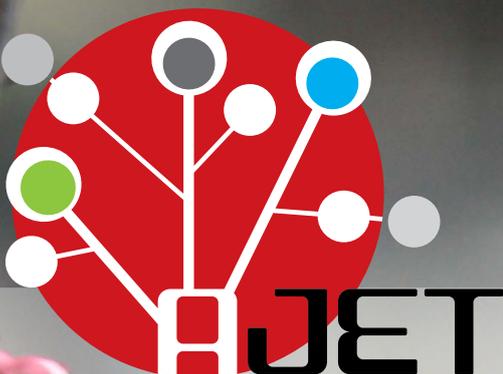


AJET

CONNECT

magazine
March Issue
2014



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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR OF **CONNECT** MAGAZINE!

It has been a crazy couple of weeks leading the Connect team. Since coming back from winter vacation, we have been consistently working on the magazine. After releasing the January issue in late January, we went on to produce the February and After JET Conference issues in the same month (both full issues at more than 60 pages!). We had a weekend to relax as we enjoyed listening to feedback about the printed AJC issue, and then it was right back to work on this March issue. I know I say this a lot about the Connect team, but I am very proud of what we have accomplished in the first months of 2014. We have two more issues to go before staff changes, and I'm excited for what we've got in store for you.

This month sees a lot of great content for you to read while basking under the *kotatsu* or hidden under a mountain of blankets. Take a few minutes to check out some of this month's new features. After hearing a lot of feedback and requests for it, we've finally started Connect Comics, which features comics and other art about life, Japan, and everything in between. If you're skilled with a set of pens or a digital tablet, show me your stuff at connect.editor@ajet.net and we'll talk about getting it published.

This month is also the first month for our Contributor Map (designed by our stalwart assistant designer Sterling Diesel, who also provided haiku this month). You can find it in the back with all the information about contributing. Check it out to see which prefectures are contributing to Connect this month (spoiler: it's a lot!). Speaking of great design, we get some behind-the-scenes information about the creation of AJET's new mascot character, Tsuru-chan on **page 10**.

Our section editors have also been hard at work this month reliably providing consistent content for our standard sections. We've got articles to help you put on your best face in the morning, take in the sight of beautiful blossoms, meet Japanese

friends your age, run a 5k, get drunk outside, get drunk in Asakusa and plenty more.

Once you've finished reading, I encourage you to get out and embrace the outside world. I fully believe that the best way to beat the winter blues (as well as end-of-term, changing staff blues) is to avoid the trap of coming home and sitting down all weekend. Whether it be winter sports, local events, or just dinner with friends, whatever keeps you up and about (and wearing pants). I've talked to a lot of unhappy friends throughout Japan, and the common thread during this time is boredom and lethargy. Don't forget where you are and all the opportunities for exchange, growth, and adventure just outside your door! We'll be here next month with more stories from the community around Japan and the rest of the world.

All my best,

Steven Thompson
3rd-year Fukushima ALT, Head Editor of Connect magazine



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FROM THE AJET CHAIR, KAY MAKISHI...



Hello JETs!

The sun is shining longer, skies are bluer, and strawberries are appearing on the shelves. I smell spring! Although ALTs and CIRs by day, your AJET National Council representatives have been hard at work (after work) this past month with lots of new AJET projects and services for you!

First, thank you to all who casted votes in the AJET National Council Elections last month. It's hard to believe that council changeover, June 1st, is just right around the corner. It feels like just the other day I was getting my platform together to run for Chair. During elections, we also received excellent feedback from YOU such as holding Re-Open Nominations if there is only one candidate for a position. All these suggestions will be presented to next year's Elections' Committee to encourage them to keep making positive changes. As always, I appreciate JETs taking their time to provide us with constructive feedback on how we can make AJET a better organization that serves JETs.

Also, based on your support and feedback, we've been redesigning www.ajet.net to provide you with more centralized resources that's easier to navigate. Got any more ideas? Shoot our webmasters David from Hyogo and Serena from Tottori an email at david.berg@ajet.net and serena.lai@ajet.net. They are superstar webmasters!

I hope everyone enjoyed the recent Question Quest giveaway contest on Facebook as well. Don't forget to give a big *arigato* to Block Reps Sarah Stout from Yamanashi and Aaron Gilling from Saitama who reached out to Question Quest to get educational resources donated to National AJET to pass on to you!

AJET is also helping to spread the word about "JETs Rally for Tohoku", a JET Alumni Association project to raise funds for

CONNECT

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Tohoku students recovering from 3.11. Funds go toward scholarships, creating a new library, support for prevention activities of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and more. And on March 11th, for 24 hours, your contribution will be matched—double the donation! Check out how you and/or your local AJET Prefectural Chapter can help out **HERE**.

Remember, with 4,372 JETs in Japan from 40 countries, our JET community really is phenomenal. Together, we have so much potential and talent to do great things. If you'd like to do more or make a bigger contribution to Japan, your students, other JETs and/or foreigners, then just do it! Be proactive. National AJET is nothing but a platform for JETs to utilize to benefit themselves and their local communities. Go ahead and use National AJET's networks, media, and resources to benefit you and the people around you. Write an article in Connect, ask to help your Block Rep create a charity event or create one yourself, or start a thread about recent events and ask for fellow JETs' opinions in your AJET Block Facebook group. Getting dialogue and action moving forward is key, in my humble opinion. The possibilities are endless and your time on JET and what AJET means is what you make of it. The AJET National Council is here to help.

Yours in JET community service,

Kay Makishi
Chair, AJET National Council
3rd-year Fukuoka CIR



meet the CONNECT team!



Steven Thompson Head Editor

I'll be kind of sad to see this year's winter go, although it was rough on a lot of Japan, here in southern Fukushima it was pretty mild. This was also the year I spent a lot of time on the slopes and really improved my snowboarding, making winter that much more fun. Outside of Connect, I've been watching Ghibli movies I've never seen and planning a second Fukushima blood donation drive. I've always got time for you, though. If you have ideas, questions, or comments, I want to hear them! connect.editor@ajet.net

Melinda Lange Layout and Design

Top o'the day to ya! March is here and our theme is one of my favorite colours—green! Not to mention clovers are adorable and can be seen in almost everywhere you go in Japan. The four-leafed ones are a little harder to find—I had to look for almost 30 minutes before I found one on my school's track field on sports day...! Also, it's almost *hanami* season! Don't let the wind bother you! Get out and enjoy those picnics!



Josiah David Director of Public Relations

Green, for me, is rare but amazing. A great tank-top I got in Okinawa, the wall-paper in the living room I share with my partner, and my birthday the same weekend as St. Paddy's day. This month, going green is all about renewing zest and welcoming spring.

Sterling Diesel Assistant Designer

The greenest I get is when I cover myself in peacock feathers. Can those be considered spring birds? Regardless, I love March. It's the time for plum blossoms, America's national poetry month, and the beginning of warmer days! I'm spending my free time getting back into writing, drawing, and going on walks to collect seasonal flowers to keep around my apartment. If you find yourself in my neighbourhood, stop by and grab a jar of my fresh pickles!



Ola Weber Copyediting

This March you can find me traveling in real Japanese style. I'm counting on a good time, as the Japanese seem to do almost everything better than their Western counterparts—except pizza and peanut butter of course! I'll be heading to Fukuoka with a group of teachers, and unsurprisingly, every detail has been planned out months ahead, including a Tonkotsu ramen feast!

Matthew Jones Culture Editor

Love is in the air... Wait a second, those aren't hearts, they're *hanami* blossoms! Which can mean only one thing: it's March! And the start of Hanami Season down here in Nagasaki. Which also means that St Patrick's Day is just around the corner. I'm not sure how Irish you are—if at all—but even if you don't have the slightest bit o' green in your blood, St. Patrick's day is all about friends, fun and more than a little **ahem** 'liquid refreshment.'



Tom Morin-Robinson Entertainment Editor

This past month, I finally found the time to get myself up to the northern reaches of Japan for Sapporo's famous snow festival. It's always fun to get some snow-frolicking in, but I must admit I left Canada in no small part to get away from massive snow banks and icy roads. As usual, I've been working on my photography which you can check out at tommrphoto.tumblr.com. And as always, if you find yourself with a story in need of telling, get in touch at connect.entertainment@ajet.net!

Lineng Tee Fashion & Beauty Editor

Hello again, dear readers! A record amount of snow in Kanto affected university entrance exams, brought food supply chains to a halt and saw many stranded at train stations or along expressways. Things are back to normal, but it was wonderful seeing communities work together to clear the streets while making quirky ice sculptures. My first batch of students graduate this month, so the ceremony is going to be an emotional one. My springtime plans include flower-hunting and window-shopping using the *Seishun 18 Kippu*, and I'm keen to hear about your adventures—involving snow or otherwise—at connect.fashion@ajet.net



Ariane Bobiash Food Editor

Hey everyone! Can you believe it's MARCH?! One highlight of the past few weeks was watching Tokushima's 20th anniversary musical. It feels great to live in a prefecture that has been doing something so cool for the local communities for two whole decades! This year's production is a musical rendition of Finding Nemo. There will be shows the first two weekends in March, so you still have time to come down and check it out! In the mean time, let Xan and I know what you've been whipping up in the kitchen at connect.food@ajet.net.

Xan Wetherall Food Editor

So there I was—supermarket, the local grower's section—when in front of my eyes, what should appear but fresh, new 山菜, better known in English as "wild edibles"! These little shoots and buds are perfect in a tempura, their soft bitterness matching the salty crunch of the batter perfectly... but moreover, they're the heralds of spring! I really can't believe it's already March. But whether your house is still 10 feet under the snow, or you're sitting pretty in tropical paradise, the seasons are definitely changing—and with it, the flavor of the food! Cooking up anything special to greet the new season? Tell us all about it at connect.food@ajet.net!



Hugo Dragonetti Sports Editor

Hey there! So it's March, which, for me at least, means three things: Saint Patrick's Day, the Grand Sumo Tournament in Osaka and the start of the cherry blossom season. I'm looking forward attending *hanami* parties and a Saint Patrick's Day parade in Kumamoto this month. I also hope I can do a lot more cycling with my local club, Tamana Biker's Club, as the days get warmer. If you have a sporting interest that you would like to share with the JET community, please get in touch at connect.sports@ajet.net

Caroline Bellinger Travel Editor

Well, winter, it seems you were holding out on us. Just when we thought we'd escaped relatively unscathed this season, the big white dumped. Hard. Fantastic news for the powderhounds among us, less exciting for anyone with travel plans. I was lucky enough to be hurling myself down Niseko's powder-fresh mountains in Hokkaido when the snowstorms hit Japan last month, though to be fair, the white stuff that greeted me when I finally made it back to Yamagata was arguably more intense. I say "finally" because it took several days of cancelled trains and buses, an unexpected stay in a manga café, and long hours waiting in train stations for me to finally get home! Ah, the life of a travel editor is tough, but someone's got to do it, eh?



Michelle Castro Volunteering Editor

I can smell Spring coming. Actually I can't, but I do have high hopes for short sleeve weather. I recently learned that a space heater can overheat and stop working. In the past month I have been playing in the snow and failing miserably at snowboarding. Shimane JETs are signing up for the annual parade for Saint Patrick's Day in Matsue and AJET is making plans for a luau in spring to raise money for the Shimane AJET scholarship fund. My neighbors in Tottori are finalizing details for the Daisen Beer Fest in June. I hope you make your way towards us when it starts to get warmer. See you next month!

Kelly Merks Events Editor

March brings in the best season: spring! The season of beautiful flowers on trees and, more importantly, my birthday! This March, I want to appease the Irish lass in me and watch the St. Patrick's Day parade in Tokyo (Sunday, March 16th), and enjoy some super-duper crowded, but old-school *hanami* in Ueno Park. This is also a big month for English camps here in Saitama. One camp I'm helping with will travel to British Hills in Fukushima for a three day British-themed camp. *Tanoshimi!* What are your favorite spring happenings in your locale? Tell us about them at connect.events@ajet.net.



AJET CONNECT magazine

March 2014

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This edition, and all past editions of AJET Connect, can be found online at <http://ajet.net/ajet-connect>. Read Connect online and follow us at <http://issuu.com/ajetconnect>.



ASK / CONNECT

Ask/Connect is your space to get in touch with the AJET Council, Connect staff, and the Connect community. If you have a question about life in Japan, would like to know something about AJET, want to respond to any of the articles or editorials in this month's issue, or if you just want to say something nice about us, here's the place to do it! **Ask your questions at connect.editor@ajet.net or via the National AJET Facebook page and Twitter!**

Here's what we heard this month:

Hello from Texas!

I would like to address those living and working in the colder regions of Japan, particularly Hokkaido. How long and what measures did you take to become conditioned to the cold weather? What has been the most enjoyable part about living in the colder regions? I hope you are having a great time!

◆ Zachary Talbot, Texas

That's a great question, Zachary. Moving to Japan can see us placed somewhere completely different from where we were used to living. Personally, I grew up in Florida, in the States. Even Florida's winters barely spend a day or two beneath 70 F (20 C), so coming to Japan, I had to learn all about things like layering, insulating, and shoveling snow. The best way I've found to put a positive spin on the sometimes dreary cold is to get out on the slopes and snowboard! Fukushima has many great resorts, and it makes the sight of snow outside exciting rather than dreadful. If winter sports aren't your thing, do anything else to get out of the house and enjoy the season (sounds contrary to keeping warm, I know). You'll find you start looking forward to winter rather than cursing it.

Don't just take my word on this, though. We asked our northern Japan Connect community about it. Here's what they had to say!

Coming from Canada I was used to winter. The biggest change was that they don't have central heating, they use kerosene heaters. If you want to try a winter sport like skiing, snowshoeing, etc., this is the place, we have world class snow, and you will likely be a short drive or bus ride from a ski slope. The winter festivals are amazing! Remember HAJET can always help you with useful advice on winter here. We even had a workshop on how to prepare, and what to expect from winter at the last Fall Meeting. Since Canada and Hokkaido have similar winters, I talked to some people from Texas about winter. Here is what they said:

"I actually found that coming from such a consistently hot place (like Texas) that the novelty of winter, ice, snow and the occasional blizzard is almost ceaseless. That's not to say it doesn't get hard, but a lot of the time I find winter really exciting just because it's so out of the ordinary for me."

◆ Taylor, Hokkaido

Nothing helps except stubbornness, buying a lot of layer-able clothing, investing in good winter boots, and resigning yourself to very large heating bills every month. At least that's what worked for me...

◆ Elise, Hokkaido (originally Texas)

What helped me was connecting with the local pharmacist, and investing in a few really nice down pieces, as well as watching local buying trends in the department store. It took me a year to adjust...[since] unlike Austin, I was dealing with months of solid winter... in Iwamizawa! By my 2nd winter I think I was more aware of what to wear, eat, and how to get around. This was especially lucky as that was the winter that [we had] record amounts of snowfall! As far as enjoyable moments...my local BOE [can] get really creative with the eight foot pile of snow outside my apartment building. I'll never forget the "snow staircase" they made us so that we could have access to our apartment mansion!

◆ Amanda, Hokkaido (originally Texas)

As a native southern Californian, Akita's harsh winters are particularly hard to live in. I think this prefecture gets the least amount of sunlight out of all of Japan; it snows seemingly every day or two. So why did I decide to recontract for another year here? First and foremost, because of the community! The people you meet at school and in your neighborhood will be your best way to acclimate to the culture AND the weather. One of the people on the city's board of education actually gave me a kotatsu (which is an excellent way to keep warm--it's a heated table, if you're not familiar with it). And I've gone over to a neighbor's house for things like Christmas or just to have dinner, and it's usually quite toasty in there. Your neighbors will also help you get out of the house, which I find to be essential for combating the cold—dinners, outings, shopping, sports games, you name it. They'll also let you know about local winter festivals, which is a big bonus for living up in the north! In Akita (and Hokkaido is probably similar), there's about a 3-week period when a ton of festivals pop up, and each one is amazing. I don't think the

central and south parts of Japan have as good of or as varied of winter festivals as we have up in the north (if they really do them at all). Travel, go to the cities (I love to hang out in Round One where it's warm enough just to wear jeans and a t-shirt), visit onsen, and just get out!

I don't know if one ever really becomes "conditioned" to the cold weather (the locals certainly complain of the cold as much as anyone else), but to keep warm I will usually wear two jackets, sometimes with a peacoat on top (the jackets are thin enough for it). If you don't have any thermal shirts or leggings yet, just buy them here. Places like Uniqlo sell them for like \$10, and I've even found cheaper ones in grocery stores or other clothing stores that work just as well. If you find yourself lacking in scarves, gloves, or thick and toasty socks, fear not, there are plenty to buy here. You'll also need boots. Boy, will you need them.

As for keeping warm at home, it partly depends on where you live. I'm kind of away from any city center, so I have a larger two bedroom apartment with a decent-sized kitchen/living room, and everything is separated by a freezing hallway. It would take a fortune to keep the whole place warm, so I and my predecessors opted just to live in one room for the winter and keep that warm. People in the cities tend to have one bedroom apartments or small two bedrooms that are connected and don't have a hallway, so those are fairly easy to keep warm. You've got choices like kerosene heaters, electric heaters, electric carpets (hot carpets), electric blankets, and kotatsu, all of which are easily attainable here. People will also bubble wrap their windows (trust me, it's a thing, and they sell bubble wrap in stores), but I was too lazy for that.

◆ Brianna, Akita



Every month, we'll ask you guys what you think about various topics and questions submitted by members of the AJET community. You can find the results for last month's question, and this month's question here!

Cast your vote and add your voice at ajet.net. You can also submit your own idea for a poll topic at connect.editor@ajet.net!

This Month's Question

Considering the amount of travel-related submissions we receive each month, we know you all love to make your way around Japan! Not counting Tokyo during Orientation, we want to know:

How many prefectures have you visited?

- Only 1; I've stayed in my home prefecture!
- 2-10
- 11-20
- 21-30
- 31-40
- More than 40
- ALL of them!

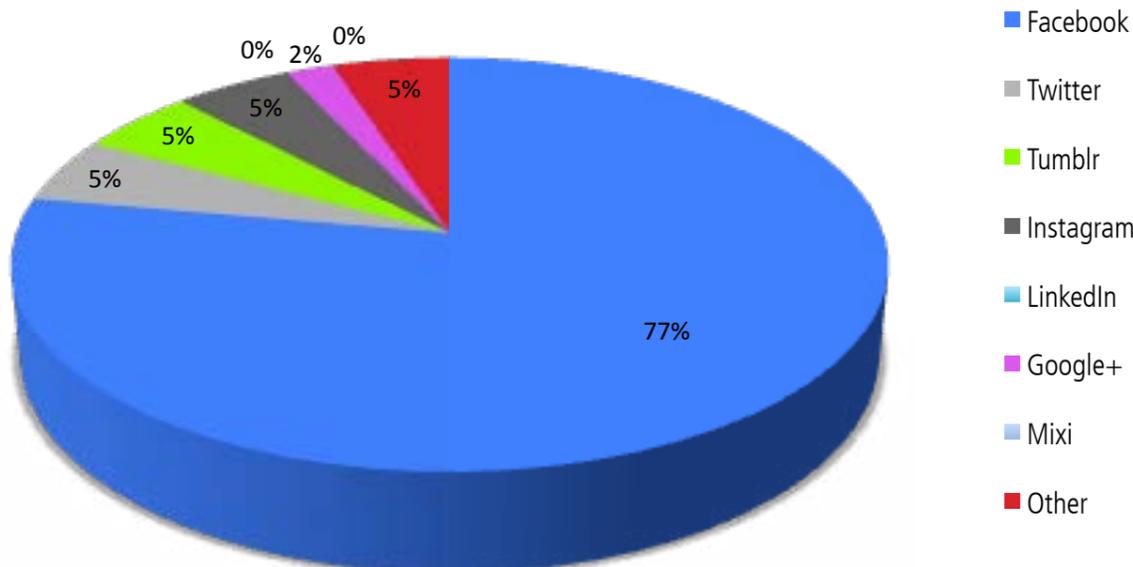
What did you think of this issue? Have a question for the community? Make sure to send your opinions to us at connect.editor@ajet.net in response to this month's articles and editorials!



Last Month's Results



It's pretty plain to see that, even here in Japan, Facebook is king. Between sharing photos, organizing events, and inviting all your friends to games they don't want to play, it's easy to see why Facebook came in as number one most-used by our readers. While Twitter, Tumblr, and Instagram are all tied up for the second-place slot, there's also at least one person out there actually using Google+.



We are hiring Recruitment Consultants and Junior Consultants to join our teams in 2014

About en world Japan en world is a recruitment service company, focusing on managerial and senior-level staff positions. With 200 staff in 4 locations in Japan and 6 overseas, we are rapidly growing in the Asia Pacific region with over 5,000 placements in 14 years. Most of our clients are global, multinational companies, and our strength lies in teamwork throughout the entire group supporting clients find the best talents in the Asia Pacific market.

What is Consultant's Job? Each of our consultant focus on a specialized area, e.g. banking, life sciences, IT, etc., and works closely with clients to accurately match talent from our extensive and well-established networks. You will not be a mere intermediary between the client and applicant, but a key player as the trusted advisor for both parties. You will be working closely with your team members and across different teams.

Many ex-JETs Success Stories

There is a number of ex-JET at en world and many of them are the most successful consultants who are consistently ranked in the Top 10 achievers in the Company. Please read Ben's story, who started as a Junior Consultant after finishing JET in 2005 is now managing our IT team!



I found JET to be a great experience, however after two years I felt that I had learned all I could and wanted something new and stimulating. As I was interested in staying in Japan, a friend recommended the Recruitment Industry to me. I soon realized that there was a huge variety of professional skills to be gained, many of which were applicable in Japan and back home. Acting as a communicating point between jobseekers and companies, has served to develop my negotiation and mediation skills, my confidence both on the phone and in face-to-face situations with senior decision makers. I have made connections with some of the biggest retail, consumer goods and medical companies in the world.

Extensive Training Programs Through our internal training program we will arm you with the professional skill-set that will set you up for a life of business success. We also offer financial support for your own initiative for development, including Univ. courses, language courses, gym memberships, etc. Continuous self improvement is one of our core values and is taken very seriously by all of us at en world.

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- Ambitious Proactive Team Player
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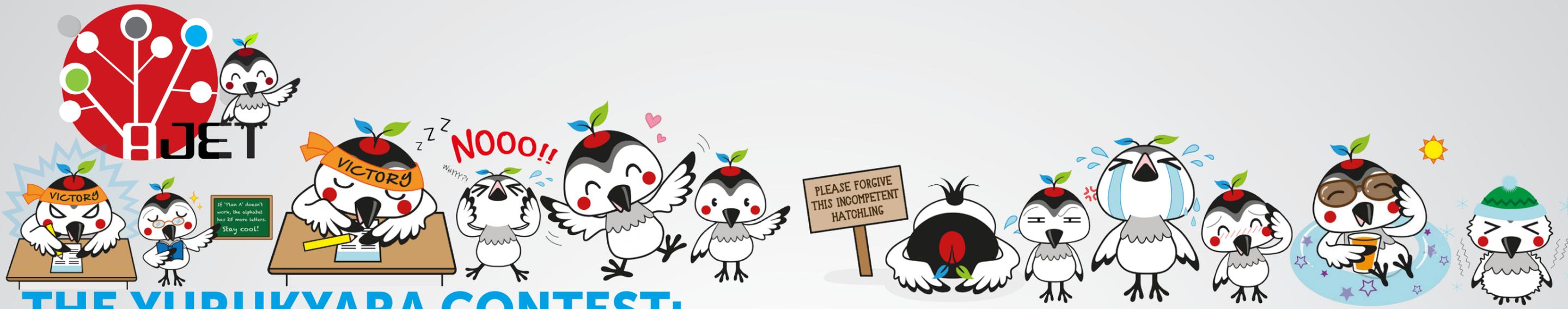
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THE YURUKYARA CONTEST: A BACKSTORY &

An Interview with Serena Lai, creator of AJET's new mascot, Tsuru-chan.

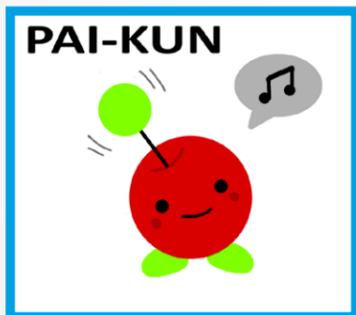
Kevin Chen, Nara

Let us start from the beginning of time—in this case, last October, when I received a surprise email from Julia Mace, AJET's Director of Public Relations. The cause? Sometime shortly after settling into Japan, I had submitted my name on a Google Form[[https://docs.google.com/a/ajet.net/forms/d/1c9t0TjPvVtEchrEo8ZKR9FgYJL6g7ywAnfsRBYpoSlc/viewform]] for National AJET volunteers (highly recommended, A+ would apply again). I was asked to run the yurukyara (mascot character) contest, and gladly accepted.

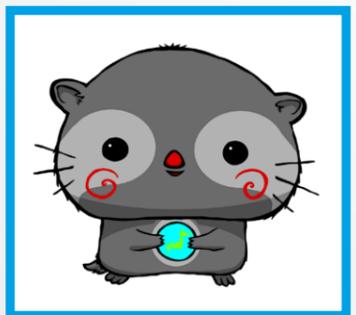
From the outset, I really wanted the focus to be on accessibility and brevity, so I turned once again to Google Forms for help, this time as a creator. Rather than bog everyone down with a single wall-of-text contest page, I had prospective contestants submit their names and emails so I could personally send them everything they needed to know on a searchable basis (added bonus: specialized reminder emails as the deadline approached!). For those that might not have had time to get a reply email sent, I prepared an open Google Doc with the same guidelines for ease of access.

In total, 24 JET participants from 18 prefectures utilized the form, and 4 other JETs either expressed interest or graciously submitted their designs bypassing it. From the total 28, we received 22 dazzling submissions, which were then voted on in a nonexclusive, points-based system; each design was given 0 to 5 points by the members of the National AJET Council, and the yurukyara with the most points was crowned the winner.

The contest voting was very close for a while, but ultimately Tsuru-chan, by Tottori JET Serena Lai, was victorious by a clear margin. High-scoring runner-ups included Pai-kun by Saitama prefecture's Anna Sears and Pocchan by Merran Eby of Fukushima. It was a thrilling experience to work with so many awesome people; I highly encourage everyone to apply to volunteer National AJET. Again, a hearty congratulations and thanks for all those who dedicated so much time and effort to crafting a new face for National AJET!



Runner-up Pai-kun, from Anna Sears of Saitama



Runner-up Pocchan, from Merran Eby of Fukushima

What inspired you to create Tsuru-chan?

I'm not quite sure to be honest. But thinking about yurukyara's and how they're meant to help represent the prefecture they're from, I did spend a while trying to think of what sort of character would best fit AJET. In the end, thinking about how JETs are dispersed all over Japan but still take the time to travel and explore other prefectures here, I thought maybe the best character might be a bird, since birds are the best equipped to travel around everywhere. After that, it was just a matter working with the colour requirements of the brief and coming up with something that would go well with the current AJET logo. Funnily, it just so happened that the colours I ended up using reminded me of Japanese cranes, so that's how Tsuru-chan was born!

Revisiting the design now though, maybe Tsuru-chan should have more of a longer neck and a thinner body. Um... maybe our mascot's a little overweight? But hey! It's still winter, so you can't blame our feathered friend for gorging on delicious, body-and-soul-warming food to keep warm! (^_~)☆ Maybe when spring comes and Tsuru-chan starts to molt a little, she'll lose a bit of weight. Who knows!

What other possibilities did you rule out?

There was a ninja and another character that resembled Mt. Fuji. But I thought maybe a lot of other people would have come up with a ninja design, so I discarded that idea pretty quickly. As for Fuji? There isn't much you can do with a mountain unless you give it arms and legs, or wings.

Tsuru-chan was clearly drawn by a veteran hand; could you talk a bit about your past experience with design?

As a child, I think I've always loved drawing pictures. I guess I was one of those who used to doodle in the corner of notebooks during class. I was also a bit of an avid reader of Japanese comics, and back in high school, I remember teaming up with an

equally artsy friend to try our hand at creating our own comic. We would spend our free time at the local library and sketch out storyboards and cook up different character designs in our art books. It was great fun!

Going through high school, I couldn't really imagine myself with a regular desk job like accounting, so I decided to pursue a career in graphic design. After graduating from university with a Bachelor in Visual Communication, I worked as a web and print designer for about 5 years before coming on JET.

How have your experiences with JET helped you, both in design and generally?

I'd say that JET has definitely helped me improve my public speaking skills. After 2+ years of rotating around to my different schools and giving all those hello and goodbye speeches, self-introductions and PowerPoint presentations about Australia, it makes me feel that maybe speaking in front of large crowds isn't too bad. Still, getting rid of stage fright isn't easy. Hopefully, now that I'm more used to it, I can feel more confident in making design presentations to clients in the future.

Working as an ALT with a graphic design background, I can say that my design experiences have also helped me with JET work. Rather than fiddling around in Microsoft Word, sometimes it's much easier to open a design program like InDesign and use that to make printable flashcards or customised worksheets. The one occupational hazard though is spending too much time obsessing over every little thing like choosing which images and fonts to use.



Michelle Castro, Shimane
Director of Volunteering and Block 9 Representative

Tons of things are on the horizon.

Hiroshima lives for adventure and Hiroshima AJET does a great job of making it very convenient for people to participate in their events. They usually provide an all-inclusive package of transportation, food, and housing to most of their events. First, no year in Block 9 is complete without a trip to see Sumo in Fukuoka. And this past October, JETs spent four hours white-water rafting down the Yoshino River in Shikoku during which they made a pit stop to go cliff diving. Dry land activities in Hiroshima included Sake Fest in Saijo and pretending to be airplane crash victims at the Hiroshima airport crash drill. Other Block 9 JETs are spending weekends at the Mizuho Highland Ski Resort enjoying some skiing and snowboarding before spring comes.

Okayama enjoyed their annual Naked Man festival in February (which you can read about in this issue), during which men in loincloths try to collect lucky sticks called *shingi*. Last year it was exciting to see such a big turnout, but also concerning because scantily clad men were falling down the steps of the Saidaiji Temple in the freezing cold weather!

Shimane AJET has been working hard fundraising for the Shimane AJET scholarship fund which provides interested students the funds to experience another culture and study English in a foreign country. Recently, Shimane just had their skiing/snowboarding weekend trip, which included a snowball fight in Hamada-Shi. One of February's annual events is the Kamate Daffodil Park blooming of over two million flowers in Masuda City. There is a short hiking trail by the flowers which provides a great view of the flower covered hill and the ocean. In the springtime, during cherry blossom season, the city of Tsuwano hosts a horse archery event.

Tottori started off the year with a hike to the Daisen waterfall. Once there, we jumped in and cooled off before having snacks and taking pictures. The trail offered a variety of potential dangers due to steep stairs, a wobbly suspension bridge, and chains that were used to help hikers get down the last 50 meters of the trek. In January, JETs gathered for a Trivia evening in Kurayoshi. The next event for them is the Hiruzen Adventure Day Illumination festival. Participants can build mini igloos and see hundreds of them lit up by candles.

Meanwhile, in **Yamaguchi**, JETs just celebrated their *shin-enkai* and are in the planning phase for future events. White-water rafting is among the adventures they are mentally and physically preparing for.

As for myself, I keep busy with sourcing articles for the volunteering section of the Connect magazine. On the AJET National Council I help to promote educational resources and professional development opportunities for current JET Programme participants. AJET Elections are coming up, so I am excited to encourage others to run for elected positions or to apply for one of the appointed positions. I look forward to seeing what goals the new council will have for next year!



Martin Barry, Shimane
Vice Chair

(Unfortunately, our dear Vice Chair has been ill for quite some time, and was unable to provide an update on his activities. We've provided information about Martin's home in Japan, the Oki Islands, in his honor. Please join us in wishing him a speedy recovery.)

Noted for their unique culture, distinctive nature, and spectacular scenery, the Oki Islands are a designated **National Geopark of Japan**. . . And yes, JETs get to live and work here!

The Oki archipelago is located 40 kilometers to the northwest of Shimane in the Sea of Japan, and spreads over a distance of 50 kilometers. Of about 180 islands, the four largest are inhabited. These islands were created by volcanic activity. The volcanoes are long-since inactive and the area is now one of the least prone to natural disasters in Japan. This dramatic landscape has also played host to a great human story of ancient settlement, exiled emperors, and a brief stint of independence. With at least 40,000 years of human life, the islands have no lack of tales and traditions stretching far back into the mists of prehistory. The landscape remains very much unchanged, and the traditional, rural life has helped to preserve some very old customs and culture.

Today, the Oki islands have a combined population of about 21,000. The main industry is fishing, with agriculture playing a central role too. There is plenty of fresh produce to be found in the shops and restaurants, and Oki's seafood is second to none. Oki beef is also famed for its quality, and while it is mostly shipped off for sale in the big cities, it is available at one restaurant on Ama Island. Across the islands, there is no lack of adventure to be had with Oki being home to some of the finest scenery in Shimane—and a breathtakingly beautiful, aqua-blue sea, which is home to some unique marine life. The sea also helps by keeping us about 3°C cooler in summer and 3°C warmer in winter. While there is some snow during the winter months, it is much less than our mainland friends. *(Information provided by <http://www.shimaneajet.com/>)*



Penny Fox, Saga
Project Manager and Block 10 Representative

G'day from Block 10! After an incredible trip over winter break to tear up the slopes of Niseko, I can't believe we're into the second half of the JET year already! For this little unicorn, that means coming to terms with the fact that my JET journey is coming to an end and I have to start thinking about what's next.

Luckily, I find myself in a Block that is busy as always, despite the cold of winter (yes, even in Kyushu we think it's cold!). Last month, we had a group ski/snowboard trip to Mizuho Highland in Shimane and Nagasaki peeps plus plenty of visitors were out and about for the annual Chinese Lantern Festival. Before we know it, it'll be time for Spring Break and a host of *hanami* parties!

In the works we also have a large block *shinennenkai* coming up in Fukuoka and the amazing **Oita AJET Charity Bike Trip** in March. This year will be the 17th annual bike event, with proceeds raised going to the Red Cross to help rebuilding efforts in the Philippines. Hopefully this money will help augment the wonderful effort by Michelle Lees of Oita, who is still working on her **'500 for 500 Challenge'**—an initiative to try and collect 500 yen from 500 people; also to help the Philippines. Michelle has already raised an amazing 235,370 yen! (That's only 14,630 yen, or 30 people, to go!!)

In my own prefecture of Saga, our people are involved on a regular basis with a volunteer initiative called Circle Time *[Ed. note - you can read more about it in the December issue, page 62]*—a programme that brings together Japanese children and foreigners through reading circles – which continues to go from strength to strength. In December last year we also had a large number of JETs contribute their time to Saga's annual charity Christmas party, which is attended by around 500 guests annually and features great live entertainment, free food and of course presents from Santa.

I'm incredibly proud of the volunteer and charity work that is happening around the block; together we can win the Race to the Top Challenge! Personally, aside from constantly striving to connect people and communities together, I'm also super busy in my role as National AJET Project Manager working on a bunch of improvements to the *ajet.net* website and also on an important spring survey for all JETs. . . . Stay tuned!



CULTURE

EDITORIAL Editorial: Let's Hanami!

I'll admit, the first time that I was invited to go to a *hanami* (flower-viewing) party I politely made my excuses. If you've seen one blossoming tree, why would you want to spend a whole afternoon looking at them? Later on, after I heard the crazy stories, I began to wonder what exactly happens at hanami parties. To satisfy my curiosity, I went flower viewing, and was soon partying with the best of them.

For those of you who don't yet know, hanami parties are less about beautiful, tranquil, pink-speckled vistas and more about the drinking. That's right, hanami parties (like a lot of things in Japan) are yet another reason to add a cheeky little bit of spice to your mid-day outdoor picnic.

Before you start enjoying the atmosphere, there's a few things you need to get right.

First, decide when to go. Click on the handy little map down there, and figure out when peak bloom will be where you are. You'll need to plan in advance where you want to go. You'll find that, on weekends during peak bloom season, whole sections of

parks get taken by people *really* early in the morning. To find the best places, ask some more veteran ALTs. Your fellow teachers, too, will know of hidden little parks where the air gets filled with gently fluttering blossoms.

Next, plan the menu. You should always have a bit of food if you're going to be drinking, and hanami parties are no different. You'll likely be there all afternoon, so pick up a few bento boxes, and make sure to crack them open before cracking open the *umeshuu* (while not normally a fan, I find the plum wine refreshingly perfect for hanami).

Don't forget the entertainment! In a crowded park, a frisbee will not be appreciated, and neither will the injuries when you *just* miss that awesome dive catch. Instead, bring some music players, books, card games and nice conversation.

Peak bloom is a really beautiful time in Japan, and the pictures you take during this time will be some of the ones you treasure long after your time here is over. So... send them in to us! I expect to see a huge amount of hanami-related submissions for next month's cover photo.

THIS MONTH IN CULTURE...

To keep my section introductions new and interesting, and for the sake of St. Patrick's Day, I'll try my hand at poetry...

First we Spotlight a company,
Renting *gaijin*, what a hoot!
Next comes a guide to *hanami*,
To give winter blues the boot.

Then we learn about St. Pat's Day
From Ambassador John Neary.
He is proud to be here to say
That Yoyogi park is the place to be.

Next, we separate wheat from chaff,
While the Japanese change their staff.

Finally, we travel to Shikoku
With Kyle Cardine, in the lead.
If these seem like the thing for you,
Pull up a chair, and give them a read.



SPOTLIGHT

Gaikokujin Rental, A Whole New Peer-to-Peer Business

This month in Culture, we Spotlight a strange new service: Gaikokujin-Rental.

Many of you will have read or heard about rental services, where customers will pay to spend time with somebody for private tutoring, exercising, shopping advice or just for friendly chats.

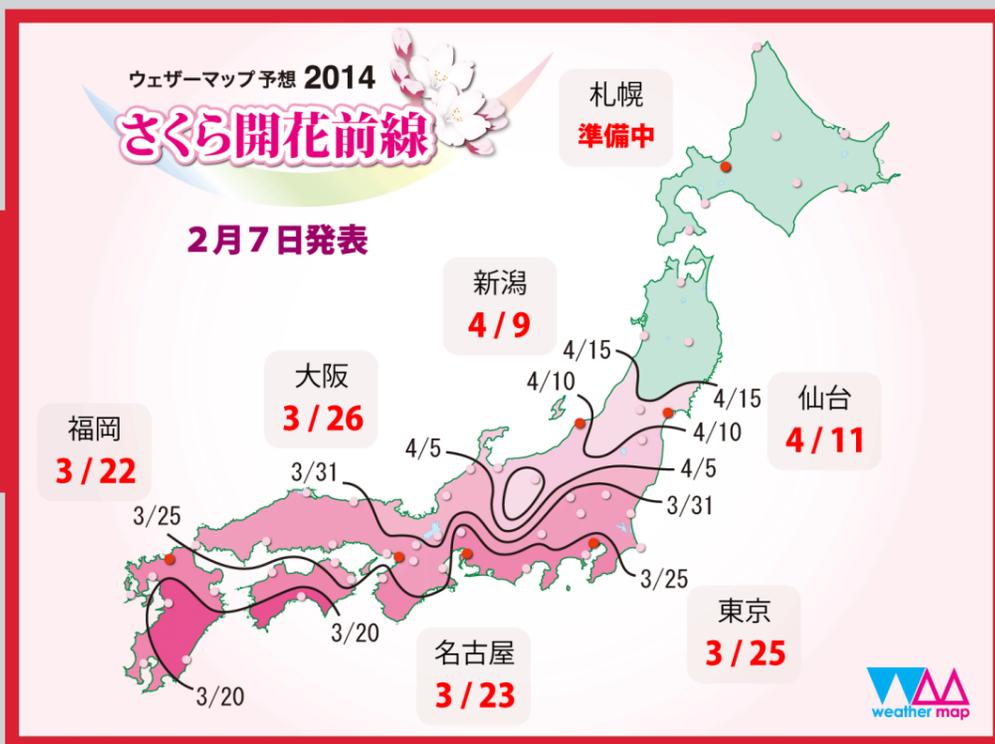
Gaikokujin-Rental separates itself from these companies in two key ways: First, it only uses foreigners, and so attracts a lot of business from people looking to improve their language skills or learn about different cultures. Secondly, the company is building up a network of professionals who are interested in networking with Japanese people.

This side of the business shows potential for great development.

Under Prime Minister Abe, Japan is seeking to increase interaction with foreign markets, and the founders of Gaikokujin-Rental anticipate that many of their customers will be interested in renting business professionals to help them prepare for upcoming meetings.

Knowledge of the company went viral as people joked about the absurdity of renting foreigners in Japan. However, in a short space of time, they have had more than 20 foreigners sign up, and dozens of Japanese people begin using the service. The company is set for rapid growth over the coming months and years.

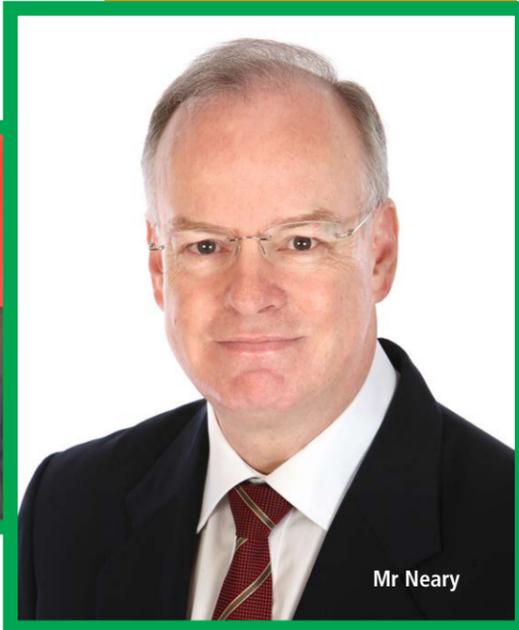
Check out our interview with the founders here: [\(LINK\)](#)



A MESSAGE FROM H.E. MR. JOHN NEARY, IRISH AMBASSADOR TO JAPAN



Abe and Irish Taoiseach Enda Kenny



Mr Neary

It is a great pleasure to be asked to contribute to an AJET publication. As an English-speaking country, Ireland has been an active partner in the JET Programme from its very earliest days. Hundreds of Irish JETs have come through the programme, and found their lives transformed as a result. Because of their efforts, Japanese people of all ages have come to know our country and more importantly, our people. Geographically speaking, Ireland is a very distant place, but I am convinced that these people-to-people contacts play a huge role in the close and friendly ties that we enjoy with Japan.

This month is one of the busiest on our calendar, the annual Festivities in Japan mark our world-renowned National Day, Saint Patrick's Day. It has been a happy surprise for me to see, since my arrival in Japan four years ago, how deeply Ireland and its culture is appreciated here. Our writers—Yeats, Joyce, Beckett—our music, dance and film and even our traditional language are widely enjoyed and studied. Our world-renowned National Day, Saint Patrick's Day, has also been remarkably popular as an annual event in communities, where people enjoy wearing something green and being 'Irish for a day'! This year, we mark the day with **events in twelve cities around Japan** throughout the month of March, including parades, concerts, Céilís (dances) and parties! There will also be **a new Irish festival in Yoyogi park** in Tokyo to complement the annual Parade on Omotesando, with food and entertainment for all ages. These events are organised mostly by Japanese people who love Ireland, have Irish friends, or who feel some deep connection with an aspect of our culture. Our cultural links with Japan form a tremendous platform on which to build connections in other spheres.

Ireland is very fortunate to enjoy good relations with Japan. In this past year alone, we have had high-level visits in both directions, including a visit by Prime Minister Abe to Ireland last June and a return visit by our Taoiseach (Prime Minister) Enda Kenny, in December and, more recently, a visit by Cathaoirleach Paddy Burke (chairperson of the Irish Senate) in February. As the

Irish and Japanese economies both return to a positive outlook, we anticipate continuing success in our economic relations. There are currently 50 Japanese companies, such as Astellas, Takeda and Fujitsu have invested in Ireland, employing 3,000 people. On the trade side, Japan is Ireland's 11th largest trading partner and a key market in Asia. Leading sectors include medical devices, IT and high end software designed in Ireland, such as the fingerprint recognition software used in Japanese airport security systems. Through Ireland's strong FDI sector, we also happen to be the largest supplier of contact lenses in Japan! In 2013, our food exports were given a boost and we hope to strengthen our food output to Japan, including seafood and our celebrated drinks sector!

There are around 1,200 Irish people resident in Japan, including all our wonderful JET participants. But with all our Japanese friends and the many Irish descendants here from other countries, we will be celebrating Saint Patrick's Day in great numbers! So to all of you reading this, I would like to offer my best wishes and I hope that the JET experience will be a fruitful and interesting one and that the links you develop with Japan will stay with you.

Go n-eiri an bothair libh go léir!
(Good luck to you all!)

Embassy of Ireland website: www.embassyofireland.jp
Facebook: www.facebook.com/irelandinjapan
Twitter: @IrishEmbJapan



Spring is the time of new beginnings in Japan, the air is full of cherry blossoms, animals come out of hiding, the school year begins, and companies go on huge recruitment drives. Previously, Matthew Jones looked at working conditions in Japan, now, he goes a step further and looks at the arduous task of simply getting a job in the first place.

Over the past month, and over the next couple of weeks, there will be a flurry of activity amongst university students as they hope to secure a job. Why? It's the end of the Japanese academic year, and that means that it's time for 新卒一括採用 (Shinsotsu-Ikkatsu-Saiyō), or the simultaneous recruiting of new graduates.

What is simultaneous recruiting?

Simply put, it's the process by which companies absorb huge amounts of recent college graduates to replace their retiring staff. Companies often attend huge career fairs, or visit universities in order to get the most applicants. The fairs are enormous, with thousands of prospective employees attending. They are all required to wear the same black suit, dubbed the 'recruit suit', and are hired, not because of their specific skills or drives, but based on their academic performance and willingness to join the company. And oh yeah, these applicants...they're applying a year in advance, for jobs that may not exist by the time they graduate. The stress of the situation is so great that one in five graduate students claimed to have considered suicide during the process¹.

This system, almost unique to Asian countries, is fraught with other problems, many of which are being exacerbated by the decreasing value of the yen. With companies trying to cut costs, there are fewer and fewer opportunities for graduates. Toyota, for example, is expecting to hire about a third of the people they hired four years ago². There are occasionally other opportunities for people to seek employment at major companies, but it is unlikely that large amounts of positions will be made available outside of the recruitment season.

What happens to people who are not employed?

Many graduates, who fail to gain employment the first time, find themselves passed over the next year, in favor of more recent graduates. In order to avoid this issue, many will opt to stay in University and try again. However, with fewer and fewer places being offered, some graduates will find themselves unable to ever find work, which has led to the rise in 'freeters' (フリーター)

A freeter is a person who is most often over-educated and under-employed, forced to work a lower-paying, sometimes menial, job in order to make ends meet. These people form a large part of the workforce for convenience stores, restaurants, etc.

Due to their low wages and prestige, they often have troubles moving to a different career, building up a sufficient pension, getting health insurance or even starting their own family. Freeters who are forced to remain living with their parents are oftentimes disparagingly called 'parasite singles'.

Despite the huge drawbacks to the current system, it's unlikely that we see any changes. Japanese business culture has the system ingrained into it. Businesses are comfortable with the practice, so, despite the huge pressure it puts on graduates, the rigid system is here to stay.

Matthew Jones is the Culture editor here at Connect. He also contributes to Japan Today and edits at the NagaZasshi. To read his previous piece on the Japanese work environment, look at the February issue of Connect.

¹ <http://www.japantoday.com/category/national/view/20-of-tokyo-university-students-want-to-die-npo-survey-suggests>

² <http://www.japantoday.com/category/business/view/toyota-to-curb-japan-output-in-april-after-tax-hike-kicks-in>

Image from The Wikimedia Foundation



THE PATH LESS TRAVELED

Fountain

Temple

Sandals

Fortunes

In Shikoku, it is common to see people afoot alongside the road wearing straw hats and white coats, carrying large walking sticks. These people are called *henro*, and, according to the Organization for Promotion of Tourism in Shikoku, every year more than five hundred thousand people join their ranks in traveling to the 88 Buddhist temples circling the island. The expedition is nothing new, 2014 is proclaimed as being the 1200th anniversary of the sacred pilgrimage.

The pilgrimage started in 815 by Kobo Daishi, or *Kukai*, depending on whom you talk to. After leaving college and committing to Buddhism, Daishi traveled to Mt. Koya and journeyed around Shikoku spreading and studying Buddhism. Later, after spending time studying in China, he returned to Japan and introduced the *Shingon* sect of Buddhism. It is this sect which most of the 'numbered' temples follow. While there have been temples added and taken off the list during the last 1200 years, the 'official' 88 are ones that were in some way influenced by Kobo Daishi, including 20 'unnumbered' temples along the trail, sometimes called *bangai*.

With such a rich history, the *Shikoku Hachijuhachi Kasho Reijoka* (the coordinating organization for the 88 temples) announced that the Japanese government is currently trying to register the pilgrimage as a world heritage site in this statement regarding the anniversary: "The Shikoku Pilgrimage that has been passed down to us over the preceding 1,200 years, has rarely seen, even around the world, cultural assets over a wide area."

Throughout 2014, almost every temple on the trail will be holding events or showcasing artifacts not normally shown to the public in celebration. The *Shikoku Hachijuhachi Kasho Reijokai* said: "During this anniversary year, both the *Reijokai* and the 88 temples will undertake many types of anniversary projects in order to offer our thoughts of gratitude and thanks to

the founder of the pilgrimage for his benevolence, for society's tranquility, and even more, to advance recognition of the pilgrimage culture."

Events include being able to enter the hall of the 500 Enlightened Ones, also called *Arhat*, throughout the year at Temple 5 in Tokushima; being able to see a *Hibutsu*, a "secret Buddha" statue that is hidden away and only shown on rare occasions, during October and November at Temple 31 in Kochi. Pilgrims will also be able to visit an outdoor Fire Festival at Temple 47 from April 29 to May 6 in Ehime. Also on display is a *Yakuyoke Daishi* statue, supposed to ward off evil spirits, which is being shown for the first time in 320 years, at Temple 71 in Kagawa until March 2015.

Daivid Turkington, who runs the website www.shikokuhenrotrail.com, said that the events at Temples 19, 31 and 75 stand out above the others.

"The showing of the *Hibutsu* at Temples 19 and 31 is special and something I would love to see," said Turkington. "The best thing for me, though, would be the chance to see the real, actual, not an imitation or copy, scroll done by the Daishi called the 'Ichi Ji Ichi Butsu'...that's going to be on display at Temple 75. If I was rich, I'd fly over just to see that."

Turkington decided to start the pilgrimage in the late 80s after seeing a Japanese Pilgrimage book while he was teaching English in Tokyo.

"I bought the book probably sometime in early '88 and as soon as I read it knew that I would do the walk someday. That 'someday' didn't arrive until the spring of 1999. I don't recall having been thinking about it...I simply woke up knowing it was time."

After his first walk, Turkington said, "it had been too expensive for what it was" and never thought he would do the trip again.

However, he returned in 2005 to give the walk another try.

"I don't know why, I just couldn't resist the call. Because it was impossible to take two months off of work like I had been able to do in 1999, I couldn't walk the entire trip this time. So I walked one prefecture a year between 2005 and 2008: Tokushima in 2005; Kochi in 2006; Ehime in 2007; Kagawa and back to Temple 1 in 2008."

While Turkington had published information about his past trips online, he officially launched www.shikokuhenrotrail.com in 2006. The website contains a history of the walk, recommendations on places to stay, tips for preparation and other information, including specifics about each of the temples. Turkington has since been hired as a guide to help a graduate student with their Masters project in 2011 and a British film crew in 2013 for a PBS special set to air this year.

"The first time was hiking, Buddhism, history, rural Japan and the Japanese immersion. It has since, in the intervening years, become a pilgrimage for me, as it was originally intended to be. It is a two month walking meditation retreat."

While walking to the temples is the most traditional method of traveling, bus tours, biking and driving have all become popular modern alternatives to tackling the trail. In Kagawa prefecture, the government organizes a group twice a year in spring and fall for foreigners who want to experience the trail.

Multiple books are also available, specifically for walking pilgrims. The Japanese book *Shikoku Henro Hitori Aruki Dogyo Ninin* contains fully detailed maps, including locations of lodging and convenience stores. The English book, *Shikoku 88 Route Guide*, also has up to date maps of the route, but adds information regarding customs at temples, names and significance of commonly seen statues and elevation charts. An interactive Google Map has also been made for those who can access it

with a smart phone on the road.

David Turkington's website has a full English translation of the anniversary events and makes important notes regarding them, including "reservations must be made no later than the day before you arrive; by phone is OK. It is *not* possible or acceptable to simply arrive and ask to get in without a reservation. Typically no one at the temples will speak English."

On January 14, 2014, the city of Matsuyama in Ehime completed a map of Shikoku by having 200 people walk in ink, making the shape of the island. The "1200 Footprint Project" was just one of the events outside of the temples that residents of Shikoku are holding in celebration. By undertaking any part of the trail—by car, bike or foot; completing by prefecture or the whole way through—the temples and communities are welcoming those who want to experience Shikoku now more than ever.

The pilgrimage road has always emanated a sense of community; anyone from any country, background or dogma is encouraged to participate. There will always be helping hands and open rooms for those wanting to experience the path; but by participating in the anniversary year, one is simply adding to that community and helping the road last perhaps another 1,200 years.

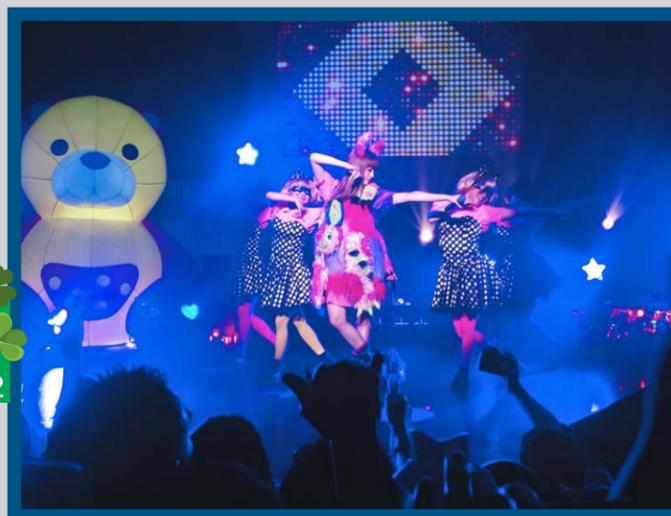
The people, food and scenery all combine to make Shikoku one of the most welcoming places on Earth. Trekking around this breathtaking island can truly be a life-changing experience.

Kyle Cardine is a first-year ALT living on Awaji Island, which means he is only able to consume onions and on-sale beef. He feels really weird about having to write in the third person, but he guesses if you want to see his other ramblings, you can check his blog at kinkairu.com or see his endless amount of article retweets at twitter.com/kinkairu.



ENTERTAINMENT

EDITORIAL
Every day is PON. Every time is PON.



Kyary Pamyu Pamyu: dubbed Harajuku Pop Princess and Japan's very own Lady Gaga. Chances are you've seen at least the video for "PONPONPON," her 2011 breakout hit. Going viral in a slew of dancing brains and floating eyeballs, it has accrued over 60 million views on YouTube and netted Ms. Pamyu worldwide fame. The music video's bizarre aesthetics typify Kyary's unique blend of two schools of Japanese teen aesthetic: the saccharine cuteness of *kawaii* and the morbid body horror of *guro* (short for grotesque). In her own words: "There are so many 'just cute' things in the world, so I add grotesque, scary and even shocking materials like eyeballs and brains to balance out the cuteness."¹

J-pop has long preached image over sound and in this respect at least Kyary is a refreshing break from the tired mold of massive idol groups in cutesy uniforms that has done little but bloat since the heyday of Morning Musume in the late 90s. But the music itself, while certainly fun and terribly catchy, is nothing revolutionary. All of Kyary's songs are the work of J-Pop mega producer Yasutaka Nakata, who, when not busy making his own brand of techno-pop as half of Capsule, has been consistently churning out hits for the popular all-girl group Perfume for just over a decade.

As evidenced by her videos, Kyary's music is intended to be a visual experience. So when I learned that she would be giving a special 21st birthday performance January 31st at ageHa, a massive Tokyo club, I had to be there. While I ended up spending a good chunk of my evening unsuccessfully inching towards the main stage, this turned out to be a blessing; at 1:30 AM on the dot, curtains were pulled on a second stage right near me and out stepped Kyary.

She hadn't gotten a bar into her latest hit, "Mottai-Nightland," before the masses stampeded inward, and I found myself just about front and center—far more intimate with certain members of the crowd than I would have preferred. I've been in my fair share of mosh pits, and while things can get dangerous, you always know that if you go down, someone will pick you up.

Crowd control issues aside, Kyary's half-hour set was a blaze of hits. "Fashion Monster" got the crowd roaring, and it never really stopped as she continued through "Candy Candy" and "Invader Invader" before finally exploding into "Pon Pon Pon" in a rain of confetti.

Her singing was spot on, but her choreography was surprisingly outshone by that of her backup dancers. Clearly bred through some strange genetic engineering project, all four of them had exactly the same height, build, face, and sweet moves. As the last calls of "Pon" faded away, the curtains closed and she was off, leaving the crowd without hope for an encore. Kyary certainly commands wild adoration in her fans and if you're ready to join their ranks, she will be performing in Tokyo again this May.

Have you read, watched, played or created anything interesting lately? Be sure to let me know at connect.entertainment@ajet.net.

¹ Masuda, Cooper. (2013, 04 06). *Interview: Kyary Pamyu Pamyu*. Retrieved from The Fader: <http://www.thefader.com/2013/04/16/interview-kyary-pamyu-pamyu/>

THIS MONTH IN ENTERTAINMENT...

It's March already and spring is only a stone's throw away. In this month's iteration of the Entertainment section, ex-Tochigi JET Max Ebert reviews three unusual Asakusa bars that would be perfect additions to a good St. Pattie's pub crawl. The hookah bar that serves scorpion infused vodka gets my personal seal of approval. For the homebodies, Kagoshima JET Adam Carter is back with a review of Kurosawa's classic drama *Rashomon*. On my own end, I've got a concert report on Japan's latest and totally weird pop sensation, Kyary Pamyu Pamyu, as well as a list of shows not to miss this month. Happy reading!



SPOTLIGHT



Five Concerts to see in March

Ólafur Arnalds

What: Dreamy, Icelandic, neo-classical piano works with an electronic twist.

When: March 4th, 5 PM.

Where: Shimanouchi Church, Osaka. Access from Nagahoribashi subway station.

How much: 3,000 yen advance, 3,500 yen at the door.

Synchronicity 2014

What: A one-day urban art festival offering a good chance to see several Japanese indie bands (including Shugo Tokumaru and Ogre You Asshole) and other cool stuff like live painting, video, and dance performances.

When: March 16th, 3 PM.

Where: O-East, Shibuya, Tokyo. Access from JR Shibuya station.

How much: 5,250 yen.

Minna no Senkan 2014

What: A three-day music festival and the perfect chance to get familiar with some of Japan's newest groups.

When: March 21st, 22nd, 23rd 12 PM

Where: Superdeluxe, Roppongi, Tokyo. Access from Roppongi subway station.

How much: 3,000 yen for one day, 7,000 for all three.

Maximum the Hormone

What: A long-standing Tokyo nu-metal/hard-core band with the greatest name ever.

When: March 24th, 6 PM.

Where: Namba Hatch, Osaka. Access from JR Namba station.

How much: 3,800 yen.

Bob Dylan

What: The folk-rock figurehead, still freewheelin' on his Never Ending Tour.

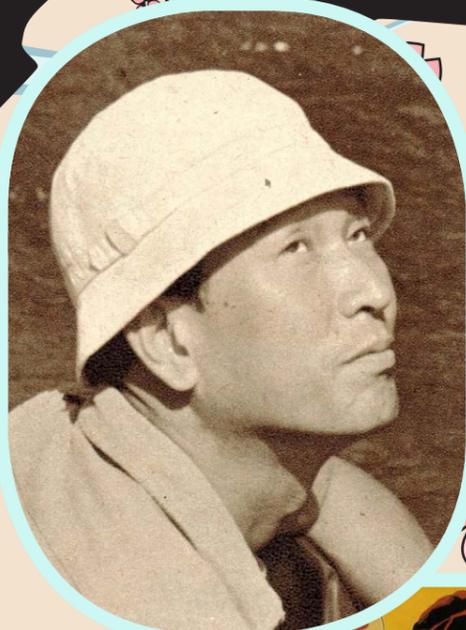
When: March 31st (Several other dates in April)

Where: Zepp DiverCity, Odaiba, Tokyo. Access from Daiba station, Yurikamome line.

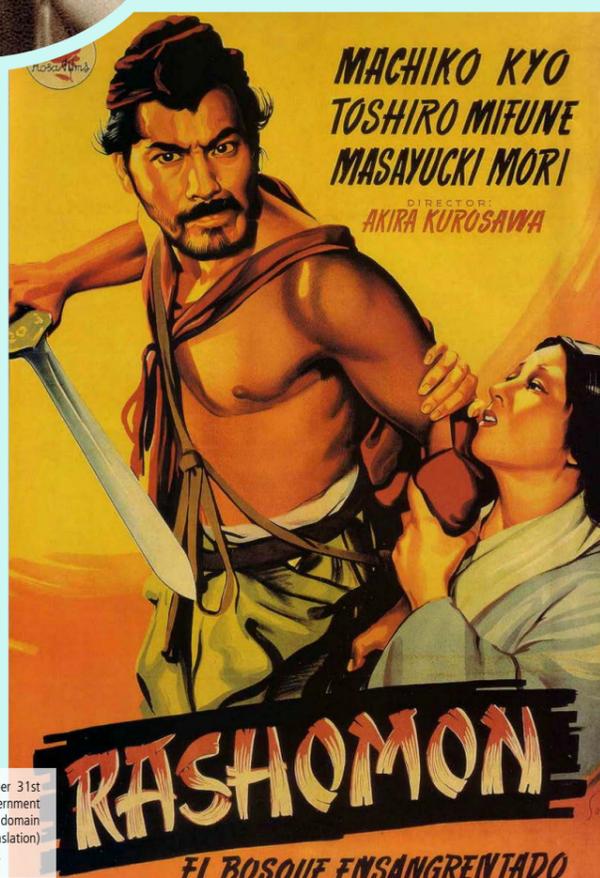
How much: 13,000 yen standing, 22,000 yen seated.

AKIRA KUROSAWA AND RASHOMON

Adam Carter, Kagoshima



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The above photographic image was published before December 31st 1956, or photographed before 1946, under jurisdiction of the Government of Japan. Thus this photographic image is considered to be public domain according to article 23 of old copyright law of Japan (English translation) and article 2 of supplemental provision of copyright law of Japan.

Akira Kurosawa is recognized as the director who single-handedly exposed Japanese cinema to the rest of the world.¹ Kurosawa, born in 1910 in Oimachi (Tokyo), immersed himself in the arts from an early age; besides painting, he read foreign literature, became a film buff, circus-goer and theatre enthusiast. After his elder and influential brother Heigo committed suicide and another brother died, young Akira started his career in the film business, working as an assistant director for five years. His mentor, the well-known director Yamamoto, taught him the ropes and emphasized the importance of good screenwriting. As his own career as a director took off, Kurosawa took this advice to heart, writing or co-writing all of his own screenplays.

After World War II, Kurosawa began directing his own films; some starring Toshiro Mifune, an actor that would go on to star in 16 of Kurosawa's films. Throughout his career, his work drew comparisons to John Wayne and director John Ford—who incidentally was Kurosawa's idol.

Kurosawa's international breakthrough came in 1950 with the release of *Rashomon* (see the review below), which won the esteemed Golden Lion Award at the Venice Film Festival, exposing Japanese cinema to the West. With his newfound success, Kurosawa had more freedom to pursue his cinematic vision, which often involved silver screen adaptations of foreign authors like Shakespeare and Dostoevsky. In time, many foreign directors would return the favour, producing Hollywood remakes of Kurosawa classics like *Rashomon* and *Seven Samurai*. In addition, George Lucas admitted that Kurosawa's *The Hidden Fortress* heavily influenced his vision for *Star Wars*.

Kurosawa's most famous film, *Seven Samurai*, the story of a small village that hires samurai warriors to protect it from bandits, re-defined the samurai genre. Kurosawa would revisit this genre with later films, as well as deal with contemporary social issues like nuclear fallout (*Record of a Living Being*), bureaucracy (*Ikiru*), corrupt business practices (*The Bad Sleep Well*) and the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki (*Rhapsody in August*).

Kurosawa's style was innovative in many respects. He was described as a hands-on director who "writes his scripts, oversees the design, rehearses the actors, sets up all the shots and then does the editing."

² Always one to recognize the power of a good script, he amassed a team of five screenwriters and brought them together in a remote setting to focus on developing screenplays together.

He always strove to inspire authentic performances from his cast, urging them to immerse themselves in their character. He also used long lenses and multiple cameras to allow for longer scenes, recognizing that more authentic performances resulted when actors could act naturally, without knowing which camera was filming. Another Kurosawa

innovation was the fact he edited his own films. He once said he shot a film to have material to edit, as he knew the most important part of the process was the editing.

He also created a corps of actors, screenwriters, composers, cinematographers and producers whom he worked with consistently. This "Kurosawa group" worked well together and grew comfortable with the director's style and whims.

Several innovative cinematic techniques have been credited to Kurosawa, such as quick action cuts and the "wipe," in which a scene ends when a line seems to wipe the scene away, making room for a new one (this can frequently be seen throughout *Star Wars*).

Kurosawa also created a new genre of "heroic cinema," dramas in which larger-than-life heroes shook the foundations of Japanese cultural tradition. After World War II, the Americans wanted to instill a sense of individualism into a country that had been based on feudalist ideas. Kurosawa, through his films, communicated that the meaning of life is not dictated by the nation but is something each individual should discover for himself through suffering.

It is easy to see why Akira Kurosawa's three assistant directors came to him after *Rashomon* was finished to tell him they didn't understand the film. One can imagine Kurosawa, at the time still a young unproven director smiling and saying, "Great, that means you DO understand the film." Just like an amorphous Zen saying, the beauty of this film lies in the viewer's personal interpretation. Kurosawa observes in his autobiography, "Human beings are unable to be honest with themselves about themselves. They cannot talk about themselves without embellishing."³

These words provide the perfect backdrop for analyzing *Rashomon*, one of his earliest and more daring films. The movie is set at the rundown temple gates of a Japanese town, where three men have gathered to take shelter from the torrential rain. The leader of the group, a witness to a recent contemptible act, begins a discussion about what took place. A samurai escorting his beautiful wife through the forest encountered a bandit, and somehow, the husband was killed with a sword. This is all we really know, but the rest is hearsay. The film itself is a succession of flashbacks acted out by the four characters: the fearsome and emotionally unstable bandit, the wife, the dead husband and the witness. As we hear four different stories, we are left trying to decide which is the most credible. As each of the flashbacks play out, the viewer becomes the detective. But unlike a classic murder mystery, there is no Ah ha! moment in which we suddenly discover who really committed the crime. And what makes the flashbacks especially gripping is the fact that each character actually confesses to the murder, which in itself is quite unusual. As the first line of the film: "I don't understand" presages, we may never know the truth.

But that crime in question is also a backdrop for a deeper debate about the course of human society: are humans inherently good or do we live in a Hobbesian every-man-for-himself world? Kurosawa creates a post-apocalyptic setting where the world seems to be sinking into disaster. The three men that have gathered in the derelict city gates lament that war, volcanoes, floods and wind have decimated their lives. Keep in mind this film was made in 1950, when the scars of World War II were still weighing down the Japanese psyche. As the rain continues incessantly, the viewer gets the impression the natural world is sinking into nothingness. But

once we start to hear these various versions of the story unfold, we realize the depravity of mankind may be the most destructive force of all. The savage behavior of the bandit, accompanied by his unsettlingly creepy laugh, jolts the viewer and provides an uncomfortable rawness to the story as it unfolds. The bandit's edginess is paralleled by one of the three men in discussion, the pessimist of the group who insists man must be selfish in order to survive. We get the feeling mankind is on the cusp of a new era, perhaps insinuated by the decrepit space these men have gathered, a once proud structure crumbling to the ground. As the characters' sometimes-savage testimonies play out, we are left wondering if there is any hope for mankind.

When *Rashomon* was produced, Japanese cinema had never seen a film like it. Though the owner of the film studio was so embarrassed by the film that he removed his name from the credits, Kurosawa's vision was soon vindicated as the film won numerous awards including an Oscar for Best Foreign Film. Kurosawa, who was a huge fan of silent films, allows his camerawork and use of flashbacks to dominate the film. He encouraged his actors to inject a lot of raw emotion and a heightened acting style, as the dialogue is almost an afterthought. Throughout the movie, Kurosawa plays with perspective, constantly toying with the power of threes. Three characters dominate most scenes in *Rashomon*, and often one of them is in the background watching the action unfold, bringing the viewer into that character's perspective. The beautiful photography and the otherworldliness of the film give it a hypnotic quality.

When an abandoned baby is discovered by the city gates, the differing personalities of the three men become apparent and without giving away the ending, I will merely say that the sun does eventually shine on this water-logged scene, bringing at least a glimmer hope to the course of human civilization. But still, we are left thinking about what really took place and whether man is indeed on a better path. Knowing his film has inspired so many questions, the expression "the *Rashomon* effect" would surely have satisfied Kurosawa when he embarked on this daring film.

NOTE: A free stream of *Rashomon* is available on several sites such as www.archive.org

¹ <http://www-cgi.cnn.com/ASIANOW/asiaweek/features/aoc/aoc.kurosawa.html> Retrieved 2010-06-18.

² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HRiBBehTnZU> 2008-11-19. Retrieved 2010-06-28.

³ Kurosawa, Akira (1983). *Something Like an Autobiography*. Translated by Audie E. Bock. Vintage Books

Adam Carter (1st-year ALT, Kagoshima) has been traveling, studying, working and gallivanting around the world for the past 17 years. Besides writing for newspapers and magazines, he has written several guidebooks, but insists it's not as glamorous a lifestyle as it sounds. Adam started his own non-profit called Cause & Affect Foundation (featured in this issue), but here he also shows that having a father as a film professor and film critic pays dividends.

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ASAKUSA BAR HOP

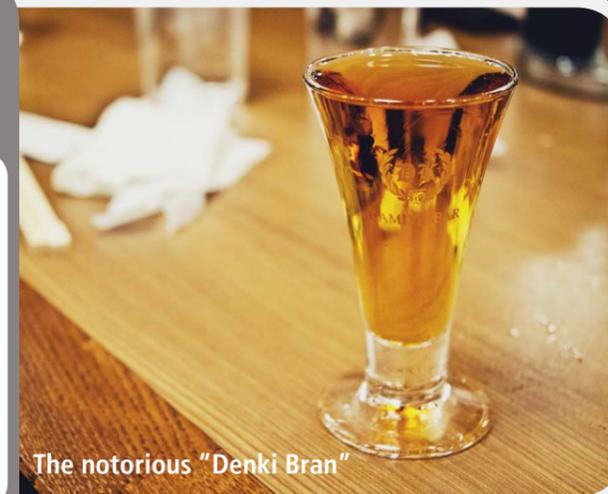
Max Ebert, Tochigi (2011-2013)

Most of us know Asakusa as the place with campy Japanese souvenirs and a big temple. But thanks to its less-than-exciting reputation, a quiet nightlife has grown in the area with more than a couple (mostly) hidden gems. Here are my top picks, all of which are doable in just one night out:

KAMIYA BAR

<http://www.kamiya-bar.com/>
1-1-1 Asakusa
11:30 AM-10 PM, Wed - Mon

The oldest Western-style bar in Japan, Kamiya Bar is part tourist trap, part cultural landmark. It touts itself as the only place in the world you can drink *Denki Bran* (Electric Brandy), their own unique mix of wine, gin and brandy. Be warned: it tastes like a smooth blend of aerosol and poison, but at 260 yen per 16 ml, it's an absolute must-try (and not half bad with club soda). The real draw at Kamiya is the friendly atmosphere and community tables. Yuki, the old Japanese fisherman who was sitting on my left, wouldn't stop buying me drinks after he found out we had the same blood type. And should he have stopped, the college professor and his *daigakusei* on my right seemed like they would've been more than happy to take his place.

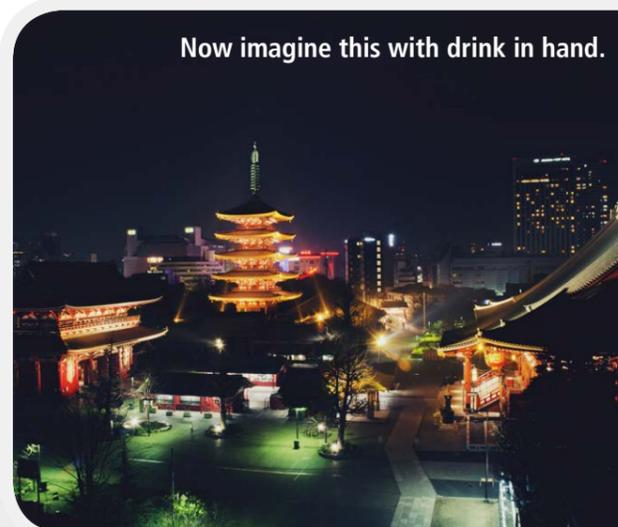


The notorious "Denki Bran"

BAR SIX

<http://www.asakusabarsix.com/>
Asakusa 2-34-4, Amuse Museum 6F
6 PM-2 AM, Tues - Sun

Despite overlooking Sensoji Temple, Bar Six manages to stay under the radar thanks to its somewhat bizarre location nestled inside the Amuse Museum—the place was almost completely empty on a Saturday night. But don't let the eerie entryway (complete with speakeasy-style buzz in) fool you, Bar Six is a high quality, affordable bar with one of the best views in Tokyo. Even if you've been in Japan long enough that you're burned out on temples of all shapes and sizes, there's still something novel about sipping a single malt scotch on a balcony that overlooks a fully lit up Sensoji. Oh, and there's an amazing view of Sky Tree on the other side of the balcony (if you're into that sort of thing). Just be sure to get there before eleven, as the temple lights turn off shortly after.

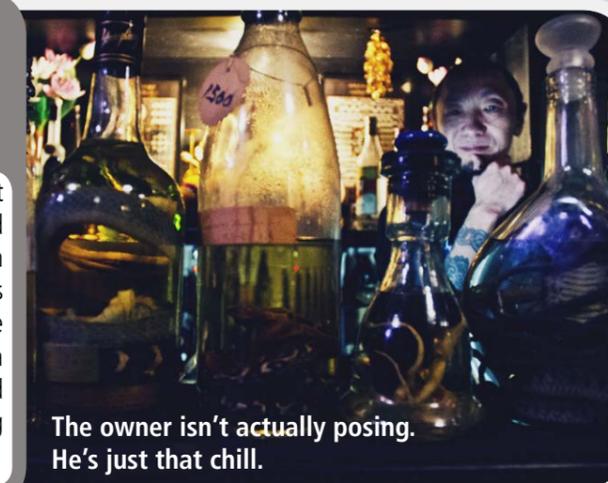


Now imagine this with drink in hand.

Bonji Bar

<http://www.bonjibar.com/index.html>
3-36-4 Asakusa
8:30 PM-3 AM, Check website

An absolute must for thrill seekers, Bonji Bar advertises itself as a Buddhist hookah bar. And while that might not sound like a real thing, it's hard to find a better description for the relaxed, ambient atmosphere. The hookah is worth trying even if you're not a regular smoker—the owner spent at least five minutes lovingly mixing up his own blend for our sampling. But the main attraction is the odd assortment of hard to find liquors on sale: everything from cannabis vodka to peyote-tequila (which is probably barely legal). I opted for something that had a scorpion in it, while my friend went with vodka that contained a snake eating another snake. Hangover the next day was only a little extreme.



The owner isn't actually posing. He's just that chill.

Max Ebert was a high school JET in Tochigi prefecture from 2011-2013, during which he took a few too many trips to Tokyo. He now lives in Tokyo (to save on train fare). If you're ever in town and need help finding a wasabi highball or chocolate martini, feel free to send him a message—especially if you want to reminisce about California craft beer.



BREAKING DOWN THE LANGUAGE BARRIER - COLOURFUL JAPANESE

Dan Brooks, Yamagata

Yamagata Prefecture is trying to bridge the gap between native Japanese people and foreigners- not just by supporting Japanese language classes, but by teaching Japanese people to make themselves more easily understood.

"Colourful Japanese" is a radio segment on the "Colourful" programme on Yamagata Prefecture's local radio station, Rhythm Station FM Yamagata. The initiative was set up in June 2013 by my office, the Association for International Relations in Yamagata (AIRY- I know, how cute is that?). From the Japanese title, やさしい日本語を学ぼう (Let's learn easy/kind Japanese!), you'd be forgiven for thinking that it was a segment for foreigners trying to pick up basic Japanese phrases. The aim of the programme is to teach Japanese, but not to foreigners. Its goal is to teach Japanese people about those pesky aspects of their own language (keigo, anyone?) that prevent foreigners from understanding them.

Three of my fellow CIR's at the Prefectural Government and I have been recording the programme with radio talent Kaori Oya, where every instalment features a 'key point' for native Japanese speakers to take on board. With some pretty hammy acting on my part, we demonstrate a scenario where we, as a struggling foreigner, fail to understand our Japanese friend- the narrator explains why- and then we take it from the top, but this time our friend knows what the obstacle was and how to avoid it.

Trying my hand at voice acting for the first time was so much fun- sitting in a soundproof studio with the headphones and mikes pretending I can't understand my friend telling me she's avoiding sweet things "甘いものを控えている" after a holiday binge, telling me she's tired because she pulled an all-nighter at NYE "夜ふかしをする" or just even telling a story that involves a lot of onomatopoeia and/or mimetic words like "カラカラ" or "ゴクゴク". The irony, of course, was that I had never heard those phrases before in my life, so acting like a confused foreigner was a lot easier than the writers had anticipated... In fact, I have a feeling that I may have inspired the key points for a couple of episodes through the often hilarious miscommunications between me and my Japanese colleagues that occur on a daily basis.

As enjoyable as being involved with the radio programme is- there is a serious message behind Colourful Japanese. As one of the Tohoku prefectures not to experience any direct damage from the 2011 Earthquake and Tsunami, Yamagata found itself very much struggling to facilitate the evacuation of foreign refugees from Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima both logistically and linguistically. Colourful Japanese is part of an increased effort on the side of Japanese local authorities to help reduce the vulnerability of foreigners in emergency situations by encouraging residents who can't speak foreign languages to pitch their Japanese at a more accessible level.

Thankfully, I've never been involved in such a serious situation myself, but I have experienced the frustration that comes from having native speakers use phrases and registers that are simply out of my depth. It's demotivating and distressing at the best of times, so I can't even imagine what it must be like to experience such miscommunications in a crisis. It must also be upsetting for Japanese people in the emergency services trying to assist foreigners in trouble without knowing the relevant foreign



Author Dan Brooks in the recording studio

language or ways of making the Japanese they use easier to comprehend. The over-riding message of "Colourful Japanese- やさしい日本語を学ぼう", to encourage Japanese people to speak simple Japanese out of consideration for us foreigners, is the reason why the やさしい in the title is not spelled in with either the kanji- 易しい (easy, simple) or 優しい (kind, considerate). It is kept in its hiragana so that it means both simple and considerate.

As foreigners in Japan and learners of Japanese, it's easy to feel put out by Japanese that just flies over our heads, especially when we know that we would have been fine if they had used a word we're more familiar with. Like, say, if the keigo - spouting Japanese postal worker had said 'アパート' instead of 'お住まい', you might have been able to arrange for a redelivery of that long-awaited care package from home. More disconcerting still is the thought that you'd get it if you received an emergency message from your local authority saying '早く逃げてください', but might have no clue what the deal was if the message read '避難してください'. This is why I'm so proud of my involvement in 'Colourful Japanese' and its attempt to remove the obstacles to comprehension between foreigners and Japanese people in order to make communication in day-to-day life and emergency situations easier. Even if it's only a short segment on local radio in a prefecture often described as the 'hidden Japan', it makes me happy to know that in our struggle to climb over the Japanese language barrier, the Japanese are trying to give us a leg up.

If you're interested in listening, you can find previous episodes of Colourful Japanese on AIRY's website at <http://www.airyamagata.org>

Dan Brooks is a First Year CIR in Yamagata Prefecture. When he's not causing minor diplomatic catastrophes in the course of his duties, you can find him neck-deep in Yamagata's amazing onsen, playing invisible curling in supermarkets or spending hours of his life trying to defeat the secret bosses on classic PS2 game, Kingdom Hearts. So laughter. Much shenanigans. Wow.

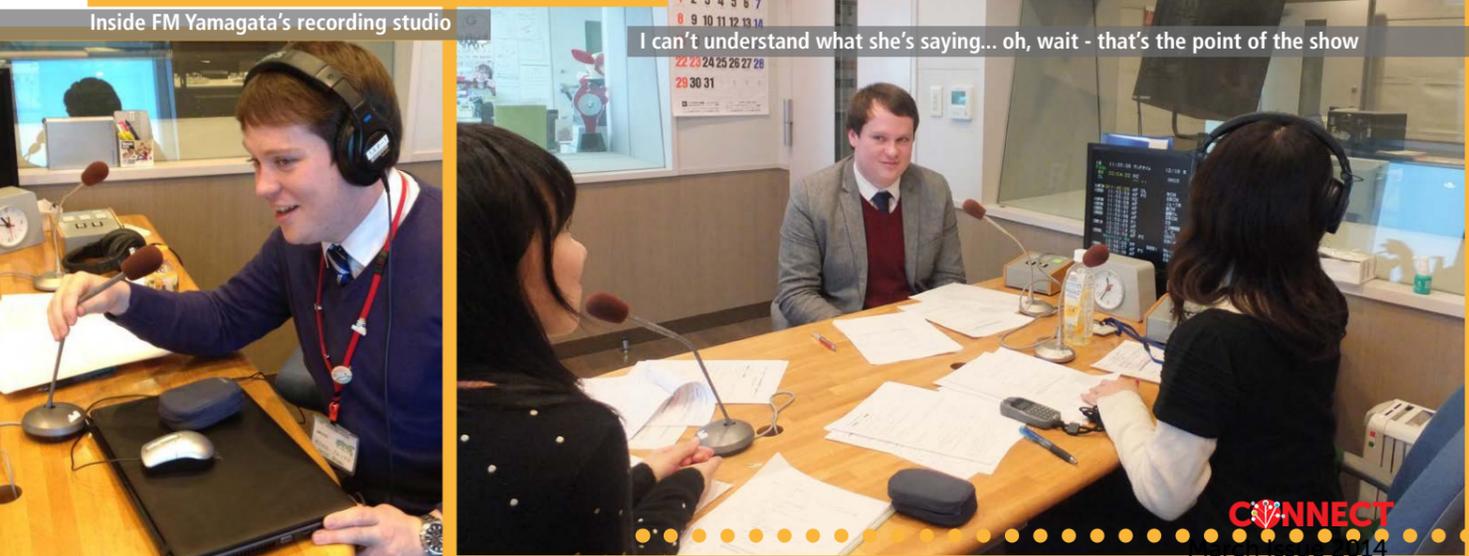
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Kaori Aoya and an AIRY colleague getting into the festive spirit



I can't understand what she's saying... oh, wait - that's the point of the show



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FASHION & BEAUTY

EDITORIAL Spring Colors and Red Carpets

Spring has sprung, which means more days of sunshine, yay! Tip: early-blooming plum blossoms come in a variety of pretty colours and have a sweeter scent than their superstar cherry blossom cousins.

Japan and its love of pink has rubbed off on me, and I now get quite excited about the *sakura*-infused sweet treats and delicate motifs on everything from *furoshiki* to travel brochures, from magazine covers to Starbucks tumblers. Fashion blogs and magazines have been working overtime to recommend coordinates in pastels like mauve, lavender, mint green, aquamarine and periwinkle. I must say, these colours are perfect for springtime in Japan. If a baby blue suit or lavender skirt is too much of a change for you, consider starting with a primrose yellow handkerchief or turquoise scarf. Ladies, you're sure to be told that you are *kawaii*; and gentlemen, real men wear pink.

There was so much to take in at the recently concluded Fashion Week(s)—prints! Patterns! Structure! Flowy ensembles!—and something for everyone. I really enjoyed the myriad of colours designers played with, and would suggest that trend forecasts aside, let's just wear what we want, since ultimately fashion is about self-expression. Sure, look to the runway, in magazines and on the streets for inspiration, but if you feel comfortable, happy and put-together, you're cool. Closer to home, folks in Kansai might want to spend an afternoon at Kansai Collection

2014, a fashion event which looks to be a lively kaleidoscope, happening on 16 March in Osaka.

Finally, I love the glamour of the red carpet, and there were many gorgeous designer gowns at the BAFTAs, SAG and Golden Globes. This season's fashion darling Lupita Nyong'o possesses effortless grace and beauty, and has been stunning in every single brightly-hued dress she's decided to wear—I do think she'd be beautiful even in jeans and a T-shirt on the red carpet. I don't find that the Academy always rewards the most deserving, but I'm definitely tuning in to the online or repeat Oscar telecast to check out who wore what.

Are you a fan of pink? Which FIW 2014 runway collection has your vote? What did you think of film award season? Hit me up at connect.fashion@ajet.net!

THIS MONTH IN FASHION AND BEAUTY...

Dear JET brethren in Tohoku and Hokkaido, please pardon those of us who are gleefully bidding thick winter coats *sayonara*. Wherever you call home in Japan, I hope everything's coming up roses—or should I say cherry blossoms—for you.

In this month's editorial, I discuss spring trends, F/W14 Fashion Week and red carpet looks. I also had a great time working with three ladies with very different styles and priorities. Because they love what they put on themselves, I think you'll find their comments honest, engaging and instructive.

Lynne Francis gives readers an honest account of the ups and downs of being plus-sized in Japan, while Lydia Quek bravely shows us her bare face, so that we might better understand the magic of make-up. You'll find the Spotlight shining brightly on Nicole Finch, whose cool-meets-cute style is inventive and spontaneous.

We wish you a March full of sunshine, daffodils and fashion/beauty experiments!



SPOTLIGHT



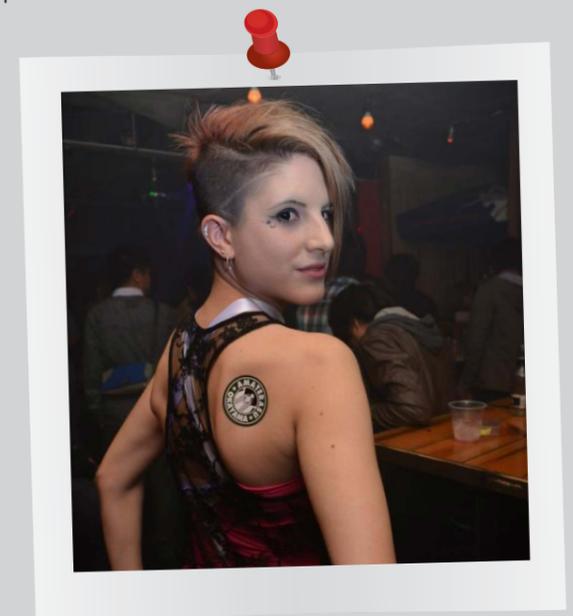
This month, we Spotlight Nicole Finch, a 2nd-year ALT in Okayama prefecture.

Anyone who's met her will surely be charmed by her quirky, irreverent sense of humour and distinctive sense of style. Here's Nicole in her own words!

When I'm not slaving over my students' English education or watching Downtown Abbey, I spend time updating myself on trends in Japanese and Korean pop culture. I'm watching every episode of *Amaちゃん* and familiarizing myself with every G-Dragon song. I also take ballet lessons, study for the JLPT, and travel, Travel, TRAVEL. For your reading pleasure, I will tell you that tofu, manjū, and mayonnaise on pizza are completely disgusting.

I'd describe my style as a cross between Cher Lloyd, Kyary Pamyu Pamyu, and Avril Lavigne. Part punk, part Lolita, part hipster, part edgy. I like to mix Canadian fashion with Japanese pieces, say, a Liz Lisa skirt with a Suzy Shier vest. I choose my clothes based on an accessory. Current faves include a purple NY new era cap, white/pink/black suspenders, pink aviators, and a white & blue or pink bandana from Daiso.

Whatever the weather, wear what makes you comfortable. Don't be afraid of jazzing up your daily ALT outfits. I do think we need something different from the 'OMG can you wear any more grey' trend spotted in Japanese staffrooms. If you want to wear a pink tutu with yellow leggings and a KISS tee on a day off, go for it! Japan loves weird!



FAT AND FABULOUS

Lynne Francis, Akita



The dress I found in AEON mall, which I wore while celebrating our dating anniversary.

Fat—a simple, three-letter word with a complicated host of negative connotations. In many cultures, fat has become synonymous with being mean, ugly, or less intelligent. As such, I want to start off this article by stating that when I use the word 'fat', I use it simply as an adjective. I don't use 'fat' as an insult, because it is not. I call myself a fat girl because I *am* a fat girl. I'm not ashamed of it. I love myself. And if there is only one takeaway I hope to share, it is that a person can be fat *and* fashionable, or fat *and* attractive; there is no 'but'.

It is no secret that I am much larger than the typical Japanese person (usually about 130 lbs or 59 kg). It wasn't that much of a deal back home, since the average American weighs more than the average Japanese. Over here though, even small, everyday encounters can lead to a lot of hurt and frustration—I broke two chairs at a conference—and anything from fastening a seatbelt to moving between desks can potentially pose an obstacle. It's a little like Godzilla trying to get by in regular society.

Prior to my time in Japan, I had a complete change in attitude and underwent a fashion makeover. I had shed the insecurities of a shy, self-loathing-therefore-cover-up-a-lot-in-dark-clothing fat girl and transformed myself into the confident, cheerful and body-positive fat girl I now am. In America, it was a lot easier to make the transition, because I didn't feel like people cared. Even in a larger clothing size, I could stand out and be comfortable in my own skin. I was finally a woman who refused to settle for *safe* styles or negative attitudes just because of my size. I liked color, and I was going to wear it.

Coming to Japan, however, would test this new identity.

I had brought with me a wardrobe of brightly-colored clothing. I had previously spent a large part of my life subscribing to the idea that fat people should only wear certain clothes because

they were 'slimming' or 'flattering'. My bright blouses, patterned skirts and colorful socks were part of a plan to make me stand out in the sea of black and grey suits I expected to encounter as a high school ALT.

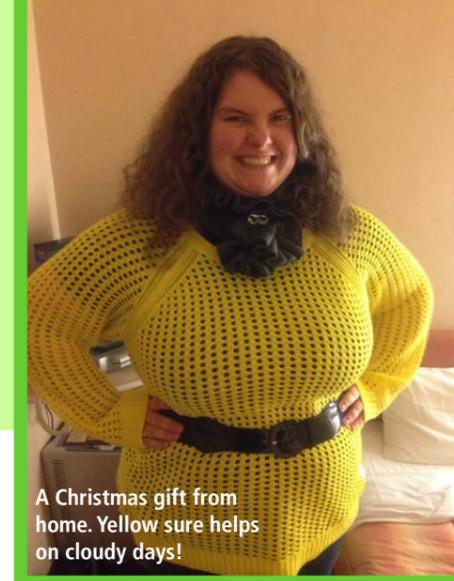
Despite how much I liked being the outgoing new ALT at my school, some experiences outside of school brought me back to a less positive place. When visiting rural Nagano, my hosts bought me snow pants, and they kept mentioning how large the pants were. Another time, a woman gave me unsolicited advice about how I should diet. I experienced outright gawking or staring, and hearing whispers of 'fat' and 'gaijin' threatened to bring me back to the negative place in which I had spent a large portion of my life.

Things didn't improve when I made trips to the mall. I would cautiously skim the racks, hesitantly going into the fitting room to see if any of my selections fit. This would turn into a nightmare, with me on the verge of tears wondering, "Why can't I just fit in one thing?" No matter how many stores or sizes I tried: *nothing* fit. Granted, shopping in the US wasn't exactly a picnic, but it seemed like a buffet compared to my shopping attempts in Japan. On days when I felt better, I would dress in bright colors, and when I wasn't feeling great, I tended to dress in darker ones. My confidence faltering, I knew something was wrong when I got to the point of seeing mostly dark pieces in my washing machine.

I still remember that fateful weekend at my local AEON Mall. I was walking fairly dejectedly past racks of clothes when a saleslady showed me a dress/sweater outfit that looked like it just might fit. I carefully slipped it on, and yes! It fit! Anyone who hates trying on clothes can surely relate to that amazing feeling of finding something that works, after so many unfruitful encounters.



Sweater dresses are the best of both worlds: comfy and professional



A Christmas gift from home. Yellow sure helps on cloudy days!



What's not to love about a bright sweater and groovy accessories?

Since that episode, I've managed to purchase some bright, colorful pieces for work, as well as for when I'm off the clock. A few options for shopping in my *fat*ulous size include:

Greatness -- Men's business and casual clothing in AEON, sizes run up to 6L.

Mint Breeze -- Women's casualwear in AEON section, sizes run up to 5L.

Uniqlo -- Men's and women's clothing.

GU -- Sizes seem to run smaller than at Uniqlo.

If you haven't had any luck in brick-and-mortar stores, look online. There will be shipping and customs fees, but if you order enough or with a friend, it's completely worth it! **Borderfree** is a great option which includes stores such as Old Navy, Land's End, Lane Bryant, Ann Taylor and Macy's. My parcel from Land's End definitely helped brighten up the dark winter days!

I understand the struggle of finding suitable coordinates, so here are some ideas that have really helped me on days when it seems that everyone is a critic, and one feels like the elephant in the room.

Belts add shape – A lot of clothes I buy in Japan (and sometimes from the U.S.) don't have much shape to them. A cool belt and a cinched waist make for an instant new look! Remember, fitted always looks smarter than slouchy or baggy.

Scarves are versatile – Sometimes, it's important to be more conservative on top, but man, it's so darn hot! A lightweight scarf fixes this right away and might provide more options when it comes to low-cut tops.

Wear colors – Bright colors make me happy, and although I've had someone tell me things like "You shouldn't wear yellow since you're so pale" or "Pink isn't slimming on you", those colors make me feel golden. Everyone has colors they feel good in. What makes you comfortable, happy, or attractive? Find it and wear it often! (Mine are aqua and turquoise).

Laughter is the best medicine – Have a day when the seatbelt is too snug or the sweater you tried on couldn't quite fit over your chest? Laugh it off and move on—tomorrow might

turn out a lot better. Having a sense of humor helps make life easier.

The truth is, you can't always prepare for the odd snarky comment or the blunt "You look fat" remark. So why not wear what makes you happy, and enjoy your life. Life is too short to wear boring clothes, and you should never let your size or anyone else try to stop you from looking—and feeling—amazing!

Sources

Quilty-Harper, Conrad. "The world's fattest countries: how do you compare?" *The Telegraph*. 21 Jun 2012. Web. 2 Feb 2014. <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/earth/earthnews/9345086/The-worlds-fattest-countries-how-do-you-compare.html>>

Lynne Francis is a first-year ALT in the land of (seemingly) eternal winter—also known as Akita Prefecture. She spends her time shopping online for peplum tops, engaging with the body positive/fat positive community on Tumblr, and taking back the word 'fat' as nothing more than an adjective. Lynne can also be found knitting, thinking up Zumba routines or trying out new crockpot recipes.



Some goodies from Land's End, thanks to Borderfree!



A thin, grey scarf - perfect for chilly mornings and evenings



PROBLEM-SOLVING MAKEUP

Lydia Quek, Gunma

There are some people who don't look any different after applying makeup. I'm not one of them. My TESOL professor, who had been seeing me barefaced in his class for six months, failed to recognise me when I showed up at school with a carefully painted face for my final assessment. As I took my seat, he asked me if I was a participant in 'Lydia's practical lesson'. It took me a second to figure out why he couldn't identify me, before I replied as casually as I could. "I'm Lydia," I said, "with makeup on."



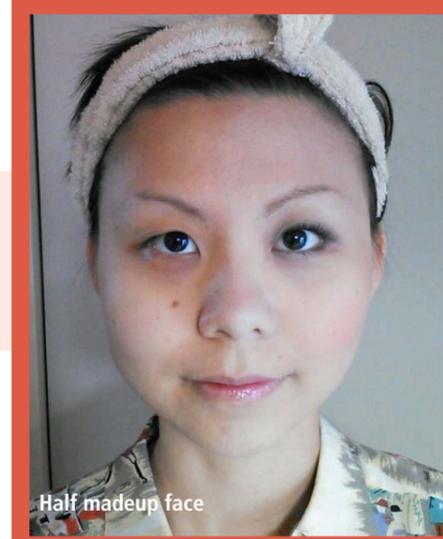
seem to do the trick (some pink would still show up) until I read somewhere about the 'even out your skin tone' thing I mentioned in Tip 1. I usually wake up with random red spots in my T-zone, so my usual cocktail for this problem is BB cream combined with a green makeup base. Non-flesh-coloured makeup bases are a dime a dozen in Japan, and they are incredibly affordable.

To mix the creams, I either: use the back of my hand as a palette and blend the liquids on my face; or, layer the creams on my skin one by one. I also tend to mix the bases according to my mood and/or event—if I would like more highlight on my cheekbones for a night out, I use a pearly white makeup base along with a dewy, skin-coloured BB cream on those areas. On more solemn occasions—start-of-term ceremony, for example—I sometimes tone down the shine and use my matte BB cream with a squirt of pearl makeup base so I don't look too dull. The trick is to keep experimenting. Because they are ultimately your first layer of real makeup—you should always put a primer before the bases—you can't really go wrong with makeup bases, since you'd be piling a lot more layers on top.

that the brand doesn't discontinue the line.

This is me with half my face made up and the other half prepped with only makeup base. I look more awake on my right!

This is the face I bring to work every day. Instead of eyeliner, I line my eyes with black eye shadow to soften the look. I can understand how some of you with deep creases can look overly-dramatic with the same amount of eye makeup I apply in my crease, so just keep practicing until you achieve your desired look. If you're experimenting with your own makeup, I suggest doing it on a day which you don't have to go out, just in case you make mistakes. I sometimes try out new techniques or products at the end of my day after work, too, just to figure out how to use them.



In this article, I'd like to share what it is I do with cosmetics to fix up my face, though I can't guarantee that the same will work for you. However, a lot of practice and the guts to try out new products will certainly help you resolve your specific beauty woes.

Tip 1: Even out your skin

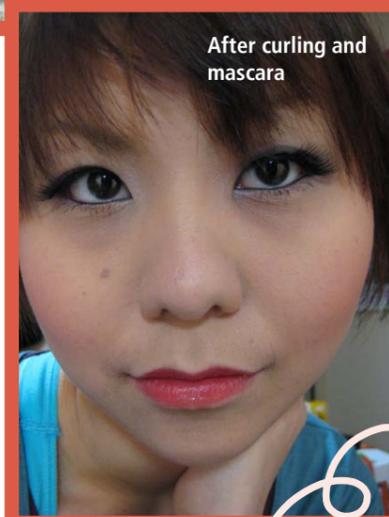
To risk pointing out the obvious, different parts of our face are coloured differently, and we need things like makeup bases, BB creams and concealers to help us make it a 'proper canvas,' so that our paints show up exactly like they look like in our palettes. Evening out my skin tone with these products before I apply foundation has also helped my makeup stay put and give my face a very professional-looking finish.

Tip 2: Get creative with concealers

My first encounter with a professional makeup artist was four years ago, during my wedding photo shoot. After applying liquid foundation on my face, she brandished an arsenal of concealer at me and told me that she would be using it to combat my dark eye circles. I remember asking her in surprise, "Are you going to layer them all on?", since it had never occurred to me to mix concealers. She said yes. I noticed she kept adjusting the shades according to how the concealer was blending with the rest of my face. I've been copying her ever since. I've covered all sorts of blemishes this way with excellent results, especially when done on top of makeup bases and BB creams. The rule is not to go any darker than one shade lighter than your foundation—feel free to experiment with concealers two or three shades lighter than your foundation. As long as it doesn't look patchy after you're done, you're set.

Tip 3: Mixing the makeup bases to achieve different effects

For years I'd tried covering redness with concealer. It didn't

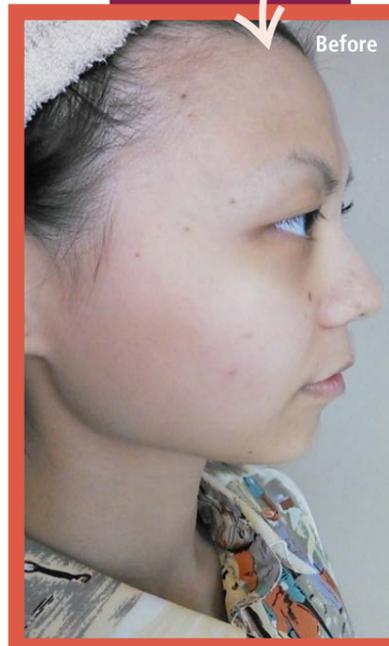


[Fashion Ed's note: For more on BB creams, check out page 26 of Nov's issue of Connect!]

Tip 4: It's all in the eyes...

I believe that the eyes should be the feature you spend the most time working on and figuring out. Eye makeup will give your entire look more definition and change your appearance in a way the other parts of your face simply can't.

As you can see from this incriminating photo, my lashes are pretty long but they grow straight down. I'm not sure if you can spot them, but the lashes on my other eye are also in the picture, and they're pointing up because I curled them. You might have heard that waterproof mascara can really hold a curl. I have to amend this. Not all waterproof mascaras can hold curls in naturally straight-as-a-poker lashes like mine. I've tried most of the mascara brands on the market and the only one that works for me is Maybelline's Volum' Express. Even other lines in the Maybelline brand don't work for me, perhaps because of the formula used. If you have the same problem, keep on experimenting until you find one that works for you, and pray hard



Tip 5: Take care of your skin

This isn't really problem solving makeup, but it certainly helps to prevent the problems you'll need to mask with makeup. I believe that what you put in your body helps your complexion more than what goes on your face, so on top of your skincare routine you should be drinking a lot of fluids—preferably water—and eating a lot of vegetables and fruits. Sleep is also an effective antidote to a breakout, and changing your pillowcase frequently also helps. Remember to keep your makeup tools clean as well!

Tip 6: Do your research

I read a lot of beauty blogs and articles and diligently watch YouTube tutorials on makeup. But I don't just consume everything. I focus only on the issues I've yet to work out, and after I acquire the necessary knowledge I start experimenting with my face. I also ask around for recommendations, especially from people with the same type of skin and eyelid crease. Looking at people's mistakes and how they remedy them, really help you get a better picture of how to tackle your beauty worries.

Everyone's struggles with makeup are different, but if you're willing to spend more time practicing, you're definitely going to find out more about your face and what kind of techniques work for you. Good luck!

Lydia Quek is a third-year JET who is willing to show her naked face to the public only occasionally. She lives with her husband and potted gerbera in Ota, a city in Gunma prefecture which looks more like Jurong—an industrial-cum-housing estate in Singapore where she spent most of her life before moving to Japan—than what you see in travel brochures advertising Gunma's onsens. Eighty words aren't quite enough to properly describe Lydia, so try to spot her in AEON Mall Ota and stop her for a chat!



FOOD

EDITORIAL Steep Talk

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Let's talk about tea.

If I'm honest with myself, I was never much of a tea drinker. Woo hoo, smelly leaves in hot water. What's the fuss? I've always been obsessed with food—but drink? Not so much. I mean, sure, my mom was always into it, and we bought lots of interesting-smelling stuff, but it wasn't really my jam. We'd end up with boxes and boxes of different herbal blends, straight blacks, fruit tisanes, and jar upon tin of unidentified (or simply forgotten) loose leaf. Mostly, I drank what I was offered, but even then, only drowned in sugar, and only to be polite. Who says no to their happy mother?

Things changed pretty dramatically when I did a year's exchange to Japan during university. My host family, while exceedingly western in many aspects of their lives, was a living example of how some things in Japan don't really change. Certainly, our house contained milk and juices, but we drank tea. We drank tea all day long, of many different varieties and temperatures, depending on the season, the weather, and the meal. Before and after dinner (but never during—I was told this is because it's impolite to drink while you eat in Japan!), we downed cup after cup of delicate green tea. As days turned into weeks, I started to realise that without my nightly green tea, I felt extremely disorientated. Not just some kind of caffeine-related craving, but almost, as if something was...missing. It was around the same time that I had my first real Japanese tea ceremony. Struck at the ritualistic nature of the drinking of the beverage, I almost choked up. It felt like something was changing. Where previously,

by Xan Wetherall

my interest in tea was only vestigial—a leftover remnant of my mother's love—I was really beginning to see the beauty of the drink.

By the time I left Japan, I was a changed woman. Where once, in a Starbucks, I would have ordered the sweetest, most dessert-like drink they had, I was now deeply and inquisitively examining their tea selections. "Is this *hoji-cha* tea latte the loose-leaf bags, or the syrup?" I'd inquire to the exasperation of baristas. *Lady*, I imagined them thinking, *we're a coffee shop*. For the rest of my university career back home, I pined away in sub-par sushi shops, dreaming of cups full of celadon-green *gyokuro*, all whilst sipping on lowest grade *bancha*. When I eventually made my grand return to Japan with JET, my first purchase from a recycle store was teapot. It wasn't something I even thought about—the action was completely reflexive. I didn't have one, so I needed to buy one, the same way one might approach buying shoes, if one wasn't wearing any.

Since my arrival, I've grown even more as a tea drinker. If you're in the neighborhood, take a glance in my cupboards. Look well upon my collection of Indian Chais. My Ceylon blacks. My ethereal Shizuoka greens. My most-prized white needle. Sit down, relax. Let me steep you up something.

Do you have a growing addiction to the little green (or black) leaf? Maybe a different drink delights your senses? Tell us all about it at connect.food@ajet.net!

THIS MONTH IN FOOD...

Hello food lovers! Did you miss us? After Connect's slimmer January and February issues and our special After JET Issue, we're back in full force! My father once said, 'I love eating. I've been doing it for years.' We're sure you feel the same way—and this month is chock-full of exciting food content from our readers! We're all about tea addiction in our editorial, while our Spotlight features Brittany Rock, a Tochigi ALT who discovered she could both bond with her students and expand her Japanese cooking horizons by joining her school's cooking club.

Looking for a new inspirational recipe you can make here in Japan? Check out the community cooking feature, with five recipes from starter to dessert! We also have Kagawan Nick Powers back this month, and this time he's telling us about his pledge to eat all of the udon and filling us in on his Top 10 udon finds thus far! There's something for everyone in this month's Food section!



SPOTLIGHT

SHS Cooking Classes with Brittany Rock

Brittany Rock, a first-year Tochigi ALT, has always had a passion for cooking. Fittingly, one of her goals when coming to Japan was to learn how to make authentic Japanese food. However, after arriving, she noticed one massive flaw—she could not speak, read, or understand Japanese. Not wanting to wait until her language skills developed enough for the task, she asked one of her JTEs if she had any idea where she might be able to sign up for a cooking class. Eventually, she was directed to her school's home economics department. There, she was not only invited to participate with the school's cooking club that meets twice a month after school, but was also asked if she would want to join the third year students for their cooking class every Monday. Aside from accomplishing her language and culinary goals, joining the students for their lessons outside of the English classroom has been a delightful experience for her. This has allowed her to get to know the students in a less formal environment and watch their English language abilities improve! So there you have it folks, if you're hoping to get involved with a certain club or activity, it never hurts to ask!



Brittany with student Yukiko (she received permission to publish this photo)

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NICK POWERS' UDON TOP 10!

Nick Powers, Kagawa



Food will always be valuable to me. I want to become the kind of person who travels the world at a whim and ends up clinking pints with the natives in a faraway land. So how am I to do this? By eating. I live in Kagawa Prefecture, the smallest prefecture in Japan, yet affectionately known as Udon Prefecture. This is because it is the home of the country's best udon. Nearly every third shop in this prefecture is a self-serve udon shop. I made it my goal last July to eat my way through at least 100 different udon dishes while I'm here, and I'm halfway there. There were times when I thought about giving up, times when I just wanted to puke the udon into the nearest toilet, and times when I wished I could never see another udon noodle again as long as I lived.

So, before I finally get sick of it, let me tell you about my life through 10 different udon dishes:

1. Japanese Curry Udon:

Ichiban favorite. Curry udon actually carries a weird kind of significance for me. A year before I moved to Takamatsu, a friend of mine recommended visiting. I read that Kagawa was known for udon, so of course I had to try some. The first udon I tried was the most mind-blowingly amazing, most savory, and spiciest curry udon I've ever had. I found it in a little udon bar in the smaller, yakuza-frequented shopping arcade next to the main arcade. I will never forget the udon, but I may never find the shop again. And believe me, I've tried.



2. Thai Green Curry Udon:

Shinpei-san is a Deity of the Noodle. The servings at his shop are massive, his menu varied but classic, and his seasonal specialties mind-blowing. Thai green curry udon was a special for the last few months and has just been removed from the menu recently. Served with a side of yuzu sauce for dipping, the green curry has duck, pumpkin, and various cool-weather vegetables, and a base of coconut milk.



3. Hiya-Hiya Bukkake Udon:

The day I landed at Takamatsu Airport, my supervisor took me for, of course, udon, and he explained *kake* and *bukkake* udon, hot-hot, hot-cold, and cold-cold



udon to me, and showed me how to serve myself. As it was the peak of the summer, I ordered cold-cold *bukkake* ("hiya-hiya *bukkake*"), cold noodles in cold broth. When I met my teachers later that week, they took me back to the same place, unaware that I had already been there. When I ordered *hiya-hiya kake* like a native, my teacher almost pissed himself. And when I did my self-introduction to his classes in September, he told all of them the story of a foreigner who knew how to order cold-cold *kake* udon.

4. Tempura Udon:

I'm Southern, so I naturally have a taste for deep-fried things. Tempura being one of those. Udon with tempura flakes and a side of tempura chicken, shrimp, or vegetables, is one of the ultimate comfort foods. Even better: curry udon with tempura.



5. Walnut Sauce Zaru Udon:

Another one of Shinpei's creations is his *zaru* udon with walnut dipping sauce. Heavy in a stick-to-your-ribs-in-the-winter kind of way, and flavorful in just about every other way. It's one of his winter specialties.



6. Shippoku Udon:

Shippoku udon is a special winter udon, and a favorite of the company that makes Takamatsu City school lunches (we have it at least twice a month for school lunch here...) Loaded with carrots, mushrooms, potatoes, taro, and chicken, it'll keep you warm, undoubtedly. Aside from school lunch, I've only had it once, as I'm trying my best to get through 100 DIFFERENT udon before I start watching the reruns.



7. Zaru Udon:

Contrasting *shippoku* udon, *zaru* udon is a popular summer dish. You get a draining board (*zaru*), with cold noodles on top, and a



bowl of cold dipping broth. The broth tends to have a heavier flavor than other udon broths, making it all the more perfect for drinking straight after you're done with the noodles.

8. Yaki Udon:

Thanks to my friends in Sanuki City, I found this at a bar called Fukuro in Sanuki-Tsuda. It's like yakisoba...but with udon. And just like the yakisoba that is actually my number one favorite food in Japan, it comes topped with flaked, smoked bonito (*katsuo*), cabbage, ginger, and beef.



9. Sea chicken Udon:

Udon with canned tuna salad and mayonnaise. The most unlikely combinations can sometimes be the best. You can find this at a store called Konpira-ya, named after Kagawa's famous Mt. Konpira (which has its own style of udon, too) in Hyogo Town shopping arcade.



10. Salad udon:

It isn't udon salad. It's salad on top of a bowl of cold udon in cold udon broth. I had this in August at a family-style restaurant called Gusto near Ritsurin Park, but a local chain, Hanamaru Udon, has a few of its own versions (Caesar salad udon!) Perfectly Japanese, and weirdly perfect in the summer. And especially perfect for whenever you happen to have leftover Caesar salad and left over udon and don't know what to do.



People never believe me when I tell them I eat udon at least 3 times a week. I hardly believe myself. Help me, please.

Nick Powers is a first-year JET in Takamatsu City, Udon Prefecture. That is to say, Kagawa Prefecture. He's a food dude, who in his free time enjoys making small talk with the local food. And occasionally with the local people about the local food. When he arrived in Takamatsu, he decided his number one goal for his time in Japan would be to eat 100 different udon dishes. He lost count after 20. He's somewhere near half.

COMMUNITY COLLECTIVE

This month, we have a mish-mash of recipes from JETs all over Japan for you to enjoy! All recipes are tried, tested, and easily made from things in your own local supermarket or grocery! Like what you read? Then get ready to cook!



Delicious avocado bake!

Egg Avocado Bake

Lynne Francis, Akita

Ingredients

- ◆ 1 avocado
- ◆ 2 eggs
- ◆ Spices to taste (I use garlic salt and crushed red pepper!)

Directions

1. Preheat oven to 220 degrees Celsius.
2. Cut the avocado in half, removing the pit. Dig out some of the avocado to make it deeper. The more you dig into the avocado, the more room for egg! (Of course, feel free to eat the avocado you dig out!)
3. Put avocado halves on a sheet of aluminum foil on a baking sheet or pan, molding the foil around the base, so the avocados won't move. Crack eggs into the pit in the avocados, then sprinkle your seasonings on top.
4. Put into the oven. Bake for 15 minutes, or until yolk is cooked. Enjoy!

Adobo Chicken

Erika Ehren, Fukushima

"This traditional Philippine dish is an easy meal to make! I hope you enjoy the recipe. It was one of my favorites when I was growing up."

Ingredients

- ◆ 2 tbsp (30 ml) vegetable oil
- ◆ 3 lbs. (1300 g) chicken, cut into pieces
- ◆ 2 tbsp (15g) minced garlic
- ◆ 2/3 cup (160 ml) soy sauce
- ◆ 1/3 cup (80 ml) white or rice vinegar
- ◆ 1 tbsp (7 g) black pepper
- ◆ 1-2 bay leaves

Directions

1. Heat oil in a large skillet over medium-high heat. Cook the chicken and garlic until the chicken turns golden brown on both sides.
2. Pour vinegar and soy sauce into the skillet with the chicken and garlic, and season with black pepper and bay leaves. Increase the heat to high, and bring to a boil. Reduce heat to medium-low, cover, and simmer until the chicken is tender and cooked through and the liquid has reduced, 35-40 minutes.
3. Serve with garlic rice, and enjoy!

Notes

- ◆ If chicken isn't to your liking, you can substitute either pork or squid.
- ◆ Rice vinegar makes the adobo sweeter. White vinegar makes the adobo tangier.
- ◆ Adobo is best served with rice, which softens the tang of the chicken, but in the Philippines it's traditionally served with garlic rice – which is just regular rice with 2 differences: 1.) add some garlic to the rice when it's cooking and 2.) fry the rice with some more garlic after it's cooked. Filipinos love garlic!
- ◆ Most Filipinos have their own personal recipe for adobo that's catered to their tastes. Some like to add vegetables, some like their adobo sweeter or tangier, and some like to add lots of different spices. It's a great recipe to experiment with in order to tailor it to your taste buds. I personally like my adobo with a bite to it, so I usually have a 1:1 ratio of vinegar to soy sauce, and I add 3-4 bay leaves. I've given a pretty standard adobo recipe above, though. To each their own!



Smoked to perfection!

Smoked BBQ Chicken

Benoit Forgues, Nagasaki

Ingredients

- ◆ 1 whole chicken
- ◆ 1 onion
- ◆ 1 orange
- ◆ Fresh rosemary

Equipment

- ◆ A simple smoker from a home store (Usually around 2000 yen)
- ◆ 5 kgs of wood charcoal and 1 pack of charcoal starters
- ◆ Foil oven backsplash to put on ground
- ◆ Smoking wood chips (any flavor)
- ◆ Metal wire

Directions

1. Set up smoker on foil backsplash in area where heat will not be an issue with the surroundings or neighbours, and where wind is minimal. Lay pieces of charcoal starter around the base of the smoker, and stack about three quarters of the charcoal around the base of the smoker. Then, place wood chips at the bottom of the smoker, in a separate plate (usually comes with smoker).
2. Clean your chicken,



Chicken in position

getting rid of excess fat and body parts, if any, and rinse with cold water. Pat down with dry paper towel. Stuff with onion, orange



The smoker, ready to go

(cut in quarters) and rosemary.

3. With the metal wire, try hanging your chicken in the smoker without anything touching the exterior walls as high as possible from the bottom. This is the tricky part – just do the best you can!
4. Pour some water in the bottom of the can, just enough so not to flood the wood chips. Then, light the chips on fire, close the lid and, if your smoker has holes in the sides, wrap everything up with foil paper, except the lid. Light up the charcoal starters all around the smoker and make sure that the charcoals are well lit all the way around. (This may take some time, depending on wind, type of charcoal) Place one large piece of lit charcoal on the lid itself.
5. Keep an eye on the smoker for the first 30 minutes, then remove the lid and check. At this point, it usually needs more water. Play it by ear, then re-seal the lid.
6. Keep an eye on the remaining time. Usually takes about 1 and a half hours for a normal size chicken on a warm day, and a little longer on a cold one. Once the chicken is smoked to perfection, remove from your smoker, and enjoy.

Rice Cooker Cheesecake

Brandy Nacol, Hiroshima

Ingredients

- ◆ 1 stick of cream cheese, softened
- ◆ 80-100g sugar (less or more sweet)
- ◆ 2 eggs
- ◆ 1 tbsp vanilla extract
- ◆ 1 tbsp lemon juice (optional)
- ◆ 50g hot cake mix
- ◆ 1 1/2 – 2 cups milk or cream

Directions

1. Mix together cream cheese and sugar. Add two eggs. Mix again. Add vanilla and lemon juice, and mix thoroughly until you achieve a smooth consistency.
2. Slowly add hot cake mix and milk while stirring constantly (or while using an electric beater on low speed).
3. Pour into rice cooker bowl. Tap on counter for a minute or so to disperse air bubbles.
4. Set to "cook", as you would with a bowl of rice. Use a wooden skewer or toothpick to check the middle. When the skewer comes out clean, with little or nothing stuck to it, it's done.
5. Use a spatula to loosen the cheesecake from the walls of the rice cooker bowl, then stick the rice cooker bowl (with cheesecake still inside) into your fridge for 2-3 hours. Cheesecake done!



Gluten-Free Dorayaki

Karyn Leigh, Hyogo

Ingredients

- ◆ 1 1/2 small bananas (~15cm long) or 1 large banana
- ◆ 2 whole eggs
- ◆ 1/4 tsp baking soda
- ◆ 1 scoop natural flavour protein powder (optional)

Filling:

- ◆ 1 can prepared adzuki beans (look for ゆであずき (yude azuki)!)

Directions

1. Mash the banana in a bowl, add the two eggs, baking soda, and protein powder, then mix thoroughly. You want everything to be mixed evenly and resemble a lumpy batter.
2. Heat coconut oil (or other healthy oil) on medium-low heat in a frying pan. Pour about 2 tbsp (or 1/2 standard ladle) worth of batter into the heated pan and flip to cook the other side once set and some bubbles appear. Cook so that both sides are golden brown and then set aside. Continue with the rest of the batter!
3. Assemble the dorayaki by spooning 1-2 tbsp of the adzuki filling into the center of one pancake. Top with a second pancake and press the edges of the pancakes together. Be careful not to overfill it as you don't want the filling falling out before you even bite into it. DONE!

For more recipes from Karyn Leigh, check out her blog at [http://mybodymypalace.blogspot.jp/!](http://mybodymypalace.blogspot.jp/)



NATIONAL AJET ELECTIONS



Connect magazine is proud to introduce the 2014-2015 AJET National Council.

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BLOCK REPRESENTATIVES

Block 1	Pending	Block 7	Kevin Chen
Block 2	Matthew Headland	Block 8	Casey McGarraugh
Block 3	Pending	Block 9	Dustin Reimar
Block 4	Patrick Loyer	Block 10	Emily Maitland
Block 5	Derek Gumb	Block 11	Tka Tyne
Block 6	Ashlie O'Neill		

Twenty-three JETs stepped forward to represent their fellow participants. It was wonderful to see so many highly qualified individuals passionate about volunteering their time and talents on National AJET. We are sure that the 2014-2015 National Council will continue to provide excellent support services and opportunities to our diverse community. We look forward to great things from everyone in the coming AJET year.

The 2014-2015 National Council is set to officially take office on June 1st, 2014. If you would like to get in touch with any of the candidates to extend your congratulations or to express your thoughts and opinions for the coming year, contact the current Vice Chair, Martin Barry, at martin.barry@ajet.net and he will make sure that the candidates receive your messages.



Are you feeling inspired to serve your fellow JETs? You're in luck! The National AJET Appointed Positions are for JETs with the special skills necessary to keep our dynamic community running smoothly. The available positions are described on the right. If you missed out on running in the elections, this could be your big second chance.

WEBSITE COORDINATOR

The Website Coordinator designs, manages, and updates the AJET website. Other duties include IT support for the AJET National Council, managing e-mails, backing up the database, and finding web, hardware, and software solutions for AJET.

ONLINE PUBLICATIONS EDITOR

The Online Publications Editor is in charge of AJET's community publications, primarily AJET's monthly magazine, AJET Connect. This involves managing magazine content, actively seeking and screening new contributors, and determining AJET's publication schedule.

HEAD OF VISUAL MEDIA

The Head of Visual Media is responsible for presenting a consistent image of AJET both in printed and digital media. One goal is to keep the clean, current look while adding a warm and inviting feel to AJET publications.

THE TRANSLATION AND INTERPRETING COORDINATOR

The Translation and Interpreting Coordinator is responsible for making AJET-related materials available in Japanese. This position works in translating AJET website and Connect magazine content. The Translation and Interpreting Coordinator works together with a group of volunteer translators and interpreters as well as native Japanese speakers.

You can find all of the information on the Appointed Positions and how to apply on AJET.net.

SPORTS

EDITORIAL Snowboarding for the First Time in Japan

At the time of writing this, the 22nd Olympic Winter Games are drawing to a close.

Justified international criticism of Russia's anti-LGBT policies and some over-indulged journalists complaining about the state of their accommodation aside, the games in Sochi appear to have been a success, albeit at a massive financial cost.

The return of the Jamaican national bobsleigh team to the Winter Olympics, as well as the debut of countries like Paraguay and Zimbabwe and the violinist Vanessa Mae representing Thailand in the women's giant slalom event meant that there were plenty of interesting competitors to capture the general public's imagination.

Like me, you probably heard more about the men's snowboard half pipe event—in which Japanese competitors won both silver and bronze—than about anything else. I believe that as a result, snowboarding's popularity in Japan and the number of people flocking to the country's resorts to try the sport will increase. I'd like to take this opportunity to encourage you to try snowboarding in Japan too.

Excited, but slightly concerned about the likelihood of sustaining an ankle injury, I took to the slopes on a snowboard for the first time in January. I learnt to ski 15 years ago and distinctly remember honing my skills on a 'baby' slope before progressing to a beginner's slope, but I wasn't afforded the same luxury this time around. Within minutes of arriving at Mizuho Ski Resort

in Hiroshima Prefecture, and after paying 4,500 yen for an afternoon session, I was riding a lift to the top of a beginner's course.

Being able to stand up on the snowboard, but lacking the ability to do much else, my first attempt began with me sliding down the slope on my backside. At the foot of the slope—rather than follow a straightforward series of slopes, like the one I'd just slid down—I decided to take another route that looked flat and easy. I soon learnt that the flatter routes are generally characterised by sharp turns, and I found myself falling at every turn and repeatedly blocking the path of more accomplished riders. Although I made a nuisance of myself at times like this, I never encountered any hostility. Everybody who I met was friendly and whenever I fell over I didn't have to look too far to find somebody else who had fallen over too.

I'd been thrown in to the deep end, but by the end of the half-day session I'd just about mastered stopping and turning, and I could ride the beginner's slope pretty well. I felt less self-conscious than I believe I would have at resorts in other parts of the world, and I left the ski hill feeling exhausted, but happy.

If you're keen to try snowboarding after seeing it in Sochi, the good news is that Japan is a great place to try it for the first time. Once you get the hang of it, it's completely addictive. You better hurry up though, because the season's almost over.

THIS MONTH IN SPORTS...

With three articles, this month's sports section is larger than it's been for some time.

First up, we have an excellent article by Rose Mason, who reluctantly took up running after moving to rural Japan. Having avoided running in the past, she recently completed her first 10km race. She talks about her experience and the thing that kept her motivated. If you want to take up running, but you're but you're struggling to stay focused, you should definitely check out Rose's article.

Next, Audrey Akcasu tells us why she enjoys outdoor rock climbing in Japan.

She also provides a brief introduction to the country's climbing culture. The article's a great resource for anybody looking to take up outdoor climbing in Japan.

In this month's final article, former ALT, Brendan Weiskotten, shares what he learned from helping to coach his junior high school's basketball team. If you're interested in getting involved with after school club activities, I strongly recommend reading this article.



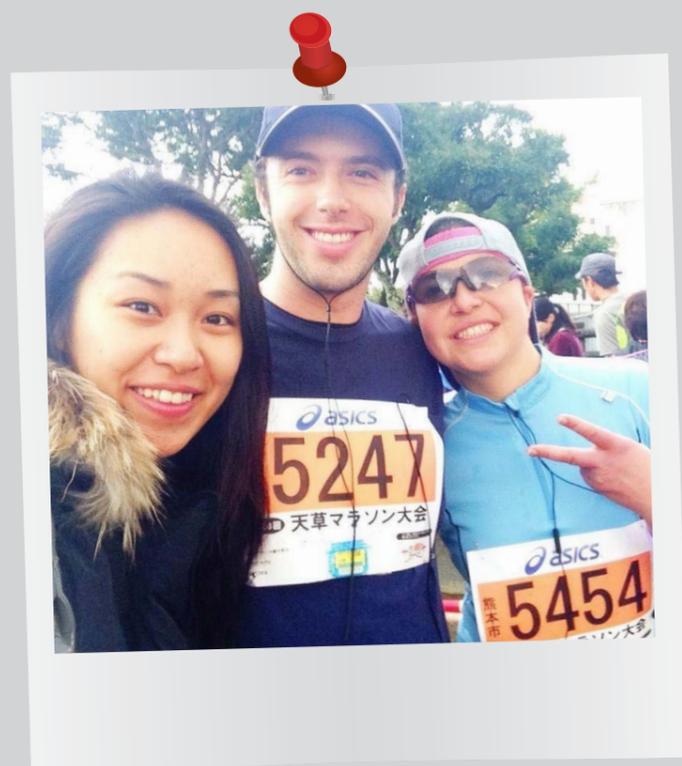
SPOTLIGHT

Karmen Rabé, Addicted to Adrenaline

Doctors recommend elevating one's heartbeat at least 30 minutes per day. Well, Karmen has an addiction that allows her to do that for an hour or two, at least three or four times a week. Her addiction's side effects include sweaty palms and forehead, accelerated heartbeat, euphoria that lasts for hours, and sometimes even hallucinations.

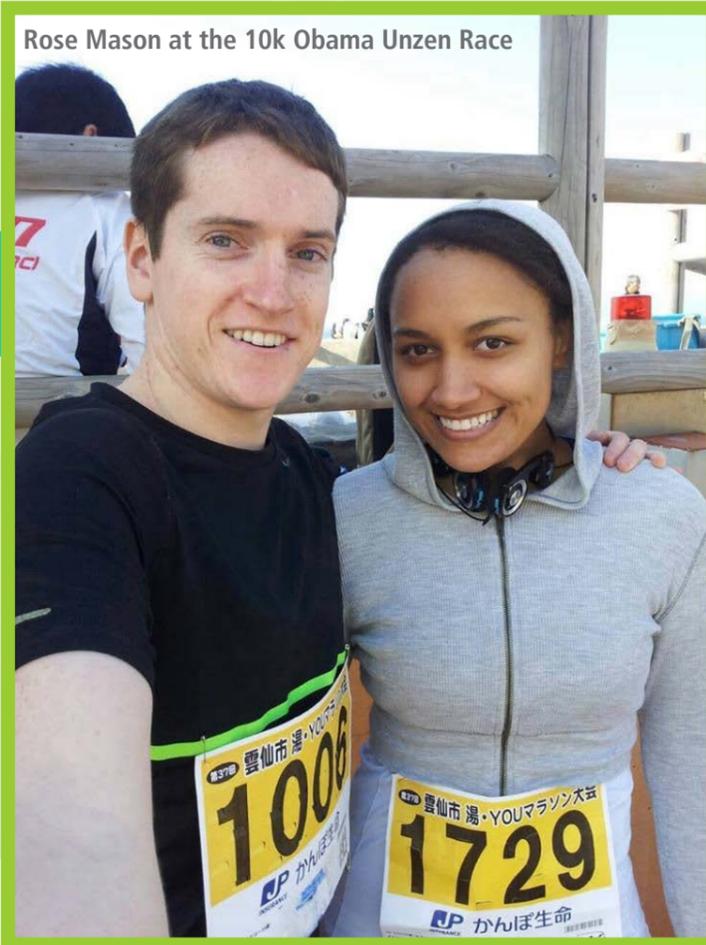
This addiction, which she enjoys outdoors in all kinds of weather, takes her to all kinds of interesting places: hidden bamboo forests, busy roads, temples, beaches and staircases. Her addiction is also pretty affordable. All it requires is some good shoes, sweatbands and reflectors (for when the urge strikes at night). You guessed it—the addiction is RUNNING! Karmen loves it and couldn't imagine going a week without it. She can't say that she was born a runner, but she's been in love ever since her first 'runner's high'.

Based in Kumamoto, she ran in the RKK Women's Relay Race a few weeks ago and is looking forward to doing the Amakusa half marathon again in November. She's also hoping to run in next year's Kumamoto Castle Marathon.



MY ATTEMPT AT FITNESS IN JAPAN

Rose Mason, Nagasaki



Rose Mason at the 10k Obama Unzen Race

46 One activity that used to fill me with dread was running. Whenever I thought about running, I just imagined shin-splits and wheezing. I've never been a very good runner. Even when I played soccer in high school, I avoided it as much as possible. I continued to avoid it at college too. Instead, I dabbled with the gym. But, upon arriving in Japan, I noticed that there were no gyms nearby. It looked like I wouldn't be getting much exercise.

I realized that the one exercise I could do anywhere was running. I wasn't very happy about this. But as the couch and I were starting to become one, I knew that I had to do it. Previous experience has taught me that I need a bit of support when it comes to activities like running. So I asked around and learned about a great program made by the NHS in the UK.

"Couch to 5K" is a free running podcast that's designed to get people ready for a 5k race in nine weeks. The best thing about it is that it assumes absolutely no previous running ability. Actually, that's a lie, the best thing about it is Laura. She not only tells you when to stop and take a break, but also gives you advice and encouragement. I would often find myself 'talking' to Laura. Whenever she would let me know that I was halfway done with a run I would say, "Thanks Laura. This is a pain, but I think we can do this!" It may seem silly, but she was a big help.

While some of the early runs were difficult, the worst was the first run. It consisted of ninety seconds of walking for every sixty seconds of jogging. That first day really showed me that I needed running in my life if I wanted to get into shape.

In order to motivate myself to get through the final leg of the

program, I decided to sign up for a 5k race. When I told my boyfriend, he somehow convinced me to run in a 10k race with him instead. The farthest I had ever run was 6.5k. I had a cold the week before my race, but I still got out there and ran it. I had to take a few walking breaks, but I finished that 10k race in one hour, seven minutes and fifteen seconds. I wasn't even close to being last.

While that 10k race was the hardest physical activity that I've ever done, it was a great experience. I've already signed up to do another 10k race in March. Hopefully this one will also have a foot spa at the finish line.

Rose Mason is a 3rd year high school ALT from the USA, currently living in Isahaya City in Nagasaki Prefecture. When she's not reading her latest Stephen King novel in one of the local cafes, she's on the lookout for an adventure in Japan. On her numerous travels, from Okinawa to Hokkaido, she has met many amazing and wonderful people. When she's not out and about, she likes to go running with her friends.

You can learn more about NHS's "Couch to 5K" podcasts and apps at <http://www.nhs.uk/Tools/Pages/couch-5K-running-plan.aspx>.

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GANBA: THE OUTDOOR CLIMBING EXPERIENCE

Audrey Akcasu, Nagasaki

The only good part of the numbing cold is that I can't feel the pain in my toes anymore. My fingers are stiff and raw. As I take off my down jacket my muscles tense up. Whoever said climbing is a winter sport was nuts.

Granted the cold, dry weather serves to keep my hands from sweating and the rocks are dry as a bone. It's cold. Luckily, down in Nagasaki it doesn't snow much so we have access to outdoor climbing all year-round. That is, if you can handle using your bare hands and wearing constricting rubber shoes—which might actually make your feet colder when you put them on—while scaling up a frigid cliff face in near freezing temperatures.

Since I came to Japan, one of my favorite aspects of the country, especially living in the *inaka*, is the ability to drive 15 minutes out of town and feel like I'm in the middle of nowhere, surrounded only by trees and mountains. What I didn't know at first was that within these forests were huge boulders that have been discovered, conquered and recorded.

Japan is filled with boulders and rock walls that you probably wouldn't think twice about. But on those rocks, people have probably slipped, fallen, bled and eventually succeeded. Not just expert climbers, but beginners too. Every *problem* (climbing route) on a rock has a grade of difficulty and a name, and there is a huge range of both.

Japan, while lacking in Yosemite-like 'big-walls', has an abundance of small boulders, good for practicing very technical moves that don't require ropes or harnesses, because they aren't very high. The difficulty level of the problems is indicated by a grading system that uses 'kyuu' and 'dan', which you may be familiar with from martial arts. The easiest problems are usually six or seven 'kyuu' and as the number decreases, the difficulty increases until you reach 'dan' level (0). Similarly, as the 'dan' number increases from zero, so does the difficulty.

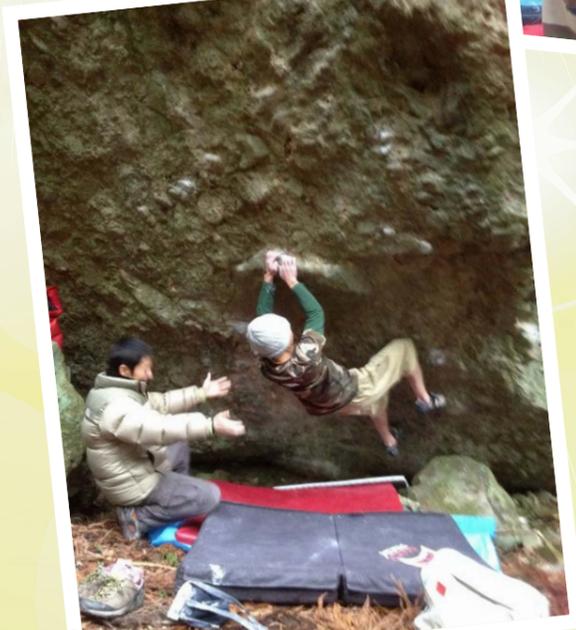
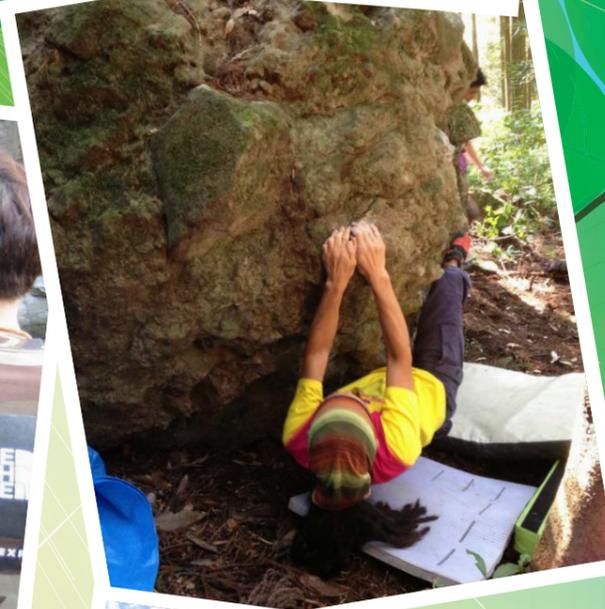
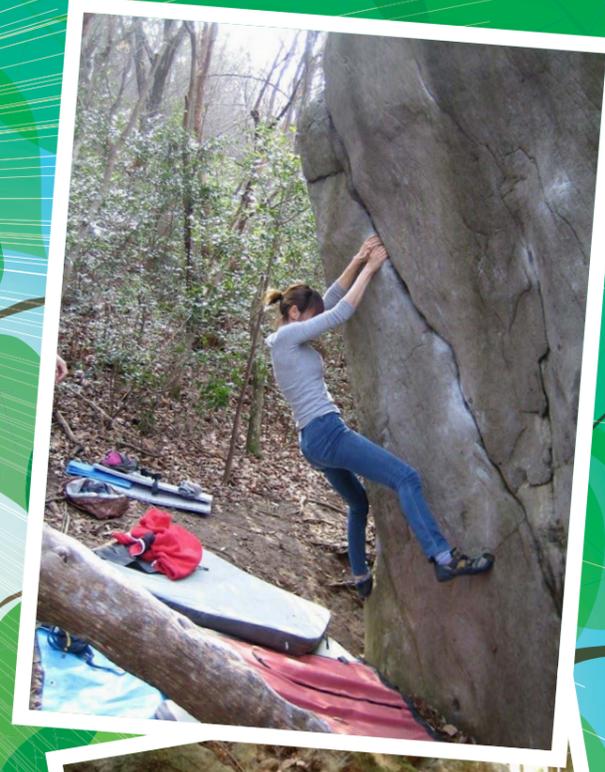
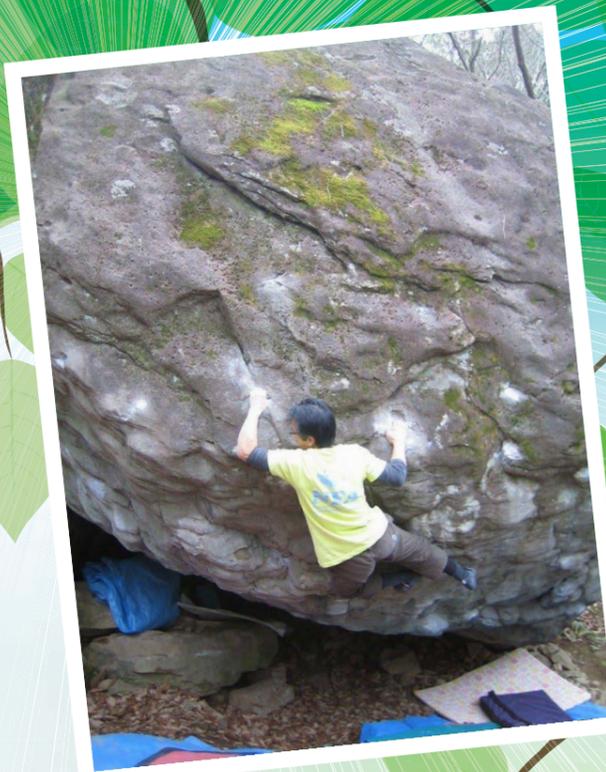
The first person to successfully climb an outdoor problem gets the honor of naming it. The names can be as boring as a number,

or they can be fun, such as 'Grand Line', 'Rocky', 'Bad Father' or my personal favorite, 'Oshare Dorobou' (stylish burglar). But no matter how cool the name is, the climb itself is what matters.

Indoor and outdoor bouldering are essentially the same, but seem worlds apart. There is nothing more gratifying than standing on top of a huge rock you just climbed, surrounded by beautiful trees and breathing in the clean air—especially if it took hours, days or weeks to finally conquer. Maybe the rocks are dirty and need more upkeep. Maybe they are sharp and cut up your fingers. Maybe a hold breaks and you take a tumble. Despite these obstacles, reaching the goal at a gym doesn't even come close to the sensation of using nothing but your bare hands to climb to the top of a real boulder. Once you've climbed outdoors, you'll never look at a rock in the same way. You won't see a rock. You'll see a challenge.

You can't do it alone though. Of course having other people with you is important for safety reasons, but their companionship and support is essential. Whether it's just entertaining you while you rest between climbs, giving you pointers about how to approach a problem, or hearing the echoes of "*Ganba!*"—climber-dialect for *ganbatte*—across a canyon, it's good to have friends around. The Japanese climbing community is tight-knit, enthusiastic and incredibly welcoming, but most of all expansive. While not a mainstream sport, there are climbers everywhere. If you want to try climbing outdoors or just climbing in general, ask around your office and neighborhood, chances are you'll find someone who will gladly take you under their wing.

Audrey Akcasu is a 4th-year ALT in Omura, Nagasaki, teaching in elementary and junior high schools. She hates cold weather and checks the length of daylight more frequently than she should admit, awaiting the long warm days of summer. To combat the cold, she spends time at the pool coaching her JHS's swim club and doing yoga or karate. Lately, her favorite past time (obsession) is rock climbing. She also dabbles in snowboarding, but snow is a rarity down south.

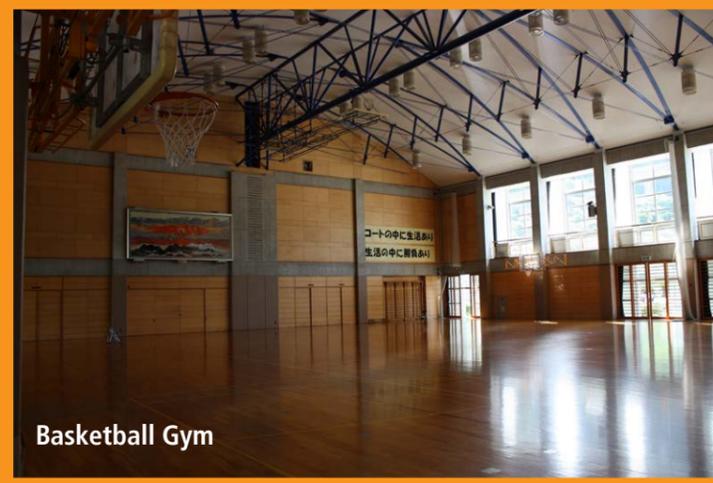


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BASKETBALLSUKATSU

Brendan Weiskotten
Chiba (2008-2011)



Basketball Gym



Basketball Students



Basketball Students

I don't remember the exact day I first watched my junior high's basketball team practice, but if someone pinned me to the floor and wouldn't let me up until I gave them a date, I'd say it was in October. What I remember most from that day was finally gaining the courage to walk over to the two coaches, and ask in broken Japanese if it was okay to watch the kids practice. Luckily for me, the coaches were happy to let me to watch.

Looking back, my surge of courage and the fact that I used to play basketball were probably why I chose to watch the basketball team. My first choice would have been soccer, but the soccer coach didn't seem to be warming to me, and I didn't feel confident enough to break down the barrier. Kendo was fun to participate in, but it wasn't the easiest of sports to observe in a small dojo and a dozen kids swinging bamboo swords.

That first day was easy enough. I just watched the kids scrimmage and attempted to catch what the coaches were saying. Some words borrowed from English, such as 'shoot' and 'pass' were fairly easy to figure out. Others were harder to figure out, plus my listening ability was still extremely weak at that stage. I enjoyed watching enough to come back the following day and another day soon after that.

After a week or so of watching, the male coach wanted me involved. After the kids had run drills and were taking a breather, he threw me a ball and told me to play one-on-one with his best player, Hiroki. To say I was a bit taken aback would be an understatement. I'd read stories of JETs participating in club sports, but here I was, being thrown into the fire after only watching for a short time. I tend to come across as a shy person when I'm new to a situation or in new surroundings, but that didn't stop me from rising to the challenge. I took the ball onto the court and prepared myself even though I hadn't played the sport in almost ten years.

I looked into Hiroki's eyes and saw a mixture of respect, excitement, and trepidation. Even now, I admire his poise when facing a 188 cm foreigner he knew almost nothing about. As I checked the ball to him, I wasn't sure how things would play out. It ended up going as well as I could expect considering I was playing in office slacks, a collared shirt, and loose shoes with no laces. He beat me 10-6. As I returned to the side of the court, I sensed respect from the kids and coaches. I wasn't sure I deserved it, but I was happy to have it after getting beat by a

fourteen-year-old.

A few days later, club sports started immediately after lunch. With no commitment to teaching classes and no other responsibilities, I stopped by to watch the kids play basketball. As the kids began to prepare for scrimmages after their drills, the male teacher turned to me and said, "We have a teacher meeting at two. Can you stay here for club sports?" I only barely made out what he said, but I replied in the affirmative and watched the boys' team take the court.

I wasn't too worried. I'd already been left alone with 30 eight-year-olds in my elementary school, so watching over junior high students who went through the same routine everyday was a cakewalk. While one team scrimmaged, the other kept score and ran the clock. What else was needed? I soon found out. When the buzzer sounded, ending the boys' workout, they all turned and jogged to me. They surrounded me and waited expectantly.

"Should I say something?"

"Yes."

"About how you played?"

"Yes."

I'm not sure anything will rival the surprise and shock I felt at that moment. Being left on my own to care for dozens of eight-year-olds was not the same. Even now, I look back on that moment in my school's gym and feel awe. After very little interaction with these children, I was being given responsibility for their growth and wellbeing. Not only were other teachers trusting me, but the children themselves believed in me. To this day I don't know how well I did. With my limited Japanese I attempted to instruct them in the mistakes I had seen. They nodded, said thanks, and bowed. Then it was the girls' turn.

I would like to say that the experience empowered me. That I latched onto the basketball teams and became part of the coaching staff. The truth is, I was scared. I had no confidence in my ability to communicate in Japanese, and I didn't believe I could live up to the coaches' expectations. So I ran. I told myself excuses, like I didn't want to spend my private time, my evenings

and weekends, doing school things. I reasoned that they'd never fully accept me as part of the team. I told myself that it was a one-off experience and wasn't indicative of their faith in me. I ended up avoiding the basketball team for the remainder of that school year. When students asked me if I was coming to practice, I would say I was busy. In short, I was a poor role model.

With the new school year came a new male coach. My main JTE, who had no basketball experience whatsoever, was being thrown into the fire. He asked me to stop by practice and help him. For the first few weeks of school, I had little to do. English classes hadn't properly started yet, so I grew bored. I finally gave in and stopped by a basketball practice. The students or coaches never made me feel ashamed for avoiding the teams. All of the negative emotions came from my own head. Slowly, I began to realize the truth, and my excuses and reservations began to recede.

Over my final two years at my junior high, I grew close to the kids on the basketball teams. I never did join them for actual games, but I would often stay after school hours to join in their practices. I eventually bought basketball shoes in my size, and started to bring workout clothes to school. I participated in drills and occasionally a scrimmage or two and never went more than a few weeks without joining a couple of practices.

The effects of my time spent with the boys and girls on those teams were slow to materialize, but when I finally realized what was happening, I was amazed. The basketball players began to participate more in English class, and they always had something to say to me whenever they saw me. I grew close to many of my students over my three years at the junior high, but when it came time for me to leave, it was the basketball students that cried. Looking back it all seems obvious, but it wasn't at the time. I have a lot of wonderful memories from my time with the school's basketball teams, but I also keep those memories as a reminder to myself. Time spent together is never wasted, and fear can only hold you back.

Brendan was an ALT in Kyonan Town, near Chiba prefecture's southern tip. His three years in Japan were incredibly peaceful and eye opening, and leaving was one of the hardest decisions he's ever made. Luckily, he now has family in Japan, and he returns yearly to continue exploring his adopted country through traveling, hiking, snowboarding, and aimless wandering.

TRAVEL

EDITORIAL Olympics in Japan

52 Stray dogs, homophobia, brown water and dual-seating toilet cubicles aside, the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics were a rollicking laugh, albeit a bit confusing at times.

In Australia—where sport is regarded as the nation's official religion—the Olympics are a chance for armchair experts everywhere to kick back for a two-week celebration of patriotism; during which staying up to watch a gold medal event is a perfectly reasonable excuse for being late to work.

Given Japan's conservative approach to, well, pretty much everything, I'm not sure why I was surprised that the coverage of the Olympics was more...orderly...than I had expected.

Live crosses to athletes' hometowns—usually a raucous affair with friends, family and every neighbor and his dog hoo-haaing and waving posters saying "Hi" to their mum—were much more subdued, with seated fans timidly offering support from lecture hall-like rooms. Meanwhile, instead of stimulating computer-generated streams of sports data, Olympics trivia, and results predictions, presenters held up stats printed on cardboard and navigated tiny athletes on miniature versions of ski runs.

This was, of course, if you were actually able to locate Olympic coverage on local TV. Where, in our home countries, we might be used to a dedicated Olympic station giving us our fix 24/7, it appeared that, while several Japanese networks had broadcast rights, they generally seemed to favor playing repeats rather than live action of anything but curling. It's to be expected that broadcasters will have an element of bias towards their own country's athletes—and don't get me wrong, I was cheering

for my adopted home's team just as much as my Australian brethren—but do we really need to see Akito Watabe's dramatic silver medal finish twenty times an hour, at the expense of other finals?

But perhaps the most important question I was asking after my first Winter Olympics experience in Japan was, "Where the hell was the snowball fight event?" I'm not even kidding.

Every February, 100 teams compete at the Showa-Shinzan International Yukigassen in Hokkaido. *Yukigassen*, (snow battle) is a competition that takes the juvenile backyard pastime to a whole new and professional level. Two teams of seven players compete in three-minute bouts by hurling snowballs at each other. While this is going on, the teams must also try to capture their opposition's flag from the other end of the field. A game is won by tagging the entire opposing team, or capturing their flag in a best-of-three style tournament. And you can be sure these guys are packing heavy artillery. Each team is allowed 90 balls per round and their machine-manufactured mounds must adhere to official dimensions.

Beginning in Japan in 1989, today there are similar competitions in Australia, Canada, Finland, Norway, Holland, Sweden, Belgium, America and yes, even Russia. There's even an International Alliance of sport Yukigassen (IAY). So whaddaya think 2018 Pyeongchang, South Korea? Could yukigassen finally knock curling out of the arena for good?

THIS MONTH IN TRAVEL...

Wow! Wasn't February an epic month, weather-wise? Unless you're lucky enough to be reading this from the tropical paradise of Okinawa, you likely became very well-acquainted with snow recently. Whether you delighted in snow sports, or were left shaking your frost-bitten fists at the sky, it's now time to focus on the arrival of spring—and of course in Japan, that means cherry blossoms a-go-go. In this issue, our wonderful readers have shared the best secret *hanami* spots around the country. From the picturesque parks in Hyogo to the stunning illuminations in Yamagata, you're sure to find a place away from the crowds to dust off your plastic sheet and chow down on a bento, while enjoying Japan's finest seasonal display. If winter has left you with a touch of cabin fever, why not delve into Johnathan Perkins' Motorcycle Diaries for some inspiration on two-wheeled adventures around Japan? Also in this issue, Sterling Diesel shares her experience of forgoing champagne and fireworks at the start of 2014, for a more traditional Japanese New Year's Eve; while I cover the two greatest winter sporting events of the year in my editorial.

Have any crazy travel-delay stories from last month's snowstorms? Want to make us all jealous with your tales of trips to warmer climes? Need a travel question answered? Then get in touch! Shoot us an email at connect.travel@ajet.net

Happy reading!

SPOTLIGHT

Sterling Diesel, Non-Traditional Reveller

This New Year's I sacrificed my usual plans to visit the hometown of someone I hosted on Couchsurfing.org. I found myself in Hota, Chiba, a small town with a beauty found only in the Japanese *inaka*.

My friend's family and I passed the time as if we were all related. Our dinner consisted of an exorbitant number of foods which were all new to me. I tried to keep myself from gorging on the feast while everyone casually picked at a *kuromame* or a piece of *konbu* while watching *Kohaku Uta Gassen*. Without their visible interest, the clock ticked away the final seconds of the year. Instead of shouting "Happy New Year!" we took a short walk to the local Buddhist temple.

We declined its free sake and snacks on our way to give a donation. I could barely focus on my prayer due to the multi-tasking priest chanting the Heart Sutra while simultaneously playing bells and hitting his *mokugyo* (a wooden, fish-shaped percussion instrument) in perfect synchronization—something usually accomplished by three monks! As I moved through the queue to strike the *bonshou* (temple bell), I watched the locals all struggle with the correct order of ritual movements.



When I finally struck the *bonshou*, the sound reverberated through me, multiplying my feelings of mindfulness, emptiness, and relaxation. That night, I feel asleep to the sound of the bell being struck over and over. Its sound drifted through Hota's night sky, my dreams, and the first hours of 2014.



The Japanese are curiously proud of their 'four seasons'. This is baffling, because four appears to be the norm worldwide, and also because many foreigners who live in Japan would argue that there are, in fact, only two: very, very hot and very, very cold. The showstopper is surely spring, when the entire country is awash with pink and white cherry blossoms. Following the sakura zensen (cherry blossom front) as it makes its way from the subtropical islands of Okinawa to the cooler climes of Hokkaido is a national pastime because, for five months of the year, getting hammered in a park with strangers in a unified celebration of flowers is perfectly acceptable. You've no doubt heard of Japan's most popular hanami spots, such as Ueno Park and Shinjuku Gyoen in Tokyo, but this year, why not spread out a plastic sheet and nibble on your bento at one of these hidden gems recommended by our readers?

Brian Smit, Yamagata

Where: Eboshiyama, Akayu, Yamagata

When: End of April, roughly between the 20th and the 30th
 "Eboshiyama in Akayu is rated as one of the top 100 places in Japan to see the cherry blossoms. At night they light up the cherry trees from below, creating a pink glowing canopy over the pathways. There are also many food vendors. It's easily one of my favorite places outside Kyoto to see the blossoms."

Tony Kim, Nagasaki

Where: Japan Mint, Osaka branch, Osaka

When: Mid-April

"Inside the Mint's grounds, towards the river, sakura trees line a walkway, some of which are rare and unusual for Osaka. The Mint opens its doors to allow the public to walk through for only one week; most local Osakans don't even know about this."

Charlotte Griffiths, Hyogo

Where: Koroen station to Kurakuenguchi station, Shukugawa

When: End of March, beginning of April

"Walking along the river from Koroen station to Kurakuenguchi station, there are more than 2,000 cherry trees along a 3km strip. Shukugawa is one of the most popular blossom spots in the region, and it deserves to be. Around Kurakuenguchi, there are also some really good restaurants if you forget your hanami picnic!"



Yoshinoyama by Areej Obeid

Areej Obeid, Yamagata

Where: Kajo Park, Yamagata City

When: Late April, usually from around the 20th, reaching full bloom around the 25th.

"Although the hanami spots in more popular places like Kyoto and Nara—especially Yoshino-yama—are quite breathtaking, what I look forward to the most is when the cherry blossoms bloom in Yamagata. Kajo Park is quieter and more relaxing than the really famous tourist spots, and the hundreds of cherry trees surrounding the moat are so beautiful. You can't really have a picnic under the trees surrounding the moat, but there are also cherry tree lined paths within the park itself too. It's so nice being able to wake up in the morning, bike over to the park, and enjoy a quiet and relaxing walk under the cherry trees. It's not something you can easily do when visiting tourist spots. Kajo Park is also home to a Kyudo-jo (Japanese archery dojo), and the dojo is surrounded by the same cherry trees that line the moat. It's a view you can only see from within the dojo itself, so it's a bit of a secret cherry blossom spot. Warmer spots in the city bloom a bit earlier, and trees that line rivers or streams tend to bloom a bit later."

Sara Paliga, Yamagata

Where: Yoshinoyama, Nara

When: End of March, beginning of April

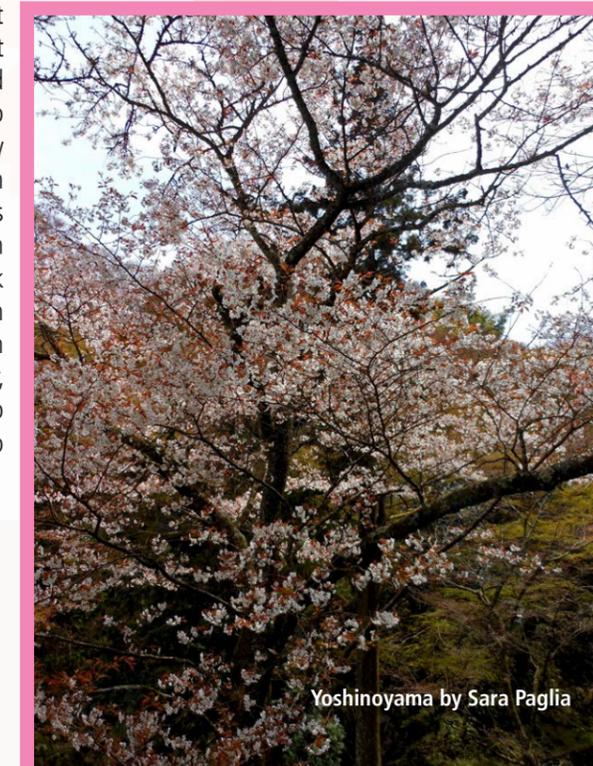
"This is said to be one of Japan's most famous sakura viewing spots and for very good reason. Even though I got there early, it was astonishing to see the soon-to-be-in-full-bloom color that just spilled over whole sides of mountains! There are around 30,000 trees in the area and you can hike or take buses to view them all. There isn't one particular spot to view the many bundles of sakura trees; you'll want to sit down and enjoy each spot for a while, so bring some good snacks and sake! This was a truly breathtaking spot and one of the most amazing I've seen to date. Perhaps I was a bit early, but there was a surprising lack of people in the area—unlike the crowded spots you may find in Tokyo or Kyoto. The blossoms are said to bloom from late March to early April, but it is very subject to seasonal changes. Last year, when I was there around April 3rd, the trees were just starting to bloom because of the cooler temperatures. However, be sure to check for an update closer to the actual season."

Brian Smit, Yamagata

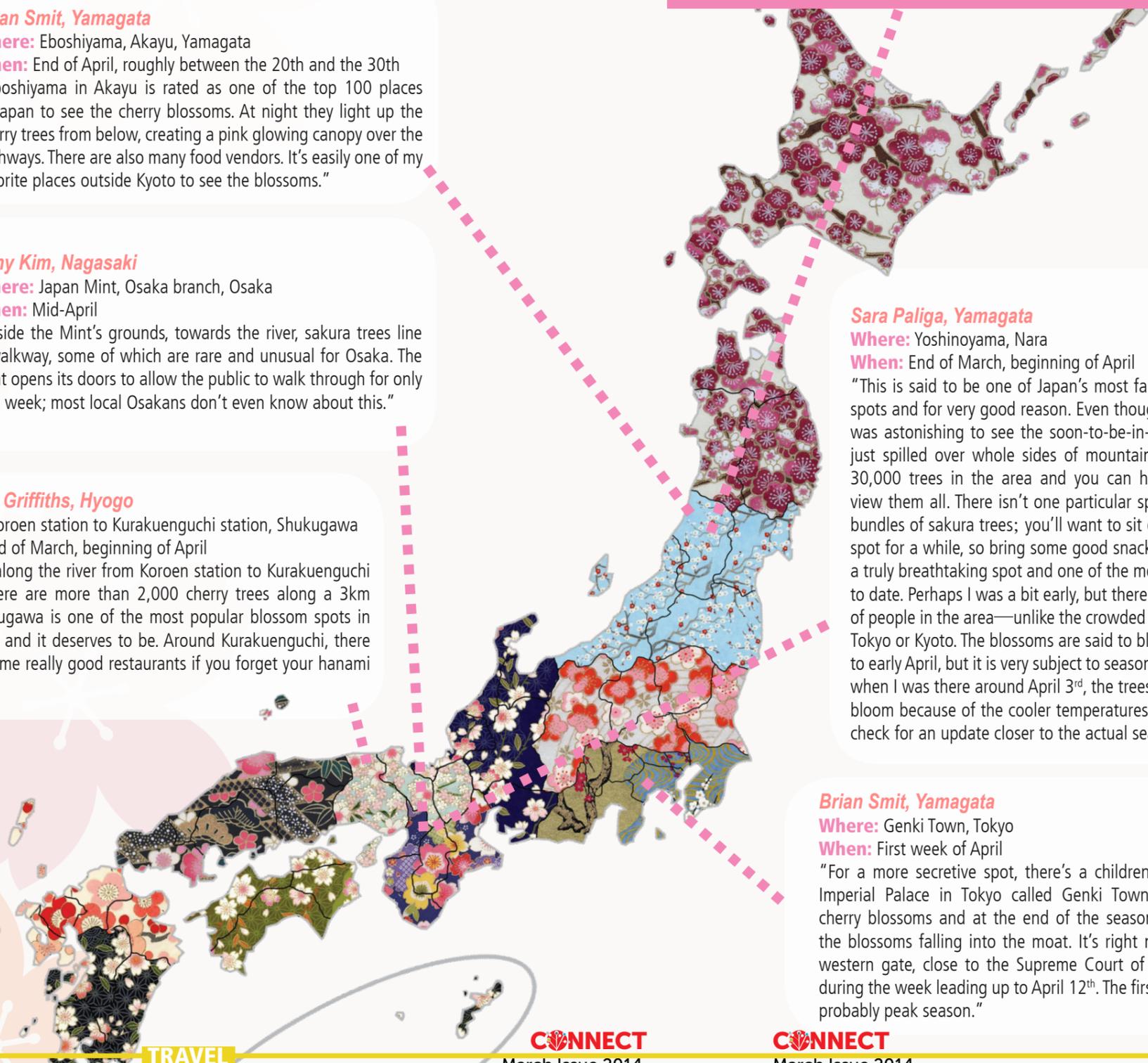
Where: Genki Town, Tokyo

When: First week of April

"For a more secretive spot, there's a children's park near the Imperial Palace in Tokyo called Genki Town. It's filled with cherry blossoms and at the end of the season you can watch the blossoms falling into the moat. It's right near the palace's western gate, close to the Supreme Court of Japan. Go there during the week leading up to April 12th. The first week in April is probably peak season."



Yoshinoyama by Sara Paglia





Kono Koen, Saga City by Penny Fox

Penny Fox, Saga

Where: Kono Koen, Saga City

When: Full bloom is typically at the very end of March/1st of April

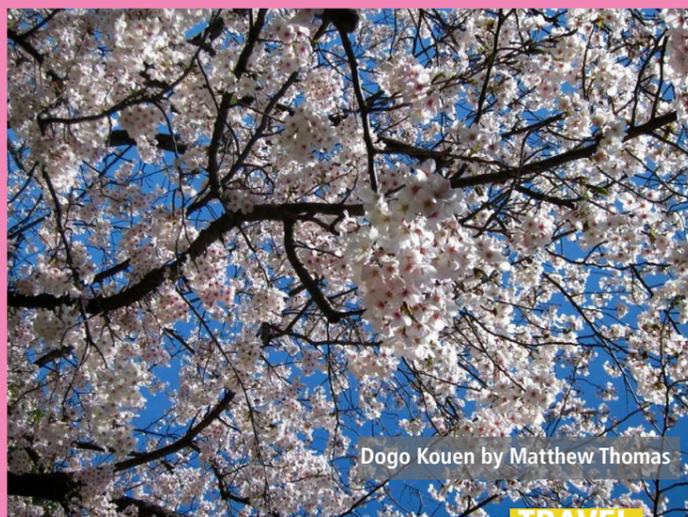
"My favorite spot in Saga is Kono Koen because it is a really large place that gets filled on weekends with people of all ages and many people's merriment can be heard all over the park. It comprises multiple walking trails around a central lake which is blanketed with blooms later in the season, and features large open areas as well as smaller more intimate settings from which to view the trees. Another slightly smaller park with a huge concentration of blossoms—reportedly the best in Saga—is at Ogi Park. Also, for the most surprising and incredible views, a trip to Yutoku Inari Shrine is well worth a visit."

Tony Kim, Nagasaki

Where: Omura Koen, Omura, Nagasaki

When: Mid-March to early April

"Omura Koen is a big, wooded park in the middle of the busy city, and is also the former site of Omura Castle. The park is full of sakura and has numerous walkways crisscrossing throughout the grounds. It can get crowded on the weekends though."



Dogo Kouen by Matthew Thomas

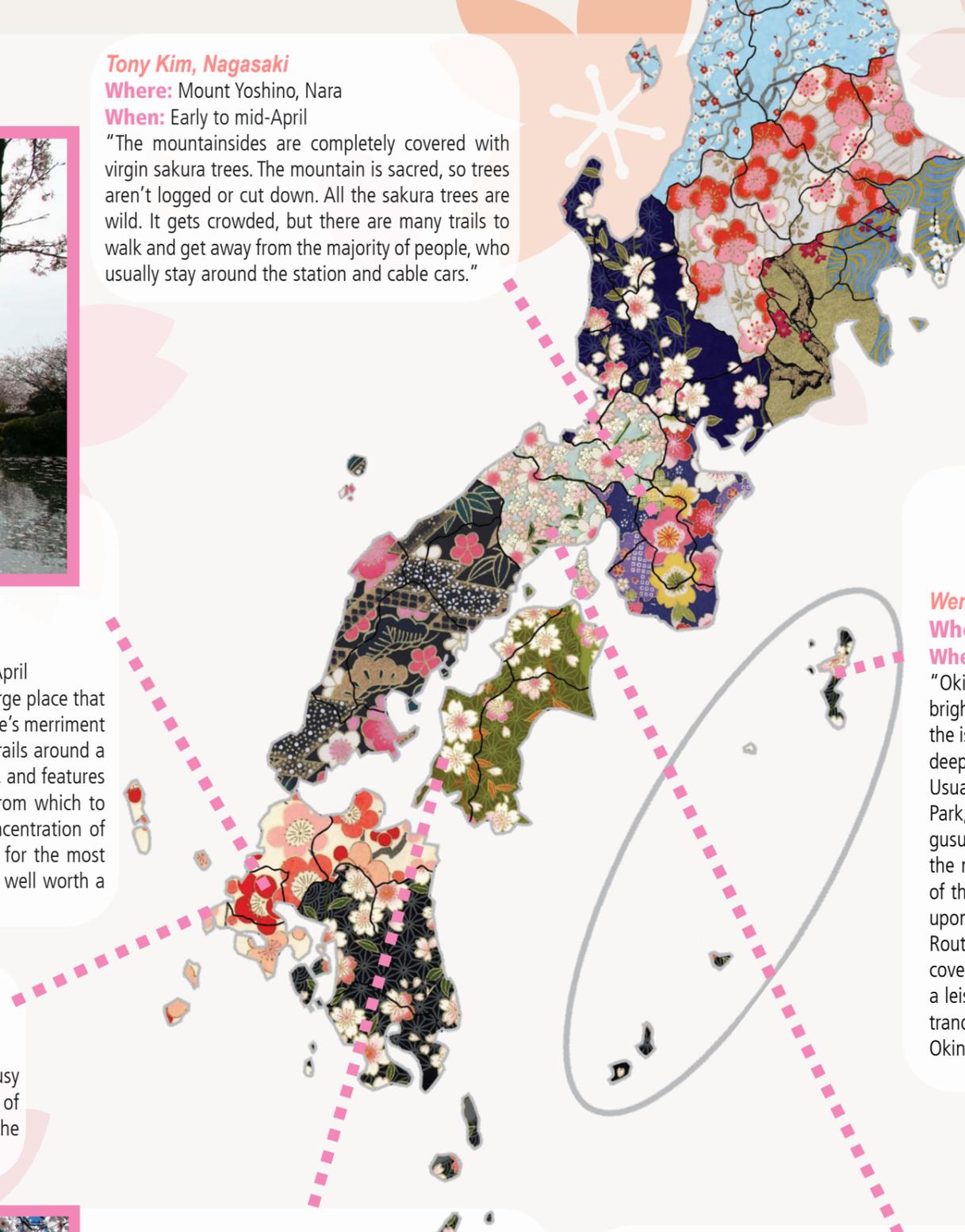
TRAVEL

Tony Kim, Nagasaki

Where: Mount Yoshino, Nara

When: Early to mid-April

"The mountainsides are completely covered with virgin sakura trees. The mountain is sacred, so trees aren't logged or cut down. All the sakura trees are wild. It gets crowded, but there are many trails to walk and get away from the majority of people, who usually stay around the station and cable cars."



Near Hentona in the Kunigami district, along route 58 on the way to Cape Hedo, by Wendy Ng

Wendy Ng, Okinawa

Where: Okinawa Island

When: Usually from third week of January to second week of February

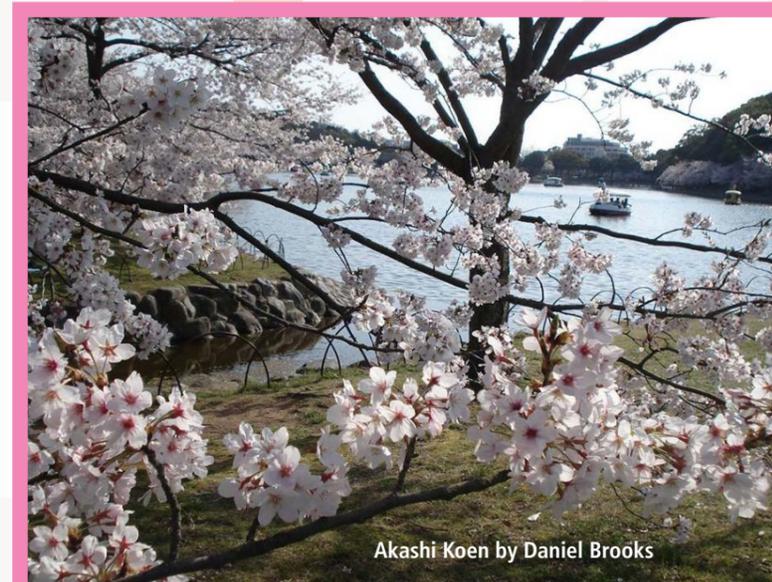
"Okinawans get the first peek at cherry blossoms in Japan. Every year in late January, bright pink cherry blossoms will slowly bloom in Okinawa, starting in the northern part of the island. Unlike mainland Japan's pale pink *Someiyoshino* (Yoshino cherry), Okinawa's deep pink *Hikanzakura* (Taiwan cherry) originates from Southern China and Taiwan. Usually, people will travel north to attend the Nago Sakura Matsuri in Nago Chuo Park, the Motobu Yaedake Sakura Matsuri at the Yaedake Mountain, and the Nakijin-gusuku Sakura Matsuri at the Nakijin Castle site. While Yaedake Mountain is one of the most popular spots to view the cherry blossoms which envelope the lush greenery of the mountains, it is extremely crowded during the festival. My friends and I chanced upon a secret cherry blossom viewing spot on our way to Cape Hedo. If you drive along Route 58 on the way to Cape Hedo, you will pass through Kunigami District. The area is covered by many cherry blossoms trees, which are hidden from the crowds. You can take a leisurely stroll and enjoy the beauty of the cherry blossoms, which is enhanced by the tranquil ambience. You've missed them this year, but perhaps you can plan a trip around Okinawa's cherry blossom season next year."

Daniel Brooks, Yamagata

Where: Akashi Koen, Akashi City, Hyogo

When: End of March, beginning of April

"Believe me, there will be a lot of blossoms at Akashi Koen! Still, the best part about this location is the swan-themed paddle boats you can take out onto the ponds, enjoying the view of the castle ruins as you go. The park is surrounded by a moat filled with adorable koi carp and the cutest turtles ever! So beautiful and so much fun!"



Akashi Koen by Daniel Brooks

For more information on the best places to see the cherry blossoms in Japan, go to: www.japan-guide.com/e/e2011_where.html

TRAVEL

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MOTORCYCLE DIARIES

Jonathan Perkins, Kagawa



Colorful, leafy, drive-by shot from fall of 2012



Panorama of and from the mountain range behind Takamatsu City in Kagawa prefecture

As the road's pitch steepened on a small mountain road in Nara-ken, another hairpin turn materialized in front of me. My stomach was queasy and, at that moment, I asked myself a question that nothing in all my previous biking experience had prepared me to answer: Was that second tuna and mayo *onigiri* really necessary?

It was late April at the beginning of Golden Week 2012. That morning I had set out on my first big motorcycle trip. Throughout the day I watched my touring buddies bank into curves in front of me. The way they flicked their bikes over and zipped through those hairpin turns was making me incredibly jealous. I didn't like being left behind, and I was frustrated knowing that they were going to have to wait up for me. Still, they had a decade or more of riding experience between the three of them, while I was coming into my third month of owning my first road bike. I didn't feel too guilty about making them wait.

My bike is a Honda VFR 750. My friend, Andrew, has a Honda VFR 800. His is a few years newer, but that wasn't what was making the difference. Their capabilities are largely the same. The difference was in the rider.

The majority of my motorcycle experience comes from off-road dirt biking, and these habits were dying hard. Unless actually eating dirt was on my plan for lunch, leaning a dirt bike over like you do a road bike is a recipe for disaster. Logic told me that if Andrew could do it, then I *should* be able to. I just had to trust my bike.

Eventually the frustration was too much to take. Another switchback turn was coming up and I decided to stay on the gas and delay my entry turning point. Putting myself into a situation where the straight road in front of me was disappearing, while my maintained speed was forcing me to come face-to-face with my instincts—which were desperately pleading with me to decelerate. Experience was telling me to look up ahead, through the turn, and to push the inside handlebar harder. I did. As my angle steepened, my teeth clenched and adrenaline coursed through my veins. I was taking my bike further than I'd ever taken it.

Eventually the turn began flowing back into a straightaway and I eased up off the inside handlebar. I had forgotten all about my *onigiri*-induced indigestion. Instead, I was enjoying pure exhilaration as I looked forward to another mettle-testing curve.

Riding off-road in the heart of the Appalachian Mountains is where my love of riding began. My grandparents are from West Virginia, so summer family reunions meant escaping the flatness of my Hoosier homeland to the rolling greenery of a state bursting with gorgeous scenery.

Though riding off-road is where it all started, getting a road motorcycle was always the eventual goal. The real push came after I had returned home from studying abroad here in Japan at Tsukuba University. My aforementioned friend, Andrew, who's a fellow Purdue alumnus (Boiler up!) and also my Tsukuba *senpai*, was an ALT in Ibaraki-ken at the time. The pictures and videos he'd put up on Facebook made me resolve to get back to Japan, buy a bike, and tour until the sound of my VFR's camshafts permanently echoed in my brain.

As it turned out, actually accomplishing this goal took the foresight of a wedding planner and the patience of a kindergarten teacher. Not only did I have to get my license endorsement in America, I also had to hold it for a minimum of six months before I came to Japan. The Japanese License Center wouldn't recognize it otherwise. This meant taking a mandatory bike safety class a full year before leaving for JET.

Buying my motorcycle was the easiest part of this whole process. It took one evening at my local Red Baron motorcycle shop. After that I enjoyed the year of riding that the international license brought me. Ever lurking in the back of my mind, however, was the fact that I would eventually have to take the dreaded test to get my Japanese license. Unfortunately for me and my American

brethren, Japan does not have a license conversion agreement like they do with other English-speaking countries. You Aussies, Brits, Kiwis, and Canucks are so lucky!

Getting a Japanese motorcycle license is truly a test of patience. The riding portion is more of a test on following procedure than it is a test of skill. It's by far the most difficult of all the driving tests you can take in Japan. Count on being failed on technicalities and arbitrary violations.

Didn't look behind you before and *after* getting on the motorcycle? You might fail, just don't make any more mistakes.

Oh, and now you didn't reach peak speed on the braking test? You'll most likely fail.

Oh, now you fell off our 10cm-high bridge thingy that's the width of my hand? Insta-fail.

Four attempts over the course of a month and I still had no license to show for my efforts. Getting rained out on the fifth week meant waiting another week for my next attempt. With a two week gap between attempts, I wasn't hopeful. Perhaps it was my apathy that made the difference, because on that fifth try I *nailed* it. License obtained!

Iain, a friend of mine here in Kagawa, went through the process of getting his motorcycle license around the same time I did. I was pretty ecstatic at the prospect of having someone local to ride with. One day I was bored at school and shooting some hoops in the gym, I got a call. It was Iain. Turns out he took a turn a bit wide and washed out on some loose gravel. His bike was in a ditch and he needed help getting it out. After confirming that he was alright, I agreed to go help him. Fortunately, he didn't have to wait until I got there. A couple of guys stopped and helped him get his bike back on the road. However, I still met up with him to survey what I thought was going to be damage in the vein of bent handlebars, ripped cowls, or misaligned wheels. Fortunately the bike made it out with only cosmetic damage, but the real hero in this story is his gear. His jacket kept him from getting nasty road rash and his boots potentially saved him from breaking his foot.

Close calls have made me nearly put my bike down a couple times, but I can thankfully say that I've avoided anything too serious thus far. It hasn't been easy. Cars seem to love pulling out in front of bikes. I generally assume all of them are going to

anyway. Old ladies have a strange desire to walk across roads at points where a turn happens to be steepest. Tar has a funny way of heating up, making even going in straight lines difficult. Steel girders, when wet, are basically anti-traction devices. Riding a motorcycle can definitely be dangerous, but it's also equally fantastic. In my opinion, it's the best way to see Japan.

In a book called *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*, the author philosophizes quite frequently on the presence of moment. Motorcycle riding illustrates this better than anything else I can think of. You slip into a state where you don't think about things that are going to happen, or things that have happened. The motorcycle becomes an extension of your body and reactions become instinctual and subconscious. All that matters is the moment occurring right now. It's relaxing and enlightening.

When riding for fun, the destination isn't important. On a motorcycle, it's all about the experience of the ride. From the gorgeous scenery of the Shikoku countryside, and the smell of the air in Shizuoka's terraced tea fields, to the boom of Sakurajima erupting as we ride by, and yes, even that corn potage ice cream I had in Mie-ken—I'll miss everything Japan has to offer a biker like myself.

Nowadays, I can take turns much more aggressively. The pegs on my bike have produced more than a few sparks. Every Golden Week we choose a region to explore, and since last year was spent in Kyushuu, the location of this year's Golden Week ride has already been decided: Hokkaido. I can't wait!

Johnathan Perkins is a 3rd year ALT in Kagawa prefecture. He's a NW Indiana/Chicagoland native who can't wait for another Bulls season with D.Rose back in action. If you have any questions about riding a motorcycle in Japan, or if you know of good shipping method for sending vehicles overseas, contact him at perkin8tor@gmail.com.



VOLUNTEERING

EDITORIAL

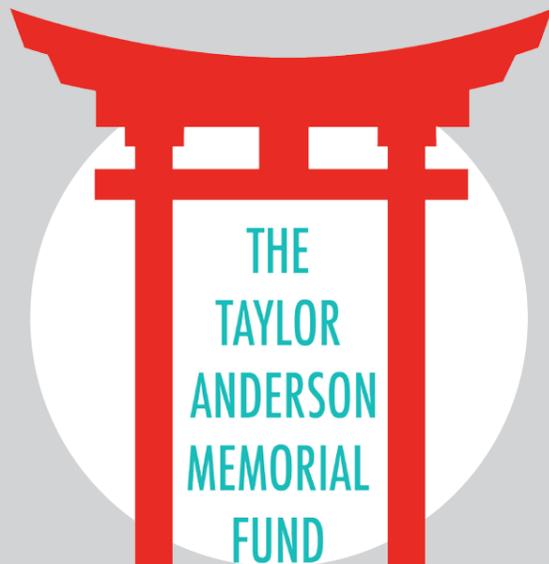
Launched in honor of a JET Program participant lost on 3.11, the Taylor Anderson Memorial Fund supports programs for students in communities still recovering from the disasters.

Join the JET community in supporting Tohoku students. Give any time, BUT your donation is doubled if you give in the 24 hour period that starts when the clock strikes midnight

in Japan on March 11, 2014. We'll match every yen, dollar, euro, or anything else donated. (For more info on the match: www.globalgiving.org/leaderboards/japan-matching-2014)

Remember: any donations JETs make count for the Race to the Top Challenge!

**JETs Rally for Tohoku
DOUBLE Your Donation by giving on 3/11**



THIS MONTH IN VOLUNTEERING...

The volunteering section this month focuses on JETs who wanted to be involved in their community and international communities. First, we have Zac Whitney, a CIR from Ishikawa who joined a *seinedan* when he came to Japan. A *seinedan* is a youth group and while Zac has been in it he has been able to learn about Japanese culture and help support his city's ultra marathon.

Next, we have the man, the myth, the legend Adam Carter. Adam Carter is a first-year JET from Kagoshima, whose philanthropy started during his travels after University. Adam uses micro-philanthropy to fund multiple projects with small amounts of money. From Chicago to West Africa, Adam Carter has been able to positively impact communities.

In the Spotlight we have Heather Dingley-McDonough from Shimane, who spent two winter breaks in Andhra Pradesh, India to help build homes for local villagers. Check out their stories.



SPOTLIGHT

Heather "Let's Build Houses in India!" Dingley-McDonough

You're sitting on someone's bed in a tiny, two-room house without any chairs. Through the open doorway, the sun sets behind palm trees, dirt roads and fields. Carried by the warm night air are the sounds of chicken and water buffalo, meal preparations, children's laughter. Your work clothes are spotted with the remains of an afternoon spent laying concrete walls and pouring cement for a roof. Now, after piggybacks and games with children, you're sipping another cup of hot chai in a villager's house. Adults and children cluster around, wanting you to share their food and comforts, wanting you to feel at home.

My last two winter breaks were spent making memories like these among Dalit people in Andhra Pradesh, India. Born into the lowest level of the Hindu caste system, Dalits—traditionally called "Untouchables"—often lack basic necessities such as food, shelter and education. Volunteering with the Association of Relief Volunteers (ARV), an Indian NGO, I helped build simple homes for Dalit villagers. ARV supports Dalit housing, nutrition and education, and throughout the year organizes small work trips focused on house-building. But the encouragement volunteers provide, and the friendship they receive, cannot be measured in bricks or cement. It may be unoriginal to say that

these trips are life-changing, but it is true.

If you'd like to learn more, please visit ARV's website (<http://reliefvolunteers.org/>) or contact me at hmcdonough77@gmail.com. I'm in touch with the head of ARV, and any information I can't provide I'll obtain from him.



VOLUNTEERING AND SOCIALIZING WITH SEINENDAN

Zac Whitney, Ishikawa

Before coming to Japan on JET, one of my biggest concerns was how to engage with the local community. I struggled with this during my study abroad experience and was keen not to repeat the mistake this time around. So, when I first arrived at my placement, I was eager to engage in whatever activities I could. By far the best way I've found is my local *seinendan* (青年団), a group I joined after a chance invitation from my visiting predecessor.

Seinendan literally translates as "youth group," and its roots trace back to the Muromachi period, when it served to support young men and women in the transition to adulthood. Back then, group members would assist in a wide variety of local tasks, from road and bridge maintenance to policing. However, most modern *seinendans*—as well as the national organization they all belong to—were founded shortly after World War II, and are primarily involved in volunteering, community building, and social events. Group designation seems to vary from place to place, but in my city, each part of town has its own *seinendan*, and occasionally the various groups cooperate for city-level events.

My particular *seinendan* gets together for events about once a month, and the event that especially stands out in my memory is the time we volunteered for my city's annual ultramarathon. About five or six of us gathered before dawn to set up and operate an aid tent for the runners as they passed through our neighborhood. When the runners jogged by, we'd shout words of encouragement and hand them some combination of energy drinks, water, granola bars and bananas.

As the last group of runners passed us, it became clear that we had a great deal of excess supplies, including almost an entire box of bananas. So, to ensure that the bananas didn't go to waste, those of us volunteering started playing rock-paper-scissors and forcing the loser to eat an increasingly large number of bananas. Of course, with my luck, I kept losing, and wound up having to eat six all at once. Even with the banana overdose, it was a lot of fun, and I felt like I got to know some of the other members fairly well.

Apart from volunteering at the ultramarathon, the group conducts a trash pickup, and volunteers at the neighborhood *bunkasai* and other festivals. The *seinendan* also participates in a lot of community building events, like a workshop in local-style pottery and various competitions between the city's *seinendans*. By far the most significant of these is the Ekiden: a relay race around the city that each group starts preparing for months in advance. I participated last year, and seeing the whole town turn out to cheer on the runners really made me feel my city's strength of community.

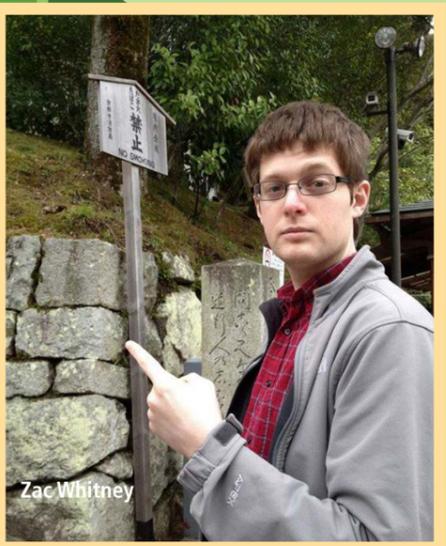
Through the *seinendan*, I've made a lot of friends and have also gotten to know the community. About half of municipalities in Japan have them; so if there's one near you, definitely check it out!

Zac Whitney is a second-year CIR in Suzu-shi, Ishikawa-ken. When he's not with the seinendan, he is contemplating Suzu's majestic salt fields, lighthouse, or battleship-shaped rock. He likes to run, read, and play the occasional video game.

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All of us who ran in or helped out with the ekiden celebrating afterwards



Zac Whitney

Children from community center in Rio Adam helped



CAUSE AND EFFECT

Shane Allen, Kagoshima



When Adam Carter arrived in Japan to start the JET Program in August 2013, he reached out to a variety of organizations that were helping the victims of the Tohoku earthquake in order to assess what forms of aid

Making such a strategic, yet fluid move to help out in Fukushima is nothing new to Adam. To get to this point in his life, he has developed a network across the world. Travel would become the catalyst towards his philanthropic mindset.

Starting his journey

Adam's philanthropic aims began with a desire to see the world. After graduating from the University of Michigan with a degree in Cultural Anthropology, he embarked on the first of many travels. "I wanted to see my World Cultures textbooks come to life, so I bought a one-way ticket to China," said Adam.

were being delivered. He was directed to a project called The Save Minamisoma Project (SMP), founded by a New Zealander businessman living in Japan. Every two weeks since March of 2011, SMP has been shipping truckloads of food and supplies (much of it donated) to the evacuees in and around Minamisoma. Adam jumped to action, wiring funds and flying up to Fukushima to oversee the delivery himself. With \$850, Adam, along with the non-profit Cause & Affect, financed the delivery of more than 3,000 pounds of food and supplies. As a result, more than 800 people living in 355 households throughout six permanent shelter communities received water, vegetables, soup, and more.

While pleased to have been able to lend a helping hand, Adam points out the sad reality:

"It is mind-blowing to realize that there are upwards of 290,000 people still living in evacuation shelters or temporary shelters in these communities. I spoke to some families that have been shuttled from one community to another. They just want some stability in their lives. Many have lost faith in the Japanese government and most doubt they will ever be allowed to return. Entire communities have been torn apart, as the shelters have thrown random people together. While it is obvious they have managed to help each other out, it is clear that they yearn to go back home."

Living on a tight budget, Adam found himself sleeping in ratty hotels, hitchhiking across difficult terrains, and even living in shanty-towns and in indigenous villages. Through this immersive style of traveling, Adam broke through the tourist/local social barrier and developed meaningful friendships in the process. The dichotomy between the freedom he experienced in life, and the hardship experienced by those he encountered inspired him to make a difference.

"I developed a compassion for my new friends; I empathized with their impoverished conditions, and felt compelled to help. It was this growing awareness of the real world and compassion for these people I met, whom by fate were born into dramatically different circumstances than myself, to which I felt an overwhelming feeling that I could actually be of help. When I was sent to Colombia in 2000 on a fact-finding mission for UNHCR during that country's brutal civil war, I got to know some of the refugees and recognized the same faces of suffering that

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Mayan community in Guatemala where Cause & Affect built latrines.



Volunteers and locals assisting in delivering goods in Fukushima



Assisting project for deaf children in slums of Calcutta, India

I had encountered around the world."

Working in association with locally-run NGOs (non-governmental organizations), Adam realized that in order to affect positive change, he had to find a way to help fund some of these programs in the towns that were overflowing with terrified villagers who had fled the violence in the countryside.

"I met a dynamic Colombian social worker who told me that with relatively few American dollars, she could create a program for pregnant mothers that would allow them to develop an income-generating skill, monitor their maternal health and educate them about hygiene and babies' health issues."

Adam thought that sounded incredible. The only problem was that he had been sent on a "fact-finding mission," without proper funding or the ability to provide the help these people needed. Vowing to find a personal approach to economic development, this experience launched Adam into the world of micro-philanthropy.

Micro-philanthropy

Micro-philanthropy differs from conventional philanthropy in two major respects. First, an emphasis on investing small amounts of cash in specific projects; instead of financing a \$2 million hospital wing, Adam may provide \$1,000 to purchase urgently-needed medical supplies for an under-equipped private rural health clinic in the developing world. Second, an emphasis on efficiency; because donations are small, every dollar must flow back to the project, with a minimum of administrative or other extraneous costs. Working with local partners who have developed the most effective means of bringing about positive change, Adam oversees every dollar spent with the same sense of thrift that he learned traveling on a tight budget.

For Adam, finding a cause and affecting a change is micro-philanthropy in action. On a five-month trip through seven countries of West Africa, Adam was able to assist twelve

projects, addressing issues such as environmental degradation, over-population, under-equipped schools, youth empowerment programs and private health clinics. He found himself personally affecting the lives within various communities working with local partners.

Before visiting a country, he does background research on the most pressing issues. From there, he looks for dependable partners, using contacts and experience in international development to seek out the most responsible way to help.

"Working with highly-accredited local partners is often the most crucial step for those looking to engage in micro-philanthropy on a personal level. This is what I tell school kids, religious groups, social action committees and college students: everyone can make a difference!"

While working in each community, Adam keeps the experience visual for everyone involved.

"The focus is always on delivering the funds in the most direct manner possible and then using photos, e-mail, social networking and videos to report back to my donors, so they can share the satisfaction of seeing their money in action, making a profound difference in peoples' lives."

Adam used to hold fundraisers in Chicago, ranging from fancy galas, to tours of Wrigley Field, but these days he relies on online donations that come in after he sends out his field reports via e-mail and blog.

Everyone can make a difference

With the knowledge he gained throughout his life, Adam believes everyone can make a start in micro-philanthropy. With recent tracks through Fukushima, and people he meets in Japan, Adam tries to inspire everyone he meets to give back.

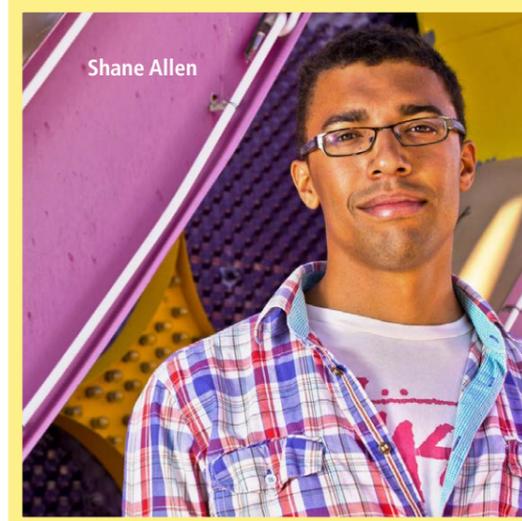
"I am thrilled to know that I don't need a personal fortune to do good works. Anyone can engage in micro-philanthropy, as long as they can raise the money, are committed to doing some background research and can promise to deliver the funds in a culturally-sensitive and efficient manner."

With this mindset, Adam encourages members of the JET community to challenge themselves. Beyond volunteering, he hopes JETs can raise money for issues important to them. In order to do so, he points out, they need to create a concise description of the project they are assisting, complete with web-links and photos. They can then contact the organization and ask what their immediate needs are. Once they can provide a detailed breakdown to potential donors of how their money will be spent, people will be more willing to assist.

"If I can tell people that \$50 will buy schoolbooks for 8 orphans, I will raise a lot more than if I merely say 'Please Give'. You would be surprised how many donations a well-composed and focused e-mail or letter to family and friends is capable of generating!"

From Chicago to Brazil to Japan and all points between, Adam has demonstrated how easy it is towards creating positive change. Adam knew the moment would come when he would be able to help Japan recover from disaster, and continues to look towards new horizons to come. Have you ever thought about volunteering in your own communities, or within the world?

Shane Allen



Shane Allen is a first year ALT, flying in from the neon-lit Las Vegas, Nevada (USA) to the countryside town of Higashikushira-cho, Kagoshima. He can be found eating *okonomiyaki*, brainstorming ideas for class, strategizing communication pieces for the Kagoshima AJET chapter, bouncing between social media channels, designing for his creative brand CarmelloVision (<http://carmellovision.tumblr.com/>) while getting absorbed in Japan's dynamic culture. What can we design together? Connect with CarmelloVision today!

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THE WORLD IS FULL OF PROBLEMS.
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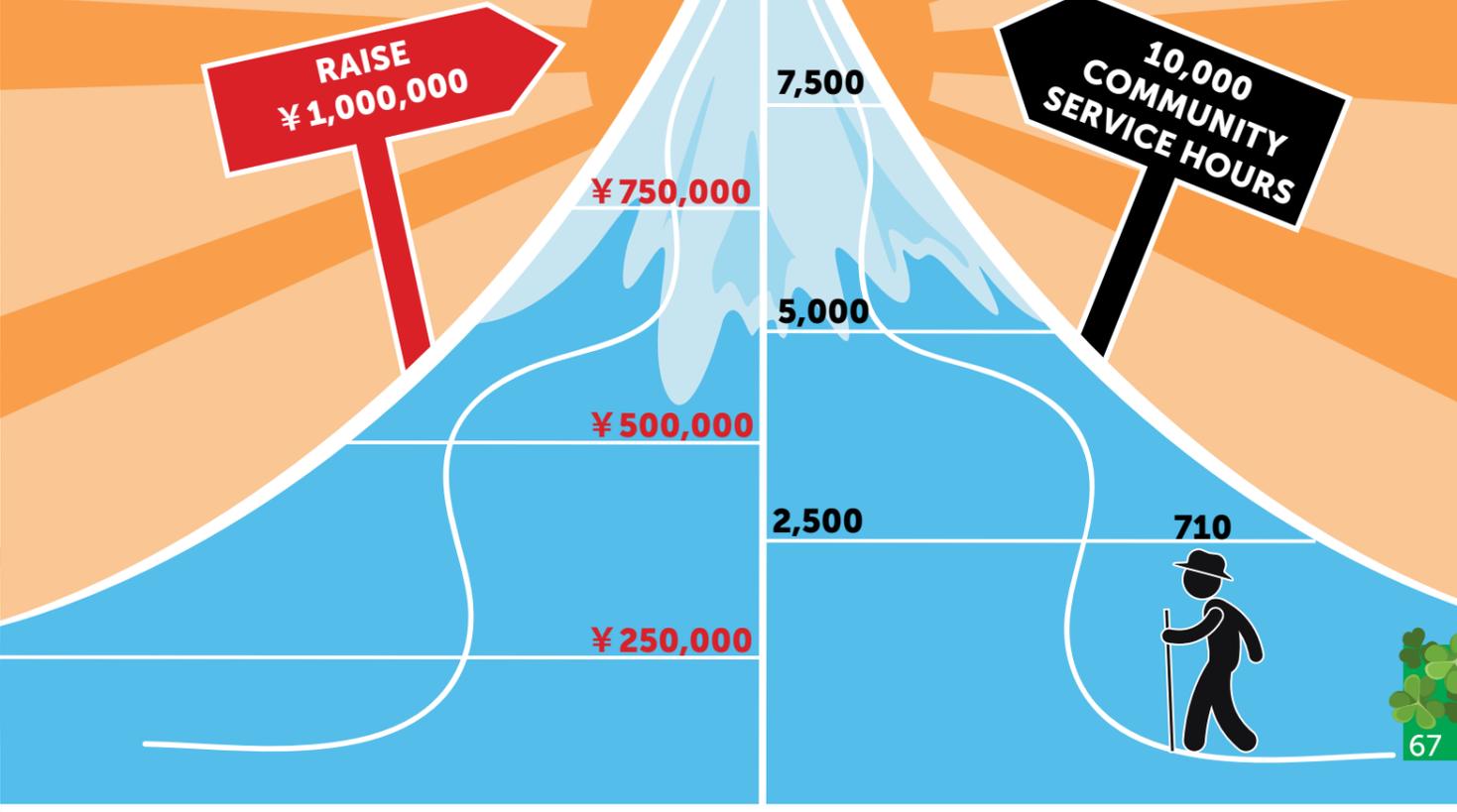
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Go where there is no path and leave a JET trail. Let's make a difference!



The JET Community Service Tracker and the Race to the Top Challenge!



AJET wants to help you help others! Be the #1 prefecture in one of these categories and win ¥ 30,000 to help fund your next AJET Prefectural Community event/project!

Top 3 Prefectures: Charity Money Raised*

1. Saga - ¥ 400,000 (48 JETs)
2. Oita - ¥ 185,019 (80 JETs)
3. Niigata - ¥ 227,800 (102 JETs)

Top 3 Prefectures: Community Service Hours*

1. Saga - 294 hours (48 JETs)
2. Yamagata - 241 hours (81 JETs)
3. Tokushima - 129 hours (82 JETs)

*Charity Money raised and Community Service Hours are recorded by using this form [HERE](#). Did you recently hold a charity event or volunteer for any organization? Then fill out this form! Let's show how much impact JETs are making. Get involved!

CONNECT
 March Issue 2014

EVENTS

GUEST EDITORIAL

Why the Okinawa Marathon is the One to Run

Michelle Martinie, Saitama



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I think the Japanified loan word マラソン (*marason*) sounds more like a city in Wisconsin, one of my home states, and less like a sports event. Still, I run them. I run marathons. I ran one last Sunday. It's one I've run before, and I want to tell you about it because if you're ever going to put one foot in front of the other for an extended period of time, you ought to do it while you're in Japan, and do it in Okinawa.

Unlike the others I've run here and elsewhere, the Okinawa Marathon is less a test of endurance, and more like a magical *matsuri* for participants and spectators. At all marathons, people come out to volunteer at water stations and cheer on participants—a very special gesture, and if you've ever done so before, I thank you. This particular "matsuri-thon" was lined with people, cheering and giving out traditional Okinawan food. Spectators made large batches of rice balls, black sugar, and pickled plums to give out to complete strangers, and the kindness and cheering continued the whole route. There were school bands and *taiko* drummers performing and dancers dressed as mythical Okinawan *Shisa* lion-dogs.

A notable point on this race course is that at around 30 kilometers it enters Kadena Air Force Base. Along the route, up until runners reach the base, the cheers are uplifting. As soon as I arrived at this point, the cheering for all the runners was overwhelming. The cheers of "*ganbare!*" escalated from happy to fever-pitched, and despite having just run 30 kilometers, I found myself doing leaping high-fives with shockingly tall people who had signs that said things like, "Your perspiration is my inspiration!"

Earlier, I mentioned this marathon was like a parade for spectators too, and not just because runners were moving past them. Okinawa marathoners have been doing this for 22 years, so many runners have participated before and already know everything Okinawans do to make us feel loved. Some reciprocate by having the wildest array of costumes I've ever seen in any marathon. I saw all sorts of characters, from Spider-Man to Mount Fuji. There is a man who runs as Ultraman every year, and I ended up in his vicinity not because he's as slow as I am, but because he stops to take pictures with children, then he speeds past me again. He did it five times during my first race. He doesn't care about his time; he just wants to make people happy and get exercise. I never saw him take off the neoprene mask that covers his whole head.

The marathon course went from the east coast of the island, to the west coast, and returned back in a big circle. When runners crossed the finish line, there were many vendors selling *matsuri* food, and as is almost expected in Japan, everyone was having a picnic and a good time. This is the time of our lives. Go see it next year! Better yet, run it! You can start training now.

Unique events happen all over Japan. Which ones have you been to recently? Tell us at connect.events@ajet.net.

THIS MONTH IN EVENTS...

Happy March, *minna-san*! Spring is nearly here, and I think most of us are ready to say *sayonara* to winter...or maybe that's just me. This section's Spotlight shines on *hanami*, that most sacred of spring activities, and where the most famous locations are to enjoy it. I turn over the Events section's editorial space to fellow Saitama ALT and avid runner Michelle Martinie. She has run several other races while on JET and just ran the Okinawa Marathon for the second time. Read her write-up on her latest race, and you may contemplate putting on those dusty trainers.

Elsewhere in the Events pages, David Claridge, the Social Coordinator for Hokkaido AJET, profiles February's annual HAJET Snow Tour. The Snow Tour is a great way to meet JETs in Hokkaido and from all over Japan, and the event covers some beautiful and very fun territory. Sabrina Zirakzadeh tells us about Okayama's legendary Naked Men Festival, and the role Okayama AJET has in this large community event. If you've never heard of this massive *matsuri*, or even if you have and want to know more about it, flip through the pages and get enlightened.

The events calendar is here to keep you company, just as it does every Connect issue. If you want to show some love for a great community event or tell the Greater JET World about what your local AJET chapter is doing, write to connect.events@ajet.net.



SPOTLIGHT

Top-Rated Hanami Events

March ushers in one of Japan's most hallowed natural and social occasions: *hanami*. Though the Okinawa and the Ryukyu islands saw its first sakura blooms in January and February, residents of Kyushu, Shikoku, and central Honshu follow the Japan Meteorological Agency's cherry blossom front (*桜前線*, *sakura zensen*) in March. Following a specific mathematical equation and observations from designated sample trees all over the archipelago, scientists predict an area's day of opening—when at least five or six blooms have opened on that area's sample tree—and the day of full bloom, when at least 80% of the blooms are open on said sample tree¹. The website www.otenki.jp was first to publish **2014's sakura zensen**, though it is prudent to note that early predictions are not always on target.

If you are keen to travel someplace new to see some of Japan's best hanami, the popular website [japan-guide.com](http://www.japan-guide.com) has a fairly comprehensive review of each region's best locations². Here are the best-rated spots:

- Shinjuku Gyoen, Tokyo
- The Philosopher's Path, Kyoto
- Kema Sakuranomiya Park, Osaka
- Yoshinoyama, Nara
- Himeji Castle, Hyogo
- Hanamiyama Park, Fukushima
- Hirosaki Castle, Aomori

¹ <http://www.data.jma.go.jp/sakura/data/sakura2010.pdf>

² http://www.japan-guide.com/e/e2011_where.html

But if you don't have it in your budget to travel very far, there will surely be a hanami party in your neighborhood. Some prefectural AJET groups have their own hanami shindig, so if yours doesn't, consider starting one! Or check out this month's Travel section for some lesser-known, but equally great spots.

Tell us how you celebrate and send us some photos of hanami in your neck of the woods at connect.events@ajet.net.



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Sabrina Zirakzadeh, Okayama

GETTING NAKED IN SAIDAIJI: OKAYAMA AJET TAKES ON THE EYO HADAKA MATSURI

February 14th saw the town of Saidaiji and its iconic temple in Okayama Prefecture blanketed in snow for the first time in twenty years. On the night of February 15th, the temple was again covered, but this time with thousands of mostly nude men fighting over a tiny stick stuck in what remained of the snow.

The snowfall was unusual but the legions of naked men are a yearly tradition at Saidaiji Temple, home of the original Naked Man Festival, or *Eyo Hadaka Matsuri*, and one of Okayama's most famous events. Every February, up to 9,000 men from around Japan make their way to the temple, divest themselves of their clothing in favor of *fundoshi*, and proceed to run through the streets near the temple, through the nearby river, and finally cram themselves into the central temple building for the main event. Ostensibly, this is done for a chance to obtain the sticks thrown out into the mass of men, which are said to bring luck to the bearer for the rest of the year, and a cash prize as well.

It's a lot of work for just a bit of luck, especially with the attendant risks. The temple is very clear on the fact that participants in the Naked Man Festival run the risk of hypothermia, frostbite, shock, black eyes, broken bones, concussions, and other potentially serious injuries, and only those who are healthy, prepared, and able to follow the safety instructions should take part in the festival. Yet despite the chance of injury, the cold, and the less-than-dignified near nudity, thousands of men continue to show up at Saidaiji Temple every year in hopes of securing the elusive lucky stick.

For spectators, one of the highlights of the festival is watching the groups of foreign men join the fray, including the group organized by Okayama AJET each year. With so much danger and discomfort obvious from the outset, why would anyone want to participate in the Naked Man Festival, particularly when dealing with the addition of amped-up stares and scrutiny as a foreign participant?

"[It's] one of the most Japanese things you can do [in Japan],"

explained Andrew Foley, a first-time participant from Kobe. He added that for most festivals and events in Japan, we are only able to observe, while Naked Man is a chance to actively participate in a part of Japanese culture. "You do it to say that you did."

Both first-time and veteran runners agree. Most of the AJET group seems less concerned about getting their hands on the lucky stick than with simply enjoying an experience that they cannot possibly get anywhere else. There is nothing like the Naked Man Festival outside of Japan, and while there are other events within the country, the Saidaiji festival is by far the largest and most famous. Due to its notorious popularity, many JETs from around Japan reach out for information to the Okayama AJET committee well in advance of the festival dates' announcement.

The Saidaiji event is also one of the more dangerous AJET excursions, which may add to the thrill. Groups of hardened Japanese competitors often combine efforts and gang up on stick-holders to win the stick, and foreign runners are advised to give up on the prize and preserve their safety instead. However, veterans and the more competitive of the AJET runners see it as a chance for expats to hold their own and really shine if they are able to get the coveted stick for themselves. Even so, Okayama AJET prides itself on having trained, informed, and led its groups into the mêlée without any serious injuries in well over a decade.

Every year about three months before the event, Okayama AJET begins advertising for spectators and runners via Facebook, email and word of mouth, so that any interested expats and friends from around the country can join in the naked fun times. For spectators, the committee purchases tickets—for both the inexpensive standing general admission area and the more exclusive and expensive seated tiers—provides buses to the event, and helps out-of-prefecture visitors to find places to stay and things to do while visiting the Sunny Country. For runners, the process is a bit more complicated. The participant groups have to be registered in advance, complete with leaders and assistants to

help the runners stay safe; changing facilities or tents must be booked; and information about safety, protocol, and purchasing the *fundoshi* and special *tabi* socks must be provided to each runner.

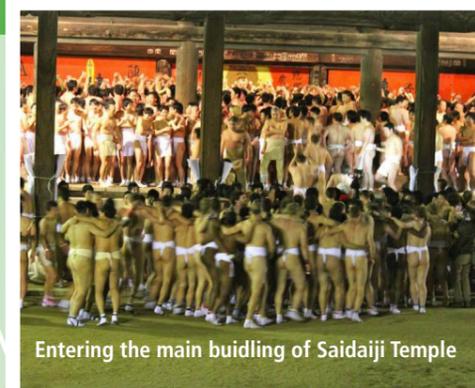
The 2014 group, named Team Rufio, was comprised of mostly non-local participants, including mini-groups from Tokushima and Hyogo prefectures, so pre-festival preparation as a group was impossible. Information such as the running route, traditions undertaken before arriving in the temple, and safety briefings were given out via email and the official event page, as well as on the bus into Saidaiji.

Nathaniel Berne, as leader of Team Rufio, was in charge of distributing route, safety, and protocol information; giving advice on pre-event preparation; psyching up the group; advising and assisting new runners; and leading the group on their frozen naked journey around the temple. As the festival is held on religious grounds, and because of the high possibility of injury, there is no shortage of rules or advice to give out. Everything from how to handle tattoos, piercings, and glasses (respectively: banned, and to be left behind to avoid snagging and broken glass); how to deal with *fundoshi* (strap in tight for both protection and modesty, and be prepared to avoid bathrooms once girded); and tips for getting through the freezing run and temple crush with minimal discomfort (stubble reduces cheek-to-cheek friction, loose hair will be grabbed, and snacking on high-carb foods before running is encouraged). Some runners did training such as leg lifts, increased daily running, and mock-sumo sessions to prepare before the event; however, most came into the event with no prior training done and were still able to make their way through the naked chaos with no more difficulty than anyone else.

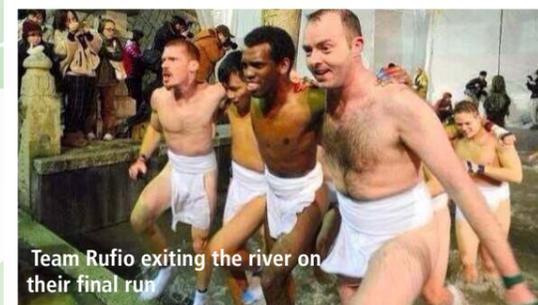
Once Team Rufio was undressed and ready, the group of gaijin began their run. Once the group is inspected, they make their way through the main gate, run through the waters of the 'Stiffness To-jo,' climb the steps of the main hall, ring the temple



A highlight of the festival for Japanese and foreign people alike



Entering the main building of Saidaiji Temple



Team Rufio exiting the river on their final run



Team Rufio preparing to ring the lucky bell

bell for luck, and then loop back to the main gate. The groups repeated this route at least three times, all while thousands of observers cheered and temple workers splashed them with yet more water, before returning to their changing tents for a last warm-up before the main event from 9:00-10:00pm. Despite the below-freezing temperatures, the scandalized squeals at the *fundoshi*-clad foreigners, and the press of the crowds, "there was a great atmosphere" and according to Foley, Team Rufio thrived on it. The team even held their own against organized groups of veteran Naked Man men during the main event. A 14-year-old junior high student from Saidaiji was the victor for the 2014 festival but Berne held the stick briefly before it was snatched away again, and that's more success than even most lifetime Naked Man aficionados can claim.

All that remains now of Team Rufio are grainy cell phone videos and photos of foreign buttocks and not-quite-nude, cheering men running in the night. The energy and unique flavor they brought to the infamous Naked Man Festival and the riverside town of Saidaiji is a memory both the runners and the spectators will continue to enjoy. We can only hope that next year's team of runners lives up to their success, and have just as much of a good time when next February rolls around!

Sabrina Zirakzadeh is a second-year JET and current Okayama AJET travel coordinator living two stations from Saidaiji in rural Okayama. When she isn't filling up on delicious festival foods around the Sunny Country, she enjoys singing, traditional Japanese folktales, and checking out food alleys at other festivals around the rest of Japan and Asia. Follow her matsuri meanderings at www.twitter.com/jupiter_star or check out her website <http://www.jupiter-star.com/>

How does your local AJET chapter get involved with community events? Tell us about your events stories, whether with AJET, community-based, or otherwise at connect.events@ajet.net.

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REFLECTIONS OF THE HAJET 2014 SNOW TOUR

David Claridge, Hokkaido

Winter brings different images to mind. For people living above the equator, it is usually associated with snow. People below the equator and in tropical climates would think of a drop in temperature, and maybe some ice. For the JETs of Hokkaido, we are thrust into a harsh and bitter environment that seems neverending, where towns and cities disappear for almost five months, and your next step could have you on your ass. But it isn't all grim—winter can bring out all kinds of new things to see and do!

On February 5th, a contingent of JETs and a visitor from Korea gathered in Sapporo to take part in the annual Hokkaido AJET (HAJET) Snow Tour. Participants were free to do whatever they thought a “snow experience” included. Hokkaido had been preparing since December, dropping snow on us on an almost daily basis.

The trip coincided with the 65th Sapporo Snow Festival, attracting people from all over the world to see what is so intriguing about this snow-covered island. Every year, this city of two million people sees about that many tourists come through within the week of the Snow Festival. The festival takes place in the very busy 12-block area known as Odori Park. Whenever there is something going on in Sapporo, Odori Park is usually where the fun is.

The Snow Festival is more than just your regular Japanese festival. It has plenty of snow, ice, cold temperatures and people rugged up in multiple layers. But on the other hand, hot drinks—alcoholic and non-alcoholic—steaming Hokkaido dishes of scallops, crab, potato, corn, LAMB!, beef, pork, chicken, and all other kinds of body warming food are available. (Writing this is making me hungry!) Locals prepare for the event weeks in advance, carefully sculpting hundreds of ice and snow sculptures, even constructing a huge slope for competitors to board and ski down in front of hundreds of amazed onlookers. I even saw an ice skating rink and ice slides.

After being treated to a Hokkaido specialty *jingiskan* dinner of seemingly neverending lamb and vegetables on the grill, the Snow Tour group was taken up into the mountains to a popular inn right near the world-famous Niseko mountain. Niseko is a very popular tourist destination in winter. Because of its cold, dry climate it receives an unbelievable amount of powder snow—averaging a depth of 350cm by March—making for great skiing and snowboarding. The four main sides of the mountain are owned by different groups who work in conjunction, allowing people to conveniently try multiple slopes types.

The name Niseko actually comes from the Ainu language, meaning, “a cliff jutting over a riverbank deep in the mountains.” For a town of around 4,500 people, it gets 200,000 visitors annually. Dubbed as the Mt. Fuji of Hokkaido, the mountain was voted sixth among the world's top ten ski resorts in 2008. Because of its international popularity, it is home to many foreigners during winter. Therefore sometimes it doesn't feel like Japan, and rather like some magical, snow-covered, far away land. It was a shock to walk into a ski lodge that holds about 250 people to find



Niseko's world-famous powder



One of the snow festival's many incredible sculptures

that almost all of them were from everywhere other than Japan. Between skiing, snowboarding, snowmobiling, snow shoeing, exploring the onsens, and beer drinking, there was no shortage of winter activities. For people who were new to a sport or needed a refresher course, there were lessons available, as well as rentals for gear. Fortunately there were no serious accidents, and everybody was able to walk or limp away from the mountain at the end of our time in Niseko.

Travelling was also an option, as many explored the romantic nearby city of Otaru to see the preparation for the annual Snow Light Festival, where the old railroad is transformed into an amazing candlelit snow path. Locals and organisations make all kinds of snow-shaped objects and illuminate them with candles. In addition, the famous Otaru canal freezes over enough to sit candles in glass balls over it. Of course, there is also the famous Otaru beer, which is brewed in the German style beer hall next to the canal. The hall is open everyday from 11 AM and serves popular German cuisine and many kinds of traditional German beer.

In its heyday, Otaru was a thriving port city, but with a declining fish population, the trade slowly diminished and the city suffered. In recent years it has transformed itself into a tourist destination and has kept a large part of the canal system. Otaru continues its glass sculpting history by offering all kinds of items in shops, and even offering the chance for people to make their own glass souvenirs. Between that, the musicbox shops, cake and omiyage shops, the beer hall, and the sushi—which people come to Otaru specifically for—it is definitely worth a visit for anyone planning a trip to Hokkaido.

I'm from Australia, and this is my second winter based in Hokkaido. Every day I get to experience an environment I had only dreamed about before. Of course, gas and power bills climb, and some days I can't feel my extremities, but I wouldn't swap this placement for anywhere else. Being a part of the HAJET Snow Tour was an awesome experience, although I learned it's a good idea to curb my pride on a steep ski slope—or else I may fly through the air and faceplant in the snow—right next to a class of teenage boys.

After only a few days, the tour was over and people went their separate ways. The great thing about the event is how it always brings people together from all over Japan. There was a strong Okinawan presence, as well as JETs from Saitama, Miyagi, Ehime, and Kagawa, to name a few. The Snow Tour is a great opportunity to meet people who are from other places in this amazing country and to showcase how we do things “Hokkaido-style.”

I would like to thank the people who came on the tour who made it as enjoyable as it was, and AJET for helping to advertise. Hokkaido's AJET is a little distant and we often forget about the many more JETs southwest of us.

For those that are interested in joining next year's Snow Tour, I recommend keeping an eye on the **HAJET website** [[**please hyperlink: www.hajet.org**] in the upcoming months and to book as soon as it is posted to avoid missing out. Or, at least make sure to visit Hokkaido in February at least once in your time on JET. If you have any questions about the tour or Hokkaido in general, you can email me or the next HAJET Social Coordinator at social.coordinator@hajet.org.

David Claridge is a second-year ALT in Otaru City, Hokkaido. Between aikido, taste testing the local brew, and visiting the many junior high schools in the city—not at the same time, of course—he is feverishly hacking away at the keyboard writing another potential masterpiece. From the small, mysterious island of Tasmania, Australia, he is a rare entity up in that harsh winter landscape.

Connect wants to hear about and promote your local AJET chapter's events, too! If you are interested in reporting on or photographing them, send us a line at connect.events@ajet.net.



A Snow Tour group photo by Marjolaine Janvier-Houde



Aside from massive snow sculptures, the city also fills with smaller icy ones like this



EVENTS CALENDAR MARCH



Let us know about what's up in your block for next month! Your area's event could appear on the next Event Calendar and be promoted by AJET at ajet.net/events!

Send them to connect.events@ajet.net.



*The block colours are coordinated to the map.

BLOCK 1

Shiawase Wine Party

Mar. 14
Shiwa, Iwate

The local Jien Jijou winery, which uses grapes grown only in Iwate, is throwing a "happiness" wine party with limited-edition 900-ml bottles of dry and sweet red wine. Adv. tickets are 3,500 yen.

http://jienjijouwine-shiwa.blogspot.jp/2014/02/blog-post_21.html

BLOCK 2

Shiogama Hote Festival

March 10th
Shiogama, Miyagi

The town's oldest festival is one of lively, colorful parades and rituals at Shiogama Jinja, praying for fire protection and economic prosperity.

<http://kankoubussan.shiogama.miyagi.jp/english/festival/index.html>

Aizu Higan Jishi

March 18th-21st
Aizu, Fukushima

One of Japan's more adorable events during which three children dress up in traditional tiger costumes and dance the *higan jishi*, announcing that Spring has come, and pray for the people of Aizu.

http://www.town.bandai.fukushima.jp/kanko/event/akaeda_higanjisi.htm

BLOCK 3

Shokutosake Tohoku Festival

March 21st-22nd
Tsukuba, Ibaraki

Tsukuba University students are hosting this special festival, featuring food and drink produced only in the Tohoku region.

<http://shokutosake.wix.com/tohokumatsuri>

BLOCK 4

Mt. Takao Fire Walking

March 9th
Hachioji, Tokyo

If walking on fire is on your bucket list, this is a great opportunity to do so in a safe environment at Yakuo Temple's Kita Hall, surrounded by beautiful scenery at the foot of one of the most hiked mountains in the world.

<http://www.takaosan.or.jp/english/events.html>

7th African Festival Yokohama

April 4th-6th
Minato Mirai, Yokohama

This event brings together many colorful cultures in one of Yokohama's landmark buildings. Attractions include drum and dance shows, lectures, photography exhibitions, a fashion show, an African games corner, a musical instrument workshop, and—of course—African food and drink.

<http://africanfestyokohama.com/>

BLOCK 5

Railway Festival 2014

March 22nd-23rd
Nagoya, Aichi

Trainspotters, rejoice! This event has something for every train enthusiast, from rare model trains, professional photographs, flea markets, and even retired government-issue trains.

<http://bit.ly/1eto3eh>

Gifu & Dosan Matsuris

April 5th-6th
Gifu, Gifu

These two festivals together are the one of the biggest events of the year in Gifu City. Beginning with a memorial for the daimyo Dosan, a weekend of parades and markets is capped by a fireworks show.

http://www.gifucvb.or.jp/en/02_event/02_01.html

Kanamara Matsuri

April 7th
Kawasaki, Kanagawa

One of Japan's very few—but very hyped—"penis festivals" draws large crowds to a local shrine. There are plenty of funky, phallic goods to be purchased, the proceeds of which go to HIV/AIDS research funds.

<http://www.travelkawasaki.com/kanamara/>



BLOCK 6

Higashiyama Hanatouro
March 14th-23rd
Kyoto, Kyoto

While not a singular event, *hanatouro* is one of the liveliest times to travel in Kyoto. In the Higashiyama district, 2,500 lanterns are installed at shrines, temples, cafés, and shops—most of which observe extended hours.

<http://www.hanatouro.jp/e/higashiyama/index.html>

Sagicho Matsuri
March 15th-16th
Omihachiman, Shiga

This matsuri features one of Japan's more unique parades: residents from each of the city's districts prepare a float made mainly from foods in order to battle each other in a *kenka*, and afterwards the floats are individually burned as an offering for a spring bounty.

<http://bit.ly/1bbRs1H>

BLOCK 7

Iga Ueno Ninja Festa
April 5th-May 6th
Iga, Mie

This month-long event celebrating the area's historical homegrown ninja spies is one of Mie's crown jewels. Tens of thousands of people come for everything ninja: competitions, cosplay, museums, and more. Bonus: passengers dressed as ninjas ride on Iga train lines for free!

http://www.kankomie.or.jp/event/detail_5179.html

2014 March Grand Sumo Tournament
March 9th-23rd
Osaka, Osaka

Sumo, Japan's national sport and the most Shinto sport of all, comes to Body Maker Colosseum in Osaka. Buy tickets at <http://www.sumo.or.jp/en/index>.

BLOCK 9

Kiyomori Festival
March 23rd
Miyajima, Hiroshima

This youthful event celebrates the life of Kiyomori Taira, a soldier-dictator who set the Miyajima community on its path to prosperity almost a millennium ago.

http://www.miyajima.or.jp/english/event/event_kiyomori.html

Matsue Musha Gyoretsu
April 5th
Matsue, Shimane

Also known as the Warrior Parade, this event celebrates the city's founding. Participants don period costumes and show off their *taiko*, dance, and armory skills.

<http://www.kankou-matsue.jp/>

BLOCK 10
100th Beppu Hatto Hot Spring Festival

April 1st-6th
Beppu, Oita

April 1st is the local "Onsen Thanksgiving Day" holiday, and to celebrate hot spring facilities are open to the public for free. Smaller festivals pop up around the city, with an abundance of live music.

<http://www.beppu-navi.jp/onsenmatsuri/index.html>

Nagasaki Hata-age Kite Festival
April 6th
Nagasaki, Nagasaki

This centuries-old event helps welcome spring to the Nagasaki and Nishisonogi peninsulas. Hundreds of kites convene in Tohakkei Park to fly for fun, while some engage in various competitions.

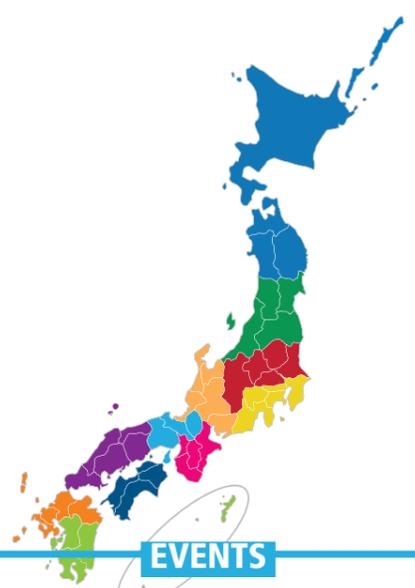
<http://bridgemedi.jp/nagasaki/en/oyakudati/event21.html>

BLOCK 11
Okinawa International Movie Festival

March 20th-24th
Ginowan, Okinawa

The 6th OIMF is being shortened this year from eight days to five, but is keeping the same theme as previous years: "Laugh & Peace." *Laugh* films are comedies from around the world, and the *Peace* category accepts dramas and documentaries.

<http://oimf.jp/>



EVENTS

CONNECT
March Issue 2014

EVENTS



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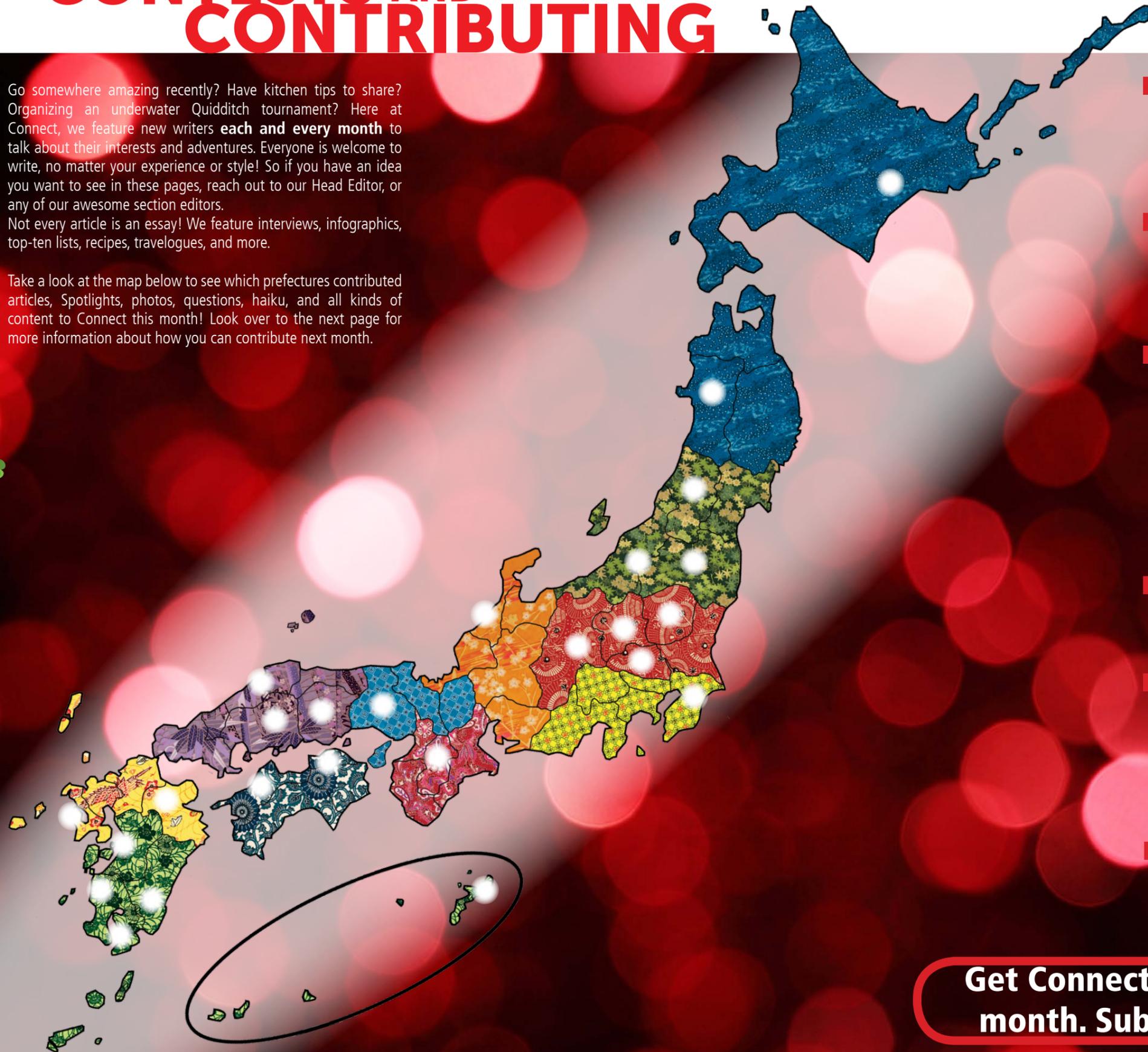
CONNECT

CONTESTS AND CONTRIBUTING

Go somewhere amazing recently? Have kitchen tips to share? Organizing an underwater Quidditch tournament? Here at Connect, we feature new writers **each and every month** to talk about their interests and adventures. Everyone is welcome to write, no matter your experience or style! So if you have an idea you want to see in these pages, reach out to our Head Editor, or any of our awesome section editors.

Not every article is an essay! We feature interviews, infographics, top-ten lists, recipes, travelogues, and more.

Take a look at the map below to see which prefectures contributed articles, Spotlights, photos, questions, haiku, and all kinds of content to Connect this month! Look over to the next page for more information about how you can contribute next month.



SPOTLIGHT

Every month, we highlight a handful of our readers who are doing something interesting or praiseworthy, nominated by their community. From fashionistas to volunteering superheroes to master chefs, we want to talk about them and what they do! Can't pick just one person to Spotlight? Tell us about a group, a town, or an event! As long as our incredible readers are involved, we want to share it!

ASK/CONNECT

Make your voice heard! Do you have a question about workplace etiquette? Did you go to an event we highlighted? Want to comment on last month's articles or editorials? Just feeling the overwhelming need to tell our editors how much you love and appreciate them? Each month we'll print your questions, comments, and witty observations so you can get Connected with us!

COVER PHOTO CONTEST

Get the perfect shot of the perfect moment here in Japan? Your photo could be next month's cover of Connect magazine! Every month we'll collect your photos select our favorite for the cover! Email all photo submissions with your **name and prefecture** to contest@ajet.net.

Photos should be a minimum of 1280 x 720 resolution, portrait-oriented, and belong to you. If they identifiably feature other people, you should have their permission to print the photo. Submit as many photos as you like! If your photo isn't featured, feel free to submit it again next month! Photos are used with permission, and all rights are retained by their owners.

HAIKU CONTEST

Each month Connect will feature haiku from our readers. Haiku are simple, clean, and can be about anything you like! If you're an aspiring wordsmith with the soul of Basho, send all of your haiku along with your name and prefecture to contest@ajet.net.

COMICS

Easily our most-requested feature from last year, Connect now features comics and other art from the community. Comics should be relevant to life in Japan, and may not contain offensive material. Please email all submissions to connect.editor@ajet.net along with your name, prefecture, and 1-2 sentences about yourself or your work. Single-panel or multi-panel comics are totally fine, just ensure that they are legible and do not contain tons of tiny text. For a good example of size and content, check out our featured comic, "Life After the BOE" by David Namisato.

CONNECT CONTRIBUTORS GROUP

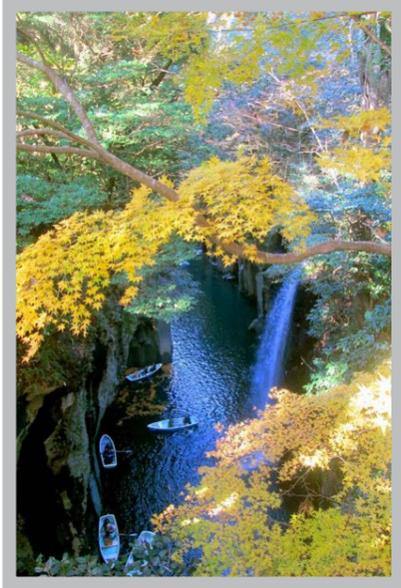
Interested in contributing to Connect? Want to stay up-to-date on interview opportunities, feature requests, and Connect announcements? Join the **Connect Contributors Circle** [] online to receive updates from us, pitch your ideas, and discuss with the Connect staff and community.

Get Connect magazine and AJET news every month. Subscribe to eConnect News here!

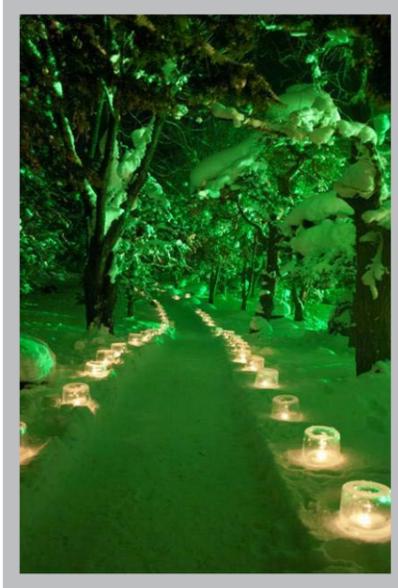
CONNECT HAIKU AND PHOTO CONTESTS

Our cover photo and haikus are all provided by current and former JETs from around the world. You can submit your entries any time to contest@ajet.net. One photo will be selected for the cover of Connect magazine! **All** photos and haikus received will be featured here each month, so give them all a little love!

You've already seen Audrey Akcasu's winning photo this month. Here are all the fantastic submissions we received!



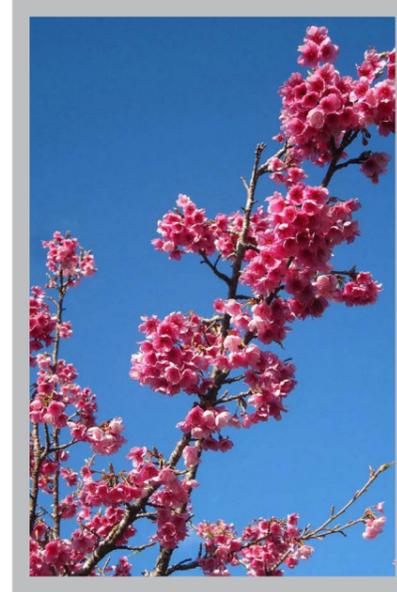
"Takachiho" – Sophie Patterson, Miyazaki



"Forest Walk, Higashikawa Ice Festival" – Catrina Caira, Hokkaido



"Fujiyama" – Sophie Patterson



"Okinawa Sakura" – Wendy Ng, Okinawa



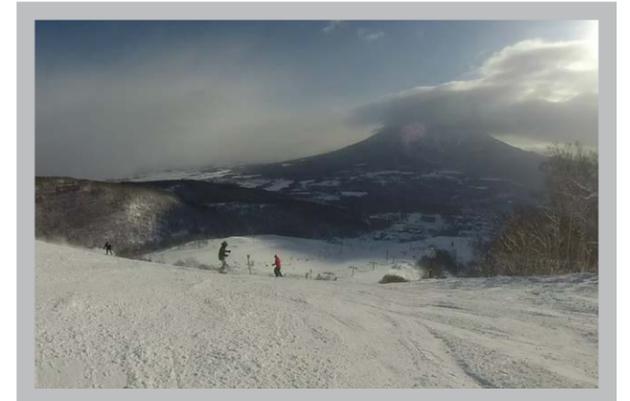
"Golden Spear of the Alps" – Jennifer Cammarn, Nagano



"Fuzzball and Blossoms" – Audrey Akcasu, Nagasaki



"Miyajima" – Sophie Patterson



"Fresh Outlook" – Penny Fox, Saga



"Watching the Pilgrims" – Kyle Cardine, Hyogo



"Incense" – Sophie Patterson



"The Lantern" – Scott Kawaguchi, Oita



Cherry blossoms bloom
In the secret viewing spot,
Hidden from the world

✦ Wendy Ng, Okinawa

On the way to school
I have new mittens on, yet
Only ice in them

How light the sky is
I have been waiting so long
Finally, spring's here

✦ Audrey Akcasu, Nagasaki

This season's blossoms:
A delicate reminder
Of our transience

Excited chirping
I awaken with the world
To a dawn chorus

✦ Sterling Diesel, Nagasaki

"Winter Mornings"

exhale, full of steam
covers, pulled in tight and close
the dread of rising

"Office Kerosene"

a warm amber glow
colleagues gather for gossip
the teapot rattles

✦ Larissa Milo-Dale, Miyazaki

This is the space for all the artists in our community. If you have a comic or other art you've created about Japan you want to share with our readers, check out the contributors' information page, and send an email to connect.editor@ajet.net!

Here are the ones for this month!

"The Adventures of Mike" by Marika Jackson, Akita



As soon as it started to get cold last year Marika created "The Adventures of Mike" to keep me busy. This original comic series follows Mike on his quirky everyday adventures, often accompanied by his pet owl, Owly, and his partner, Rika.

"Cultural Equivalencies: Japan vs. 'The West'" by Larissa Milo-Dale, Miyazaki

Where people congregate in the office for chit-chat and gossip:



Japan



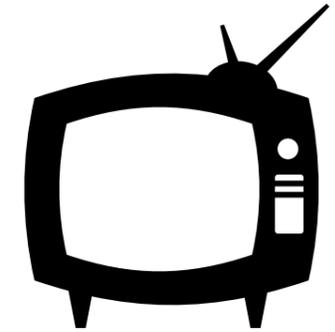
'The West'

Larissa has thoroughly enjoyed her first winter in 8 years with no snow and no temperatures below 0 here in Southern Japan. Between English activities both in and out of school, hosting movie nights, and travelling around Kyushu at least once a month, life is never short of incredibly busy. You can read about my interests and antics on Twitter @larashka



FLASHBACK: JAPAN'S You **Tube** TOP TEN

Chris Barstow, Yamagata



While you wait out the last bits of winter weather under your kotatsu, we thought we'd bring back this piece from last year to keep you busy while sitting in front of your computer.

YouTube has made global superstars out of choreographed Filipino prisoners, sneezing Chinese pandas and imaginary pony-riding Korean entertainers. However, Japan has also produced some rather entertaining videos to add to the bunch, as well. Here is a list of some of your favourite Japanese YouTube clips:

10. Japanese Girl Meets Daniel Radcliffe

A teenage competition winner gets to fulfill her life's ambition and meet the real-life Harry Potter. Despite squealing with excitement and shaking with joy, she still manages to conjure up some textbook English...what would her ALT say?
<http://youtu.be/Mnz90CdRFsg>

9. Cathy's House

The epitome of Japanese sketch comedy weirdness, it's as hilarious as it is strange. From the variety show *Vermillion Pleasure Night*, the sketch is also available in dubbed English.
<http://youtu.be/NUnwFHplBg4>

8. Kracie—Happy Kitchen #4—Mini Hamburger

By methodically creating miniaturised novelty foods in complete silence, RR Cherry Pie has built up a cult online following. Whilst making a burger, fries and Coke out of powders and water may be enough to put you off fast food for life, a small part of you will still no doubt want to taste it.
<http://youtu.be/g8gJOCwBuFc>

7. Maru the Cat

No YouTube list could be complete without featuring a star of the fluffy, four-legged variety. Maru's cunning talents to portray a wide range of emotions have made him into one of Japan's most famous and popular online animals.
http://youtu.be/z_AbFPXKms

6. Extreme Janken

Ever wondered how you can spice up a dull game of *janken*? All you need is a stick, a bucket and a desire to assault your hapless opponent. We recommend breaking this out at your next teacher *enkai*.
<http://youtu.be/Kd-Tr6ErqBA>

5. "Smoke on the Water"— Japanese version

One of the more bizarre but brilliant examples of Japanese/Western cultural fusion, this clip sees a Deep Purple's rock anthem tackled by an orchestra consisting of *shamisen*, *koto* and other traditional native instruments.
<http://youtu.be/ASsyGWa3TPE>

4. Polar Bear Escaping from Tokyo Zoo Drill

As those hilarious school intruder drills demonstrate, Japan is fond of covering their bases when it comes to emergency preparation. This clip will show you what to do in case a man dressed as a polar bear decides to go a little crazy in your school (or, you know, a zoo...if that's different).
http://youtu.be/6dDL7suUM_g

3. Broken Wear

Combine a Japanese Jackass with a techno soundtrack, picturesque locations and bad English, and you're close to imaging the life of Mr. Broken Wear, a man on a mission to push his body and garments to the limit for your entertainment.
<http://youtu.be/vTElb8cg-t8>

2. Japan Culture Lab – Sushi

Learn some surprising new etiquette tips when sampling Japan's signature dish in this hilarious parody of the customs of the traditional sushi shop... You'll never look at a hot towel or a fire engine the same way again. The group behind this video, Rahmens, released several videos in the same vein.
<http://youtu.be/qCpbBVthD7o>

1. Sh*t Japanese Students Say

Three and a half minutes of witty insights into the typical Japanese classroom, capturing the personalities, expressions, slang, and mangled English that we're all too familiar with. Almost too accurate. *[Editor's note: This video was produced by Miki Dezaki (alias Medama-sensei) whom we interviewed in April 2013 after his "Racism in Japan" video made waves across the internet.]*
<http://youtu.be/ty7RmPCP7OI>

What are your favorite Japanese YouTube videos? Share them with us at connect.editor@ajet.net and we'll publish them next month!

With thanks to: Amelia Hagen, Gordon Farrell, Kaley Kriminger, Amanda Horton, Sarah Jane Blenkhorn, Siôn Palmer, Amber Mezbourian, Sara Paliga and Erica Marfell Lewis!





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