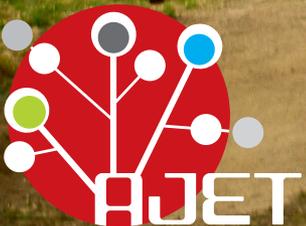


AJET

# CONNECT

magazine



AJET

May 2013

# 10/27/14



So readers, this is it: twelve months and ten issues later, we've come to the last Connect of this JET year. It's been a wild ride, serving as your Editor, and I'd have to say that what I've enjoyed most has been the opportunity to Connect with tons of likeminded writers from all over Japan. For most of our time here, we JETs are so busy watering the grassroots in our own local communities that it can be easy to forget that we're all part of something bigger. The group fervor that pulsed at our own Tokyo Orientation can seem faraway and forgotten (especially for us Inaka Kids), making it easy to feel anchorless. It's projects like Connect that help renew that sense of belonging, reminding us that the community's out there: it's up to us to immerse ourselves in it.

Taking the plunge this month, we've got a whole host of stories to share from right across the JET community. Heenali Patel explores Japanese perceptions of nudity in Culture, Nick Pelonia interviews ALT Dori White about her burgeoning sumo career in Events, and Connect's own Chris Barstow explores some hilarious Engrish signage in Entertainment. That's not to mention the return of "Like a Boson", as well as other great features in Fashion, Food, Sports, Travel and Volunteering!



All that remains is to send out my final round of thanks to the magnificent Melania and my wondrous Connect team, as well as all of you for continuing to tune in to Connect each month! Although the time has come for me to bow out, Connect isn't over: starting in July, former Events Editor Steven Thompson is going to be introducing you to a whole new editorial team and a brand new Connect! You can keep up to date with all the latest developments on your AJET Block's Group on Facebook and on Twitter (@NationalAJET), and if you're ever interested in getting involved, Steven himself is only an email away at [steven.thompson@ajet.net](mailto:steven.thompson@ajet.net).

It's been a pleasure!

Jim

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- ♦ Note: in last month (April's) edition of Connect Magazine, we erroneously attributed the cover photo to Melania Jusuf, when it should actually have been attributed to Josh Del Pino (who's also provided us with this month's cover!) Apologies and thanks in equal measure, Josh!

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

Editor's Welcome 2

Message from the Chair of AJET 5

Hello from Your Section Editors 6

Like a Boson: Will We Ever Cure HIV? 8

Following the recent news that a child born with HIV had been effectively cured, people began seriously considering the likelihood of a forthcoming global cure. Our stalwart science companion Amanda Horton talks about the only two cases of HIV to be cured, and what these cases mean for the future of the global pandemic.

Travel: 29 Things I've Learned While Travelling on JET 10

Veteran Travel section editor Amelia Hagen reflects on her five years of JET globetrotting; offering warnings, recommendations, and words of wisdom in one compact list.

Travel: Journey to Fukushima 11

When Fukushima CIR Lachie Tranter first came to the prefecture, he was immediately taken in by the beauty and history of it. Since then he's been traveling to every corner eating famous food and trying his hand at making bad pottery. Read about how much awesome he packed into a two-day trip recently.

Travel: Seductive Sri Lanka 12

For budget travelers, nothing beats a destination rich in culture and history with cheap food and accommodation. ALT Hannah Auld introduces us to Sri Lanka, a friendly, open country which is quickly emerging as a top tourist destination.

Hiking and Hot Springs: Highlights of a Weekend in Nagano 13

Nagano-based travel writer Peter Ninnes takes all the guesswork out of planning a trip to the great outdoors for those looking to reconnect with nature. With three different itineraries for all the hiking, sightseeing, and onsen-ing you could ever want, Peter's got it all sorted out for you!

Events: Yamashi's Legendary General 15

As leader of Yamanashi English Teacher's International (YETI), Brittany Shropshire knows her prefecture and its people better than most. After recently attending the annual Shingenko festival, she realized how much of an impact such an important historical figure has on the modern day.

Events: Perseverance is Strength 16

Hokkaido ALT Nick Pelonia lives in a small town that holds a singularly unique event in Japan: women's sumo. Nick talks to Dori White, fellow ALT and soon-to-be sumo champion.

Events: Running Through the Concrete Jungle 18

Our favorite travel guru Amelia made her way to Tokyo recently to participate in the Yamathon. A charity event that sees teams of four exploring their way through the streets of Tokyo as they touch base at every station on the famous Yamanote line.

Volunteering: Bonding Beyond Borders for Bali 19

We first heard about the Oita AJET Charity Bike Ride back in the December issue of Connect. This month, we hear back from Rhianna Aaron about the results of all that philanthropic pedaling!

Volunteering: Sharing Smiles 21

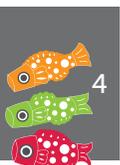
Smile Kids Japan is a countrywide organization that brings support, intercultural exchange, and (of course) smiles to local orphanages once a month. If you're looking to volunteer in your prefecture, section editor Neetha Mony would like to tell you how.

Sports: Surf's Up, Sun's Out 22

Self-confessed surf addict Matthew Dursum gives us a comprehensive guide to finding great surf on the Japanese archipelago, providing recommendations and tips for Japan's four distinct seasons. Chief among them? Watch out for foot-spearing sea urchins.

Sports: Running the Scenic Route 24

One of first-year JET Jessica Perl's first trips was to the island of Yoron to run a 21 km marathon. She expected some nice views and good running, but was overwhelmed by the kindness of Yoron's supportive citizens and the energizing beauty of the sea.



**Culture: From Sea to Summit** 25

Shizuoka ALT and Fuji-looking enthusiast Jordan Ozaki prefers relaxing on the beach to climbing Mt. Fuji from base to summit, but that doesn't mean she can't talk to someone who did! Jordan looks at the cultural importance of Fuji, and the significance of climbing the whole thing.

**Culture: The Naked Truth** 26

Every culture holds different values, and these values change over time. Heenali Patel summarizes and analyzes the history of nudity and sexuality in Japan in this well-researched article.

**Entertainment: Let's Studying English!** 28

Living in Japan, it's high-impossible not to see English everywhere. Japan loves the language (part of the reason we're here), and from products on the shelves of the *suupaa* to handbags in the hundred-yen store, you're bound to find bounties of broken, rambling, or just plain funny English. Editor Chris Barstow waxes poetic on the risks of random translation.

**Entertainment: The Console Wars** 29

Events editor Steven Thompson harnesses the mighty opinion of his fellow gamers in this look at the new technology going to battle this year. Check it out for a rundown of the goods and bads of the boxes begging for your business.

**Fashion and Beauty: Hair Today, Gone Tomorrow** 31

Summer comes earlier down south in Okinawa, and Kathryn Strong is preparing for the sweat and frizz that comes with it. She has some ways to get your hair under control and out of your face while still looking good and professional.

**Fashion and Beauty: Eyes on the Prize** 32

Beauty bloggers Siobhan Sullivan and Miriam Bouteba spent a lot of time trying to track down suitable substitutes for the makeup they'd found in Japan and came up with three highly recommended products. If you're leaving the land of eyeliner this summer, make a note of these names.

**Fashion and Beauty: Exporting Styles** 33

Harajuku has long been known as one of the world's fashion centers, and fashion-forward bloggers Siobhan and Miriam want to keep you ahead of the game. Read on to see what's hot in Ometosando this season.

**Food: Japan's Big Pickle** 34

It's rare to see a cleanly-arranged Japanese set meal without a little dish of pickles in the corner, but have you ever wondered why? Food editor Xan Wetherall dives into the briny depths of Japan's pickle history.

**Food: The Evolution of Kyushoku** 35

If you're an ALT, you've almost certainly eaten school lunch with your students. And while everyone's experience with the tray of school-mandated munchables differs as much as anything else on the JET Program, there's much to be said for Japan's school lunch system. Editor Ariane Bobiash extols the virtues of these balanced meals

**Events Calendar** 37

**Photography Contest Results**



Here we are: It's time for this year's AJET National Council to bid you farewell and to welcome in a brand new group of dedicated individuals. It has been a busy and productive year! I am incredibly proud of all of the work my hardworking council has been able to accomplish. Every year a new group of people come together and try their best to push AJET forward in ways that benefit JET participants, the JET Programme and life in Japan! Now it's time to hand over the torch.

As I leave, I want to give a heartfelt thanks to this year's National Council. Thank you for all you have done. I know I say thank you a lot, but I hope the repetition of it doesn't make it feel any less genuine. Everyone here has done so much work! I'm not sure that many outside of AJET will know just how much work truly goes into an effective AJET council. And I'm not sure many will ever truly see or recognize all that you've done, but here is my attempt: thank you for all of your awesome and amazing talents and efforts that you've put forward to make the 2012-2013 council stellar. Sure there are areas we fell short, and areas we could have improved. And we all did some tasks better than others. Still, at the end of the day, we did and accomplished a lot. And we did it while remaining a supportive and wonderful team. In my experience, that is a rare accomplishment. So I

am really proud of everyone and what you have done. Incredibly proud. Much love, respect, admiration and appreciation to all of you.

And of course many thanks to all of you who have supported and worked with us this year. Thank you for helping us and being understanding throughout the year, for filling out surveys, for giving us feedback, for reading and contributing to this magazine and for all of the work you do on behalf of Japan and the JET Programme. There are so many dedicated and amazing individuals out there! Keep doing what you are doing! I'm proud to be your colleague.

As I head out, I am looking forward to some quiet downtime. I'm already planning out the books I will read, the trips I will investigate, and the new subjects I will study in my newly found freedom! After two years on AJET, having a less action-packed life will be a nice change of pace. But of course, I will miss the excitement too and especially I will miss the great people that I've had a chance to meet, interact and work with, people like you.

Fortunately, I leave you in good hands. You have elected a talented and enthusiastic new council to take up our efforts. I am looking forward to seeing what this new set of talents, enthusiasm and ideas will bring to the JET community. I have faith they will be great.

Many thanks to everyone for a fantastic year! I hope our paths cross again!

All the best,

  
Mark

A message from the Chair of AJET

MARK  
SAYS...



# MEET YOUR EDITORS...



## **Sarah Jane Blenkhorn, Culture**

This is it - the last Connect issue of the AJET year. It's been a fun year, with lots of interesting stories to share. Here are a couple more, to keep you primed for the new issues coming in August! Heenali Patel leads with a thoughtful exploration of the changing views on nudity in Japan. And you've climbed Mount Fuji! ...but have you really climbed Mount Fuji? Jordan Ozaki reports on Oxfam Japan's Sea to Summit Challenge - from sea level to peak! Thanks for the good year, everyone!  
*sarah.blenkhorn@ajet.net*



## **Amelia Hagen, Travel**

With May comes Golden Week, sunshine, and flowers preceding those June showers. It also means Connect's last issue until the new 2013-2014 JET year and a travel smorgasbord to dive into. Lachie Tranter unearths the real Fukushima while Hannah Auld reveals why Lonely Planet chose Sri Lanka as one of its top destinations for 2013. Lastly, I wrap up my final travel section as editor with a few things I've learned while traveling as a JET. I've loved bringing you to foreign and domestic travel destinations the past two years and I hope you've enjoyed Connect Travel just as much as I have. Connect with other travelers via the AJET Couchsurfing group, Tatami Timeshare, and the JET-setters Facebook group for travelers and stay tuned for a travel-related AJET surprise at the end of this month! *amelia.hagen@ajet.net*



## **Ruth Rowntree, Sports**

Hi folks! May heralds my final sprint as Sports Editor as we make way for a new editorial team this summer. However, I can't take-off without thanking all of you who contributed, made article proposals, read our work, spread positive PR vibes and championed everyone's efforts. It's been a pleasure working with you all over the past ten months, so know that your involvement and interest has been greatly appreciated. Please also show your support to the new team once they take to the starting blocks.

And so, with Summer that bit closer, this last lap is sprinkled with sand, sea and sweat. One of Kyushu's surfing kings gives us the lowdown on the Japanese surf scene as he knows it, so swap warming your chair at the Board of Education for waxing boards of excitement on the beach this summer! We're also transported to the tiny, idyllic island of Yoron where marathon merriment struck, leaving one lithe lady with fond memories to share.

That's all folks! Parting words... A sporty quip by fellow Irishman, Oscar Wilde: "Football is all very well a good game for rough girls, but not for delicate boys."



**Chris Barstow, Entertainment** As it's Spring and the time of year for new beginnings, this issue we take a look at some brand spanking new developments in the gaming world. And, in keeping with the season of change, it is also time to pass the baton on to a brand new team when Connect returns for the next issue. So, whether you will be leaving these shores for new horizons beyond New Horizon this summer or saying 'Hi, Friends!' to a fresh batch of JETs, thanks for reading! *chris.barstow@ajet.net*



### Neetha Mony, Volunteering

In this month's issue we return to community outreach and ideas for local AJET chapters. Does your prefecture have regular Smile Kids visits? If not, read up on how to initiate visits in your area. Also, Rhianna Aaron gives us the play by play of Oita AJET's Charity Bike Ride and their staggering fundraising total. As this JET year comes to a close, I would especially like to thank all the amazing volunteer section contributors! Thank you for sharing your stories and wisdom about volunteering during and after your JET service. [neetha.mony@ajet.net](mailto:neetha.mony@ajet.net)

### Annabella Massey, Fashion

Here it is—the last issue of this year's AJET Connect! It's been an absolute pleasure working with the Fashion and Beauty readers and contributors this year. I'll be leaving Yamanashi in August and heading back to the UK for postgraduate studies, but am really looking forward to seeing what direction the magazine takes next! Check out Kathryn's final 'Style Strong' column for tips on what to do with long hair in the summer—and look out for more of her excellent work next year. I'd also like to introduce a couple of new contributors to you, Miriam and Siobhan. They run the 'Remotely Fashion' blog and have written two fantastic articles for us on Japanese trends in the UK and how to source *really good* (i.e. Japanese quality) liquid eyeliner back home—advice I'll definitely be putting into practice once I touch down at Heathrow. Thanks for reading and getting involved this year!



### Ariane Bobiash and Xan Wetherall, Food

Hello once again, and welcome to the last issue of this JET year's Connect! It's been Ariane and I's first year joining the team, and we've been totally tickled to be a part of it! We've written and recruited, eaten and drunk, all with help from readers like you! For our last spring push, we've got a palate cleanser of a tsukemono article from yours truly, exploring the tasty tidbit that is the ubiquitous Japanese pickle, followed by dessert, in the form of Japanese school lunches, and how they compare to the rest of the world by the lovely Ariane! Hungry for more? Me too! Can't wait to see you all next year! [xan.wetherall@ajet.net](mailto:xan.wetherall@ajet.net) and [ariane.bobiash@ajet.net](mailto:ariane.bobiash@ajet.net)

### Steven Thompson, Events

Spring is finally here in Fukushima, and the symbolic sakura bring with them a revitalization of events both great and small as people emerge from their kerosene-heated homes. In this year's final Events section until fall, Nick Pelonia talks to Hokkaido ALT Dori White about her victories in a women's-only sumo tournament up north, Brittany Shropshire reflects on the effect one man had on the prefecture of Yamanashi, and our favorite travel addict Amelia brags about her perilous journey following Tokyo's Yamanote line on foot in the 5th annual IVG Yamathon. Reading about all these great events get you pumped to leave the house? Check out the Events Calendar for some great suggestions, or contact me at [steven.thompson@ajet.net](mailto:steven.thompson@ajet.net) with some of your own! Thanks for a great year, thanks for supporting us, for sending in your ideas, for telling me what's going on in Japan. Most of all, thanks for reading. I'll see you next year here in the pages of Connect!





# WILL WE EVER CURE HIV?

Amanda Horton

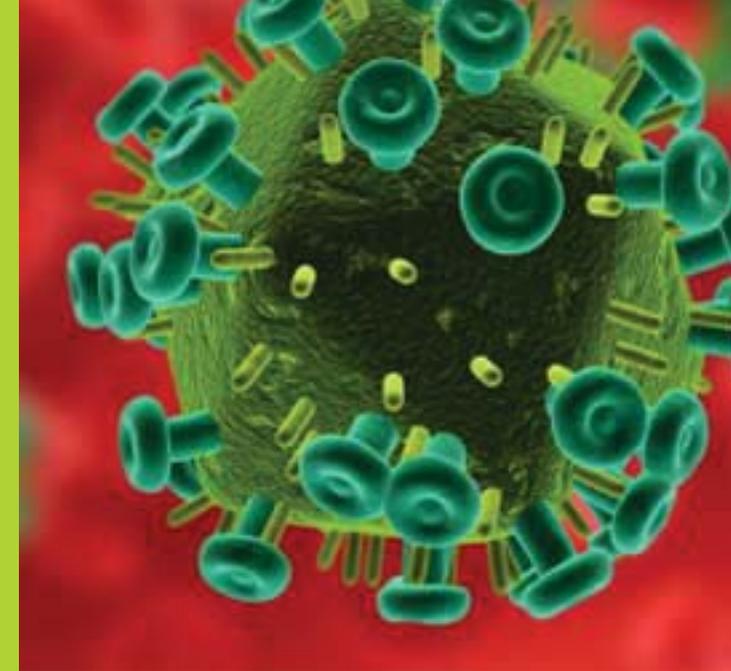
Last month the impossible happened, a toddler was cured of HIV with routine drugs. The treatment lasted 18 months before the child and mother disappeared. When they were found, doctors were astonished to find the virus had no returned. A year later, and the toddler is still HIV-free. To the world, it seemed like a miracle. It is only the 2<sup>nd</sup> recorded case of HIV being cured, and the first one where commonly prescribed medication was the cause.

HIV is terrifying. It is one of the worst global pandemics in existence today. Since it was discovered in 1981, it has killed 28 million people. By comparison, the 1918 flu pandemic killed 20 million, and World War 2 killed 40 million. It is incurable, has a high mortality rate, spreads quickly, remain asymptomatic for long periods, and there is no vaccination to protect against it. The combination of these factors is rare today, and is what make HIV particularly fearful and problematic. There is hope, however.

Back in the 1980s, there wasn't much hope of treatment, let alone a cure. So little was known about the virus, people became terrified of contracting it simply by using the bus. Now we can not only treat HIV, but it seems we can cure it as well. So dare we dream of eradicating HIV?

Well, it isn't quite so simple. There are many factors to take into consideration when considering this case. Firstly, and possibly most importantly, the doctors involved were able to hit the virus hard and early, giving the toddler the antiretroviral drugs within hours of being born, her mother having just tested positive for HIV. The child's lab tests hadn't even come back before the doctors started treatment with the standard child medication. There is also the problem of not knowing exactly how a baby's immune system affects the treatment, as babies still get most of their protection from their mother's breast milk.

Still, this gives us hope of curing HIV in infants if they are treated early enough, but it is not applicable to adults.



Adults often have HIV for years before symptoms show, by which time the virus is fully established in the immune system when no medication can uproot it. To understand why this is, we need to look at how HIV works.

HIV stands for Human Immunodeficiency Virus. As you might suspect, it causes a deficiency in the immune system of the host. HIV itself does not kill, but it survives by invading host immune cells and growing inside them. AT first, it rapidly spreads through the body, before hiding inside DNA. It uses the host cell's replicating systems to produce copies of the virus, essentially turning our immune system into a HIV factory. Slowly, over the course of years, the immune system weakens, causing the host to develop AIDS (Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome). It is at this stage that opportunistic infections, such as pneumonia, cancer, or gastrointestinal disease, take hold. The immune system is unable to fight back against these usually mild infections, and eventually the host dies. From infection to AIDS can take many years, the CDC estimate that 50% of infected people take 10 years to develop AIDS. Hosts have usually developed AIDS by the time they realise they are

infected at all, meaning HIV can be spread unintentionally, especially by promiscuous people.

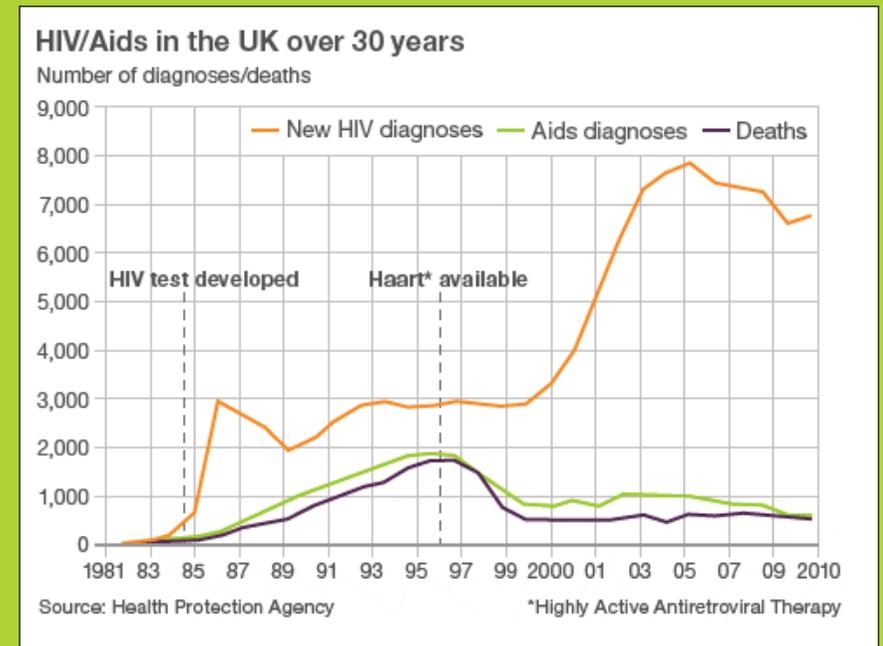
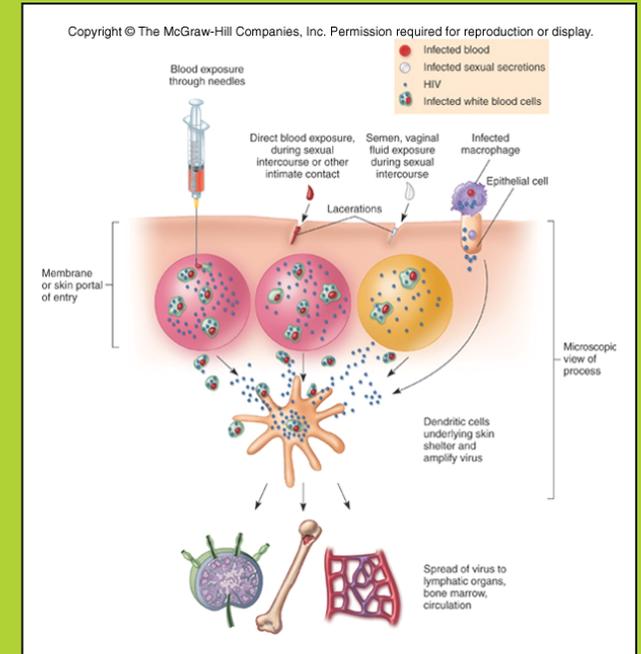
HIV is difficult to fight for many reasons. Firstly, it mutates, making it hard to target as medication and potential vaccines need to be constantly adapted. This is the same problem we have when treating cold and flu viruses. Secondly, it destroys the immune system, the very thing designed to fight against invaders.

It's not all doom and gloom, HIV, while scary, isn't so easy to catch. It is a blood infection, meaning you need to have contact with an infected person's blood. This can be from sexual contact, sharing needles, breastfeeding, pre-natal transmission, or blood transfusions. In children, it is mostly commonly acquired from infected mothers, and these cases can be prevented by drugs, caesarean section and bottle feeding. In adults, most infections are from unprotected sex with an infected partner, especially in countries where blood is screened for infections before transfusions take place. Really, all said and done, prevention is better than cure when HIV is concerned. That said, there is no need to get paranoid. HIV cannot be transmitted by blood-sucking insects, not even the dreaded mosquito, in saliva, tears or sweat, by sitting next to someone, sharing their seat, sharing their toilet or even shaking hands. There are a whole host of diseases you can get in those ways, but HIV is not one of them. HIV is a very fragile virus, it does not survive well outside the host body, and so environmental transmission is incredibly difficult.

Anyway, let's get back to curing the 36.7-45.3 million people who are infected. I said earlier that the toddler recently cured was the second case, so let's talk about the first. In 2007, Timothy Ray Brown became the first known case of HIV being cured. However, the method wasn't exactly standard, or cheap, or risk-free. Timothy was cured by having his immune system destroyed as part of leukemia treatment, he was then given a stem-cell transplant to restore it, but the cells contained a rare genetic mutation

which is resistant to HIV. With some genetic engineering, the host's own immune system could be adapted to be resistant to HIV. This is all experimentally, however, and costly. A cure would be useless if no one could afford it, so for now, while not impossible, it is still just a dream.

Before you get depressed, it should be remembered that HIV is no longer the death sentence it used to be, at least not in the developed world. Since good antiretroviral therapies came into use in the 1990s, many HIV carriers can expect to live a near-normal lifespan. Proper precautions can prevent transmission to others, and many HIV carriers can live a perfectly normal life. Unfortunately, nearly 70% of infected people live in sub-Saharan Africa, where access to drugs is relatively poor. Without any truly effective treatment, and with 14,000 new cases a day, all efforts now are on stopping the spread of HIV, and for now, all we can do is hope.



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# 29 THINGS I'VE LEARNED WHILE TRAVELLING ON JET

Amelia Hagen

Over the past five years I've spent on the JET Programme, I have used all 100 days of my *nenkyu* to travel somewhere out of my own prefecture. It's been a wild rollercoaster ride and I thought I'd share a few tidbits I picked up along the way. Here's to hoping you learn even more during your time on JET!

1. Convenience stores can also be restaurants in Japan—complete with dining tables.
2. There's always a limit to bargaining in third world markets. Humor is key.
3. Mud can be your friend! (Google Boryeong Mud Festival.)
4. Generally, if you are trying to help others, others will inadvertently help you, too.
5. It is possible to run into JET friends you know in other countries...several times.
6. In Miyajima and Nara, keep your snacks and maps away from the deer.
7. Relationships change through travel, for better and for worse.
8. In New Zealand, everything is 'sweet as.'
9. Kusatsu is the best *onsen* town in Japan. Kurokawa is a close second.
10. I will never enjoy train rides as much as I do in Japan.
11. Even when 100 is the goal, 81 bowls of *wanko soba* in Iwate is way too many.
12. Taking a day and a half to attend the Justin Bieber concert in Osaka and dress up like a *ninja* in Shiga is a totally legit use of *nenkyu*.
13. Visiting a family member abroad can help ease the pain of another recently deceased family member.
14. Be wary of *kava*.
15. Some of the best conversations are with those far older and far younger than you.
16. Monkeys enjoy *onsen*, too.
17. Playing out a human scavenger hunt in matching t-shirts is a sure-fire way to get your group on TV at a *sake* festival.
18. If you leave your passport in a Burmese cab, don't worry, the guesthouse owner you just met will have memorized the cab driver's license plate in order to call him about returning the passport later that day.
19. Hong Kong is still home to the best skyline in the world.
20. Do not fall for the tea house scams in major Chinese cities.
21. When you meet someone, you could be talking to a future TED speaker.
22. Pay it forward like you may not get another chance to do so.
23. "Let the world change you, and you can change the world." – Nepali bar wall
24. Sometimes all the health precautions in the world won't prevent you from getting sick abroad.
25. Embrace the time you have alone.
26. A smile can get you into hot water and can get you out of it.
27. Give people the benefit of the doubt but never fail to go with your gut.
28. The most practical piece of clothing is a sarong.
29. "People you meet create the paradise you find." – Robin Esrock

*Amelia Hagen is a fifth-year ALT in the home of Ayumi Hamasaki, also known as Fukuoka Prefecture. When not boarding a 737 or regretting that overnight bus trip, she is most likely planning her next jaunt. You can follow her on Twitter via @jetset\_amelia as she tweets her travels.*

# JOURNEY TO FUKUSHIMA

Lachie Tranter

Two years have passed since the March 11<sup>th</sup> Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami and there has been significant progress. However, much is left to do here in Fukushima. I believe one of the most important jobs, particularly for people outside of the prefecture, overseas is to get to know the real Fukushima. It is a prefecture surrounded by nature. Fukushima has over 900 *onsen*, stunning mountain ranges, five coloured lakes, the spectacular waterfall cherry blossom tree and, finally, amazing local food from the main three regions: Hama-dori, Naka-dori and Aizu. Back in winter, I and a group of friends went on a journey to discover all of this and more.

The first stop was Lake Inawashiro, located at the foot of Mt. Bandai in northwest Fukushima, and the home of the celebrated Dr. Hideo Noguchi (of "1,000-yen note mugshot" fame). Here, we ate a special celebratory style of *soba* made from local prefectural ingredients. This area is famous for producing buckwheat used for *soba*.

From here we moved to Lake Hibarako in Kitashiobara Village in the Aizu region to try riding snow mobiles as well as ice fishing on the frozen lake. Here, I even managed to catch a fish! Later that night, we fried the fish we had caught for our after-party inside the *ryokan* at the *onsen*. It was surprisingly tasty.

After a long day on the frozen lake, it was time to warm up so we headed back towards Fukushima City to stay the night at Tamago-yu Onsen, a hotel with outdoor hot springs that smell like rotten eggs because of the underground water minerals. Trust me, the health benefits outweigh the smell! Jumping out naked from the steaming hot baths into the surrounding snow was an experience to say the least.

The following day, we ventured back an hour across to the west of Fukushima to try our hand at traditional ceramics in Aizu-Wakamatsu City, where my entertaining attempt to make a Japanese *sake* bottle failed miserably.

We had worked up a healthy appetite by this point so it was time for a special "Wappa meshi" (circular steamed bento box) lunch at Tagoto, a famous cuisine hotel, where the food was melt-in-your-mouth sublime.

The next stop was Tsuruga Castle in Aizu-Wakamatsu City, the scene of the Sunday night NHK drama 'Yae no Sakura,' the final battle in the Boshin War, and the scene of the last *samurai* (not involving Tom Cruise). Tsuruga Castle is also famous because it is the only current castle in Japan with a red tiled roof. We decided to have our own war in the snow, before we were told to stop by the "*samurai* guard" at the castle.

The last stop in this two-day trip around Fukushima ended back in Fukushima City at a famous restaurant, "Manpuku," for some Fukushima *enban*, or circular plate, *gyoza*.

Tourist numbers are still 20 percent down from pre-disaster numbers, particularly in the Aizu region. This is sad considering the history and beauty this region offers and the fact that it is 200 kilometers away from the damaged nuclear plant. My own two-day trip around the prefecture was extremely enjoyable! I hope everyone will also begin a journey to Fukushima. I am sure you will have a fantastic time, even if you choose to do just one of the activities above. Spring and summer are also great times to visit. Let's not forget that Fukushima remains a beautiful and enjoyable place to live.

*Lachie Tranter is a second-year CIR/PA at the Fukushima Prefectural Government in Fukushima Prefecture. He loves travel, food and history so Fukushima has been a great place to explore. As his "religion" is Australian Rules Football (AFL), he is planning an Australian Rules Football event in Fukushima, and for all of those who don't know what it is, YouTube!*

Image sources:  
[www.mylifeasmrs.com](http://www.mylifeasmrs.com); [www.brownjca.org](http://www.brownjca.org);  
[www.twitter.com/masakosydney](http://www.twitter.com/masakosydney); [dustinandlaura.blogspot.com](http://dustinandlaura.blogspot.com)

# SEDUCTIVE SRI LANKA

Hannah Auld



In some religious mythology, when Adam and Eve were cast out of Eden, Adam was sent to Sri Lanka. Not much of a punishment; the island itself doesn't fall far short of paradise, and with the end of its 30-year civil war in 2009, the country basically *is* heaven for budget travellers. While certainly in the process of beefing up its tourism industry, there are still a few years left to enjoy the singularity of this remarkable island.

We touched down in Colombo, staying there one night before heading to Galle and the coastal towns of the South. Galle Fort, one of the most popular destinations, seems like a particularly luxurious tourist ghetto, with stunning views of the Laccadive Coast and plenty of hotel restaurants where you can eat like a king for half the price of a Japanese McDonald's. It's relaxed, but sedate—the minute you step (or tuk-tuk) outside its walls to Galle town or to the nearby beach town of Unawatuna, the holiday atmosphere remains but the local colour is revived. It's true, you won't go far without encountering the irrepressible Sri Lankan character. Stony "tourist" stares are only till you smile, say hello and see this completely reciprocated. Underneath their friendliness, Sri Lankans are no fools either—with a wicked sense of humour, an impressive literacy rate for a developing country (over 90 percent) and English education since first grade, they make up a country of charming and willing conversationalists.

While the South is for beach chillin', the Central Province is for spiritual treasures. In Kandy, there's the Temple of

the Tooth, a revered Buddhist site said to hold one of Buddha's—you guessed it—teeth, and the Bairavokhanda Vihara Buddha who towers over the city. A bit of an urban hike, especially in the heat, but he's worth it; this site offers some of the best panoramas of Kandy Lake, lined with whitewashed stone, nestled in its lush green surroundings. We sadly ran out of time to visit many of the highlights: namely, Sri Pada (Adam's Peak), a Buddhist pilgrimage climbed by torchlight to view the sunrise; and Anuradhapura, the capital for almost 2000 years, holding the ruins of ancient Sri Lankan civilisation. This prompts a bit of advice when travelling through Sri Lanka: unless you want to pay for a private driver, know exactly where you're going and leave plenty of time in which to get there. Off the usual tourist trail usually means having to navigate a sadly underdeveloped transport system, made clear to us when our train broke down for an hour in the sweltering afternoon heat. Fair enough, 40-year-old trains on century-old colonial tracks will always make for a bumpy journey. But Colombo to Galle spent trundling along on the antiquated railway, sitting in an open carriage door, gazing at the Laccadive Sea—it's hard not to fall for Sri Lanka. A million miles from the *shinkansen* comforts we all know and love, but no less enticing a journey.

*Hannah Auld is a first-year ALT from Glasgow. She will read anything and everything put in front of her and enjoys travelling, learning Japanese, yuzu sake, and sampling as many types of onigiri as a vegetarian possibly can. She lives in Kurume, Fukuoka Prefecture.*





## HIKING AND HOT SPRINGS:

# HIGHLIGHTS OF A WEEKEND IN NAGANO

Peter Nimnes

Many Japan residents and tourists from overseas visit Nagano Prefecture in winter for its great skiing and snow boarding at venues such as Hakuba and Shiga Kogen. Yet for many Japanese people, Nagano Prefecture also evokes images of clean air, forested mountains and remote hot springs. Now that winter is over, there are many opportunities to get away from the big smoke and enjoy a weekend break or a longer stay in Nagano, hiking in the mountains or soaking in the onsens.

Nagano Prefecture in central Honshu is neighbor to eight other prefectures—Saitama, Yamanashi, Shizuoka, Aichi, Gifu, Toyama, Niigata, and Gunma. Most parts of eastern and northern Nagano can be reached in 2-3 hours by car or 60-90 minutes by bullet train from Tokyo. From Nagoya, the southern reaches of Nagano can be reached in 1.5 hours by car, while Nagano City is about a 4-hour drive. Another option from Nagoya or Osaka is to take the scenic JR Shinano Line through the famous Kiso Valley to Matsumoto, Chikuma and Nagano cities (2-3 hours from Nagoya).

Whether you are interested in hiking or hot springs, basing yourself at somewhere like Kamesei Ryokan in Chikuma City gives you access to plenty of choices. The hikes around the Chikuma River valley in the vicinity of Ueda City and Chikuma City are suitable for most levels of fitness, while there are also many fine hot springs establishments nearby. Below are my recommendations for, first, an onsen weekend, second, a hiking weekend, and third, a five-night “onsen plus sightseeing” trip around Nagano prefecture. Of course, these itineraries can be modified to suit the time available. And if you have a few days to spare, there are more suggestions in the books listed at the end of this article.

### Onsen Weekend

Friday—Travel to Chikuma City and check into Kamesei Ryokan. Enjoy a traditional Japanese meal (kaiseki cuisine) and soak in the indoor and outdoor baths.

Saturday—have a relaxed breakfast, and then drive to one of the day-use onsen establishments deep in the mountains, such as Jippuku no Yu or Sasara no Yu. Both places also have cafeterias serving the famous Nagano soba noodles, so you can have lunch before or after your bath. Drive back to Kamesei Ryokan, then spend the rest of the afternoon strolling around Togura-Kamiyamada Onsen town. Soak your feet in the footbath in the main street, or visit one of the other local bathhouses such as the historic Kame no Yu. Enjoy another evening meal at the ryokan or ask the proprietor, Tyler-san, for his local restaurant recommendations.

Sunday—Check out of the ryokan at 10am. If you are heading back in the direction of Tokyo, stop at one of the onsens in Tomi City or Komoro City to enjoy fabulous views of the mountains. Yurarikan in Tomi City has great views across to the mountains to the west, including Mt Yatsugatake and Mt Tateshina, while from Aguri no Yu Komoro there are great views of the occasionally smoking volcanic cone of Mt Asama. If you have come from the Nagoya direction, you could make a stop at Gake no Yu in Matsumoto City for some excellent views across the Matsumoto Plain or enjoy the big outdoor bath at Awa no Yu in Shirahone Onsen.

### Hiking Weekend

Friday—drive to Chikuma City, check into Kamesei Ryokan. Enjoy a traditional Japanese meal (kaiseki cuisine) and soak in their indoor and outdoor baths.

Saturday—Take a picnic lunch and hike to the top of Mt Gorgamine. This hike takes about 4-6 hours, depending on the route taken. Your climb is rewarded with magnificent views along the Chikuma River Valley and across to the Northern Alps. With an early start, you can also hike along the ridge from Gorigamine to Miyasaka Pass and back to the ryokan, or all the way to Mt Ariake in the north of Chikuma City (7-8 hours).



Sunday—Check out of the ryokan and head to Ueda City. Climb Mt Tokko (3 hours return) or Mt Komayumi (also 3 hours return) for superb views of the Shioda Plains and the Bessho Onsen area. Reward yourself with a soak in one of the baths in Bessho, such as Oyu, which is in a classical wooden building in the middle of the town. If you have time, visit some of the famous temples and shrines in the town, which date from the Kamakura Era (1185-1333).

### Five-Night Onsen plus Sightseeing Tour

You can start this round trip at any point, and below I start in the west of the Prefecture and go clock-wise.

**Day 1.** Drive to Matsuomoto City and stay at Maruei Ryokan, Shirahone Onsen. Located in the mountains near the border with Gifu, this ryokan has small, separate male and female indoor baths, and a mixed bathing outdoor bath with Shirahone's famous silky smooth, opaque, milky water. Across the road is the well-known Awa no Yu, which has a much larger outdoor bath but tends to be more crowded. Try them both if you have time.

**Day 2.** Drive into central Matsumoto City and visit the castle, then continue north up to Hakuba. If your budget allows, stay at the Hakuba Highland Hotel. In any case, take a soak in the hotel's Tenjin no Yu baths, which have fabulous views of the Northern Alps.

**Day 3.** In the morning, drive east to Nagano City and visit Zenkouji Temple, which dates from the 7<sup>th</sup> century, and is said to contain the oldest Buddha statue in Japan. In the afternoon, drive over to Yamanouchi Town and visit the snow monkeys at Jigokudani Wild Monkey Park. Stay at one of the many ryokans or hotels in Shibu Onsen town or nearby Yudanaka Onsen. Guests get free entry to the numerous local bathhouses, including the atmospheric Oyu in Shibu Onsen.

**Day 4.** Drive south to Chikuma City and stay at Kamesei Ryokan in Togura-Kamiyamada Onsen area. The English-speaking proprietors can tell you all about the history of the

local area. Soak in the ryokan's indoor and outdoor baths. There is a family bath that you can rent, too. Stroll around the onsen town, try one of the other local bathhouses, or soothe your feet in the footbath in the main street.

**Day 5.** Drive south through Ueda City, Tomi City, and Komoro City. There are a number of day-use hot spring establishments in these cities with excellent views west to the Yatsugadake mountain range or east to the Asama range with its smoking volcano. Spend the night in the Karuizawa area, and in one final splurge, visit the very chic Tonbo no Yu at Hoshino Onsen.

The above are just a few examples of the many fine hiking and hot spring escapes available in beautiful Nagano Prefecture. Full details can be found in my "[Nagano Onsen Guide: The Top 100 Day-Use Hot Springs](#)" book, and in the "Hiking, Walking and Biking Nagano" series of books (for [Ueda City](#) and [Chikuma City](#)), all in English and available on amazon.com or from select bookstores in Nagano Prefecture.

*Peter Ninnies is an educational consultant and travel writer based in Chikuma City, Nagano.*





# YAMANASHI'S LEGENDARY GENERAL

Brittany Shropshire

Have you ever heard of Yamanashi prefecture? If you have, the thought that probably comes to mind is, "Oh yeah, I went there to climb Mt. Fuji." Maybe you've had a sip of our famous Katsunuma wine, although you didn't actually know where that wine came from. Chances are you've never had the chance to try our prefectural specialty, an udon-like hearty noodle dish called *houtou*.

So I don't blame you at all if you've never heard of our most famous festival, *Shingenko Matsuri*.

In fact, I bet that Japanese people don't even know that this tiny prefecture was once in a position of power during Japan's period of unification in the 16th century! Oda Nobunaga and Toyotomi Hideyoshi are relatively well-known figureheads of the Warring States era, but Yamanashi has its own hero from that time period: Takeda Shingen.

The influence of this powerful warlord can be glimpsed almost anywhere in Yamanashi, even on a normal day. Walk a few meters from the south exit of the capital's main station, and you'll be greeted by the looming statue of his armor-clad figure. Shingen's four-diamond family crest is engraved on various buildings and signs; it's evolved into a prefectural symbol. Yamanashi's most famous shrines are related to Shingen as well. Takeda Shrine, which is said to hold his spirit, and Erinji, which is the location of the Takeda family grave, are two often-visited tourist attractions. Even our local soccer team, Ventforet Kofu, takes its name from Shingen's famed battle adage: "*fu-rin-ka-zan*", or "wind-forest-fire-mountain," meaning to run as fast as the wind; wait as quietly as the forest; attack as powerfully as a fire; and defend as imposingly as a mountain. Originally an expression to motivate his troops, this phrase now serves as a similar inspiration to our players!

Every year during the first weekend of April, the citizens of our prefecture hold a vibrant festival in Shingen's honor, called "*Shingenko Matsuri*"—the Festival for General Shingen. Three days of cultural activities, performances, and battle reenactments mark the anniversary of Shingen's death in 1573. Citizens from all over the prefecture come to the capital to take part in the celebrations, and individual cities host their own events as well. Perhaps the highlight of the weekend is the Koshu Army March held on Saturday evening, which boasts nearly 1,500 participants and is one of the biggest parades in Japan. Each year, a famous actor or talent is asked to play the role of Shingen himself.

Despite the bothersome weather conditions on the drizzly Saturday afternoon, this year the well-known period drama actor Matsudaira Ken braved the rain as General Shingen. Spectators lined the streets to observe the mounted troops, hundreds of foot soldiers, and young maidens all clothed in traditional garments as they marched along the roads of the capital and around the base of the Maizuru castle ruins.

If you're a fan of history, consider stopping by to check out the parade next year. You can take in an amazing reenactment of a unique time period, eat yummy Yamanashi festival food, and check out a variety of cultural exhibitions while you're here. *Fu-rin-ka-zan!*

*Brittany is a second-year ALT living in the Land of Fuji, Yamanashi! She enjoys traveling, video games, and the never-ending tickle wars with her nauseatingly cute elementary school students.*

*All photos taken by Thomas Lord, and used with his permission.*

# PERSEVERANCE IS STRENGTH

Nick Petolina

Every May, the tiny town of Fukushima on the southern tip of Hokkaido hosts a Women's-Only Sumo Tournament. Fukushima (not to be confused with the prefecture) is most famous for raising two former sumo grand champions: *Chiyonoyama* and *Chiyonofuji*, the latter often being considered as the most successful sumo wrestler of all time. Although the role of women in Japanese sumo history is a controversial one, this unique competition strays from tradition and plays host to 64 female participants. Most participate to have fun and to say they participated, while some travel from all over Japan and train vigorously. The tournament is open to women of any nationality. In fact, a foreigner placed first in 1998 and remains the only foreigner to do so.

Last year, the tournament's sole foreign entrant, a JET ALT named Dori White, competed and took second place overall. This May 12<sup>th</sup>, Dori will try her best to become the second foreigner to achieve first place in the tournament's 22-year history. We asked her about her sumo adventures.

## Where are you originally from and where are you located now?

I am from Kansas City, USA and graduated from the University of Kansas (Rock Chalk Jayhawk!). I am on my 3<sup>rd</sup> year as the town of Mori's ALT.

## How did you find out about the sumo tournament? Why did you decide to get involved?

My predecessor entered before and encouraged me to try. I have always liked sumo wrestling; however, I was rather hesitant to enter. I was thinking about entering my first year here, but the event was cancelled due to the Tohoku Earthquake. I almost didn't enter last year but was encouraged from my friend to try, just to say I had the wild experience of entering a sumo contest. She promised to act as my cheerleader (she did a phenomenal job) and so the adventure began.

## Did you have any kind of prior contact sports (martial arts/wrestling/football/etc.) experience?

Does *tae kwan do* in third grade count? No? Ok then. I have never had any prior experience. I honestly was just hoping to not embarrass myself. I had no practice and all I really knew about the rules of sumo is get the other person out of the ring. I walked into the tournament thinking, "Ok, Dori, just try to get into the top ten." After seeing the competition, I was very nervous. It was my first time ever doing sumo, and I was doing it in front of a lot of people. I had a lot of "the shakes" waiting in between matches.

## What were the reactions to you participating and then doing so well? Did anything change as you did better?

My fellow competitors were very sweet. I was pretty oblivious and nervous, yet they were very supportive. Although later I heard that apparently many women were rather panicked about coming up against me. My friend and I had a great time the night before at Fukushima's *enkai*, so many of the people who ran the tournament would flash me an encouraging smile. As I did better, many members of the audience would ask for pictures of me or actually come up to me and give encouragement. I felt like a politician as one man thrust his baby in my arms and snapped a photo. I still can't believe that actually happened. It was a very positive experience and I hope that I have just as great a time this year. My mother and step-dad have come to watch me this year (it is on Mother's day), so I hope they also have a great time.

## What's a good strategy for sumo wrestling? Do you have any special moves?

I had no strategy, just get the other person out of the ring—or smush them. Either way works. My favorite match was when I lifted this woman off her feet then waddled over to the edge of the ring and set her outside. No special moves; just lift or smush.





**Did any of your students or coworkers watch you? What was it like returning back to your town after doing so well in the tournament?**

Because I was rather nervous, and honestly thought I wasn't going to do well at all, hardly anyone in my town knew I entered. So no one other than my cheerleader friend came to watch me. The Friday before the competition was the BOE *hanami*, and over a *nama* beer I told the boys (my office was all male at the time) that I was going to go for it. They ate it up! They were giving me tips and had two of the younger guys practice against each other to show me how to grip my opponent. It was one of the best experiences I have had with my office. And then to hear I got second place! They held a surprise party for me, giving me a photo album they had made using photos they had gotten after calling Fukushima's *yakuba*. I was incredibly touched (there were tears).

What was the best outcome of the whole experience was that my rapport with my students deepened significantly. All that week, students, some of whom who were uninterested in me before, came up to congratulate me, say they saw me on TV or the newspaper, or challenge me to arm wrestling. Some of my students from a problem class really became well-behaved during my lessons. That is an amazing thing, that something I was so nervous about doing had such an impact on some of my students. They had a sense of pride for me.

**As this year's tournament draws near, have you been doing any kind of training since placing 2nd last year?**

I went to my first live sumo match for my birthday last year, and then in October I went to Tokyo to watch sumo training. I took some video and have watched it closely. I try and mimic some of the movements, especially the squatting exercises. Sumo was surprisingly hard and

physical. I found that a quick start gives you a lot of edge. Moving from the sumo start position (heck, just holding my balance in the start position) is hard for me. So I try to work on my balance a lot. I also joined a gym to improve my overall fitness.

**What are your thoughts and what will you be doing differently (if any) going into this year's tournament?**

There is a saying in Japan, "*Keisoku wa chikara nari.*" It means "perseverance is strength." It's one of my favorite Japanese proverbs and I am going into this tournament holding that in my head. I want to grip tighter, hold on longer, and push harder.

The biggest difference between this year and last year is that a whole lot more people are telling me to "get first." The pressure to get first is a bit overwhelming. Although I want to get first, and I have been sweating and training for first, I am going to walk into this with the same hope as last time, "Ok, Dori, just try and get into the top ten." And even if I fall I will still try again next year because my other favorite Japanese proverb is "*Shichi ten hakki,*"—fall down seven times get up eight.

**Closing comments**

I consider getting second place at the Fukushima Women's Sumo tournament one of, if not, the best, experiences I have had as an ALT. Even if I fail to place again, I got second once. I have a great relationship with many of my students thanks to this and the support of my community. My two-foot trophy is also pretty awesome, too.

*Nick is a second-year ALT in Fukushima-cho, Hokkaido. He likes coffee, traveling, taking photos, and thinks it's pretty trippy writing about himself in the third-person. Whoa.*

*All photos taken by the author, Nick Pelonia, and used with his permission.*



# GOING GODZILLA: THE TOKYO YAMATHON

Amelia Hagen

430 participants. 117 teams. 46 kilometers (28.6 miles) walked. 29 train stations visited. 11 hours, 6 minutes. 4 friends. This is the Tokyo Yamathon.

The Yamathon is a charity fundraiser event created by then-Shizuoka-JET Joe Pournovin in 2010 and organized in conjunction with the International Volunteer Group (IVG). As its website says, it is indeed the 'ultimate urban challenge,' requiring participants to visit (and by visit, I mean **walk or run to**) all 29 stations on the famed JR Yamanote Line in Tokyo. Participants take on the Yamanote Line in teams of three to four people and are given smart phone and paper maps ahead of time. However, in the end, it's up to each team's wit to get them back to the finish line at Yoyogi Park.

Where does charity factor in? Each team pays an 8,000-yen registration fee. Thanks to Yamathon sponsors who cover necessary costs, this money goes directly to Oxfam Japan to fight poverty in the Congo. Each team is also expected to fundraise for Oxfam Japan via an online giving page or accepting cash donations in person. Through our team profile on the Yamathon website, we were able to post photos of us, showcase our team goals and mindset, and include a link to our Virgin Online Giving page.

Saturday, April 20<sup>th</sup>, was the big day. At exactly 7:09am, with each of us rocking a different color and matching bandanna, we set out from Yoyogi Park heading south towards Shibuya, posing differently for pictures in front of each station. Hamamatsucho was riding in a car; Shimbashi was squatting, smoking salarymen; Yurakucho was EXILE; Akihabara was an attempt at a *hadoken* photo; Uguisudani was the 'Flying V.'

Throughout our 46-kilometer adventure and between countless *conbini* stops, we encountered numerous other Yamathon'ers, camaraderie, some rain, cool artwork, hunger, exhaustion, and the prettiest wisteria-draped public bathroom I've ever seen. My teammates and I also 'experienced' each other's corny jokes, played around in a park in a north Tokyo neighborhood, ate Yoshinoya beef

bowls like never before, and logged our progress via social media. I could say it was one of the best experiences I've had on JET, but that would still probably be an understatement.

When we reached the Yoyogi finish line, 11 hours and 6 minutes later at 6:15pm, we were told we placed 46<sup>th</sup> out of 117 teams and basically went crazy out of excitement. As organizer Joe later said to me, "People like overcoming pain and the buzz you get from doing something like that." Our team would agree. With over one million raised and counting this year, there's certainly a reason the Yamathon was featured in the Japan Times a few years ago.

What makes the Yamathon so special? According to Joe, it's always been about "bringing together the JET community." Core Yamathon volunteer Fred De Condappa emphasizes the ease and safety of the event and highlights the people he's met. These two have high hopes for the Yamathon. If anything can be learned from the Yamathon story, it's that, as Joe says, 'There are so many JETs out there who can do so much. The sky's the limit.'

Interested in getting involved next year? Contact IVG at: <http://tokyo-yamathon.com/contact-us>.

*Amelia Hagen is a fifth-year ALT in the home of Ayumi Hamasaki, also known as Fukuoka Prefecture. She usually serves as your AJET Connect Travel Editor but enjoyed the Yamathon so much, she thought she'd share. You can still follow her on Twitter via @jetset\_amelia as she tweets her travels.*





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# BONDING BEYOND BORDERS FOR BALI

Rhianna Aaron



This past March, approximately 100 people supported and participated in the Oita AJET 2013 Charity Bike Ride: “Kizuna” — Bonding Beyond Borders. This was our 16th year of running the event and it turned out to be our largest ever! This year’s ride brought together participants from eight different prefectures and raised money for Foundation 18, an orphanage and elderly care program in Bali, Indonesia! Here’s a recap of the event:

On the morning of Saturday, March 16th more than one hundred people gathered at Tsukumin Park in Tsukumi City, Oita Prefecture. The weather was sunny and cool, but the atmosphere was buzzing with excitement. Months of planning by the organizers, a truly dynamic duo, was finally going to be put to the test. As early as 8:00am bikers were prepping gear, volunteers were distributing goodies, musicians were playing tunes, and spectators were taking it all in. After final announcements and a safety check, the ride commenced at 10:00am. A crowd sent off the bikers with a countdown, cheers, and a musical fanfare from ファミリアトロンボーンアンサンブル (Familia Trombone Ensemble), a touring trio of talented musicians! Immediately after the bikers were off, the volunteers hopped into their support vehicles and the ride was officially in top gear.

The course took participants from Tsukumi City to Sumie Beach in Miyazaki Prefecture on Saturday and then returned along the same route on Sunday, for a total of about 200km. Along the way, cyclists were supported by volunteers who offered snacks, drinks, and minor repairs. There were also a few rest stops along the way that offered rare treats such as carrot ice cream or the chance to see a beetle statue the size of a car!

The route was beautiful, but not without its fair share of challenging climbs. Volunteers did their absolute best to encourage and motivate bikers throughout the duration of the ride, and especially along the sloping peaks and valleys. Although challenged, the bikers were excited to reach each checkpoint and spend a few moments recharging. Almost every volunteer car was stocked with refreshments, although gummy snacks and chocolate chip cookies seemed to be high on everyone’s wish list. Towards the end of the route on Saturday, bikers were presented with some tough decisions. Only



VOLUNTEERING





20

VOLUNTEERING



the most courageous riders dared to complete the last 20km on what should be known as "Hell Hill", while those with weary legs opted to catch a pre-arranged shuttle to the campsite.

Despite everyone being exhausted from the first day's trip, the scene at camp was boisterous and fun! New friendships and memories were made while many participants mingled and socialized in various cabins. A few brave women and a few overconfident men, decided to have an arm wrestling contest: the battle of the sexes! It's not clear who came out on top, although there was a rumor that a few humbled men retreated into their cabins after being defeated by an unsuspecting female or two. After a delicious meal of giant soft tacos, a group meeting was held. Prizes were given for achievements such as most donations raised, first rider to finish, first rider to quit, and last rider to cross the finish line. But arguably the best prize of the night was a surprise marriage proposal. As the meeting was shifting gears into a bingo game, the lights suddenly turned off and a heartfelt plea was made to the backdrop of cell phone lights and Bruno Mars' hit song 'Marry You'. Yes, that's right! One of the organizers got engaged during the bike trip! The first night ended on a high note as everyone dozed off to sleep, dreaming of making it back to Tsukumin Park still standing.

The next morning, eager bikers hit the road and did so in record time. The ride started at 9:00am and the first biker arrived back in Tsukumi City just before noon! Compared to the day before, this was at least 90minutes faster than the previous day's fastest time. However, most participants lingered about after finishing and formed a human tunnel to welcome the last 4 bikers who arrived shortly before 4:00pm.

Approximately two weeks after the end of the bike ride, the startling donation total was announced. The event raised ¥907,385! That's AUD \$9291, CAD \$9832, EUR €7550, GBP £6356, NZD \$11,557, TTD \$61,962, and USD \$9659! Upon hearing the amount donated, Cate Bolt, the founder and CEO of Foundation 18, fell off of her chair and burst into tears. She had no idea that such a significant amount of money was raised and was left speechless. The money sent to Indonesia will go far to fulfill the needs of the Balinese orphanage, elderly care center and community that is supported by Foundation 18. Please read more about this amazing charity here: [www.foundation18.org](http://www.foundation18.org)

If you've never participated in the Oita AJET Charity Bike Ride, it's highly recommended that you join while you have the opportunity! Many JETs say that it's their favorite event while here in Japan. It's definitely a challenge, but all the fun and memories made make it well worth it. Email [oitajetcycling@gmail.com](mailto:oitajetcycling@gmail.com) if you'd like to be kept up-to-date with details on next year's event. よろしくね!



# SHARING SMILES

Neetha Mony

Over the past year, I've learned about dozens of amazing organizations JETs have worked with, from international nonprofit organizations to local projects to even AJET chapters. There is so much out there for those seeking volunteer work. But while many of these organizations are in prefectures far from you, Smile Kids Japan is an opportunity that can be initiated anywhere.

My first year on JET, some very dedicated sempai JETs worked hard to organize the first Smile Kids visit in our prefecture. One of the JETs had some students who lived in an "ikuseien", or foster home. She arranged a meeting for the foster home staff and JETs to talk about beginning regular visits. The staff was nervous, unsure of why a group of foreigners wanted to volunteer their time, but they agreed to let some JETs come as long as we included some cultural activities and games. Looking back at our first visit, we were all nervous, hoping that the visit would have a positive impact on the kids. Now, two years later, the Smile Kids outreach in Nara is going strong and the kids enjoy seeing familiar faces at the visits.

If you or your AJET chapter is interested in starting Smile Kids visits in your prefecture, here's some information from Meredith Smith, a Fukui ALT and Smile Kids Japan's Media and Public Relations Director.

## What's the purpose of Smile Kids Japan?

Smile Kids Japan's mission is to have all of Japan's orphanages visited once each month by dedicated teams of culturally diverse volunteers willing to provide big brother/ big sister mentorship and cultural exchange to children who rely on Japan's orphanages for care and support.

We are looking for people with a passion for child welfare to organize culturally diverse volunteer teams, and lead monthly, 2-hour visits to their local orphanages. There are 585 orphanages in Japan, which means we are looking for 585 leaders. Will you be one of them? Let's work together to bring smiles to the faces of children in need across Japan!

## Why Volunteer With Smile Kids Japan?

We fully support volunteers by assisting them with making orphanage visits successful. We provide assistance right from the start by helping volunteers contact, and start relationships with their local orphanage(s). We provide continual support, ideas, and advice for as long as a volunteer/ volunteer team wishes to donate their time and skills to our cause.

We fully support Japan's orphanages. We have worked with staff and children in orphanages across the country. With that experience, we are able to easily liaise between orphanages and volunteers in order to make relationships work, and provide only benefits for all involved. Smile Kids Japan has become a trusted name in the child welfare community, so joining us will make it easier for you to reach your goal of helping children in your community.

**If you are living in Japan and interested in starting or joining visits to your local orphanage, please email [volunteer@smilekidsjapan.org](mailto:volunteer@smilekidsjapan.org) .**



# SURF'S UP, SUN'S OUT DIVE IN! GET ON BOARD!

Matthew Dursum

*4th Year American JET Matthew Dursum is a self-confessed サーフィン馬鹿 (surf addict) who attacks the Kyushu surf scene when both the occasion and the waves arise. He says he flounders about the plaice a lot but he's just being a little koi as he's reely on his whale to being hooked like an ofishal surf pro!*

*Read on to find out more about Japan's surfing landscape, seasonal surf-turf trends and how the ocean unfolds to offer sport and fun to those who dare brave the brine.*

## Sussing out the Surf Scene

It's been almost four years since I moved to this disparate island nation. Through my father's stories and photos of his former life in Japan I became fascinated and knew from an early age I wanted to live here. Along with my interest in Japan I have another passion: surfing. Surfing motivated me to finally leave my home in Michigan and go out West. I studied at The University of California, Santa Barbara and it was there that I became aware of the JET program and was able to fulfill my lifelong wish to live in Japan.

When I moved to Japan from California in the summer of 2009 I was not so well-informed about the quality of surf here. Upon arriving in my seaside town during the start of typhoon season my daydreams were somewhat fractured, though only momentarily as by gaining fluency in Japanese and being social and curious I became informed about the many surf points just within an hour from my house. I was pleased to learn Japan has every type of wave imaginable and during the right swell and wind conditions waves here can do great impersonations of Hawaii or Indonesia. I've surfed all over North America, Central America, the Philippines and Indonesia and Japan holds its ground.

## Marvelous Natural MakeUp

The geological makeup of the Japanese archipelago, as a result of hundreds of millions of years of plate tectonics,

makes Japan a great surfing destination. Sitting on the western boundary of the Pacific ring of fire, the volcanic history is shown in the rugged coastline. Surf spots are countless due to complex topography and bathymetry. Bays, inlets, river mouths, beaches and offshore reefs diversify the type of waves available. Shallow reefs, crowded beaches, and rocky point breaks can be found everywhere; you just need to know where and when.

Japan is surrounded by the East China Sea, the Sea of Japan and the Pacific Ocean. While every ocean coastline in Japan gets surf, the quality and consistency varies. This largely has to do with the area over which wind has blown, called fetch, as well as wind speed, time duration of wind, the distance from the storm center to the coast and the localized wind patterns. All these factors make surf forecasting difficult and imprecise. I've gone to the beach after reading a forecast predicting flat conditions only to see perfect glassy peaks roaring in front of me. But more often than not it is the opposite scenario.

## Favorite Beaches/Surf Spots

Water quality and sea life varies regionally. In coastal urban areas, pollution can greatly impact water quality whereas around rural areas and small islands the ocean is clear and full of life. The southern islands south of Kyushu host some of the world's most beautiful coral reefs. These reefs also create shallow barreling waves - not for the faint hearted!

Here are some top places I recommend you bring your board:

- Kagoshima Prefecture, Tanegashima Island (whole island) (beginner-advanced)
- Kagoshima Prefecture, Amami Island (whole island) (beginner-advanced)
- Miyazaki Prefecture, Nichinan (beginner-intermediate)
- Kagoshima Prefecture, Ei Town (beginner)



22

SPORTS

- Kochi Prefecture, Niyodo Beach (intermediate-advanced)
- Okinawa Prefecture, Aha Point (intermediate-advanced)
- Okinawa Prefecture, Sunabe Seawall (advanced)
- Miyazaki Prefecture, Oura (intermediate-advanced)
- Miyazaki Prefecture, Uchiumi/Curren's Point (advanced)

Rocks, urchins, pollution around urban and agricultural areas, and crowds are the biggest dangers in Japanese waters. Although sharks live in every ocean there have been only eight known fatal attacks in Japan since 1900. Regardless of how few sharks Japan has one should exercise common sense and avoid "sharky" areas like murky river mouths or steep drop offs.

### Seasonal Treats & Trials

At times it seems that everything from fashion, food, customs and especially surf conditions are highly influenced by the changing seasons. Japan experiences a typical continental East-coast climate but lacks the temperature extremes experienced by places like the Eastern United States.

**Summer** in Japan starts off wet and humid with a relentless rainy season. Water temperatures in the southern half of the country become very warm. During this time northerly continental cold fronts and southerly subtropical warm fronts converge over the Japanese archipelago. This creates heavy moisture and strong winds. When the storms originate in the Sea of Japan good moderate period swell can ignite southwest Kyushu, and sometimes Shikoku and Honshu. During late summer, typhoons start to develop in the Pacific Ocean. Typhoons are for surfers in Japan what monsoon rains are for starving farmers in arid flood plains—they bring bounty and/or destruction.

Every Japanese surfer will beam widely when someone says "aki (秋)," or **autumn**. During this season the sun also beams and the winds turn offshore. Typhoons march in from the south and more often than not curve around the main islands of Japan without causing any damage. However the southern islands get hit on a yearly basis. Regardless of the danger, the quality of surf during the late summer and early fall can be world class.

I remember one particular day at a secluded reef point when I experienced fall perfection. The ocean looked like a magnificent painting. Double overhead tubes were spitting down the line with only a handful of guys out. I unfortunately stepped on a sea urchin while making the hairy paddle out. Regardless of the **incredible** pain, I was able to get countless deep barrels; even making a double barrel.

**Winter** can be a challenge for surfers in Japan. In Southern Kyushu the sea remains warm in comparison to the cold Californian waters I was used to. Despite that, air temperatures will hover just above freezing throughout the day. Combine that with howling gail force northerly winds and you've got a very cold surfing environment. A thick wetsuit is advisable. While these cold winds bring unbearable cold to the majority of Japan, Okinawa and the Southern Islands remain refreshingly cool throughout the winter. Sea temperatures in these sub-tropical reefs hover around 18°C while air temperatures rarely fall below 10°C. However, even in the south the winds can feel bitterly cold. As an after-surf treat for braving the cold many Japanese surfers bring along hot water and big plastic tubs, indulging in a hot bath in the parking lot while checking out the waves.

My fondest memories of winter are the cold, sometimes snowy, winter storms and their accompanying Northwest swells. On an average of once a year these storms generate great waves in the East China Sea. If local wind conditions are right, there can be beautiful, glassy, head high conditions. The warm, clear, blue water can feel deceivingly tropical if you can forget about the bitter air.

During the **spring**, the ocean seems to go to sleep due to the lack of waves. However late winter storms or early southern squalls will at times surprise surfers with good waves. Unfortunately these swells are rare. Just as depression sets in from the lack of waves the mountains become green and the cherry and plum trees bloom into romantic bouquets of color. As the flower petals decorate the ground you can exercise your "gaman tsuyosa・我慢強さ," (self-control and perseverance) as the first typhoon seedlings start to emerge near the Philippines reminding wave-starved surfers that the huge typhoon swells of summer will soon arrive...

### As I wave goodbye

My life in Japan has been enriched by my surfing experiences here. I can close my eyes and reflect on a series of priceless moments shared by lifelong friends in a powerful sea: waves smash against jagged black reefs projecting sea spray up into the misty green mountains; the smell of incense wafting down from the temple perched precariously on the cliff above mixes with the sea air; a Japanese crane flies overhead as you and your friends laugh hysterically at each other's jokes. This scene has become all too common for me but now, after four years, my time here is coming to an end. It's been swell, Japan.



## YORON ISLAND HALF MARATHON

# RUNNING THE SCENIC ROUTE

Jessica Perl

*Jessica Perl has been getting into the island-life groove down Kagoshima way. Yet, she always finds time to actively explore her environs - by ferry and foot. She headed down to the most southern island of Kagoshima Prefecture's archipelago for the Yoron Island Half Marathon on March 3<sup>rd</sup> this year. Here she offers her insights and advice about taking on that 21.1 kilometer circuit—around an idyllic island brimming with culture and cheer—as well as beauty and beer! Perhaps you'll also consider breaking off from the mainland for your next marathon challenge.*

I haven't been to many places in Japan yet but, even so, I feel you won't find a more gracious welcome than the one visitors received when they arrived to Yoron the weekend of the race. After getting off the ferry, everyone was given a small bag of sand with a hand-written note from the students of Yoron wishing the participants luck in their races. The note also offered advice to runners; instructing them to look at the ocean when they felt tired, as its beauty would enable them to keep going.

For the majority of the course, you have breath-taking views of the sea, and these certainly helped to keep me going. You also run through neighborhoods where locals stand on the side of the road with their family and friends, old and young, as well as their pets (one guy had a goat!) and cheer you on by banging frying pans, playing traditional drums and *shamisens*, and dancing *eisa*. Their unique encouragement and enthusiasm was almost enough to distract me from the many uphill sections—almost. Luckily,

water stations appeared fairly frequently throughout the race, though you must make sure you're actually getting water and not *yusen*, the local alcoholic beverage made from sugar cane. The Yoron people do love to have a good time; even when running competitively!

In the evening, after the race, there is a party where you can mingle with the locals, dance to traditional island music, sample some *yusen*, and just have a good time before catching your flight or ferry the next day.

I finished with a time of 1 hour and 59 minutes and I came in 3<sup>rd</sup> out of women in my age group, and 16<sup>th</sup> out of all the women who ran the half. I figured that earned me the beer and various fried things I indulged in after the race.

For my previous half marathon, I trained for 10 weeks, but this time round, I was only able to train for eight. I felt it was adequate. The other alternative is to do no training at all, which, I was surprised to find, was the case with many of the Japanese people I spoke with, some of whom were running the FULL marathon! So don't let the issue of training deter you. Those with no training made it through alive! (Well.....mostly....)

Whether it's your first or fiftieth marathon, I definitely recommend making the trip down to southern Japan to run the Yoron half (or full!) marathon.

*Jessica Perl is a 1<sup>st</sup> Year American ALT on Okinoerabu, an island in southern Kagoshima Prefecture.*



# ヨロンマラソン



# FROM THE SEA TO THE SUMMIT

By Jordan Ozaki

There are over 30,000 pictures with the hashtag “mtfuji” immortalizing Mount Fuji’s iconic symmetry on Instagram. A “Mt Fuji” search on Flickr will bring up over 140,000 images.

Those who climb this sleeping volcanic giant to the top usually bask in the rising sun, admiring the lush land 3,776 meters below. However, Fujieda ALT Peter Stanton felt as if he had “cheated” when he started climbing from the fifth station—the usual starting place. Almost a year after he first scaled Fuji, he came across the Oxfam International Volunteer Group’s challenge to climb Fuji from the base to the top, a yearly climbing event called Sea-to-Summit. Oxfam is a federation of 14 coordinating organizations that organize events to raise money for impoverished nations. Stanton is no stranger to Oxfam events that put physical strength to the test. Last year, in the “Yamathon” he walked the 40 km Yamanote line, visiting all 29 stations in under 12 hours.

Stanton’s second Fuji journey began at sea level on Tagonoura Beach in Fuji City. It was an 11-hour hike to the fifth station. The entire journey took a harrowing 22 hours. Fellow climber Shizuoka ALT Christopher Leinonen claimed that he “moved like an arthritic 90 year old” for a week following the climb. By climbing Fuji in its entirety, they took part in a centuries-old tradition; long before buses and cars and the fifth station, climbers ascended the mountain as a spiritual practice, paying respect at shrines peppered along the slopes.

The impressive stature of Mt. Fuji, the beauty of its surroundings, and the metaphor of climbing, are well suited to Shinto and Buddhist ideology. Shinto incorporates nature spirits of (*kami*) in its practices, while a key aspect of Buddhism is centered on pilgrimage to cultivate spiritual discipline.

A three-year excavation conducted in Yamanashi revealed that religious sites may have existed near

the second station long before the Edo period. Religious sects like Shugendo and Fujiko were born here, and centered their spiritual practices on climbing the mountain. Today, pilgrims devote themselves to annual climbs. At the northern base, a *sengen* shrine marks the entrance to the mountain. It’s one of thousands of *sengen* shrines in Japan paying homage to Mt. Fuji’s deity, Konohana Sakuya Hime. According to legend, Konohana Sakuya birthed a son in the fire of Mt. Fuji, and has since received offerings to prevent volcanic eruptions and help with easy childbirth.

Mt. Fuji remains a national treasure, a cultivator of tradition, and a sacred destination. For Stanton, climbing from the sea represented completion, beauty, and self-improvement, as well as “a chance to get out of the office or mall and back to a natural and fulfilling existence.” At the summit, his exhausted group took out seawater they had collected at the bottom and poured it out on top of Japan’s highest peak, to run back down to the sea.

For more information on the ultimate Fuji climb, visit: [sea-to-summit.org](http://sea-to-summit.org)

*Jordan is a 2<sup>nd</sup> year ALT in Shizuoka City. She once attempted to climb Mt. Fuji from the sea, but ended up sunbathing on the beach instead.*



# THE NAKED TRUTH: THE RISE OF VIRTUAL NUDITY IN JAPAN

Heenal Patel

A heap of round bodies squirms and squeals as the chilly night air descends upon it. Its outer rim of pale exposed flesh shudders in the lantern light like an inflated, over-plucked chicken. Rolling down the streets, it passes crowds of people who shuffle along under the shadows of rickety buildings, clutching steaming buns and sticks that drip with jammy sauce. Buttocks jiggle; arms flail; loincloths flash like crumpled smiles into the dark....

No, this isn't a scene from a Heironymous Bosch painting. It is, in fact, the somewhat less infernal *Hadaka Matsuri*, or Naked Man Festival. Yes, that's right, a festival for hoards of Japanese men to brave freezing temperatures in barely more than their birthday suits.

Though such a scene is a commodity for western folk like myself, the Naked Man Festival has a long tradition in Japan, with a deep well of symbolism that goes beyond the surface of its wrinkled hindquarters. And if one were to flip through a Japanese history book, references to nudity would come hard and fast- from images of feudal peasants working fields unclothed, to public baths peppered with naked bodies. Historically, it is clothing that has traditionally suggested sexuality in Japan—a sumptuously dressed woman has tended to hold more erotic sway than a bare one. In contrast, when one imagines a loin-clothed sumo wrestler, it is unlikely to be within a sexual frame of mind.

Nudity in Japan has been unlinked to sexuality, and the norm for centuries- but does this really continue to be the case for the younger generation of Japanese, brought up - at least in part - on Western food, trends and commercialism? How has their perception of nudity started to change, if at all?

An investigation on how the Japanese interpretation of nudity is changing inevitably involves a discussion about shifting sexual perceptions. My first encounter of this stemmed from the classroom. Having described my recent cultural escapades at the Naked Man Festival to a class of fourteen year olds, the instant reaction was 'were there

naked girls too? How much could you see down there?' Perhaps this can be explained by the idiosyncratic nature of my students; or the social demographic to which they belong. But I couldn't help notice how very stark the difference seemed between the traditional image that most foreigners have of Japanese nudity, and the reality lodged comfortably in the crevices of my students' brains.

So when did this shift begin? Unsurprisingly, the clash between modern nudity in Japan and its traditional counterpart gleans much of its *raison d'être* from politics. Towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Japanese government banned public nudity as a means of appearing more 'civilised' to the West, with the intent of repealing a series of unequal political treaties. What eventually followed was a burgeoning pornography industry and a new sexual attitude towards the human body to go with it. As *Pink Japan* eloquently puts it: 'Once the naked body had been legislated against and thus ceased to be commonplace, it took on an erotic and mystified meaning.' (Source: <http://www.japanvisitor.com/pink-japan/nudity-in-japan>)

Looking around, it certainly seems like recent generations have been exposed to nudity in a sexual context far more than the generations that came before them. Anime shows abound with top-heavy women dressed in garments the size of miniature tea towels; pachinko parlour entrances are festooned with posters of tightly equipped characters smiling down from awkward angles; even the uniforms worn by most high school girls are becoming borderline fetish costumes.

The graph below, comparing the cumulative frequencies of 'Experience of Sexual Arousal' among Japanese youths in 1987 and 1993 illustrates that more recent generations are becoming sexualised at a younger age, at least in part because of an increase in exposure to the naked body in popular culture.

And yet, despite an increase in exposure to sexually charged nude imagery, Japan remains one of the least sexually active countries in the world. According to SSL International PLC (the makers of Durex condoms), Japanese people aged 16 to 55 have sex around 36 times a year on average, compared to the world average of 97 times a year. Furthermore, a government survey in 2010 revealed that one third of Japanese males aged 16 to 19 are not interested in, or even feel an aversion towards sex- double the figure of 2008.  
(Source: <http://factsanddetails.com/japan.php?itemid=675>)

The Japanese concept of the body has often been described as having fewer boundaries and substantiality than its Western counterpart. As pointed out in *Japan Focus*, whilst the Western body is often seen as an opaque, definitely edged mass, the Japanese have tended to view the body as 'a form or husk, which the wind can literally pass through'. This particular distinction between Western and Japanese culture seems to be becoming less and less the case. Bodies are turning into concrete forms, more hard-wired to their changing role in society as a visual and sexual stimulant. Against the backdrop of a growing pornography industry and decreasing sexual activity, the appearance of the nude

body is being instrumentalised a great deal more than the nude body itself.  
(Source: <http://www.japanfocus.org/-debbie-notkin/3230>)

Changes in perceptions of nudity are contributing to a profound change in the way young Japanese people are identifying with the human body and their own sexualities. To many of the younger generation, intimacy is becoming less appealing. Referring to an increase in boys' fascination with virtual online girls, a Japanese public health official reasoned, 'They don't want to get hurt [by being duped by human girls]. So they never advance past the 2-D world.' How has their perception of sexuality and the body become so distorted? Perhaps it is down to the lifestyle they are encouraged to lead. In contemporary Japan, many children do not have time for quality human and physical contact. Occupied with extra-curricular activities, training programmes and *juku*, leisure time often revolves around passive activity like playing video games, watching TV and, in general, forming deeper relationships with 2-D figureheads than with real ones. What follows is a connection with the human body that is rooted on the screen, distorted and inflexible. As explained in a sexual study on Japan conducted by the University of Berlin,

'While there is much information related to sex and sexual behaviours on television and in comic books, exposure to this information is not sufficient when they have to use it on their own, cognitively and affectively...'  
(Source: <http://www2.hu-berlin.de/sexology/GESUND/ARCHIV/IES/JAPAN>)

How is this likely to have an impact on the future society of Japan? Already we can see the beginnings of a society where an ageing population has become a growing burden on younger generations that refuse to go forth and multiply. But just as disturbing is the mental impact the loss of the naked body in its actuality is having on the Japanese. Fuelled by a society where nudity is becoming less and less real, and more and more virtual, children are being introduced to a world of 'fan service' pornography, fetishisms of every shape and form, and other methods of arousal that nullify the need for physical human contact. Are we seeing the rise of a new kind of mass mentality that is likely to favour Japanese society? Possibly, though I doubt it. Perhaps it is time to re-evaluate the way in which the naked body is represented before it is too late. Perhaps it is time for the Japanese to re-prioritise reality. And perhaps, on a wholly practical level, it is time to put the 'together' back into 'in the altogether'.

# LET'S STUDYING ENGLISH!

Chris Barstow

Many people arriving in Japan for the first time are staggered by the amount of English that is visible on signs and products up and down the country, making it more accessible to the helpless foreign visitor. However, written English can sometimes be rather unforgiving of mistakes, and any attempt to translate an idea containing even the subtlest spelling error or contextual misunderstanding can mean the difference between communicative perfection and unintentionally hilarious 'English' clanger.

Just as car-makers Ford found out when they tried to market their Pinto ("small penis" in Portuguese) to Brazilians, branding your product in a language without regard to its linguistic nuances can be a recipe for disaster. Japanese supermarkets are filled with products that have been misguidedly monickered. For example, processed meat manufacturers should perhaps have thought twice before launching their 'Homo sausage' into stores nationwide. Similarly, 'Pungency' makes people think 'musty' rather than 'milk tea', whilst 'Crunky Ball Nude' conjures up images of ointments and medical pamphlets rather than

a delicious box of chocolate biscuits. And quite what corporate message the kitchen towel brand 'Naïve Lady' wants their customers to take from the product is unclear.

For a nation that developed the beautifully economical haiku form, it's perhaps surprising that even the most simple of ideas can sometimes generate a rambling commentary in English which makes War and Peace look like a birthday card. Some of the best gems are found on omiyage biscuits, which often sport inappropriately fluffy prose to describe the usual disappointing mixture of refined sugar and hydrogenated fats that you're compelled to munch with gratitude as a memento of your co-worker's trip to Nagoya.

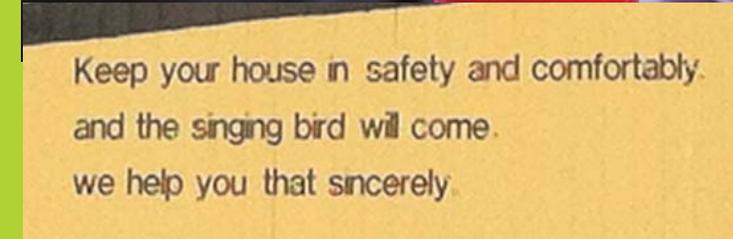
Clothes are also prone to displaying some rather over-elaborate examples of the English language. If an Elementary school student is wearing a sweatshirt, the chances are that it will contain a profound philosophical sound-bite in mangled English. Some of my favourite nuggets of garment wisdom include 'huggable—slightly bitter', 'depression is not the answer' and 'celebrate toast—facing the future'. And whichever brilliant mind thought up 'delicious Felicity - merging feeling' deserves some kind of prize.

Even when language has been spelt correctly and used in the right context, it can still throw up some unintentional awkwardness. As purveyors of delicacies such as haggis, black pudding and sweetbreads are fully aware, an ambiguous product name can often disguise the unappetising sounding mish-mash of animal innards which make up its content. Although most of us have probably experienced that enkaï moment where a colleague tells you that the salty, opaque, gelatinous morsel that just passed your lips wasn't the animal/vegetable/mineral you thought it

was, some menus go out of their way to turn over more stomachs than the average yakitori joint... assorted raw guts and skewered uterus, anyone?

So, as English teachers, should we be on a mission to correct these mistakes and eradicate 'English'? No. Instead, perhaps we should heed the words spotted on the shrink wrap of a particular brand of toilet seat cover: "Some people are developed of humor. Don't be cross with me for my mistake. Accuracy does not consist with fluency". Indeed.

*Chris Barstow is a second year ALT in Yamagata Prefecture. He will be spending the rest of his time in Japan celebrating toast and facing the future...*





# THE CONSOLE WARS: 2013'S BURGEONING BATTLE OF VIDEO GAME TECH

Steven Thompson

The last wave of video game consoles hit the markets back in 2006, so after seven long years, it's time for a new generation. This year will see all the challengers lined up to square off, with the big names dropping at the same time. We talked to members of the video-game group Gamers in Fukushima, and asked them to measure up the competition fighting for your dollars (or yennies) this year.

## Sony Playstation 4 – Phil Kendall

Although we're still too deep in rumour and speculation to be calling dead certs, I'm finding myself increasingly tempted to scrawl Sony's name on the top of my betting slip for the next-gen race.

With most major releases appearing on multiple platforms, this generation's winner will not be decided by processing speeds alone, but by the quality of services available. PS4 is less about the box beneath your TV and more about the stuff in the sky, making PlayStation 4 games playable even before they're fully downloaded and providing access to your games, TV, movies, and music via PSVita, tablets, and even other people's machines through Gaikai's cloud-based gaming service.

Already described as "impressive" by a number of developers, the PS4's hardware is thought to be technically similar to that of a typical gaming PC, with the inclusion of 8GB of RAM in particular being applauded. Already familiar with similar hardware, developers will be able to hit the ground running, which means more games in greater variety.

The PS3 has gradually become a great place for indie titles with games like *Journey*, *The Unfinished Swan*, *Sound Shapes* and *Gaucamelee!* to name but a few. With Sony aggressively approaching independent developers, PS4 is shaping up to be something of a haven for games made by the little guy.

The next few months will be telling, but so far Sony's new wunderbox has grabbed my attention the most. Just so long as the new controller's "share" button doesn't turn my Facebook feed into a cringe-fest of gaming bravado and video spam...

## Nintendo WiiU – Mary Effler

The only console on the list already released, the WiiU has proven itself to be every bit as fun as its predecessor, but can it stand up to the powerful systems set to compete this year?

Nintendo has the benefit of a head start, and a famously loyal fanbase built over many years thanks to reliably great iterations on its key franchises like *Zelda* and *Mario*. While the Wii marked a radical departure from the traditional console formula that Microsoft and Sony pursued, the WiiU feels more like a natural evolution of the Wii. The addition of a big gamepad controller with a touchscreen takes games outside the TV and provides opportunity for unique gaming that can't be found on traditional consoles or PCs. Some games can be played on just the gamepad, making the system ultra portable, or freeing up the living room TV, which could prove invaluable for gamers with families. It's also a surprisingly good, interactive universal media remote.

However, Nintendo has always struggled with online features, lacking the robust community of either Sony or Microsoft, and the WiiU is barely as powerful as the last generation of consoles. In a few years, the differences in performance between the WiiU and the new systems will be remarkable, and is already easily seen on WiiU versions of PS3 and 360 games.

If Nintendo is to compete in this coming generation, they'll need to stick with what made the Wii successful: affordable, easy-to-use, full of interactive and interesting gameplay, and broad appeal to more than just 'hardcore' gamers.

## Microsoft's New Console – Steven Thompson

Really nothing is solidly known about the next iteration of the Xbox console, not even its name. Microsoft will hold an event in May to talk about the new box, but for now, let's indulge in some rampant speculation. Talk points to a very powerful console sold cheap with a subscription (much like how smartphones are sold with contracts). While much of this is likely to happen, we won't know until we see it.

The hottest of the hot-button issues regards whether or not the console will require an "always-on" internet connection. There's lots of evidence pointing towards this being the case. An "always-on" connection could point to a lot of things, including preventing the use of preowned games and a download-only console without a disc drive. If an active internet connection is required to play games on the system, without providing any benefit to users, Microsoft could have trouble getting people on board. Such a bold move also separates it from the PS4, which is set to release at the same time.



ENTERTAINMENT

Microsoft's Xbox Live service provided access to more than just games via services like Netflix and Hulu. With how much Microsoft has put into developing SmartGlass (which connected the 360 to every phone, tablet, and PC it could find) and Kinect motions controls (rumored to be bundled with every new console as shiny new Kinect 2.0), it's not hard to imagine that Microsoft's new console is hoping to be the main box sitting under your TV.

## Valve SteamBox – Steven Bogos

The last two console generations have been dominated by three companies: Microsoft, Sony, and Nintendo. Valve, creators of *Half-Life*, *Portal* and the Steam platform for PC games have decided that this time around, they want a piece of the action.

Introducing the Steam Box, Valve's entry into the console hardware market.

The first thing that you need to know is that the term "Steam Box" actually refers to two different things. The first is the Steam Box as a concept - a cheap, barebones PC built around Valve's Steam PC platform, utilizing its new "Big Picture Mode" to play your PC games on your living room TV. The second is Valve's own, official home console.

We know surprisingly little about the later. We do know that it will run on a Linux-based operating system, it will have access to the entire Steam library of games and it will be comparable to a mid-level gaming PC. Hardcore PC gamers will see little use in the Steam Box, opting to just build their own rigs, but for console gamers that are enticed by PC gaming, but find the concept of building and maintaining their own PC daunting, the Steam Box is perfect.

Valve is so confident in its new box that it doesn't even see Sony, Nintendo or Microsoft as a threat, stating that Apple, with its iOS platform, are the ones to watch out for. But, these are bold words for Valve, considering the price and specs of its console have yet to be revealed. Personally, I'm estimating around \$500 for a system slightly more powerful than a PS4.

## Ouya – Steven Thompson

The Kickstarter success story is setting its sights on a piece of the console market alongside the well-established major players Sony, Microsoft, and Nintendo. Ouya is an Android-based console, selling for \$99 USD when it hits shelves in June. Ouya's stated goal is to bring mobile-style gaming to your living room TV on a platform that is transparently open and easily modifiable. Don't expect a powerhouse in line with a high-end PC though; think more in terms of a powerful tablet, with its full resources dedicated to games.

Ouya's games are directly-provided by developers, with little interference or publishing from Ouya itself. The only requirement being that they are "free-to-play." Ouya also boasts plans to offer non-gaming apps like popular media center XBMC and internet radio. Ouya also features native support for retro games via software emulators. However, lofty goals and actual execution can differ once a product is released, and Ouya's starting to get into the hands of those who funded it on Kickstarter.

Ouya as it is now is still in its early stages, with many of its features being tested by the community. Early impressions are that the interface is rough and the games are few in number. Ouya seems to be listening, and updates frequently on their progress and plans via every type of social media out there. With two months to go before their big public release, Ouya has a lot of potential to carve a niche in the gaming market, and a lot of work ahead.

*Steven Thompson is a second-year ALT in Fukushima prefecture. He created the group Gamers in Fukushima so he could find great people to play great games with and make them do research and write articles for him.*





# STYLE STRONG: HAIR TODAY, GONE TOMORROW

Kathryn Strong

Let's talk hair. Let's talk hair and summer. Up on the main islands, where most of you are, you still have a few more blessed months of breezy spring. But down here in Okinawa, summer is imminent. I'm already suffering sunburn; my shorts and sundresses are back in the clothing rotation; my flip-flops are perpetually thrown haphazardly in my genkan. And my hair, my hair that in the winter takes just the barest coaxing to fall straight and sleek to my shoulders, my hair has reverted back to all of its bad summer habits. My bangs curl in all different directions, no matter how many times I straighten them. Sweat glues them to my forehead, while the rest is plastered to the back of my neck. It's constantly frizzy and always looks dirty. Wearing it down is not an option. Let's look at a few options for dealing with our hair during the heat and humidity of Japanese summers.

**The Ponytail:** The ponytail is a tried and true stand-by which is also remarkably versatile. Wear it high on your head for a perky youthful look or swept back at the nape of your neck for a more professional look. You can choose to slick everything back or leave a parting, and you can use any number of accessories. The ponytail is almost endlessly variable. It's my go-to for transition seasons. Unfortunately, in the heat of the summer, I've found that no number of pins can keep all my little wispy hairs in order.

**The Bun:** The barest step up from the ponytail, there are a few advantages of the bun. Firstly, buns allow you to further restrain your hair, pulling it even further off your neck to keep you cooler and hide any sweat or stringiness.

Secondly, buns look just as professional in the back or top of your head as they do when they're low which, once again, means that they'll be cooler.

**The French Braid:** A step up from the bun in effort and also in hair control, a French braid can be used to keep all the smaller hairs in check. Even with my hair (which has always had the tendency to form a halo of little curls around my face during times of high humidity), if I pull the braid tight enough and apply pins liberally, I find a French braid to be effective. I like to twist the end into a small bun to keep everything off of my neck and as far away from my face as possible. Unfortunately, braiding hair takes time. Although it's a solution, the time is prohibitive, which leaves me with one final option.

**Cutting It Off:** That's right, this next month I'm planning on cutting all my hair off. When I was little, a close family friend was diagnosed with cancer. Around that time, I first heard of "Locks For Love," a program where if one's hair is long enough, one can get it cut and donate it to be made into wigs for people undergoing chemotherapy. I've always been interested in the program, but due to chlorine damage and caprice, I've never had the ten inches of hair required to donate. Until now. So in just a few weeks, during Golden Week, I will be traveling back to the United States for my little brother's graduation and I'll be cutting my hair. I'll let you know how it goes!

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

# REMOTELY FASHION: EYES ON THE PRIZE

Siobhan Sullivan, Miriam Bouteba



☞ Japanese liquid eyeliners on the left feature a brush-tip pen, while liners in the West usually have a sponge-tip like the one on the right.

☞ On the left: Our favorite Japanese eyeliner by La Rose De Versailles, available in most Japanese makeup shops and drugstores.

On the right: 'Blink' by Barry M, a popular U.K. eyeliner that unfortunately cannot compete with the terrific qualities of Japanese eyeliner.



☞ Physician's Formula 2-in1 eyeliner pen is remarkably similar to Japanese eyeliner pens and a precise cat-eye liner look can be created easily.

We could both wax lyrical about the many wonders of Japan: boys carrying their girlfriends' handbags (and looking cuter with them); prancing around Harajuku for hours on end without ever seeming to feel tired, to name but a couple. It goes without saying that we both miss living there and can spend hour upon hour reminiscing, like a couple of *obaachans*, about the good old days. But when feeling homesick for our second home, it is possible to put Arashi on, head down to the Japan Centre on Regent Street, pick up Fruits magazine to appease our teary eyes and munch on *Takenoko no Sato* (oh yes, we come down really quite firmly on that side of this fence, no *Kinoko no Yama* for us, thank you very much) to satisfy our growling tummies. And yet, call us vain, call us shallow, but the one thing we had not been able to find in the UK was a suitable replacement for decent liquid eyeliner.

Having heard horror stories of whitening product being in almost everything, we never imagined that we would have such an intense love affair with makeup in Japan. Despite the number of covetable Japanese brands, it was with some trepidation that we approached the makeup counters in "Wants" (bleached faces with our tanned necks was not a look that either of us was eager to experiment with), but once we overcame our initial resistance, we were like over-excited children in a particularly wonderful sweet shop; the glitter, the colours, the PACKAGING! It was all so fantastic!

However, it did take us some time to embrace the eyeliner pens. Makeup that would stay on for 24 hours always seemed more like a threat than a promise. But once we had dipped a toe in that inky black pond, we were hooked. Not only is the colour more intense than UK liners, but the precision of the fine-tipped brushes is also unparalleled. Although we have managed to find a pen-style applicator which is still relatively easy to use, the tip is a sponge and not a brush. A minor deviation you might think, but for the naturally clumsy (seriously, falling over while standing still happens all too frequently), it can make all the difference in the world. After over a year of searching, we have

finally discovered some fairly good substitutes available in the U.S., Canada and the U.K. that will ensure your eyes remain suitably feline, even when you're coping with the trauma of reverse culture shock.

## Physician's Formula EyeBooster 2-in-1 Lash Boosting Eyeliner and Serum

This remarkable eyeliner pen has a beautifully precise brush tip and uses a "high-tech Japanese formula" that is smudge-resistant. The ink dries almost immediately to leave your eyes looking perfect. As if that weren't enough, it also contains a lash-boosting serum. Available in most U.S. chemists, it retails at \$10.95.

## Geisha Ink

There is a gel-like quality to the quick-drying ink, it flows easily, and most importantly, it has the fine-point brush pen. The price is the only downside. At \$32CDN, it is more of an investment than the other choices, but it will last for months. Available online and at numerous makeup shops across Canada.

## DHC Eyeliner

Recently launched in the U.K, we have high hopes that this Japanese brand will fill the aching void. It is reasonably priced at £16 and available online and at Harvey Nichols.

We must stress that original is best, and if you are leaving this summer, fill your suitcases and stuff your bras with them! Smuggle as many eyeliners out of the country as you possibly can. Your friends back home will thank you – if you can bear to part with them, that is.

*Miriam and Siobhan were ALTs in Hiroshima. They met at a picnic and have been friends since the moment they realised that they shared a mutual love of clumpy shoes and all things kawaii. This love has been harnessed into their fashion blog, <http://remotelyfashion.blogspot.co.uk/>. They can usually be found communicating in a pitch that even dogs struggle to register.*



FASHION

# REMOTELY FASHION: EXPORTING STYLES

Siobhan Sullivan, Miriam Bouteba

There is a fashion myth that trends which debut in Japan take years before they trickle down to the fashion consciousness of the rest of the world. This myth is in fact a truth, and those of us lucky enough to have lived in Japan may have a sartorial advantage when we return to our home countries.

## Pastels

Starting from head to toe, we are now seeing a huge trend in pastel hair colors in the U.K. Not just a look for gothic lovers, the average young person is embracing utterly unnatural shades in lilac, candy-floss pink, or seafoam green. Pop into your local English drugstore and you can even purchase box dye kits catered specifically to the pastel-colored hair market. We can't help but say, "Harajuku did it first!" Harajuku fashionistas have been rocking the trend for a while now, and usually wear head-to-toe pastel clothing and accessories to match.



The latest L'Oréal at-home hair dye kit in 'Pastel Pink Panther' at a Boots Pharmacy in England. L'Oréal also offers shades in lilac and peach.



A fashionable combination of pastels and color-blocking are featured on this knit sweater from the up-and-coming Japanese fashion line, 'ilu098' (<http://www.ilu098.com>).

have some yennies to spend before you leave Japan, we recommend buying some unique pastel pieces as they're a strong trend this season. And if you're brave, take it to the head too!

## Ear Jewelry

But not everything is all fluffy pastel. Interesting punk-inspired pieces are also on trend. Fancy ear jewelry such as ear cuffs, faux gauges, ear chains and spiked studs are available now at all the high street shops. However, we remember back in 2010 when we stumbled upon an odd-looking over-the-ear cuff in a Hiroshima Shareo boutique. Make sure to rock these cuffs with a deep-side part and your hair pushed to one side in order to properly show it off. We also observed many stylish Japanese boys wearing spike or hoop earrings; so, don't let your gender limit your ear ornaments.

## 'Flatforms'

The next trend, which we spotted nearly a year ago in Tokyo, is an edgy style that will elevate your height and your look: the futuristic 'flatform' shoe. Platform shoes are a trend that regularly ebbs and flows between seasons, but the unique 'flatform' adaptation is what is taking off slowly in the west. What's hot are all-white or all-black flatforms in either a lace-up style or sandal format. They

work beautifully with vividly colored accessories, such as neons and cobalt, and clothing with clean lines. One-part clunky and other part cheeky, what's so great about this trend is that it gives our feet a welcome break. We have always commended the efforts of Japanese women to remain gazelle-like at all times by wearing heels no matter the situation (a hike up Mt. Misen? No problem.) But now it's time to take a tip from our fashionable Japanese sisters and embrace height without stress. We recommend visiting the funky boutique 'Nadia Flores en el Corazon' (<http://nadia.jp>) in Harajuku to snap up your own pair.



This DIY Japanese nail-art inspired manicure was achieved with a 'water-marbling' technique and a lot of patience.

## Nail Art

Lastly, a trend that even the fashion-uninitiated cannot ignore while living in Japan is the amazing nail art that Japanese women wear. Nail art knows no limits in Japan, and pretty much any design can be requested (at a cost of 7500 yen and upwards!). Our favorite looks while in Japan were 3D stickers, glitter gradients and pearls. Fortunately, the nail art obsession has reached us in England and one can request gel nails at salons or purchase nail art kits at high street shops. A dream not realized while living in Japan was a gel nail art manicure at Malva Nail in Shinjuku (<http://ameblo.jp/malva-nail2>), where you can receive spectacular custom designs. However, it gives us a reason to return to one of the most fashionable countries in the world and find out what will be coming our way next season!

*Miriam and Siobhan were ALTs in Hiroshima. They met at a picnic and have been friends since the moment they realised that they shared a mutual love of clumpy shoes and all things kawaii. This love has been harnessed into their fashion blog, <http://remotelyfashion.blogspot.co.uk/>. They can usually be found communicating in a pitch that even dogs struggle to register.*

# JAPAN'S BIG PICKLE

Xan Wetherall

Pop quiz! Name something you almost always find at a Japanese meal... that isn't rice. Got it? Give up? If you said "pickles", give yourself a pat on the back. Japanese pickles, or *tsukemono* as they're more commonly referred to, are so ubiquitous at mealtime in Japan, it's easy to overlook them. But there they are, every meal of the day: crunchy, yellow *takuan* radish pickles in the morning with piping hot rice, a bright red *umeboshi* pickled plum in lunchbox, and a cute little pile of *fukujinzuke* mixed veggie pickles next to your evening curry set.

*Tsukemono* come in all shapes and forms, from the simple salt-cured *shiozuke*, to the careful slicing, preparation, and preservation of Kyoto's famous *senmaizuke*. All over Japan, people have their own unique and special way of preserving their produce. But why the pickle popularity? The answer lies in Japan's own history and culture. With most arable land dedicated to rice production, vegetables were sparsely grown. Unlike rice, once the veggies were off the vine, they started to go bad, and didn't last through the colder months—when nutrition-starved families needed them most. The solution to this mealtime problem was simple: pickle it! Salt and vinegar aren't the only preserving agents in the Japanese pickle markets, either: it's common to see varieties like miso paste pickles (*misozuke*), rice bran pickles (*nukazuke*), and even pickles made from the lees of sake (*kasuzuke*).

When it comes to varieties, however, some pickles are inevitably more famous than others. *Takuanzuke*, the bright yellow daikon radish pickle, for example, is identifiable with just a glance. Made from whole daikon radishes dried in the sun then pickled in rice lees, their crisp, crunchy texture

is a recipe with a legacy stretching back to a Zen temple in the 17th century. But there's another pickle with an older history still: the infamous *umeboshi* pickled plum is mentioned in medicinal documentation as far back as the 10th century. Before their era of pickle praise, *umeboshi* were prized as Japan's version of the cure-all, something that sometimes still holds true: while on a homestay, I was told by my host-grandmother that if I ever got a headache, I should hold *umeboshi* to my temples, and keep them there until the pain was alleviated!

So, why do we still eat pickles with every Japanese meal? Why is this humble side dish such a common denominator, even now? The importance of *tsukemono* lies in the realm of what we might call "home cooking" in English. In the tight times of the post-war period, families began to produce their own pickles, rather than buying them, making it a very personal act. So, in addition to the traditional variable of extra nutrition, pickles became a kind of comfort food. In reference to the connection between the Japanese meal and *tsukemono*, the anthropologist Naomichi Ishige went so far as to cite the French proverb "A meal without cheese is like a one-eyed beauty." That is, without the pickles, the meal is lacking. Love them or hate them, with more than 1000 years of history, these meal staples certainly aren't going away anytime soon. Dig in, and see how many varieties you can find!

*Xan Wetherall is a 3<sup>rd</sup>-year Fukushima ALT who enjoys collecting influenza strains, eating green vegetables into extinction, and singing mushroom-related songs. Ask her about fresh sea urchin!*

# THE EVOLUTION OF KYUSHOKU, AND WHY OTHER COUNTRIES SHOULD TAKE NOTICE

Ariane Bobiash

You excitedly snap a picture of the plate of curry rice on your tray and hastily upload it to Instagram to show off to your friends. You've scored the lunch jackpot! Or perhaps you can more easily recall the horror you experienced slicing into a piece of fish only to discover its pregnant state. Whether you look forward to lunch time or wish you could sneak away to eat out like your high school ALT friends do, the ubiquitous Japanese lunch programme is a crucial component of many a JET's workdays and, of course, for almost every Japanese school student up until the end of junior high school. School lunch, however, is eaten around the world, and recent trends in other countries make Japan's school lunch, or *kyushoku*, especially fascinating.

*Kyushoku* seems to be a source of controversy amongst JETs, some asserting it's a balanced, tasty meal much healthier than what they grew up eating for lunch in their home countries, others vehemently claiming to get the worst food in their prefecture. Love it or hate it, *kyushoku* is undeniably a fascinating and unique aspect of Japanese educational institutions that has been through a few interesting changes since its conception.

The first *kyushoku* was reportedly served in 1889 in Yamagata prefecture, consisting of *onigiri*, salted fish, and pickled vegetables. However, nation-wide *kyushoku* did not exist until after the Second World War, though the food wasn't quite the same as today. Immediately post-war, when Japan's landscapes were in a shambles and large-scale agriculture was still impossible, there was a heavy reliance on US military-provided food products such as powdered milk and canned goods. The US also brought surplus American wheat to the country, making bread the staple carbohydrate for lunch meals. When US occupation was over, Japan continued to import surplus American wheat to use for *kyushoku* bread.

In 1954, the 'School Lunch Law' was passed, which added junior high schools to the scheme. Programs were set up around the country, some schools having food cooked on site and others utilizing local '*kyushoku* centers' serving

various schools in one area. For the next few decades, lunches were bread based, often serving *age-pan* (fried bread) with various stews and curries. Rice-centered meals were not introduced until 1976! Today, there is one school nutritionist for every three schools in Japan, with some schools enjoying a full-time on-site nutritionist. The menus must meet the city or municipality-approved per-meal cost target (usually between 250 and 300 yen), nutritional guidelines, and be appealing to students. As long as the appropriate caloric content and nutritional profile is met, kitchens are free to source their food from wherever they wish. This allows locally grown foods to be fed to students.

In 1960, the government founded the 'Japan School Lunch Research and Reform Association' whose job was to improve the health of school children via *kyushoku* and to increase nutritional awareness. Every nutritional aspect of each meal is carefully monitored, with every meal containing '33% of daily calories, 50% of recommended daily intake of calcium and 40% recommended daily intake of protein, vitamins, and minerals'. Local ingredients are used whenever possible. While making school lunch announcements, children will often explain exactly where the ingredients came from and which vitamins and minerals they contain! This of course teaches children about nutrition while also giving them the knowledge of what types of food are harvested in the area. Experts in Japan have even credited the school lunch system for maintaining Japanese food culture and waistlines trim in an increasingly convenience food-oriented society. This being said, the *kyushoku* system is certainly not perfect. It is not prepared for children with allergies or special dietary requirements in mind, something that should be of concern due to the rising number of children with allergies in Japan.

In spite of this, the content of Japanese school lunch meals as well as the way they are served have been sources of awe at various times around the world. Especially with the increasingly severe obesity epidemic in many developed



countries, school lunch programs have been put under scrutiny. Until recently in the US, nutritional guidelines claimed that pizza could be classified as a vegetable and flavoured milk containing more sugar than soft drinks was regularly served to elementary school students. A few years ago, in a special exposé-style program boldly called *Jamie Oliver's Food Revolution*, celebrity chef Jamie Oliver showed how nutritionally horrifying school lunches were in the UK in a visit to a South-East London school. He then created a new trial lunch menu for that included balanced meals made from scratch. A few years later Oliver travelled to one of the 'statistically fattest' towns in the US to do

something similar, where he was initially met with disdain and hostility for trying to instigate change. Nonetheless, his programs brought attention to the frightening conditions of school lunch in many parts of these countries.

We turn to an American blogger who is another example of someone who has recently shed light on the dreary conditions of school lunch in the US, and it's connection to rising childhood obesity: Sarah Wu is a speech pathologist who while working in a large, Chicago-area elementary school, made an important discovery. A hasty start to her morning meant that she had forgotten to pack a lunch for school, leading her to purchase the hot meal served daily to students. She was horrified with what she was given (a plastic-wrapped, mushy hot dog and Jell-O) and decided to document every day's school lunch for a year on her blog, under the alias Mrs. Q. She describes, "Frequent menu items at my school included chicken nuggets, hot dogs, pizza, pasta, and hamburgers. Fast food." Her blog ([fedupwithlunch.com](http://fedupwithlunch.com)) became increasingly popular, and she published a book in 2011 about the experience. Today she is a 'school lunch activist'. In the US, Sarah Wu is not alone, in recent years, people outraged at what children are being fed in schools have written other books on the topics of school lunch in the US and what parents can do to change the status quo.

A similar event happened last year when a 9-year-old girl from Western Scotland started blogging her school lunches for a project, only for the site to go viral. Similar to what Wu had documented, the young student's lunches consisted of small squares of pizza and sugary desserts, leading many to once again criticize what growing children were receiving for lunch in industrialized countries.

Last year, US First Lady Michelle Obama instated a new national school lunch program in the country, backed up by the US Department of Agriculture, in an effort to address this issue. Prior to this, there had been no major national change to the school lunch system in over a



decade. The new program places calorie limits on the lunch and includes more fresh fruits and vegetables as well as whole grain products. The response so far has been mixed, with some children rejecting the healthier options, but it is certainly a step in the right direction. With all the kerfuffle surrounding school lunch in the US and other developed countries, their governments could certainly turn to Japan for inspiration on how to move forward!

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# JAPAN EVENTS

May 17<sup>th</sup> 2013 – June 12<sup>th</sup> 2013

Don't see your favorite festival here? Have an upcoming event you're super excited for? Let's put them on the calendar and spread the love! Contact Events at [steven.thompson@ajet.net](mailto:steven.thompson@ajet.net) with the details! If you're not sure what's going on in your area, you can always get in touch with your Block Representative or local AJET chapter!

Event name	Location	Date
<b>Nikko Grand Spring Procession</b>	<b>Nikko, Tochigi</b>	<b>May 17<sup>th</sup> – 18<sup>th</sup></b>
<p><i>Nikko's Toshogu shrine is one of the most-visited shrines in Japan, and this spring event is their largest. Held to honor Tokugawa Ieyasu, who laid the foundations for modern Japan by unifying the warring states, the festival's main feature is a 1,000-samurai procession carrying a shrine housing Ieyasu's spirit. The 17<sup>th</sup> also features a samurai horseback archery display and competition.</i></p> <p><a href="http://www.nikko-jp.org/english/toshogu/gyouretsu.html">http://www.nikko-jp.org/english/toshogu/gyouretsu.html</a></p>		
<b>Kanda Matsuri</b>	<b>Chiyoda, Tokyo</b>	<b>May 18<sup>th</sup> – 19<sup>th</sup></b>
<p><i>Held on odd-numbered years, the Kanda matsuri is one of Tokyo's largest and most vibrantly extravagant; with this year promising to be moreso due to 2011's being cancelled. Black and gold lacquered shrines are carried by more than 500 people. The festival has a long posh history, since Kanda used to be the central quarter of the ancient capital of Edo (now Tokyo).</i></p> <p><a href="http://www.kandamyujin.or.jp/event/detail.html?id=35&amp;m=00">http://www.kandamyujin.or.jp/event/detail.html?id=35&amp;m=00</a></p>		
<b>Sanja Matsuri</b>	<b>Taito, Tokyo</b>	<b>May 17<sup>th</sup> – 19<sup>th</sup></b>
<p><i>Rival in size and spectacle to the Kanda Matsuri is Asakusa's Sanja Matsuri. This festival draws 2 million visitors over a full weekend to Sensoji, so expect crowds upon crowds. Friday and Saturday see the smaller mikoshi shrines carried around (over 100 in total), but Sunday is saved for the temple's three main mikoshi, which house the spirits of Sensoji's founders.</i></p> <p><a href="http://www.japan-guide.com/e/e3063.html">http://www.japan-guide.com/e/e3063.html</a></p>		

<b>Mifune Matsuri</b>	<b>Kyoto, Kyoto</b>	<b>May 19<sup>th</sup></b>
<p><i>Held in Kyoto's western Arashiyama area, the Mifune festival features performing arts of all kinds afloat graceful river boats. This is appropriate since the local shrine, Kurumazaki, holds the patron deity of the performing arts. Watch it from a hired boat, or from Arashiyama's famous Togetsu Bridge.</i></p> <p><a href="http://www.jnto.go.jp/eng/location/spot/festival/mifunematsuri.html">http://www.jnto.go.jp/eng/location/spot/festival/mifunematsuri.html</a></p>		
<b>Lilac Festival</b>	<b>Sapporo, Hokkaido</b>	<b>May 23<sup>rd</sup> – 27<sup>th</sup></b>
<p><i>To celebrate the coming of spring, this fragrant festival fills Odori Park with thousands of lilacs, the symbol of the city. There is also an event held in Kawashimo Park, which is a bit more open and outside the downtown area. There will be events during both such as music performances and lilac giveaways.</i></p> <p><a href="http://www.sapporo-tourguides.com/news/lilac-festival-in-sapporo.html">http://www.sapporo-tourguides.com/news/lilac-festival-in-sapporo.html</a></p>		
<b>Romeo &amp; Juliet</b>	<b>Nagoya, Aichi</b>	<b>May 24<sup>th</sup> – 26<sup>th</sup></b>
<p><i>The Nameless Theatre company has been bringing quality productions to an international audience since 2011. With shows presented in English with Japanese subtitles, everyone can enjoy a night out at the theater. This production of Romeo and Juliet will be performed at the Aichi Arts Center with five showings.</i></p> <p><a href="http://namelesstheatre.org/romeo-and-juliet/">http://namelesstheatre.org/romeo-and-juliet/</a></p>		
<b>Takigi Noh Theater</b>	<b>Kyoto, Kyoto</b>	<b>June 1<sup>st</sup> – 2<sup>nd</sup></b>
<p><i>Firelight Noh performances, which give you the feeling you've stepped back into ancient Japan, are an event everyone should see at least once. Kyoto's Heian Grand Temple hosts these open-air performances after dark. Even if you speak zero Japanese, the intricate visuals and striking atmosphere will keep you transfixed.</i></p> <p><a href="http://www.jnto.go.jp/eng/location/spot/festival/takigionoh_kyoto.html">http://www.jnto.go.jp/eng/location/spot/festival/takigionoh_kyoto.html</a></p>		



Great Japan Beer Festival	Shibuya, Tokyo	June 1 <sup>st</sup> – 2 <sup>nd</sup>
<p>Held since 1998 at the Ebisu Garden Hall, this festival draws thousands of revelers sampling hundreds of micro-brewed craft beers. Brewers compete for the coveted Japan Beer Cup, so come out and cast your votes while getting splendidly buzzed on beer samples.  <a href="http://beertaster.org/index-e.html">http://beertaster.org/index-e.html</a></p>		
Mibu Rice Planting Ceremony	Kitahiroshima, Hiroshima	June 2 <sup>nd</sup>
<p>Although the actual rice planting is done in cycles with modern equipment nowadays, the communities of Mibu and Kawahigashi in northern Hiroshima still carry out this centuries-old planting ritual. Colorfully-dressed women called Saotame plant rice to the sounds of shrine music. Cattle also take part, and are dressed up at the shrine for the festivities.  <a href="http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/RL/00411">http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/RL/00411</a></p>		
Yasuda Kinnen Horse Race	Fuchu, Tokyo	June 2 <sup>nd</sup>
<p>Yasuda Kinnen is the final leg of the annual Asian Mile Challenge event. Horses over 3 years old compete for a 100-million-yen prize. This is a huge day for racing, so expect thousands of people to be in attendance and soak up the enthusiastic atmosphere.  <a href="http://japanracing.jp/en/information/yasuda-kinnen/index.html">http://japanracing.jp/en/information/yasuda-kinnen/index.html</a></p>		
Lilac Festival	Sapporo, Hokkaido	June 2 <sup>nd</sup> – 3 <sup>rd</sup>
<p>Similar to the event held in Odori Park described above, but in Kawashimo Park</p>		
Atsuta Shrine Festival	Nagoya, Aichi	June 5 <sup>th</sup>
<p>This is Atsuta Shrine's biggest yearly festival, and aside from the usual mikoshi carrying and religious rites, the festival also features martial arts demonstrations such as judo and kyudo. The whole shrine complex is also lit up with hundreds of lanterns, with 365 decorating each mikoshi.  <a href="http://nagoya-info.com/festivals/">http://nagoya-info.com/festivals/</a></p>		
Yosakoi Soran Festival	Sapporo, Hokkaido	June 6 <sup>th</sup> – 10 <sup>th</sup>
<p>Taking over Odori Park in the middle of the city and attracting more than 2 million visitors annually, this event has exploded in popularity since its inception 20 years ago. 300 teams of dancers compete for the judges over the days of the festival, and spectators are often drawn in and invited to dance along.  <a href="http://gosapporo.com/arts-entertainment/festivals/yosakoi-soran/">http://gosapporo.com/arts-entertainment/festivals/yosakoi-soran/</a></p>		

Chagu Chagu Horse Festival	Morioka, Iwate	June 8 <sup>th</sup>
<p>Named for the tinkle sound of decorative horse harnesses as they trot from Sozen Shrine to Hachiman Shrine. The main crowd centers on the start of the 9-mile route at Sozen Shrine in order to see the horses being decorated. This festival was originally meant to honor the horses for their hard work during the rice-planting season, and now commemorates Iwate's long history of horse breeding.  <a href="http://www.jnto.go.jp/eng/location/spot/festival/chaguchaguumako.html">http://www.jnto.go.jp/eng/location/spot/festival/chaguchaguumako.html</a></p>		
Niigata Inaka International Basketball Tournament	Tokamachi, Niigata	June 8 <sup>th</sup> – 9 <sup>th</sup>
<p>For the past few years, Niigata JET Cameron Chien has organized an interprefectural basketball tournament in the mountain town of Tokamachi. Over two days, over 50 players compete to take home the treasured Inaka Cup, which is actually a giant bottle of local sake. If you and your friends want to act out your NBA dreams and meet JETs from all over Japan, get in touch!            Registration ends May 21<sup>st</sup>!  <a href="http://www.facebook.com/events/229328210525421/?ref=14">http://www.facebook.com/events/229328210525421/?ref=14</a></p>		
Yamagata Bolder Boulder	Yamagata, Yamagata	June 9 <sup>th</sup>
<p>A 10 km walking event held in Yamagata city every year, this international day out was inspired by the Bolder Boulder held in Colorado, USA. The walk is meant to encourage fitness and bring people out into the city to see the sights and make some friends. Signup is until May 23<sup>rd</sup>!  <a href="http://www.h3.dion.ne.jp/~mswy/">http://www.h3.dion.ne.jp/~mswy/</a></p>		
Osaka Rice Planting Ritual	Osaka, Osaka	June 14 <sup>th</sup>
<p>Held at the main Sumiyoshi Shrine in the city, this rice planting ritual features costumed women planting rice seedlings in the waters of the rice fields while singing traditional songs. It is followed by a warrior parade and mock battle with sticks, in case normal rituals without mock battles aren't your thing.  <a href="http://www.sumiyoshitaisha.net/calender/otau.html">http://www.sumiyoshitaisha.net/calender/otau.html</a></p>		
The Grand Aizu Scavenger Hunt	Aizuwakamatsu, Fukushima	June 15 <sup>th</sup>
<p>Held to encourage interest and exploration of Fukushima's famous castle town, this interprefectural scavenger hunt will see participants walking around the city in an attempt to find 20 unique and interesting items. Come out to meet ALTs from all over Tohoku and beyond!  <a href="http://www.facebook.com/events/646799372013906/?ref=14">http://www.facebook.com/events/646799372013906/?ref=14</a></p>		

# PHOTOGRAPHY WINNERS

Behold this month's sakura extravaganza! You've already seen Josh Del Pino's adorable winning photograph on the cover of this month's issue (that's two months in a row!), now take a look at the runners-up from the May Photography Competition!



CONTEST

**#2** Ming Tan, Nara



**#3** Neetha Mony, Nara



May issue Haiku winner



CONTEST

**in this fresh turned earth  
waits a green, growing promise  
the seed, yet unseen**

Sarah Jane Blenkhorn  
Shimane