flavor base to build upon with other seasonal ingredients – in this case, apples. There are few flavor combinations more perfect than apples and pork, and this recipe capitalizes upon the delightful pairing of sweet and savory, mimicking the similar flavor combination of baked ham and honey glaze.

As stated, this dish is remarkably easy. All you need is a stove, a skillet, a small pot, knife, measuring cups, tongs, a whisk, and a cutting board.



### Ingredients

4 boneless pork chops  
 3/4 cup apple juice  
 4 tablespoons brown sugar  
 4 tablespoons butter, room temperature  
 2 medium sized apples, chopped into bite sized chunks  
 Salt for seasoning  
 1 tablespoon butter  
 1 tablespoon flour

### Instructions

Heat the butter on low in a small pot until just melted and add equal parts flour. Increase to medium heat and cook for an additional six to eight minutes or until it just begins to turn to a golden color. This will be used later on in the recipe to turn the leftover liquid in the pan into an easy and delicious sauce.

Salt your pork chops just before you put them into pan, as salting the chops too early can draw out moisture and toughen the meat. There is nothing worse than a tough pork chop, believe me.

Combine room temperature butter and brown sugar. If you forgot to leave the butter out or you're making this recipe on a whim, melting the butter in the pan and then adding the brown sugar on top is also acceptable, though I find the butter sugar mixture gives a more even coverage to the meat.

Put a skillet on medium heat. When skillet is hot, add butter and sugar mixture. Tip the pan to ensure an even coating, and allow the butter mixture to melt, but not burn.

Once melted, add pork chops. I would suggest two chops per pan at a time; you don't want to crowd the meat as this can lower the temperature in the pan and cause the chops to cook unevenly. Leave

the pan uncovered. Cook each chop for four minutes before turning. Add apples and apple juice.

Allow chops to cook an additional four minutes, and then remove from pan. If your pork chops are particularly thick, you can cook for a minute to two minutes longer on each side, but I would recommend the standard four. (The converse goes for if your chops are particularly thin; reduce cook time to two minutes per side). Again, tough, overcooked pork is nobody's friend.

Drop heat down to low and add 3/4 of the roux, mixing together to thicken the liquid into a sauce. Your sauce should resemble a glaze more than gravy. If the sauce doesn't thicken right away, be patient, stir, and wait at least three minutes before adding the rest of the roux. When thickened, pour sauce and cooked apple pieces over chops.

It's as simple as that. I recommend pairing this dish with garlic mashed potatoes and buttered spinach with mushrooms for the perfect holiday meal. Happy eating!



*Alyssa Markham is a first year JET living in the small village of Sakegawa in Yamagata prefecture. She considers herself a "mad food scientist" and loves experimenting to find the perfect recipes. She often lurks in the cooking appliance section of Yamada and likes to host dinner parties because it makes her feel fancy.*



# **WORKPLACE TIPS**

## Lesson planning Tips

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

For a dozen years I have been working with elementary, junior and senior high teachers of English (JTEs) in Hokkaido. Through a sister-province relationship between Hokkaido and Alberta (Canada) over 100 teachers have studied at the University of Alberta for an intensive 4-week immersion in language, culture and pedagogy in a ratio of 1:3 Japanese teachers to Canadian facilitators. In addition this project has reached out to over 800 teachers. With the assistance of ALTs, 15-30 teachers participate in week-long immersions at the Hokkaido Educational Research Institute (DOKEN) in Ebetsu, Hokkaido. Each program aims at teachers of a specific level of learner – elementary, lower secondary or upper secondary. The experientially-based program is designed around a short- and long-term instructional planning model affectionately labelled B-SLIM (Bilash's Success-guided language instructional model).

ALTs play an important role in the professional development (PD) program as they assist in materials development, small group facilitation, language modeling and injectors of world content and enthusiasm. Once a week I present a demonstration lesson in a local school to show how the content presented can be put into action – theory into practice.

In working with ALTs over the years I have become aware of many successes, frustrations and lost potential. In listening to them and the JTEs I noted how a cultural divide has often prevented maximizing resources for the benefit of learners of English. As a result, nine team-teaching seminars have been offered throughout Hokkaido. These seminars are designed to help JTEs/HRTs and ALTs develop a common language and common set of understandings. Informal feedback suggests that both JTEs and ALTs have become more aware of how the 'other' sees the world and as a result relationships have become more positive and ALTs feel more valued. In fact, several JTE-ALT teams have reported that by learning more about how one another thinks, they are more engaged in co-instruction, co-planning and collaborative resource development.

As a result of this work I will be sharing tips about planning for instruction (which includes short- and long-term lesson, unit and year plans). If you have

any questions please email me and I shall provide some feedback to you. In this issue I discuss two commonly asked questions. For further information please visit my website.

**My JTE asks me for ideas for lessons and also wants me to help with lesson plans. I am never certain how to help? What kind of advice can I offer? Do you have any suggestions?**

Here are a few things that might help:

1. Ask the JTE what the goal of the lesson is. What should students be capable of producing by the end of the lesson or series of lessons? This means more than understanding – it means oral and/or written production (speaking and/or writing). Sometimes it takes several lessons to reach the production stage because students must pass through comprehension first.
2. Scan the procedure or lesson plan for its 'flow'. How has it been scaffolded? Are the steps the right size? Too big or too small? Does the series of activities or tasks move from lots of support to the learners to less support. Notes, visible points on the board or in the textbook, flashcards, a dictionary are types of support the students might use to help them practice learning the vocabulary or grammar. Figure 1 shows some characteristics of steps in a scaffolded lesson. Since it may take several lessons for students to be able to produce learned concepts independently, the scaffolded steps to reach one goal may extend over two or three lessons. When students are using supports (like reading aloud a skit or presentation) they may not be fully storing the vocabulary or phrases to retrieve on their own; further over-reliance on the written word impedes the development of confidence in speaking.

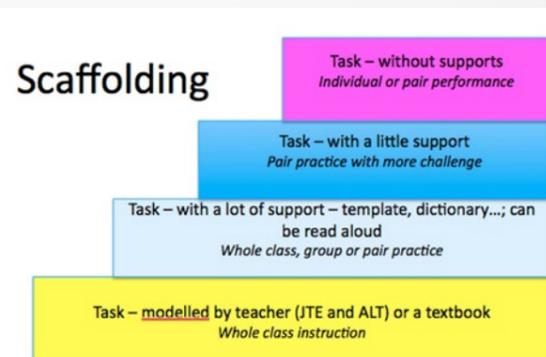


Figure 1: Scaffolding

3. Did you notice a challenge in the lesson – a task that might not require a lot of language knowledge but would enable students to use the language that they do know. Challenge is created by increasing the cognitive load, for example by increasing the speed of response for an activity. Note the relationship between support and challenge in Figure 2. Too much support may yield confirmation of knowledge or ability but insufficient or inappropriate support may render students frustrated and eventually unmotivated to learn more English.

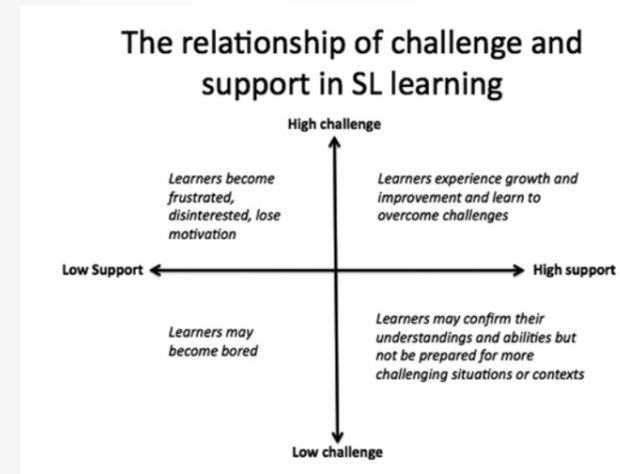


Figure 2: The relationship of support and challenge

4. Scan the tasks to consider how many multiple intelligences (Gardner, 1983) the students will use as they engage in the lesson. Aim for 5-7 of the following eight:
  - a. When learners are reading, writing, listening, speaking and understanding or making humour in English they are utilizing their linguistic intelligence.
  - b. When learners are working with partners or in small groups to solve a problem or prepare a presentation in English they are utilizing their interpersonal intelligence.
  - c. When learners are moving around in order to complete a task in English they are utilizing their kinaesthetic intelligence (e.g. playing charades with sentences from the textbook)
  - d. When learners are singing, chanting, doing a cloze activity while listening to music in English they are utilizing their musical intelligence.

- e. When learners are writing, reading, completing a task individually or reflecting on their own learning in English they are utilizing their intrapersonal intelligence.
- f. When learners are looking at images to help make meaning or using pictures or icons as cues to help their memories, or creating a project that integrates visuals or graphic organizers in English they are utilizing their visual-spatial intelligence.
- g. When learners are following steps in a process, applying grammar rules, sequencing parts of a story or sentence or making sense out of a reading passage in English they are utilizing their logical-mathematical intelligence.
- h. Because learners must be able to hear the language clearly before they can replicate it I have added auditory intelligence to Gardner's list in a foreign language learning context

5. Does the lesson integrate any authentic material? A website, a story by the ALT, sample brochures or newspaper clips can introduce the students to the 'real-life' world of English. Assigning homework can help to distribute the practice or frequency of exposure to English for learners. Encourage your JTE to assign both textbook-related content as well as internet homework, and help by proposing some useful sites and associated activities. You might adapt the following:

- a. Ask students to go to a site and listen –watch it for 1-2-5 minutes. (e.g. a short song or youtube clip)
- b. Use 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 with ReadSpeaker" beside it. Click on the icon: Do you hear the article being read aloud?

OR, beside the title of the article, you should see an envelope icon with the title "email". Click on that icon and email the article to yourself: Did you receive the article in your inbox?





### Signs of the blues

Some common signs by many people who suffer from the blues experience include a change in appetite (either increase or decrease), change in sleeping habits (waking more in the night, waking early in the morning, having trouble getting to sleep), increased tiredness, increased feelings of isolations, being trapped and generally down, decrease in desire to exercise, and actual decrease in exercise and decrease in desire to socialize. Please note that different people have different symptoms, the list above is just a guide. And you don't need all of them to take action.

### What causes the blues?

There is no definitive answer to this. It has been speculated that a decrease in light (duration and intensity) decreases the brain activity in some sections of the brain and causes the blues. But not all the evidence supports this theory.

What is known is that as you move from warmer/lighter places (eg Okinawa) to colder/darker places (eg Hokkaido) the number of people who suffer from the blues increases. It is also known that someone who comes from a warmer place in winter to a colder place is more likely to suffer the blues.

All mood disorders can also be triggered/affected by a change in one the signs, such as decreased sleep or exercise. All the signs and symptoms are linked, and thus there can be a flow on effect which causes the blues to be triggered. An example of this would be if someone was to decrease the amount of exercise because they were no longer able to ride their bike to school or run in the afternoon. This leads over a couple of weeks to feelings of lethargy and difficulty going to sleep which then moves to feelings of isolation, a decreased desire to socialize, etc, etc.

### What can you do to avoid or get yourself out of the blues? There are quite a few different things.

#### 1 Change a sign

Like the negative link mentioned above there is also a positive link between the signs. If you

change one sign for the positive the others will follow. Probably the most effective way is to increase the amount of exercise you are doing. Most cities, even those in the back country, usually have a heated swimming pool and a gym where you can swim some laps or lift some weights. It probably feels like the Stone Age compared to where you come from, but it still works.

#### 2 Ensure you are warm at night

This one may seem obvious, but it is important. Your body will work much harder in the night, and thus be less rested if you are cold while you sleep. You may not wake, but your blood flow will be up, you move around more and your organs will contract.

#### 3 Get out of the house

Force yourself to socialize. You might not want to, but you will feel better in the end. And your brain likes nothing more than a stimulating chat with some friends over a good meal.

#### 4 Visit an onsen

There is evidence that people who have warm baths, and in Japan that means an onsen, are more likely to sleep well at night during winter. Don't ask me why.

#### 5 Don't be too hard on yourself,

but don't over indulge by always feeling sorry for yourself. Being away from your family and friends at this time of year is hard for everyone, irrespective of the weather. Recognize this and make sure you treat yourself a bit during this season. Buy yourself a present, speak more to your family on Skype, write a long letter to your friends telling them how much they mean to you. But don't wallow in self pity, make sure you don't just sit at home and feel sorry for yourself.

#### 6 AJET PSG - 050-5534-5566

If you are lonely or find yourself unable to sleep give PSG a call. We are here every night from 8pm to 7am and would love to hear from you.

## Beating the winter blues

Kieran Murphy

### A fact

Everyone gets down from time to time! It does not mean you are weak, that you are 'sick' or that there is something wrong with you. It just means that you are human. There will be some people who tell you they never get down – they are either lying, or an alien robot that has taken human form.

### Another fact

You are more likely to get down and suffer the blues during winter. Scientists have a term for this – Seasonal Affective Disorder, but most people call it the winter blues, or the blues for short.

### What are the blues?

Back to the scientists for a minute – The blues are a mood disorder; they are on the same continuum as, at the mild end, culture shock and anxiety disorders and at its worst depression. What all this means is that when you have the blues your mood and emotions are out of kilter from where they are normally.

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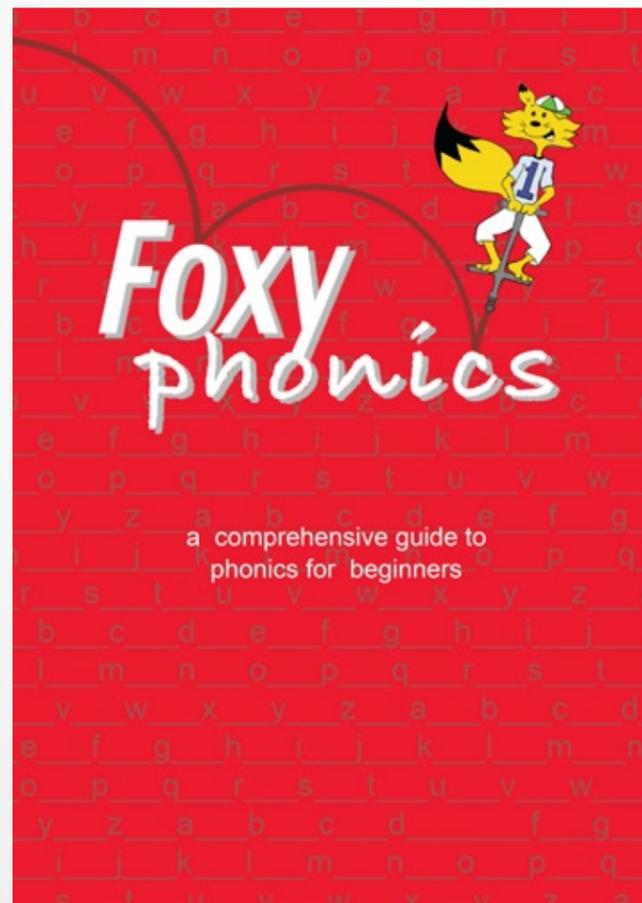
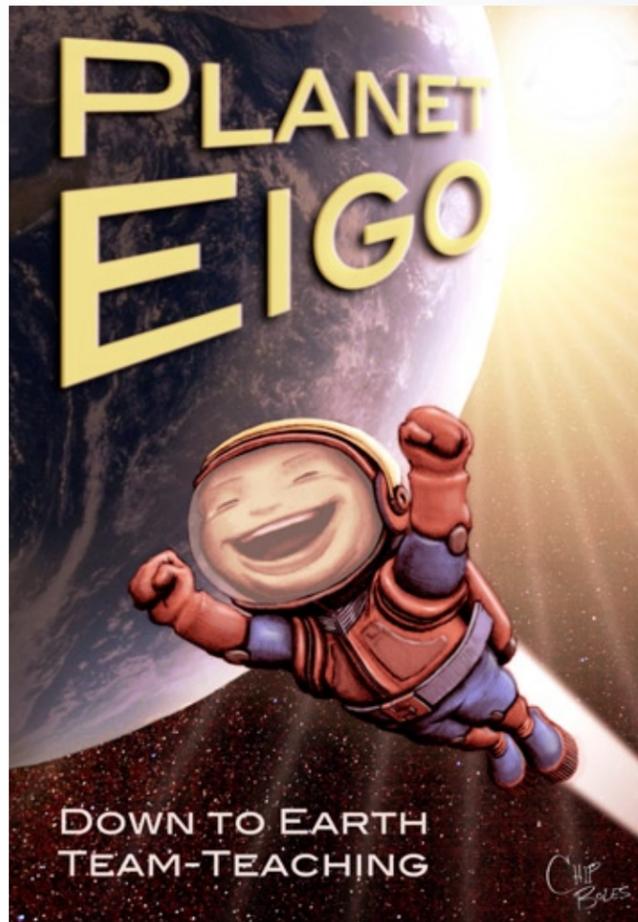
drimlike.com

## AJET BOOKS

### Planet Eigo

¥4,000 non AJET member \*  
¥3,000 AJET member \*

Planet Eigo is a collection of lesson plans and helpful teaching methods specifically designed for team-teaching in Japan. In addition to lesson plans, activities and games, Planet Eigo includes nearly 100 pages of detailed explanations on Team Teaching, Learning Theory, Instructional Planning and even has a section dedicated to teaching in Elementary Schools. Planet Eigo is also written with English and Japanese side by side, and is spiral bound for easy photocopying.



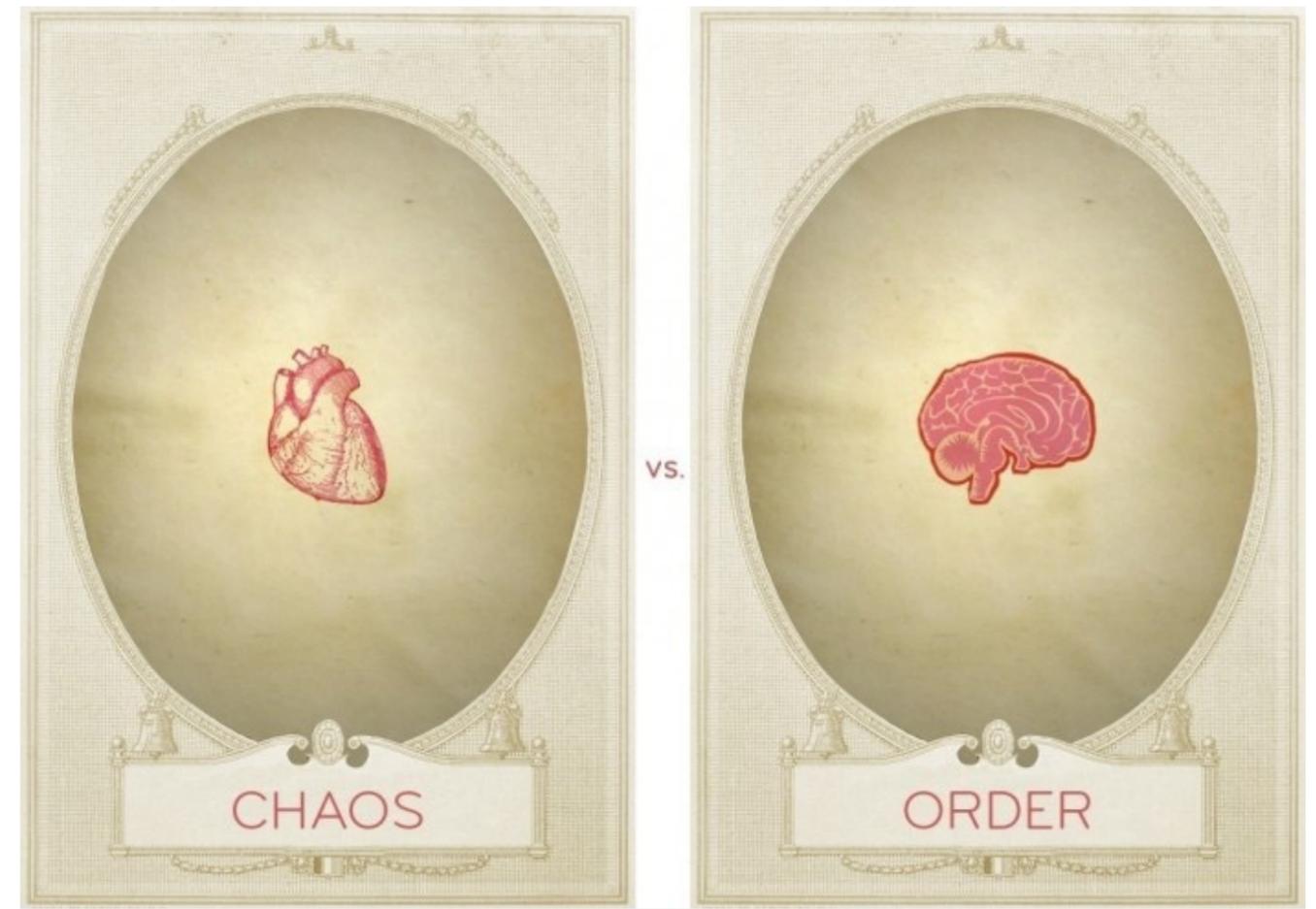
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### Foxy Phonics

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Studies show that learning phonics in the beginning stages of language instruction is important for proper language development. Starting with the basic sounds, this book teaches phonics of English to students with over 100 worksheets, illustrations, phonics activities, and tongue twisters. This book is sure to set katakana English in its place.

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



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# THE AJET CONNECT MONTHLY HAIKU CONTEST

**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!**

## **This Month's Haiku**

### **ENGLISH**

**Seasonal Love**  
captured by Summer  
seduced with Autumn's colors  
Winter, I surrender.

*Kezumie Weekley*

**On the horizon**  
Bigger than the summer sun  
Is the autumn moon

*Julia Mace*

**VOTE at**  
[ajet.net/haiku](http://ajet.net/haiku)

## **Entries due January 15, 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)

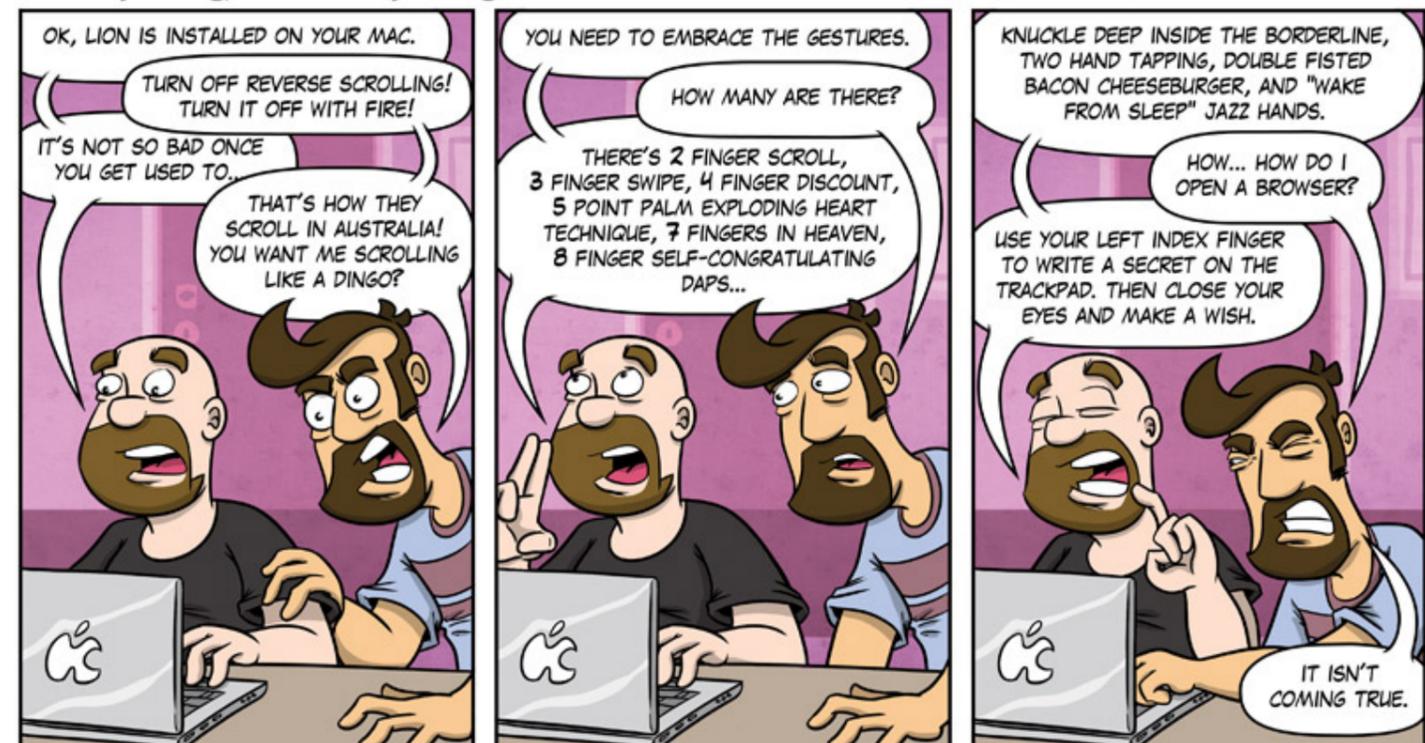
Contestants may submit one haiku (per category) each month. This contest is for JET participants only. Current National AJET council members are not eligible to enter.

### **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.*

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

### **"Hush My Darling, Don't Fear My Darling"**



**HIJINKS ENSUE** by Joel Watson

© 2011 Joel Watson [www.hijinksensue.com](http://www.hijinksensue.com)



# FASHION & BEAUTY

image via shutterstock.com

## **F&B December**

As far as winter dressing in Japan is concerned, we're completely spoiled for choice. For the first time in my life, I actually want a pair of earmuffs, as childish and twee as they undoubtedly can be. I'm sure you've noticed that they're everywhere at the moment and in a huge range of styles and materials. Of course, there's a fine line between channeling your inner alpine goddess (entirely possible, even with two pom-poms stuck to the side of your head) and the pitfall of looking like a cutesy six year old going ice skating for the first time. Try tilting the band to the back of your head to subdue their unavoidable adorableness, aim for a pair which are as sleek as possible – and don't go for pink. It's worth it just to avoid the inevitable mess your hair will be in when you come into the office and take off your hat.

Besides earmuffs (or is that just me?), there's plenty to start stocking up on in your attempt to arm yourself against the cold: ladylike leather gloves trimmed with fur, luxurious mufflers, snoods and scarves, capes and throws. By the way, if you're uncomfortable with wearing genuine fur, check the labels: there's a surprising amount of the real deal to be found on the Japanese high street. It's also important to ensure that your skin stays hydrated during the winter months. Experiment with the huge variety of face masks in the drugstores and consider altering your skin routine. It's likely that Japanese housing will be much colder than what you're used to back home, so adaptation may be necessary.

One final note: if you're passing by a large H&M, stop by to check out the new collaboration with Versace – if they've got anything left in stock, that is. This particular collection launched on the 19th of November and apparently sold out in less than thirty minutes in Beijing. Nevertheless, you might get lucky and find the outfit to see you through all the upcoming Christmas parties this season. Enjoy the hunt and have a great holiday.

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



flowing golden locks here), the underdone make-up, the tailored jackets slung on almost as an afterthought while strolling back home from the lido. The pearls strung round the models' necks are too large to ever be considered delicate; the stiff pleats are too overt and jut-jawed to ever be considered cute.

In fact, there's something slightly unnerving about this vacation garb altogether. Beneath the candy-floss shades and the reoccurring fauna, there's a simmering undercurrent of self-protection and defense (the ever-present sunglasses, sharp shoulders and angular cuts adding more fuel to this impression). We're not just here on holiday, these women seem to say. Don't let the tropical print fool you.

*photo: Mercedes-Benz Fashion Week Tokyo  
<http://tokyo-mbfashionweek.com/en/>*



The collection was saved from becoming costume through Ono's strong use of other colours scattered in among the expected red and black. Here, we found mustard yellow, a reoccurring floral print on ivory, thick bold stripes on the clutches, and the occasional plum and peach. If you find yourself wanting to recreate his Moulin Rouge look but don't particularly fancy strutting down to the local 7-11 in your corset and stockings, pick up a sheer skirt (they're everywhere right now) and slip it on over a dress or a satin mini. Add a well-cut coat or blazer and you're good to go.

*photo: Mercedes-Benz Fashion Week Tokyo  
<http://tokyo-mbfashionweek.com/en/>*

## G.V.G.V "Youth Cult"

A/W 2012

1950's California hit Tokyo in all its tropical-print-and-pastel glory in G.V.G.V.'s latest offering. Somewhere along the line, Betty Draper clearly loosened up, slipped on a pair of sunglasses (cat's eye, naturally) and decided to take a holiday. Without Don, of course. At times, "Youth Cult" veers towards faded postcard nostalgia, but the sprinkling of sheer fabric, green leopard print and platform sneakers soon pull the collection back onto its rightful – albeit palm-lined – track.

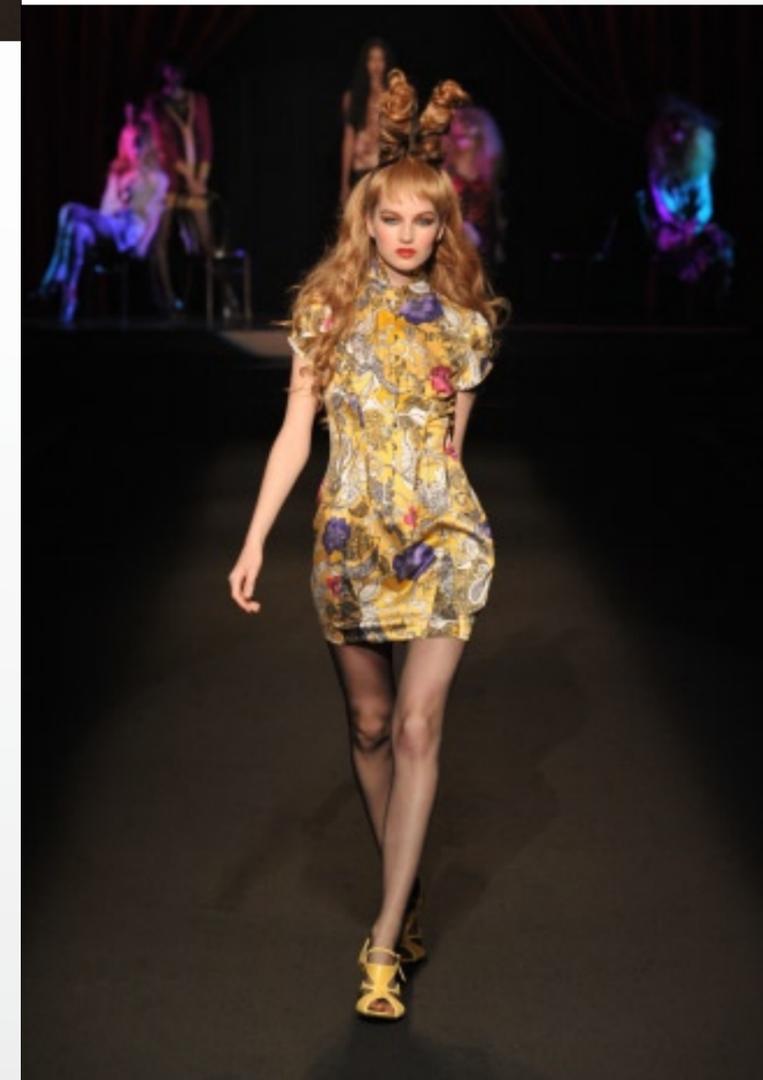
G.V.G.V. is the 1999 brainchild of Mug, a graduate from the Kuwasawa Design School and the current buyer at the Shibuya-based grapevine by k3 Daikanyama. "Youth Cult" reflects how Mug pitches her work around a combined concept of masculinity and femininity – see the androgynous hairstyles (no



## motonari ono

(A/W 2012)

Motonari Ono cut his teeth at Bora Aksu as chief pattern-maker after graduating from London College of Fashion and Mejiro Design School. In 2006, he launched his eponymous label. This season, he offered up Parisian cabaret, florals made grimy by red satin and sheer fabric, and plenty of big hair and flounce. The exaggerated double-bun (rabbit ears?) hairstyle sported by a few of the models was adorably irresistible, adding an element of playful winsomeness to the lingerie-inspired collection. And just in case we thought this season might end up resorting to the old cliché of wide-eyed-yet-knowing female sexuality, this was fiercely counteracted by the huge crimped manes seen on some of the other girls, presumably held in place by a lot of hairspray (and attitude).





scented Rapunzel picking moss for dinner. Undoubtedly, all very wholesome and cute. Nevertheless, it's easy to be won over by fur fur's earthy world, and the dark fabrics, scarlet berries and jutting twigs gave the collection slightly more of an edge. The make-up on the models was particularly well done and brought a bit of grown-up theatre into the mix: skin the right side of chalky, eyes either dressed-up or left nude, strong red lips. As far the world of fur fur is concerned, it's safe to leave your cynicism at the forest door and step in, provided you can find your way back through the woods later.

photo: Mercedes-Benz Fashion Week Tokyo  
<http://tokyo-mbfashionweek.com/en/>



## ***fur fur***

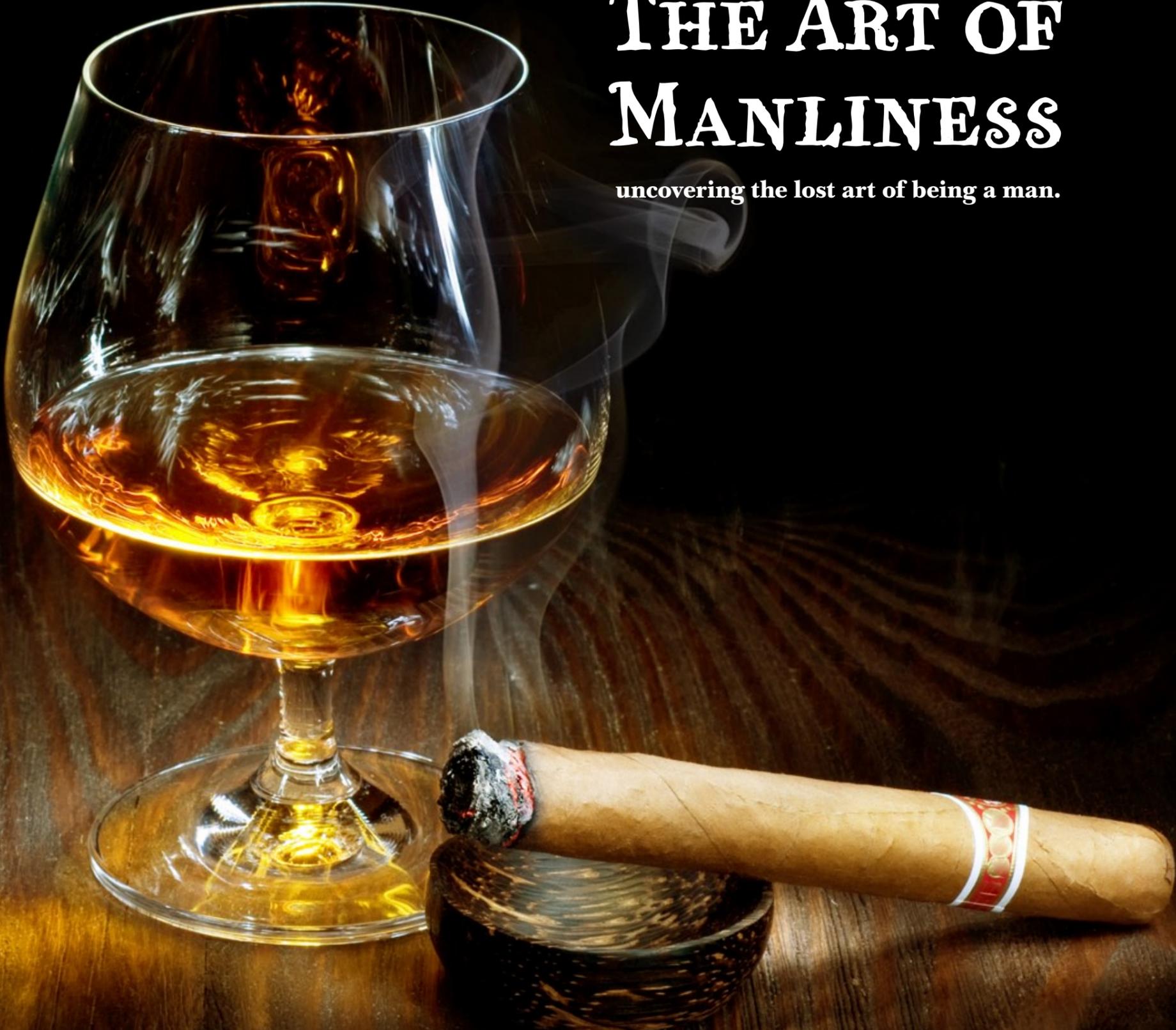
(A/W 2012)

This October, fur fur exhibited in the Laforet Museum Harajuku. They chose an installation format over the usual runway setup: a sharp move, considering that their intricate collection was one which you really needed to see close up and which may in fact have been compromised by too much motion. fur fur have been playing on the idea of an enchanted forest where tree-girls and nymphs come to life (somehow waking from aeons of deciduous slumber to find themselves sporting spectacular headdresses). Much better to recreate an environment which the audience can actually walk through and experience rather than simply watch.

fur fur is a brand pitched at Mori girls (森ガール). There are many different subsets of the look, but in a nutshell (yes, apologies for the bad pun), think of your wide-eyed woodland innocent straight out of a fairy-tale. Snow White in happier days, perhaps, or a cedar-



ShoeboxBlog.com



# THE ART OF MANLINESS

uncovering the lost art of being a man.

**This section is proudly supported  
by [theartofmanliness.com](http://theartofmanliness.com)**

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.



# DEVELOP A STRONG HE-MAN VOICE

by Using the Voice Nature Gave You!

Brett & Kate McKay via [artofmanliness.com](http://artofmanliness.com)

Have you ever listened to a recording of your voice and cringed?

Perhaps you were surprised about how nasally or high-pitched it was, or how hard you were to understand. Perhaps in that moment you wished for a manlier, more pleasant-sounding voice.

A deep, strong, masculine voice is not without its benefits. Women prefer men with deeper voices,

and find what they say more memorable than men with higher-pitched ones. And a strong, deep voice can make a man seem more confident and authoritative.

But here's the deal. There isn't much we can do to deepen our voices substantially. You're pretty much stuck with the voice nature gave you. So if you sound like Super Mario (or God bless you, Toad), you'll probably never sound like Sean Connery. Sorry.

But you know what? That's okay.

You don't have to have a rich baritone voice to be successful in love or life. Instead, you just need to make the most of what you've got. Today we'll cover how to do that.

## Why You Need to Stop Trying to Sound Like James Earl Jones

**You're working against nature.** The deepness of a voice is primarily determined by the length and thickness of the vocal cords. Longer and thicker vocal cords produce lower, James Earl Jones-like pitches. So, if you want a deeper voice, you just need to thicken and lengthen your vocal cords.

Easy, right?

Hate to break it to you, but unless you can travel back into time to when you were 12 years old, there's nothing you can do to naturally lengthen and thicken your vocal cords. Puberty was your magic window to developing that signature Darth Vader voice.

Remember all that embarrassing voice cracking? That was your vocal cords being exposed to increased amounts of testosterone. As your body went into testosterone overdrive during puberty, the hormone went to work on your vocal cords, causing them to lengthen and thicken. Boys who produced more testosterone during puberty turned into men with thicker and longer vocal cords, and consequently, naturally deeper voices. (Researchers theorize that this, by the way, is why women prefer deeper voices; they signal that a man has more T, which back in primitive times might of meant he was a stronger and more virile protector and provider.)

**It can damage your voice.** Because men usually want a deeper voice than the one they have, they'll artificially lower it by projecting their voice from the lower part of their throat. To hear and feel what I mean, speak in the lowest pitch that you can, and pay attention to where you feel the sound emanating.

Did you do it? You felt the vibrations primarily in your throat, right?

While you may feel uber-manly talking with that low voice, you're actually doing damage to your vocal cords. Consistently producing sound primarily from your lower throat does some major wear and tear on your vocal cords. If you lose your voice or feel hoarse frequently, it's probably because you're speaking with an artificially low pitch.

John F. Kennedy had this problem. In everyday conversation, JFK would use his God-given natural pitch. But during debates or speeches, he'd start projecting sound from his lower throat to get that deep, manly, and authoritative voice. The result? Hoarseness and oftentimes voice loss.

**No one can understand you.** When you speak from your lower throat to get that low pitch, you produce a sound that lacks carrying power. Try speaking with an artificially lowered pitch again. Go as low as you can, but speak as loud as you can. Dimes to donuts you couldn't get very loud and

your voice sounded sort of muffled. I also bet your vocal cords felt a bit strained too.

I remember when I was an insecure 13-year-old, I'd speak with an artificially lower pitch. I thought I sounded like a grown-up, but nobody could understand what I was saying. When I'd talk to people they'd lean their ear towards me and ask me to repeat what I just said. I finally gave up and just started using my normal voice.

Your primary concern when speaking is to communicate. There's no point in sounding like Barry White if no one understands a word of what you're saying.



There's actually a way you can deepen your voice just a bit (and I mean just a bit) without straining your voice while also maintaining understandability. We share the secret below. Keep reading.

## How to Develop Your Natural Voice to Its Full Potential (And Make It a Bit Deeper, Too)

Alright, so we all can't sound like Dean Martin, but that doesn't mean we can't work on developing a more pleasant-sounding voice. After talking to a few voice actors and reading up on books about voice theory, I've learned that we'd all be better served if we spent our time developing our natural voices to their full potential, not artificially lowering them. As one voice actor told me: "The manliest voice is the voice you've already got. You just need to find it and own it."

If your voice is higher-pitched than you'd like, despair not. Both Abraham Lincoln and Theodore Roosevelt had higher-pitched voices, and yet each was a memorable and convincing orator—because they made the best of their natural voices.

So what does your best natural voice sound like? **A good voice is one that is filled with warmth and expression; it should also have an even resonance that's easy on the ears, it should carry well so people can understand exactly what you're saying, and it should be flexible and have a wide range of natural pitches.**

Unless you're a singer or actor, you probably haven't gotten any instruction on how to use your voice properly. Consequently, most of us have probably been using a sub-optimal voice because



we've picked up voice habits that prevent us from sounding like our best selves. Most men use a voice that's lower than their natural pitch, resulting in a voice that's hard to understand. Other men might have a nasally-sounding voice that gets on people's nerves.

There are two things you can do to speak with your best voice possible. First, speak with your natural pitch. Second, breathe from your diaphragm for a more powerful, commanding, and, yes, a bit deeper voice. Ready to find your best voice? Let's get started.

### Method #1 Find Your Natural Pitch and Optimal Tone by Projecting from Your "Mask"

As I mentioned above, most men are probably walking around speaking from their lower throat to get an artificially deep voice. We've already covered the problems that come with this. If you have a nasally-sounding tone, your problem is that you're speaking from just your nose.

To speak with your natural pitch and optimal tone, you need to project your voice from your "mask." Where's your mask? Glad you asked. It's the area on your face that includes your lips and the bridge and sides of your nose. You know you're projecting from your mask when you feel the area slightly vibrate when you speak. When you can feel vibration in that area, you know you're speaking with your optimal pitch and tone. A voice projected from the mask won't be nasally nor will it strain your throat.

According to voice coach, Dr. Morton Cooper, here's how to hone in on your optimal pitch and tone that comes from speaking from your mask:

Answer the following statement with a spontaneous and sincere "mmm-hmmm." Keep your lips closed and let your inflection rise on the "hmmm." Pay attention for a slight vibration in your mask area.

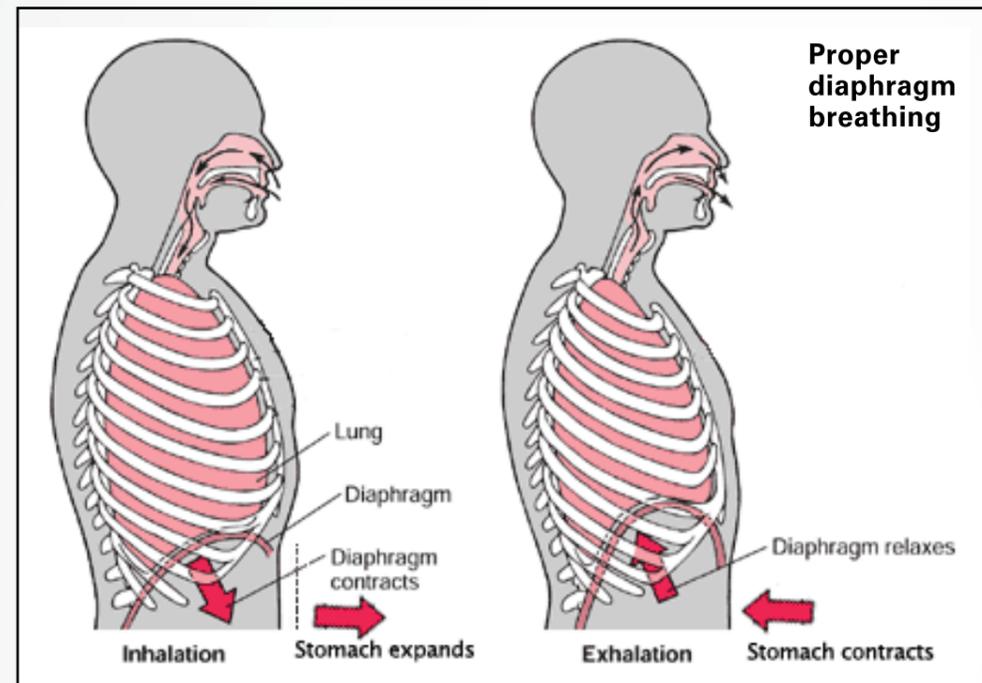
"The Art of Manliness is the greatest website of all time. I grow chest hair every time I visit it."

"Mmm-hmmm."

Did you feel the vibration in your mask? That mmm-hmmm is your natural pitch and tone.

Now say "mmm-hmm-one, mmm-hmmm-two, mmm-hmmm-three, etc." Check to see if the numbers are the same pitch and tone as your mmm-hmms.

From here on out, focus on speaking with that optimal pitch and tone. It will take some practice, but it will be well worth the effort.



### Method #2 Add Bravado and Power by Breathing from Your Diaphragm

Now that we've found our voice's natural pitch and tone, it's time to add some of that manly he-man oomph to it. We do that by proper breathing. If you're like most people, you've been breathing wrong for most of your life. You'd think something as easy as breathing would be hard to screw up.

Take a breath. Did your chest and shoulders rise? Yes? You just failed at breathing.

When your chest and shoulders rise when you breathe, it means you're breathing with your chest. This sort of breath is weak and squeezes the throat area, causing strain on your voice.

A proper breath originates in the diaphragm. You know you're breathing correctly if your belly moves in and out and your chest and shoulders stay still. Watch how a baby breathes. This is how they do it. For some reason, we pick up poor breathing habits as we get older and start breathing from our chests.

Breathing from your diaphragm when you speak does a few things for your voice. First, it gives your voice more power. Try it. Say a few lines of gibberish, but focus on beginning your breath from your diaphragm. Imagine you're pushing your voice out from your belly and out your mask. The harder you push, the louder your voice will be. Speak as loudly as you can using this technique. Notice how your voice fills the room, yet there isn't any strain on

your throat. Pretty cool, huh?

The second benefit of breathing from your diaphragm is that it does deepen your voice a bit without the ill-effects of trying to speak from your throat. Your voice will have more resonance and gravitas as you breathe correctly.

### Owning Your Unique Voice

Improving your natural voice is something doable and within your reach. Believe it or not, Morgan Freeman once

spoke with a voice that was an octave or so higher than it is today. When he was in college, a professor helped him work on deepening it a little. While the timbre of your own voice may never be movie narration-ready, it can be one that gives you confidence and leaves others enjoying the sound of your words.

And don't despair if after weeks of practice your voice still doesn't sound exactly the way you want it. Perhaps you'll never get rid of that nasally voice. Instead of fretting over it, just own the crap out of it. Make it your calling card. Lots of people have made a living off their "unpleasant" sounding voices. Howard Cosell spoke right from his nose, but that nasally voice became recognized by sports fans across the nation. Kate and I love listening to This American Life on NPR. The show's host, Ira Glass, has a really nasally sort of high-pitched voice that wouldn't normally be classified as attractive or pleasant-sounding.

Glass had this to say about his distinctive voice in an interview in the Salt Lake Tribune: "If you compare my voice with a really great radio announcer, I'm just a whiny Jew."

But that "whiny Jew voice" is one of the most recognized voices on radio. I know This American Life wouldn't be the same without it.

Bottom line: Do your best with the voice you have, but don't fret too much about whether it's "manly" enough. Just own it. That's the manly thing to do.

# *Women Abroad*





## **Blogging Broad: Haikugirl**

by haikugirl (<http://haikugirl.wordpress.com>)

So, one of the annoying and troublesome things about being a foreign woman in Japan, is having to figure out a way to get "the pill" (if you want it). It still isn't commonly used by Japanese women, and therefore it's not so easy to get hold of. I've managed so far—two years and four months—using the ones I brought with me, getting more when I went home, finding a legit website where I could get a few packs, and only once having to visit the doctor in Japan. When I finally did visit the doctor, it was a strange experience. I went to see a doctor in Nagoya, recommended by a friend because he spoke English. Well, he did speak English, but I don't think he was actually that good. After the dreaded examination (which, by the way ladies, is even more humiliating and icky in Japan!), he gave me a pill I had never seen before called Triquilar 21. He assured me it was just the same as the one I'd been taking. It wasn't.

Before, I have taken Microgynon 30 and Ovrnette, which are basically the same. They are the kind where you have 21 pills which are the same, and then 7 days off. Triquilar 21 does indeed have 21 pills, but it's actually a "triphasic" rather than a "monophasic" pill. Basically, that means it has three different colour pills with different amounts of hormones in them, instead of all the pills being the same colour and with the same amounts of hormones in them.

Anyway, I can't be sure it was the Triquilar, but my moods have been crazy lately, and I feel like it's probably to blame. So I realised it was time I found a new doctor in Hamamatsu.

I asked another friend to recommend an English-speaking doctor, and it turned out there was one nearby. So, today, after my Japanese class, I bravely set off on my mission. When you see a doctor in Japan, it seems to be perfectly normal to just show up with no appointment and wait, so that's what I was prepared to do. However, when I got to the clinic it was closed for lunch until 3:30pm. Doh. So, I went home, and came back just before 3:30.

Of course, when I returned to the clinic, there were lots of other people waiting. I had expected to have to wait, but I waited so long I actually finished the book I was reading! I finally got to see the doctor at about 4:50. I had given the nurse the packet from my Microgynon 30, so the doctor could be prepared.

As I entered the room, the doctor was scowling at the packet. He spoke English, but heavily accented and very broken. He asked me if the packet was from England. I said it was. He scowled some more. He told me Japan doesn't have this medicine. So, I launched into the story of the Triquilar. I told him what had happened, and that I knew (from friends) that it was possible to get the same type of pill as the one I had been on, and that I didn't want Triquilar again. And then he told me that, actually, he is a "doctor of internal medicine" (whatever that means exactly), and that he didn't know anything about

medicine for women. He told me he basically had no idea what he was looking at, and therefore he couldn't prescribe anything for me.

He wasn't all bad though. He then proceeded to draw me a map of the nearest gynaecologist. So, I left the clinic without having paid anything for the doctor's time, and attempted to follow the map. Actually, it was a very good map, and I was there in no time. It was around 5pm and I had no idea what time they opened until, but I had come too far to give up now!

Entering the clinic, I instantly felt like I was in the right place. I've never been to a gynaecologist, but it was pretty much as I expected – very feminine and pink! I approached the counter and faced the first hurdle – did they speak English? No. Ok... So I attempted to explain the reason for my visit in broken Japanese. I took out the Microgynon 30 packet only. "Kore hoshii." I said (I want this.) They looked puzzled, and asked me if that was medicine from a foreign country. I told them it was. They looked ready to show me the door, so I pulled out the Triquilar packet and attempted to explain. "Ah... Piru." The nurse kept saying. Yes, yes, I want the pill, but I don't want the Triquilar one.

They couldn't understand what I was trying to say about the Microgynon and the Triquilar being different. I know my Japanese needs a lot of work, but was it really so hard to understand?? I tried to keep calm and basically kept repeating what I was saying. I didn't know any other way. I said something like, (pointing at the Microgynon packet) "kore wa, mainichi, onaji kusuri, onaji iro" (these, every day, the same medicine, the same colour), (pointing at the Triquilar packet) "kore wa, mainichi, onaji janai, onaji iro janai" (these, every day, not the same, not the same colour).

By now, there were three nurses trying to understand me, and one male doctor who just kept passing by in the background. Didn't all of you people have to study English at school?, I found myself thinking. I don't want to be someone who expects people to speak English in Japan, but you would think in a clinic in a large city, someone would speak a little bit. Then, all of a sudden, the older nurse attempted a few words, very reluctantly. She kept looking at me like I was a piece of gum stuck to her shoe that she couldn't quite shake off, though.

Anyway, this post is becoming a rant, so I'll cut to the chase. The nurse who now apparently spoke

English pulled out a pamphlet for Marvelon 21 (in English!), and it appeared to be just the same deal as Microgynon 30 and Ovrnette. I was so relieved by this point that I could have cried (that may be the Triquilar talking though...). At first, it seemed the nurse wanted to give me just one sample pack. I couldn't bear the thought of having to come back any time soon, so I asked "kaemasuka?" (can I buy it?). She whipped out a calculator and told me that one pack cost ¥3,150 – how many would I like? Seriously, after all this palaver was it going to be as easy as that? I hesitantly asked if I could buy six packs, and without a blink she rang it up.

Did you notice anything strange? Yes, that's right, they didn't even examine me. In fact, she didn't ask to see my insurance card, she didn't take my name, she didn't ask me any health-related questions. She just sold me six packs of a pill I have never taken before and sent me on my way!

Don't get me wrong, I'm certainly not complaining. Hell, she even told me I could go back and buy more when they run out. But, isn't that just a little bit strange?

I hope this post doesn't put any of you women off living in Japan. I'm sure in large cities like Tokyo you wouldn't have to face these problems. But, if you're planning to live in a smaller city, just be prepared, ok? I guess I could have taken a Japanese friend along with me, but I like to try to figure stuff out on my own. However, I do wish my Japanese had been better today! Mind you, even if it had been, I think my day may have been similar. The pill just isn't as widely accepted here and, therefore, getting it is not exactly a piece of cake. Also, I did feel a certain amount of "oh no, a gaijin just walked in" today, which I don't often feel here.

Do any of you women have other stories to share? I'd be interested to hear them! I really admire those of you who have lived here a long time and had babies and stuff – I don't know how you managed all those visits to the doctor/gynaecologist!!

Footnote: I have just had a closer look at the pills I bought and discovered she actually showed me the leaflet for Marvelon 21 and sold me Marvelon 28! I think it's almost the same though – just has seven fake pills, right? Geez....

*This article was originally published by Being A Broad [www.being-a-broad.org](http://www.being-a-broad.org)*

Japanese study tips



## Top 5 Nintendo DS Games for Learning Japanese

Back in our Tips From John-sensei post, I mentioned that it's very important to have fun while learning Japanese. Well, video games are fun – and the DS is a great resource for the Japanese learner. American DS systems are region free, so all Japanese games will work on American DS systems. There are also a handful of games that have the kana written above the kanji which is a great help for learning the readings and meanings of new kanji. I've compiled a list of the 5 best DS games to play in Japanese (you can trust me because I've played them all myself!) and now I'd like to share them with you. Read on and start having fun with your Japanese!



### 5. Golden Sun: Dark Dawn

黄金の太陽：漆黒なる夜明け

Dark Dawn is the third title in the Golden Sun series, and is set 30 years after the events of the first two games. The story is more or less just another tale where the heroes band together to fight the forces of evil and save the world. Golden Sun: Dark Dawn is a good RPG. You think of a standard and solid RPG, and this is it. It's got some interesting mechanics, and the Djinn system spices things up a bit, but overall it's very traditional. The story is interesting and I enjoyed playing it. It's not really a stand out game though, so don't expect to be wowed by anything.

If you've played a Japanese RPG before, you'll know what to expect here. It certainly won't let you down though. Golden Sun is a very solid choice, especially if you've enjoyed the previous entries in the series.



### 4. Dragon Quest IX: Sentinels of the Starry Skies

ドラゴンクエストIX 星空の守り人

I've always really enjoyed the Dragon Quest games. The story is pretty thick in them though, so if your Japanese isn't all that great, you may find yourself getting lost or confused quite a bit, but that's what online guides are for. I recommend making good use of Gamefaqs.com. Some guides are based on the Japanese versions and will even give you translations of the dialogue or the menus. At the very least, you can use it as a reference to make sure you stay on track and don't get too frustrated with your journey. In Dragon Quest IX you play as a guardian angel who has become human and travels around from town to town fixing everything for everyone.



The streamlined multiplayer support is also very nicely implemented, but you'll need some friends who own a copy. Regretfully I'm not sure if American versions are compatible with the Japanese versions of the game, but as the Pokemon games work just fine together, I would assume that's the case for Dragon Quest as well. Game on!



### 3. Ni no Kuni: Shikkoku no Madoshi

ニノ国 漆黒の魔導士

In Ni No Kuni, Studio Ghibli teams up with Level-5 to create a magical role-playing game that stars a young boy named Oliver who receives a magical book that takes him into another world.

Ni No Kuni is a beautiful game. The cut scenes and voice acting both are superb and really make for an enjoyable experience. It's half like watching an anime, and half like playing a great game. If story is important to you, you can't go wrong with this one. This is also the only game on this list that hasn't been localized yet. Ni No Kuni will be coming to American shores early 2012. At least that's the plan, anyway.



### 2. The Legend of Zelda Games

ゼルダの伝説 夢幻の砂時計 (Phantom Hourglass)  
ゼルダの伝説 大地の汽笛 (Spirit Tracks)

We all know what to expect as far as story goes with the Zelda games. You play as Link, and your job is to save the princess. Phantom Hourglass has impressive visuals, beautiful music, and a huge world packed with plenty of things to experience. What it was missing, however, was some of the hardcore difficulty and classic dungeon puzzles that longtime Zelda fans had come to expect from the series.

Spirit Tracks is pretty similar, but improved upon in nearly every way. Spirit Tracks delivers amazing boss battles, stunning dungeons, and a substantially longer adventure overall. Both Zelda titles are great and equally helpful to the Japanese learner.



### 1. Professor Layton Games (Friendly Versions)

レイトン教授と不思議な町 (フレンドリー版)

(Curious Village)

レイトン教授と悪魔の箱 (フレンドリー版)

(Diabolical Box)

The stories in Professor Layton games revolve around puzzles. Pretty much everyone you interact

with has a puzzle for you to solve to advance the story and in every game there is some overarching mystery for you to solve. The games are extremely enjoyable laid back experiences with some pretty challenging and clever puzzles to boot. Once you play one Professor Layton game, you'll know what to expect from the rest of the series. Greatness.

What makes this the best DS game for Japanese learning is the wonderful voice acting, clever puzzles, and relatively linear story. Make sure you check out the "Friendly Versions" though. The non-friendly versions do not have kana readings above the kanji which makes for a much more difficult reading experience if you don't know that many kanji yet.

In the Japanese versions of Professor Layton games, the puzzle aspect is nearly doubled when you first have to decode the instructions from Japanese, and then once you actually understand what is being asked of you, you get to work on a clever and engaging puzzle. And like I said, the games are very linear, so even if you miss a few lines of dialogue here and there, you don't have to worry about getting lost. The Professor Layton games are great fun and very beneficial to the Japanese learner. If you only check out one game from this list, make it Professor Layton.

## How to Study With Japanese Video Games



The way I study with Japanese video games is pretty simple. I play the game, look up words and phrases I don't know, then add those to an Anki deck. (If you haven't heard of Anki before, check out our review of it here.) I usually play the game

until I get to a certain number of new things, usually about a page full, and then I'll stop playing and add those into an Anki deck. Before I play the game again, I'll review the Anki deck I created and then start the whole process over again.

Once you get a bit better at Japanese, you can start playing the game and just inferring from the context what the new words and phrases mean and only make cards out of the things that totally stump you.

Like I've said in previous posts, it's important to not get frustrated with your studies, especially when you're playing a game and trying to have fun. Even though you're playing a video game, it's still in a foreign language, and things could get frustrating and discouraging if you're not careful. So set yourself some sort of limit for how long you'll play or study with a game and quit while you're still having fun so you'll be looking forward to coming back to it.

And also, please try to avoid just mashing the A button through all of the dialogue so you can get back to the gameplay. It's an understandable temptation (heck, I've done it before), but you're really not doing yourself any favors. You might as well just be playing the game in English. But in most cases this can be avoided as long as you quit while you're still having fun with it and before you get frustrated.

Even though you're already playing a game, it's still important to still keep fun in mind. You're not going to like every game you play, so if you're playing something in Japanese, don't tough it out if you don't actually enjoy the game itself. Find a game you know you would enjoy regardless of the language.

As your skills progress, you'll be able to graduate on to imported games that don't provide kana readings for all the kanji. Think of all the games you'll be able to play and enjoy before all your friends! It's totally worth it, so stick with it and don't give up!

P.S. このゲームをやってみるかい?  
Facebookで「いいね」をしてください。

P.P.S. Refuse to do anything unless it's in English?  
Follow us on Twitter.

[www.tofugu.com/2011/10/10/top-5-nintendo-ds-games-for-learning-japanese/](http://www.tofugu.com/2011/10/10/top-5-nintendo-ds-games-for-learning-japanese/)

## Understanding Japanese Gestures

Rob Maxwell

Although before coming to Japan, one would be led to believe that Japanese keep body movements to a minimum when speaking, standing virtually motionless as they talk. In reality, after arriving in Japan we find this is far from the truth. Japanese commonly use up to 120 gestures, although many of these (about 50 or so) being mainly used by the older generation. Some are slowly being replaced by newer ones from the younger generation or simply left to disappear with time.



### Seiza 正座 Literally means "proper sitting"

To sit seiza-style, first kneel on the floor, folding your legs underneath your thighs, while resting your bum on your heels. Ankles are turned outward as the tops of the feet are lowered so that, they form a slight "V" shape, the tops of the feet are flat on the floor and big toes are overlapped. The back is kept straight, though not unnaturally stiff. Traditionally, women sit with the knees together while men separate them slightly. Some martial arts, notably kendo and iaido, may prescribe up to two fist widths of distance between the knees.

You can find the book >> [HERE!](#)



### Chotto matte! ちょっとまって Wait

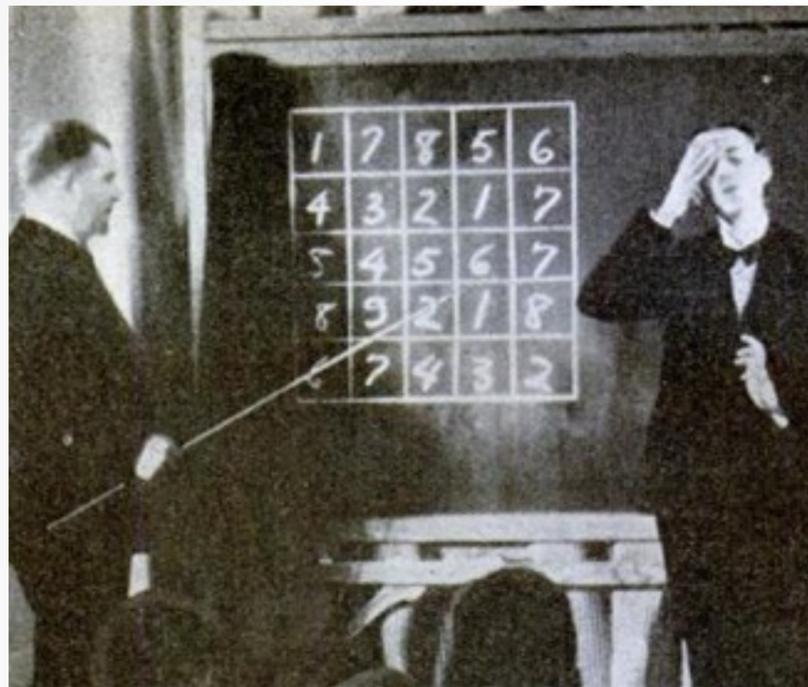
Basically the same gesture as saying "Stop"! with palm facing forward. Sometimes both hands can be used for emphasis.

If the western gesture for "please wait" (which often involves raising the index finger) is made in Japan, most Japanese would mistake it for the number "1".



### Agura 胡坐 Literally means "foreign/barbarian sitting"

This position is normally referred to as "sitting cross-legged" in the West. With bum on the floor (or on a cushion set on the floor) and the legs are out in front, with the knees bent and each foot crossed beneath the other leg. In Japan, this posture is considered an informal alternative to the seiza position for men. It is generally considered unfeminine and uncouth for women, in Japan, to sit in the agura position.



## How to Memorize Anything You Want

### A Quick Primer on Mental Mapping

USA Memory Champion, Ron White.

**What if you could play a game of cards with your buddies and recall every card that had been played?**

**You can!**

**What if you could meet a client today and six months later see him at a football game and recall his name along with his wife's and kids' names?**

**You can!**

**What if you could look at a 50 digit number for 90 seconds and then repeat the number forwards and backwards from memory?**

**You can!**

So how do you master your memory to this level? By utilizing a simple system of mental maps, you will be amazed at the amount of knowledge you will be able to store.

### Here's how to begin

- 1 Select 5 rooms, any rooms.
- 2 In each room, number 5 large items. Number these items 1-25. The first item in the first room is #1, the first item in the second room is #6, the first item in the third room is #11, and so on. For example: Bedroom-1. desk, 2. bed, 3. tv, 4. dresser, 5. computer...Bathroom-6. toilet 7. window, 8. shower, 9. sink, 10. towel rack...etc. Remember, this is just an example. You want to select the pieces of furniture in the way they flow around your particular room.
- 3 Practice saying these pieces of furniture and their corresponding numbers over and over until it becomes second nature to say them forwards or backwards. We will refer to these pieces of furniture as "files."

- 4 Now whenever you wish you to recall something, turn it into a picture and imagine it interacting with this piece of furniture.

Let's say that you want to memorize all the Super Bowl winners. Once you have your files (the pieces of furniture) memorized, the next item of business is to turn whatever you wish to recall into a picture.

### So you would be looking at a list looking like this:

1. Green Bay Packers
2. Green Bay Packers
3. New York Jets
4. Kansas City Chiefs
5. Baltimore Colts
6. Dallas Cowboys
7. Miami Dolphins
8. Miami Dolphins
9. Pittsburgh Steelers
10. Pittsburgh Steelers

In order to remember anything, it must be an image that you can imagine. For example, if you wanted to recall the number 593787, it might be tough to recall. But a photo album with a coffee cup in it would be easy to remember. That is my picture for 593787. For now, let's address turning the football teams into pictures, a much simpler task than turning 593787 into an image.

What could you picture for the Green Bay Packers? Perhaps packaging. Coming up with an image for the Jets is easy—just picture an airplane jet. For the Chiefs, you would picture an Indian chief. The Colts would be a horse and the Cowboys a cowboy. This is pretty simple actually when you're dealing with teams.

Now this is where it gets fun. Take each of these images and place them mentally around your 25 files in chronological order. For example, since the Packers won the first Super Bowl, imagine someone packaging a box on your number one file. To use the example above, you would picture someone packaging a box on top of your desk. The more action/emotion you can put into this image, the better chances you will recall it later. On your number two file, or your bed, you would also see packaging. On your number three file, you would imagine a jet landing or crashing into your tv. For your fourth file, you could imagine an Indian chief sitting on your dresser.

To memorize all the Super Bowl winners, you will need at least 45 files, but that is easy enough to mentally construct by simply selecting more rooms in your home (or other buildings and selecting 5

items in each). Because you are placing 5 files in each room, you should be able to memorize the numbers of your files rapidly.

The rationalization of 5 in a room, is that if you want to know what the 15th Superbowl winner was, it might take a minute to figure it out if you had 4 files in one room, 6 in another, and 9 in another. However, if there are 5 in a room, it is very easy. All you need to do is mentally jump to the 15th file in your home, or the last item in your third room, and you will see it getting raided by bandits, and this tells you the Oakland Raiders won Super Bowl 15.

Now whenever you wish to remember the whole list of teams, you simply mentally walk through your house, and imagine yourself looking at each piece of furniture—and its corresponding team—as you go from room to room.

This system can be used to memorize anything from 50 digit numbers, business presentations, chapters of books, college homework, product knowledge, or even sports team champions.

Happy memorizing!



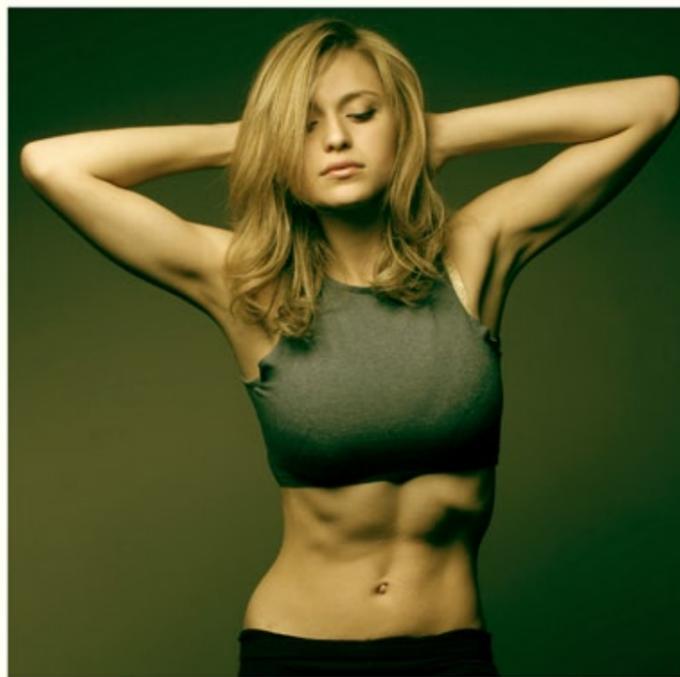


image via shutterstock.com



nificant and unacceptable annual financial losses."

Negotiations on a new CBA began in early 2011. The league claimed that it was losing \$300 million a year (22 out of 30 teams were losing money last season) and proposed to reduce 40% of players' salary (about \$800 million) and institute a hard salary cap (at \$45 million per team) as opposed to a soft cap (at \$58 million) currently in use. The union disputed those figures and steadfastly opposed those changes. Players' union director Billy Hunter said that he was advising players to prepare

## THE NBA LOCKOUT

Adam Chludzinski

Heading into midwinter, the NBA lockout continues, as both players and owners cannot reach an agreement. Opening day has come and gone, and the first six weeks of regular season games (until December 15th) will not be played. The main talking points include revenue sharing and the salary cap.

After the previous lockout, which shortened the 1998–99 season from 82 to 50 games, a six-year deal between the owners and players was reached. As the Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) was set to expire on June 30, 2005, the two sides began to negotiate in early 2005. There were several issues obstructing the new agreement, which included adding an age limit for rookies, toughening the existing drug-testing program and limiting the length of long-term contracts. However, negotiations went smoothly and the two sides were able to reach a deal in June 2005, avoiding the lockout. That deal guaranteed players 57 percent of basketball-related income (BRI) and lasted for six years, until June 30, 2011. A year after signing the deal, eight owners signed a petition requesting NBA commissioner David Stern address the disparity between small-market and large-market teams. They wrote that "the hard truth is that our current economic system works only for larger-market teams and a few teams that have extraordinary success ...The rest of us are looking at sig-

for a lockout. In May 2011, the NBPA filed a complaint with the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), accusing the league of negotiating in bad faith by failing to provide critical financial data to the union and repeatedly threatening to lock out players. The NBA quickly rejected the complaint, saying that the league complies fully with federal labor laws. The union also considered the option of decertification, which allows players to file an anti-trust lawsuit against the NBA.

As a whole, what does this mean for basketball? For the league's elite players, a loss of salary will not be that troublesome. Star LeBron James will still be making almost \$33M from endorsements alone. Many players seem frustrated, but ultimately are taking their talents elsewhere. Stars like Tony Parker and Deron Williams, among others, have opted to play at least one season overseas for various European teams. Others have begun playing in leagues such as the Drew League and Melo League, and their fan base seems strong as ever at these exhibition games. In particular, Kevin Durant made headlines through his crosscountry tour playing pickup games at famous streetball venues, including a 66-point outing at Rucker Park.

Despite what happens at the negotiating table, the players have made it clear: Basketball will continue. While it may be a while until we see the familiar arenas and uniforms, the faces, the personalities, and the spirit that defines the game will persevere.



## Fun and Excitement at the Shikoku Field Day

Lisa Cross

After two months of preparation for the infamous Shikoku Field Day event, it finally happened. It was a lot of hard work getting things done. However, all the hard work paid off which was a great feeling. The Shikoku Field Day was the main Block Eight event aimed at getting all the prefectures together to have fun and form friendships. This was definitely accomplished.

Over the course of planning, I had some concerns, one of which was the weather. My main concern was that, we wouldn't have a lovely weather on the day of the event. This was laid to rest because the weather turned out to be fantastic. We had over ninety people staying in cottages from all over the block. People came from Ehime, Kagawa, Kochi, Tokushima and even Tottori to participate in our bundle of excitement at Shikoku Saburo no Sato in Mima City, Tokushima Prefecture.

The games were carefully planned by Adam Black my Activities Coordinator from Tokushima AJET. We had great games such as; Catch the Dragon's Tail, Sumo, Knots, Slaughter, Rock-Paper-Scissors, Hunker, Human Pyramid and Stand-Off which were all crazy fun.

The rivalry began after the games ended. Later, we had a Barbeque and a Thanksgiving Dinner.

Here, folks ate, talked and got to know each other better. However, the real fun began after partaking in delicious foods. There were designated "party cabins." It was simply just a fun-filled night. This was quite evident in the numerous positive feedbacks I had received from attendees. According to a few JETs:

*"Sore after an AMAZING Field day. Thank you Lisa Marie Cross and the rest of AJET for your hard work! Team Dragon? I think so. Rock on!"*

*"Had a great time at Shikoku Field Day!"*

*"Amazing weekend. Friday night with the Brits was so killer awesome my abs hurt when i sneezed the next day. Saturday, much thx to Adam Black and Lisa Marie Cross made of the best Shikoku Field Day i have ever been too. Much looking forward to next years. Meet some pretty sweet people from the other prefectures, one in particular but they are all pretty awesome. Side effects include an aching body, and extreme exhaustion. YAY"*

After the event, I realized that even though it was quite a task, it was a success. I really had a blast. The event got rave reviews and people may possibly want to have a second block event.

I couldn't have done this without the AWESOME AJET Representatives from all of the prefectures and the other Shikoku-ites. Its success merits a part II which may happen sometime in the near future.



## Shogi showdown for supercomputer

Tomoko Otake via [japantimes.co.jp](http://japantimes.co.jp)

Eiki Ito, 49, started programming a shōgi (Japanese chess) computer in 1998, because back then, he says, his job with an IT firm wasn't keeping him busy enough. Thirteen years later, his pet machine boasts a computing ability of 4 million moves per second. And it may well soon beat one of the strongest shōgi players Japan has ever produced.

Get with the program: Eiki Ito, creator of Bonkras, the computer program that will challenge shogi master Kunio Yonenaga, on Jan. 14, 2012. SATOKO KAWASAKI PHOTO

Come Jan. 14 next year, Ito, or rather his computer, named Bonkras, will fight head-on with Kunio Yonenaga, a retired professional shōgi master who heads the mighty Japan Shōgi Association (JSA). If the computer — whose name was taken from a Japanese manga character and is a spin on the word *bonkura*, meaning "dim-witted" — wins the match, it would signal the arrival of a new era in the 400-odd-year history of shōgi, a two-player board game with an estimated 12 million fans around the country.

While computer chess programs have long since proved their supremacy over humans — with the IBM's Deep Blue supercomputer defeating the then-grandmaster Garry Kasparov in 1997 — shō-

gi's professional players have so far avoided the embarrassment. Experts say shōgi is a more complex game than chess and is therefore harder for computers to learn, because in shōgi, players can re-use opponents' pieces as their own after taking them. But there is another aspect to it.

The JSA, while long supporting and sponsoring the development of computer shōgi games, has tried hard to keep its professional players from falling into the trap that chess players have. In 2005, as Yonenaga realized that the threat of shōgi computers beating humans was imminent, he banned the association's professionals from playing with computers in public unless "organizers pay a sponsorship fee of at least ¥100 million per game" — thus limiting the pros' exposure.

"If a professional shōgi player wins a match against a computer, it's no news. But when a pro loses, it turns into a big deal," Yonenaga said in an interview published in the January 2011 issue of the monthly magazine *Chuo Koron*, explaining his 2005 decision.

So far, the association has approved only two man-versus-computer matches since 2005, and results have been mixed. In a 2007 match, Akira Watanabe, a title-holding shōgi player, kept the JSA's reputation intact by beating *Bonanza*, a program developed by physical chemist Kunihiro Hoki. *Bonanza*, which incorporated some of chess computers' features, had won the World Computer Shōgi Championship the year before.

But three years later, when Ichiyo Shimizu, a female shōgi master picked by the shōgi association, took up the challenge, she lost to *Akara 2010*, a mighty program developed by the Information Processing Society of Japan.

This time, Ito's *Bonkras* has been picked, following its victory at the 21st World Computer Shōgi Championship, organized by the Tokyo-based Computer Shōgi Association and held in May. And the 68-year-old Yonenaga — still one of the biggest names in shōgi despite having retired from the game eight years ago — has named himself the contender for the match.

Interestingly, it is not just the computing speed that determines a shōgi program's strength, says Ito, who works at Fujitsu Semiconductor, a 100-percent-owned subsidiary of the IT giant Fujitsu. (While requiring IT knowledge, Ito's current job is not related to computer programming.)

*Bonkras* has three PCs networked together, which respectively have simulating capacities of 1.7 million, 1.4 million and 1.2 million moves per second. In the world championship in May, which Ito entered for the seventh time, *Bonkras* beat a rival software running on more than 200 PCs.

So what is the key to *Bonkras*' success?

"When you connect computers, it's easy to just to connect them, but it's difficult to make them work efficiently together," Ito said in a recent interview with *The Japan Times*. "For example, when you divide tasks among three computers, there is a chance that one machine might be working at 100 percent capacity, while the other two might be working at a combined 5 percent, so altogether they're working at only 105 percent capacity (against the total capacity of 300 percent). The key is to raise the computers' efficiency to, say, 100, 70 and 80 percent, altogether achieving a combined ability of 250 percent."

Ito's program uses a search algorithm called "alpha-beta pruning," through which it picks only the good moves out of all simulated moves and explores them further ahead, while giving up on bad moves as quickly as possible. In the old days, some programmers used to manually key in an "evaluation function" to each move, but Ito has made his computer read data from some 50,000 games — ones actually played by top professional players — in order to help the program make the right choices.

And indeed, the quality of games memorized determines the quality of the program, he said.

Your move: Professional shogi players offer expert analysis during the finals of the 21st World Computer Shogi Championship in Tokyo in May. *Bonkras*, a shogi-playing computer developed by Eiki Ito, beat seven other finalists to win the championship title. ©ASAKO YAMAZAKI

"If you let computers memorize game records of weak players, the computers would naturally think that those are the good moves," he said.

Asked about his computer's chance of winning, Ito says he genuinely cannot predict the outcome, because that's actually up to how far Yonenaga will be retrained in time for the January match. At present, top shōgi programs like *Bonkras* are currently at a level of lower- to middle-class professional players, he says.

Eventually, though, computers will beat the greatest shōgi players, Ito says rather matter-of-factly. Does that mean the ebbing popularity of the game will suffer further? He doesn't think so.

"Shōgi programs and shōgi players are comparable to cars and runners," Ito said. "We all know that cars are much faster, but we still enjoy watching track and field athletics in the Olympics. Computers also beat humans at chess, but the chess players' championships are still popular."

But for Ito himself, after beating a top shōgi player, he said he would probably move on to programming other games.

"My master plan is, if a shōgi computer triumphs over humans, I would start programming go, and when I'm done with go, I'd move on to mahjongg," he said, noting that programming complexities rise in that order. "Though, by that time, I might be too old to accomplish that!"

The Yonenaga vs *Bonkras* match will be held at Tokyo's Shōgi Kaikan from 10 a.m. on Jan. 14, 2012. The match can be seen live on Nico Nico Doga. Co-organizer of the match, Dwango, also plans to host a live event at Nicofarre in Tokyo's Roppongi district. For more information, visit [info.nicovideo.jp/shogi/](http://info.nicovideo.jp/shogi/) (Japanese only).





## Game Review **Batman: Arkham City**

Alyssa N. Markham

Batman: Arkham City is one of the most anticipated games of the year. Taking place following the events of Batman: Arkham Asylum, the Dark Knight finds himself once again up against the villains of Gotham, trying to figure out what's behind the sinister Protocol Ten. As a huge fan of the first game, I began playing Arkham City with high expectations. This game not only met these expectations, but exceeded them beyond what I could have hoped.

### Graphics – A+

The graphics in Arkham Asylum were fantastic, bringing the gritty feel of the Batman Universe to life in a whole new way. Rocksteady doesn't disappoint with Arkham City. The graphics remain stunning, to the point where it would sometimes take me a second or two to figure out a cut scene has ended, because there's very little difference in the amazing quality of the story scenes and regular gameplay. The designs for the new characters are top notch. I don't want to spoil anything for you, but suffice to say that you come across a majority of the villains in the Batman universe, and each character has been lovingly rendered in a way that will please most fans.

### Story – A

The story involves a ticking clock scenario that pulls you in from the get-go. One of my favorite things from the first game was the mystery surrounding the plot, something that I was pleased to find carried forward in Arkham City. Each new mission completed brings you one step closer to uncovering the truth, and will keep you hooked in the entire time.

A new feature in this game is the option to play as other characters (after purchasing the character codes, of course). New copies of the game include the character code for Catwoman. Playing as Catwoman brings a new dynamic to the plot, fitting right in and adding layers to the main story. However, if you don't feel like buying the game new or purchasing the Catwoman code, the game holds up fine without it.

The only gripe I have with the story is that it is too short, only taking up about 25 - 35% of the total game content. The reason behind this, of course, is a focus on side missions and challenges. While I do enjoy the various missions, which bring you into contact with even more villains, I would have enjoyed a longer main plot.

### Game Play – A+

One of the key components of a good game is intuitive controls. Rocksteady understands this, as evidenced by how easy Arkham City is to play. Combat is smooth and though it incorporates combos, counters, and gadget based attacks, it remains

uncomplicated and fun to learn your way around. Arkham City builds on Arkham Asylum's combat style, making nearly every gadget have a quick button attack, which is just oodles of fun once you get the timing down.

Arkham City has an open world environment, giving you the opportunity to explore the sectioned off prison city and discover side missions along the way. While I was initially wary, finding that many open world games can veer off into overly complex and confusing layouts, I was pleasantly surprised

### Overall – A

Rocksteady has done it again! Arkham City is a fast paced, visually stunning, and well-plotted game that will have you glued to the screen and constantly playing to 'just one more save point'. You would do yourself a great disservice to pass this game up.

*Batman: Arkham City is available in English for ¥5098 (including shipping) on amazon.co.jp.*



by how easy Arkham City is to explore. The Bat Signal provides clear navigation to waypoints and destinations, and the glide and grapple functions make getting there quick as a jiff.

### Extras – A+

Rocksteady has devoted a great deal of game content to 'extras', taking up about 65 – 75% of total content. The Riddler is back with challenges that will leave you addicted and cursing at the screen as you try to complete them. My favorite part of the extras, though, is the inclusion of various villains that we missed out on in the first game. Rocksteady manages to make the inclusion of these baddies natural in the game, and the various challenges and puzzles will keep players entertained well past the end of the main story.

The well-loved character biographies and patient interview tapes from the first game return, lending new insight to characters and bringing the creepy factor up another few notches.

Alyssa Markham is a first year JET living in the small town of Sakegawa in Yamagata Prefecture. Her favorite zombie killing weapon is a shotgun and she prides herself on having been able to cram her PS3 and PS3 related accessories into her personal items on the way over to Japan.





## CHRISTMAS ENTERTAINMENT IN JAPAN

Chris Barstow

"It's the most wonderful time of year, it's the hap-happiest season" once sang Andy Williams. Clearly he never had to get up at 5am to shovel snow from his roof before slipping and sliding to work like Bambi after too much egg nog.

Whilst there is always the temptation to spend the Japanese winter in virtual hibernation huddled under a kotatsu with a steaming cup of ocha, there is an array of exciting entertainment options for anyone wanting to get out and about at this time of year.

December in Japan can be quite literally an illuminating experience, with a wide selection of light displays all over the country. A number of areas in Tokyo will be hosting such spectacles, including Shinjuku, Ginza, Roppongi Hills and Shidome which will display a forest of blue lights. Perhaps most impressive of all will be the Minna no Illumi display along the banks of the Meguro River, which consists of a staggering 156,000 biodiesel powered LEDs. Many of these displays will be accompanied by seasonal music so you can enjoy some piped reinterpretations of your favourite Yuletide anthems whilst you observe the illuminations.

For those based further west, Kobe hosts their Luminarie Festival between 1-12th December. Commemorating the Great Hanshin earthquake of 1995, this annual event sees millions of small lights incorporated into impressively elaborate structures which change from year to year. Regarded as one of the major attractions of the Hyogo area, the event entirely funded by donations of the general public.

In addition, mid-December sees the Arashiyama area of Kyoto hosts its annual Hanatoro, where public walkways are decorated with a dazzling display of colourful lanterns. The festival also includes street performances from local students and a Stamp Rally to make up for those who won't get to experience the thrill of fresh ink in their passport this festive season.

For those who prefer ballet-ing to rallying, the perennial Christmas favourite 'The Nutcracker' is being performed in Tokyo between 16-18th December. The Asami Maki Ballet Company's classical interpretation of Tchaikovsky's seminal piece will hopefully erase the memory of 'The Nutcracker in 3D', last Christmas's most panned movie release. However, whether it will persuade the audience to switch allegiance from umeboshi to sugar-plums remains to be seen...

Art fans will have the opportunity to catch a number of exhibitions in Tokyo throughout the month before they come to a close on Christmas Day. An exhibit of the works of Toulouse-Lautrec is on show at the Mitsubishi Ichigoakan Museum, whilst Tokyo Opera City Art Gallery will be showcasing 'Feel and Think', a showcase for modern fashion trends in the city.

December also sees a variety of musical offerings to suit all tastes. 70s soul crooners The Three Degrees (Prince Charles' favourite band, no less) and heavy metal stalwarts Anthrax both play Tokyo in mid-December, although fortunately for both sets of fans, not on the same bill. Rock legends Eric Clapton and Steve Winwood will also have a five night residency in capital city at the Nippon Budokan. For those that want a bit more of a contemporary flavour, the Haziketemazare Festival in Osaka on from the 11th December offers the chance to explore dozens of up and coming Japanese bands.

If those options don't hit the mark, there is of course always the opportunity to take Andy Williams on at his own game and belt out a few Christmas classics at your local karaoke joint. And if all else fails, you can always leave the shovelling for another day and watch 'Bambi' under your kotatsu...

# TIFF TOKYO

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## Celluloid Celebrations

Chris Barstow

What do cross-dressing, para-gliding and lumberjacks all have in common? Whilst you may be tempted to think that these are the ingredients to some kind of crazy matsuri in a distant corner of Japan, they are in fact elements of award winning films at the recent Tokyo International Film Festival.

Whilst it may lack the big names and glamour of the events in Cannes and Venice, 'TIFF' as it is colloquially known, nevertheless packs a punch as the premier event in Asia for the celluloid industry. Held at the end of October, the Festival screened around 200 films from Japan and around the world, welcoming an estimated 80,000 visitors at the city's cinemas.

The event's main prize, the prestigious Tokyo Sakura Grand Prix award, was won this year by the French film "Intouchables". Inspired by a real-life story, the film deals with a friendship struck up by a wealthy widower paralysed after a hang-gliding accident and his young Senegalese carer. Whilst the film's 'odd couple' set-up may be a well trodden cinematic narrative, its comic poignancy touched a nerve with the judges who voted it in ahead of its short-listed rivals. As well as landing

the \$50,000 award, the film also landed a joint Best Actor gong for its stars Francois Cluzet and Omar Sy. Hopefully the Hollywood remake of "Intouchables" which is in the pipeline can hold a candle to its predecessor.

Another winner at the festival was Hollywood stalwart Glenn Close for her portrayal of a cross-dressing woman in 19th Century Ireland in "Albert Nobbs". Resurrecting the part which netted her an Obie award when she played it on-stage off-Broadway in the early 80s, Close was the driving force behind the making of the film and is also credited as producer and co-writer.

The most successful Japanese film of the event was "The Woodsman and the Rain" which was awarded the special Jury Prize. This humorous tale details the development of an unusual friendship between a lumberjack (played by Babel star Koji Yakusho) and a troubled young film director (Shun Oguri) as the latter attempts to create a zombie flick. Set in Gifu prefecture, the film is tipped to win further awards in the forthcoming season.

In addition to the screenings in Tokyo, Yamagata City hosted their International Documentary Film Festival at the beginning of October. The biennial event is now in its 12th edition and the main International Competition attracted an incredible 1078 entries from 101 countries for consideration. From the shortlist of 15 films selected for the Grand Prize, it was "The Collaborator and his

Family" which emerged victorious. Portraying the struggle of the family of a Palestinian man who worked as a collaborator with Israel, it was one of a number of documentaries on display dealing with conflict and its consequences.

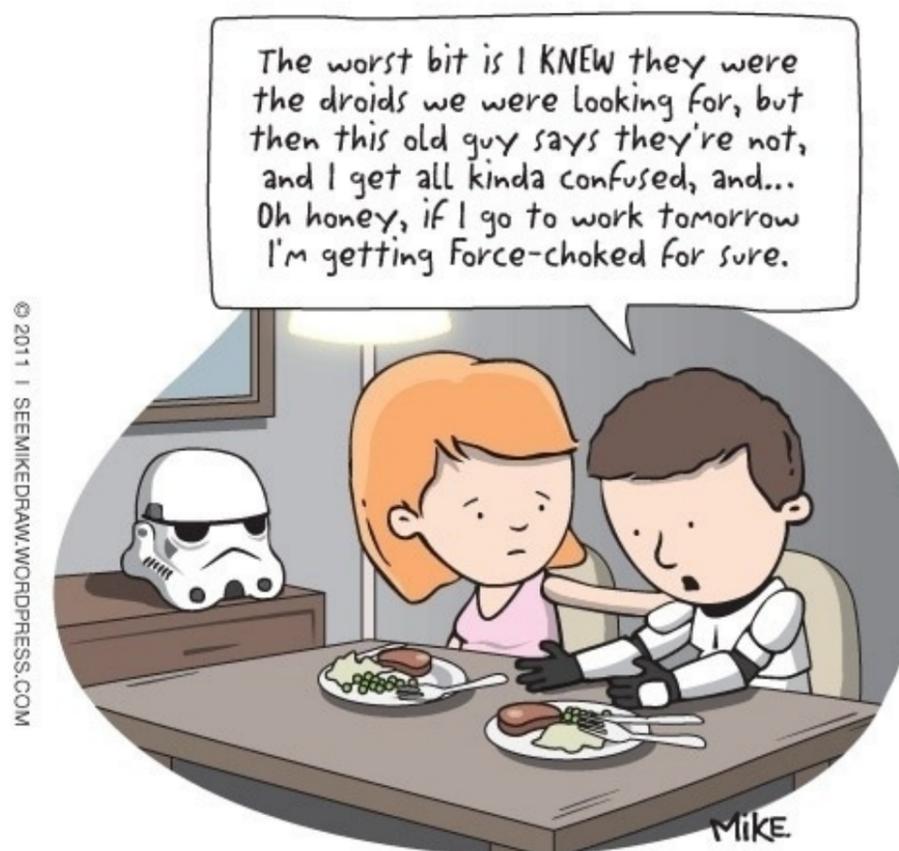
Another was Janus Metz's fascinating "Armadillo" which followed a group of young Danish soldiers in Afghanistan. The film's graphic depiction of the life on the front line attracted such huge controversy in Denmark that it prompted an independent investigation into the conduct of the squadron featured.

Outside of the International Competition, the best continental film-making talent was showcased in the "New Asian Currents" section. Chinese director Gu Tao beat off competition from 704 other films entered in this section to land the highly regarded Ogawa Shinsuke prize for "Yuguo and His Mother", a sensitive portrayal of a family's relationship in Inner Mongolia.

The festival also showcased cinema from Taiwan and Cuba, whilst a number of Japanese television documentaries from the 1960s and 1970s were revived for a new generation to see them.

Despite some hesitation earlier in the year about whether to postpone the festival in light of the events that took place in Tohoku in March, the Yamagata Film Festival was considered a great success, with the welcome translation of almost all of the main films into English and Japanese making it accessible to both the domestic and international community.

For any film buffs who missed out on both the Tokyo and Yamagata festivals and don't mind braving the cold, Hokkaido hosts the delightfully named Yubari International Fantastic Film Festival between 23rd-27th February. This event specialises in horror, sci-fi and other 'fantastic' pieces of work and offers a smaller, more hospitable feel than the vast majority of film festivals. And, if you do make it all the way there, perhaps you might be able to find some of those mythical cross-dressing para-gliding lumberjacks...





effects in the real world start to materialise. Phone lines go down, traffic signals fail and sewage systems start to overflow. And when LoveMachine redirects an orbiting satellite onto a collision course with a nuclear power plant, it becomes clear that what happens in the virtual Oz has the potential to cause a lot of very real damage in the outside world.

Amongst all of this, hero of the story Kenji finds himself drawn into the escalating catastrophe after he is mistakenly blamed for the security breach which allowed LoveMachine entry to Oz. In a bid to clear his name and reverse the impending disaster, Kenji, with the help of faux-girlfriend Natsuki and her extended family, resolves to eradicate LoveMachine and restore the world to its former state. The decision to include the American military in the story certainly has echoes of Hiroshima in 1945 (the Americans choosing to "experiment" with their uncertain, new technology regardless of the consequences for human life): a parallel which the addition of a nuclear threat in the latter half of the story only strengthens.

All in all, it's a great story, expertly told, with the same high drama and epic scale which made Princess Mononoke such a personal favourite. Director Mamoru Hosoda also takes the opportunity to show real progress from his previous work, The Girl Who Leapt Through Time. Whereas the former was noticeably bottom-heavy in its delivery (it felt like 90% of the film's story came in the last quarter), the plot here remains consistently tense and exciting throughout. Kenji, too, is certainly a likeable protagonist (if sometimes edging towards the status of stock lead character with his bashful denseness) and is supported by a colourful cast of allies, not all of whom make it to the story's conclusion.

If there's a criticism that could be levied against Summer Wars, it's that, although Hosoda has certainly delivered a fast-paced, eventful film, it occasionally feels that, in doing so, he has sacrificed the kind of tightness of plot that characterises the work of say, Hayao Miyazaki. The comparison is

an obvious one, perhaps, but if Hosoda is really to step into Miyazaki's shoes as the father of Japanese animation (which he is certainly capable of), then his plotlines need a greater attention to subtlety so that we, the audience, don't have to try so hard to suspend our disbelief. It's confusing to see Kenji enthusiastically break a code he receives by text message from an unnamed enigma, only to discover that enigma was in fact LoveMachine... are we really to believe that any hero, no matter how bashful, would be that reckless? And then there's the fact that, when Natsuki's family declare war on LoveMachine, they have, within minutes, inexplicably assembled a fleet of ships, planes and trucks to assist their grand plan. Of course, a little hyperbole is to be expected in the anime medium, but when Hosoda runs away into the world of the ridiculous so patently as this, the legitimacy of his storytelling suffers.

Nevertheless, Hosoda's anime is, as a category, much more adult than Miyazaki's. Miyazaki's films have their own beauty, but, being targeted primarily at children, are not characterised by the same complex plot work (with, perhaps, the exception of Mononoke) that keeps Summer Wars so engaging throughout. Kiki's Delivery Service and My Neighbour Totoro, in particular, are two Miyazaki films almost devoid of plot entirely. That is not to say that their classic status is undeserved - indeed, their simple, unpretentious storytelling is what has made them so popular with child audiences in the first place - but that they can sometimes seem not to fully satisfy the appetite of an adult viewer.

Hosoda, on the other hand, is able to deliver the best of both worlds: a sophisticated feature which adults can enjoy, with a simple enough message (of the need for unity in times of a crisis), such that children will not find themselves lost in the unfolding chaos.

To say Hosoda is the "next Miyazaki", then, is a statement of perceived status, rather than substance. That is, the substance of the two directors' works is, in a sense, incomparable... but, if Hosoda is able to tighten his craft, then he may just one day acquire the same status which has made Miyazaki a household name in Japan. Summer Wars is certainly evidence of his potential.

**Rating: 4/5**  
**Summer Wars is available on DVD from amazon.co.jp for ¥3750 including postage.**

*James Kemp is a first year ALT in rural Ehime. He enjoys travelling, nomihodai-ing and performing Britney's entire karaoke back catalogue whilst dressed as a playboy bunny. No, really. For more, visit his blog at <http://chasing-cherry-blossoms.blogspot.com/>*

## Summer Wars:

James Kemp

Summer Wars is an animated feature set in modern-day Japan. Central to the story is the digital world of Oz: a kind of omnipresent, social-networking site more akin to Second Life than Facebook. That is, Oz isn't just a place where you can chat and play games, but a fully-fledged virtual society with its own shopping centres, business districts and more. What's more, Oz is also the motherboard from which modern society itself is able to function. Traffic signals, sewage maintenance, even space exploration - every walk of society is controlled by local governments through Oz. So, when the American military chooses Oz as the arena in which to test LoveMachine: billed as the world's first form of A.I. with an inbuilt desire to know, all kinds of shit starts going down. As LoveMachine invades government infrastructures on Oz, the





**Anthony Russo - Harvesting More Than Just Rice**

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**Josh Del Pino - Classroom**

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**Lucia Brea**  
**Monk at Eheiiji Temple, Fukui**

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**Myoko waterfall**

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