

AJET

# CONNECT

magazine



January/February 2013 Issue



# February

Love is in the air! And, just like that, your own long-lost love, AJET Connect, is back from a restful Christmas and ready to dedicate itself to you for another year. But what's this? Somehow, we're different. Yes, you're not the only one who can keep a New Year's resolution. We've lost weight, baby! (Thanks for noticing). This month is a one-off *slim-line* edition of Connect. Bitesized, but no less satisfying! (If you're wondering why, it's because we're also chucking out a copy at next month's After JET Conference in Yokohama and, alongside the worst case of flu we've had since, well, forever, frankly that's enough work for one month).

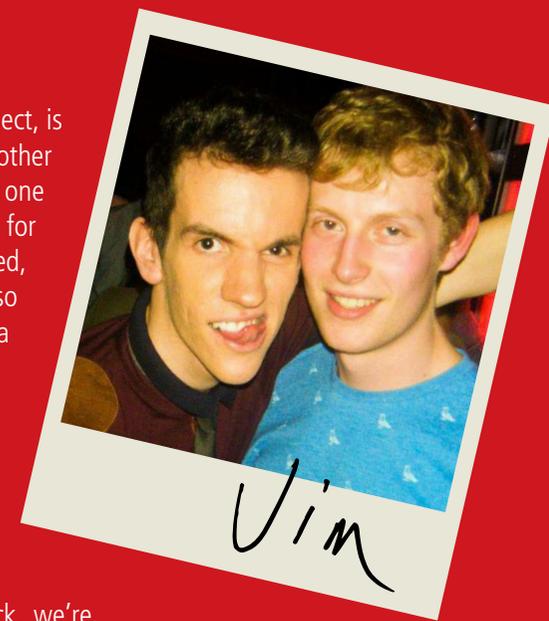
So, what has Cupid got in his quiver for you this month? Well, for the love-struck among you, Amelia Hagen's serving a treat in Travel with Eight Practical Gifts for Your Travel-Junkie Lover; not to be outdone, Sarah Blenkhorn's getting all jittery and sweaty-palmed over in Culture as she decodes Japan's Valentine's culture. But, before you get lovesick, we're also offering some top food-sharing tips in Food, exploring Japan's obsession with pachinko in Entertainment and taking a scuba-diving trip under the deep blue in Sport. All this and more awaits you in the coming pages!

It's also a time of Big Change in the Connect calendar... it's AJET elections season! After two years living the Japanese dream, I'll be heading back to London this summer, which means the position of Editor is up for grabs! (A few of our section editors will be bowing out too, so there's likely to be a host of other positions opening up short of chief). If you think you'd be interested in getting involved with Connect on a permanent basis, don't hesitate to get in touch. It's a great project to be involved in, and I'm more than happy to informally discuss the ins-and-outs of Our Little Magazine, so please do drop me a line!

As always, I'd like to thank Melania and our team of Editors for their ceaseless hard work, as well as Ming Tan and Sam Hall, our two contest winners! Next month, we'll be returning to business as usual with our standard bumper-sized selection of articles. Before then, make sure you read what we've collected for you this month—and get involved with our contests, too!

Happy reading!

Jim (james.kemp@ajet.net)





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This edition, and all past editions of AJET Connect, can also be found online at <http://ajet.net/ajet-connect/>

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Entertainment: The Magnetism of Pachinko	11	With Thailand remaining one of the most popular Golden Week destinations nationwide, many JETs may be looking forward to a springtime of full moon parties and elephant riding. But beneath the fanfare is a cruel reality: the majority of the elephants featured in Thailand's tourist industry have suffered brutally. Laura Turner visited an elephant sanctuary in Thailand to investigate for herself. Read on for her story	
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I am very excited to write to you about AJET elections! Are you looking for a new challenge in the coming year? Are you eager to try your hand at improving life for JET participants across Japan? Do you want to work with an amazing team of dedicated and talented individuals? Well, I have a job for you... Please consider running for the AJET National Council.

Without a doubt, this work has provided me with new challenges and experiences during my tenure. If you are like me, you enjoy new challenges and AJET has certainly been one. During my second year, I stepped up in my local Fukushima AJET chapter, and subsequently ran for an AJET National Council position at the end of that year. Shortly before I began my fourth year on JET, I became Chair of the Council. Each of these steps greatly complemented my ALT job, keeping me active and growing in areas outside of my work at school, which has essentially remained the same each year.

I have heard many council members discuss how they love the work and team environment on National AJET this year. And I have to say that I agree 100 percent. I have learned and grown so much as a result of my experiences on the Council, and I believe we have accomplished a lot of great work as a team. Of course, AJET is far from a perfect

organization and that's where we need you. You can continue to help AJET grow in new and amazing ways that will benefit not only the JET Programme, but its participants and people across Japan.

AJET can be quite an adventure, so if you are looking for an easy year, this might not be the job for you. However, if you are looking for a new challenge doing some interesting and meaningful work for the JET Programme, then AJET might be what you're seeking. Take a look at our elections page online at <http://ajet.net/ajet-elections/election-rules/>. There are both elected positions and appointed positions. Please feel free to contact me or any of the council members about running.

Also, please consider stepping up for leadership in your local chapters, as well as applying to be a Tokyo Orientation Assistant. These are all great ways of getting involved in the JET community. Really, my advice is to look for new opportunities each year that allow you to take on new roles within the JET Programme. Doing so has kept each year fresh for me. I've gotten to take on new challenges, and I've grown a lot in these positions, but more importantly I feel like I am able to give back to a community that has enriched my life in so many ways.

As we head into the new elections, I am very excited to see who will step up in the various blocks, appointed positions and executive leadership roles on the council! I hope that some of you will throw your name into the ring. Maybe one of you will be writing this column in a few months' time. I look forward to reading it!

All the best,

Mark

## A message from the Chair of AJET

# MARK SAYS...

# MEET YOUR EDITORS...



## **Sarah Jane Blenkhorn, Culture**

Welcome to February - the longest month of the year, so I've heard. But in Japan, at least according to the old lunar calendar, it's already spring. Setsubun has come and gone, and the demons have been driven out into the cold. And with spring, our thoughts turn to love. This month, I offer my personal perspective on Valentine's Day in Japan. Enjoy the magazine in the comfort of your kotatsu, if you are lucky enough to have one. Keep your own demons away and bring in some luck with a handful of dried soybeans and this magical chant: "Oni wa soto! Fuku wa uchi!"

*[sarah.blenkhorn@ajet.net](mailto:sarah.blenkhorn@ajet.net)*

## **Amelia Hagen, Travel**

Happy New Year! Long time, no travel...errr talk? Since Valentine's Day and White Day are just around the corner, this month's combined travel section brings you eight suggestions for your travel-loving significant other! Recommendations cover all budgets so there's guaranteed to be something for you! Experiencing post-winter vacation wanderlust? Don't forget to join the 'JET-setters' group on Facebook to exchange advice with other JET travelers like yourself! See you next month with a few pieces that may just make you go, 'Wow!'

*[amelia.hagen@ajet.net](mailto:amelia.hagen@ajet.net)*



## **Ruth Rowntree, Sports**

Welcome to February, folks!! I hope you're getting back to full fitness after the festive season! I'm feeling fairly elastic again now that I'm back into my yoga-tastic training, cycling circuits and futsal fun!

Did you make a New Year Resolution to take on a new sport or re-embrace a former fitness fad? Or have you some awesome outdoor adventures already lined-up for this year? If so, share it with the JET community by sending your thoughts and shots through to: *[ruth.rowntree@ajet.net](mailto:ruth.rowntree@ajet.net)*

This month the Sports Section sheds those padded ski-pants and slips into something slicker to suss out Scuba Diving! Find out how, despite the cost, exploration of aquatic landscapes can enrich your experiences here—and elsewhere!

## **Chris Barstow, Entertainment**

It's that time when it can be the hardest to stick to all those resolutions made at the start of the year. Whether you swore off cigarettes or chocolate, booze or burgers, everyone has their vices that they are desperate to stop. This month, we take a look at one of the Japan's biggest vices and uncover the origins of pachinko. And, if you've resolved to get writing in 2013, please don't hesitate to get in touch! Until next month...!

*[chris.barstow@ajet.net](mailto:chris.barstow@ajet.net)*





### **Neetha Mony, Volunteering**

After the high of winter break that leads to anxious recontracting decisions and Golden Week planning, winter in Japan flies by. As we bundle up in snowy weather and watch our breath in our apartments, let's escape to balmy Thailand with its coconut drinks, sandy beaches, and elephants! During Christmas break, Laura Turner and her friends decided to volunteer at an elephant rescue park near Chiang Mai that helps rehabilitate abused domesticated elephants. Find out how to get up close with these friendly pachyderms. 'Til next time! **แล้วพบกันใหม่**  
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### **Annabella Massey, Fashion:**

Happy new year, everyone! I hope you all managed to rest and recharge over the holidays; I certainly spent most of my time in gorgeous Thailand doing exactly that. Stepping off the plane and back into sub-zero was a slight shock to the system, but I love dramatic coats and scarves too much to ever really get tired of winter. See this month's 'Style Strong: Staying Warm' column for Kathryn's sound advice on how to negotiate the fine line between winter-fabulous and winter-frumpy (learning how to sashay across ice helps. That, and model layering.). Finally, if you're interested in contributing to Connect's fashion and beauty section this year, just send an email my way at [annabella.massey@ajet.net](mailto:annabella.massey@ajet.net).



### **Food, Ariane Bobiash and Xan Wetherall**

Winter, winter, winter... you're gonna make me say it, aren't you? We're over. Done! Sure, you've got your fancy winter strawberries and hot nabe, and the grilled oysters are pretty good... but it's *freezing*, there's no central heating, and the kerosene stinks! Still, I've got to say—winter's Northerly winds are definitely whisking in a cornucopia of excellence in the food section this edition! Be sure to whip by and check out our crash course on the bounty of Southern Japan's citrus fruits, and don't leave without blowing through the solution to pepping up those dull winter dinner carb binges: food swapping! Think you've got what it takes to spring in to the next edition? Hit us up at [xan.wetherall@ajet.net](mailto:xan.wetherall@ajet.net) and [ariane.bobiash@ajet.net](mailto:ariane.bobiash@ajet.net)! Until then, my gluttonous friends!





rewarding behaviors. Many addictive substances act on dopamine receptors. Love-struck couples had their brain chemistry examined and it was found that these couples had high levels of dopamine. These people had more energy, less need for sleep or food, more focus, and tended to take delight in life's little pleasures.

- ♦ **Serotonin.** Those people who are constantly talking about their crush, doodling their lover's name absent-mindedly anytime they hold a pen, and become unable to hold a conversation because their thoughts keep drifting onto their partner, are acting like that because of serotonin. They become obsessive about their love. Dr. Marazziti of the University of Pisa, discovered that the serotonin levels of new couples were the same as people with OCD.

**Third stage – Attachment.** Love is blind. In fact it needs to be. Couples in a relationship need to feel their loved one is perfect, despite the flaws, and that the relationship is special. This causes us to stick with it long enough to enter the attachment stage. It also causes endless Facebook updates about how and why a partner is special. The hormones linked to attachments are:

**Oxytocin.** This is the cuddle hormone. It is released by women during childbirth, creating in them a strong attachment to their new child. It is also released by the hypothalamus during orgasm in both men and women, which is why people often feel the desire to cuddle after sex. It basically conditions us to be faithful, as the more often we have sex together, the deeper the attachment. This hormone is so powerful that at the mere sight or sound of her baby, it causes a mother to release breast milk. Studies show that if this hormone is blocked, then rats reject their young and when it is injected into virginal females, they treated another rat's offspring as their own. This encourages a couple to be together for the time it takes to raise children. It is why people can stay married for seventy years and still love each other more than newly-weds.

**Vasopressin.** This hormone controls your thirst in conjunction with your kidney. Now, I know what you're thinking, "I've heard of being thirsty for love before, but that is ridiculous". Just bear with me. Prairie voles are highly sexually active, more so than is necessary for reproduction. Like humans, they form fairly stable pairs. It was found that when Vasopressin was suppressed in male prairie voles, they lost their devoting attitude towards their partner, failing to protect her from new suitors. Eventually the bond between them deteriorated. So it turns out that as well as controlling when you drink, Vasopressin also controls your desire to maintain your bonds.

Now you know how you stay in love, how do you start falling into it?

**DNA.** Studies show we are attracted to people with the best genes. It is in our genetic interests to mate with people who have good genes, as these will then be passed on to our children.

**Faces.** Men like symmetrical faces, but women are more attracted to small facial scars, as they look for people who can provide and protect.

**Figure.** The hourglass figure that is so desirable in women is linked to fertility. As women age, they put on weight around the waist, and increased age also means decreased reproductive health, so an hourglass figure is an image of a young, reproductively-healthy woman.

**Body.** We are, in fact, attracted to people who look similar to ourselves. Correlations have been found between couples regarding lung volume, middle finger length, ear lobe lengths, ear size, neck and waist measurements, and metabolic rates. Mensa also found that couples share a similar IQ regardless of their individual education level.

**A chip off the old block.** What we really want, scarily, is someone who reminds us of our parents. In heterosexual couples, girls look for their father in a partner, and boys look for their mother. Cognitive psychologist, David Perrett, at ST Andrews University in Scotland, morphed his

students' faces into the opposite sex, and then asked them to pick the most desirable face. The students were unable to recognise their own face, but felt attraction towards it. This is possibly because it reminds us of familiar features we already love and trust in our parents.

**Longevity.** Yes, your genes even decide how long it will last. Twin studies have shown that the degree of marital success was highly likely to be shared.

**Smell.** Dr. McClintock at the University of Chicago found that heterosexual women desire men who smell similar to their father. This may be because a man with genes similar to a woman's father is likely to have a good immune system, but he is also genetically different enough to prevent any dangerous mutations arising from inbreeding. Another study at the University of Bern in Switzerland showed that hetero women prefer the smell of men with an immune system different to their own.

This is all well and good, but you can hardly go around sniffing people before you date them. So how can you fall in love without conducting a science experiment? A York psychologist, Professor Arun, has the answer:

Step 1 – Find a complete stranger.

Step 2 – Talk intimately about each other's lives for thirty minutes.

Step 3 – Stare silently into each other's eyes for four minutes.

He asked couples to carry out those three steps, and after 34 minutes most of his subjects said they felt deeply attracted to the other person. One couple even got married afterwards. Of course, people may run screaming or the hills when your first questions isn't weather-related, or get a little freaked out when you engage them in a staring contest, but no method is perfect.

**Happy Valentine's Day!**

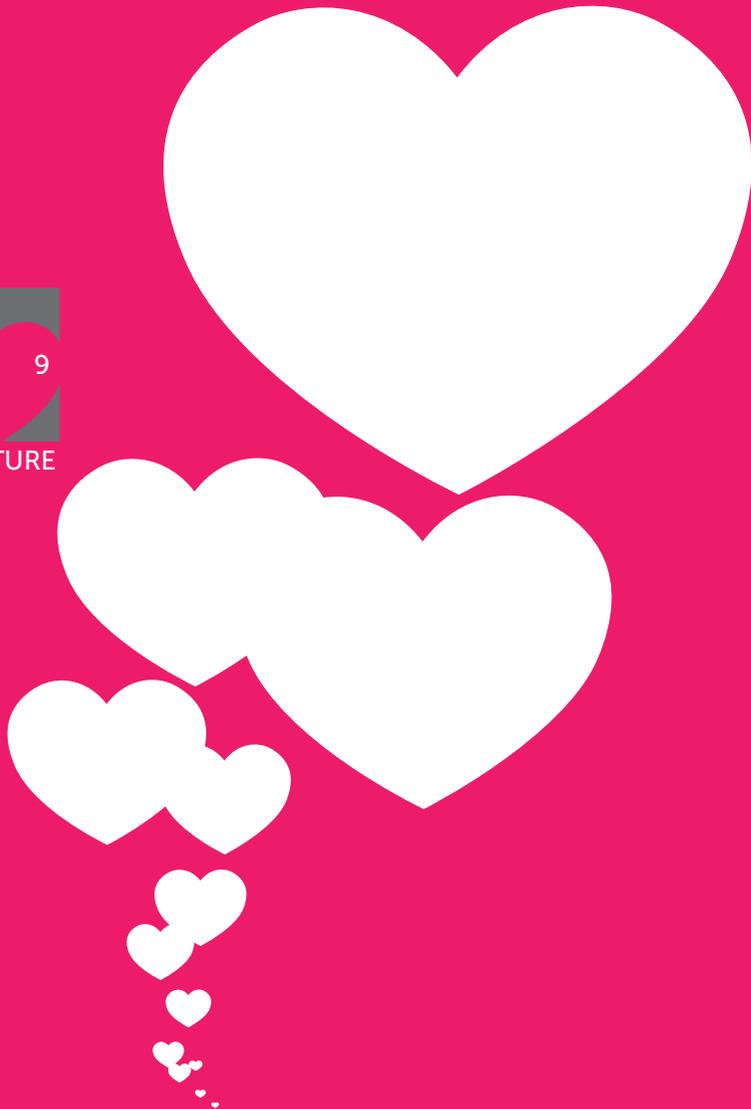
# WHERE IS THE LOVE?

## (AND OTHER VALENTINE'S DAY MUSINGS)

Sarah-Jane Blenkhorn



CULTURE



My Japanese boyfriend and I had a little spat in November over our plans for Christmas. Although I had heard about the importance of Christmas in Japan as a couples' holiday, I had seriously underestimated my boyfriend's attachment to it. I was not even going to be in the country for Christmas, having made my plans to visit home long ago. My tepid reaction to the idea of Christmas cake, and my surprise when he asked what kind of present I was thinking of getting him, put him in a snit. After we had ironed out the problems and made plans for an early Christmas party for two, I thought ahead to February 14th. Curious, I asked my sweetheart, "So, how about Valentine's Day? Is that a romantic holiday?"

**"Nope." His replay was instantaneous.**

Valentine's Day isn't romantic? I wasn't really surprised. After all, I've observed a few Valentine's Days in Japan. Like many imported holidays, the Western day of love and romance didn't enter Japan unscathed. In fact, it was completely turned on its head. In place of men wooing the object of their affections with candy, flowers, trinkets and expensive meals, *women* are expected to give sweets of some sort—preferably homemade—to all the important men in their lives, such as husbands or boyfriends, sons, coworkers and bosses. These last two are most likely to receive 'giri-choco', or 'obligation chocolates', which

are given simply because it is expected. Many girls have rebelled, choosing instead to give 'tomo-choco' to their girlfriends. The recipients of their gifts are expected to give a gift of sweets in return one month later, on March 14<sup>th</sup>, also known as 'White Day'—a triumph of Japanese marketing.

White Day, while profitable, is a necessary holiday here. It addresses the Japanese need for harmonious relationships. It is almost unthinkable in Japan that one would receive without giving something in return. You can see this in the custom of newlyweds giving presents to the guests at their wedding. Last October, after giving students some small chocolates for Halloween, I was surprised at my desk by girls shyly offering me candy in return. (Halloween in Japan is beginning to mirror Valentine's Day in that respect.)

We can see the difference in the attitudes of young men and women to Valentine's Day by looking at high schools. In the school where I work, here's what the students had to say on the subject in their diaries:

### **The girls' perspective:**

*"Today is Valentain Day! I made a cheesecake for my friends in this morning. When I was seeing my friends eat it, I was nervous. But they said to me, "It is good!" So I was relieved. I'm looking forward to White Day."*

*"I'm going to make chocolates next week Saturday. I want to give them a boy (But he's not this school student)."*

*"Today is Valentine's Day. I made cheesecake. I will give cake for Mr. Oguni. Did you make chocolates? If you make chocolates, I want to sent to me."*

**The boy's perspective:**

*"Today is Valentine's Day! This morning I got up earlier than usual. Because I was very exciting. First I got a chocolate from my mother. After arrived at school. I got a chocolate from two girls!! I was very very happy. Last year, I got only one chocolate. But, this year, I can get two! I want to get more chocolate next year."*

In the aftermath of last year's holiday, boys streamed into my class, boasting improbably about their popularity with the ladies.

1st Boy: "I. got. one. hundred. chocolate!"

2nd Boy: "I. got. one. thousand. chocolate!"

3rd boy: "I. got. one. million. chocolate!"

1st and 2nd Boys in chorus: " *Usō!*" ("Lies!")

An article I read on this subject suggested that, because of the role reversal, Valentine's Day had a semi-feminist overtone. I feel that the article's author had missed something vital. I think Valentine's Day in Japan is the opposite of feminist. Girls feel very much obligated to make chocolates, cookies or cake—and to be frank, some of them are lousy cooks. For the record, I gave all my students—boys *and* girls—chocolates on Valentine's Day. And I bought them at the store without a pang of guilt. I'm a busy woman.

Love and its companion, romance, are complicated subjects. This is the field where we can see some of the greatest differences in cultures. While in the western world, people often say 'chivalry is dead,' it sometimes seems that in Japan it was never born. A man opening a door for a woman, for example, is not very common. Japan is still a very patriarchal society, and outward displays of emotion are still frowned upon.

While these days, love matches are becoming more the norm, arranged marriages are still surprisingly common. In past times, the lucky ones found love in those marriages, while others formed a practical alliance, and the unlucky ones didn't get along at all. In classic kabuki plays, if the story centered around a romance, it was likely to be the love of a samurai, merchant or clerk and a courtesan or prostitute; this was the most likely place in feudal Japan for two people to find the freedom for love outside the constraints of society.

A man in his seventies told me that young people of his time would try to avoid meeting or even viewing a picture of the proposed match until they could gather enough information through friends or family to decide whether the match was good. Once the prospective couple had met, it became very difficult to refuse the match without one side losing face. He had a very traditional marriage, and did not seem particularly fond of his wife.

However, arranged marriages change with the times. Compare a friend of mine in her forties who also had an arranged marriage. She and her parents met with about fifty prospective suitors and their parents before she finally found a suitable match. "The trick," she said, "was to

watch the parents of the young man, and see how they got along." It seemed to have worked, as she and her husband have a comfortable relationship, although she seems to 'wear the pants'.

The traditional Japanese household seems—or perhaps 'seemed' is the better word - to be split into two very separate spheres, with the husband leaving early in the morning, coming home very late at night, and frequently travelling on business. Even dating couples often seem to keep their interests separate. I've had a middle-aged housewife tell me bluntly that she didn't like her husband, but she enjoyed the personal freedom she had.

Perhaps this image of a loveless traditional marriage is one reason young people in Japan are putting off getting married till much later in life, posing a huge problem for the country as the population ages and dwindles. Maybe they are just enjoying their freedom as young adults. Perhaps, as some studies suggest, young Japanese have not really learned how to court each other. The interest is there, definitely, but are the skills? Certainly, in high school, boys and girls don't tend to mingle, but prefer groups of friends their own gender.

This month, will I miss the Valentine's Day rituals I knew in Canada? Maybe a little. I'm a little too old for the colourful Valentine's Day cards I gave to all my classmates in Grade 3—the cartoon ones with the horrible puns. I've never really been one for flowers, and even on Valentine's Day I've been happy to pay my part if I went to a restaurant with my sweetie. Some nice chocolates wouldn't go amiss, though - and I could be persuaded to share.



# THE MAGNETISM OF PACHINKO

Chris Barstow

Whether you're trying to line up cherries on a fruit machine or staking your life savings on black at a Vegas roulette table, there are a plethora of gambling options in the western world. Conversely, strict gambling laws mean that Japanese residents have a rather more limited palette of opportunities from which to court lady luck, with an outright ban on casinos and many types of sports betting. However, a loophole in these laws has allowed an industry to develop which has turned a children's pastime into a thriving sector worth a staggering ¥29bn per year.

Pachinko consists of a player shooting tiny metal balls into a device resembling a vertical pinball machine. Once fired, the balls filter down through a network of small pins, setting off a chain-reaction of events if they land in key positions, giving the player a chance to win more balls. The aim of the game is to obtain as many balls as possible.

The origin of modern-day pachinko machines can be traced back to the French skittle game of bagatelle, which was popularised in 19<sup>th</sup> Century America. By the 1920s, Japan had latched onto the simple appeal of the pastime, gaining popularity in the Nagoya area in the 1930s and proliferating throughout Japan during the post-War period. Traditional mechanical flipper machines were replaced by electronic devices in the 1980s as parlours became ever louder and brighter to attract more customers. Over time, the machines have become increasingly sophisticated and complex, offering extra bonuses, hints and special modes to players. Nowadays, pachinko machines also contain animated sequences to heighten the tension for the player and arguably add to their addictive appeal.

The 12,000 pachinko parlours which operate in Japan circumvent Japanese gambling laws through their complicated reward system. Rather than earning cash for their haul of ball bearings, pachinko players can exchange their bounty for prizes, ranging from cigarette lighters to bicycles. However they can also claim 'special prizes', usually pieces of plastic containing small slivers of precious

metal, which can in turn be traded for cash at a separate exchange shop located near the pachinko parlour. This long-winded process is tolerated by the legal authorities so long as no cash is exchanged on the parlour premises. However, in order to keep the facade of independence between the parlour and the exchange shop, pachinko staff are curiously unable to tell their punters where they can claim a monetary reward.

Pachinko parlours have been the target of public wrath in recent years. The electricity-sapping machines were a target of criticism during the energy conservation drive following the 2011 Tohoku earthquake. In addition, hundreds of thousands of Japanese people are said to be hooked on the machines, with many having lost their life savings in the hope of securing ever more silver balls.

Despite the addiction risks associated with gambling, some have mooted the relaxation of Japan's stringent laws and advocated the construction of super-casinos in a bid to attract high-flying tourists. However, whilst the recent betting scandals amongst sumo players seem to have stifled the public appetite for a change in gambling laws, you can bet your bottom dollar that the mesmerising pachinko parlours of Japan will retain their popularity for years to come.

*Chris Barstow is a second year ALT in Yamagata Prefecture. He prefers Pacman to Pachinko...*



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# JAPAN EVENTS

Don't see your area here? Have an upcoming event you're super excited for? Let's put them on the calendar and spread the love! Contact Events at [steven.thompson@ajet.net](mailto:steven.thompson@ajet.net) with the details! Disclaimer: Much of this information is obtained from the internet, so check your dates before booking!

Event name	Location	Date
<b>Sapporo Snow Festival</b>	<b>Sapporo, Hokkaido</b>	<b>February 5<sup>th</sup> – 11<sup>th</sup></b>
One of the most famous festivals in Japan, the Yuki Matsuri in Japan's 5 <sup>th</sup> -largest city is a sight to see. Fantastic snow sculptures, ranging in size from a few feet tall to full-scale snow palaces, are set up throughout the city's Odori Park. <a href="http://www.snowfes.com/english/">http://www.snowfes.com/english/</a>		
<b>Asashikawa Snow Festival</b>	<b>Asashikawa, Hokkaido</b>	<b>February 6<sup>th</sup> – 11<sup>th</sup></b>
Hokkaido's second-largest winter festival, which boasts some of the largest snow sculptures, with one from 1994 making it into the Guinness Book of World Records. Only an 80-minute train ride from Sapporo, it is possible to see both festivals! <a href="http://asahikawa-tourism.com/asahikawa/asahikawa_winter/winter_festival/asahikawa_winter_festival.html">http://asahikawa-tourism.com/asahikawa/asahikawa_winter/winter_festival/asahikawa_winter_festival.html</a>		
<b>Nagasaki Lantern Festival</b>	<b>Nagasaki, Nagasaki</b>	<b>February 10<sup>th</sup> – 24<sup>th</sup></b>
To mark the Chinese New Year, Nagasaki city holds one of Japan's most spectacular lantern festivals all over the city. The biggest displays are in Minato and Chuo parks. Every year features more than 15,000 lanterns and lighted floats. There are also tons of traditional Chinese performances, including acrobatics and dragon dances. Check the website for specific dates and times. <a href="http://www.nagasaki-lantern.com/">http://www.nagasaki-lantern.com/</a>		

<b>Chinese New Year</b>	<b>Yokohama, Kanagawa</b>	<b>February 10<sup>th</sup> – 24<sup>th</sup></b>
The second-biggest place to celebrate the Chinese New Year is at Yokohama's Chinatown. Over 15-days there will be parades, performances, and all the delicious Chinese cuisine you can stomach. <a href="http://www.chinatown.or.jp/agenda/event/984">http://www.chinatown.or.jp/agenda/event/984</a>		
<b>National Foundation Day</b>	<b>Throughout Japan</b>	<b>February 11<sup>th</sup></b>
A patriotic national holiday honoring Japan's founder and first emperor, Jinmu. There are lots of flag-waving parades, with the biggest at Tokyo's Meiji Shrine. Emperor Jinmu was a direct-descendant of Amaterasu, the Sun Goddess, whom you may remember from the cult-classic PlayStation 2 game, Okami. What I'm saying is, you should play Okami today.		
<b>Snow Light Path Festival</b>	<b>Otaru, Hokkaido</b>	<b>February 8<sup>th</sup> – 17<sup>th</sup></b>
Running around the same time as Sapporo's hugely-popular snow festival, Otaru's festival is quieter and incredibly beautiful. The city is decorated in lighted snow sculptures, with the area along the river being particularly nice. <a href="http://www.japan-guide.com/e/e6706.html">http://www.japan-guide.com/e/e6706.html</a>		
<b>Ta-Asobi Ceremony</b>	<b>Itabashi, Tokyo</b>	<b>February 13<sup>th</sup></b>
Many such ceremonies are held during Lunar New Year in Japan, which supplicate for family prosperity and good harvests. However, the ceremonies at Suwa and Kitano Shrines in Itabashi-ku are virtually unchanged from ancient times. If you love you some Important Intangible Folklore Cultural Assets (IIFCAs, as only I call them), then check it out.		



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EVENTS



<b>Valentine's Day</b>	<b>Throughout Japan</b>	<b>February 14<sup>th</sup></b>
<p>What most of us know as Valentine's Day is celebrated in two parts in Japan. This month, women and girls give chocolates and gifts to the apples of their eyes. It's the guys' turn next month, on White Day. Keep an eye out for special couple deals at hotels and restaurants wherever you may go!</p>		
<b>Japan Golf Fair</b>	<b>Odaiba, Tokyo</b>	<b>February 15<sup>th</sup> – 17<sup>th</sup></b>
<p>Can't get enough golf? Make your way over to Tokyo Big Sight for 3 days of all the putters, birdies, and other golf things you can handle. Admission is free. <a href="http://www.japangolffair.com/english/index.html">http://www.japangolffair.com/english/index.html</a></p>		
<b>Plum Blossoms in Japan</b>	<b>Throughout Japan</b>	<b>February 15<sup>th</sup> – March 10<sup>th</sup> (approx.)</b>
<p>This is the time when plum blossoms (ume) are blooming. Not as famous as sakura, but just as beautiful. Some famous parks for viewing include Banpaku Park in Osaka, Yushima Tenjin in Tokyo, and Kitano Tenmangu Shrine in Kyoto.</p>		
<b>Japan Grand Prix International Orchid Festival</b>	<b>Bunkyo, Tokyo</b>	<b>February 16<sup>th</sup> – 24<sup>th</sup></b>
<p>The world's largest and most prestigious orchid show takes up the entire Tokyo Dome for 9 days, with hundreds of thousands of the tropical plants on display. Apparently, the blue orchid of Borneo will be shown for the first time in Japan. Orchids! <a href="http://www.jgpweb.com/english/">http://www.jgpweb.com/english/</a></p>		

<b>Hachinohe Enburi Festival</b>	<b>Hachinohe, Aomori</b>	<b>February 17<sup>th</sup> – 20<sup>th</sup></b>
<p>The three-day Enburi festival is a harvest festival with the unique feature of implicating actual farm equipment into the various dances and ceremonies. There are several types of Enburi dances performed, including the slow naga-enburi and the faster, amazing dosai-enburi. <a href="http://www.city.hachinohe.aomori.jp/kanko/festival/enburi/">http://www.city.hachinohe.aomori.jp/kanko/festival/enburi/</a></p>		
<b>Kanjo Festival</b>	<b>Nozato, Osaka</b>	<b>February 20<sup>th</sup></b>
<p>At Osaka city's Nozato Sumiyoshi shrine, this festival is held every year to commemorate the girls who sacrificed themselves to save the village from disaster and the samurai who put a stop to it. <a href="http://www.osaka-info.jp/en/search/detail/event_11.html">http://www.osaka-info.jp/en/search/detail/event_11.html</a></p>		
<b>Konomiya Naked Man Festival</b>	<b>Inazawa, Aichi</b>	<b>February 22<sup>nd</sup></b>
<p>An ancient purification rite that's been continued to this day, the Konomiya Shrine's Hadaka Matsuri involves a crowd of 9,000 men chasing and trying to touch one hairless, nude one. The reason for this is to transfer their bad luck and ills to the purified man, who makes his way to the temple to be purified once more. Those who would dispel their bad luck are dressed in loincloths and doused in freezing cold water as they pursue the solitary scapegoat. <a href="http://www.konomiya.or.jp/main/hadakamatsuri">http://www.konomiya.or.jp/main/hadakamatsuri</a></p>		
<b>Art Rink Ice World</b>	<b>Yokohama, Kanagawa</b>	<b>Until February 24<sup>th</sup></b>
<p>Each year, many different artists use the ice rink outside Yokohama's famous Red Brick Warehouse as their canvas. Check out the beautiful designs, do some skating, then head over to Chinatown to celebrate Chinese New Year. <a href="http://www.yokohama-akarenga.jp/artrink2012/index.html">http://www.yokohama-akarenga.jp/artrink2012/index.html</a></p>		



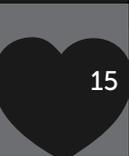
Tokyo Marathon	Shinjuku, Tokyo	February 24 <sup>th</sup>
<p>This 42km marathon begins at the Tokyo Metropolitan Government Building in Shinjuku and follows a challenging path through Tokyo's greatest sights, before finishing at Odaiba's Big Sight. Registration for runners is closed, but that doesn't mean you can't go watch!  <a href="http://www.tokyo42195.org/2013_en/">http://www.tokyo42195.org/2013_en/</a></p>		
Motomachi Shopping Street	Yokohama, Kanagawa	February 26 <sup>th</sup> – March 3 <sup>rd</sup>
<p>All throughout Yokohama's shopping district are sales on a large scale. Hundreds of thousands of visitors come to shop for anything their hearts desire from handbags to electronics to import goods.  <a href="http://www.motomachi.or.jp/html/index.html">http://www.motomachi.or.jp/html/index.html</a></p>		
Tokyo International Literacy Festival	Throughout Tokyo	March 1 <sup>st</sup> – 3 <sup>rd</sup>
<p>This inaugural event will see sitdowns and workshops with some of the biggest names in contemporary literature, including Nobel laureate JM Coetzee and Pulitzer Prize winner Junot Diaz. Reservations are required for most of the events, since a lot of them take place in cafes. Intimate, enlightening. Check it out.  <a href="https://fs222.formasp.jp/n962/form1/">https://fs222.formasp.jp/n962/form1/</a></p>		
Omizutori	Nara, Nara	March 1 <sup>st</sup> – 14 <sup>th</sup>
<p>Omizutori is the common name for Shunie, two weeks of events at Todai-ji. Every evening after sundown, the priests perform Otaimatsu, where giant torches are lit along the temple's outer stage and the burning embers rain down on the visitors, blessing them for the year. The peak days are from the 12<sup>th</sup> – 14<sup>th</sup>.  <a href="http://www.japan-guide.com/e/e4110.html">http://www.japan-guide.com/e/e4110.html</a></p>		

Girls' Festival	Throughout Japan	March 3 <sup>rd</sup>
<p>The Hina Matsuri is an annual event in Japan. Festivals are held in many places, with one of the most-attended being the Yurihonjo Hinakaido in Yurihonjo, Akita which features a tour of over 50 Hina Doll displays throughout the city. Shimogamo Shrine in Kyoto observes the original tradition of Hina Matsuri, which is to float the dolls out to sea to carry away trouble. A lighter, but well-attended event takes place along Tokyo's Sumida river.</p>		
Dai Himonjiyaki Fire Festival	Aso, Kumamoto	March 9 <sup>th</sup>
<p>The festival itself is really a full month of events, but the main event is the Dai Himonjiyaki, which is a ritual setting fire to Mt. Aso to maintain good soil and grass. The slope is originally set ablaze in the shape of the kanji for 'fire' before spreading magnificently. Most of the festivities center on Ojo-Dake shrine. Also around the same time (the date changes according to the Chinese Zodiac) is the Hifuri Shinji ceremony, another fire festival which celebrates the marriage of the gods. There's yet another fire festival at the end of the month in nearby Nishihara village. So, if you're in Kumamoto in mid-March, be sure to ask where the fire is.  <a href="http://www.jnto.go.jp/eng/location/spot/festival/daihimonjiyaki.html">http://www.jnto.go.jp/eng/location/spot/festival/daihimonjiyaki.html</a></p>		



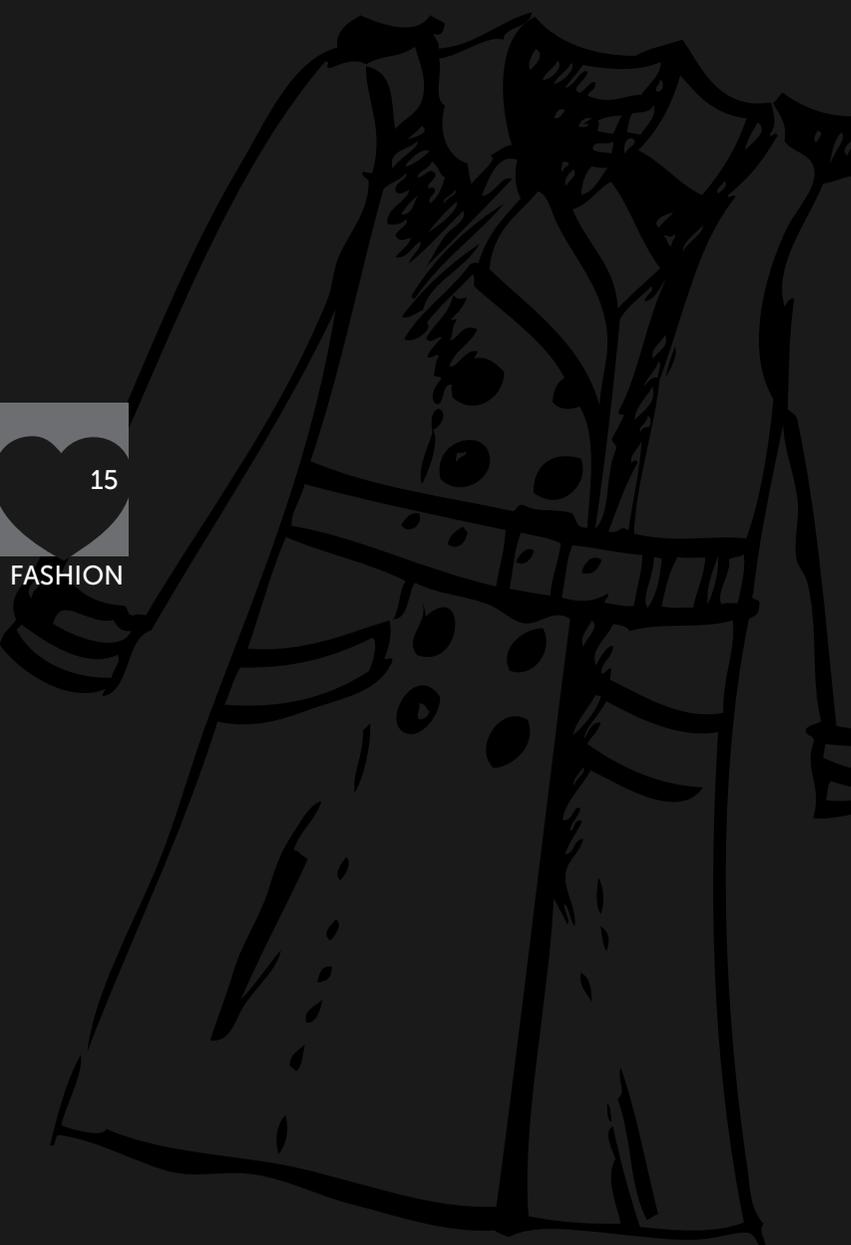
# STYLE STRONG: STAYING WARM

Kathryn Strong



15

FASHION



Let's face it: no matter where you are in the country, Japanese winters are cold. From the endless Hokkaido winters all the way down to damp Okinawa with its sharp winds, staying warm during this season is no easy task. As a southern girl who has acclimated to one of the warmest parts of the country (our cherry blossoms bloom in late January), this is even more daunting. However, I'm not one to be thwarted by my wardrobe. While I could do as the locals do and accessorize with *kairo*, I've decided to make this winter a challenge: I firmly believe that it's possible to dress both warmly and stylishly. With that goal in mind, I've developed a few guidelines that I'm going to share with you.

Everyone says layer. While layering is a great way to keep warm, this is so often translated to "Throw everything you own onto your body." That's not actually a very successful approach. It leaves you looking as round as a snowman and not as warm as you could potentially be. The key is strategic layering. Try and limit your layers to around four; any more and you start losing the benefit of all the clothing. Instead, your joints get bogged down by all the extra weight and fabric. However, make those four layers count by choosing them carefully.

The most important consideration should be material. If you're going to be exercising, you want your closest layer to be something drying so you won't end up with sweat stuck against your skin. If you aren't planning on building up a sweat, then you want the closest layer to be insulating so it keeps your heat right next to your body. I

recommend Uniqlo's Heat Tech for this. Once you get it warmed up, it's like you've got a whole bunch of *kairo* packed tightly around your core. The next layer should be something warm but not too heavy and it should fit close to the body. Then comes your heavy sweater and coat. It's important that one of the outside layers blocks the wind. A waterproof layer never hurts either. Basically, you want to do everything you can to keep nature out and your body heat in.

Following those layering tips will keep you warm, but they won't necessarily make you look good. That's when color comes in. When you're going to be wearing this much clothing, it's important to pick a simple palette and stick to it. This doesn't necessarily mean wearing only greyscale outfits (although, of course, you can if you want). What it does mean is packing clothing that all works together. If your outer layer coat is a bright red, would you then wear a hot pink sweater, a lime green shirt and a baby blue undershirt? Probably not. Try and bring items which can all be worn with each other together. Not only will that mean you get more wear out of each piece, but it will also guarantee that you look put together.

Finally, to really keep warm, it's important not to forget all your extremities. I have poor circulation, so my fingers always feel like ice. When packing, be sure not to forget gloves, warm socks and shoes (boots are fantastic!) — and, most importantly, a hat or hood for your head and ears.

*Kathryn is a 2nd year ALT in beautiful Okinawa. Life on island has led to her developing an acute fear of winter and the opinion that the phrase "formal bikini" is not necessarily an oxymoron.*

# CITRUS OF SOUTHERN JAPAN

Ariane Bobiash



Though it is currently the middle of January and spring still feels like ages away, there is an incredible abundance of winter citrus being grown in southern Japan! Anyone who lives in this country should be familiar with the delicious *mikan*

mandarin orange, but there are several other lesser-known members of the Asian citrus family enjoyed around the country. We have the large lime-like *kabosu* of Kyushu and the even more sizeable grapefruit-like pomelo grown in Southern Shikoku as well as other varieties. I will elaborate on two of these: the *sudachi* and the *yuzu*!

You may be familiar with *yuzu*, an aromatic bright yellow citrus fruit with an extraordinarily refreshing taste. According to [yuzupassion.com](http://yuzupassion.com), this fruit was first introduced to Japan from China via Korea in the Nara period (year 710). Over here, *yuzu* is often used in Japanese cooking as a main ingredient in *ponzu* sauce (a tangy vinegar-based sauce often served with fish), in *nabe* hot pot and over soft tofu and to liven various vegetable dishes. Some izakayas and drinking establishments offer refreshing *yuzu* cocktails. *Yuzu* liqueur can also be found easily and makes an excellent fruity gift for friends and family abroad. Homemade and store-bought candied *yuzu* is also a fantastic, gummy-like treat. The vivid fruit has uses beyond food and drink: a '*yuzu* bath,' which is quite literally a bath filled with several floating *yuzus* offered at some hot springs, is said to provide excellent aromatherapy and even ward off colds!

In my humble prefecture of Tokushima, we primarily grow a different Asian citrus: the *sudachi*! The small, round, lime-like fruit is such a treasure of the region that our mascot is the aptly named *sudachi-kun*, a smiley; cartoonish *sudachi*

with arms and legs. This citrus is often used in various sauces and served fresh with fish or on udon, and its juice also tastes wonderful in dressings when mixed with French mustard, olive oil, and a sweetener. Try making fried udon with *sudachi*, or whichever Japanese citrus available, using the following recipe!

## FRIED UDON WITH SUDACHI

Makes 2 generous servings

### Ingredients

- 2 single-serving packs of udon
- 1 package of fried tofu or protein of choice, cut in squares
- 1 bunch spring onion, chopped
- 1 medium sized package of bean sprouts
- ½ of large bunch of spinach, chopped
- ~ 1 cup enoki mushrooms or mushroom of choice
- ~2 tablespoons soy sauce
- sesame oil for frying
- ~2 tablespoons mirin
- salt and pepper to taste
- ~1 tablespoon of fresh citrus juice

### Directions

- ◆ Put a small pot of water to boil.
- ◆ Heat sesame oil in frying pan (medium heat), add spring onion when heated
- ◆ Once pot of water boiling, add udon for 2 mins, strain and set aside
- ◆ Add tofu and mushrooms to frying pan, as well as the mirin and soy sauce, cook for a few minutes
- ◆ Add strained noodles, bean sprouts, and spinach mix for 1~2 mins
- ◆ Season with salt and pepper to taste and drizzle with citrus juice
- ◆ Enjoy!



# FOOD SWAP!

By Raygan Solotki

I, like many JETS, went from living with my parents to having roommates all through university; JET has been my first experience living alone. That means there's nobody around nagging at me to pick up my stuff, wash a dish, or question me on the whereabouts of the last piece of cake. It also means that occasionally my fridge is empty, or I don't have the energy to cook. I spend a lot of time from November through March eating a dinner that consists mainly of a bowl of microwaved frozen peas. It isn't very healthy, but as my kitchen is roughly -40 degrees Celsius, I have no desire to spend any time in there trying to come up with something nutritious and interesting.

The ideal situation for me is to pull something out of my freezer, toss it in the microwave, wait under the kotatsu until I hear the "ding", run back, toss the contents in a bowl and be back under the kotatsu as fast as possible. Maximum cold air exposure: 5 minutes. I started out spending an hour every Sunday afternoon making all my dinners for the week. However, as anyone who does this can attest: 20 portions of spaghetti *will* make you hate spaghetti.

So, this November in Gifu, I organized the first ever regional food swap, and it was such a success, I cannot wait for the next one in February. Here's how we did it, and how you can do it, too:

1. Gather a group of like-dieted friends. I recommend 5-6 participants. Set a meal budget (2-3000 yen is ideal.)
2. Start a Facebook event for the day of the swap. Everyone should list their dietary restrictions, allergies, aversions, etc. Post what you are each planning on making to avoid duplicates.
3. Everyone goes to the 100 yen shop and buys enough plastic containers for each guest to receive 2 portions—yourself included. I recommend each to be about 300ml.

4. A few days before the meet up, everyone makes a large portion of their pre-determined dish. Make enough for everyone (again, don't forget yourself!) to get two portions of the meal. Individually package the food, and freeze the portions. This is important for ease of transportation.
5. On the date, meet at a central location. We chose a restaurant, but you could just as easily make an extra bit of your dish, and meet at someone's place for a pot-luck taste test of everyone's creations.
6. Swap! Everyone gets two of everything. This means that, including what you made, you now have 10-12 ready to go, pre-portioned meals. One meal made, less than 3000yen spent, 12 different meals in the freezer. Genius!

For this to work well, I recommend everyone make something that can be added to a base of rice or noodles. Curry, spaghetti sauce, soup—these are the best things to share. However, we did have lasagna and savory pie added into our mix, and they were also incredible! This activity can of course be combined with a dessert swap, a book swap, or even a clothes swap! Happy swapping!

*Raygan is a 6th year JET in Gifu Prefecture. She is a disgruntled pro-diver placed in one of the few land-locked prefectures. Being from Western Canada, she is spending the winter rolling her eyes when someone asks if it is warm in comparison to the frozen, barren wasteland that she hails from.*



# UNDER THE SEA: TAKE A PLUNGE WITH SCUBA DIVING!

Matt O'Boyle

Happy New Year everyone! You have surely settled back in Japan after heading home, or away, over Winter break. For those of you who didn't go home, you probably spent your vacation traveling Japan or decided that if you couldn't see your family then you'd rather spend Christmas in a warm, exotic country. I'm willing to wager that adrenaline was pumping powerfully through your veins throughout your trip.

But then it ended.

You went back to the airport at the end of your vacation, boarded the plane and immediately started thinking about the long, drudging monotony of the average office day. Sure, you may have been looking forward to seeing your students again or seeing the expressions on your co-workers' faces when you presented them with the best *omiyage ever* (maybe), but ultimately you and I both know that within 10 minutes of your plane taking off the following thought started going through your mind, "So, what am I going to do for Golden Week?"

There is more to Japan than just the cities and inaka. Some of the most spectacular natural and man-made wonders of Japan can actually be found right below the surface, if you know where to look. That isn't some sort of zen metaphor; I'm talking about scuba diving!

People get into scuba diving for a lot of reasons. For some it is the thrill of being somewhere untouched by most people. They dream of forgotten shipwrecks, giant schools of fish swimming around coral and perhaps having an up close and personal encounter with a migrating pod of whales. (Note: Whales actually do migrate through the southern islands of Japan in the Spring!).

For me, it was because I was a Sci-Fi nerd.

I was sitting in my apartment one evening watching "The Abyss", directed by James Cameron. The movie is about

alien life forms that live deep beneath the water in a giant trench. There is one scene where a rat is forced to breathe oxygenated water and is actually able to survive that way! (I found out later that was no special effect, they actually did that to the rat!). I thought both of these things were awesome, so I decided to look into trying out scuba diving for myself.

Since then, I've been on roughly 40 dives and have earned my Advanced Open Water License with Nitrox and Deep Diving Specialties and have dove with dive shops across Japan and Thailand, including multiple certifying organizations such as CMAS, PADI and NAUI. On my most recent dives in Thailand over Christmas, I saw my first Whale Shark and also dove to my first shipwreck, the HTMS Sattakut, a Thai battleship off the coast of Koh Tao. This Spring, I'm considering returning to Okinawa to see a much deeper wreck from WWII called the U.S.S. Emmons; the Emmons wreck begins at 36 meters deep.

So, how did I get here in slightly over a year?

My Japanese wasn't, and is not, what I would call amazing, so I was very nervous about trying to find an instructor that I could understand. Normally, a language barrier can be a good learning experience; however, when the subject matter involves teaching skills that are necessary in order to not kill yourself, then you may want to make sure nothing is lost in translation.

If your Japanese is exceptional, finding an instructor is easy as there are PADI dive shops all across Japan. A simple Google search will turn up many of them. If you live on Honshu, there are so many English speakers around Tokyo that it isn't too difficult to go online and find someone who is willing to certify you for Open Water Diving, which is the basic level of certification through PADI and certifies you to dive to 18 meters.



If, like me, you live on Kyushu, there are still options to find an English speaking instructor if you feel your Japanese isn't up to snuff. Jonathan Rankine, a Canadian Ex-JET, has lived in Kyushu for 15 years and runs a dive shop called Grand Bleu off Okinoerabu. He is a CMAS 2 Star Diving Instructor with roughly 1500 dives under his belt and has trained hundreds of students. He has gone diving in 7 different countries and has been to many of the great diving spots in Kyushu, including Yakushima, Nobeoka, Amami, Tanegashima, Cape Sata, Yoron and Okinawa. Jonathan's wife is a SHS English teacher, so this March he will be moving closer to mainland. He plans to be operational by Golden Week, so if you're looking for an underwater adventure of your own look him up!

If you have plans to go to Okinawa, there are English speaking dive schools there such as Piranha Divers which offers its OW (Open Water) course for roughly 50,000 yen. This is about standard in Japan, but make sure your fee includes rentals! You can sometimes get discounts through shops or individual instructors if you can find friends to go with you and get their license as well. Usually, the bigger the group, the bigger the discount!

The process to get certified takes about 3-4 days depending on where you go to get it done. I won't lie; it is kind of like being back in school for a little while. You have to do a bit of reading, and then you have to watch some videos. There is some formal instruction before you even get in the water and yes, at the end, there is even a written test you have to pass! The OW itself is basically a safety course. It teaches you all of the basics of simple dives and scuba gear maintenance, as well as how to read dive tables and dive signs. It is the etiquette upon which all later diving courses are built upon.

Does the price sound a bit steep? No worries, many dive shops offer what is called "Discover Scuba" which is when a Dive Master is personally assigned to an uncertified diver to monitor their equipment as they go down for a dive to see how they like it. This process usually costs about 10,000 yen per dive which is significantly cheaper than biting the bullet on a license. Furthermore, the Discovery dive will typically count towards one of the dives you need to complete your OW license, so it isn't money wasted if you do decide to get your license after all!

There are as many certification organizations for diving as there are flavors of ice cream! To name a few: CMAS, PADI, NAUI, SSI, GUE, IDA... and many more. The ones you see most commonly in Asia are PADI and SSI, but CMAS and NAUI are more popular in Europe and Africa. That does not mean that the organization you use should be dictated by what is popular in your region, but be aware that in order to rent dive equipment from any respectable shop you will need to possess whatever the equivalent of an OW (Open Water) license is through whichever organization you choose. (Note: Open Water is the term used by PADI for their level 1 license. The name for the basic license may vary from organization to organization).

Our time in Japan is limited, so making it as enriching and unique as possible is something every JET strives for. If for no other reason, consider diving just because when else in your life are you going to live in such close proximity to so many small, untouched islands ripe for exploring? Hope to see you down below!

*Matt O'Boyle is a full time Zombie Hunter who enjoys scuba diving, watching movies and teaching English in his free time. Don't believe me? Find a zombie; No? I guess I'm doing a good job*

# 8

## PRACTICAL GIFTS TO KNOCK YOUR TRAVEL JUNKIE SIGNIFICANT OTHER'S SOCKS OFF

Amelia Hagen



1. **Personalized CDs** – Feel like being creative and thoughtful with your gift? Making your partner in crime a CD of personally-selected songs is the way to go. He or she can easily upload the songs on the old iPod and take the music on the next jaunt. This avoids the hassle of having to make a pre-trip playlist of new music too!
2. **Passport Cover** – I received a gorgeous lavender Coach passport cover from a friend before I studied abroad in college and it's been used more than I ever imagined. Each time I pass through immigration, it reminds me of the friend who gave it to me. With so many options to choose from, you're bound to find one to make your significant other enjoy taking his or her passport out every trip.
3. **LeSportSac Multipurpose Bag** – Worried about keeping hard currency and valuables safe? LeSportSac totes and messenger bags are perfect because they have so many pockets and zippers. You can separate and keep things in various places without ever having to wear a money belt. Did I mention these come in uber-cute colors and designs?
4. **Pack Towel** – Does your partner have issues with packing too much? A Pack Towel can help! This thin, lightweight towel folds up to fit in a small mesh pouch. It dries exceptionally fast too. No more fluffy towel in your bag and you can fit other more important gear in there!
5. **Lonely Planet or Rough Guide Guidebook** – The go-to Lonely Planet or the critics' favorite, Rough Guide, is a good choice if your partner has an upcoming international trip coming up. If you don't want to lug



it around, try purchasing a Lonely Planet iPhone or Android app. Even if he or she doesn't have a trip coming up, a guidebook can be fantastic inspiration!

6. **Waterproof Camera** – Okay, I'll admit: this is not the cheapest present in the box, but it is certainly one of the most practical. Snorkeling: check. Onsen (empty ones!): check. Rainy weather: check. Whitewater rafting in Kumamoto: check! Enjoy the waterworks without the worry!
7. **Crank-up LED Flashlight** – I actually had never heard of this until my trip over the winter holidays. However, a certain Scottish friend enlightened me when we needed a torch of sorts to make our way back up the hill to our guesthouse. Just crank it up a bit and the light comes on – no batteries required!
8. **Take a trip together!** – Travel can absolutely be the perfect gift in itself! It doesn't even have to be out of town. Try a staycation during which you visit any local hotspots you have yet to visit together. If you want to be more original, plan a scavenger hunt throughout your trip.

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





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# ELEPHANT TOURISM

Laura Turner



For many tourists, elephant trekking is top of the 'to-do' list while travelling in Thailand. As a popular winter vacation spot for JETs, many of your Facebook feeds were most likely inundated with photos of cute elephants performing tricks on the beaches and streets of Thailand, or of friends throwing peace signs on the back of an elephant. Elephant tourism is a lucrative business in Thailand, with hundreds of thousands of tourists parting with their baht just for the chance to tick off a bucket-list item. It's a bragging right for some, a childhood dream for others; for most, a happy memory to keep forever, with little thought to the welfare of the elephant below them. It is a country that calls itself 'the land of the free', yet their largest, and most endangered, inhabitant is the least free of them all.

On December 22<sup>nd</sup>, my two friends and I left chilly Japan to travel to the balmy heat of Thailand. Unlike most of our friends, we were headed not for the beach paradise of the southern islands, but for the northern jungles of Thailand. Our final destination: the Elephant Nature Park, an hour north of Chiang Mai. Here we were to volunteer for a week, helping the park to provide food, shelter and care for the 34 elephants who call this sanctuary home.

Founded in 1995 by Sangduen 'Lek' Chailert, the Elephant Nature Park is a safe haven for elephants broken by the tourism industry and illegal logging. It is one of the few places (if not the only) in Thailand where visitors can interact with elephants, without exploitation. At the park there are no tricks or treks, no paintings by elephants and no bullhooks or abuse. Instead, the 34 elephants are helped to recover from the trauma they have suffered, and are treated with love and respect in a land where the elephant has very little rights.

At the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Thailand was home to over 100,000 Asian elephants. Now, in 2013, there are believed to be only 500 elephants left in the wild, with a further

2,000 domestic elephants facing a bleak future<sup>1</sup>. Nearly all of these 2,000 domesticated elephants are put through 'phajaan', a traumatising ritual that breaks the elephant's spirit and domesticates them for use in tourism and logging. The Phajaan, also known as 'the crush', involves caging juvenile elephants for a week, not allowing them to sleep, eat or drink. During this week of deprivation, the elephant is repeatedly stabbed and tortured with hooks, knives, brands and chains. It is often the first time the elephant has been away from its mother, and certainly the first time it has been in contact with humans. Once it has been broken, the elephant is then trained for its future job. Whether this is learning to carry humans upon its back (the weight of which can deform and even break the spine of an elephant), being used to beg on the bustling city streets, performing tricks such as painting and massages, or to be used in the illegal logging industry, the domesticated elephant lives in fear of more torture and pain. The Elephant Nature Park's mission is "to save the Asian elephant from extinction and give domesticated elephants a life worth living, by preserving habitat and increasing public awareness on humane treatment practices"<sup>2</sup>. During our time at the park, we were able to do our own small part towards this goal.

On Christmas Eve we arrived with 35 fellow volunteers at the Elephant Nature Park, ready for a week of hard work and the chance to be up close with the rescued elephants at the park. On our first day we were given the grand tour of the park, meeting the many elephants that call this place home. With only 3 of the elephants being born at the park, the vast majority come with their own tragic tales. We met Jokia, an elephant rescued from the illegal logging industry. After being forced to work throughout her pregnancy, Jokia miscarried and was left too grief-stricken to work. Her owners punished her by stabbing her in both eyes and forced her to continue working. Other elephants at the park suffer from traumatic physical injuries (such

<sup>1</sup> Elephant Nature Foundation 'Our Mission' <http://www.elephantnaturefoundation.org/go/mission>

<sup>2</sup> Elephant Nature Foundation 'Our Mission' <http://www.elephantnaturefoundation.org/go/mission>



as broken legs, infected wounds and dislocated pelvises), while many others suffer from emotional trauma. Amongst the sad stories, are the now happy, such as the new arrival of Navann, born in October to the land-mine injured Sri Prae. We were lucky enough to learn about each of the 34 elephants' lives, and to be accepted by each elephant during our stay.

During each of the seven days we were at the park we were given jobs to complete. With each elephant eating over 10% of its weight in food, we were tasked with providing enough food for them. This involved scrubbing and chopping watermelon, pumpkins and bananas, harvesting locally grown corn fields and banana trees, and gathering rice straw. As well as food duty, we dealt with the end-product (scooping up elephant dung is definitely the most unique, and surprisingly non-smelly, way to spend your Christmas morning), bathed elephants in the river, constructed stone barriers around the park, and cleaned the local area. For all the hard work, we were given plenty of rest time and fun excursions. Boxing Day afternoon was spent inner-tubing down the river with a beer in hand, while another afternoon saw us visiting a local school (funded by our volunteer fees) and playing with the children. Easily one of my favourite activities was the giant mud-fight on our last day (this, of course, was to ensure the mud pit was ready for elephants to use as a natural sun block). The park is also home to over 350 rescued dogs, so when you weren't helping elephants, you had the opportunity to play with rambunctious puppies and dogs.

By the end of our week stay, it was incredibly hard to leave the park. For many it felt like second home. We left with new friendships formed, and a deep love for the beautiful creatures we were privileged to work for. It is certainly a week full of memories that I will never forget, and a place I am eager to return to. Being able to hear the stories of these elephants, and help in any small way, was one of the most rewarding ways to spend Christmas break. Thankfully, through the work of the Elephant Nature Park and the

Save the Elephant Foundation, more people are becoming aware of the plight of the Asian Elephant, and change is slowly happening. Sadly, for the 2,000 domesticated elephants in Thailand it is a change that has come too late.

### What can you do?

- ◆ When in Thailand, avoid elephant camps that give rides or make their elephants perform tricks.
- ◆ Educate yourself and your friends on the plight of the Asian elephant.
- ◆ Volunteer at the Elephant Nature Park (or one of the many volunteer programmes the Elephant Foundation runs in Thailand and Cambodia)
- ◆ Donate money to the park, or foster an elephant.

For more information go to <http://www.saveelephant.org/>. The park runs numerous trips, from single day trips to four week volunteer stays.

*Laura is a second-year ALT currently residing in Kumamoto-ken. Her favourite pastimes include cooking, stalking Kumamon, spending too much time on tumblr and perfecting her Celine Dion at karaoke.*



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Welcome to AJET Connect's monthly Photography Contest! Send us your photos and battle it out with other works of art from all over Japan in the hopes of becoming the highly coveted Photo of the Month. The photo with the highest number of votes will have the honour of being featured on the cover of the next issue, as well as being entered in the annual AJET Photography Contest. Submissions are welcomed from all current JET Programme participants.

case that you submit photographs where people are clearly featured, you must get permission from those featured before you submit their image.

Please submit your photos by February 23rd. A shortlist will be created and you will have one week to vote for your favourite photo via online poll at [www.ajet.net/photos](http://www.ajet.net/photos). Voting will be open from February 24th until midnight on March 3rd.

Taking inspiration from the occurrence of graduation ceremonies nationwide in the month of March, the theme for this month's photography contest is "Forget Me Not". Of course, you're free to interpret the theme however you will – think outside the box and your photo may end up on top of March's issue! Submissions should be original, high quality JPG files. Contestants may submit one photo each month. This contest is for JET participants only. The theme for this month's competition is "Forget Me Not". Send your entries to [contest@ajet.net](mailto:contest@ajet.net). In the



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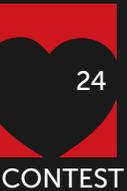
Photographers retain the rights to their photograph. By entering the contest, photographers agree to have their submitted photograph published on the cover of AJET Connect magazine, displayed on the AJET website and posted on AJET Facebook sites. Photos will be credited to the author named in the entry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

# MONTHLY PHOTOGRAPHY CONTEST

# PHOTOGRAPHY WINNERS

You've already seen Ming Tan's amazing winning photograph on the cover of this month's issue, now take a look at the runner-ups from the January-February Photography Competition!

If you're interested in entering March's Photography Competition, flip over to the next page for more details!



**#3**

A New Sunrise, A  
New Beginning  
Katie Yearley, Ehime



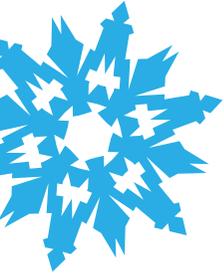
**#4**

Untitled  
Rokan, Fukushima



Waiting for a Bright Beginning  
Melania Jusuf, Ehime

**#2**



**Cheers to Bonenkai  
Alcohol was in the air  
Sake, teachers change**

Sam Hall  
Nagasaki City



**MONTHLY HAIKU CONTEST**

Got a haiku of your own you want the JET community to hear? Submit it for March's Haiku Competition! Contestants may submit one original haiku to [contest@ajet.net](mailto:contest@ajet.net). Haikus should be received by February 25th. The competition is open to current JET participants only. The winner will be decided by means of an online poll, with the winning haiku being published in next month's issue! Happy haiku-ing!



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# CLASSROOM TIPS: THE EIKAIWA POINT CARD

Mary Farray

When I first got to Tano town in very rural, Kochi prefecture, I was brimming over with excitement and enthusiasm for turning my tiny little boat-carving, tofu-frying town into a glittering beacon of internationalization and English language-learning. A couple of bulletin boards, a fake postal box, a few dozen school lunches with sixth graders begging to chat with the ALT, and those kids would be speaking breezy English with every foreigner they met.

## Had a good laugh?

After a year of showing up at sports club, site-reading karaoke books with the brass band, and sitting through *kyushouku* while asking “what color do you like?” for the millionth time, I found my students as reluctant as ever to bother with English outside of the classroom. They like the ALT, they are thrilled when you’re around, and they love teaching you Japanese, but frankly they just aren’t very interested in something that has no tangible result (by the by, one of the reasons many of them don’t care much about going to university, but that’s an essay of a different font).

## So I busted out the stickers.

I pride myself on my sticker collection. Holiday, special interest, location specific, 3D... you name it, I will stun you by finding it somewhere in the green duct-taped envelope where they live. (The *shougakkou* has an excellent collection of different duct-tape rolls. Oh, the possibilities!) When I taught music in the states, I gave out stickers when my younger kids finished a piece or accomplished a certain skill. This tactic works with kids of all ages in Japan, from first-graders up to teachers. They love stickers, but the kids generally stick them on their binders or books and promptly forgot where they came from. I didn’t have many repeat participants. After all is said and done, a sticker is cool, and you know I love glitter, but it doesn’t really show much achievement unless it’s linked to something more substantial.

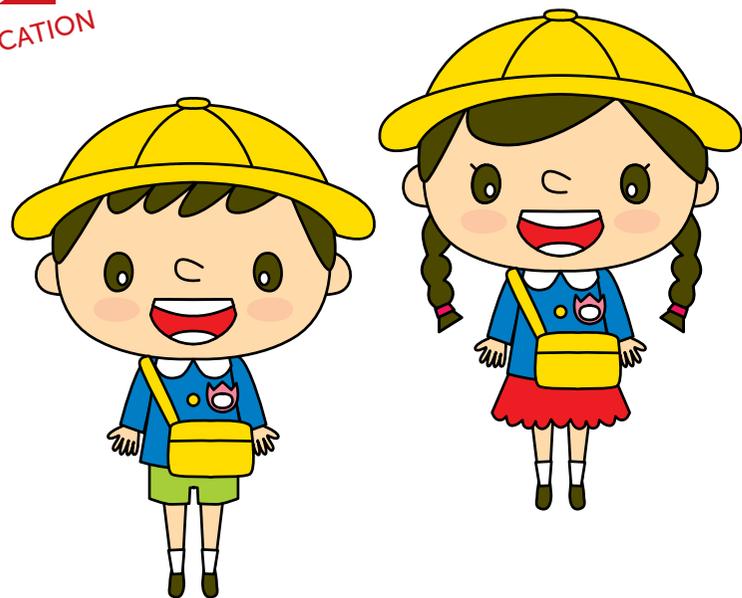
## Enter the point card.

If you’ve been in Japan at all, you’re already aware of the Japanese penchant for point cards that reward customers for availing themselves of various services. If you’ve lived here for more than a month, you’re sure to have collected a fair number of point cards for your own use. I have one for my supermarket (I’ve gotten a golden kiwi), one for bringing my own bag to the super (thirty days of eco-friendliness means 100 points on the card), the espresso shop I frequent once every six weeks (free latte in three more months), Mr. Donut (fifty points buys you a breakfast pastry, and it doesn’t take long to rack them up, especially if you drag your friends there and graciously lend them the use of your card), plus a host of other establishments (dry cleaners, gym, library, auto repair shop, DVD rental, the local cement factory). And why not just tack one on for your Eikaiwa sessions?

I downloaded some pictures of popular cartoon characters (One Piece is particularly well-suited to this since almost every kid likes it, and they can collect the whole crew), laminated them, cut them up, and passed them out on the first day of class of the new year.

Kids understand the point card system, because it’s part of Japanese consumer culture already, so I don’t have





to explain it very intricately, which is good because my Japanese is still in the nascent stages of development (I made myself a Japanese conversation point card; every time I survive a conversation, I sign off on it and after awhile, I treat myself to a bottle of sake). Each time a kid talks to me, I give them a sticker, which they put right on the card, meaning they keep track of their progress. Each card has a pre-determined number of stickers they need to earn, fewer for the earlier cards and more for the later ones. When they've collected the right amount, they get the next card in the set. Some of the kids get super-excited and search me out two or three times a day to drive up their points.

What's that you say? They're just greedy little grubbers who have no respect for the Western World and are only in it for the pictures of Monkey D. Luffy?

**Ouch.**

**And what's wrong with being in it just for Luffy?**

Some of my fellow ALTs have argued that this system is just an instantaneous gratification gimmick that really doesn't do much to encourage the kids' innate love of learning. If you've got kids who will just walk up to you and struggle with their rudimentary language skills for the pure pleasure of learning something new and different, then bless you. In a perfect world, I would teach for free. And then beg for my rice every night like a Buddhist monk. In my opinion, though, that's just not very practicable, nor does it sound very fun.

My high-achieving students tell me they want to travel to other countries, study abroad, work in Tokyo, or teach English when they grow up, and I want them to dream big. I also want to give them a concrete reason to learn English *right now*, not just in the future. My timid students and my too-cool-for-school kids have less interest in taking a risk on something that has no apparent effect on their lives. For those kids, the point card is a good excuse to practice

English. For shy kids who can't see a reason to subject themselves to the extra stress of talking with a grown-up pictures of cute fuzzy animals can become an awfully sweet enticement. For the tough kid who runs with the cool crowd, collecting anime cards is a good excuse for struggling with that dratted *eigo*. I've never met a kid who didn't like to be the first with the newest anything.

**Which is the point of the exercise.**

**As far as I can see, it's like having a job**

I go to the office, to the classroom, to the community center and do my job. I get paid a salary and, hopefully, I get more freedom in my life. My students come and talk to me and practice their English. They can earn stickers through actual conversation with me or each other, if I'm within hearing distance, or by requesting homework, which technically isn't conversation, but is still English practice. They are building a future with more freedom and opportunity. They can't see that far, yet, but they are investing in their own futures. If you want to be a rice farmer, more power to you. But for the student who may someday want the option of doing something different, this is a great tool that provides a quick return.

You study English, get into a better high school, go to university, and have the freedom to determine your own future or at the very least, have some more options. There aren't many opportunities to speak English out here in *inaka*, which makes most kids think: "why bother"? Giving students an immediate reward when they try shows them that even on a very basic level, there is a point to all this *gaikokugo*.

**And if you've got a point, I've got a card to stamp it on!**

*Mary Faray is a second-year ALT in eastern Kochi prefecture. Internationalization is close to her heart, as are heat-tech fabrics, three extra layers of cashmere-wool-polyester-blend sweaters, and a kaero, on its fifth hour.*

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