



April Photo Contest Winner



Kelvery Longopoa - Graduation

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

To our readers

Thanks for the warm reception you have given our magazine! Rob and I have been editing and designing AJET Connect since last summer, and it has been one of the highlights of the year for us. Your responses as readers have helped us to make it a better magazine.

As we step down, we'd like to welcome AJET's new Online Publications Editor, James Kemp, and our new Head of Visual Media, Melania Jusuf, who will be continuing the work of publishing this magazine 'by JETs, for JETs'. They head a large group of volunteers who take the time to write, research and find great stories for Connect, and we hope that you will join the team.

AJET Connect will be taking a summer break, but we'll be back in August with our special Tokyo Orientation printed issue, followed by the next online issue in September. Look for us then!

Thanks!

Sarah Jane Blenkhorn
Rob Maxwell

Seeking new editors!

AJET Connect is looking for editors for the following sections:

Sports and Activities: the editor of this section is responsible for finding sports events (JET and non-JET) within Japan and promoting them. He or she may also post stories about world sports events.

Volunteering: how can JETs make a difference in Japan, or the world? The Volunteering editor promotes groups and events, in Japan and abroad, which JETs can join to help the disadvantaged, the poor or the victims of disaster world-wide.

Events: what's happening in Japan? The Events editor tracks down the local festivals, holidays, JET-sponsored events and other happenings and lets our readers know about them.

Got a story or an idea for one? Let us know! Contact James at james.kemp@ajet.net

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



for JETs, by JETs

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My Final Message as Chair

It's hard to imagine it's been a year since I became AJET Chair. The mix of emotions that comes with finishing my term are hard to describe. I'm so proud of my team and what we accomplished, but I wish we had a bit more time, so that we could do more. It's exciting that there's new challenges to come in my own life, but sad that I have to end this chapter with AJET.

This year has brought things with it that I could never have imagined.

Good and bad. I look back on the year and I'm so happy to have witnessed the unprecedented support we got from 1st year JETs signing up for the AJET e-Connect, but at the same time, who would have thought that we'd have typhoons destroying areas of Japan right after the Tohoku disasters and we would need support to JETs and to rebuild a second time in so many months?

During my time as chair, I wanted to engage all JETs, current and past, as well as the ministries and communities around us. I wanted to inspire everyone to greater success and triumphs that we could all enjoy.

I challenged you all, in my election campaign, to make this the year that "We can do more, we can help more, we can be more!"

That call to action set the tone for a year that was a whirlwind of toil and work for us, balanced with marked achievement. There were times where our

day jobs and our volunteer jobs, supporting JETs, added up to 80-90 hour work weeks. At times I questioned whether it was worth it.

But looking back, if you were to ask me, "Would you do it all over again?", There's no other answer than, "YES. In a heartbeat."

This year saw AJET re-branded to clearly show the world what AJET does: Connects people linked to the JET Programme; participants, ministries, alumni, our countries, and the world. That started a chain reaction of more close interaction from all of those parties.

This year, you saw the AJET website revamped and redesigned so that you could more easily navigate it. We saw facebook groups created for regions across Japan, to allow JETs to connect with other JETs locally and share what they found relevant to their experiences. We saw AJET make a presence in the twitter universe and speak to the public, as well as multiple instances of coverage in the media.

AJET got involved with JET Alumni and members of our council even attended the JETAA International Conference, to make sure current JETs were represented. AJET engaged Embassies and started close relationships with U.S. and Canadian governments, which we're hoping will result in more and more opportunities for JETs.

Lastly, you saw the inception of AJET Connect magazine, which is connected to and downloaded thousands of times each month. Not to mention,

perhaps the most monumental development: The iPhone, iPad, and iPod AJET "iConnect" app, which will undoubtedly be a game changer for new JETs and anyone visiting Japan.

So what was the most memorable of all these things, you ask? Well, as the Chair, I've met more JETs across the country and corresponded with more of you than I never would have had the chance to before.

The most amazing thing for me as the chair, has been seeing what regular JETs do everyday.

A JET named Michael Maher-King started a project that has hundreds of JETs across the country participating in orphanage visits called "Smile Kids Japan". Paul Yoo jumped to action in Akita after the disasters, getting tonnes of fresh fruit to survivors with his "Fruit Tree Project" that turned into "Volunteer Akita", still at work and most recently sending an orphan from Tohoku to college, who would never have had the chance otherwise. Tokushima JETs put on a musical, in Japanese and English, for their community year after year. Shimane AJET put on a charity hike that raised ¥1.71 Million yen for Tohoku.

That's the final message I want to share with you here today. It may seem that AJET, and others working on major projects, are doing something that you can't. But that's just not true. We're JETs. Just. Like. You.

So, this is my challenge to you all in the next year:

**Make something amazing.
Do something inspiring.
Touch the lives of the people around you.**

You have one of the most unique platforms in the world to do it, as a foreigner, in a government backed exchange program, whose goal is to draw attention to itself and the ideals of internationalization.

Each day you spend on this programme, and in life, is what you make of it. Your time as a JET is shorter than you may think, take it from me after 5 years. Don't waste a moment.

I'm happy to say that during the past JET year, we did what we set out to do:

We Did More. We Helped More. We Were More.

I hope that you'll all join me, in the years to come, and let's use these experiences as a springboard to Change the World.

Until we connect again,

Your friend,
Matthew Cook

2011-2012 AJET Chairman

www.cooksensei.com
www.twitter.com/cooksensei





A Message from the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan to the Association for Japan Exchange and Teaching

I would like to offer my congratulations on the first anniversary of the launch of "AJET Connect" the rebranded magazine of the Association for Japan Exchange and Teaching.

For more than a quarter of a century, the JET Programme has played an important role in exchanging and promoting friendship between Japan and the participants' home country.

JETs connect Japanese local governments and communities with the people around the world, and they are indispensable partners for the "Full Cast Diplomacy" which I advocate, Japanese diplomatic efforts with the participation of various individuals and organizations in advancing diplomacy.

Many people fell victim to the Great East Japan Earthquake last March, and it also claimed the valuable lives of two JET Programme participants, Ms. Taylor Anderson and Mr. Montgomery Dick-

son. May their souls rest in peace. I strongly hope that the will of serving as a bridge between Japan and their home countries will be remembered and taken over by their students and colleagues. Solidarity demonstrated by AJET and JETAA members and their dedication to informing the world of our country's condition, right after the Great East Japan Earthquake, reminded us of "kizuna" or the bond of friendship between Japan and those AJET and JETAA members.

There has been steady progress toward recovery and reconstruction and also to the creation of a "resilient society" from an unprecedented disaster. I am confident the voice of JET participants who witnessed our country's advance with their own eyes will help to greatly bolster the reconstruction efforts of Japan.

Likewise, Japan is committed to continue vigorously working on the JET Programme.

I would like to extend my best wishes to you for your Association's future development.

Koichiro GEMBA

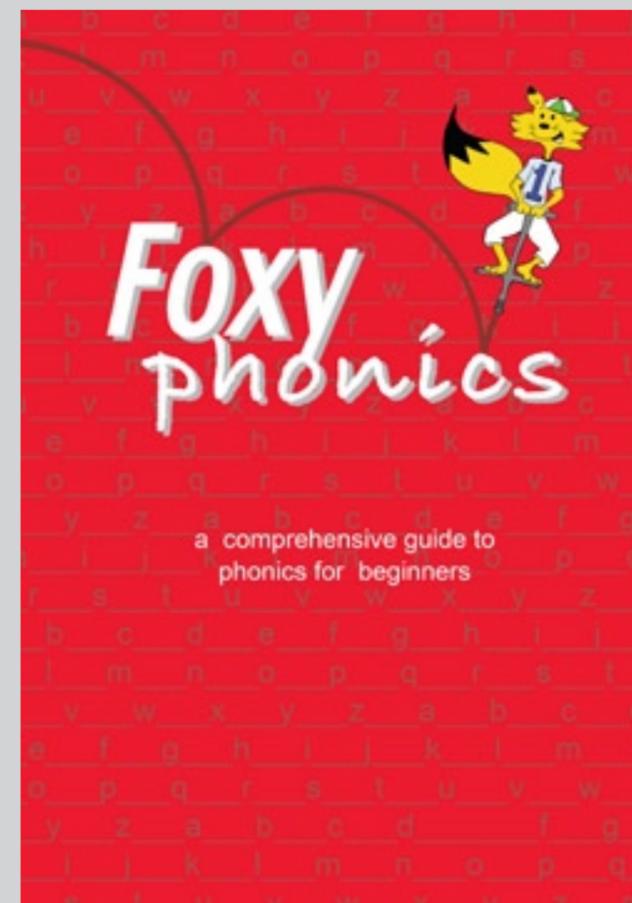
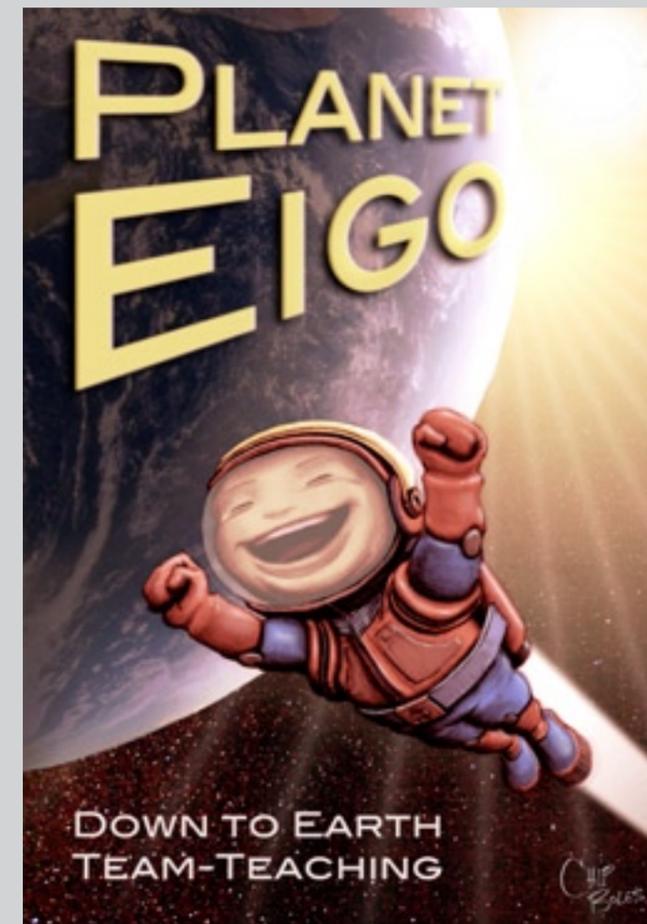
Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan

AJET BOOKS

Planet Eigo

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

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



GET BOTH BOOKS FOR ¥4,000*

Foxy Phonics

¥2,000 non AJET member *
¥1,500 AJET member *

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

Foxy Phonics and Planet Eigo can be ordered via email publications@ajet.net

* Plus shipping and packing

LIFE AFTER JET





Life After JET

Mark Flanigan

Where are you from?

I was born and raised in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA.

What year(s) were you a JET and where were you placed?

I was an ALT from 2000-04, during which time I actually lived and worked in two different places in Nagasaki Prefecture. I spent two years as a municipal ALT in Hirado City, which was the first place the Dutch landed in Japan and also the resting place of William Adams, who was the real life inspiration for the main character in James Clavell's novel, *Shogun*. I was then selected to serve as the Nagasaki Prefectural Education Centre ALT, where I planned and conducted teacher training workshops for both JTEs and ALTs. On my fourth and final year of JET, I also served as the Prefectural Advisor in tandem with my teacher training duties.

Where do you live now?

I live on the campus of International Christian Uni-

versity (ICU) / 国際基督教大学 in Tokyo, where I am finishing up my two year Master of Arts in Peace Studies as a Rotary International Peace Fellow. Here at ICU, I am also a Resident Assistant in the Global House dormitory, which houses an equal number of Japanese and international students. Following graduation, I will move to New York City to work as a Program Director with the Japan ICU Foundation.

What have you done since your time on JET?

In the eight years since my time on JET, I returned to the US, earned an MS in Peace Operations from George Mason University, was selected as a Presidential Management Fellow (PMF) and then served with the US Government from 2006 until 2010, when I moved to Tokyo to begin my Rotary Peace Fellowship.

How did you go from being a JET to a Rotary Peace fellow? What does this entail?

I was introduced to the Rotary Peace Fellowship by another JET and Peace Fellow alumnus, Daniel Sturgeon. Daniel was also living and working in the DC area and actively encouraging qualified applicants to pursue the Rotary Peace Fellowship. He personally introduced me to the Rotarians who would become my sponsoring Rotary Club on Capitol Hill and was extremely helpful in mentoring me and others through the application and selection processes. As the application is an annual one, due by July 1st each year, the first step is to seek out and to be nominated by a local, sponsoring Rotary Club.

If JETs are interested in your path of study, where can they get more information?

My advice would be to get started ASAP! ICU in Tokyo is one of five possible options for obtaining a fully-funded graduate degree. While there is technically no guarantee that all selected Peace Fellows will be sent to ICU, being a former JET and having a strong interest in Japan certainly helped me to be selected to study here! I personally believe my time as a JET gave me a deeper appreciation for my two years at ICU, as I never thought I would have the opportunity to live once more (and study full-time) in Japan. For more specific information, the newest Rotary Peace Fellowship application is available at www.rotary.org/rotarycenters. You can also find a local Rotary Club for endorsement at www.rotary.org/clublocator

What do you think the biggest change to the JET Program has been since you were a JET?

I recently went back to visit Nagasaki Prefecture and even met one of the current ALTs in Hirado

City. He is now in his 5th year, which was impossible when I first became a JET. Needless to say, he knows Hirado like the back of his hand by now! I do think that staying so long can be a very positive option, if both the ALT and his or her contracting organization are in agreement, as there is no need to re-adjust to a new ALT every year.

What advice would you give to JETs in their first year on the JET Programme?

Whether you plan to stay one year or more, learn as much as you can about the Japanese language, culture, people, educational system, and traditional arts. Once you return to your home country, it can be a challenge to maintain those connections, so immerse yourself in them as much as possible while you have the amazing opportunity to live in a real Japanese community. Also, don't compare your own living arrangements to others, either positively or negatively...your time on JET is everything that YOU make of it, so strive to make the very best of each day on the Programme.

What do you think is the biggest challenge facing the Programme, and how should we be combating that?

The biggest challenge would seem to be an economic one, as the Japanese government (like many others) feels the pinch of budgetary pressures and faces additional factors such as a declining birthrate and the related consolidation of municipalities and schools. The best thing we can do, as current and former JETs, is to keep making the case as to why the JET Programme is a worthwhile investment for Japan. Steven Horowitz is a prime example with his excellent JetWit Blog, as he regularly highlights the many ways in which diverse JET alumni continue to interact with and support Japan long after their JET days have passed. By sharing our stories through JetWit, JETAA and other forms of media, we can be living ambassadors for all that is best about the JET Programme.

You can reach Mark at markinmitaka@gmail.com.





Reverse Culture Shock

via www.sydneyjetaa.org

“Why don’t the trains run on time?”
 “Why are people so impolite?”
 “I wish you could get shabu-shabu in Australia.”
 “Why doesn’t anyone understand?”
 “That would never happen in Japan.”

Remember those difficulties you faced after you first arrived on JET? After the initial euphoria that followed your arrival in Japan, you probably went through periods of frustration and annoyance, bouts of homesickness, and general negativity towards your environs.

You may be surprised to find the familiar symptoms of culture shock resurfacing after you have come home. Most of us don’t expect to feel out of place in our own country or city, and it can be quite a confronting experience when this happens. The fact is, most JETs do go through a period of ‘reverse culture shock’ to some degree.

Reverse culture shock is similar to the culture shock you experienced in Japan, in that you are adjusting to changes in your environment. You may have come home expecting things to be exactly as they were before you left; instead, you find that your home feels very different from the one you left behind one, two or three years ago. People you were close to have moved on with their lives, and things have changed.

The key to this is that, while your home may have changed while you have been away, it is you who have changed even more. Being overseas for an extended period has broadened your mind, and opened you up to new ways of seeing things. You have almost certainly matured emotionally. You have become more multi-cultural. Things that you once took for granted about your home country and city, you will look at with new eyes – how do aspects of your life in Australia compare with your life in Japan? What did you miss about Australia? What do you now miss about Japan?

Just as culture shock comes about as a result of differences between our preconceived notions of Japan and the reality once we arrive there, reverse culture shock is the result of differences between our pre-JET attitudes to home and our new reality as we re-evaluate our old environment with our new ways of thinking.

At the same time, you may feel that your family and friends no longer understand you; they may seem a little narrow-minded or boring. Remember, they have not been through the same lifechanging experiences that you have while on JET, and they themselves may find it difficult to understand how – and why – you have changed. They may not immediately be ready to accept the ‘new’ you. This can exacerbate the symptoms of reverse culture shock.

Reverse culture shock may manifest itself in many ways:

- > Feeling critical of all things ‘un-Japanese’ about your home country
- > Missing the good things you experienced overseas
- > Missing the sense of ‘adventure’ that comes with living in a foreign country
- > Inability to share your experiences with family or friends; feeling that they ‘just don’t get it’
- > Feelings of alienation
- > Restlessness or boredom
- > Lack of self-confidence
- > Anxiety or depression

Because it is largely unexpected, reverse culture shock may be as difficult as the initial adjustment period after you arrived in Japan, or more severe still.

A survey (conducted by CLAIR) of over 1,000 past JET participants in 2006 found that about 70% went through a period of reverse culture shock, of whom 68% felt it most acutely within the first two months after returning home, and 25% in the first 2–6 months. A smaller number reported the effects of culture shock lasting more than one year beyond coming home.

The good news is that reverse culture shock will show you what you have learned not only about Japan, but about your home country and culture, and about yourself. As with culture shock, you will eventually adjust to your new life in your old surroundings.

Strategies for Coping with Reverse Culture Shock

- > Keep your sense of perspective. Remember that your attitudes have changed, and it is normal that you will see familiar things in a different way.
- > Expect that those close to you will not understand, and may find it hard to sympathise with your difficulty settling back in.
- > Maintain a sense of humour.
- > Stay active – go for a walk or run, join a club or sports group, keep busy.
- > Develop long-term goals for yourself – what do you want to do with your life after JET?
- > Maintain your ties with Japan – stay in touch with friends from JET, seek out Japanese culture at home, keep up your study of the Japanese language.
- > Join JETAA for support, social activity, or just to meet other former JETs.





Finding That Dream Job After JET

Noel Bradshaw, Hyogo JET 2004-2006

The JET Programme continues to attract talented and motivated people who leave the Programme with a huge amount to offer the world. However, when I asked leaving JETs about their career plans at the recent 2012 Conference for Returning JETs, the most common response was, "I'm keeping my options open".

As a former Hyogo JET myself, this took me back to the last few months of my contract. I regularly told people that I was keeping my options open but in reality, I did not have any good options. Choosing a career after JET was hard and that is why I invested a huge amount of time into thinking, researching and planning in those final few months.

Six years on, I am now extremely happy in my career. I would like to share with you a few tips that helped me and, hopefully, can help you get closer to that dream job you are looking for, regardless of whether you stay in Japan or return to your home country.

1. Understand yourself better.

As obvious as it sounds, not knowing yourself can be the biggest hurdle to working out what you want to do. When I was nearing the end of my time on JET, a major problem was that I did not have a clear idea of which career would be a good match for my skills and personality. Additionally, I was still trying to decide what was really important to me in life. When you are in this kind of situation, where do you start?

First, try to understand what you are really good at. What are your talents – the things you can do more naturally and more instinctively than anyone else? These are your "core competencies", in which few other people can compete with you. They are the things that will make you really valuable to companies, allow you to quickly excel in your job, and make you stand out.

Next, it is time to assess the things you enjoy doing most. Do you like interacting with people? Is organising events rewarding for you? Do you enjoy creating things? Along those same lines, what kinds of activities do you not like doing? For example, some people cannot stand the thought of sitting at a desk all day long staring at a computer screen.

A caveat here: while, you should definitely look for a career doing something you like, the higher priority is to choose something you are good at and make that the foundation for your career. Too many people dream of building a career around a hobby or a passion and, while not always the case, they often end up hating the thing they were once so passionate about.

To really get to know yourself better, try taking a personality test. Different personality types are suited to different types of work. There are numerous websites (do a Google search) out there that have online tests and some also provide you with feedback about which job type matches your personality. Common tests are the "Myers-Brigg Type Indicator" and the "Keirsey Temperament Sorter." Often, the process of going through the test can be more important than the result of the test itself, as the test challenges you to think about who you really are.

2. Do research.

You need to work out what kind of job is right for you. A fantastic book that can guide you through this process is "What Color is Your Parachute" by Richard Nelson Bolles. This book, and others like

it, can help give you a clearer vision about that ideal job.

In addition to reading, it is beneficial to talk to as many people as you can. Every time you share information with someone about your career plans, your ideas become more refined. You also benefit from the different perspectives and experiences of the person giving the advice. Talk to companies, go for interviews (even if you are not decided on the company), and attend career fairs. There are a lot of people out there who are willing to help, especially JET alumni.

3. Make a plan.

Planning leads to action. Without a concrete plan in place, it is so easy to drift. Before you know it, it will be July and you will be no closer to finding that much-needed job. What do you want to do in five years or in ten years? Where do you want to be in the world?

Once you have the end goal in sight, you can start to work backwards and work out what you need to start doing now to get there. Planning will enable you to start to develop the right kind of skills and to gain relevant experience now. It will help you prioritise and decide what elements in a job offer are the most important to you.

One of the best books for life planning I have read is a time management book called "Time Power" by Brian Tracy. The book includes a step-by-step approach to planning your life and is well worth a read.

4. Be ready to compromise.

That perfect job in exactly the field you want, with a six-figure salary and six weeks of paid holiday per year may be out there somewhere, but the chances of you getting everything you desire this early in your career are slim. You need to be ready to compromise.

To illustrate this, there may be a company that you really want to work for, but it has no openings for the job of your choice. In that case, apply for a different job with the same company and work your way up to your ideal job. As another example, your ideal career may be an altruistic one but starting out with a more business-focused career may allow you to earn some good money initially and give you the freedom to make choices further down the line.

Compromising will allow you to make a start on your career. It is patience, good planning, and a lot of effort afterwards that will enable you to go the rest of the way.

5. Network.

Of course, you have the usual routes to finding a job – job sites, newspapers, recruitment agencies, and the like. Without a doubt, you should try all of these. However, most great companies that have really great jobs don't tend to advertise much. Why would they? Nobody wants to leave and when an opening does arise, there is usually a queue of people waiting to get in the door.

You need to make yourself one of those people waiting to get in the door. To do this, get out there and let all those companies know how great you are (without being arrogant). One way of doing this is by networking.

If you are staying in Japan, the Chambers of Commerce (ACCJ, BCCJ etc) have regular networking events in the major cities. They are not cheap to attend (around 6,000 yen each time) but they are fantastic opportunities to exchange business cards with both Japanese and foreign business people. Most large cities around the world will have similar networking events.

These days, social networks such as Linked In and Twitter have revolutionized networking and made it significantly more accessible. It is now very easy to become a part of a special interest or industry group online and start connecting with people in the area you want to work in.

Good luck!

The career I started after JET turned out to be perfect for me and, at the time, I thought it was just luck that brought me this opportunity. However, I now know that without all the thinking, planning, research and networking I did in my last few months of JET, I would not have been able to recognize that this opportunity was right for me when it landed at my feet. I am confident that if you have faith in yourself and your abilities and you put in the necessary effort, you too will find the right career path. Good luck!



"... we started a sempai system which links new JETs with South African JET alumni" (South Africa JETAA)

"...every year we organise preparatory Japanese Language Proficiency Test lessons in Dublin" (Ireland JETAA)

"...we keep in touch through regular monthly Friday night Edinburgh pub evening" (JETAA Scotland)

"... we have been working with USA JETs to establish sister city and prefecture links" (JETAA USA)

Linking it all together

At national/international level, JETAA collaborates with JET alumni, CLAIR, MOFA, AJET and Japanese communities across the world to promote JET, JETAA and Japan through cultural exchange, educational circles and international liaison.

There is a JETAA International team, made up of 5 executive officers and 18 representatives from JETAA countries. This group liaises with JETAA countries and works alongside CLAIR and MoFA to further improve the JET programme and build on the JETAA global network.

Getting more involved in JETAA committee or starting up a new chapter

If you are interested in organising events, there are lots of ways to get more involved. Committee member elections positions take place sometime between February and June every year. Members will receive contact from the current chapter representative to let chapter members know when, how and where this election will take place.

If there is no JETAA Chapter in your area, just contact the JETAA Country Representative in your area to find out more about setting up a local chapter. If your Country does not have a JETAA group and you would like to set one up, get in touch with JETAA international (executiveofficers@jetalumni.org), we'd love to support you in establishing an initial JETAA chapter in your country.

Please contact JETAA-I any time if you have any queries about JETAA international, or want to share any ideas. You can send an email to executiveofficers@jetalumni.org



Get in touch with your local JETAA We are keen to hear from JETs who are returning from Japan.

Most chapters have a Welcome Back event for Returning JETs, around autumn, This is often hosted by the Japanese Embassy or Consulate and it's a great way to meet ex-JETs and your local Japanese community, as well as get to hear more about what's going on in your area.

The best way to connect with the JETAA community is to contact your nearest chapter. For multi-chapter countries, a list of chapters and their locations will be available on their websites.

You can also contact your local Japanese Embassy/ Consulate with your contact details and to let them know you are living in the area. Embassies or CLAIR offices (London, New York, Tokyo) are another way to get put in touch with your local JETAA group.

You can sign up to mail shots and check out what is going on through websites and local chapter social networking portals.



www.jetalumni.org
<http://jetwit.com>

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JET Alumni Association

Bringing Japan home

Every year, for many JETs, their time on the JET programme comes to an end. For most, it will also be time for them to leave Japan, knowing lives have changed and new directions inspired.

Joining JETAA gives JETs leaving the programme the opportunity to stay part of an ever growing and interlinking network of friendship and support.

There are approximately 24000 registered JET alumni all over the world, meaning JETAA international (JETAA-I) links together what is possibly the biggest international exchange alumni association in the world. Just now, you will find JETAA chapters in 16 of the currently participating countries in the JET programme.

JETAA gives opportunity to meet up with other ex-JETs and to make links with your local Japanese community, such as Japan Societies, universities, embassies and consulates and other Japan-related organizations which promote and experience Japan abroad. Chapters also serve as resource to the JET Program Offices and local embassies as supporters to the JET programme recruitment process and departing JETs.

The potential opportunities to get involved in JETAA are limitless, it's really up to you!

Here are just some recent updates from chapters,

"...we held a tree planting ceremony with local schools and university of West Indies Japanese club" (Jamaica JETAA)

Expand your Horizons at Temple

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Interviewing

How to discuss your weaknesses

Vince Ricci

Sometimes, your interviewer will ask: What is your greatest weakness?

This question can cause anxiety, but it need not do so.

Vince hints

- > Embrace weakness.
- > Flaws make you human.
- > Show self-awareness.
- > Demonstrate growth potential.

Employers ask about your weakness to test how you perform under pressure.

- > Therefore, do your best to stay calm.
- > Smile.
- > Stay positive about the past. If you complain about your past, interviewers will assume

that you are the kind of person who will eventually complain about their organization, as well. No one likes to be around negative people.

- > Avoid clichés like "I'm a workaholic" or "I'm a perfectionist"
- > Pick something relatively minor and have an answer for how you are addressing the issue.
- > Work-related weaknesses are best.

Finally, the key to a "good" weakness is showing that you have developed self-awareness and self-control to minimize the negative impact. Some of my clients mention "compensatory techniques," or ways that they handle the weakness.

When you state your compensatory technique, focus on the issue at hand. "I sometimes

over analyze my projects, which can cause me to fall behind in other tasks. To avoid that, I set aside a specific amount of time for review. When that time is up, I move to the next task on my list of priorities."

Need more hints?

Please see Vince's tips here www.vinceprep.com/interviews/strengthsweaknesses

Vince Ricci

Vince runs a highly successful admissions consultancy. Based in Japan, he supports clients around the world as they apply to top MBA and graduate programs. He earned his History BA from Stanford University and his MA in Digital Media Design for Learning at NYU. Vince serves as a part-time lecturer at the University of Tokyo.

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Preparing for a Smooth Landing After JET

Michael Parrish and Richard Miller

The Conference for Returning JETs can be a bittersweet experience. You might be excited to be going back to see family and old friends you have not seen in two or three years; returning to your old haunts; having generous portions of long-craved food—the comforts of home. At the same time, you may be disappointed to be leaving Japan just when you were becoming skilled at communicating in Japanese, or have found the one store that carries your preferred brand of peanut butter or Marmite (Vegemite). Furthermore, you have to consider what you will do for a living when you get back. While everyone's situation is different, here are some general ideas that will help prepare you to re-enter the job market or start you on the path of your post-JET career and life.

Résumés

The first step is to update your résumé (or CV) which might have sat untouched since your original JET interview. If you have worked as an ALT and are going into an educational field, then adding your JET experience will be straightforward. If you will be going into another occupation, it would be useful to analyze your JET experience in terms

of the skills you acquired, instead of just writing 'Taught English to Japanese junior or senior high students.' Creating a functional résumé rather than just a traditional chronological résumé allows you to outline the transferable skills gained from your JET experience such as language skills, interpersonal and intercultural communication skills, presentation skills, management skills (both time and people, i.e., students, co-workers), problem solving skills, or skills in adapting to and dealing with new situations. Be sure to include any achievements outside the classroom. Did you start, or participate in, any special programs, clubs or organizations at your school or in your community? Did you do volunteer work? Did you make a presentation or lead a workshop at the various JET-sponsored meetings / conferences or in your community? Did you take a Japanese proficiency test or attain another cultural or professional certification? If you have not done any these things to help enhance your experience to take home, it is not too late to do some of them before you return.

The important thing is to cast your JET experience in its most positive light, but with neither misrepresentation nor exaggeration. In the age of Google, any fact can be checked: once one part of your résumé is questioned, then everything you wrote becomes suspect and your entire application will probably be rejected. Be careful of self-aggrandizing titles, if you were an ALT, then do not put you were an 'educational consultant' or 'curriculum designer'. CIRs might be 'cultural ambassadors' for their countries, but they are not actual ambassadors. Be realistic about your language ability, many people may assume that two or three years in Japan would make you a fluent speaker, which is not always true. It may be necessary to collect some documents to support your résumé or job application, which can include: certificates of employment/participation on the JET Programme, certificates of test scores, diplomas or certificates of any education you completed, or letters of reference. Concerning letters of recommendation, some Japanese may be reluctant to write a letter in English, but if you offer to write up an 'example' of what you think your letter of recommendation should include, it often makes the referee more likely to help you out. Some of these documents may be difficult to obtain once you leave Japan, so collect, copy, and store them now (include an electronic, online version if practical). Be sure to thank your referee and keep their contact information current in case a potential employer needs further clarification.

Networking

In addition to learning about Japanese culture, JET provides an excellent opportunity to learn about other participating countries and meet people from different parts of your own country. These personal connections can continue long after your time on JET is over—an international version of AJET's Couchsurfing 'Tatami Timeshare' group—and serve as important professional resources. Setting up an online group or keeping in touch through social networking channels are useful ways to maintain contact and meet other JETs. Another source of personal and professional connections is the JET Alumni Association (www.jetalumni.org). There are chapters in most major cities around the world and the JETAA network often advertises Japan-related employment opportunities. Japanese colleagues or close acquaintances could be valuable resources, too. In the education field, membership in professional organizations such as Japan Association for Language Teaching (www.jalt.org) or English Teachers in Japan (<http://ltprofessionals.com/ETJ/>).

Continuing on in Japan

Should you decide to stay on in Japan; several important issues need to be considered. Initially, the most pressing are visa issues, because your JET contract may require you to leave Japan or not start other employment for a certain period. Once you return to Japan, you need to be careful to get appropriate visas (educational, training, work, spousal, or tourist) and abide by the requirements. Many employers are reluctant to sponsor visas, which can become a catch-22 situation. As the JET contract ends in July, it is not the best time for job hunting, as most contracts start in April. (If you have a valid visa, you may be eligible for unemployment benefits that could tide you over for up to six months.) Having said that, there are a variety of positions available: junior and senior high school ALT positions that have been outsourced to private language schools, jobs in translation and editing, and if you have the requisite master's degree, university teaching (for more info on university jobs, see Andrew Sowter's Jan. 2011 AJET article). The Japan Times Monday edition and website, Ohayosensei.com, Gainjinpot.com, daijob.com, and JobsinJapan.com all list a variety of positions in various fields. Once you do get a job, be prepared for sticker shock: average starting salaries are typically much lower than what you received during JET. Note also that benefits, such as insurance and housing, are not always included.

Further Education

Instead of jumping into the job market, many former JETs choose further education, often inspired by their experiences. The above résumé advice applies equally well to university applications (more detailed examples on JET CRJ2011 website "Getting into Graduate school"). There are a few graduate programs that have special scholarships or admission preferences for JET participants (for example, the Japan-focused MBA (JEMBA) at University of Hawaii, Manoa <http://www.jaims.org/jemba.html>; Monterey Institute of International Studies, www.miis.edu). The teaching experience gained while an ALT on JET may also count towards teacher certification in some areas. There are also many opportunities from the Japanese government to pursue graduate studies in Japan, but the application process takes over a year (see Embassy of Japan website).

The anticipated joys of home, the rush to tie up details of your JET experience, say your goodbyes and steel yourself for what comes next can be exhilarating and exhausting. Just remember the transition to whatever post-JET path you choose can be made easier with just a little forethought and effort.

Michael Parrish

Michael Parrish, originally from Tallahassee, Florida, USA first came to Japan on the JET Programme in 1995, and taught for the Hiroshima City BOE for three years. Currently he works as an Instructor of English as a Foreign Language at Kwansei Gakuin University in Nishinomiya, Japan.

Contact: mmparrish.japan@gmail.com

Richard Miller

Richard Miller, originally from Ottawa, Canada, is an entrepreneur and ESL instructor who has been in Japan since 1995. He earned his M.Ed. from Temple University in 2003 and an MBA from the University of Liverpool in 2009. Currently he is a Lecturer at Kansai University, Osaka, Japan. He also writes a career advice and job information column for the Japan Association for Language Teaching's The Language Teacher.



A Recruiters Guide to Finding Work in Tokyo

Byron Nagy via JETAA Tokyo

For any JET just finishing up the program and planning on making the long trip to Tokyo, probably the concern that is foremost in your mind is the question of a job. Certainly the obstacles are significant including but not limited to financial, linguistic and visa related.

There is good news however. Recent hiring trends suggest that there is growing demand for Japanese speaking foreigners at Japanese companies here in Tokyo. The earthquake and ensuing crisis has pushed much of corporate Japan to consider the future in very real terms. Now more than ever, companies are proactively acquiring assets abroad, relocating manufacturing and expanding their international marketing and sales activities. Some companies like Rakuten and Uniqlo have even gone as far to change their internal language to English in order to move their organizations closer to the international standards.

However most Japanese companies are not really equipped in terms of HR to face the challenge of globalization. In my opinion, former JETs are just what the doctor ordered. Not only do we have the linguistic and cultural skills, but our experience on JET is vital because we have already successfully navigated a Japanese work environment, understand the Japanese decision making process as well as have other vital soft skills such as understanding the importance of **nemawashi, aisatsu and kuuki wo yomu**.

I believe that successfully finding work in Tokyo after JET hinges on three vital competencies. Having mastery of all three means your chances of finding employment is relatively high. Lacking mastery of all three means you will probably have your work cut out for you.

Japanese

It goes without saying but without fluency in both written and spoken Japanese, you will have a very hard time securing employment here in Japan. (Just imagine trying to find a white collar job in the US without being able to read or speak English) That being said, written and spoken Japanese are two very different things. For most Japanese companies, the only tool they can employ to gauge your level of Japanese is by looking at your CV to see if you have passed a proficiency test. (JLPT or BJLPT) Having passed 1kyu will potential get you an

interview but without being able to communicate in an interview situation, those test scores will get you nowhere.

The unorthodox path I took when learning Japanese was to build a strong base of grammar and vocabulary and then start cramming for 1kyu from my second year. My rationale was that since the content is for the most part not cumulative and generally differs completely depending on the level, why even bother with 2kyu, 3kyu or 4kyu since most companies only care about 1kyu. Because the JLPT is a standardized test, by buying a cram book you can learn the vocabulary, grammar and kanji specifically needed for passing. Once you have passed, you can put it on your resume and then refocus on learning the practical and business Japanese you will actually use on a daily basis. 1kyu will help you get your foot in the door but your spoken Japanese and communication skills are what will help you pass an interview.

Specialization

In addition to linguistic ability, having a specialization in terms of your experience or academic background is very useful when it comes to finding employment, especially with a foreign firm. While some of us were lucky enough to have a technical background in the natural sciences, engineering, graphic design or computer science, I believe it is safe to say that the majority of people who come on JET have a liberal arts background and are therefore considered generalists at the start of their career. This is not necessarily an obstacle with Japanese companies however, which are often happy to consider generalists with strong communication and problem solving skills.

In addition, **being able to effectively market your prior experiences is essential.** Take my experience as a CIR on the JET Programme for instance. In addition to translation and interpretation work, my time spent globalizing the town website and writing monthly articles can be considered PR and Marketing experience. Also as a regional block representative, I helped coordinate and advise other JETs in the area which could be considered HR experience if explained clearly. Lastly don't forget how salesmanship is a key competency of the JET experience. As grass-roots ambassadors, we are essentially sales representatives for our home countries and cultures, charged with the mission of communicating a value proposition to our prospective clients. Being outgoing and friendly, presenting effectively, clearly communicating abstract ideas, tailoring our approach to our target audience and listening actively all essential sales skills and things we do on a daily basis as JETs.

Networking

Perhaps exponentially true in Asia, its not so much about what you know, but rather about **whom you know**. While language ability and a specialization can take a long time to acquire competency, networking is something that everyone can begin today. The first step is physically relocating to Tokyo and then getting out and meeting people.

Everyday in Tokyo there are a handful of different networking events to choose from, hosted by various social and business groups and associations. The JET Alumni Association is an excellent place to start but also consider your local business chamber such as the ACCJ, which sponsors business and networking events on a regular basis. In addition I highly recommend participat-

ing in JMEC (Japan Marketing Expansion Competition) as an excellent way to get a foothold in the Tokyo business community. JMEC has a very comprehensive alumni network made up of both Japanese and foreign professionals with a wealth of experience in Japan, and alumni are usually eager to help out their fellow kouhai. Finally I would suggest making liberal use of online networks like **LinkedIn** in order to both expand and manage your growing network of contacts.

Reach out to everyone you know and ask questions. People are usually very eager to share their own experiences and opinions with you and give you career advice. This is a great way to not only expand your knowledge on the subject but also get a better sense of what it is that YOU really want to do. This will no doubt be a question in any interview and having a clear idea of

the direction you want to take your career is very persuasive in an interview. Passion and enthusiasm are generally what will secure you that job, much more so than simply having experience.

Sure things are a lot more complicated than that, but if you focus on improving your Japanese, leveraging your prior experiences effectively and actively expand your network of Tokyo contacts, your chances will increase exponentially. With all the doom and gloom about unemployment in the Japanese media, you might think the timing is bad. I would argue just the opposite. In many ways bilingual globally minded workers are the future of corporate Japan and now is our time to shine.

Byron Nagy

Byron Nagy is the founder and CEO of SEKAIBITO K.K., a human resources company based in Tokyo focusing on new graduate recruitment of global talent for domestic Japanese companies. After a stint as a CIR in Miyazaki, Byron has spent the majority of his career working in HR and recruitment here in the Tokyo area.

<http://www.jetaa-tokyo.org/article/recruiters-guide-finding-work-tokyo>

Jet Effect

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

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

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

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





JET Effect **Matthew Cook**

Many people reading this may already know you because of your work as the AJET Chairman, but you've also done quite a bit where you placed as a JET in Osaka prefecture. What got you started getting involved with helping other JETs and getting involved in Osaka?

My first two years working in Japan were, for the most part, a nightmare. I had what they call a "worst-case scenario" for living and working as a JET in Japan. Osaka public school students routinely score low out of all the prefectures on nation wide tests, and our city/municipality scored lowest in Osaka prefecture last year. Even though that's the case, about 95% of the kids are still great kids, but 5% of the students is all it takes here to have a total breakdown of the system. We're talking about students attacking teachers, students walking into classes they don't belong to and distracting the students, screaming, throwing furniture out windows, breaking things....literally STOPPING the rest of the class from studying much less the teacher being able to instruct the lessons. Even when things weren't as bad, or when the badly behaved students weren't in the classrooms, the teachers didn't know quite what to do with me, and since this was my first time in the classroom, I didn't know how to teach, either. I asked everyone around me from JETs to the Board of Education, and no one had ANY good advice. Finally, I called

CLAIR, but found that there was nothing that they could do either because they aren't our employers 'officially', so they had no power to change my situation. It was a really difficult spot to be in. After a LOT of persistence and putting my foot down to administrators at school and the Board of Education, I got a transfer to another school in the same city, which ended up being a blessing in disguise.

What do you mean by "blessing in disguise?"

I was transferred to a school that was in the middle of dramatic changes and I got the unique opportunity to be a part of that. This school had some of



the same problem students and situations as the last, but the leadership of this school, and the experience of the teachers there, really shined through.

The behavioral problems were hard at first, but at this school I was given the chance to be much, much more than just an ALT, and now I'm considered a regular sensei, and an integral part of the team. My students respect me, I often teach by myself, I go on school trips with the kids, and most importantly....I've gotten to teach what I want. I know it's a rarity as a JET to get the opportunity to actually develop curricula and teach instead of simply "assisting" classes, and it's been something that I haven't taken for granted. I can really never thank my co-workers enough for the chances they've taken by giving me some room to work and try experimental projects that I've created.

Can you tell us more about Osaka AJET?

Osaka is a strange place for JETs and AJET. Part of the appeal for JETs across the country to get involved with AJET is that they need the support and help of other JETs in their area. In Osaka, that's not needed as much because there's more readily available English resources and people that are used to dealing with foreigners, as well as more events and places to go.

My first couple of years on JET, Osaka AJET was nothing more than a few social events a year, thrown together with no purpose other than a good time and no real team or structure. That all changed when Donald Chow, a then second year JET in Osaka, stepped up to be the new President. Donald and I had the vision of AJET accomplishing a lot more and being a lot more, than what it was, if we could offer JETs more opportunities than just parties. This was in the midst of JET being cut back across the prefecture due to budget constraints. We wanted to draw a lot of attention to the Programme. We also had other executive team members, Ben Lawson and Keiko Hamano, that were ready and willing to get more active and start new endeavors.

So what types of things did you get started?

A great variety of things. We held a variety of fundraisers over the course of the year, starting with a budget of literally nothing, and raising thousands of dollars that year for charity. We started teaching English classes to volunteer firefighters. We started visits to two orphanages in Osaka, not only donating our time, but also rice and other items for the kids. We also held enormously successful food

and material drives after the 3/11 disasters.

Our reasoning was, if we were going to look our co-workers, supervisors and politicians in the face and tell them that JET is a programme worth investing in, we had to PROVE that we were worth that investment. We can do so much more for those around us, and we should have striven to be better than we were the days and weeks and months and years before that. If all JETs were doing this, then this programme would never have been questioned in the first place!

So, what made you switch from organizing your local AJET chapter to running for the chair of the AJET national council?

I had some close friends, that really believed in what I was saying, that if we represented ourselves in a better light, we could help the entire JET Programme, not just Osaka. I had never really thought about it, but with some prodding, and a lot of deep thought and reflection, I decided that there



was a lot that could be done to make this experience better for all JETs.

I also knew that if we wanted to save this programme from dramatic change for the worse or shrinking numbers due to budget cuts for the programme or bad publicity, it was up to us to do it. We simply can't sit around and wait on the min-

istries or others to help us, when it's well within our means to help ourselves. I knew in my heart that if we wanted this programme to be something we can all be proud of being part of for long into the future, it was up to us to be the change that we wanted to see in the programme.

This is not to say I'm not still working hard for JETs in Osaka. I've started a really fascinating partnership with the Yamamoto Noh Theater in Osaka. Together, we're bringing JETs in to participate in workshops involving traditional Japanese theater including: Noh, Rakugo, Kodan, and Oza-shiki Asobi. They're teaching us about their arts, in the hope that we'll share that knowledge with others when we return to our countries. At the same time, we're helping them with their English presentations for the shows, so that they can better describe and explain their arts to audiences, in one-of-a-kind, all-English shows!

I've also worked very close with my own U.S. Embassy and the Consulate in Osaka-Kobe. The Consulate General, Patrick Linehan, has helped us to have meetings with the East Asia Regional English Language Officer, in hopes of helping the local authorities to reform English education, and

even came to visit my school and speak with my students after watching one of my classes. A few weeks ago, we helped them to hold a special dinner for JETs, where we were spoken to by Embassy officials, who were JET alumni, from every decade of the JET Programme's existence!

If you could do JET again, what would you do differently?

Plenty. For starters, I would have been much more assertive with my expectations regarding my experience as a JET here, to my employers, and what I wanted to achieve during my time here. I think so many JETs come here with that "fish out of water" feeling. It's so easy to take the position of "I'm the guest here, so I should just accept everything about work and life the way it is because it's not my country and culture".

What often results is a JET being unhappy with their experience, and having feelings of being unable to change it, so they just take it in stride and go home to their country, at the end of their contract, leaving their successors to experience a similar, if not the same, situation.



In my mind, just accepting things the way they are couldn't be any more of a mistake or waste of our time as JETs. It's true, we ARE guests here. We should definitely take our time settling in, and watching how things are done. I often hear JETs who've been here multiple years state: "My first year was just getting trained and figuring things out."

After figuring things out, I believe that we should speak our mind, though. It's our responsibility to work for the changes we want to see in the world, no matter the country or the community. We weren't brought to this country to be Japanese, or to do every little thing "the Japanese way". We were brought here to expose Japanese citizens around us to other ways of thinking and doing things, while at the same time learning from them and sharing the positive attributes of their culture with our own countries.

It's true, I got a particularly bad placement when I got here originally. But looking back, I probably should have started standing up for myself and my students a lot earlier and demanding changes and the support we deserved much earlier.

What advice would you give someone who has ideas for their schools or even the JET Programme, but doesn't know how to give them momentum?

My main advice to JETs is to always keep their eyes open. It's all about connecting the dots. We've got such a unique opportunity here. There are so many more experiences and opportunities that are

available to us because we are speakers of English or foreign. You should always think about what's going on, and how you can help others with the resources you have available to you, whether that's speaking English, your home country, or the other JETs in your community. If you are consciously thinking all the time about how you can help and what you can bring to the table, when opportunities present themselves, you'll see them. Then, it's just a matter of "connecting the dots".

My other advice is to keep in mind that anything is possible. Persistence is key. If you really believe in something, and you know it's accomplishable and it's the right thing to do, never stop fighting for it."

So what's next for Matthew Cook?

I plan to stay in Japan for the time being and continue to fight for English education reform. I'll be in Osaka for the time being, and I also plan to stay involved with the JET Programme as an alumni. I truly believe in JET and the possibilities that an internationalization strategy like this can do to make the world a better place. If there's a way to help and support JETs, past or present, you can count on me being there. I truly believe that after this shared experience we have all had, the one thing we can all agree on is:

Once a JET, Always a JET.



Noh theater photo by: Len Krygsman IV, NighthawkPhotography@gmail.com"



culture corner

What a difference a month makes!

Sarah Jane Blenkhorn

In my little corner of Japan, May has brought twenty-degree plus weather and a myriad of sweet-smelling flowers, chirping song-birds and buzzing insects. The night chorus of spring peepers practice in the pond on the castle grounds, and a bullfrog sings bass. It's a wonderful time to be in Japan.

In this issue, Rosie gives a little advice to an ALT with ESS club troubles. Eryk Salvaggio gives his clever and insightful take on running in Japan (I recommend you check out his excellent blog, thisjapaneselife.org, for more great stories). Anthony Russo writes about the joys of living in his adopted hometown in Miyazaki prefecture, while Stephen Thompson shares the folklore of Izumizaki, Fukushima prefecture. (If you have an interesting story to tell about your Japanese home, your experiences here, or life at your school or office, here's the place to tell it! E-mail us at communications@ajet.net to share!)

We have lots of May events happening all over Japan to tell you about; thanks to Lisa Cross in Tokushima for researching them for us. Check them out and spend the nice days to come exploring.

Here's hoping you have a great summer. We'll see you in September!

Sarah is a second-year ALT in Matsue, Shimanu, the 'Venice of Japan.' If you look for her, she won't be home; she'll be rowing, singing, jogging, cheering on her students' teams and concerts, and generally enjoying the splendid spring.

Calendar of Cultural Events in May 2012

Nozaka Mairi 1-10 May Daito City, Osaka Pre	Thousands gather on the approach to Nozaka Kannon Temple to enjoy puppet plays, storytelling and a range of other classical arts and festival amusements.
Fujiwara Festival 1-5 May Hiraizumi, Iwate Pre	The main event is a period dress parade on the 3rd recreating the arrival of Minamoto Yoshitsune and his entourage when he came to Haraizumi in northern Japan to seek the protection of Fujiwara Hidehira.
Tarui Hikiyama Matsuri 2-4 May Tarui, Gifu Pre	This festival features floats known as Hikiyama. Children in full makeup and costume perform Kabuki plays on stages built in to these lavishly decorated three-storied festival floats.
Shimonoseki Straits Festival 3 May Shimonoseki, Yamaguchi Pre	Many colourful events in the port town of Shimonoseki including recreations of a samurai era sea battle involving about 200 boats, the famous duel between Miyamoto Musashi and Sasaki Kojiro and a colourful parade of courtesans.
Yokohama Port Festival 3 May Yokohama Port	Parades, dances and entertainments all with an international flavour. Features dragon dances, baton twirlers and decorated festival floats in the port area of Yokoyama.
Odawara Hojo Godai Matsuri 3 May Odawara, Kanagawa Pre	Shinto ceremony, parades of warriors in full period dress, traditional music and mikoshi parades.
Kamezaki Shiohi Matsuri 3-4 May Handa, Aichi Pre	A gathering of 31 antique dashi, (drawn festival floats). These remarkable wooden constructions are towed around town and then down to the beach where they are pulled through the shallows at low tide.
Hakata Dontaku 3-4 May Hakata , Fukuoka Pre	Large scale festival with history going back nearly 800 years. Colourful and musical parades and events all over the downtown area of Fukuoka city.
Giant Kite Festival 3-5 May Showa, Saitama Pre	Giant decorated kites (up to 15m in length) are flown on the banks of the dry riverbed of the Edo River.
Togyu Taikai 3-5 May Tokunoshima Island, Kagoshima Pre	Traditional bullfighting event in which two bulls are pitted against each other in a test of strength. Unlike Spanish bullfighting, the animals are not wounded and are not killed.
Hamamatsu Festival 3-5 May Hamamatsu, Shizuoka Pre	Local teams fly huge decorated kites, attempting to bring kites of other teams to the ground. Accompanied by assorted events, traditional and otherwise, including sacred dances, parades and taiko drumming.
Hiroshima Flower Festival 3-5 May Hiroshima	Festival for peace featuring flowers, music and a wide range of fun and entertainments in Hiroshima. Attracts visitors from all over the world.
Kutani Chawan Matsuri 3-5 May Terai, Ishikawa Pre	Dozens of stalls selling kutani pottery set up in the grounds of Terai Town Hall and the Sano Kutani Museum. Many events related to kutani pottery also take place.
Seihakusai 3-5 May Nanao, Ishikawa Pre	Features a parade of three enormous dashi, (drawn festival floats) each around 20m in height and weighing around 20 tons. Known locally as deokayama (giant mountains), these floats are built entirely from wood, bamboo and rope and without the use of nails.

Shio no Michi Festival 3-5 May Omachi, Nagano Pre	A procession of local people, dressed in traditional costumes, visit historical spots on the route of the Shio no Michi (Salt Route), a historical road that was once an important trade route.
Okinohata Suitengu Festival 3-5 May Yanagawa, Fukuoka Pre	Three days of festival music and ceremonies are held on a floating stage made from canal boats tied together with stalls and other festivities on the banks of the canals in Yanagawa.
Sea Bream Netting Festival 3-31 May Fukuyama, Hiroshima Pre	See demonstrations of this centuries old method of fishing on specially prepared tourist boats during the period.
Ageuma Shinji 4-5 May Tado Shrine, Kuwana, Mie Pre	The ageuma (rising horse) ritual involves young horseback riders in samurai armour riding horses up a steep 3m high cliff. It is traditionally believed to predict the success of the coming year's harvest. The festival also includes a procession of a boy on horseback and retainers in period costume.
Yabusame Matsuri 4-6 May Sengen Taisha Shrine, Fujinomiya, Shizuoka Pre	Demonstrations of yabusame, traditional Japanese horseback archery.
Sagami Giant Kite Festival 5 May Sagami, Kanagawa Pre	Held on the banks of the Sagami River, this is an annual event at which a giant (14m long) kite is flown by a team of nearly 100 people.
Kotohira-gu Shugiku 5 May Kotohira, Kagawa Pre	Kemari, a ritual game of kick-ups played by priests in Heian Period (794-1192) robes, is played in the grounds of this famous shrine in Kagawa, west of Takamatsu.
Nihon Dowasai 5 May Kusu, Oita Prefecture	An event held in the memory of Takehiko Kurushima, a writer of children's stories who lived in this town. Various events for children to participate in such as a festival parade and kids' sumo wrestling.
Kanda Festival The Saturday and Sunday closest to 15 May Kanda Myojin Shrine, Tokyo	Floats, wagons filled with dancers, and around 200 mikoshi are paraded through a large area of downtown Tokyo in honour of the deities of the Kanda Shrine, shinto priests on horseback accompany the parade. The main Kanda matsuri is held once every two years in odd-numbered years, while festivals held in even-numbered years are on a smaller scale.
Takigi Noh Performance 11 & 12 May, 4-9pm Kofuku-ji Temple and Kasuga Shrine, Nara	Performance of traditional noh theatre held outdoors lit only by torchlight at Kofukuji Temple and Kasuga Jinja in Nara.
Johana Hikiyama Festival 14-15 May Johana, Toyama Pre	A parade of six intricately carved and lacquered floats, each the work of skilled local craftsmen. These are joined by lori yatai floats that carry musicians playing folk tunes.
Otabi Festival 14-18 May Komatsu, Ishikawa Pre	Kabuki is performed by children on eight festival floats parading around the town led by children performing lion dances.
Sanjo Matsuri 15 May Sanjo Niigata Pre	Features a parade of hundreds of local people dressed as warriors and attendants. Recreating the clan lord's journeys to Edo Castle during the Edo Period (1603-1867).

Calendar of Cultural Events in April 2012

Aoi Festival 15 May Kamigamo Shrine, Kyoto	The Aoi (hollyhock) Festival is a solemn and formal parade dating back over 1,000 years, involving 500 people in full Heian Period court dress. An ox drawn cart is led to Kamigamo Shrine from the Imperial Palace (Gosho) in Kyoto where Shinto rituals take place.
Kurofune Matsuri 16-18 May Shimoda, Shizuoka Pre	Many events of both a traditional and an international flavour as this is a festival to mark the coming of the kurofune (black ships) led by Commodore Matthew Perry who arrived in Shimoda in 1854 to demand that Japanese ports be opened to American trade.
Sanja Matsuri 16-21 May Asakusa, Tokyo	One of the largest mikoshi parades of all Japanese festivals. A parade of about 100 portable shrines centered on Sensoji Temple in Asakusa, Tokyo. Many geisha as well as others dressed in traditional costumes also take part. Attracts 2 million spectators every year.
Kobe Matsuri 16-18 May Kobe	Citizens' festival featuring parades during the day and in the evening, samba dancing and a fireworks display held out over the harbour in Kobe.
Tosho-gu Grand Festival 16-18 May Nikko, Tochigi Pre	Nikko's most important annual festival, featuring yabusame (horseback archery) and a 1000 strong costumed re-enactment of the delivery of Tokugawa Ieyasu's remains to Nikko.
Aoba Festival 17-18 May Sendai, Miyagi Pre	2-day people's festival in Sendai packed with events such as mikoshi parades, a flea market, warrior processions, taiko drumming and street dancing.
Kawawatari Jinkosai 17-18 May Tagawa, Fukuoka Pre	Thrilling traditional festival during which ten teams carrying richly-decorated mikoshi participate in races, ending in a hectic crossing of the Hikosan River in the afternoon of both days. Tagawa is east of Fukuoka city.
Mifune Boat Festival 3rd Sunday Arashiyama, Kyoto	Thirty boats carrying participants in court dress of the Heian Period (794-1192) travel upstream on the Oi River in Arashiyama, Kyoto. Leading the way are three boats carrying players performing noh dramas, gagaku musicians and shrine maidens respectively.
Uchiwa Maki 19 May Toshodai-ji Temple, Nara	Buddhist ceremonies and performances of court music and dance held before the main event when thousands of specially prepared paper fans are thrown into the crowd at Toshodaiji Temple in Nara. The fans are kept as good luck charms for the coming year.
Mikuni Festival 19-21 May Mikuni, Fukui Pre	One of the largest festivals in the Hokuriku region. Features a parade of unique festival floats each decorated with ornately decorated, giant effigies of famous samurai warriors.
Aioi Peiron Festival 24-25 May Aioi, Hyogo Pre	Harbour festival with teams of oarsmen and women competing in longboat races. Also features street parades, dancing and fireworks.
Nanko Matsuri 24-26 May Minatogawa Jinja Shrine, Kobe	A memorial service for the spirit of Masashige Kusunoki, the enshrined deity of Minatogawa Jinja. Many visitors come for the shigin contest (recitation of Chinese-style poems), and for the rice-cake scattering event.

Things to do after you leave Japan

by xxx

Re-learn English

After years in Japan chatting with your students, your co-workers and your Japanese friends, exposing yourself to varying levels of English, you may already be aware that your native language has taken a serious blow. You may find yourself dropping pesky words such as 'a' and 'the' from your speech, and really, who needs plurals? You now use 'Fight-o!' and 'Challenge!' the Japanese way, shout 'Sugoi!' at every opportunity and express surprise/disgust/disappointment by going "Eeeeeeeeeeeh-hhh..." (guilty on all counts).

Ease slowly back into speaking everyday English. Ask your family and friends to help by smacking you in the head every time you speak Japanese English. Believe me, they will be more than happy to oblige.

Go to the movies

Visit your local movie theatre pretty much anywhere outside of Japan. Enjoy paying for a movie ticket without feeling like you are single-handedly bankrolling a major studio. Crunch your popcorn, slurp your bucket-sized cola – no one will care. Enjoy the noise and buzz of the people around you as the movie starts. Laugh out loud at the funny bits, without feeling like everyone else thinks you're crazy or a colossal dick.

Go to a library*

Open a book. You can read it! Open another one. You can read that, too! Piles and piles of books, magazines and newspapers, and you can read every page! Avoid hyperventilation or scaring the staff – at least one of them probably studies martial arts.

*also applicable to bookstores

Visit a supermarket

Where's the seaweed aisle? Wherever you look – past the pillow-sized bags of chips, beyond the shelves of bread (bread which is not stuffed with bean paste, nor chocolate-flavoured), next to fruit that does not cost a day's pay – you will fail to find seaweed. Whether that's a good or bad thing depends on you.

Go to a party

Someone will give you a beer. You can drink it right away, instead of waiting for the speeches and the toast and watching it lose its ice-cold sheen. You can probably recognize all the food on the table, none of which is related to squid. No one will tell you how good you are with chopsticks.

Reacquaint yourself with customer 'service'

The lady at the airline counter who growls menacingly as she checks your boarding pass. The college student ringing through your drugstore purchases who tells you in far too intimate detail about his a) rotten morning b) breakup with his girlfriend c) night in the drunk tank. The barista too wrapped up in checking her iPhone to take your order. They'll quickly have you nostalgic for the impeccable service of the Land of the Rising Sun. None of them will kneel to take your order.

New Year's Eve

Go out to enjoy New Year's Eve in the freaking cold**. Wonder why everyone is screaming at you. Have champagne instead of soba – it has more fizzy bubbles, but it probably won't help you live longer...

**Er, well in Canada it is...

Go to a Japanese Restaurant

Take your friends, and whisper to them, "This isn't real sushi." Insist on ordering and talking with the staff in Japanese, until they tell you they're Korean. Try to gross out your friends by eating the things on the menu with the most tentacles.

Stop Bowing

This is hard to do. After years of constant head bobs, you will automatically do it when someone opens a door, or while driving, or while on the phone. You'll do it even when you think you aren't. It's kind of charming, actually. People will think it's cute. And they will instantly know you've been in Japan.

Fit In

After years of being stared at, you are suddenly completely normal again. No one looks twice at you. Weird, huh?



Joel Assogba caught AJET Connect's attention when he sent an open letter to the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) to complain about a children's book by the famous children's author Miyoko Matsutani, *Ninjin-san ga Akai Wake* ("The Reason the Carrot is Red"), which he says promotes racism and directly affected his children when they were attending school in Japan. The story as he describes it goes like this: "A carrot and a burdock ask a white radish (daikon) out to a bath. The burdock jumps in the water but soon hops out because the water is too hot; it remains black. The carrot stays in the hot water longer and turns red. The daikon cools the bath with some cold water and washes himself thoroughly, which turns him shining white.

At the end, the three stand beside each other to compare their color. The burdock is black and dirty because he did not wash his body properly; the daikon is white and beautiful because he did." He says that among other racial slurs, Japanese schoolmates called his kids "black and dirty as burdocks." He published his own book, "What Colour are Burdocks?," in response to Ms. Matsutani's book. (The full text of the letter, printed in the Japan Times on April 10th, 2012, is available here: www.japantimes.co.jp/text/fl20120410hn.html)

We asked him some questions about his experiences in Japan.

What brought you to Japan initially?

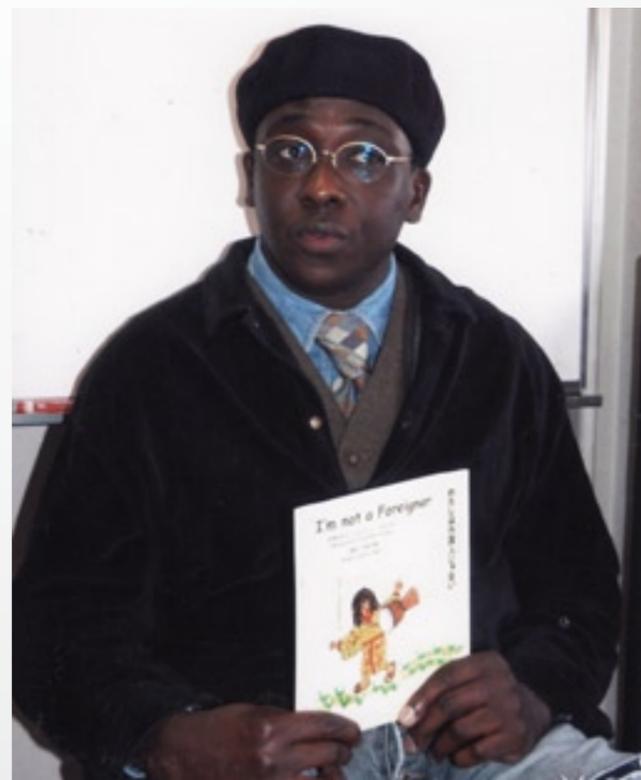
My interest in Medieval Japanese classic literature such as the 'Tale of Heike', "Tsurezure gusa" (Essays in Idleness) written by Kenko YOSHIDA, and most of all "Hojoki" (An Account of My Hut) by KAMO no Chomei, which summarizes the "Mujo" (transiency) view of Buddhism. KAMO no Chomei (鴨長明, 1153 or 1155–1216) was a Japanese author, poet, essayist, philosopher, and social critic. He is representative of the literary recluses of his time, and his celebrated essay *Hōjōki* is representative of the genre known as "recluse literature" (*sōan bungaku*).

I love KAMO no Chomei, and of course Japan, too!

When you lived in Japan, did you live in an urban or rural area? Do you think your location – urban or rural – contributed to the attitudes your children encountered at school?

I lived in Chikugo-shi (Fukuoka), a city of about 48,808 people, only 10 minutes by car from downtown Kurume-shi (about 303,277 people), and about 35 minutes by JR Express train from Fukuoka-shi (about 1,461,631 people). So, I don't think it is a remote area.

I think bullying and racism are universal issues that have little to do with "urban or rural" areas. These issues have more to do with the way children are brought up and what they are taught by parents,



teachers and society as a whole. Racism is not something children are born with. It is based in shallowness and untrustworthiness, and limits all humanity. It is only by speaking out against racist attitudes that we can embrace tolerance, diversity, love, compassion and respect for life.

Were you surprised by the publisher's reaction to your phone call? He didn't seem to accept your argument – that the book was racist – at all.

I was shocked, but not surprised. He knew the book was racist, but he denied it for the simple reason that the story was told by a famous author, Miyoko Matsutani, who is considered the "Mother" of Japanese juvenile literature. On many occasions, I have been yelled at and told to go back to my country if I "badmouthed" Miyoko Matsutani. I vividly recall an incident that really flipped me off. While I was talking to kids, their parents and teachers about "Ninjin-san ga Akai Wake" and why I created "Gobo-san no Iro wa?" at an elementary school in Fukuoka, a mother stood up and interrupted my presentation; "Don't badmouth our beloved Matsutani-sensei in front of our kids, You are a Gaijin and you don't know anything about our beautiful culture..." the principal jumped in, saying to me: "Don't brainwash our kids, stop your lecture, thank you."

I never badmouth anyone, but every time that I find something wrong in our societies, I challenge it. Let's not confuse "criticism" with "badmouthing." BADMOUTHING is charging falsely or with malicious intent; attacking the good name and reputation of someone, but CRITICISM is the practice of judging the merits and faults of something or someone in an intelligible (or articulate) way. When the criticism is valid, it must be made by all means necessary, because it is the only way we can make the world a better place to live.

A lot of traditional folktales like this one, not just in Japan but all over the world, can be quite offensive, or at the very least insensitive, to modern readers. How would you propose to balance the 'rich culture' the publisher Mr. Ikeda defended with the changing times, where the messages of these old stories are no longer acceptable?

A "rich culture" is a culture that is flexible and respects diversity. A culture that defends fixed notions is a very poor culture. Just like "The flowing river never stops, and yet the water is never the same," it is impossible for any culture in this world not to evolve.

Is the image of servants, maids and housewives a reality? Does a handsome, rich prince always rescue these helpless women? And most importantly, do they always live happily ever after? The simple answer is "No!" These "Once Upon A Time" fairy tales that have been read as bedtime stories for as long as anyone can remember. However, they have a severely negative influence on children. They give them false expectations, stereotypical ideas and the impression that all dreams come true!

Let us examine the so-called heroines of these fairy tales — they are all beautiful! Cinderella, Snow White and Anastasia — are any of these women Black? Chinese? Asian? Plain? Heavysset? Physically challenged? "No." What kind of message is this sending? Is every young girl that reads a fairy tale white, thin and gorgeous? "Most definitely not!" Girls feel that unless they are blessed with beautiful looks they will not find their "prince charming" and live happily ever after.

Besides being beautiful, look at the roles these women play. Snow White was a housemaid for seven male dwarfs, Cinderella, a servant in her own home and Belle, a helpless prisoner to a powerful male. Some may argue that these characters are good role models for girls because in all tales they play the "important" roles. But really all they are doing is confirming people's warped belief that "it's a man's world".

It is about time we parents and educators use our creativity to bring to pass stories to counter

traditional folktales that are damaging the foundation of our multicultural and multiethnic contemporary societies.

Many JETs here have families and multiracial children attending Japanese schools. What advice would you give to those parents for dealing with racism and bullying?

Make sure that your kids tell you everything that happens at school (good and bad) every day after they come back home. Do not tolerate any racist comments. Kids need to take pride in their ethnic background while growing up, and do not forget to tell them very often; "You are very Beautiful in the color of your skin!"

I usually go to schools to talk to kids, parents and educators. Racism is all about ignorance, and the only way we can counter it is through education. I always go with the spirit of "Hate the Sin, but Love

the Sinner!" and I tell Racists and Bullies that as Human Beings, they are not Evil, but what they are doing is Evil, so they Must stop doing Evil things. I usually ask them to put themselves in the victim's place and feel his/her pain, then I whisper in their ears the Golden Rule: "Do unto others, as you would have them do unto you!"

I believe in a good human nature, so I help my kids and other kids practice compassion, and nurture their good inner selves with universal human values such as Peace, Love, Tolerance and Respect for Life.

"If you want to be happy, practice compassion. If you want others to be happy, practice compassion." (Dalai Lama)

What has been the reception for your book, What Color are Burdocks? Is it available only in Japan? Do you plan to write more children's books?

I am really passionate about writing and illustrating juvenile literature, so it is no doubt a lifelong affair for me. I was quite satisfied with the coverage I have received in the Japanese media; the three main national newspapers (Yomiuri, Asahi, Mainichi) and several other regional newspapers have written excellent reviews about the book and my social actions. Several radio and television shows also have allowed me to express my views on the issue of racism. Many public libraries purchased not only "What Color are Burdocks?" but my other books as well. I was honored to find out that seven of my publications (including "What Color are Burdocks?") are at the Japan National Diet Library in Tokyo: <http://www.ndl.go.jp/en/index.html> (Search Joel Assogba)

Now, what makes me sad is that the media here in Canada refuse to cover my publications and social actions. There is a kind of subtle racism going on now in Canada, especially in the media. Canada now finds itself in an era of race relations more complex than in the days of fragrant racism. Bigotry then was blatant, so entrenched that it could be shattered ultimately only by the conscience of the country and the hammer of the law. Today, when explicit discrimination is prohibited and blatant racism is no longer fashionable, much prejudice has gone underground. It may have diminished in some quarters, but it is far from extinct. Like a virus searching for a congenial host, it mutates until it finds expression in a belief, a statement, or a form of behavior that seems acceptable.

The camouflage around such racism does not make it benign. It can still damage life opportunities. Take the durable, potent stereotype of black people as the least intelligent of all races and lazy. In December last year, when I asked 400 white Canadian attendees of one of my seminars on Diversity to evaluate various racial and ethnic groups, blacks ended up at the bottom. Most of them labeled blacks as less intelligent than whites (75 percent); lazier than whites (80 percent); and more likely than whites to prefer being on welfare than being self-supporting (85 percent).

Much of this prejudice is no more than a thought, of course. To inhibit the translation of biased thoughts into discriminatory actions Canadian society has built a superstructure of laws, regulations, ethics and programs that include affirmative action and diversity training. Still, images manage to contaminate behavior, often subtly and ambiguously.

Is there anything else you'd like to say to the JETs teaching in all levels of school in Japan, as our role beyond teaching English is to introduce foreign cultures and promote international exchange? What can we do to help promote awareness of racism?

Please explain the importance of valuing and promoting cultural diversity to students and the value of being able to speak two or more languages.

Make sure that schools you work at provide opportunities for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural education of their pupils to ensure that they understand and value social and cultural diversity in Japan and the world. An essential part of preparation for adult life is preparation to live in a multi-ethnic, multicultural and multi-faith society and this must be positively promoted in your schools. The schools, therefore, must not allow any form of bullying, racism and other forms of violence, whether physical, intellectual or emotional towards any child, thus making sure that they are safe places where everyone can learn together.

How you do this:

- > By making children feel valued and good about themselves.
- > By ensuring that children have equality of access to learning.
- > By making adjustments to the environment and resources to accommodate a wide range of cultures and ethnic groups.
- > By positively reflecting the widest possible range of communities in the choice of resources.

- > By avoiding stereotypes or derogatory images in the selection of books or other visual materials.
- > By celebrating a wide range of festivals, for example Ramadan, Kwanza, Chinese New Year, Saint Patrick Day, Hanukkah...
- > By creating an environment of mutual respect and tolerance.
- > By having displays celebrating the multiculturalism of the school, for example world flags, famous people from various ethnic and national origins...
- > By encouraging positive behavior in children, for example kindness, inclusion, tolerance...
- > By learning about different faiths and cultural practices as part of the curriculum.
- > By celebrating important events, for example Black History Month, International Women's Day, Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, The International Day for Elimination of Racial Discrimination...
- > And last but not the least, ASK YOUR SCHOOL LIBRARIANS to PURCHASE MY BOOKS and POSTERS to promote Anti-Bullying, Anti-Racism, Tolerance, Diversity, Peace, Nonviolence, Compassion and Respect for Life among students (Laugh Out Loud!)

Joel is an African-Canadian "Japanese," with the spirit and soul of a world citizen. He ran a language school, "Queen's," where he taught English and French for 17 years. He is also a writer-illustrator and a passionate public speaker. He has published many trilingual books (Japanese / English / French) and articles in Japan's main newspapers. He is a regular contributor to The Japan Times ST. Author of five popular illustrated books, he has also published a bilingual book to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the A-bomb dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. He has designed and published two colorful posters to promote multiculturalism and prevent "Ijime" (bullying) in Japan. He travels all over Japan to give lectures in Japanese on parenting, education of the heart, universal values, crime prevention, human rights, antiracism, nonviolence and peace... He held a special literary event for students, French speaking people and other invited guests in the Manulife VIP Lounge (Canada Pavilion at EXPO 2005 world exposition in Aichi, Japan), and also at Embassy of Canada in Tokyo, Japan (in 2006). He is now living in Ottawa (Ontario, Canada) with his Japanese spouse and their three children.

Joel's books (Daddy Publishing):

- > The Rainbow's Kids (Trilingual: Japanese/English/French), a message book to promote Peace, ISBN 4-9900918-0-9, August 2001, Japan.
- > Wind of Freedom (Trilingual: Japanese/English/French), a message book to promote Equality, ISBN 4-9900918-1-7, February 2002, Japan.
- > What Color are Burdocks? (Bilingual: Japanese/English), a message book to promote Diversity, ISBN 4-9900918-2-5, November 2004, Japan.
- > Peace (Bilingual: Japanese/English), a book to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the A-bomb dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, ISBN 4-9900918-3-3, August 2005, Japan.
- > I am not a Foreigner (Bilingual: Japanese/English), a message book to promote to fight against racism and promote Multiculturalism, ISBN 4-9900918-4-1, March 2006, Japan.
- > Respect for Life (Bilingual: Japanese/English), a message book to fight against bullying and promote Life, ISBN 4-9900918-5-X, September 2008, Japan.

•Poster: Multiethnic and Multicultural Japan, a message poster to promote ethnic and cultural diversity in Japan, March 2003.

•Poster: Bullying: Zero Tolerance (Bilingual: Japanese/English), a message poster to fight against bullying, August 2007.

You can place orders at: joel5711@gmail.com





Ban Chan Night

Emily Gurvis

I recently had the pleasure of volunteering with Peace Boat, an international NGO currently working in Ishinomaki, Miyagi Prefecture, one of the cities hardest hit by the March 11th earthquake and resulting tsunami. When people ask me about my trip, my initial reaction is to say how great it was. The fun I had interacting with other volunteers and the local people sometimes felt inappropriate and was often tempered by the seriousness of the situation.

Finding a whole tea set imbedded in the ground or a child's school slipper is sobering, and I think it's these conflicting emotions that make the experience so moving. The most humbling moments for me were the lunch times when we would sit down together and talk with the local people. Several times these lunches occurred in the temporary housing neighborhoods provided to those displaced by the tsunami. Our hosts would set out drinks or snacks as a thank you for our work and eventually talk would turn to the earthquake, to the tsunami, and to all that followed.

A common lament of those we spoke to is that no one knows the

truth. Men and women in this coastal town don't hear about their community on the news. They don't hear their stories or see themselves in the faces of the newscasters. In the spirit of passing on a piece of what I have learned, and to publicize a little known truth, I would like to tell you the story of Ban Chan Night.

It's Ban chan night and all of the volunteers sit huddled together in the main room, making themselves comfortable on individual tatami cushions, when Ban chan starts speaking. Sho, my team's leader and translator, sits behind me. Ban chan starts by saying he wants to talk about the incident, and the things you couldn't see or experience on the television. "If you feel sick," he says, "you can leave. But I am here to tell the truth."

When the earthquake hit it was slow. Ban chan looked at his watch, waiting for the intermittent shaking and rolling to end. As it continued for over 5 minutes, progressively picking up speed, he knew something was wrong. He'd never felt an earthquake so strong. Immediately after the earthquake was over he contacted his wife and made sure his children were safe at school. At the time Ban chan's only concerns were for his

home and his possessions.

Ban chan continues and says that when the tsunami warning was initially announced, the radio said to expect only 50 cm. About 20 minutes before the tsunami struck it was expected to reach 6 meters in height. He knew that when the tsunami came it would be big and he imagined it would be something like a large typhoon, he states. Now, Sho's voice softens as he echoes Ban chan in English. "But when it came it was unbelievably big."

At this point I am having trouble hearing Sho speak. His voice has dropped to mirror Ban chan's low, steady tone. I can feel the tension in him and I turn to look. Sho is seeing past me and straight to Ban chan. I turn my body so that I have Sho speaking into one ear, and Ban chan into the other. My new position allows me to look at the other volunteers. I see Yudai, one of the main leaders, who surely must have heard this speech before, and there is a telling tension to his face that says no matter how many times he listens to this story it will always be as bitter.

Thinking only of reaching his children still at their elementary school, Ban chan got in his car and started to drive. He was waiting at a stoplight when the tsunami hit. Ahead of him the large river that cuts through Ishinomaki suddenly overflowed and a black wall came rushing at him. Immediately Ban chan went into reverse and began speeding away. A man in another car chose to get out and run. Ban chan could see the man ahead of him, and the wall behind him, all racing away from the sea.

"Even now I dream about it," Ban chan says. It haunts him and his family says that when he sleeps, he screams. He knows that he

made the right decision by running, but he says that if the wall comes for him again he knows he will be too frightened to move. The way Ban chan speaks of the tsunami, of the "black wall", makes it sound like this natural disaster is a person, a criminal, who intruded into his life with intent. Perhaps it is easier to think of the tsunami as something willfully malicious rather than to believe that thousands of people live or die based on fortune. If Ban chan had gone through the stoplight and turned, heading to his children's school, he would not have seen the water coming and he would have died. It's a miracle that he is still alive to tell us this story.

Ban chan was lucky enough to evacuate to one of the several large mountains that dot the town and as he looked out over Ishinomaki he felt his knees weaken and he fell to the ground. There was a large fishing boat where his parents' house should be, people in traffic jams with their backs to the tsunami, and houses floating freely. Although he says he saw it with his own eyes, he still couldn't believe it was possible. A large, black shape out at sea had come and wiped the city clean.

As he stood on the side of Mt. Hyuri a car floated by, a hand sticking out of the window. Rushing to the car he grabbed the hand and pulled, saving one life. He saw another car pass by and although he tried, he couldn't free the driver and both were swept out of sight. Thinking of these people he states that in an emergency "a car is a coffin." He cautions that you can easily become trapped in cars, making the chance of survival extremely low. "Please always keep it in mind and don't forget it," Ban chan says. I look at Ban chan as he gives us this advice and his mouth is turned down in an angry

frown. I feel he is reprimanding us, forbidding us from making the same fatal mistakes.

My body is so tense now that I barely move. The flow of information to both ears is overwhelming and I have to consciously relax my shoulders and fists. I see others are trying to do the same, subtly shifting on their mats, arms wrapped tight around their knees. We look like rapt students. Ban chan tells us how the houses melted away like paper and how men and women clung to bridges, screaming for help before succumbing. He can remember their faces, he says. Not at first, but two or three months after the tsunami, their voices, their last words, and the fear on their faces remain with him. He could pick each person out of a photograph. Ban chan says that when he heard one frightened man yelling for his father Ban chan tried to jump into the current to save the man and only the other people on the mountain could hold him back. Ban chan stops and his face contorts. He is crying and his hands are clenched in front of him like fists. The tension I feel at his words is nothing compared to what he must feel while recounting this story.

The first morning after the quake, Ban chan woke at daylight and all he saw was the sea. In some places the water didn't recede for a week. Bodies were scattered through the streets like garbage. Ban chan and the other evacuees stayed on the mountain for 3 days with no food or water. They used the snow for food and to flush the toilets. Ban chan notes that although their survival is due to the snow, many of the elderly died from the cold. His face is bitter as he says this and I can't imagine being so very helpless to the elements.

In the 3 days Ban chan was trapped on Mt. Hyuri, news spread in the unaffected parts of town as people compiled lists of survivors. When Ban chan was told there was nothing left of Minami Shogakkou, his children's elementary school, he checked the list of survivors. Unable to find their names, Ban chan decided to cross the bridge where the tsunami first struck to look for them himself.

What was once a 30 minute walk had turned into 4 hours of congestion as hundreds of people continued to search for their loved ones. Along the way Ban chan learned that Minami had been successfully evacuated. "I knew my children were safe," Ban chan says, "but when I saw them I felt a safety and happiness I had never known before."

As Ban chan says this, a low humming distracts me. It's Sho's phone alarm. Less than a minute later the earthquake comes. Everyone freezes and Ban chan tilts his head to the side, silently counting. Ten seconds of waiting and we are told to get our shoes and get out. Perhaps it was the sick, slow rolling of the ground where I have only ever felt small jolts before, or perhaps it was the proximity to that graveyard of a river laying less than a mile from us, but I have never shot to my feet more quickly. We are all scrambling at the genkan as the ground comes to a stop. It's been about 1 minute. Everyone pauses and looks to the Leader. A beat later and she nods. Sho tells us to get our jackets. A quick run to our bunk room and I am back at the genkan in record time, clutching the "emergency" 2-liter of water we were all asked to bring.

Luckily, this all ends up being precaution as no tsunami warning is issued, but it is a stark demonstration of how suddenly

and easily I can be taken unawares. As we all shuffle back to our tatami mats we look at each other, raising eyebrows, taking deep breaths. My friend

Kan walks past and wraps an arm around me, squeezing tightly. I wonder what look I have on my face. I must appear shaken - and I am. It is far too easy to lose yourself in the instinct to get out. I sit back down and Sho settles behind me again with a sigh. The way he calmly translated for and instructed our group, versus the way I so quickly ran for the door, shows the two possible extremes. I can't imagine being in charge of a school during an earthquake, or being so helpless that you are forced to leave other people behind as you flee.

Ban chan echoes my thoughts and says that there is no way in hell we can beat Mother Nature. "No matter how much power or technology we have, we don't stand a chance." And such is the abrupt beginning to the rest of our lecture. "What could dying people have thought in their last moments," Ban chan asks us. "I wish I had run away. Gone higher." He tells us that a lot of people were found dead in a nearby Pachinko parlor. Instead of evacuating and running they decided to stay and argue over money.

No matter what the cost, figurative or literal, we must protect our own lives. If no one survives the disaster then there is no one to tell this story to the next generation. Being a Jew, this concept is familiar to me. We have a similar mantra and many of our holidays are based on the premise, "never forget." We believe that to forget is to allow yourself to become a victim of history. The people of Ishinomaki will never forget, but what of the following generations

who may never experience such a disaster?

Ban chan councils us as though we are his own children. "I don't want you to see what I have seen. But I want you to know. Always run. If it comes again, everything - houses, cars, buildings - these things you can make anew. As long as you have your own life, it is possible

to rebuild." And therein lies the biggest truth of this evening. Not that we are helpless, but that we are strong - infinitely so. For those that are left behind after a loss of this magnitude, the most productive thing is to move forward, not to forget the tsunami but to build a stronger, safer city because of it.

If you live in a dangerous place, and Ban chan acknowledges that this is especially pertinent in Japan, you must be prepared. He tells us that to be prepared means to save lives. What if one person in that Pachinko shop had convinced people evacuate? Those are lives saved. But now those people are lost and can't contribute to the recovery efforts.

On March 11th the tsunami came. And on March 12th the urge to give up was overwhelming. But in that moment, people were willing to help. The young and the strong reached out to the old and the injured and asked, are you okay? "This is you," Ban chan says, looking at us. Tired, unshowered, and achey, I have rarely felt so uplifted. "From all over Japan, from all over the world, people asked - are you okay?" This is why Ban chan decided to stay and help. He found food and he found water and he chose not to bathe for a week after the disaster so that others could.

After the quake, Ban chan came

to work for Peace Boat and when the hurricane struck Mie Prefecture last September he was one of the first volunteers dispatched to the region. He's crying again, but I suspect that it's out of pride this time, when Ban chan talks about a traffic jam made of only emergency response vehicles, of an American marine who praised Japan's calm and fortitude where many Americans would have panicked and turned to looting, and when he states that the Japanese treat others' problems as their own.

Peace Boat's goal in Ishinomaki is to help facilitate rebuilding and to give assistance when it is asked. Sho's voice curls into my ear again and it balances there as I try to catch Ban chan's Japanese. "The people of Ishinomaki have recovered because we have joined hands with the volunteers," Sho translates. One person alone can't do it. Together, people can work to recover as fast as possible. "And that, "Ban chan says, " is relief effort."

There is stubbornness to people in Japan that I think many of us as foreigners have experienced. I can best describe it as a refusal to lie down. Here, too, there is a deep tradition and a pride that calls people back to Ishinomaki when others would have fled. The men and women that my team worked with were all local farmers and fishermen whose livelihoods had been washed away. Though it may be easier to relocate, they have chosen to stay and to rebuild and educate the next generation. Whole fields must be re-sown and nets must be recast, but the people here have infectious laughter and I have no doubt that when I next visit Ishinomaki, the riverbank will be green and the sea will be blue again. In the local dialect, I would like to say, "がんばっぺ石巻! がんばっぺ日本!"

Rosie. A Word to the Wise

Dear Rosie,

I've done everything I can to encourage the members of my ESS club at school, but the club just keeps shrinking. The members of the club - all girls - like English, but they're all so shy and hard to motivate. I'm at the end of my rope trying to come up with ideas for them. I just don't know how I can get them more involved - or get more members!

My Poor English Club!

Dear "My Poor English Club,"

I had the same problem with my English club last year. A lot of the most active students graduated, and not enough new students joined. There were only three students in the English club at one point, and most of the teachers treated it like a joke, moving our classroom and taking our budget. The best

advice I can give in this situation is to simply continue doing your best. The students still deserve your full attention and energy despite the small number of participants. Put your heart into it, and they will know that you did your best. Even if the English club phases out for a year, it could be back next year with even more students! Plan and enjoy activities that can be done on a smaller scale. Whatever you do though, make sure you let those students know that you really care and they'll have a great time participating in your English club activities.

If you've come up with anything neat, share your English club ideas and projects here! Post pictures and small blurbs about activities that were a hit. Send to communications@ajet.net and we'll include them in the next column.

Hope to hear about some of your most successful ideas soon!

Best of luck,
Rosie

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Singing in the Rain

Adam Black

I have to admit that I had never even heard of touch rugby before coming to Tokushima. Sure, I'd heard of rugby—that was the sport that Ross played to impress Emily, which led to a bunch of giant English dudes beating the sh—uh, the living daylights out of him. Not in a mean way—just in a sporting way. Yes, I realize that Friends is probably not the most reliable way to learn about a national past-time, but I think I learned the most important thing about rugby: namely, that I should never, ever, play rugby.

So I was a bit leery when, shortly after coming to Japan, I heard that the Eishinsha Cup AJET Games Touch Rugby Tournament was the most fun event we have in Tokushima, and that I should definitely join the team. Sure, the “touch” part was reassuring; at least nobody would be charging me with a morningstar (much of the action took place off-screen in that episode of Friends, but I can only assume that medieval weaponry was involved). But I'm the type of person who classifies inner-tube water-polo as “fun, but a bit too complicated, and far too strenuous.” In other words, I rarely meet sports that like me, and I was sure that touch rugby wouldn't be any different.

But peer pressure is a wonderful motivator, and I soon found myself attending practices with my fellow Tokushima JETs, often with the Shikoku University team (charmingly named “PUG”) helping to teach

the beginners. What I found was that touch rugby is a rare beast: it's a sport that is friendly to beginners but has plenty of strategic headroom for higher-level players. The game scales well to player skill.

If you've never played before, the rules are pretty simple. Two teams of six line up facing each other on the rugby pitch. One player on the possessing team touches the ball to their foot, and begins running with it. When a player on the defending team touches the ball-carrier, he or she puts it down and steps over it, and another player on the attacking team picks it up and keeps running. What happens next is important: after the touch, the defending team must backpedal five meters before they are on-sides, once again able to touch the attackers. The person who picked up the ball, meanwhile, is known as the dummy-half; this player must pass the ball (laterally or backwards only) quickly, for if the dummy-half is touched, it causes an immediate turnover. The same is true of a missed pass. Otherwise, the attacking team has a total of six touches before the ball changes hands. If an attacking player can reach the scoring zone and put the ball down before being touched, that's called a “try,” and the attacking team gets one point.

Okay, maybe it doesn't sound that simple in words, but I promise it is once you actually try it. Once people know the rules and what they're supposed to do in a few situations, there's a beautiful flow to the game, and from a few simple rules emerge some really interesting strategies to create holes in

the defense. It's a game that rewards strategy and patience as much as speed and power, and while I can't say that I'm good at it, it's definitely a sport that I can call fun.

But this article isn't about touch rugby; it's about the tournament we have every year in Tokushima. The tournament was started in 2004 by Australian JETs Ron Page and David Cowland Cooper, who reached out to Daisaku Oya at Shikoku University for help organizing. Oya-san has been doing (from my perspective) most of the heavy lifting since Ron and David went back to Australia; he has secured a number of sponsors to help out with the costs of the tournament, most notably Eishinsha, an all-grade-levels cram school, and every year he coordinates accommodations with Shikoku Saburo no Sato, our venue in Mima, Tokushima. The tournament typically runs on a Saturday and Sunday in late May; the preliminary rounds on Saturday sort the teams into three different brackets: the towel, cup, and T-shirt brackets. The champions of each bracket are determined through Sunday's games, and the each winning team receives the prize that their bracket is named after.

But in spite of the undeniably competitive nature of the tournament, the atmosphere is one of intense friendliness and cooperation. Anywhere from a dozen to two dozen teams participate every year, and their skill levels vary widely (the Tokushima JETs' team usually finishes embarrassingly near the bottom, while the Nga Hau e Wha, a mostly New Zealander team, typically dominates), but everyone seems determined to have a good time. The skilled teams often mentor less experienced teams even as they're playing against each other, and I've never seen beginners get discouraged, or veterans get impatient with a skill mismatch.

One thing that helps, I think, is the festive atmosphere created by Saturday night's barbecue. Every year, we order copious amounts of food from the Meat Guy (we also provide vegetarian options!), and Oya-san brings cases upon cases of beer (well, happoshu, but who even notices after the second can?), and we have a big tabe/nomihoudai that intensifies the afterglow of victory and salves the sting of defeat. As much as I've grown to like touch rugby itself, I have to admit that my favorite part of the tournament is grilling dozens and dozens of burgers, not caring about singed hands because people keep handing me beers and sausages and other things that make me awfully glad that we are generally born with taste buds.

Last year, it rained. No, it didn't just rain, it typhooned. The fields were so saturated that we had to cancel the entire second day of play, which was a major bummer. Saturday's games had been fun (if damp), and the barbecue was great as usual, but Sunday felt like a bad note to end the tournament on. But there's something that tournament regulars look forward to every year if (when) Nga Hau e Wha wins: haka, a Maori war dance which is equal parts thrilling and terrifying. I won't do it the injustice of trying to describe it here; see if you can find a video online, but make sure it's one where you can see the eyes. The eyes are important. Anyway, although no victor had been determined, it was pretty unanimous that people wanted to see their haka. So we all gathered in the covered barbecue area, with a space cleared for the team at the front. An expectant hush fell over the huddled crowd as they took their positions—and then they asked if they could sing a song first.

I wish I could capture the beauty of what they sang. We'd all seen these players reign over the pitch, and many of us had seen the intensity of previous years' haka, but damn it all, these people could sing, too. And although the rain didn't let up one jot, it felt like the sun was shining directly on my brain. I know that I'm not the only one who felt that way. That was the moment I realized how amazing this tournament had become. A community had sprung up where, at a sporting event, 200 people would willingly gather to hear a dozen sing a song, and we could all be moved by it together. I have a hard time imagining another event where that would be possible.

They danced their haka afterward, and it was awesome, but for me, the defining element of last year's tournament was the harmony they shared with us under the barbecue area's roof, in the middle of the pouring rain. I know that I won't be able to take any credit for this year's touch rugby tournament; everything good about it will come from the people who attend. I'm looking forward to it, rain or shine.





Takachiho's Resident Tourist

Anthony Russo

In the eyes of a foreigner, just as there are two sides to every story, there are two sides to every town. A person living in a town as a foreign resident will undoubtedly have different experiences to that of the tourist merely passing through. Residency begets a unique opportunity to delve deep into the soul of a town that the time constraints of touring do not allow for. With the passing of time, secrets are unveiled, friendships are formed, and knowledge obtained, all culminating in a greater understanding and appreciation of the townspeople, their local culture, and their way of life.

Set amongst titanic mountains terraced in rice fields and exploding in a palette of greens, the rural town of Takachiho lies inland in northern Miyazaki. It remains steeped in tradition and is a popular destination amongst Japanese tourists. The sparse population numbers only fourteen thousand, yet many more visit each year. A myriad of tour buses, traditional inns, and pub-eateries cater to the one-timers from all over Japan and abroad. As the birthplace of Japanese mythology, Takachiho is where it all began for the Land of the Rising Sun.

Having lived and worked at the local high school for over a year now, I have seen the demise of my

trusty guide map, obtained during my first few days in Takachiho, as I crossed off the numerous places I had visited. But the places not marked on the map were soon to be revealed to me as I settled in and began to uncover the beauty of this bucolic town and its welcoming folk. Takachiho has been given the epithet 'power-spot' for good reason; if a trip here doesn't empower you, then you deserve to have your tourist visa taken away!

There are certain sightseeing spots that the traveller passing through Takachiho will undoubtedly include in their itinerary. Mention the name of the town to those who have heard of it before, and the first thing to pop into their head will surely be the famous gorge, evidenced by the abundance of souvenirs adorned with the image of this natural landmark. An afternoon can be spent taking in the views from the adjoining walking trail, riding a boat out to the seventeen-metre high waterfall, and visiting the freshwater fish aquarium.

For the time-poor, the tour of Takachiho is not complete without at least dropping by to the town's main shrine. Deceptively unimpressive, the true secret to appreciating Takachiho Shrine is in viewing the nightly yokagura performance: a traditional dance to pray for a good harvest in the coming year, depicting an array of mythological gods and goddesses, with a little sexual innuendo thrown into the mix. But one must face the gelid temperatures and the throng of tourists, as it is held during the

winter months and still sees people spilling outside the shrine building trying to glimpse the performance taking place inside.

As a resident of Takachiho, I have been fortunate enough to be invited to what I've coined as 'extreme' yokagura: an all-night version of nonstop dancing, drinking and numbing cold. The night begins with dinner at the house of a particular family, indulging in an assortment of homemade dishes from tantalizing sushi and sashimi to artery-clogging chicken namban. Then it's on to the next residence where the locals give it their all in an unceasing sequence of thirty-three dances in the spirit of yokagura, donning the masks of the deities with their petrifying gimlet-eyes, bulging noses, and grimacing visages. As the night wears on, the temperature plummets, and it is only the intermittent serving of sh ch that makes it bearable. Seeing my students performing, swelling with pride as they indulge me in their unique culture, only makes it harder when the eyelids start drooping and the guilt sets in. But a few hours' rest does not go astray: it leaves you revitalised to return in the morning to watch the climatic finale.

The tourist can claim to have ticked Takachiho off the map with a visit to the gorge, the shrine and hopefully a yokagura performance. And I would be surprised if they hadn't been enchanted by the affability of a Japanese person they encountered during their trip. Yet the fact that I've had to run errands and carry out routines as I go about my daily life in this town illustrates the different experiences of the tourist and the foreign resident. As the latter, I could not have lived here this long without having filled up the petrol tank, or having received a haircut. And in Japan, these are no ordinary experiences.

During my first few months in Japan, when I was carless, I commuted to school on foot. Along my route are the colossal mountains in all their splendour, countless automobile workshops overflowing with farming machines and vehicles, and a pachinko parlour resounding in the sordidness of incessant gambling. Squeezed in between this hotchpotch of natural beauty and urban sprawl is a tiny, nondescript petrol station. As I walked past it day after day, to and from school, curiosity got the better of the attendants peeking out of the service room window at me, who eventually plucked up the courage to accost me one day on my way home, to say hello. Suffice it to say I have not filled up my tank elsewhere since, and the friendship

I now have with Erina, Jun, Kenji and Takaki has seen us bond over filling up at the pump, testosterone-induced arm wrestling, dinner and karaoke outings, and weekly futsal practice. Needless to mention, these genki service attendants with a capital 'G' have also been my source of dirty Japanese words.

It wasn't too long either before I was befriended by the friendly folk at the hair salon. Unsatisfied with my prior barber, I sought a recommendation from a friend about an alternative. I walked into Yano's Barber one evening after work expecting a mere exchange of money for service, but before I had left almost an hour and a half later, I was assisted by the daughter of this family owned and run shop, Ayu, who's fluent in English, regarding the hairstyle I desired; exchanged mobile phone and Facebook contact details with my barber Shinji; chatted while I was served coffee and sweets; received some soup and a vegetable drink to take home; was asked to have a few drinks in the near future; and received a better haircut than at the place I used to frequent. Sure enough, the following week I was at their home having dinner, where I was served, complimented, paid attention to and included in the conversation even though we spoke different languages, invited to participate in the town's upcoming festivals, and had my taxi ride home paid for. And all I originally wanted was a haircut!

I will return to my home country in the West one day and be bitterly disappointed by the service I will have to endure. I will nonchalantly fill up the car at the petrol station, pay the moody teenager at the checkout, and be on my way to the hairdresser, where I will receive a hair cut whilst making contrived small talk and then be ushered out promptly to make room for the next customer, immediately forgotten and replaced. And it won't matter whether I live nearby or I am a tourist passing through; the treatment will be the same. In Japan, however, the dichotomy of a town exists in the experiences one is capable of having. As a resident of Takachiho, I've been fortunate enough to see and do things the visitor simply cannot achieve during their time here. We would both be treated in the same benevolent manner in our encounters with the Japanese, but only through living here are you graced with the opportunities to move beyond the archetypical tourist experience into the heart and spirit of all that it means to be Japanese.



Legends from Home

Steven Thompson

There's a story told in my village:

"The very first settlements in Izumizaki sprang up below the mountains. Atop one mountain, the highest, was a large weeping cherry blossom tree. It was here that the fox god who protected the fledgling village was said to live and watch over the people. Every year throughout April, the tree would put on a magnificent display of blooming cherry blossoms. It was at this time that the peasants of the area would perform a special ritual, taking their rice seedlings and soaking them in nearby Etsubo pond.

One day during these rituals, hundreds of crows began collecting around the weeping cherry tree and made a huge commotion! Ever more and more crows came until the sky over the village was full of them.

The people of Izumizaki grew worried that this strange phenomenon might be some sort of sign, an omen of disaster or impending doom. They had to investigate, but they were afraid. The peasants

timidly drew near the roots of the great cherry tree to see what exactly was going on, as the crows were creating riotous noise and movement in the tree. Nearer and nearer they came, till they spotted something glittering by the base of the tree. Hardly believing their eyes, they saw it was heisoku, Shinto offerings of pure gold!

The village elders took the gold and called out to the crowd, 'Behold, a magnificent sight! A treasure of gold! What shall we do with these incredible offerings?'

The villagers all agreed that the gold was not theirs, but an offering dedicated to the fox god who protected Izumizaki from the top of the mountain.

So it was decided that this priceless treasure should be dedicated to the honor of the crows and placed in a shrine at the top of the mountain. This place has ever since been known as Karasutouge, The Mountain of the Crows."

I'm a first year JET in the village of Izumizaki, in Fukushima Prefecture. I came here from the American state of Florida last August. I knew about the shrine mentioned in the story, and had been up the

mountain to see it in my first month, but only to snap pictures and check out the great view from the top. A bit later in the year, while doing an activity in class, I learned that "Karasutouge" meant The Crow's Pass, which I thought was cool, if not a bit ominous. It wasn't until making preparations for our village's recitation contest that I was given a collection of village folk tales to type up and edit.

What was so fascinating to me was that almost all of the stories talked about areas and landmarks that I pass by every day. Another story told of a famous sumo wrestler from Izumizaki, Ikazuchi Mineemon, whose remains are interred in the local temple. This temple, Shoken-ji, is visible from my front door, and I see it every morning when I leave the house.

One of my favorites was a group of stories about a fox spirit named Donnimu, whom the villagers dubbed "Lord Fox." In one tale, Lord Fox disguised himself as a human in order to get a village doctor's help for his wife (the Lady Fox, of course), who was going through a difficult childbirth. Lord Fox brought the doctor to his home, which had been furnished to look like a human home, but had no ceiling and was open to the night sky. The doctor, after examining his patient, knew her to be a fox, but safely delivered the baby nevertheless. The doctor expected to be paid in "leaves or some such," but was instead handsomely paid in real legal tender. The home of Donnimu and his lady wife was the ancient burial mound across the street from my main school. The doctor lived in my neighborhood.

Folk tales can be found in every culture, since people always seek to explain the things around them, especially places of great power or beauty. We're enthralled with the idea of fantastical forces beyond our comprehension, and we love a good story. What's more is that they're told so often they become an inseparable part of the local culture, and a great way to connect with your new hometown in Japan.

I'm lucky enough to be good friends with the director of the local museum, and we talked about Izumizaki's ancient places and local folklore. He told me about other places around the village that had stories, and showed them to me. Every year in the fall, the people of the village get together to explore the ancient burial mounds and ruins in the village, which have cave paintings and totemic figures. Sometimes, we're so eager to see the

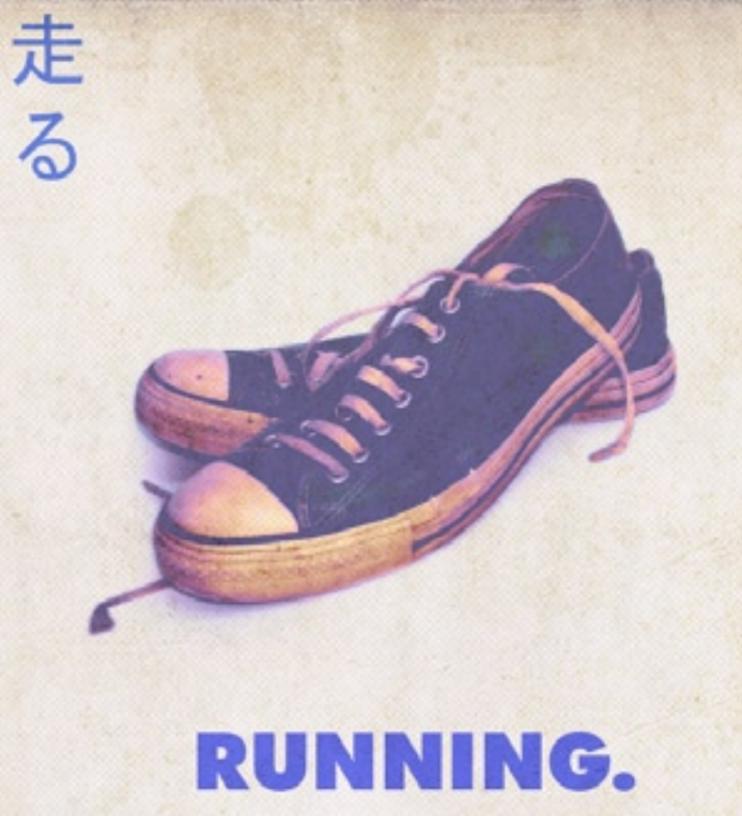
famous sights of Japan, like Kyoto, Fuji-san, and the Cup Ramen museum, that we neglect our own local areas and their rich histories.

Not only did I learn more about the history of Izumizaki, but the director and I talked about American folktales as well. Most American folktales have to do with exploration and heroism, rather than fantastic spirits, and we talked about these differences. The director pointed out that humans were the defining force in American folktales more so than Japanese ones (which were usually about humans impacted by the spirit world), and that says something about American culture. Remembering and sharing these stories had me ruminating on my own culture and the things we pass down. Exchanging these stories did more than a PowerPoint presentation or awesome foreign omiyage ever could.

I would encourage you not only to learn about local folktales where you live, but to share your own, no matter which country you hail from. If you don't feel confident talking about your own folktales in Japanese, try typing them up and getting help translating them. Use them for local recitation contests, eikaiwa classes, or story time at a local library. Folktales are the keepers of local culture and customs, and an amazing way to promote international exchange in your new home.

Steven Thompson is a first-year ALT living in Fukushima prefecture. As his students have keenly observed, he is a "tall man every day." When not maintaining his height or providing his services as a jungle gym for the local kindergarten, he writes fiction, blasts classic rock in the car, and encourages Japanese gamers online to trash talk. He really wanted to call this article "Legends of the Hidden Temple."





On Running in Japan

Eryk Salvaggio

**For the listener, who listens in the snow,
And, nothing himself, beholds
Nothing that is not there and the nothing that is.**

Wallace Stevens, "The Snowman"

Japan makes me anxious.

Cool It Down

I've been independent my entire life, and here I am in a completely dependent society, a writer – and reader – turned illiterate and a passive communicator in a land full of passive communicators.

Japan loves when you are polite and vague. Words like "probably" and "maybe" come so often that the nation is draped in an elegant and exhausting uncertainty.

All of this, according to American psychologists, is a recipe for anxiety. At least, for Americans.

The neurotic American tends to assume the worst. When we're given responsibility over the mystery, we tend to brace for cataclysmic failure instead of more realistic outcomes. When we can't say what we want directly, we aren't expressing ourselves and feel that no one can understand what we need. We turn into 16-year-old goth clichés.

This made me want to hide in a bathtub.

I Can't Stand It

I spent a lot of time in the bathtub watching the water rise as I inhaled and drop as I exhaled, sending steam into spirals as I sat sweating with a pastel-colored lamp shaped like an egg. It was meditation as relaxation – the kind of meditation you might practice at a spa.

I sat in the bath and breathed out my anxiety. Then I'd stand up, towel beads of water from my shoulders, and sleep. I'd spend the next work day bombarded with polite imprecision. I'd walk home from work and find my breath getting shorter.

Then I started running.

I bought a gray and green track suit inscribed with a slogan that would only be inspirational in Japan: "I do not try, and I do not find success."

I wear this track suit with the only winter hat I have, which is part of a hamburger costume. So I look like Mayor McCheese on a fitness campaign as I run at a nearby track scaring off the cats.

Run Run Run

Running is a good example of practice in the Buddhist sense, because the thing you are practicing is also the thing you are doing. I have to tell my anxiety to shut up and do the things that I want to do but don't want to do.

I get to practice this over the course of 5-8 kilometers 1-3 times a week. Every time I put a foot in front of the other, I beg myself to stop. Then I ignore it.

Mindfulness meditation is about being present. I tried to practice with my eyes open. I'd sit comfortably, watch my anxiety float up and then remind myself that the anxiety was a story – that I was inventing my planet, then freaking out about it.

The problem with mindfulness meditation is that it's boring. Everyone tells you that you should transcend that boredom, but frankly, the boredom made me anxious. And while I'm sure I could, eventually, liberate a million souls into enlightenment with proper training, I felt like the first priority was to stop freaking out about losing control over nearly every aspect of my life.

So, I ran. And I adopted my mindfulness practice into running.

I Found a Reason

Mindful Running - which ought to be the name of a new-age fitness bestseller - is entirely about controlling the story you tell yourself while running. In standard meditation, you let anxiety come and go but stay focused on the breath coming in over the ridge of your nose.

With running, it's your entire body. Your legs are tired, but your brain says they are more tired than they are. You feel cold air sting your lungs, and tell yourself that you will run more when it is warmer. You feel out of breath and tell yourself you have to stop.

But you keep running.

White Light, White Heat

When I started running, I just sprinted. I'd assume that a proper workout meant pounding my lungs and heart into an exhausted mash for as long as I could. That's what I'd call mindless running.

Mindful running is about pacing. You get better at pacing the more you practice, and you have to practice to understand pacing. Eventually you know how your legs need to move to sustain a long run, and you can push it harder or keep it slower, depending on the demands of the terrain.

I've learned to do this with my anxiety. Rather than fighting it until it bursts out into the hot water of the bath, I've started to look at my anxiety and devise a strategy for pacing my way to a somewhat more benign form of hysteria.

At the start of a run, you have all this energy. You feel like you need to sprint. But one of the hardest things to learn as a new runner is to refuse to indulge the temptation to burst.

From giving you a panic attack or low-level neurosis to making you think maybe you should stop running and go get some pastries, your brain hates everything about you and wants you to fail.

What your brain wants is to be safe, comfortable, warm and well-fed. Anxiety is your brain's way of making sure you stay swathed in a down comforter eating chocolate ice cream in your apartment for the rest of your life.

Most of us don't want that.

Train Round the Bend

So you need to practice arguing with your anxiety. Running is really just a prolonged series of arguments with the part of your brain that wants you to stop running.

I look forward to running now and in some perverse ways I have started to look forward to other sources of stress, for the same reason. It gives me the chance to practice. Now I see stressful places and people as opportunities to practice overcoming anxiety.

When you approach everything as a chance to practice, everyone becomes a perfect player. As you might choose to run a steep hill without giving into exhaustion, you might choose to have a difficult conversation without giving into resentment. Like a hill, they will be perfect even when they are terrible, because you get to practice. Hills, and people, are always playing their roles perfectly. Even when you fail, you get better.

Eventually, as you run, you stop being at war with your entire body. And if you allow yourself to practice, you will become mindful of the choices you are making with every step, in spite of every part of you giving you an excuse to stop – you can feel the difference in your clarity of thought.

Suddenly, you notice the herons reflecting on the still pond or the sun setting on lounging cats. For a series of ever-expanding moments, it's not about your breath, or the impact in the knees or the crush of sneaker cushioning on your feet. The argument about that world outside you goes away, and you're just there, moving through it, seeing nothing that is not there, and the nothing that is.

I shower, of course, but I haven't had a bath in months.

Golden Opportunities

So, Golden Week has just ended. You've made it back from your holiday, battled your way through the crowds and traffic, and now you're sitting in your apartment contemplating another few months of work before you get to have another big break in the summer.

Volunteering abroad and in Japan is a great way to spend a couple of weeks of your summer. Think about it - you can visit somewhere with a group of friends and work together to help people. What could be a more rewarding and fun bonding experience?

A couple of organisations that organise creative and adventurous volunteering experiences are PEPY (www.pepyride.org) and Habitat for Humanity (www.habitat.org). With PEPY, you can have an incredible experience cycling across Cambodia to promote quality education across the country. Habitat for Humanity gives you the opportunity to build houses in deprived areas of many different countries around the world. One of this month's articles gives an account of one person's experience with Habitat in India - definitely worth a read if you're interested!

If you want to contact us to ask about any of this month's articles, please email either Melody at melodywong1@gmail.com or Matt at sanoramen@gmail.com.

Happy volunteering!

Melody Wong and Matt Thompson



volunteering



It would have separate rooms for their children.

With a contribution of less than what I spent on movies and food in a month, I had increased the standard of living for a whole family. It was this realization that became such a formative experience for me: the idea that there could be such a gap in wealth and means is easy to see on television, but hard to grasp until you experience it.

There those who don't have money, and there are those who are poor.

Matthew Ross worked as an ALT in Ashikaga, Tochigi prefecture until 2011. Now he's back in the US, writing stories and causing mischief.



Those who are Poor

Matthew Ross

It's difficult to enumerate all the ways that my service trip with Habitat for Humanity helped give me perspective I never realized I was missing. The most obvious way was the house itself. I remember thinking beforehand that the house we would build would resemble something modern if a bit cramped with cheap plaster and wooden floors, and that there would be specialists there volunteering their time to install indoor plumbing and electricity.

Needless to say, when I saw the half built, windowless concrete structure, half the size of my living room, I felt a bit crestfallen. I remember thinking to myself that I couldn't be doing much good building such a tiny place in the middle of a ghetto and wondered what we were doing here if we couldn't even build something that resembled a proper home.

I did my best not to be put off by the situation, though, and got to work. The sun bore down on us but not unbearably. We had plenty of water and were able to take breaks often. After the first day I felt I still had so much energy left to give.

It wasn't until several days later that I would be enlightened as to how much good we were doing our hosts. That's when the Habitat employees took us to see the quarry. The quarry used slave labor to mine for the stone they needed. Of course, they hid it behind a different name, telling people that the laborers had debt to work off. These laborers came from across the country, most unable to speak the local language (India has over twenty) and denied anything except the bare minimum of food and water required to live. If by chance these workers ever managed to pay off their enormous debt, they were simply allowed to leave the premises. It was these homeless, impoverished people that we were building houses for.

The domiciles of these people were one meter high tents fashioned from palm leaves and mud. It was hard to imagine a family living in something that would disappear with the next storm. No sooner had we arrived and seen the people's homes than we were hurried away: the owners "didn't welcome tourists."

That was what I had never realized. Sure, from my point of view what we were building was little more than a tool shed, but to the people we were building it for it was more than quadruple the size of their last home. It would keep the wind and the rain out.





Peace of Mind

Canon Purdy

In August of 2011, I returned to Ishinomaki with three friends to take part in Peace Boat's 23rd volunteer mission. As you may know, Ishinomaki is the site that was the hardest hit by the deadly tsunami in the Tohoku region on March 11, 2011. I had a very personal reason to travel back to Japan to volunteer; I had spent two years living just one hour north of Ishinomaki in Minamisanriku. Ishinomaki was the home of my dear friend, Taylor Anderson, a fellow JET Programme ALT who lost her life saving her students from the tsunami. It was also a place of many of my countless good memories of Japan.

On March 11th, while I was visiting my town, I witnessed the tsunami disaster from the field of my middle school. With the help of my good friend, I spent four days in the evacuation center before making it to Sendai. When I journeyed south to Tokyo and then home to California, I knew I had to return to Miyagi soon to help somehow. The opportunity came for me when some of my friends expressed interest in a trip through Peace Boat, a volunteer organization we had heard about from friends who had participated before. Prior to the

trip, I was able to raise funds through my own charity to donate to the Minamisanriku Board of Education. We devoted the last week of our five-week journey to volunteering with Peace Boat.

Peace Boat is an extremely well run organization and I was struck by the dedication of everyone involved. Our "leader-leaders" gave us our assignments each day. Having been able to work with each of them throughout the week, I found out that many of them had actually begun volunteering before I had even returned home from Japan. While I was running towards safety, many of them rushed over to help. Most of them had quit their jobs and traveled towards Tohoku to live in harsh conditions in order to assist their fellow countrymen. I was able to express my very personal gratitude to them and they seemed very interested in my own experiences.

The first few days of work were focused on an abandoned beach area where we spent most of our time digging ropes out of the ground and picking up pieces of plastic. It was not the most appealing job since the glut of trash seemed endless and we would have to stop early each day as the tide flooded our work area with more debris. On the

bright side, the International team, the group I was associated with, and the Japanese team slowly got to know each other better. Among the volunteers, there were people from France, Canada, India, and all over Japan. There were college students on summer break, part-timers who were finding a renewed sense of purpose, and even a mother of three who had set out on her own to help. Despite our backgrounds and careers, we were all there for the exact same reason.

Each night we returned to camp, eating dinner sitting in a circle, swapping stories, and playing games. The feeling of community and purpose overwhelmed me so much that every night I would remark on how grateful I was to have come and how this was the most rewarding experience any person could take on. It was a very healing process for me, being able to do something about the destruction I had witnessed and for having the opportunity to support the town that had taken care of those I loved. Too often I had family and friends back home trying to comfort me, but what I really needed was action and direction. I had found plenty of that being in Ishinomaki.

The second half of the week was spent in a single town that had been almost completely washed away. There was nothing left but a house that remained intact at the very top of a slope. We dug out clogged gutters before the rain came, cleaned the mountain-side, and tidied up the ruins so that the town's citizens could begin rebuilding. Peace Boat was aware of the potential detriment of huge amounts of volunteers to the local work force and took their cues directly from the local government. During those few days, other Peace Boat groups, Tokyo volunteers, and private volunteers joined us as we dug ditches and removed debris. Despite a sudden storm and high humidity, we made great progress and the volunteers who had been there the longest told us how much progress they had seen.

My week volunteering was stressful, for sure. I stopped eating, no doubt from emotional overload. When one of our group members was injured, I went into a near state of panic. I spent each day looking out of the window and wondering what had happened to my friend and to the countless people who had lost their lives. Despite my sorrows, my time volunteering was full of laughter, which contributed to the foundation of new, meaningful friendships. I shared a bath with volunteers cleaning up my old school, I made a tiny contribution to a huge city that had suffered so much, and I was

back in a place that understood what I had been through. Most importantly, I was able to share this experience with my close friends and create lasting connections with individuals from all around the world. People were always so grateful and kind to us volunteers, but it was I who was the most thankful. That one week will stay with me far into the future and I only hope that I have made my fellow volunteers and the people of Miyagi proud.

Canon Purdy was a Miyagi ALT in Minamisanriku from 2008 to 2010. She returned to Minamisanriku for graduation on March 11th, 2011 and was witness to the disaster. She currently works in San Francisco in marketing and hopes to return to Japan in the near future.





TRAVEL

Moving about in May

Amelia Hagen

Down in Kyushu, even though the cherry blossoms are gone, May is my favorite month in Japan. By now, you're most likely feeling rejuvenated after a few relaxing days of no school or you're trying to get back into the swings of things after jetting out of town for the Golden Week holidays. Whatever you're feeling, don't despair, lovely, warm weather is here and it's time to take advantage of it before rainy season is upon us.

Japanese people often ask me, 'What is your favorite place in Japan?' They expect me to say Kyoto but I always seem to throw them a curveball when I say, without skipping a beat, 'Okinawa!' It's the sunshine, the food, and the laidback attitude that get me every time. While I could gush about the Ryukyu Kingdom all day long, I've left it to Elysse Hurtado this month. Below, she shares some heartwarming insights into the people and culture of Japan's southernmost islands.

Though Golden Week has just passed, now is around the time when JETs begin making plans for their summer vacation. As you probably know, Thailand is arguably the most popular JET destination abroad. Japanese teachers have frequently said to me, 'Have you been to Thailand yet?' While Thailand does indeed abound with beautiful beaches and stunning wats, its next door neighbor, Cambodia, with fewer tourists, is not just a treasure, it's home to one – the magnificent Angkor Wat. Here, CJ Stearns of Hyogo explains why Cambodia is not simply famous for Angelina Jolie's Tomb Raider.

If you happened to peruse the AJET travel section last month, you might recall my article on finding cheaper flights abroad. This time, my focus is on domestic flights. Similar to Southeast Asia and Europe, Japan has become a hotspot for Low Cost Carriers (LCCs) lately, but which ones go where? Snatching up these LCC flights can also sometimes be a challenge. Read on for some advice on getting the ones you want when you want.

Once again, I would like to shamelessly plug the Tatami Timeshare group on Couchsurfing.com. Sign up for Couchsurfing today to potentially meet JETs from around Japan. If you are traveling outside of your AJET block, feel free to join and post in another block's Facebook group for recommendations straight from local JETs. I want to give a *BIG shout-out to a group of Block 5 JETs who provided me with some local information that really enhanced my trip to the Hokuriku region over Golden Week. Following this issue, our next Connect edition will not be until September, but feel free to drop me a line at ameliahagen@gmail.com, if you ever want to talk travel!*



Beautiful Cambodia

CJ Stearns

It was hot. Very hot. Sweat poured down my face, down my arms and legs, down the small of my back, it poured down everywhere. Barefoot, round-faced children played and ran alongside the tuk-tuk, pressing us to buy their things – small trinkets: magnets and figurines, pirated guidebooks, and handmade dolls. Stray dogs barked and whined. Colorful art and clothing flashed past. The jungle simmered. We were in Siem Reap, Cambodia, and we were being driven by Mr T.

Let me back up. A week before, we stood at the docks of the Mekong River in the Cambodian capital of Phnom Penh. It had been a long boat ride from Vietnam. So when I stepped off the dock into the (relatively) calm and laidback streets of Phnom Penh, I was immediately impressed. In all of my travels through Southeast Asia, I have to say that Phnom Penh is my favorite city. Though capital of a developing country with a history of violence and struggle, it has something about it that reminds one of the peace and sophistication of the cities of Europe. This is largely due to its French colonial architecture, which at one time gave Phnom Penh the nick-

name “Pearl of Asia.” The streets were a bit dirty and worn, and the flocks of mopeds and motorbikes still swarmed the streets as they do throughout the rest of south Asia, but the little capital city of Cambodia had something special about it.

There were only a few major sites of historical interest to see in Phnom Penh however, much like Cambodia as a whole. Three major ones, in fact, and only one of them has history before the terrible events of the 1970s. For those who don’t know, Cambodia has had a long history of occupation and war, which dates back thousands of years with its neighbors on either side, Vietnam and Thailand. The French came along in the mid-1800s, promising Cambodia protection, but ended up suppressing her people for nearly 100 years. During the Vietnam War, Cambodia became one of the most heavily bombed countries in the world during secret raids by the United States. And finally, there was Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge.

Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge have left their own special stain on Cambodia’s history books, and Phnom Penh in particular. To make a long story short, in the late 1960s Cambodia was going through a major upheaval. The ultimate winners at

the end of it were a radical communist group called the Khmer Rouge, led by a man named Pol Pot. Pol Pot had a thing against education, mostly because he failed out of school. He decided to bring Cambodia back to “Year One.” He wanted to create an agricultural utopia – where everyone but he and his top men lived and worked in the rice fields outside of the cities. His men burned historical records, burned down buildings, and sought to destroy all art, literature, and dance. Almost immediately, he drove everyone out of Phnom Penh, into the country. From there, the killing began.

He killed doctors, lawyers, teachers, businessmen, government officials, artists, writers, musicians, and anyone with any significant amount of educational background. They were all sent to a building that the Khmer Rouge converted from Cambodia’s only high school into a new prison – Tuol Sleng. They documented, photographed, tortured, and killed approximately two million Cambodian citizens this way. Many of them were sent outside of the city to be killed and buried, in a place known today as the Killing Fields.

Eventually, the Khmer Rouge were stopped by invading Vietnamese forces, but only because Vietnamese citizens had begun disappearing around the Cambodian border. Sadly, justice has yet to come for the Cambodian people. Pol Pot died peacefully under house arrest, and some members of the Khmer Rouge are still in power.

However the strength of the Cambodian spirit has risen above it all. Though you would expect a country of broken people, it is quite the opposite. I have never been met with more smiles and better spirit, nor more kindness from complete strangers. Cambodians are a strong people with a gentle soul.

So the Khmer Rouge left two things untouched during their cleansing of Cambodian history – the Palace of the Silver Pagoda, which is the seat of the king, and the Temples of Angkor.

When in Phnom Penh, you will want to see the Silver Pagoda first. You aren’t allowed to take pictures inside the pagoda, unfortunately. It has a floor made of silver, giving it its name, and the treasures inside are very much worth seeing, including jewelry, statues and an actual eyebrow hair of the Buddha (or so they claim).

Save a day just for Tuol Sleng prison and the Killing Fields, because they will wipe you out. The

museum has pictures of the victims on display in the solemn, silent halls. The Killing Fields take about half an hour by car from Tuol Sleng, sitting peaceful and green in an outer suburb of the city. They have a small museum and a large stupa that houses some remains. During the evening following these visits, do something fun and relaxing - a massage and a stiff drink are recommended .

The biggest tourist spot in Cambodia is of course the famous temples of Angkor. The best way to go during the dry season is by bus, approximately six hours. During the wet season, a boat ride of about five hours is offered, up to Lake Tonle Sap. The nearest place to Angkor is the growing town of Siem Reap. There are many hostels and cheap hotels to stay there and most of them are fairly priced and comfortable.

The temples of Angkor are the result of a long, rich history, which produced the tradition of Thai dance (dancers were stolen from the kingdom of Angkor during war time) and the inspiration for art, novels, and film. They have become famous for being the penultimate “lost jungle city”, but contrary to popular belief, the temples had never been truly forgotten by the Cambodians. However, the visitor will feel like a jungle explorer wandering through the ruins. Angkor is without a doubt the most beautiful and awe-inspiring man-made wonder of the world that I have ever seen.

For the temples, please reserve at least two days. I would personally suggest three to five, to give them the time they deserve. For something a little different from the regular route - about a 40 minute drive out of the main temple complex, there is a sacred river that flows down into the temple valley. To purify the water, the ancient Angkorians carved out the bottom of the river bed into a series of lingams (the phallic symbol of the Hindu god Shiva). It is called Kbal Spean, or “The River of a Thousand Lingas.” It is perhaps a lesser known attraction, but utterly breathtaking, nonetheless.

To get around the Angkor complex, there are many options available. You can rent a bike, but that will only get you around the “Grand Circuit” and not too many of the outlying temples. Taxis and tuk-tuks can be rented out for the length of time you will be staying, with your driver sometimes acting as a sort of guide. If you can develop a rapport with your driver, it will only be to your benefit. If you pay him a fair wage (\$50-\$70 for three days is pretty fair) and try to get to know him a bit, he can



really help you out. Our tuk-tuk driver made sure to take us to the most popular temples at the times when there were the fewest people, and to some delicious and cheap places to eat. Our driver called himself Mr. T, no joke.

The entire temple complex of Angkor has too much for me to completely cover here. The highlights you should not miss are: the gorgeous Ta Prohm temple, with its famous “strangler” trees – made famous by the film “Tomb Raider”; the temple of Bayon, with approximately 216 faces (my personal favorite); and of course the grand Angkor Wat temple, inside which you can enjoy massive bas reliefs and a climb up to the iconic towers. A visitor’s pass pricing is as follows: \$20 for a one day visit, \$50 for three, and \$60 for seven days. The three day pass is valid for any three days in a week, and the seven day pass for any seven days within a month.

Phnom Penh and Angkor are not the only attractions that Cambodia has to offer. There is also a small town on the Mekong called Kratie, which is one of the last places you can see the endangered river dolphin in its natural habitat. On the southern sea coast is Sihanoukville, an old French colonial resort town.

Cambodia is a country rich in beauty and history. Though it has a sad past, I feel that a country with such a kind people and vibrant culture has nothing but a bright future.



Eastern Japan ALT Soccer Tournament

The Eastern Japan ALT Soccer Tournament will be held this June 2-3rd in Sania Park (one of the best sports parks in Japan), Sugadaira Kogen, Nagano prefecture.

The ALT Soccer Tournament has men’s and women’s divisions. It is scheduled to start at approximately 9:30am on Saturday, June 2nd and conclude around 3:30 on June 3rd.

A maximum of 20 men’s teams and 20 women’s teams can enter the tournament. Men’s teams are 11 players per side and women’s teams are 6 players per side.

On Saturday, each team will play three or four games (fifteen or twenty minute halves) in a league style tournament. Following these games, teams will be ranked, and then on Sunday all teams will enter a knockout cup competition. For the men, it is likely that there will be two tournaments on Sunday for the ‘The best’, and ‘The rest’ (depending on the number of participating teams)

The tournament fees per player are 12,000 yen for Saturday night and 17,000 yen for both Friday and Saturday night. The fees for supporters are 10,000 yen and 15,000 yen respectively. The fees include: hotel accommodation near the sports park (including breakfast and dinner); raffle tickets for a charity raffle to benefit the Tohoku region (optional); curry lunch on Sunday (no lunch provided on Saturday); prizes for the winning teams; shuttle buses to the grounds; and entrance to the Saturday night party!

The application deadline is **Friday, May 18th**. Please contact the organizers to receive an application prior to that date. Teams will be accepted on a ‘first come, first served’ basis. Final payment by furikomi (bank transfer) must be received by Friday, May 25th.

For more information, or to enter a team, please check out the official website: <http://sites.google.com/site/altsoccertournament/index>

Note: The deadline for the Western Japan ALT Soccer Tournament on Awaji Island (Hyogo prefecture) has already passed. But if you happen to be near the island on May 12-13th, swing by for some excellent soccer. Always a good time.



The High Life of Japan's Low Cost Carriers (LCCs)

Amelia Hagen

By now you know that there are low cost alternatives to flying with the Japanese standard of All Nippon Airways (ANA) and Japan Airlines (JAL). If you're like me, you aim to maximize your jet-set budget around Japan. Below, I break down seven of Japan's Low Cost Carriers, aka budget airlines, in terms of destinations, costs, booking, and typical availability. Hopefully, this will simplify Japan's LCC business for you when planning trips in the future.

Skymark Airlines

Arguably the most well-known budget airline in Japan, Skymark first really stepped out in 1998 but did not become extremely popular until 2009. Originally only offering flights on a few routes, Skymark has recently expanded its offerings. Its destinations now include Amami, Ashikawa, Fukuoka, Ibaraki, Kagoshima, Kitakyushu, Kobe, Kumamoto, Miyako, Nagasaki, Naha, Sapporo, Tokyo Haneda, and Tokyo Narita. Fares range from 2,800 Yen (Naha-Miyako) to around 20,000 Yen. Please note that all flights go on sale two months in advance at 9:30am. Get your fingers ready then as the site can become quite overloaded and the cheapest flights for holiday periods can be difficult to obtain.

JetStar Japan

Fresh on the scene, JetStar Japan is keen to pounce on the domestic LCC customers. Having announced flights just last month, JetStar Japan's major stakeholders include Qantas, Japan Airlines, and Mitsubishi Corporation. Initial destinations this summer include Tokyo Narita (the hub), Kansai, Fukuoka, Naha, and Sapporo. You can book flights now through next April on JetStar Japan's website but the majority of weekends are already sold out. Try flights on weekdays – you might have to give up a day or two of *nenkyu* but it will probably save you some cash. Of course, you can also easily fly JetStar internationally from Japan out of Kansai or Narita heading to Cairns or Melbourne – Tullamarine.

Hokkaido International Airlines (Air Do)

This Sapporo-based LCC is not just about its cute and cuddly-looking Boeing 737s and 767s. Officially taking off in 1996, Air Do serves a plethora of primarily northern cities. Destinations consist of Tokyo Haneda, Asahikawa, Hakodate, Sapporo, Memanbatsu (Ozora), Tokachi-Obihiro, Sendai, Niigata, Toyama, Komatsu, and Fukushima. Similar to Skymark, Air Do flights go on sale two months prior. Fares between Haneda and Sapporo range from 9,800 Yen to 26,000 depending on when you book. Purchase at least 28 days in advance for the cheapest flights. Unfortunately, the website is in Japanese only. To those looking to explore different parts of Hokkaido, Air Do could be your ticket there!

Solaseed Air

Not to be left out of the LCC picture, Kyushu is home to a few LCCs with destinations that might surprise you. Solaseed Air is part of the club. Originally incorporated as Skynet Asia Airways in 2002, Solaseed seeks to connect Kyushu regionally, with Tokyo, and with Naha. This re-branded LCC currently flies to Tokyo Haneda, Naha, Miyazaki, Nagasaki, Kumamoto, Kagoshima, and Oita. However, additional destinations are in the works. Visitors to Japan may want to take note: Recently, Solaseed has offered discounts to foreign tourists of up to 65% off regular fares. If you're currently living in Japan, Solaseed is advertising 9,700 Yen flights on every route if you reserve at least 28 days in advance. Excluding the portion for tourists coming from abroad, this website is only available in Japanese.

Peach Aviation

Based at Osaka's Kansai International Airport, Peach was the newest LCC darling here before JetStar landed in Japan a few weeks ago. Peach is a joint venture by All Nippon Airways and First Eastern Investment Group, and announced flights last year. Its flights began in March and from Kansai, the bright magenta Airbus 320s now fly to Fukuoka, Kagoshima, Nagasaki, and Sapporo. May 8 marks its inaugural flight to Seoul with flights to Hong Kong and Taipei coming later this year. One-way flights between Fukuoka and Kansai range between 5,000 and 12,000 Yen and are even lower during sales. I'm happy to report that Peach's flashy, bustling website is available in both English and in Japanese. You can book flights earlier with Peach but cheaper fares may become available as part of bargain sales after you book yours.

StarFlyer

Headquartered and based in my city of Kitakyushu in Fukuoka Prefecture, StarFlyer is the classiest LCC I've ever flown on. Its Airbus 320s' exteriors and interiors are almost entirely black. All seats (economy) are leather and come with USB charging ports, adjustable headrests and footrests, and LCD monitors. Unoccupied middle seats can even be used as cocktail tables. Modeled after JetBlue Airways in the US, StarFlyer operates flights from Tokyo to Kitakyushu, Fukuoka, and Osaka. This July, StarFlyer will commence Kitakyushu-Busan flights that can be as low as 6,600 Yen for day trips and 7,600 Yen for regular round trip flights. As long as you book on the early side, all domestic routes hover around 10,000 Yen one way. If you're an ANA frequent flyer, you can also earn miles by flying StarFlyer. Like Skymark, fares are released two months in advance at 9:30am.

Air Asia Japan

A joint venture between Malaysia's Air Asia and Japan's ANA, Air Asia Japan expects its first flights to take off later this August. Air Asia Japan will be based at Narita and will first fly to Okinawa, Sapporo, and Fukuoka. In October, flights to Busan and Seoul will commence with long haul flights to destinations such as Thailand, Taiwan, Indonesia, and Singapore coming later. Air Asia's home site frequently hosts sales and announces new routes. Be on the lookout for more information there soon. Ever since I scored that round trip Kuala Lumpur-Bali flight for \$50 USD, I've been a fan of Air Asia. I'm excited to see what Air Asia brings to the LCC mix to differentiate itself in Japan later this year.

There's your roundup of LCCs in Japan. East Asia has joined Europe and Southeast Asia in terms of offering flights that appeal to everyone's wallet. There are certainly a variety of options that open up The Land of the Rising Sun to the budget-minded traveler now. Just have to know where to look! The biggest piece of advice I can offer is to watch your dates and book early. Two months prior is the magic window of opportunity. Enjoy perusing your LCC options across Japan – you never know what steals you might find!

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





Hot Sun, Warm Hearts

Elysse Hurtado

The prevailing image of Okinawa is one of brilliantly white beaches underneath a blazing sun, both sky and sea a vivid sapphire blue, framed with lush green foliage dotted with exotic tropical blooms. It's this colourful, climactic picture that draws in thousands of tourists every year, seeking the fun and sun promised in every ad and brochure. But what awaits you there, if you care to explore a little further, is a much richer panorama. The beauty of the islands, the interesting cultural heritage, the delicious food, all of these are as accurate as can be; but the real star of Okinawa is the people themselves.

Though I was unlucky enough to arrive in Okinawa just as it began to rain (that quick, heavy, humid rain so common in tropical climates), I made the most of my proximity to the tourist trap that is Kokusai-dori (literally, international street) to wander along the endless rows of souvenir shops and restaurants as the hawkers adroitly tried to corral me inside for a look at their wares. Though the odd shop does have some unique pieces, for the most part the goods are identical in quality and price (and some glass marketed as Okinawa souvenirs has stickers that say Made in Vietnam...) and the hawkers themselves are often weary college kids who seem burnt out by the revolving door of tourists that they are forced to approach. However, once you enter the public markets along Heiwa-dori and Makishi, you start to get a glimpse of the real Okinawa.

At first the stores and their goods are no different from those on the main street, but the further I traveled into these covered shopping arcades the fewer tourists I encounter. At some point, which I was never able to ascertain for sure, I realized I was now in the market intended for locals; some imaginary line had been crossed, as the stalls grew tinier and tinier, and now I was regarded less as a potential sale and more as an interloper. Many of the stores are no bigger than a large closet, their wares piled high on tables out front while the little older ladies inside either chat across the dividers, arrange their goods, or sit quietly as if waiting for something. These are the areas where I feel most at home.

Hand-baked pastries and fresh seafood, coffee shops so small it's a wonder the owner can even sit down inside, piles of frilly pastel bras or old ladies' clothing, used books and hand-made souvenirs: here, the customers are outnumbered by the sheer volume of tiny stores, and most of the elderly owners seem indifferent to the almost complete lack of interest in their wares. The walls and ceilings of the shopping arcade are worn and faded, cracked and patched, covered in aged signs and fronted by aged owners. It's almost hard to believe that at the opposite end of these avenues lies one of the busiest and most garish tourist sectors in Japan.

According to local lore, Kokusai-dori itself was originally a black market. After the Americans razed Naha to the ground, leaving not even a stray palm tree standing, the locals had to start from absolutely nothing. Since the Americans had their own

private markets, the inhabitants slowly began congregating on this lowly strip of land and from their efforts for survival grew the theme park level attraction that stands now.

In the same way, if you wander the streets farther and farther away from the main drag, the local color seeps out like the tropical plants that refuse to be dominated by the concrete, typhoon-resistant buildings. Known for its jazz, Naha has several tiny jazz bars which offer live performances almost every night; Parker's Mood, which I visited on my last night, is carefully decorated to give the impression of a high-class New York jazz bar and brings an intimate quality to the performance due to its small size. Local restaurants dispense with the gaudy signs and present their food plainly and simply. Small cafes filled with local artists' work and delicately prepared foods are abound. Unlike many parts of Japan, being a foreigner here does not invite stares but instead the occasional smile or nod.

To deepen the experience, I travelled to nearby Tokashiki Island by ferry and spent the day climbing over the thickly forested mountains and dabbling my feet in the aquamarine seas on its famous beaches. Even here, the locals stopped to ask where I was from and offered me free use of their umbrella when it rained, and I felt just as welcomed by their free and easy manner as by the beauty around me. After visiting the cultural heritage sites at Shuri Castle, where the rulers of the Ryukyu Kingdom, Okinawa's original incarnation, held court, I challenged myself by navigating the maze-like streets to find a cafe I'd been intrigued by on the internet run by a husband and wife team. The husband creates and sells exquisite ceramics and is quite a delightful jazz pianist himself, while the wife handles the food and provides instruction in the local traditional 'bukubuku tea' (frothy tea). Upon seeing my interest in his work, the artist began to give me fascinating details about the inspiration and creation process, comparing glazes and symbols, and playing me a few songs. Soon more customers were asking about my background and I became drawn into yet more conversations. It seemed that the longer I stayed the more new friends I made and when they pressed me to return again someday, there was absolutely no resistance on my part to giving a joyful assent.

Not to be outdone, the small mom 'n pop restaurant across from my hotel also held many warm surprises. The husband and wife owners quickly felt as close as family and listening to their advice

and musings on life filled many hours when my feet were tired from my travels at the end of the day. I was even so lucky as to hear about the resistance to the American colonization and subsequent Japanification of Okinawa from the husband, who was a social agitator and protestor in his younger days. Having seen the stores selling dog tags and mock military uniforms as souvenirs, it was easy to see how far the American cultural penetration had proceeded; the more gradual, less obvious appropriation of Okinawa as a part of Japan was much further from the surface.

Though I was unable to fully pursue the swimming and sea-side amusements that I had hoped for due to the slightly chilly weather, as the days went on and the sun came out, the whole area became as tropical as anyone could hope for. More than that, the warmth and frankness of the residents was what really won my heart. I went from considering Okinawa a Japanese tourist destination to a cultural and politically fascinating community that I would actually like to try living in someday. Come for the sun, sea, and sand, but stay for the strength and smiles of the people.

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



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David Namisato





FASHION & BEAUTY

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In this issue, see Josiah Hussey's article *Boys to Men: Learning to Tick the Boxes* for this month's Fashion and Beauty read. I'll just briefly drop a note here to cover what I managed to catch during Japan Fashion Week myself. Full-time work naturally meant I couldn't throw myself into the proceedings as much as I might have done otherwise, but I managed to make it up to Tokyo for the SHIROMA and araisara shows and the CUNE installation. SHIROMA took on a futuristic yet floaty vibe; I liked the wires one model had twisted across her face. araisara presented itself as tailored, classically elegant and full of sleek, well-considered volume. The CUNE installation in 21_21 Design Sight was pure Harajuku fun, with fabric 'guts' trailing out of the dresses and rolling eyeballs in place of buttons.

Though they weren't directly connected to JFW itself, the lavish Chanel parties and couture show staged in support of Japan's earthquake and tsunami recovery efforts naturally garnered a lot of media coverage this year. Karl Lagerfeld even proffered a few observatory pearls plucked from his usual strain of wisdom: "[Japan has] changed a lot but it's changed for the better I think. I noticed that people became bigger than before because now they eat more cake and sweets and things like this that they didn't do in the past. There's a real change in the look of the Japanese people. Normally, before, they were all tiny. It's the kind of beauty you get from junk food." The launch of Karl Lagerfeld and Carine Roitfeld's new photography book, "The Little Black Jacket", was also celebrated on their Japan trip. Look out for it in bookshops this upcoming August.

Finally, for any JETs who might find themselves in Tokyo between April 22 to May 20 with an hour or so to spare, the new (and free to enter) Dior exhibition in Ginza should be worth your time. 'Lady Dior As Seen By' has been traveling around the world, showing in Shanghai and Beijing just before touching down in Japan. The classic bag (the eponymous Lady Dior) has been interpreted, played upon and shot by around 50 international artists. Wen Fang's 'alligator bag' is particularly eye-catching: a Lady Dior made out of transparent resin with a real alligator skull trapped inside. If you don't fancy leaving your prefecture (but still want to, you know, appreciate a bag), check out the Lady Dior short film series starring Marrison Cotillard on YouTube instead.

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

Boys to Men: Learning to Tick the Boxes

Josiah Hussey

Roll up dem' sleeves, summer's almost here! Temperatures in central Honshu regularly breaking into the 20s means more than just a month of pink flowers: the systematic shift in dress code known as "CoolBiz" will slowly come into effect across the country. Started in 2005 as a way to conserve energy used in cooling offices, the recent Tohoku Earthquake has made the seasonal dress code an especially important task – as seen here in Kofu, where staff members have been much quicker to ignite the kerosene heaters in winter than they were to engage the air conditioners in the hotter months.

This time of year is especially terrifying for the adult male, the infamous "salaryman". Not only is he going to be sweating a lot, the dress code written in an invisible rulebook since early childhood education makes the task of deciding on a summer wardrobe all the more daunting. Having your clothing decided for you for so long and then being given free choice incites confusion.

A New York Times article from 2005 addressed these fears surrounding CoolBiz by characterizing the salaryman's staple aesthetic as simply a "black suit". The article attributes the first failed attempt at summer dress codes in the 1970s as being because of the silhouette. A short-sleeved smoking jacket, known as the "Safari look", was about as appreciated as leftovers for an anniversary dinner. The whole look was, simply put, a hot mess and hastily scrapped. Returning with a facelift in 2005, Coolbiz decided to relax the rules rather than creating a totally different uniform. It's stuck ever since.

From the New York Times: "Several younger men have shown near panic at the idea of having to improvise a wardrobe beyond a white shirt, dark tie and black suit." "There is something very convenient about wearing suits," said Naoto Oshima, 33, a systems engineer. "It is very easy to get dressed in the morning. I don't have to worry about what to wear to work at all." Tomonari Kori, 25, stated flatly, "I wouldn't know what to wear if we had to dress down."

There is a revisit to themes of group mentality and alter ego constructs when you look at the salary-

man's relationship with the dress code. Such a relationship is borne from strict guidelines set out for coordination since primary school. Cultivating a personal style is almost entirely circumvented in youth and lost altogether on the aging man who doesn't feel the need to keep up. From my experience as a high school exchange student in blazer-style uniform, I can recall some of the unspoken rules that separated the cool kids from the duds. As a teacher in Japan, I can now see that a free-choice dress code never really made it up the list of priorities. Dating a salaryman doesn't hurt in making these observations either.

In high school, I quickly noticed that the cool kids found simple ways to drastically alter their appearance: the key being alternatives in the dress code like button-downs instead of a polo and/or deciding to wear a tie, even when it was optional. The most important items in every boy's wardrobe were, surprisingly, his socks, his belt and his wallet. Imagine your first gym class where you're the only boy wearing white tube socks and your classmates are too embarrassed to even look at you. Hanging myself on an imaginary designer scarf, I ordered my host mother to take me to Jack (Japanese clothing store, mostly seen west of Nagano) immediately to buy patterned ankle socks. As a teacher, I've done units with my kids involving fashion both directly and indirectly. The same themes continue to re-emerge. As young boys living in a society that is still indisputably gender confirmative, learning personal style beyond ticking the boxes is mendoukusai (a nuisance). This throws into question two very large assumptions: firstly, the stereotype of Japanese men as aesthetically superior. Secondly, school uniforms are used internationally and it hasn't affected the rest of the world in quite the same way.

Every country's got their fair share of the fashionably challenged/apathetic, but the trend here is abetted into a lifelong practice through the continuation of uniform all the way into adulthood for both men and women in most professional jobs. Men, in particular, transition from high school into post-secondary education (quite possibly the only time in their lives they get a say on what they wear) and then into a full-time job. Certain jobs are fully restrictive, such as the balloon-panted, paint-covered construction workers, or the matching pale blue jumpsuits and separates for office workers or electricians. It's the omnipresent salaryman that requires further investigation to see the fruits of their subversive fashion education as children.

A salaryman (or even a high school student) having the right hairstyle and the right accessories not only separates him from the pack, but also shows a higher level of understanding about the real and abstract rules of dress.

Here is a breakdown of my own observations on the transition from high school boy to salaryman:

Wallet: I remember being a ninensei in Ishikawa for only a couple months before the boys in my class called me over and asked me to throw my wallet on the table. I had nothing more than a plain, tattered, (fake) leather billfold. I got a swirling feeling of nausea seeing them all pull out Gucci, Vuitton and Bvlgari. One shy kid pulled out his Coach. Basically, anything monogrammed will do – and if it's long enough to prominently stick out of your back pocket, then you're on the right track. This trend is not forgotten as boys grow older.

Belts: For boys, "black" tends to mean dark-anything-they-can-get-away-with. The belt is a prominent feature in a boy's wardrobe and it is as important as the shirt they wear. This is because the belt is the most visible accessory with the most choice. Once boys turn into men, loud printed belts are dropped in favor of machismo or more powerful and austere looking belts.

Socks: As mentioned above, Japanese boys love fun socks. Plain black for the office as men, but on the weekends or on out-of-suit days, grown men often revert back to their playful patterns.

Jacket and scarf: Generally, the high school student will find his blazer alone to be sufficient covering, but he may opt for a jacket reflective of his own aesthetic interests – a simple parka, something in hip-hop style or in animal print. The champion of the scarf arena is, without question, Burberry. You just need to have one. If you don't have one, go get something with a loud print or made from a great material to soften the judgmental eyes of your peers. When boys are turning into men, I've noticed the popular trend is a same-on-same pin-stripe jacket made from a material that is both stiff and shiny. Black-on-black or grey-on-grey (appearing almost silver with the reflective material) is the most popular.

Shoes: For boys, simple labels like Vans or Crocs seem to do, whereas the salaryman needs to have a slick dress shoe. The status quo is jet black with a simple, silver buckle off to the side. The more

fashionable or daring salarymen will go for interesting colour or design choices. A JTE of mine wore white and black tuxedo shoes; my own pair is Russian blue.

In recent years and since the inception of Coolbiz, coloured shirts and eccentric ties have become more acceptable. A female coworker of mine has mentioned they're even admired. However, the implementation of Coolbiz has meant that ticking the boxes has become more difficult. You can follow the rules, but when you're encouraged to shed the suit, it can become confusing for boys to discover an original way to dress that is still professional and still workplace-appropriate. Like being an ant that's lost the line, it's an opportunity to break free and make choices. It's been seven years since Coolbiz became a household word and, in practice, it's being mastered by continuing to tick the boxes. Go get yourself some great printed or coloured shirts (rolled-up, not short-sleeved), some fun ties/bowties, fun-but-professional belts and a few pairs of slick shoes to take this time of relative freedom with stride. A true win-win situation which your coworkers will appreciate while you save a little on antiperspirant and sports drinks.

**<http://www.nytimes.com/2005/05/20/business/worldbusiness/20tieless.html?pagewanted=all>*

Josiah Hussey is a first year ALT from Canada living and working in Kofu City, Yamanashi Prefecture.



Yellow Fever

Chris Barstow

In 1976, a trio of young, ambitious Japanese musicians joined forces to create a futuristic sound which has influenced a generation of music-makers and helped develop the blueprints for numerous modern genres from hip-hop to J-Pop. Sampled and covered by famous acts as diverse as Michael Jackson, Eric Clapton and Jennifer Lopez, the Yellow Magic Orchestra (or YMO as they are commonly known) are deservedly regarded as musical pioneers with their innovative use of cutting edge equipment in a time when the computer was still a thing of mystery and magic. Embracing digital recorders, synthesizers, drum machines and the bleeps and buzzes of arcade games, they sculpted a sound which fused together futuristic technology, traditional Asian influences and a healthy dose of zaniness to create their own unique brand of electronica.

The threesome of Haruomi Hosono, Yukihiro Takahashi and Ryuichi Sakamoto had originally only planned to collaborate together on a one-off project. However, the huge success of their self-titled debut encouraged them to give up their solo aspirations and become a full-time band. Their sell-out live shows gained interest from abroad and soon they became one of the first Japanese acts to be signed to an American record label. Shortly afterwards, they were tasting international success as their instrumental single 'Firecracker' (later re-

released as 'Computer Game') became a surprise global hit, even reaching the Top 20 in the UK. It was helped along by a memorable, technicolour video, which was one of the first promos to incorporate computer graphics.

Their second album 'Solid State Survivor' continued to push boundaries as the group used brand new samplers, sequencers and other equipment to further shape their modernistic sound. Its bilingual lyrics furthered their popularity abroad in addition to helping them become the most successful band in Japan. Selling over 2 million copies, it even caught the attention of Michael Jackson, who added his own lyrics to the catchy 'Behind The Mask' for a track which would have been included on his legendary 'Thriller' album had it not been for royalty disputes between the two parties. Before Jackson's version finally got a release on his posthumous 2009 album 'Michael', the reworked track became a hit for his backing musician Greg Philliganes as well as rock legend Eric Clapton.

After releasing their live album 'Public Pressure', YMO tasted further success with 'X-Multiplies', which matched the record seven weeks at the top of the Japanese album charts achieved by 'Solid State Survivor'. Beyond their commercial success, YMO's idiosyncratic beats and sounds also provided material for the pioneers of new scenes emerging out of inner-city America in the early 80s. Afrika Bambaataa, known as the 'father of hip hop', used 'Firecracker' as the basis for his genre-defining 'Death Mix', whilst Hashim utilised the same

sample to create the electro floorfiller 'Al-Naafiyysh', which was recently introduced to a new generation courtesy of its use on the 'Grand Theft Auto' video game. Along with European counterparts Kraftwerk, YMO also provided inspiration for the synth-pop sound in the UK that dominated the airwaves around the same time.

YMO were not only musical innovators but also were heavily influential in the field of fashion, where their quirky dress sense was adopted by thousands of fans. Most notably, imitations of their highly recognisable 'techno-cut' hairstyles could be seen in boardrooms up and down Japan at the band's peak.

However, by the mid-80's, the band felt it was time to spread their wings and re-embark on solo careers. Of the three, Sakamoto became the most successful, creating the soundtrack to the films 'Merry Christmas Mr Lawrence' and 'The Last Emperor', the latter of which netted him an Oscar and a Golden Globe. He also wrote the music for the opening ceremony at the 1992 Olympics in Barcelona and released several successful solo albums.

The trio made a brief comeback with their 1993 album 'Technodon', which incorporated thriving new musical movements such as acid house and techno and provided them with another suc-

cess. Subsequently, they went back to working on other projects, with Hosono and Takahashi reuniting in the early 2000s to form the act Sketch Show. However, the band was thrust back into the spotlight in 2007 when they performed at the Live Earth concert and also starred in a tongue in cheek advertising campaign for Kirin Lager. They subsequently released new material under the moniker HASYMO, and performed both their collaborative and solo work in several high profile gigs in Europe. However, the last few years have seen the band return back to their roots and revert back to their original name to play highly acclaimed shows in Japan at Fuji Rock and the World Happiness Festival.

With no signs of their output diminishing as they enter their 60s, the trio continue to win new fans as people discover their diverse back catalogue. In addition, the same spirit of electronic wizardry and experimentation that formed the building blocks of the Yellow Magic Orchestra sound lives on in numerous modern outfits throughout the world.

Ryuichi Sakamoto once famously described the group's eclectic creations as akin to musical bento box. And, whilst some of their more eccentric pieces may occasionally make the band appear to be a chopstick short of a kyushoku, there's no doubt that modern music has a big debt to pay to Japan's electronic innovators.

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Film Review
John Carter

Steven Thompson

I am a longtime fan of science-fiction movies, and am endlessly forgiving of them. So when I read the mostly mediocre reviews for John Carter, I assumed I would enjoy the movie regardless. For the most part, I was right. John Carter, while not the tightest movie in terms of plot or characterization, has its share of great, sci-fi pulp fiction moments.

John Carter is based in part on the first novel of a series by Edgar Rice Burroughs, whom you may know as the writer responsible for Tarzan (and whose works later inspired many sci-fi writers). The film carries over many of Burroughs's pulp fiction hallmarks and pitfalls. John Carter takes place on Mars, called Barsoom by the natives. When Carter is teleported there by a piece of alien technology, he becomes embroiled in an ongoing civil war for control of Barsoom. The most common complaint about John Carter is its one-dimensional characterization, which is a fair complaint. The titular hero (played by Taylor Kitsch of Friday Night Light's fame) has no interest in the quarrels of the Martians until he decides he's madly in love with a princess of Mars, Dejah Thoris. Actress Lynn Collins brings an immensely likeable spirit to Thoris. The romance, while somewhat forced, is played well thanks to great chemistry between Kitsch and

Collins. Kitsch, in the meantime, expertly carries over his soft-hearted badassery from Friday Night Lights.

John Carter is the first live-action feature to be directed by Pixar's Andrew Stanton. Stanton's previous directorial works included Finding Nemo and Wall-E. Considering those films, it's perplexing that John Carter suffers most from bad directing. The film adheres to Burrough's double-frame narrative, which is not presented clearly nor fully understood until around twenty minutes in. Too much time is spent asking where, when, and what, and not enough time following the film's opening act. Events throughout the film seem unbalanced, with scenes being given varying focus and length seemingly at random. However, the double-frame pays off beautifully in the end, and is worth sticking with. I only wish it had been handled better. The action is the best of high-budget sci-fi though, and paced well throughout the film. Carter is surprised to find the lower gravity of Mars gives him super strength, leading to amusing scenes of over-powered acts.

The problems with John Carter lead me to an interesting realization, though. What's heavily criticized in John Carter you can find in any of Disney's animated features: one-note characters, irregular pacing, often overpowering cheesiness. I think, in part, John Carter shows that we still judge animated and live-action films by a different set of criteria. We hold live-action to a different standard, regarding only it as legitimate cinema. To that end, John Carter is made much like a Disney/Pixar animated film, and can be enjoyed and appreciated just as much. Taken as such, I think anyone looking for lighthearted action and romance can find it in John Carter.

Steven Thompson is a first-year ALT living in Fukushima prefecture. As his students have

keenly observed, he is a "tall man every day." When not maintaining his height or providing

his services as a jungle gym for the local kindergarten, he writes fiction, blasts classic rock

in the car, and encourages Japanese gamers online to trash talk.





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