



AJET
CONNECT
magazine


AJET
25th Anniversary

November 2012 Issue

October



Put your skeletons back in the closet for another year, October's over. The apples have all been bobbed, the treaters tricked, and Old Jack o' Lantern's once sinister face has drooped into a frown, mocking the piles of leftover Halloween stickers your kids are going to continue receiving into April...

Well worry not, because here at Connect we're ready to give Old Jack something to smile about again. Yep, this month, we've got two brand new faces to introduce you to on the Connect editorial team: Ariane Bobiash and Xan Wetherall. With more culinary know-how than the entire cast of Anpanman combined, this delicious duo is here to resurrect our much-missed Food section, serving up seasonal recipe ideas with a side of dietary dos and don'ts! To see what's on this month's menu, flip on over to page 40!

On top of that, November also sees the launch of three brand new features! Starting this issue, those kind souls at AJET's Peer Support Group (PSG) are here with a monthly column offering you some friendly lifestyle advice to make sure you stay on top of things, and don't miss the chance to make the most of this fantastic opportunity we've all been blessed with! You can find this month's premiere installment on page 10: it's just one of the ways in which PSG is diversifying the ways in which they can connect with you.

Also new this month, scientific whizzkid Amanda Horton is serving up the first article in her "Like a Boson" series, where she promises to provide rock-solid scientific answers to your burning questions. This month, we ask her: is Japan safe after the Fukushima nuclear disaster? Find out the answer for yourself on page 11.

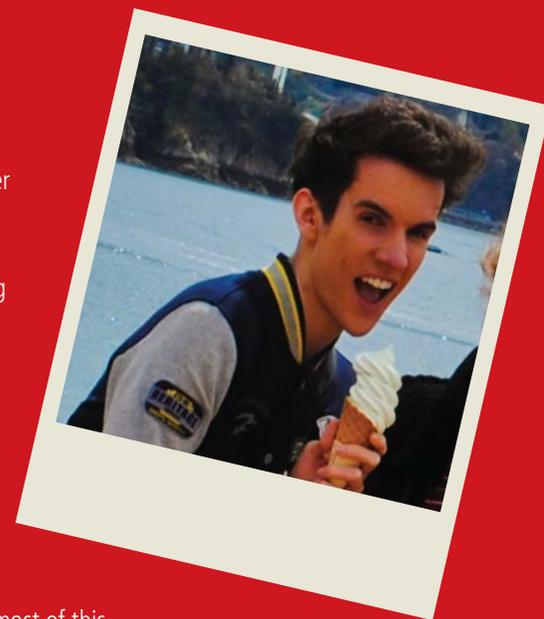
Completing the triumvirate of new features, Style Queen Kathryn Strong is taking residence in Fashion with "Style Strong", a monthly column in which Ms. Strong herself gives you practical advice on how to work some of fashion's most current trends. This month, it's the braid. Flip on over to page 28 to find out how you can make this trend your own!

Everywhere else, it's a case of "if it ain't broke...", as Connect returns with a bumper selection of articles from the heart of the JET community! This month, say goodbye to your omiyage woes as Amelia Hagen swoops in with the Omiyage Manual, the definitive guide to souvenir shopping across all of Japan's 47 prefectures. Things get furry in Volunteering as we serve up a tag-team of animal-themed articles, giving you the lowdown on how you can offer your help to all creatures great and small. Finally, serial sport superstar Ruth Rowntree's been interviewing JETs all across Japan about their sporting endeavours – find out the results in the first installment in our JET Sport Profiles. All this and more awaits you in the coming pages!

As always, I'd like to send a huge "arigatou" to our angelic designer Melania, our ceaselessly genki team of editors, and all of our individual contributors. Each and every one of you is a vital piece to the Connect jigsaw, without whom we'd have nothing! Oh, and a clap and a cheer go to Kobe's Clay McIntosh's for winning October's Photography Contest and providing us with our hysterical cover photo! Let's just hope the contents of that bag were deer-friendly...!

Catch you in December!

Jim



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- ♦ James Kemp
- ♦ Melania Jusuf
- ♦ Sarah Jane Blenkhorn
- ♦ Chris Barstow
- ♦ Annabella Massey
- ♦ Amelia Hagen
- ♦ Ariane Bobiash
- ♦ Xan Wetherall
- ♦ Neetha Mony
- ♦ Steven Thompson
- ♦ Ruth Rowntree
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This edition, and all past editions of AJET Connect, can also be found online at <http://ajet.net/ajet-connect/>

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AJET Peer Support Group: Work Relationships AJET’s Peer Support Group is always available to (anonymously and confidentially) discuss your specific situation (every night of the year from 8:00 pm to 7:00 am on 050-5534-5566). In addition, PSG is here with a monthly advice column to offer some general tips to help you stay on top of your life as a JET in Japan. This month, the magnifying glass moves to the issue of working relationships.	10
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Culture: The Drums of October Last month, Matsue’s yearly drum procession—or Do-Gyoretsu—reared its head once more. Sarah Jane Blenkhorn was there amidst the sake, sugar and salt, doing her own to master the historic drum patterns. Read on for more on Sarah’s experience.	15
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Events: Saijo's Sake Festival Last month, things got messy in Saijo. For two days, the usually quiet town in Hiroshima-ken found itself on the top of every Western Japanese JET's itinerary. Connect Editor James Kemp pieces together what little he remembers from a wild night at this year's Sake Festival.	22
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Volunteering: Japan Cat Network: Helping People Help Pets It's not just people who are the recipients of Japan's vast network of voluntary bodies—those of the four-legged kind are equally in need! In the first of this month's two animal-themed volunteer pieces, Sarah Lamberg profiles the work of the Japan Cat Network. Read on for more, including how you can get involved.	35

Volunteering: Animal Friends Niigata Just as the Japan Cat Network is doing great work across the country, Animal Friends Niigata is working hard in Tohoku to provide some much-needed love to all creatures great and small. After the disasters of last year, their work has never been more important. Amanda Horton explains.	37
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Food: Miso Soup Would Like a Word It's the staple of every school lunch menu, yet when confronted with the possibility of making their own miso soup, most people balk and settle for the ready-made sachets. Well, Xan Wetherall is here with a revelation: it doesn't have to be this way. Read on to find out how to make your own tasty miso soup from scratch!	41
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Education: Planet Eigo—Sample Page Struggling with lesson plans? Well, Connect is here to lighten the load! Every month, we're going to be giving you a free sample page of Planet Eigo to use in the classroom! Now who said there's no such thing as a free kyushokku? For more information on Planet Eigo and other AJET publications, check out http://ajet.net/ajet-publications/	

AJET Peer Support Group

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MARK SAYS...

A message from the Chair of AJET

Fall is here! It feels like summer's Tokyo Orientation was just yesterday. Time truly flies here in Japan. But, at the same time, so much is happening all around us. The new JETs who arrived just this summer here in my prefecture now feel like old friends; my third year students are starting to prepare for high school admission exams; the rice fields have now been harvested, and our school festival has come and gone...

As old as the inaka-versus-city debate is amongst us JETs, I feel truly lucky to have received a rural placement. It's amazing to watch the mountains transform from lush greens into autumn colours. The oranges, reds and yellows that are starting to appear are absolutely stunning. Being surrounded by such natural beauty is one of the great benefits of living in Japan. That's why I enjoy exploring so much of Japan at this time of the year. Every season that comes can change a place in such indelible ways that it is often worth a revisit just to take in the new season there. One of the first places in Japan where I witnessed fall colours was Kyoto. Experiencing the dazzling and vivid colours of the trees around the temples was one of the more beautiful experiences I've had in Japan. The JETs in my area do an annual fall hike at the Five Coloured Lakes near Mount Bandai. That is also one of my favorite fall activities. The colours never fail to amaze.

I'm sure many of you have great tips for places to visit this autumn. If you are new, and even if you aren't, I highly recommend getting tips from your fellow JETs nearby. Recently, a new Facebook travel group was started up (by Amelia Hagen, our Connect Travel Editor and AJET Treasure!), called "JET-setters". The group's full of JET members who exchange travel advice for adventures within Japan, as well as abroad. I invite you to check it out! And if you haven't signed up for your AJET Block group and prefecture group on Facebook, it's never too late! (For the few of you who don't have a group for your prefecture, I invite you to start one!). I've seen a lot of people check in with someone else's AJET Block or prefecture pages when seeking travel advice on a specific area: it's another great way to draw on your fellow JETs' collective wisdom.

Personally, I have enjoyed seeing the great travel advice being exchanged online. It's just another manifestation of the amazing interconnectedness of us JETs. Right now, I think we're just beginning to scratch the surface of the potential that these groups hold. Our Japanese community really is full of useful information that can improve our lives: information that goes well beyond the best places to view the changing leaves. It'd be a shame not to tap into that.

Happy Autumn to you all!

MEET YOUR EDITORS...



Culture, Sarah Jane Blenkhorn

Welcome to November! While the weather gets cooler, this is the season when you can enjoy the outdoors in Japan, taking in the autumn leaves and enjoying plenty of sports and cultural events. In this issue, I've shared my first-hand account of the Matsue Drum Festival - after five years, I'm a veteran at drumming! I'd love to hear your stories about local cultural activities as well, and for the next issue, I particularly want to hear your accounts of Christmas in Japan! sarah.blenkhorn@ajet.net



Entertainment, Chris Barstow

November: it's that time of year when the nights are getting longer and the air is getting distinctly chillier. This month we bring you a review of ex-JET Daniel Clausen's brand new novel, "The Ghosts of Nagasaki", and we also take a look at some famous songs which name-check Japan (where all is not always as it seems!) Both are sure to keep you occupied this season when you're not comfort eating, choosing a new kotatsu blanket or trying to remember where you left your red jerry can. Until next time...! chris.barstow@ajet.net



Events, Steven Thompson

Remember, remember the 5th of November. Also, remember the other days in November. Though the weather may be getting colder, there's still plenty going on throughout Japan. Emily Atkinson sees her town transform every year during the Karatsu Kunchi festival, and tells us what things happen (spoiler alert: they're awesome). On top of that, our very own James Kemp, captain of this here Connect cruise, talks about the (piecemeal) parts of the Hiroshima Sake Festival he remembers. Check the events calendar to see what's going on, and as always, if you've got events to talk up, I've got a listening ear/inbox! steven.thompson@ajet.net

Fashion, Beauty, Annabella Massey

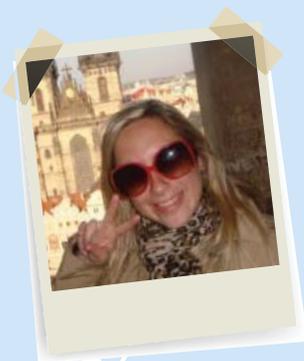
In this month's issue, Connect Fashion and Beauty takes you out of Japan and into the streets of Hong Kong for some striking everyday style moments snapped by our editor James Kemp on his recent trip there. I'm also delighted to introduce a brand new monthly style column, brought to you by Kathryn Strong. Check out The Art of the Braid for Kathryn's advice how you can adapt the red carpet's latest trend - plaited hair - to your workplace. In the meantime, enjoy November, get your hands on the biggest statement scarf you can find, and stay warm! annabella.massey@ajet.net



Sports, Ruth Rowntree

Hi there! For November's edition we've kick-started the 'Sport Your Colours' feature with profile pieces from JETs who love their sports... and similar divertissements. Find out how sport helps them get their kicks, flings a bit of magic into their lives, and all that jazz! And, have you looked to the hills lately? You don't have to be a fervent fitness fanatic or hardcore hiker to enjoy the glorious, rouged glint of Autumn; but it helps - especially if you like to be challenged with more than just a walk in the park. Some Kyushu folk prefer to take the stairs this season, and so, here you can read about the 3,333 Steps Stone Staircase Challenge in Kumamoto. Take care - and take the stairs! ruth.rowntree@ajet.net





Travel, Amelia Hagen

If you're like me, you've been taking advantage of the gorgeous fall weather by getting out of your stomping grounds. Leaves have started falling off the trees and neighbors and co-workers alike are talking about taking trips to see the beautiful momiji leaves. This month, Connect Travel brings you Elysse Hurtado's tale from Korea, an omiyage special on souvenirs across Japan by prefecture, and some recommendations for the Matsue, Shimane area. Happy reading under the kouyou! amelia.hagen@ajet.net

Volunteering, Neetha Mony

For me, one of the hardest part of living in Japan is the no pets policy in my apartment building. What's a pet lover to do? Consider volunteering at an animal shelter! It's a great way to regularly visit dogs and cats we can't have in our housing situations and help with a pressing need in Japan. After the March 11 tsunami and earthquake, the need for stray animal care has increased exponentially. Check out November's articles on Japan Cat Network (with shelters in Shiga and Fukushima) and Animal Friends Niigata for more information on how you can get involved. neetha.mony@ajet.net



Food, Ariane Bobiash and Xan Wetherall

November, November, November! Step right up and taste the season's bounty! As we move ever closer to the season of festivities, we bear an early gift: the new and improved AJET Connect food section! How can it be both, you ask? With an unprecedented double editor set, how could it be anything else? This month, a miso soup-flex shows that its namesake isn't half as hard to make as you'd imagine! Then, a vitamin-laden roundhouse kick shows how you can still vegan it up, even in Japan! Got any gourmet moves you'd like to share with us? Send them on through! You can reach us at ariane.bobiash@ajet.net and xan.wetherall@ajet.net





THE STONE WALL: USING GENDER-NEUTRAL LANGUAGE IN THE CLASSROOM

Zachary Spence

No matter what age level you teach, your students are in a stage of development—personally, mentally, and physically—and whether they’re looking to you as a role model or not, you’re bound to have some influence on their lives. Because of this, there are plenty of things that we have to be careful of when we speak to students; for example, not using unfamiliar colloquialisms, obscure words, or swearing. To this list, I’d like to add one more item: gendered language.

By gendered language, I mean saying things like, “Hey, guys,” or “Do you have a girlfriend?” It’s any word that requires you to assume or suggest a gender. These are things that, as native speakers, many of us have internalized from early on. But there are two big reasons to avoid gendered language, especially in your interactions with students: comfort and practicality.

Before I begin, I’ll give you a short disclaimer. All of these suggestions are just that: suggestions. Whereas I do strongly advocate you adapt these practices yourself, in the end it’s your decision to make. With that said, here are some of my suggestions (and reasons) for using gender neutral language in your classroom.

First and foremost, as mentioned above already, avoid the use of “guys” as a way to address groups. On the “comfort” level, it’s sexist. It’s the same as using “he” as a gender neutral pronoun. In a subtle way (or not so subtle, once you start listening for it!), it marginalizes women by suggesting that using a pronoun that doesn’t usually explicitly exclude them is too much trouble. On the “practical” level, it’s a colloquialism. You may say, “Hey, guys,” or “Are you guys finished?” to a group of female students and have one ask you in confusion, “Are you calling us men?”

There are some easy alternatives to “hey, guys:” everyone, everybody, students, class, team, all, or even, if you’re from the American South and looking for a teachable moment, y’all.

Next up: go ahead and use “they” as a gender neutral third-person singular pronoun. However you personally feel about this, there are many textbooks in Japan nowadays that use “they” this way (where “he” or “she” would usually be considered prudent). In terms of comfort and practicality, this gives your students the opportunity to be gender-non-specific without sounding awkward. (“I gave my friend an EXILE pencil and my friend liked it” vs. “I gave my friend an EXILE pencil and they liked it.”) However, it’s also good for students who are queer* or questioning. They will be able to talk about others—potentially their partners or people they like—without having to awkwardly evade a pronoun or lie about it. This goes for us, as well; a queer JET may talk about their partner using gender neutral language, as this is preferable to lying about their gender or pretending they don’t exist.

On this point, please note that not all textbooks use this gender neutral “they,” and thus some JTEs may be hesitant to teach it out of the fear that it would be marked wrong on an entrance exam. Before implementing it, talk to your JTEs and see what they think.

My final main point is to avoid using titles. By this I mean both English titles—Mr. and Miss—and Japanese titles, such as san and kun. Whenever you use any of these titles on a student, you are assuming, imposing, and policing their gender. Depending on the school or the teacher, san or kun may be used on everyone equally, but in other schools, san is largely used on female students and kun exclusively on male students.



Japan is, in many ways, a highly gendered society; in schools, this shows strongly in their often gender-segregated uniforms. For students who are questioning their gender or are genderqueer**, being mandated to wear a heavily gendered uniform may be difficult emotionally and mentally. Now, add a gendered title on top of that, and you'll have a very, very uncomfortable student.

You may think, "My students are totally used to it; they don't care about gendered uniforms! They don't care about gendered titles! I don't have any genderqueer/trans students!" My question for you is: how do you know that? In my opinion, part of an educator's role is to make students feel comfortable. If I call a student "Yamada-kun," and that student has been thinking recently that they don't much like being male-bodied, am I making them feel comfortable? Or am I making an assumption about them and reminding them of the struggles they would face as a person with an uncommon and often poorly understood identity?

From the standpoint of practicality, we've been hired to teach English. Japanese titles are not English. In the culture of my home country, students weren't addressed by titles. I was called exclusively by my first name. Since I've also been hired to bring my culture into the classroom, I do the same with my students. Other JETs have raised valid arguments, such as, "Don't you feel rude not using a title on your students?" I personally don't feel that way, but, again, everyone should make these decisions for themselves.

If we use gender neutral language in our classrooms, we can make them safer and more comfortable spaces for potentially queer or genderqueer students—as well as for ourselves. For some people, these may seem like trivial matters that are too ingrained to try to change.

However, something that seems small to you could have a tremendously positive impact on another person (to this day, I feel relieved when a person asks if I have a "partner" rather than a girlfriend or a boyfriend). If it can make our classes that much more accepting and enjoyable for all of our students, I think it's worth the effort.

Oh, and one last thing—feel free to bring your gender neutral language out of the classroom, too!

*Queer can be used as a blanket term for people who are not straight, or as a personal identity label. For example, some people dislike using the "LGBTQ" acronym because it puts the identities in a (potentially hierarchical) order and because there are so many different identities that the acronym becomes either bulky or limited. Some people who identify as queer would say they do so because they are attracted to people of any gender, so other labels don't fit them. It is a very versatile term.

**Someone who is genderqueer does not identify with either of the binary genders of "female" or "male." When used as a blanket term, genderqueer may also include transgender identities, for example a female-bodied person who identifies as male or a male-bodied person who identifies as female.

Zachary is a second-year ALT in Kakogawa, Hyogo. He enjoys putting stickers on his students' work and writing novels. He can be reached at beikastreet@gmail.com.

AJET PEER SUPPORT GROUP ON: SUCCESSFUL WORK RELATIONSHIPS AND COMMUNICATION

Summer is coming to an end, and second semester classes are back in full swing. So, we here at the AJET Peer Support Group (PSG) think this is a good time to talk about a common source of stress among the ALT population: work relationships. No matter your specific situation, a pleasant work environment is going to depend on a good working relationship with all of your coworkers. Although PSG is always available to (anonymously and confidentially) discuss your specific situation, we'd like to offer some general advice for keeping those relationships as good as possible.

As an ALT, your personal job satisfaction and your ability to perform well at work is highly dependent on interpersonal relationships. So, getting on well with those you work with on a regular basis, your JTEs, supervisor, fellow teachers, and other coworkers, is extremely important. Now is as good a time as any to take a few moments to consider how things are going and where there might be some room for improvement. Ask yourself the general question, "Do I have a good relationship with my coworkers?" or, more specifically "Are there any issues that need to be resolved?" Once you've taken stock of your working relationships, good or bad, ask the most important question: "What can I do to improve them?"

In any relationship, the only thing you have complete control over is yourself. So whatever the issues are, the only sure fire way for them to improve is to be proactive. In a perfect world, you work with amazing JTEs at all of your schools, your supervisor is an excellent communicator and speaks fluent English, and all of your coworkers are friendly and easy to get on with. Naturally, it may also be the case that your JTE is disorganized, or you have a

difficult language barrier with your supervisor, or perhaps (as does happen) some of your co-workers are not the nicest people. There are many things that are outside of your control, but you can nonetheless do your part to make things better. That being said, try to keep your solutions down to Earth. So anything that would involve the use of a magic wand is off the table. If you think the best way to improve your situation is to banish a few of your coworkers to a desert island or overhaul the entire English education system in Japan, you're probably starting a bit big. You can use your imaginary magic wand to try to figure out what you'd like to change, but afterwards look for real ways to make things better.

The simplest thing for you to do is to try to get into good communication habits. Once you fall into habits at work, it can be hard to get out of them, and the same thing holds for your coworkers in how they relate to you. To get things to change for the better, try taking some proactive steps. If you're stressed out because you aren't getting all the information you need to get your job done well, or you just walked into an empty time teacher's lounge for the umpteenth to find everyone else is at an event you never even heard about, sitting at your desk wondering why no one is talking to you won't help. You need to address the issue. If you often have classes sprung on you last minute, be more insistent about getting schedules from your JTEs, and don't let it go with a single, casual mention. If you have trouble understanding exactly what your JTEs want from you, ask for feedback on your suggestions and lesson plans. If your supervisor is uncommunicative, take that first step and be the one to start conversations. The main thing is to work with what you can control, your own actions, to work towards improvement. Old habits die hard, and

creating good working relationships with useful feedback about your performance takes effort, but the rewards, both in terms of a better work environment and better planned and executed lessons are well worth it.

Of course, improving a situation is always easier said than done, but staying positive and realistic is half the battle. It also may help to take a moment to consider why things are the way they are. Other teachers (even JTEs) may be just as nervous about talking with you in English as you are talking to them in Japanese. They may not be telling you things because they think it would sound condescending to tell you something that to them, having grown up with and worked in the Japanese education system, is totally obvious, even if it's completely foreign to you. No one is perfect, but do yourself and others a favor by not assuming the worst and giving your coworkers the benefit of the doubt. It can be tiring to put forth what feels like most of the effort in some relationships, but it's worth it. So stay positive and proactive at work, and always try to think of ways to make things that much better.

If you'd like to talk through a problem, you can always give us a call at 050-5534-5566. We're available every night of the year from 8:00 pm to 7:00 am and are more than happy to talk about anything from big life decisions and workplace relations to how to use your rice cooker.

The AJET Peer Support Group is a confidential and anonymous listening and referral service, operated by JETs, for JETs. It has operated every evening since 1995. Have a topic you'd like to see discussed, or a general question for PSG? Feel free to e-mail us at psg@ajet.net



LIKE A BOSON: IS JAPAN SAFE AFTER THE FUKUSHIMA NUCLEAR DISASTER?

Amanda Horton

Welcome to Like a Boson, where I hope to alleviate worries and offer some scientific answers to burning questions. This month's installment will be about radiation.

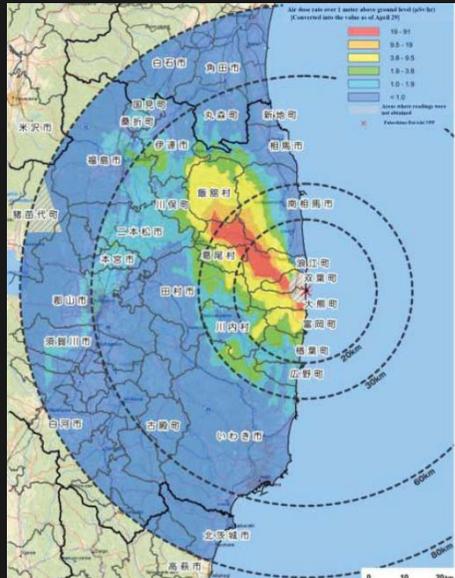
You've moved to a new country, you have to deal with cultural differences, language barriers, and a whole flood of new people to remember. The last thing you need is trying to decide whether or not the glowing green daikon in the supermarket is safe to eat. So is Japan safe right now?

What happened? A powerful double quake off the East Coast, coupled with the resulting tsunami, badly damaged the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant. The moment the earthquake struck, the reactors were shut down. This is achieved by control rods being inserted, which stops the chain reactions needed to produce nuclear energy. This happened in all of the reactors. The reactors do not instantly cool down, however, as there are still some short-lived fission products (the things which drive the chain reactions) bouncing around generating heat as they decay. At this time, it is essential to keep the fuel rods submerged in water to keep them cool. Normally, when the main generator is damaged (as it was in this case) a back-up generator kicks in to make sure the coolant keeps flowing. Unfortunately, the diesel generator at Fukushima was also damaged when the tsunami struck, so when the emergency battery ran out there was nothing left to pump the water around.

What's the big deal? Until a cold shutdown is achieved, the fuel rods need to be kept cool to prevent a meltdown. The generator works like a car radiator. Heated water is taken away to

cool and replaced with cooled water, thus the water never reaches boiling point. At Fukushima, the water was not removed, so started to boil away and expose the fuel rods. As the water boils, the pressure inside the reactor increases until it explodes. This is a hydrogen explosion. Obviously this is bad as it can damage the containment building, but it is not as bad as a nuclear explosion. To prevent explosions, steam is released to relieve the pressure. This steam is slightly radioactive, but far from dangerous. The highest dose recorded was 106.3mSv, which is practically nothing and certainly nothing to worry about in the short term. The main reason for keeping the fuel rods cool is to contain the radioactive isotopes within the fuel rods. As the fuel rods were exposed, they began to melt.

What is a meltdown? Meltdown is a scary word, which instantly conjures images of radioactive wastelands filled with dust and skeletons, like something from a Terminator film. A meltdown is when the fuel rod melts and collects in a pool on the floor of the reactor. A meltdown is treated very seriously because of the potential, however remote, that long-lived radioactive materials could escape into the surrounding environment. Not all meltdowns are equally serious, however, and should not be treated as such. In Fukushima, three of the six reactors melted down within days of the tsunami, and the hot fuel damaged the concrete containment. This meant that the water being poured in to cool the reactor was leaking out. Because this led to a wider environmental impact, Fukushima was classified as a Level 7 disaster. While it seemed to be a very drawn out process to us watching the news, all the damage occurred within days of the tsunami. Everything that came after was the result of the workers having gained a better idea of the situation as the site became steadily more accessible. Cooling was restored by pouring seawater into the reactor, permanently destroying it in the process and a complete cold-shutdown was achieved in Mid-December 2011.



Could this happen again? Well, there are no guarantees in life, but it is unlikely. The problem at Fukushima was that the design did not take into account the sheer scale of the tsunami which was generated by the earthquake. The magnitude of the earthquake was an extremely rare event, only suspected to occur once every thousand years. While it is true that the power plant should have been more cautious given the fact it lies near a fault line, it would have been protected had the tsunami been of average size. Had the tsunami not destroyed the back-up generators, the entire issue would have been contained without an incident, and it should be noted that other power plants along the East coast were safely shut-down after the earthquake hit. The conditions the radiation workers were dealing with were also exceptionally difficult as the tsunami and earthquake had caused complete devastation and a total blackout. Also, the power plant was built in 1971, and today's designs are much safer. Given the old design and the relative rarity of huge-scale tsunamis, I wouldn't start buying nuclear disaster insurance just yet.

Will I get cancer living here? As far as the risk of cancer goes, you are no worse off living in Japan than you would be in most places in the world. An acceptable level of radiation exposure set by the NRC is 1mSv a year for the general public and 50mSv a year for radiation workers. The evacuation zone has an exposure limit of 20mSv a year. So exactly what does this mean? Well, radiation poisoning is considered to start when levels reach 100mSv a year. At this amount the cancer risk increases to 1:200, that means that for every 200 people exposed to 100mSv a year, 1 will get cancer. Fukushima's core reached 400mSv/hour, but the main gate was at just 11mSv/hour. To put that into perspective, just living in a city in the developed world exposes you to 4mSv/year from both natural background radiation and synthetic sources (like x-rays). Regular smokers are estimated to be exposed to 150mSv/year based on the amount of polonium-210 deposits in smoker's lungs. Not that smoking is a healthy lifestyle choice, but it does carry more cancer risk than simply living in Japan, even if you were living within the evacuation zone. Cancer itself is an extremely complex topic. Whilst it has become pretty established that radiation doses of over 100mSv/year increase the risk of cancer, there is a field of scientists who believe in radiation hormesis: the idea that low levels of radiation exposure give people an overall benefit. The scientific understanding behind the risks and benefits of radiation exposure below 100mSv/year is extremely clouded, with lots of conflicting reports, so no one can really say for sure.

Figures help though, so let's try to add some. The NCRP established the figure of 0.00005 fatal cancers per mSv. At 20mSv/year, that is an increased risk of 0.33 over 30 years, so 1 in 33 people can expect to develop a fatal cancer in 30 years if they are living within the evacuation zone. Put another way, 1 in 1000 people exposed will develop cancer, which is an absolutely miniscule amount statistically speaking. Still freaking out? Let's compare this to other common hazards.

Risk	Order (death/year)
Meteorite impacts	~0.00000001
Radiation risk to U.S. population from nuclear power plant	~0.00000001
Radiation from high-altitude flight	~0.0000001
Lightning	~0.0000001
Radiation death from consumer products	~0.0000001
Flood, tornadoes, or earthquakes	~0.000001
Death from cholera or whooping cough	~0.000001
Train passenger death	~0.000001
Natural background radiation	~0.00001
Passenger deaths in aircraft accidents	~0.00001
Death from leukemia or tuberculosis	~0.00001
Brain damage from whooping cough vaccination	~0.0001
Overall road accident deaths	~0.0001
Death from bronchitis or influenza	~0.0001
Death from childbirth	~0.00024
Lung cancer risk from smoking (20 cigarettes/day)	~0.001
Death from all causes at age 55	~0.001
Death from cancer, stroke, or heart disease	~0.001
Deaths from 20 mSv exposure (Fukushima exposure limit)	~0.001

~ Source: The Neutron Economy

As you can see, living in the evacuation zone carries the same risk as smoking, dying at 55, or contracting cancer regardless. Given the fact that no JETs are living within the evacuation zone, I would be more concerned about the damage you're doing to your liver by wholeheartedly embracing Japan's drinking culture!

I hope this answers some of your concerns. If you have any questions, please email me at ac_horton@hotmail.com.



ALOHA: UNITING JAPAN AND HAWAII

Mark Fujishige

Less than a week after leaving my home in Honolulu, I was greeted at the tiny Tottori City Airport by a group of Board of Education representatives in blaring Aloha shirts. It was, I thought, a special welcoming gesture for a shell-shocked ALT from Hawaii. Turns out the shirts are standard wear in the summer months in my small town of Yurihama-cho—and the ties between my home here and back there run much deeper than I ever could have imagined five years ago.

During my first few days in town I went on a tour with my supervisor and he proudly pointed out the (winter-hardy) “palm trees” that lined the road, as well as other Hawaii-themed buildings and landmarks as we drove by. There was Café Kitchen Luau, where you can enjoy their take on loco moco, a Hawaiian favorite consisting of two scoops of rice, topped with a hamburger, fried egg, and brown gravy. The café was located right across the street from Aloha Hall, and happened to be a few hundred meters from the “Hawaii Island” apartments... the list could go on.

After receiving my placement notice I had found an article from the local newspaper written a few years earlier about Yurihama. It briefly recapped the town’s formation through the merger of the three small towns of Togo-cho, Tomarison and Hawai-cho. I learned that a sister-city relationship had been formed between Hawai-cho and the County of Hawaii in 1996. (In no small part because, Hawai and Hawaii are written identically in Katakana.) I found this

mildly interesting, but the significance of this relationship didn’t register with me until after I arrived in Yurihama.

There are school exchanges that take place each year between the three junior high schools in town and Hilo Intermediate School on the Big Island of Hawaii. Every other year students from Hilo come to Yurihama for a weeklong cultural exchange and participate in a home stay with Japanese students. In the off years, students from Yurihama do the same kind of exchange in Hilo. Then there is the annual Hawaiian Festival, which draws hundreds of hula dancers from around the region and plays host to musicians and dancers from our sister-city to perform, instruct and take part in cultural exchanges. I even discovered that my town has specifically requested JETs from Hawaii for several JET generations, and that my being here was no coincidence.

Up until my coming to Yurihama, my understanding and experience with Japan had been more or less a one-way-street. I was aware of the influence Japan had on Hawaii, but wasn’t really aware of what sort of influence—if any—Hawaii had on Japan.

Growing up, most of my experiences with Japan and her culture had been through family traditions and stories passed down through the generations and broadcasts on KIKU TV (those of you from Hawaii know what I’m talking

about). My great grandparents were among the 200,000+ Japanese laborers who immigrated to Hawaii during the late 19th and early 20th century. That group of people brought with them the language and culture that would become an integral part of Hawaii as we know it today. In more recent history, the Japanese have had a large impact on the local economy through tourism and commerce. To see the reverse influence even in such a small town like Yurihama was quite an experience.

But over the years I've continued to realize that in my town, the influence isn't a one-way situation. Both towns continually strive to deepen their ties with each other, and the sister-city relationship has grown to be more than just the product of coincidence thanks to a name similarity or an interest in commerce. It's more even than just the aunties who enjoy hula or buildings that bear Hawaiian names. It's about the connections and interactions between the people and communities on both ends that give this relationship value and depth, and the shared aloha is the thing that binds them.

"Aloha," of course, is a Hawaiian word that's now known all over the world. It can be used as a greeting, to bid farewell, or convey affection. In the 1970s a kupuna (elder) named Pilahi Paki suggested a more contemporary but equally meaningful definition:

- A** is for Akahai—meaning kindness (grace), to be expressed with tenderness.
- L** is for Lokahi—meaning unity (unbroken), to be expressed with harmony.
- O** is for 'Olu'olu—meaning agreeable (gentle), to be expressed with pleasantness.
- H** is for Ha'aha'a—meaning humility (empty), to be expressed with modesty.
- A** is for Ahonui—meaning patience (waiting for the moment), to be expressed with perseverance.

Since I was young I'd heard the phrase, "live aloha" used by those around me. More than just a word, it's a way of approaching situations and people in your everyday life, and influences the actions we take and decisions we make. I never expected the connection between the sister-cities to run deeper than the floral print, nor to see such aloha expressed between the members of the two communities. However, it has made all the difference.

Hawaii and Japan have strong ties that connect them, and the JET Programme plays a role in that, too. At the start of the current JET year, my younger brother joined the Programme as an ALT. He has been placed in Sumoto-shi, Hyogo-ken, which also maintains a healthy relationship with the County of Hawaii through a sister-city program similar to the one Yurihama enjoys. In addition to myself, he also joins my sister who is in her 4th year as a JET ALT in Ikeda-cho, Gifu-ken. In her town the Junior High School has a sister-school relationship with Mililani Junior High on our home island of Oahu. I would wager that many of us have been placed in our adopted Japanese hometowns for reasons more significant than just coincidence.

As JETs we often hear that we are actively taking part in "grassroots internationalization." It's true! I would go on to say that as we share our culture and promote understanding, we also have the opportunity to spread a little aloha in our own communities. The world could definitely benefit from some aloha these days, and there's no better place to start than where you are right now. Wherever you've been assigned, regardless of where you hail from, I hope the ties that bind you and your community will be strengthened with warmest aloha as well.

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THE DRUMS OF OCTOBER

Sarah Jane Blenkhorn



*watch the moon grow fat
we gather to summon forth
the drums' deep rumble*

Every city, town and neighbourhood in Japan seems to have its own unique festival or event, functioning as a source of pride and a way to bring the community together. So it is with Matsue, the small city in Shimane where I live. Among Matsue's local claims to fame is the yearly drum procession, Do-Gyoretsu, which takes place on the third Sunday of October every year.

As I've heard it, the festival was started in 1724 as a way to welcome the princess Iwa-hime, a distant relation of the Emperor, who came from Kyoto to marry the lord of Matsue. There is no record of that cultured noble lady's reaction to being greeted by the pounding din of massive drums as she made her way to her new castle home. We can only hope she was properly appreciative. The festival was adapted from a much older festival, the Sagicho festival, which originated as a New Year's festival in Kyoto in the Heian period.



The "do" are large drums played horizontally, slung in a wheeled cart with a shrine-like roof so they can be pulled around town (fortunately most of downtown Matsue is quite flat). They can be played by a number of people at once. During the festival, the large carts are pulled by—no lie—teams of small children, who are handsomely rewarded with candy after the event.

There are approximately 30 community groups that take part in the festival, though many groups only take part once every two or three years. Most of the groups are based in the neighbourhoods from which they take their names, with the oldest drum groups coming

from the neighbourhoods closest to Matsue Castle. There is a lot of pride in those old neighbourhoods. I play with a drum group called "Doyukai" or "Drum Friends Party." It's a unique group, being much newer than the other groups (celebrating its thirtieth anniversary this year) and not affiliated with any particular neighbourhood. It is also very open to the participation of non-Japanese—hence my involvement. This year we had members from Canada, America, England, Russia, Australia and Korea playing in the festival.

In the weeks leading up to the festival, the neighbourhoods near Matsue Castle echo with drumbeats, the shrill accompaniment of bamboo flutes and the clash of Changara cymbals, as neighbours come together to practice and enjoy the nippy October air. In a way, this is the part I like the best. Festival day is exciting, but the slow build-up to that day is a chance to make friends, have fun and feel the joy of playing together with rhythm and music, a time when language barriers don't matter so much.

On the first day I played with Doyukai, a pair of drumsticks was thrust into my hands. They were thick and surprisingly heavy. The older members of Doyukai, who had been drumming for twenty years (give or take), showed me how to hold the sticks properly, how to hold my arms extended, and nuance—when to tap lightly, and when to swing with all my might. I was feeling pretty good about myself, when they changed to the next pattern. Whoa! This one was much, much harder. It seemed to change constantly, so finding the rhythm took a long time. When it was almost nine o'clock, the experienced players peeled us off the drums to play the final pattern and show us how it was done. My oh my, it was fast! And they just got faster and faster!

Each drum group has its own costume, usually consisting of leggings, a happi (tunic) with the group's crest, an obi (belt), a hachimaki (headband), tabi (white split-toed socks) and seta (sandals). When the different groups blend on festival day, the result is a riotous kaleidoscope of colour.



Although the festival is great fun, there is a huge amount of labour involved every year, from the beginning of practices at the end of August, when the contents of the drum storage shed—a massive jumble of stuff, for such a small building—are spilled out and rearranged. Practices become more and more frequent, becoming daily in the two weeks before the festival. The Doyukai members push our pair of practice drums to the nearby parking lot and practice drumming while walking—an intensive workout in physical coordination.

Doyukai, despite its status as a newer drum group, has pride of place during the parade, because we are the only group that performs mochimaki (rice cake throwing). Our drum cart has a flat roof with a low balcony on it, unlike the others, which have roofs built like miniature shrines. To conclude the opening ceremony of the festival, a group of Doyukai members throw little cakes of mochi to the clamouring crowd from the top of the drum cart. It's a mad spectacle as the spectators scrabble for the rice cakes and stretch out their arms to catch them out of the air!

The day before the festival, we gather in a local community centre in aprons and kerchiefs to make the mochi. We skip the traditional pounding in favour of more modern machines to make the steamed, glutinous rice into mochi. The hot mochi is dropped onto large floured tables and rolled, stretched, torn and shaped into little discs. Some of the fresh mochi is eaten during the breaks, devoured with kinako or soy sauce and nori.

The night before the festival, there is a little pre-festival celebration in the castle parking lot. Using smaller drums borrowed from the city, we push the rumbling cart through the dark streets of the castle town, directing traffic with glowing batons. A huge pot of steaming nabe is prepared at the castle, and beer is poured for the kanpai. When we drum together, swaying with the same rhythm, our eyes meet, reflecting our shared excitement. The gathered

spectators are then invited to try out drumming for themselves.

On the day of the festival we all gather together at our drum shed to prepare, bagging the mochi, decorating the drum cart and the sake cart, and readying food and drinks for the day. The cart, its frame wrapped in red and white strips of cloth, is adorned on the top with sasaki, a sacred plant. The drums are tapped and tuned, the skins shivering with a light touch. The women and girls primp, checking hair and make-up, mothers helping daughters. A bento lunch is shared on a tarp in the warming sunlight before we finally set out for the castle.

Each drum group pushes their drum cart to the wide avenue in front of the castle. There, all the groups blend in a surging sea of colour and noise, fuelled by sugar, salt and sake. In the bright autumn sunshine, we slowly circle the avenues in front of the castle, drumming and shouting the whole time, before peeling off into two groups. Our group crosses with others over O-hashī, Matsue's oldest bridge, and rumbles through the narrow streets of Tenjindori before stopping in front of the Tenmangu Shrine. With a final flourish of our drumsticks, we say our final good-byes to the other groups and make our weary way back to the drum shed to put everything away and conserve our energy for one final party.

Do-gyoretsu captures a wild and fun-loving part of Japanese culture, and that is one of the things I love about it. I love coming back to it again and again, finding new faces among those that are well known, and following the familiar patterns, hoping to finally master them. Maybe next year, I think I will. Next year.

*follow the drumbeats
thunder in the autumn air
perhaps you'll find me*

BOOK REVIEW:

THE GHOSTS OF NAGASAKI

Aisling O'Gara

The Ghosts of Nagasaki is Daniel Clausen's third book, due for release in December. The novel revolves around Pierce Williams, an American analyst living in Tokyo, whose dissatisfaction with his life as a bureaucrat in an anonymous corporate chain has become unbearable. Seeking to reconcile his troubled past with his current glossy existence, he begins to write: about his life before Japan as a troubled foster child lost in the American system, about his experiences in Nagasaki as a young English teacher, and about his gradual evolution from idealistic young man to cynical bureaucratic automaton. This traditional coming-of-age story is self-consciously leavened with a more fantastical narrative inspired by Japan's history. Williams' story unfolds across the backdrop of Nagasaki, whose own ghosts begin to mingle—literally—with the ghosts of his memory, creating a postmodernist novel which weaves together history, fiction, intertextuality, and memoir.

Clausen's novel is largely impressionistic, focusing (at least in the opening section) on atmospherics. Characters are painted in broad sketches, usually identified by their first name and nationality ("Mikey Welshman", "Jim from Jersey", and so forth), and one or two notable traits. While this serves the novel well in some respects—evoking the anonymity of the city and the disposable nature of the expat community, where friends are temporary and distinguished only by these notable traits—it is also a failing, as characters occasionally tip into stereotypes. This is most notable with background characters, primarily the Japanese women, who are represented generally as vapid cuties or, in the case of one woman, marriage-hungry and slightly pathetic. Presumably this is to create a sense of contrast for the more special, interesting women with whom Williams later interacts, but it's an amateurish technique which undermines the mood Clausen is attempting to create. Overall, though, the author succeeds in evoking a Murakami-ish, hazy, surrealistic atmosphere.

Indeed, Murakami is a clear influence on *The Ghosts of Nagasaki*, both in terms of structure—the bipartite narrative Clausen uses is something of a Murakami signature—and plot. Like Murakami, Clausen alternates between utterly surreal and achingly quotidian; but the novel undercuts its surrealist overtones with ironic pop culture references and the *Trainspotting*-style wisdom of the Welshman. It's Murakami by way of Tarantino; instead of Dylan and Lennon, we have Iggy Pop and ironic *MacGyver* marathons. Clausen proves himself surprisingly adept at using humour to lighten the at-times portentous atmosphere of the novel, slyly highlighting its more outlandish elements without ever undermining the narrative itself. This is a difficult balancing act to maintain, and it does occasionally fall flat—the aforementioned Welshman character's laddish antics are occasionally less entertaining than intended; the descriptions of Japanese students struggling with English sometimes err on the side of cruelty—but when it succeeds, it is very effective.



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ENTERTAINMENT





Narratively speaking, the novel can be quite sophisticated, exhibiting a deft, occasionally Proust-inspired handle on the nature of time and history. The memoir format allows Clausen to give a sort of postmodernist take on this narrative, continually reminding us via authorial intrusion that we are reading fiction, that the “truthfulness” of the memoir doesn’t matter so much as its emotional content, that fiction and the contents of one’s head can create a reality as important and real as the world outside us. The ambiguity regarding what “really happened” as opposed to the actual events of the novel creates an interesting tension between writer and reader, ultimately privileging the reader’s interpretation. However, this narrative complexity is marred somewhat by the occasionally simplistic content of the book itself. Clausen’s mouthpiece is a little too Holden Caulfield, a little too misunderstood-sensitive-young-man, to be truly interesting. The dreamy young male protagonist (especially when surrounded by vapid people—usually women—searching for the one woman who is *different* and *better*, as Williams does) is such a cliché of fiction at this point that it takes an immensely skilled writer to illuminate the trope, and Clausen is not entirely successful in his attempts to do so.

Williams, like every young liberal American male ever, hates bureaucracy, Big Pharma, corporations, and ‘The System’. He still believes in the notion of ‘selling out’, a stalwart of this kind of fiction, which invites the question of whether it is even possible to draw the distinction between ‘selling out’ and personal/artistic integrity nowadays when remaining outside the corporate system is essentially impossible. This question, arguably more interesting and relevant, is never addressed by the novel, which instead focuses on its character’s rather predictable hatred of sell-outs and bureaucrats. Williams parties and drinks and attempts to pick up women but is somehow Unfulfilled By His Empty Life, suffering spiritual anhedonia which he attempts to assuage with (Too Much) Fun; he is tortured by the very excess with which he attempts to fulfil himself, creating a vicious cycle. This is nothing that hasn’t been explored a thousand times over, and the book lags when Clausen focuses on his protagonist. The result is a book which could have been a lot *more* had such liberal arts fictional clichés been avoided; the actual events of the novel are interesting and even hilarious at times, but Williams’ diatribes about the state of the world are tedious at best.

Overall, *The Ghosts of Nagasaki* is a worthwhile if occasionally uneven read. The novel is an interesting exploration of the ways in which fact and fiction mingle in our memories, both expressing and forming our consciousness. By setting the events of the book in Nagasaki, Clausen’s narrative touches upon the notion of collective consciousness as determined by history while simultaneously creating it. The use of the memoir structure creates an interesting tension between the more surrealistic, traditional-novel elements and a kind of postmodern self-awareness, which saves the novel from Murakami-imitation territory. This postmodern self-awareness is played with a refreshingly light hand, preventing the hipper-than-thou irony overkill which often mars novels of this sort. Clausen is a talented observer, and the realities of life as an English teacher in Japan are skilfully and humorously rendered. At the same time, the book suffers from several undergraduate clichés which limits its emotional impact and weakens its central argument against bureaucracy and corporate anonymity. Ultimately, *The Ghosts of Nagasaki* is the work of a promising writer whose future efforts are guaranteed to be of interest.

Ghosts of Nagasaki is written by former JET Daniel Clausen. For more on the book, visit www.ghostsofnagasaki.com. Book orders should be sent to lexicalfunk@gmail.com.

LET'S REVIEW!

SONGS IN JAPAN

Chris Barstow



Aneka

Japanese Boy

Scottish folk singer Mary Sandeman became an overnight sensation in 1981 with her uptempo ditty about the demise of her love affair with a mystery Nihon-jin. Adopting the moniker "Aneka" and cladding herself in a kimono, Sandeman seemed certain to crack the Asian music market as well. However, despite selling half a million copies in the UK, the song flopped in Japan. The reason? Apparently, the song sounded too Chinese...

Sample Lyric: "Mister can you tell me where my love has gone?"

The Vapors

Turning Japanese

Whilst Aneka coped with the end of her transcontinental affair with a spot of soul-searching, the Vapors were coping with lost love in a rather different way: by taking matters into their own hands. The Oriental-riff laden 1980 hit was purportedly about by the insanity caused by being dumped by a lover and having only a photograph for comfort. However, many people speculated that the title actually alluded to facial expressions pulled during acts of self-love, and that the song was in fact a euphemism for onanism...

Sample Lyric: "No sex, no drugs, no women, no wine, no fun, no sin, no you, no wonder it's dark".

Alphaville

Big In Japan

As well as Kraftwerk's robotic wizardry and Nena's perky Luftballons, German synth-pop also gifted to the world Alphaville's 'Big In Japan'. Stemming from an oft-used expression by fading artists to desperately reassure audiences of their continued relevance, the song became an international chart-topper in the mid 1980s. However, just like 'Turning Japanese', the song's true meaning has little to do with the country it refers to: it's actually about a Berlin couple trying to wean themselves off of heroin.

Sample Lyric: "Should I stay here at the zoo, or should I change my point of view?"

Mini Viva

Left My Heart in Tokyo

English duet Mini Viva had a hit in the UK in 2009 with their dance-pop anthem about a love affair in Japan's capital. Despite being named the catchiest single of the year by NME magazine, their follow-ups were less successful and they soon faded into obscurity without even the chance to be big in Japan...

Sample Lyric: "Mickey Mouse with the diamonds in the right sack, give it time and I'm gonna get you right back."

Gwen Stefani

Harujuku Girls

Since her 2004 debut 'Love Angel Music Baby', Gwen Stefani has fused together Japanese and American pop cultures with a healthy dose of cross-promotion and product placement. By recruiting a quartet of stylised Japanese dancers, No Doubt's leading lady has cultivated a visual image that has helped her sell everything from perfume to clothing. Gwen's love of Japan's youth fashion capital is best encapsulated by her nonsensical ode to her entourage, 'Harajuku Girls', an album track on her debut release. Good job the titular characters weren't from Ushigome-Kagurazaka instead...

Sample Lyric: "Your underground culture, visual grammar, the language of your clothing is something to encounter."

Chris Barstow is a second year ALT in Yamagata Prefecture. He's been to paradise, but he's never been to Mie.



GLAMOUR, DANGER AND DECLARATIONS OF LOVE:

THE KARATSU KUNCHI FESTIVAL

Emily Atkinson

Every year for three days at the start of November, Karatsu City attracts thousands of people from Japan (and all over the world) to see the Karatsu Kunchi Festival. Karatsu is a small city located in the rural Saga Prefecture, in the northwest of Kyushu. The festival is Karatsu's moment in the spotlight and one of its most famous staples (alongside its pottery), providing a perfect opportunity to see a seldom-seen part of Japan and witness a unique display of local culture.

I have lived in Karatsu for three years now, and every year I get caught up in the city's excitement as it prepares itself for the festival. From the beginning of October, groups of musicians crammed into garages, parks, and car parks all over the city centre practice the Kunchi tune on bamboo flutes to the beat of taiko, whilst friends and family sit with their bento dinners and watch.

Karatsu Kunchi has been held for over four hundred years, and is now considered an "important intangible folk cultural property" (a classification encompassing crafts, music, or traditions that hold high historical value in Japan). The purpose of the festival is to offer thanks to the patron god of Karatsu Shrine and to ask for the god's protection for the coming year. The god primarily protects Karatsu from fires and household dysfunction. However, the floats that made the festival famous first debuted when a man called Kahei Ishizaki was inspired by the beauty of the Yamaboko parade in Kyoto's Gion Festival, and subsequently decided to bring the tradition back to his hometown.

The fourteen huge floats (hikiyama) are hauled through the city of Karatsu by teams of men and children, with long, thick pieces of rope, making a spectacle of strength, beauty, and tradition. The musicians cram themselves onto the float and play furiously to motivate their team in the procession. The road is scattered with salt to protect the floats' wooden wheels. The air is thick with

the smells of festival food, the wailing of flutes, and the shouts of "Enya! Enya!" (or "Yoisa! Yoisa!" if it is a team of only men and boys). These chants originally used to be songs, but the songs themselves have long been forgotten (along with what enya or yoisa actually mean).

The floats are shaped from wood, clay and layers of paper into creatures from Japanese folklore, such as demons, sea bream and dragons. They stand about six to seven metres in height, and weigh in at around three tons. Each one has its own unique story, created from the wealth of the area of the city it represents; Hou-ou Maru, the giant gold phoenix float, is the heaviest and one of the most resplendent of the floats, made when the Oishi-Machi area was the wealthiest part of Karatsu. The locals are fiercely proud of the float from their area; elementary school students come to school wearing t-shirts of their favourite float and junior high school students doodle them into their notebooks. A few days before the festival starts, the floats are moved from the Karatsu Kunchi Exhibition Hall and put on a display in the city. The park by my own apartment is then overshadowed by the Hiryu float, a giant red dragon made in 1846. Its likeness was reportedly taken from a Chinese painting on a wooden door in Nanzen-ji, Kyoto. Hiryu, a dragon god of the sea, is considered a sacred animal in Japanese folklore.

The festival opens on the evening of the 2nd (known as Yoiyama), when the floats are adorned with lanterns. The first time I saw the parade, I was wedged into a doorway with my friends on a narrow street not far from my home. The floats would appear at the bottom of the street around a tight corner. The signal of a float's approach is the sound of drums. Then the leader of the float appears, dressed in traditional costume, waving a bamboo stick. Policemen come with him to wave the crowds back so they don't get run over! Then the teams come into view, the youngest at the front, all pulling on two thick pieces of rope and shouting "Enya!" or "Yoisa!" in unison. As they turn to



look behind them and start to yank on the ropes, the float suddenly appears in a rage of screaming flutes, grinding wheels and blazing lanterns.

Each day, the floats are pulled along different routes through the city (with two long stops on the 3rd and 4th where the floats are lined up on display so visitors can take photos and the teams can rest and drink sake from gigantic wine bottles before taking up the ropes again). On the 3rd, the floats are dragged through the sand in an area called Taisei, which is one of the most exciting displays of the festival. It can also be very dangerous. When the music starts up, the pullers charge off at a run and hope their speed and strength is enough to drag the float through the sand without it sinking... this can lead to some of the people sitting on the float flying off it from the force!

If you know where to look, there's an abundance of similar thrilling moments throughout the festival. The crowds tend to be in the centre of town, near the food stalls and amusements, as well as the shrine and the wider roads. But one of my favourite areas to watch the parade is out on the edge of town at a sharp corner in the road. The floats are on wooden wheels without pivots, so as the teams charge around the corner the men closest to the float throw their weight into it in order to wrench it round after the pullers. Sometimes they are running so fast that their floats swing wide around the corner, missing the watching crowd by inches, or narrowly avoiding collision with nearby storefronts.

The city is teeming with life until the emotional finale on the 4th, when the floats are returned to the Hikiyama Exhibition Hall. Afterward, the exhausted teams somehow manage to find the strength to toss their leaders up and down in the air to the cheers of the crowd. Recently, there has also been a frequently observed but unofficial tradition of students professing their love to their sweethearts in the height of all the emotion on the final day. They can be spotted all over the route of the final parade, sobbing and bashfully giving small gifts or love letters.

The pride the people of Karatsu feel towards Kunchi is contagious. Out of this pride and excitement at having so many people come to the city, some tourists may find themselves invited into homes to eat with fifty or more people gathered around a long table laden with food. It is also often possible to watch the parade as it passes by the window while you eat. Alternatively, there are plenty of great restaurants, bars and shops with beautiful views of the beaches and mountains surrounding the city, as well as the iconic Karatsu castle. The Hikiyama Exhibition Hall is open to the public all year round, so if you are unable to make it to the festival this year, you still have the opportunity to see the beautifully maintained floats in their resting place.

Emily is a third-year ALT living in Karatsu City in Saga Prefecture. She is a fiercely proud ginger and a frequenter of early-to-late evening yakiniku establishments.

SAIJO'S SAKE FESTIVAL

James Kemp

As vodka is to Russia, fine wines are to France, and a can of John Smith's is to England, no booze-buff can return from Japan without having sampled some authentic Japanese sake. Last month's Sake Festival in Saijo provided the perfect opportunity to do just that.

Saijo's Sake Festival is a two-day cocktail of events all related to the wet stuff. Take a handful of street entertainers, add a dash of live music, dance and portable shrines, top it off with free tasting tours of the local breweries... and watch the visitors flock quicker than you can say "kanpai!" This year, revelers could let go with even greater abandon, with a national holiday on the following Monday offering a much-needed day of rest after a weekend of fermented chaos.

For all of the different blends of fun on offer, the majority of the crowd was here for one thing only: *the Sake Hiroba* (or, *the Sake Square*). Upon entry to the square, sake fans were presented with their very own miniature sake cup; inside, over 900 different varieties of Japan's liquid pride awaited their sampling. With endless refills on offer, admission a paltry ¥1,500 and gates open from ten *in the morning*, it was an opportunity we certainly couldn't beat.

So, of course, we had to join it. Slipping through the streets of Saijo, there were already signs of those who had hit it a little too hard, a little too soon: a few men were draped over bushes like second-day bunting, unaware entirely of the police officers prodding them...or the fact it was only two o'clock in the afternoon. More excited than deterred, on we ventured. Queuing to pay for our tickets, I similarly found myself the recipient of a mystery poker. *Damn*. I mentally prepared my excuses. "Look officer, I just had one Asahi on the train to steel myse-". But it wasn't a police officer at all. Quite the opposite. It was an obaachan, brandishing an entry ticket. "Oh great", I sighed, "a ticket tout". Wrong, again. Wordlessly grabbing my hand, she thrust the ticket into it with a smile and scurried off. Perhaps it was our matching knitwear sweaters that took her fancy...? Whatever it was, my inability to shake my ingrained Western cynicism left me feeling like an undeserving fool. "Sumimasen!" I yelled through the crowds as she silently slipped away, not even waiting for me to thank her.

The inside of the Sake Square was everything we'd hoped for. Sake cups in hand, we were determined to make the most of our... six hours? (Okay, so maybe time *wasn't* an issue). Surveying the square, the clientele could be divided into two distinct groups: your connoisseurs and, well, people like us. Whereas the former treasured their programs, scouting out their desired beverage with stubborn precision and respectfully savouring it, the latter stashed their programs in their pockets at the door, heading straight for Kinki Region's Sake #69. Yep, if alcohol is a social lubricant, the Sake Square was positively *slippery*. Former strangers from all over Japan were chatting and laughing like old friends, pausing only to re-fill their cup at one of the endless number of stalls bordering the plaza. Amidst all the revelry, we staged a search for the rumoured *banana sake*. With no leads and over 900 varieties on offer, it's little surprise our search ended up fruitless. A few cupfuls in, we'd forgotten about it entirely.

Waking on Sunday morning, we considered another trip to the Sake Square. But, no. When it comes to sake you can, perhaps, have too much of a good thing. Now, where are my trousers?

James is a second-year ALT currently living la vida inaka in Ehime-ken, from where he serves as the Editor of Connect Magazine. All his official documents say "James", but he'd really rather you called him "Jim".



JAPAN EVENTS - NOVEMBER 2012

Don't see your area here? Have an upcoming event you're super excited for? Let's put them on the calendar and spread the love! Contact Events at stevan.thompson@ajet.net with the details!

Event name	Location	Date
Fukuoka Grand Sumo Tournament	Fukuoka, Fukuoka	November 11 th – 25 th
Held at the Kokusai Centre in Fukuoka, November's Grand Sumo Tournament will set the standings for the months leading up to the main event in Tokyo in January. http://www.sumo.or.jp/eng/		
Shichi-Go-San	Throughout Japan	November 15 th
A yearly tradition wherein girls aged 5, and boys aged 3 and 7 are brought to local temples and dressed in their finest of fineries. The parents pray for good, long, and successful lives for their children.		
Christmas Market	Osaka, Osaka	November 16 th – December 25 th
Every year at Christmastime the area around Osaka's Umeda Sky Building transforms into a German-style Christmas wonderland. Wonderful German goods like sausages and mulled wine are on sale, along with Christmas goods and decorations. http://www.skybldg.co.jp/		
All-Japan Folk Dance and Music Convention	Shinjuku, Tokyo	November 17 th
Groups from throughout Japan showcase various traditional performing arts at the Nihon Seinenkan Hall near Meiji Shrine's Outer Garden.		

Kansai Culture Day	Throughout Kansai	November 17 th – 18 th
Throughout 10 prefectures in the Kansai region, museums, galleries, and various cultural facilities will open to the public free of charge. Get yourself some culture! http://www.kansaibunka.com/		
Ebisuko Festival	Ebisu, Hiroshima	November 18 th
Marking the arrival of winter and honoring the god of commerce, shops during the festival display gold coins and ships outside the storefronts and have many bargain sales, grumbling all the way about having to do so. On the final day, the main road is closed and taiko and dance performances are held. http://www.gethiroshima.com/event/ebisuko-festival/		
Kyuanji Maple Festival	Ikeda, Osaka	November 18 th
Kyuanji temple in Northern Osaka is considered one of the best places to view autumn foliage, and the Ro gate is a national cultural property. Over two days, there will be an autumn maple tea party. http://www.ikedashi-kanko.jp/event.html		
Shinnosai Medicine Festival	Osaka, Osaka	November 22 nd – 23 rd
Began when drug wholesalers in Doshomachi would create new pills and give paper tigers to ward away illness during a time when cholera was rampant in the area. Now, the festival is much brighter, and the tigers are still given at Sukunahikona shrine to ward off illness for the year. http://www.osaka-info.jp/en/search/detail/event_54.html		



Tokyo Motor Show	Odaiba, Tokyo	November 22 nd – December 1 st
<p>The biggest car show in Japan of the year. Both recreational and commercial vehicles are shown here, and many make their debut. Anyone looking for the latest from the main manufacturers should be sure to attend! http://www.tokyo-motorshow.com/en/</p>		
Harvest Ceremony	Kyoto, Kyoto	November 23 rd
<p>To give thanks for a bountiful harvest, priests at Meiji Jingu stack vegetables and fruits up in the shape of boats in the main shrine complex. A Shinto ceremony is held and open to the public. http://www.meijijingu.or.jp/english/ceremonies/1.html#niinamesai</p>		
Issa Haiku Matsuri	Adachi, Tokyo	November 23 rd
<p>To honor the haiku master Kobayashi Issa, Entenji temple hosts a festival complete with readings of his works, comic performances, and a ceremony for winners of school haiku contests throughout the country. Oh, also there's a frog sumo tournament. You don't see that every day. http://www.timeout.jp/en/tokyo/event/668</p>		
Osaka's Best Art Exhibit	Osaka, Osaka	Until November 25 th
<p>50 pieces selected by the public under the theme of "I want to see a genuine piece of my favorite artwork." This gallery at the Museum of Modern Art features works from Modigliani, Dali, Magritte, and many others both Western and Japanese. http://www.city.osaka.lg.jp/yutoritomidori/page/0000166029.html</p>		
Doburoku Raw Sake Festival	Nihonbashi, Tokyo	November 28 th
<p>Visitors to the shrine during this festival can not only enjoy the atmosphere and Kagura-mai dancing, but are given raw (unrefined) sake and wheat to take home, which is boiled and eaten with rice. http://www.timeout.jp/en/tokyo/event/670</p>		



STREET FASHION IN HONG KONG

Photographs: James Kemp
Text: Annabella Massey

Last Christmas, I took a trip to Hong Kong to visit an old friend from university. Exploring the city, I was immediately enamoured by its rough-around-the-edges charm and the fashion of its locals. Camera in hand, I took to the streets to capture some of the more interesting trends of the everyday people of Hong Kong. What I found couldn't be further removed from my experience of living in Japan for a year. Not only were those who I stopped very open to having their pictures snapped (many were flattered that I'd considered their everyday-wear to be photo-worthy), but it didn't matter that I don't speak any Chinese, either: the proficiency of the locals' English was enough that I was able to have real conversations with the people I was photographing.

So, here are the results of my afternoon shoot in Hong Kong. I passed the snaps onto our Fashion Editor, Annabella, to get her take on the local fashion. Here's what she had to say:

1. Living proof that you can indeed come across as an put-together adult while still indulging your love of all things cute. The slouchy, oversized plaid jacket and the simple hair tone down the Hello Kitty effect, blending fashion's favourite feline in with the overall look. Love the semi-sarcastic neon pop of colour delivered by the socks, which somehow prevent the footwear from looking like a pair of clown shoes (or even worse, MBTs). The frames are a nice touch, bringing in white accents from head to toe and adding polish.



2. A good attempt at a pun never goes unappreciated by me, though it's probably best he doesn't take this one to the House of Windsor. The light sprinkle of hot pink makes the outfit. Outrageously flamboyant socks would have lifted the look up a notch (in fairness, when would they ever not?), but overall, Di like it.



3. Adorable! If you thought this was a sneaky attempt to get a boring plain white T-shirt through the underground and past the fashion police, think again. This is, after all, a man who knows how to work skinny harem trousers, ear studs and a large scarf. I assume the two-toned clutch dangling from his arm is actually the well-considered accessory I've taken it to be and not just a brown paper bag carrying his lunch.



4. Very nice—a fur gilet that manages to be sleek and not, erm, sheep. This is a sweet and unfussy daytime look, ideal for taking round town. And matching your bracelets to your busses is always a winner.

5. This haircut is perfection and suits her delicate features and face shape exactly. She knows what she's doing, too—instead of pairing her elfin crop with a twee little dress (as the gorgeous Michelle Williams is wont to do) and going all fairytale-in-the-forest, she's roughened the cut up with Converse-style trainers, tiny denim shorts and a checked shirt that doesn't make her look like an off-duty lumberjack.



6. Not bad—it takes a certain amount of flair to make cherry-red skinny jeans work and the rounded navy blue pumps combined with the too-long sleeves give the whole look an endearing charm.



7. I'm on the fence about leopard print. Mostly because the basic (and unsubtle) message is "I'm WILD like an ANIMAL!" and this can get a bit grating after a while. But on the other hand, leopard print is kind of fabulous on the right individual (à la Kate Moss). Either way, it looks sharp and sleek here because it's being used exactly as leopard print should be used: sparingly, and as an accent. And credit to her for trying the dip-dyed hair and running with it – whether it's found on the street or on the catwalk, fashion's all about that sort of experimentation and fun.



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



THE ART OF THE BRAID

Kathryn Strong

Ever since Jennifer Lawrence plaited her hair for her role as Katniss Everdeen in *the Hunger Games*, braids have been popping up everywhere. Blake Lively, Selena Gomez, and Zoe Saldana have all been seen wearing this trend. In fact, you'll be hard pressed to find a celebrity who hasn't been spotted either on or off the red carpet with her hair braided. While braids are sometimes thought of as a summer hairstyle, with the second movie in *the Hunger Games* trilogy, *Catching Fire*, set to be released soon, the trend looks set to remain.

One of the greatest aspects of braids is their versatility: they look equally beautiful on women of all ages and races; they can be worn to the gym, grocery shopping, to work, or on the red carpet; they're perfect on their own, used as accents, or seen peeking out from under a winter cap. With a little practice, they are easy to do—and even easier to wear.

Here are some tips for how to make this A-list trend your own.

Less is more: if you're planning on pulling back all of your hair, stick to just one braid. While pigtail braids were adorable when you were in middle school, wearing them now will make you look juvenile. Three or more braids and you look like you're reliving the 80s. If you're doing small accent braids (like Blake), it's okay to do a few more, but it's still best to keep the number low.

Don't be too perfect: perfect braids bring to mind images of the first day of elementary school. You don't want your braids to be too tight, too slick or too symmetrical. Don't be afraid to let a few pieces of hair fall out of the braid or to use different sized strands for braiding. This will make your hair look both more casual and more mature. Besides, making perfect braids is way more work.

Have fun: don't think that braids have to go straight down your back. Try a braided ponytail, a side braid, accent braids swept into a half-up style, or go straight to the trend inspiration and French braid over your crown and around the back of your head, like Katniss herself.

As JETs, our days can start at sunrise and go well past sunset. Running from school to club activities to Japanese classes, work parties and whatever else we have to do, it's not uncommon for us to have little to no time in between. With that in mind, braids are not only beautiful, but can also be eminently practical. If your bangs won't lie flat one day, or you haven't had the chance to get a haircut recently, or you just didn't have time to wash your hair, a few minutes in the morning spent braiding will ensure that your hair will be out of your way all day. This will not only give you the confidence boost that comes from knowing that your hair looks great, but will also leave you free to focus on what's really important—making the most of your time in Japan.

A WALK ON
THE WILD SIDE:
**ATTACKING
THE 3,333
STEPS OF
'NIHON
ICHI'
JAPAN'S
LONGEST
OUTDOOR
STAIRCASE
CHALLENGE**



Okay, so walking can't really be that extreme to warrant its Very Own Article... can it? Well, I guess the same can be said for extreme ironing... until you witness it! And so, we bring you this unique wilderness walk up the 3,333 stone steps of Japan's longest outdoor staircase. In Japanese, the staircase is called the 'Nihon Ichi no Ishidan' (日本一の石段), and it's located in Misato, Kumamoto. Upon completion you can indeed call yourself a Stair Master.

First Year JET Luke Hendrickse, from Canada, is nestled in the mountainous town of Misato along with the aforementioned Monster Staircase. Unsurprisingly, then, Luke had a few words to share on the matter:

"Climbing the stairs has been the greatest experience I have had in Japan so far. I have taken them on a total of nine times and intend on doing them at least once a week. Not only is it a wonderful workout but it also serves as a great time for self-reflection and a chance to get away from the fast paced life that comes with the territory of being an ALT.

There are a total of 3,333 steps stretching over 2km up to the 600m summit. The steps were built in the 1980s with donations from various organizations, and countries, including China, Brazil and India. Some countries even donated stone from which steps were created! This is a must-see sight if you visit or live in Kyushu.

The scenic stairway leads to the top of a mountain, where the breath-taking view and wonderfully fresh winds will (almost!) blow you away. Along the way, you can experience some of the most beautiful nature and wildlife that rural Japan has to offer. The stairs are surrounded by trees and an array of diverse flora and fauna. Stone markers in kanji can be found every 100 steps to help track your progress.

The first time I ascended the stairs I went alone after work at around 6pm. I could not read kanji so I had little sense of how much I had completed. As I continued, I saw a man in his 60s making his way to the top as well. I felt like stopping and giving up, but seeing Old Ojiichan inspired me to keep going until I got to the top. When I finally made it, it was very peaceful; a green pathway appeared, leading up along a winding hill. After following the winding path, the entire area opened up and suddenly I was looking out onto one of the most beautiful views I have ever seen. I could see all of Misato, the neighbouring towns, and the ocean. It was such a rewarding experience. I stayed up there and sat on a bench until it got dark, taking in the scenery, and then reluctantly made the trek back down.

This monument is a growing tourist attraction, so it is well maintained and the stairs are kept in great condition. That said, it can be a bit slippery in places. Water and rest stations are placed along the route for convenience. For those that are avid runners, the sense of achievement of finishing a major running event is similar to that of completing the stairs! It's a great day trip out; I have seen many families having picnics at the summit. If you forget to pack a lunch you can find a couple of restaurants at the base of the mountain and there's also an onsen or two not too far away to soak your soles in afterwards.

Aside from the amazing experience of going up Japan's longest outdoor staircase, Misato is a beautiful place. It is a rural region that was formed by the merging of two towns—Chuo and Tomochi—in 2004. The area is surrounded by mountains and lush greenery, and reminds me of the typical countryside settings in Japanese movies.

えがおCUP

第28回 日本一の石段

アタック・ザ・日本一

参加者大募集!!

平成 11月17日 小雨決行
大会開催の都合は
11月1日(日)開催

熊本県下益城郡美里町坂本

●競技種目 フルコースの部 (3333段)
 ハーフコースの部 (1620段)

●参加料: フルコース・ハーフコース (参加費・保険料を含む)
 各1,000円 (11月5日(月)迄申し込み)

●申込締切: 700人 (定員超過の場合は抽選)

●競技内容: 本大会は石段のE段を往復する所要時間競技。E段は約1.5kmあり、往復は約3km。雨の日は濡れた石段は非常に滑りやすくなります。雨天中止の可能性があります。

●日程 ●往: 8時30分～9時45分 ●往復: 10時30分
 ●参加費: 10時～ ●往復: 14時
 ●開演式: 13時30分～ ●閉会式: 14時

●お申込み方法
 ●お申込み先: 熊本県下益城郡美里町坂本 1100番地
 〒861-0452 熊本県下益城郡美里町坂本 1100番地
 美里町役場 企画課 庶務課
 TEL 0964(46)2111 FAX 0964(46)3510
 ●お申込み先: 熊本県下益城郡美里町坂本 420番地
 〒861-0732 熊本県下益城郡美里町坂本 420番地
 美里町役場 企画課 庶務課
 TEL 0964(47)1111 FAX 0964(47)0110
 E-mail: shokoku@2012@town.kurawamachi-misato.lg.jp
 URL: <http://www.town.kurawamachi-misato.lg.jp>

●大会の開催は、12月2日(日)16:55～17:25 KXTで放送予定です。

●同時開催
 ＊はるちゃんパルーンショー
 ＊ブックペアーライブ
 ＊地元特産品の販売



Finally, for those who are in the Kumamoto area later this month... On Saturday, November 17th Misato will have its annual stair challenge. About 700 participants will climb the 3,333 steps, with the winner being the person who climbs it in the time closest to their estimated time – as stated on their application form. If you are free, then certainly come and cheer on the locals and ALTs taking part! However, since it's open all year round you can indeed come and test your 'heels of steel' at any time! Misato is forty minutes by car and an hour by bus from Kumamoto City.

The following are testimonies from other fellow JETs who have also done the stairs!

Karmen Rabé, 1st Year ALT, Kumamoto City

Waking up to a foggy—but nevertheless gorgeous—morning in Misato, was all the incentive I needed to genki-appu for the 3,333 steps. Upon arrival, the steps look innocent enough, and certainly no more daunting than any of the beautiful shrine entrances you might have stumbled upon during your time in Japan thus far.

And then, the challenge begins...

The first few steps are okay (wow! This is fun!), and all the while surrounded by a mystical, magical path upwards. It completely feels as though you have been swept up and dropped in the middle of Miyazaki's "Princess Mononoke". After a while, I wasn't sure if I was drenched in sweat, rain or a combination of the two! The moss-covered, fern-hidden steps seem oblivious to visitors heaving their way towards the summit. Upon reaching the top, my initial thought was, "Oh wow! I can't believe I just did this." Then I proceeded into one of those kind-of embarrassing, this-is-so-profound-I'm-crying moments... But I was really happy to have done it! Truly, the 3,333 were breathtaking in more ways than one!

Jaime Marie, 1st Year ALT, Miyazki Prefecture

Misato may be a small town, yet this was no small hike. Built into the side of this mountain were 3,333 stone steps! It took a little over an hour to trek to the top. It started off fine, but soon enough my heart was pounding, my legs were heavy, and each step was a tremendous effort. At some point, we all stopped talking to concentrate on our breathing and to carefully approach each step, many of which were wet and slippery.

As we ascended the mountain on that cloudy day, the fog grew thicker and thicker. Visibility extended about 20 feet ahead of us and on either side of the stair case we could only see the trees. Beyond the immediate flora, there was nothing but stark whiteness. The world was completely blanked out beyond our direct surroundings, and I knew we had to be on the inside of a cloud. Breathless from exertion and the beauty around us, we finally reached the top.

While the climb was reminiscent of a scene from a science fiction movie, the top was so peaceful and utterly quiet that it felt like we were as close as possible to Heaven on Earth. Apparently on a sunny day, you can see the ocean from the top of the mountain. Even without that view, making the climb was an incredible experience. We descended the mountain, back down each of the 3,333 steps, in about an hour. Mine and everyone else's legs were shaking faster than a belly dancer can shimmy, but the sun came out and we were all content.

Rose Mason

Where: Isahaya City (2nd Year ALT—USA)

Sport: Quidditch

Team: Nagasaki Nighthawks, Nagasaki Prefecture

Mascot: We're currently interviewing interested hawks for this position.

Colors: Still working on this one! We're thinking of either a dark burgundy or a dark blue or even a dark purple with black accents.

Team Catchphrase: Why So Sirius?

Team Warm-up Routine: Nagasaki Ganbaranba

Current Position: Reclining by my kotatsu...

Though otherwise, "Beater by day and Chaser by night." I switch on and off between the two.

Sideline, Half Time or Full Time: I am most definitely a full time player and lover of Quidditch. The idea of making a Quidditch team in Nagasaki started on a typical day at the local coffee house. Before we knew it we were making hoops, buying balls and trekking through Nagasaki with our brooms in hand. Playing Quidditch for the first time far exceeded my fun expectations (and I have very high fun expectations). Whether I'm a beater or a chaser, I'm always having fun! It's the best sport that I've ever played!

Follow us on twitter at <https://twitter.com/Nighthawks1965>

In her free 'muggle' time, Rose likes to unwind by making Greek yogurt, watching the boats on Omura Bay and looking up city mascots in Japan.

Photo credits: Amy Gifford



Sam Hall

Where: Nagasaki (1st Year ALT—New Zealand)

Dance: Modern Jive (AKA Ceroc)

In a class of their own: I teach beginner lessons on Saturdays at Gaidai University in Nagasaki.

Dance wear: A smile, socks and anything else that is comfortable. Wear dance shoes if you have any.

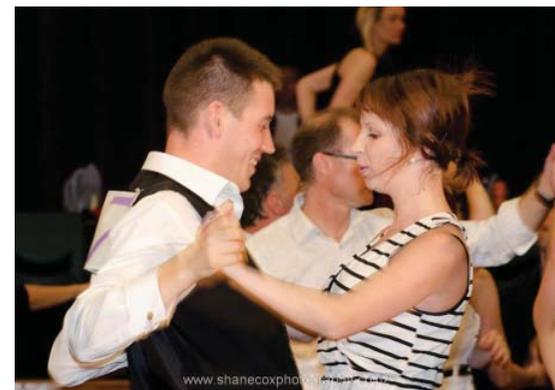
Tune Trivia: The music is quite upbeat and you're actually likely to hear some familiar tunes, e.g. Jai Ho, Troublemaker, Break Your Heart (Taio Cruz)

Sideline, Half Time or Full Time: So I've been dancing Modern Jive, also known as Ceroc, in New Zealand for two years. I truly love giving lessons here in Japan. Ceroc is very suitable for those who have never danced before; the steps are very simple but, more importantly, the lessons are heaps of fun! I currently have 8 students and they always tell me how much they love it. I'd love to get more dancers, so come along... Let's 'Modern' Jive!

A Lesson Learned: The lessons are on Saturdays from 2-4pm at Nagasaki's Gaidai University. It's totally free—and 111% fun! Definitely bring socks to spin in if you don't have dance shoes.

Mr. Hall teaches Kendo during the week and social dance at the weekends. He enjoys contemplating life while relaxing at his local bar Monkey Wrench on Fridays.

Photo Credits: Bro Pics: Sam Hall; Pro Pics: Shane Cox <http://www.shanecoxphotography.co.nz/>



Todd Armitstead

Where: Kumamoto City (2nd Year ALT—USA)

Sport: I recently lost a bet, so I must say 'football'.

Team: Manchester United / US National Team (men's and women's)

Mascot: Not Kumamon.

Team Chant: "U-N-I...T-E-D, United are the team for me, with a knick-knack paddy wack, give a dog a bone, why don't city f*\$£ off home!"

Current Position: On the field I'm a right or left winger, but politically in between.

Worst part: Remembering I can't cheer when United plays in the Champions League because it's 4am on Wednesday or Thursday.

Best Part: Being able to kick a ball around or share a drink and a cheer with all sorts of people around the world. "GOOOOOOOOAAAAAALLLLL" is understood in any language.

Sideline, Half Time or Full Time: I first started following United at 5am on a Saturday back in San Diego about 8 years ago. Since then, I've lived in Manchester for a year, and watched them in various establishments in seven countries and five different time zones. At the moment I'm trying to keep up with my Junior High students during recess and trying to find others who just like a kick around no matter the place or equipment.

Todd is from San Diego, California. When not meditating on the passive voice at school, or waking up at all hours to watch soccer, he likes hiking in Kyushu's beautiful surroundings with friends, dreaming about Mexican food and lapping up Kumamoto's world class drinking water.

Photo Credits: Todd Armitstead



Sarah Blenkhorn

Where: Shimane, "the 47th most popular prefecture," and one of Japan's best-kept secrets (3rd Year ALT - Canada)

Sport: Soccer (aka Football)

Team: the Shimane Sheilas (aka the 'Shimaniacs')

Mascot: 'Soccer Mom', cheerleader and epic chauffeur Tash Austin—though we may have coaxed her onto the field for the next game!

Colours: Electric green (impossible to look at directly, impossible to miss)

Team Trivia: the Sheilas have been unbeaten since their return to the West Japan ALT tournament in Awaji four tournaments ago. We'll be defending our title against all comers in the November tournament. Former team captain Jenn Doane has gone semi-pro with a team in Hiroshima. Rock on, JD!

Motto: "Shi-MANE!" (accompanied by a nipple flick)

Chant: "I see you drivin' 'round town with the girl I love, and I'm like... F*%K you!"

Player Jerseys: D. Zilla, Buff Heart, Danger, Beddall, Okie, Kubrin, Buri, Mie, Eriko

Injuries sustained: a broken thumb, a black eye, bad knees and muscle pain for days!

Fond Memories: Driving through the night in a wagon jammed with girls, DJ Beddall spinning tunes from the co-pilot seat - then back again, infinitely tired, with a trophy, prize beer and dirty socks; playing in driving rain, swan-diving through deep puddles (pools?) of water, and rolling around the wet grass when we won.

Choose the correct answer: Sarah Blenkhorn is a (whimsical / tired / brick) (English teacher / chanteuse / doormat) living in (Shimane / luxury / sin).

Photo Credits: Shimane Sheilas



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THE OMIYAGE PROJECT

Compiled by Amelia Hagen with help from JETs across Japan

So you're off on a trip to a far-flung prefecture and you've made the mistake of bragging about it for the past month to your co-workers and kids. Now, they're all demanding omiyage... well, don't panic, because Travel Editor Amelia Hagen is here to help with the definitive omiyage guide for all of Japan's 47 prefectures!

1. Hokkaido – Shiroi Koibito, Royce Chocolate Potato Chips, Rokkatei dairy products, anything lavender-related, fresh caramels
2. Aomori – anything apple-related
3. Iwate – Nambu senbei, anything from Koiwai Farm, Kamome no tamago, anything wanko soba-related, anything associated with Hiraizumi
4. Miyagi – Hagi no tsuki, gyutan, zunda mocha, Zao cheese, sasakamaboko, Ichinokura or Urugasumi Nihonshu
5. Akita – anything namahage-related, Akita dog-associated goods
6. Yamagata – Kojira mocha, cherries, anything else cherry-related
7. Fukushima – Fukushima Mamadoru, Usukawa Manju, Akabeko cookies, anything from the Taroan shop (Aizu)
8. Ibaraki – natto, tea, ume sweets, sweet potatoes, ebisuya dango
9. Tochigi – lemon cookies, gyoza, strawberry baskets
10. Gunma – konyaku, daruma dolls, manju, cabbages, anything with Gunma-chan
11. Saitama – osenbe, sweet potatoes, buckwheat daifuku, kuri manju
12. Chiba – peanuts, anything else peanut-flavored
13. Tokyo – Tokyo Banana, Goma Tamago, anything Sky Tree-related
14. Kanagawa – nikuman in Yokohama, shumai (ready-to-eat or frozen)
15. Niigata – sake, rice, lacquer sake cups
16. Toyama – shiroebi senbei, Tateyama sake, Tateyama umeshu
17. Ishikawa – leaf gold products, Wajima lacquerware, Kaga Yuzen fabric
18. Fukui – kayu, other forms of tofu, dinosaur goods
19. Yamanashi – shingen mochi, deer skin wallets, peach or grape wine
20. Nagano – apples, Shinshu Kit-Kats (apple, blueberry, Shichimi Chili Pepper flavors), walnut sweets, Japanese pickles, Shichimi Chili Pepper Flakes
21. Gifu – mizu manju, milk roll cake, Hida beef, Takayama/Seino beer, mino washi fans, sarubobo dolls
22. Shizuoka – green tea, mikan, Unagi Pie, Abekawa Mochi
23. Aichi – shrimp senbei, uiro steamed cake, manju, Higashi confections, Yamachan chicken wings
24. Mie – pearl products, green tea, mochi, Ise udon goods
25. Shiga – Anything with Hikonya mascot, funazushi, anything from Hikona, anything Lake Biwa-related
26. Kyoto – Yatsunashi, green tea
27. Osaka – anything takoyaki-related, Chinese steamed buns
28. Hyogo – Kobe Pudding, Fukuju Sake, Morozoff Sweets, Konigs Krone Sweets, Kunisaki crab things, Himeji shihomi manju
29. Nara – anything Sento-kun-related, anything associated with deer, pickled vegetables, kaki no hazushi
30. Wakayama – ume, umeboshi, anything mikan-flavored
31. Tottori – Konan things, Ge Ge Ge no Kitaro goods, anything pear-flavored, Daisen meat/milk products
32. Shimane – wagashi, Kanozo brownies, shrink-wrapped shijimi clams
33. Okayama – white peaches, kibi dango, muscat grapes
34. Hiroshima – momiji manju, anything okonomiyaki-related, oysters, Miyajima wood crafts
35. Yamaguchi – Hagi pottery, oranges
36. Tokushima – Naruto wakame seaweed, awa washi paper, bamboo crafts, iya soba
37. Kagawa – sanuki udon, Aji stones, lacquerware
38. Ehime – mikans, fertility-related goods (Uwajima), Imabari towels, mikan mochi
39. Kochi – anything associated with Sakamoto Ryoma, Yuzu, Katsuo no tataki (tuna), Anpanman goods
40. Fukuoka – Hakata Torimon, mentaiko, anything mentaiko-flavored, Mojiko banana products, yakicurry goods
41. Saga – Arita pottery, Yobuko squid, Ureshino tea, Saga beef
42. Nagasaki – Castella cakes, champon
43. Kumamoto – anything with Kumamon, basashi (horse meat), okashi no kobai, karashi renkon
44. Oita – kojo no tsuki, shitake mushrooms, Seki Aji/Seki Saba Monaka, anything onsen-related
45. Miyazaki – mangoes, chicken namban-related products, anything with moai
46. Kagoshima – satsumo imo, senbei, kuro buta (black pork) products
47. Okinawa – Miyakojima Chinsuko Cookies, Kurozato, star sand, Goya products, snow salt, Awamori liquor

FIVE MUST-HAVE MATSUE EXPERIENCES

Amelia Hagen



This month's travel highlight goes to Block 9! Matsue can be found nestled in Shimane Prefecture surrounded, by a variety of interesting places to see and things to do. Here are a quick handful of highlights you should be sure not to miss out on when making Matsue your home base!

1. Izumo Taisha Grand Shrine

Japan's oldest shrine and its second-most important shrine after Mie's Ise Shrine, Izumo Taisha is often confused for being in neighboring Tottori prefecture. If you venture to Shimane, Japanese co-workers will surely ask you if you visited Izumo. There is construction going there at the moment but you can still visit the shrine!

2. Sakaiminato

Are you a fan of Ge Ge Ge no Kitaro? Even if you have no idea who Kitaro is, you will enjoy the character-filled Mizuki Shigeru (Kitaro's creator) Road in Sakaiminato—just 90 minutes by train from Matsue. Be sure to grab a booklet to collect Kitaro character stamps at the tourism information office when you arrive. Complete your stamp book and you'll get your very own certificate at the end!

3. Shijimi Burgers and Soup

Matsue is located on Lake Shinji, which means it is famous for shijimi clams. The Lake Shinji Shijimi Centre is a great place to pick up not only shijimi omiyage but to try it yourself! The shijimi burgers and shijimi miso soup are especially recommended. Afterwards, relax at the nearby public foot bath!

4. Wagashi Making Class

Looking for a different travel activity? Matsue is famous for a type of Japanese sweet called wagashi, and you can sign up for wagashi-making classes right in the heart of the city. Take the 1,500 Yen, one-hour class at Karakorokoubo and you'll get to make three delicious Japanese sweets to bring home with you!

5. Adachi Art Museum

Think this is just another art museum? Think again! Adachi Art Museum is in little Yasugi, less than 30 minutes by train from Matsue, and has been named the Best Garden in Japan since 2003. Complemented by thoughtful and vibrant works of art, Adachi impresses even repeat visitors. Foreigners receive 50% off the 2,200 Yen admission price with a passport, so make sure not to forget yours!



CAPTIVATING KOREA

Elysse Hurtado

Upon returning from Korea, I ran into my next door neighbor, who told me about her own trip to Korea 15 years ago; she described Seoul as small and rural, with electricity ending at the edges of the main city, and an airplane flight that smelled of kimchi: in short, a not particularly exciting destination. My own experiences in Korea could not have been more different.

Within moments of exiting the massive, space-age airport I was equipped with an electronic money card (T-money) that covered my transportation on buses and subways, as well as purchases at certain stores. Seoul itself is reminiscent of Tokyo in terms of design and grandeur, filled with curved glass and steel, and humming with the creative energies of its millions of residents. Boasting one of the easiest-to-use subway systems in the world, Seoul is also incredibly navigable.

On the cultural side, there are several well-preserved temples and palaces in a style similar to that of China or Japan, but differing in their splendid use of the full color palette. Greens and pinks, blues and yellows blend beautifully into mesmerizing patterns and designs, capturing the eye and the heart as you pass under their ornate roofs. Many of the museums and art galleries are also completely free of charge. From world-famous artists to up-and-coming local creatives, there were several parts of town where you couldn't throw a brick without hitting a plethora of intriguing galleries.

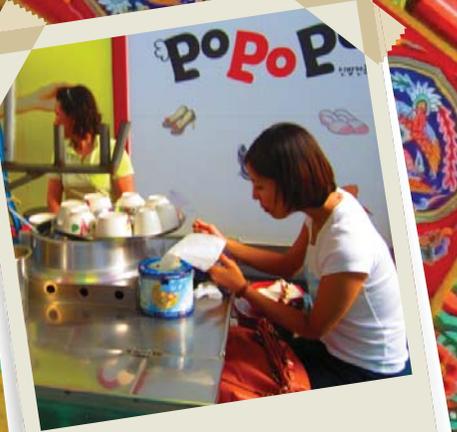
Busan, by contrast, has less art but much more natural beauty. The endless golden beaches and emerald waters can draw you in for hours, while the beauty of coastal temples such as a Yong Gung Sa will bring a peace and serenity that every traveler cherishes. The Moon Tan trail winds through the seaside bluffs and gives breathtaking glimpses of the ocean from between the aromatic pines, promising ethereal views of the moon setting on the nearby beach.

However, there are still numerous things which both cities have in common, not the least of which is the delicious cuisine. From the comforting taste of Samgetan soup to the kick and spice of handmade kimchi, there is something here for all palates and at a reasonable price. Another shared feature is the plentiful shopping opportunities. Both cities encompass vast, traditional markets, filled with hundreds of tiny stalls selling everything from cosmetics to ginseng tea. Best of all, you are allowed, or rather expected, to bargain, so you can enjoy both the fun of a purchase and the thrill of a deal at the same time.

Finally, the major selling point of the country as a whole was the warmth and joviality of the locals. Despite a language barrier, they showed no fear of interacting with me, and it wasn't hard to feel at home quite quickly. One woman even went so far as to make phone calls on my behalf when I arrived at a hostel to find it closed for the night, making me comfortable while I waited and insisting I eat with her, all despite us not sharing a language in common.

To be honest, one week in Korea was not enough. It only whetted my appetite for more. If you haven't already enjoyed the sparkling nightlife and captivating culture of Seoul, or the laidback beaches and beautiful vistas of Busan, you're missing out.

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



JAPAN CAT NETWORK: HELPING PEOPLE HELP PETS

Sarah Lamberg

In America, I volunteered every week with the local cat shelter in our town. My husband and I fostered kittens every month, much to the dismay of our own 3 year old cat, who never took a liking to a single one.

I assumed I'd be able to do the same in Japan. I quickly found out, however, that animal shelters are few and far between here, and animal welfare in general is a concept that is yet to grip the public consciousness as it has at home.

While comforting myself by gazing longingly at animal websites, I came across the Japan Cat Network (www.japancatnet.com). The Japan Cat Network (JCN) is a non-profit animal welfare group founded by two American English teachers. Their main shelter is in Kansai in Hikone, Shiga. After the 2011 earthquake and tsunami, they founded a second shelter in Inawashiro, Fukushima to serve the people and animals uprooted by the evacuation.

What does the Japan Cat Network do?

The JCN operates under the principle of TNR: Trap, Neuter, Return. JCN uses humane traps to capture stray cats and dogs for spaying/neutering, and returns feral cats to safe areas. They conduct awareness events about the importance of spaying/neutering, and often provide free spay/neuter clinics. JCN operates two no-kill shelters and provides adoption and foster opportunities for dogs and cats throughout Japan.

I visited the Fukushima shelter, which has been working on rescue and recovery efforts for the animals left behind in the evacuated areas of Kawamata and Namie. Volunteers travel to the area several times a week to fill feeding stations for abandoned animals, retrieve animals in need, and control the stray population through the principle of TNR.

How can I help?

1) JCN has Amazon.co.jp wish lists for the Shiga and Fukushima shelters. You can see which items they need and orders are shipped directly to the shelters.

- 2) Monthly subscriptions are available to help support day to day expenses, and one-time donations can also be made through the donation section on the JCN website.
- 3) The shelter in Fukushima is currently looking for long-term volunteers willing to live and work at the shelter. If you or someone you know may be interested, please contact the shelter.
- 4) You can also participate in short-term volunteering for a few days or weeks.

What responsibilities will I have as a volunteer?

Typically, volunteers are responsible for cleaning and feeding two of the three cat rooms twice daily. Volunteers also feed and walk the dogs twice daily. My husband and I stayed in a loft over the cat room. This gave us the ability to clean and feed the animals before even leaving our room, as well as providing some cuddly bedmates at night. You have the option to leave the cats in a locked area or let them run around free (which I highly recommend). This loft is free to volunteers, but you are recommended to bring your own sleeping bags, pillows, and towels.

After the cat room was finished, we went next door to take care of the cats in quarantine. These are cats that were recently brought into the shelter and are awaiting vaccinations, spaying/neutering, or are feral and will be released into a safe area. These cats stay in individual cages and cannot be released.

We tried to finish our work in both rooms by 8:30am so we could take care of the dogs outside, who are so excited to get out of their kennels. After grabbing some poop bags, we took them on a 30-40 minute walk through the beautiful mountains. Our favorite area to walk was a large meadow that offered gorgeous views of both Lake Inawashiro and Mt. Bandai.



Many of the homes in this small resort town have been abandoned, as fears of radiation have chased the tourists elsewhere. However, the people who have remained are extremely friendly, and the restaurants are perfect for people from the inaka who rarely ever find foreign food (like us!). It's quiet, peaceful and relaxing, and the radiation level in Inawashiro is normal.

What is it like to work in the evacuated area?

We were fortunate to be able to go into the evacuated area, but there is no guarantee you will be able to do so. The longer you stay, the greater your chances of going in are, as volunteers typically go in several times a week.

The area in which JCN works is about an hour and a half by car from the city. However, only evacuees are allowed into the restricted area, so after packing up our rental car with food, medical supplies, and cages, we headed to Nihonmatsu. Nihonmatsu is the closest town to the evacuated area, and is home to many evacuees, though many of its original residents have voluntarily evacuated. Here we picked up "A-san", an evacuee who started her own small shelter and is the key to JCN entering the restricted area.

Animal welfare groups had passes for one year to work in the restricted area, but those passes were not renewed. Groups like JCN are not allowed in the area anymore, so must operate with the help of an evacuee like A-san. JCN has feeding stations throughout the Kawamata and Namie area strategically placed where animals have been seen. We drove slowly through the empty towns, looking out for tiny faces peeking out of bushes, or braver souls running down the road at the sound of the car.

JCN's Fukushima shelter was full, and it was heartbreaking to see many friendly cats that we could not take back. All we could do was feed them and leave. We did rescue four kittens because they were in danger from a group of tanuki nearby. The most powerful moment on our trip, however,

was getting stopped by four policemen. They pulled us over and surrounded our van. It was A-san, three foreigners, and four meowing cats. I suspect the policemen knew who we were and what we were about, as they repeatedly said that animal welfare groups were no longer welcome in the area. After ten excruciating minutes of questioning, the police let us go.

At that moment, I realized both how important and how fragile JCN's work in the evacuated area is. All these animals rely on the agency for food and support, but JCN could be kicked out permanently at any time... and then what?

We returned to our car humbled and quiet. We were starving and thirsty, and it was dark and cold. I wondered how these volunteers live this life, day after day, with no material rewards and little help. All these forces stacked against them, but still they make the effort. When you go to the shelter, you can see just how great that effort has been by the furry faces looking lovingly back at you.

Logistics and Fees:

Getting to Inawashiro is easiest if you have a car. If drivers don't have an ETC card, the expressways can be expensive. If you have a navigation system in your car, you should be able to go by regular highway (as we did) without much trouble. Tokyo is the easiest city from which to depart by train, and JCN volunteers can pick you up if given advanced notice.

It doesn't cost anything to volunteer at the shelter, and you can stay at the cat loft for free. You can cook your own food, as the loft has a refrigerator, microwave, toaster oven, and drip coffee maker. However, if cats are not your thing, you can also rent a private room for ¥2000 per night.

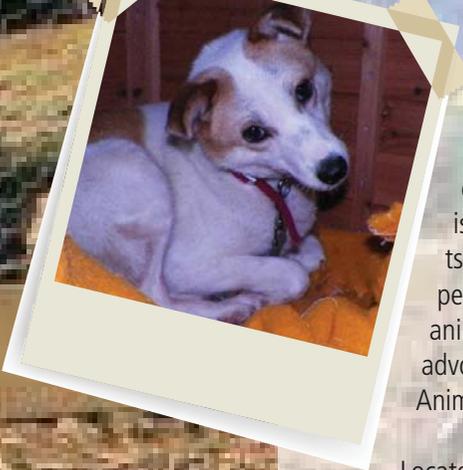
For more information, including how to start a TNR in your area, please visit JCN's website at www.japancatnet.com.

Sarah is a first year ALT currently building a bunker of blankets in preparation for winter in Nagano-ken. She plans to spend the winter hand-sewing a yukata for warmer days in the spring.



ANIMAL FRIENDS NIIGATA

Amanda Horton



After the disasters in Tohoku last year, I felt a strong desire to help out in any way I could, especially since my prefecture, Yamagata, is not such a great distance away from the tsunami-struck zone. Finding volunteer work for people wasn't so difficult, but what about the animals? Who is championing their cause? One advocate is Isabella Gallaon-Aoki and her staff at Animal Friends Niigata (AFN).

Located in Maki, a small town south of Niigata city, AFN was once a small local rescue centre set up in 2008 that exploded in size in the aftermath of the earthquake. Since March 2011, they have rescued over 700 animals from the disaster zone, mostly from Fukushima's evacuation zone, when many pets were unintentionally abandoned. AFN visits the evacuation zone regularly to capture as many animals as possible and refill feeding stations. They post pictures of the new arrivals on the internet, in case any families are looking for a lost pet, and have already reunited many pets with their owners. AFN also adopts animals on death row. Through their efforts, they have successfully managed to get one shelter's death count to zero. AFN strongly believes that every animal deserves a chance at life, so they take in everything from stray cats and unwanted dogs, to injured tanuki, homeless chickens, and even a terrapin or two. In total they have rescued 1,200 animals (a number which continues to grow). Currently 500 animals call AFN home, 300 of which are from the disaster area. All these mouths need a lot of upkeep, and it costs 2 – 2.5 million yen each month just to keep the shelter running.

This phenomenal cost is mainly covered by generous donations and AFN's small pet hotel business. Volunteers are also welcomed to help look after the animals by cleaning the cat rooms, walking the dogs, playing with the animals, and any other job that needs doing. It is hard

work, but extremely rewarding. Especially when you see a weak, sickly animal being nursed back to health under AFN's devoted care.

While there are animals who will likely never find a new home, AFN fortunately has a strict no-kill policy, so every single animal there is given guaranteed shelter for life. Some animals have owners that can't take care of them right now, and these pets are also given a home at the shelter or placed with a foster family for as long as needed. Every animal here is loved dearly, and they are carefully matched up with new families to create healthy adoptions where everyone is happy. This adoption process demonstrated its success right after the disaster when AFN took in over 100 dogs and cats from a pet shop, all but one of which has been re-homed.

There are many ways you can help, even if you can't adopt a pet. AFN will always welcome volunteers to help look after the animals. If that isn't possible, you can donate money or goods to them. For more information please check out www.aniigata.org or AFN's Facebook pages: "NPO Animal Friends Niigata" and "Animal Friends Japan".

Amanda is a third year ALT currently living in Yamagata. When she's not chasing her dream of being Dr. Dolittle, she can be found with her nose buried in her Kindle, having her mind blown by the latest scientific research, doing everything possible to avoid the housework, and drooling over Arashi members.



HOW TO STAY VEGAN IN JAPAN

Ariane Bobiash

Before starting JET, I spoke with several people about remaining vegan in Japan. The responses I received varied wildly, from “Oh Japan is a great place to be vegan, isn’t it? The Japanese are so healthy and eat so many vegetables!” to the much less optimistic, “You won’t be able to; it’ll be a disaster.” I can say with confidence that neither viewpoint could be further from the truth: though not always easy, you can indeed eat plant-based here without too much of a kerfuffle. What’s more, this is coming from someone who lives in the inaka; those of you in larger cities should find a vegan lifestyle even easier. So, whether you’re a veghead new to Japan, someone with a food allergy, or simply curious, read on for tips on how to eat plant-based in the land of fish.

AT HOME

- If you enjoy cooking, you should approach cooking veggie food in Japan as an exciting new challenge. If you can’t read any Japanese, get on it! Learning katakana is a good starting point, and will be a huge help when shopping for groceries. Also, become familiar with the kanji and kanji variations of food you may be trying to avoid such as pork (*butaniku* 豚肉), beef (*gyuniku* 牛肉), chicken (*toriniku* 鶏肉), meat extract (*ekisu* ~ エキス), fish stock (*katsudashi* 鰹出汁), dairy products (*niuseihin* 乳製品), and egg (*tamago* 卵). Be aware that many snack foods such as flavored chips and prepared foods such as curry cubes and soup mixes contain meat or fish extracts for added flavor. Thankfully, a growing number of packaged foods now have clear allergen labeling alongside the usual ingredient list, with a table listing common allergens (milk, fish, soy, wheat, peanuts, etc). A small circle in the appropriate box will indicate which allergens the product contains.
- Ask around to discover your nearest health food store (even my modest town boasts one!). Though they may be very different than those back home, you’ll be surprised at the veggie items on offer, including prepared seitan (meat-like wheat gluten) and imported mock-meat products (most from Taiwan, the mock meat capital of Asia).
- Familiarize yourself with Japanese ingredients that are naturally vegetarian, such as the many different kinds of tofu and other soy products (strawberry flavoured soymilk, anyone?), noodles, *konbu* (kelp) and mushroom-based broths for soup.
- Think about using these ingredients in exciting, non-traditional ways. As you have learnt this month, miso is an extremely popular fermented food with a rich history in Japan. Miso soups can be enhanced in a variety of ways, but did you know that the soybean paste makes an excellent dressing as well? Try blending miso paste, lemon juice, garlic, and your sweetener of choice for a unique salad or roasted veggie dressing. A similar blend would



also serve as a rich marinade for baked or pan-fried firm tofu, which could be eaten with rice and veggies or even in a sandwich. 'Silken', or soft tofu, can be used as more than just an addition to soups or as a cold side dish. The soft white wonder gives smoothies a great texture and a protein punch! Try it also as an alternative to egg salad as a sandwich spread, mashed and seasoned with garlic or onion powder, turmeric, and paprika. The possibilities really are endless, and there is no need to spend exorbitant amounts of yen making these creative meals using widely available local ingredients!

- Remember that many Japanese fast foods that aren't normally vegetarian, such as gyoza dumplings, curry rice, or yakisoba fried noodles, can be recreated at home inexpensively! Search for veggie Japanese/Asian recipes online and you will get a plethora of ideas. A good cookbook for plant-based Asian cuisine is "*The Asian Vegan Kitchen*" by Hema Parekh.
- If Japanese food just isn't cutting it or you want more variety, check out the various Japan-based grocery ordering websites that will deliver straight to your door. Many do free delivery with a minimum purchase.
 - indojin.com is a great website specifically for inexpensive beans and nuts, originating from India.
 - store.alishan.jp is great for natural/organic/vegetarian products
 - yoyomarket.jp has a mix of Costco foods and organic products

EATING OUT

How difficult it is to eat out as a veggie in this country will generally depend on three factors: (1) your location, (2) your Japanese ability, and (3) how strict you are about what you eat.

(1) Living in or near a larger city means having easy access to foreign cuisines such as Thai, Indian, and Italian, which usually have plenty of vegetarian options. You should also be able to find vegetarian or macrobiotic (マクロビ) restaurants. In fact, many veggie restaurants in Japan are heavily inspired by macrobiotic practices, or the belief that eating certain foods can lead to longevity. Yin-yang philosophy is central to macrobiotic cuisine so great attention is paid to seasonal foods and to various aspects of balance. Brown rice, or *genmai* (玄米) will often be the focus of meals, accompanied by fermented bean products and vegetables.

For a traditional Japanese vegan experience (probably better saved for a special occasion, as the price can run quite high), give *shojin ryori* a try! This is a plant-based cuisine, sometimes served at Buddhist temples and special restaurants. Similar to macrobiotic fare, a lot of thought is put in to the seasonality of ingredients in this temple cuisine. Make sure to call in advance to reserve, as your experience will likely be an elaborate multi-course meal.

(2) Obviously, if your spoken Japanese is decent or you are with someone whose is, it will be easier to explain what you can and cannot eat. Simply saying that you are vegetarian will frequently not be understood, and there are cross-cultural differences in what is considered to be meat or an animal by-product. People may think a dish is 'vegetarian' if it simply



contains *little* pieces of meat or meat/fish based stock, so be wary. For those of you with little Japanese ability or who want to ensure they are being understood, it may be worth printing out these 'dining out cards' created by a blogger, set out to help people with dietary restrictions in Japan communicate their requests (<http://www.justhungry.com/japan-dining-out-cards>).

(3) Do you mind that *katsuo dashi* is almost omnipresent? As just one example of a sneaky animal product, this aforementioned bonito flake fish stock is a popular umami flavour additive in everything from miso soups to dipping sauces. If you are determined to avoid it, plan ahead or prepare to be creative when eating at Japanese restaurants.

Personally, I have found the best of luck doing so at udon, soba, and sushi restaurants. For both udon and soba, it is always possible to set aside the fishy sauce and make your own dipping sauce from soy sauce and other condiments provided, such as green onion, ginger, or radish. Sushi places will have *kappamaki* (cucumber sushi), and sometimes *inarizushi* (sweet tofu skin stuffed with rice), among other veggie varieties. Most of these restaurants will also offer vegetable tempura, which is traditionally vegan. If all else fails and your dining mates insist on *yakiniku*, a combini will save you with a light but adequate meal. Look for the aforementioned *inarizushi*, onigiri such as *konbu*, *umeboshi* (pickled dried plum), or *wakame* (a different type of seaweed), as well as prepared salads, nuts, fruit, and other snacks.

After a while, eating veggie in Japan will be a breeze! And for those times that it's not, a good attitude and sense of humor will go a long way. *Itadakimasu* and *ganbatte ne!*

Ariane is a Canadian first year ALT living in Tokushima-Ken, Shikoku...and is one-half of your brand new Food Editor duo! In her free time she can be found making food, reading about food, or eating food. Ariane's other hobbies include karaoke, traveling, and grassroots internationalization.



MISO SOUP WOULD LIKE A WORD

Xan Wetherall

Miso soup: we've all tasted it at least once, and how could we not? Here in Japan, miso is one of the "big five"—the "so" of the sa-shi-su-se-so Japanese seasoning arsenal. But even still, many people find the idea of preparing miso soup themselves to be a daunting task. How do I make the stock? What miso should I buy? What do I add once I've got the soup going? Because of these questions alone, many would-be soupers balk before they even consider the answers.

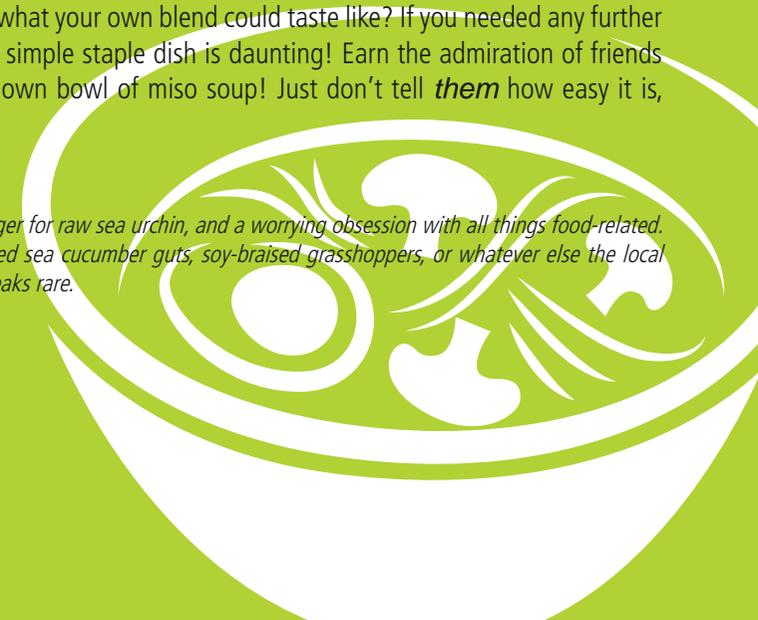
How about if I told you it was really a snap to prepare? That in just a few short paragraphs, you'd be ready to make your miso soup debut? Prepare to become a miso wizard!

First, the stock. You've probably heard of "dashi", the pale stock made primarily of dried bonito flakes and kombu seaweed used in so much of Japanese cooking. You've probably also wondered who would have the patience to make it themselves, and the answer is... not many at all. These days, many of even the most devout housewives (and husbands!) tend to use instant dashi stock for their miso soup base. The most popular of these is Ajinomoto's *hondashi* (ほんだし) mix, which can be identified by its uncannily fish food-like granular texture and odor, and can be found in any Japanese market. However, with just a few tablespoons of this magic powder in the suggested serving size pot of water, you're ready for the next step: the miso.

When it comes to the miso itself, the most common type is rice miso, or fermented soybeans mixed with rice. Rice miso is usually divided into three types: sweet, or *ama* (甘), mildly sweet, *amakuchi* (甘口), and salty-dry, *karakuchi* (辛口). So, which one is appropriate for miso soup? The answer is... all of them. With miso, it purely comes down to what taste suits you! Different regions of Japan have different preferences, so if you like what you're downing at your local sushi shop, it's worth asking the chef what kind of miso he's using! Add a heaping spoonful or two of your miso pick to your boiling stock, mix it in well, taste often to make sure it's to your liking, and you've got your miso soup!

Wait! Aren't we forgetting something? Right, the rest of the ingredients! If you want to stick to tradition, simple cubed tofu, wakame seaweed, and a sprinkle of chopped green onion is the way to go. If you'd like to get more creative, just remember: miso soup is pretty free-form, and incredibly forgiving. If you like it, put it in, and see how it works out! Feeling a bit bolder about that sneaky soup? Curious as to what your own blend could taste like? If you needed any further persuading, just remember: everyone *else* still thinks this simple staple dish is daunting! Earn the admiration of friends and coworkers alike just by whipping them up their very own bowl of miso soup! Just don't tell *them* how easy it is, superstar. Now get out there and season!

Xan is a third-year Fukushima ALT with a mottled heritage, a deep hunger for raw sea urchin, and a worrying obsession with all things food-related. She is often sighted in different bits of Japan, up to her eyes in pickled sea cucumber guts, soy-braised grasshoppers, or whatever else the local specialties might be. Xan likes her fish raw, her sake strong, and her steaks rare.





uniform ruffled,
head hung low in autumn rest,
train jolts textbook shut.

Katie McIntosh
Kobe



MONTHLY HAIKU CONTEST

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

PHOTOGRAPHY WINNERS

So that's where they go in winter
Stuart meadows, Fukui

#2

You've already seen Clay McIntosh's hilarious winning photograph on the cover of this month's issue, now take a look at the two runners-up from the October Photography Competition!

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



Untitled
Stephen Harmon

#3

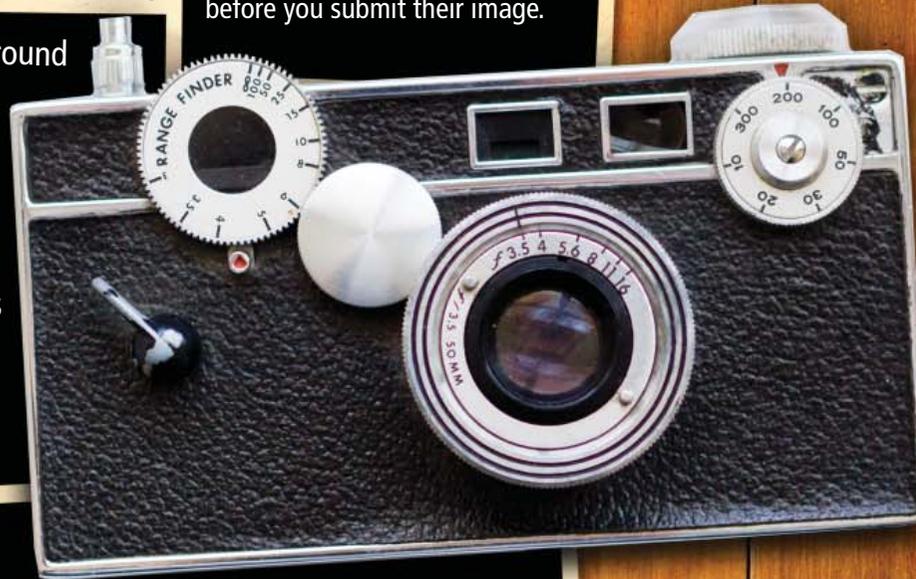


MONTHLY PHOTOGRAPHY CONTEST

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

Submissions should be original, high quality JPG files. Contestants may submit one photo each month. This contest is for JET participants only. The theme for this month's competition is "The Spirit of Christmas". Send your entries to contest@ajet.net. Current National AJET council members are not eligible to enter. In the case that you submit photographs where people are clearly featured, you must get permission from those featured before you submit their image.

With the holiday season just around the corner, this month's theme is "The Spirit of Christmas"! Of course, you're free to interpret the theme however you will—think outside the box and your photo may end up on top of December's issue!



Please submit your photos by **November 25th**. A shortlist will be created and you will have one week to vote for your favourite photo via online poll at www.ajet.net/photos. Voting will be open from November 26th until midnight on December 3rd.

Ownership/ Use Rights

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



HOKKAIDO SNOW TOUR 2013



"Best winter ever. Hokkaido was damn cool" Nic Bunce, Wakayama-ken

"One of the best investments I made all year, wouldn't have missed it for anything..." Dalton Polyvas, Embetsu-cho, Hokkaido

"The powder in Hokkaido is incredible. If you like skiing/boarding, do not miss this trip. It's definitely worth it. The HAJET crew does a great job!" Evan Milton, Okayama-ken

Greetings from Hokkaido AJET's Social Coordinator, Mikaly. With winter fast approaching, I'm delighted to announce details for HAJET's biggest, and most thrilling event of the year...



The HAJET Snow Tour.

Every year ALTs from all over Japan participate in HAJET's Snow Tour to experience the swish world class ski resort of Niseko and to check out the world famous snow and ice sculptures of the Sapporo Yuki Matsuri.

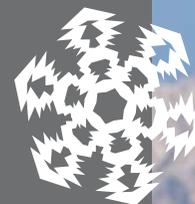
Whether you are in Okinawa, Wakayama, Fukui or Fukushima, this is YOUR chance to join us for 2013!

Date: Saturday, February 2nd – Tuesday, February 5th
(Please note that nenkyu [annual leave] for Monday and Tuesday will be required).

Cost: ¥ 30,000 (a deposit of ¥ 10,000 is due by November 30th)
This price includes accommodation, three breakfasts, two dinners and buses to/from Sapporo.

For full trip details please visit www.hajet.org

All questions and inquiries can come to me, Mikaly, at: social@HAJET.org



ダーツ Darts #8



Students practice asking and responding to questions./ 質問の仕方と答え方を練習する。



Worksheets
ワークシート



Pairs
ペア



20 mins
20分



JHS1
中学校 1



Summary

This is a simplified version of Battleship. It can be used to practice yes-and-no questions and responses.

概要

バトルシップの簡単バージョン。Yes/Noの質問と回答を練習できる。

Prepare a blank "Battleship" grid with the rows being one sentence variable, such as subject, and the columns being another sentence variable, such as predicate. Ensure that the contents are matched to a yes-and-no question format. For example, the question form might be "Were you [action] [time]," the row values "study English", "watch TV", etc., and the column values "yesterday afternoon," "five o'clock Wednesday," etc.

1 バトルシップのワークシートを用意する。横の列のラベルにYes/No質問の一部を書き、縦の列のラベルに文の続きを書く。例えばWere youを練習する場合、横の列にwatch TVやstudy Englishを書き、縦の列にyesterday afternoonやfive o'clock Wednesdayなどを書く。

In the grid, students write the numbers 1 through 5, each in a different space of the grid. Each number represents the amount of points that space is worth.

2 生徒はマスに1~5の数字を1つずつ書く。相手がマスを当てるとその点数がもらえる。

Students ask each other questions from the grid. If the corresponding space is blank, the student gives a negative answer and no points are awarded. If the corresponding space has a number in it, the student must give a positive answer and tell the other student the number of points in the square.

3 生徒は交互に質問をする。マスに数字が入っていない場合、相手は否定文で答えて得点はない。数字が入っている場合、肯定の答えをして、質問した生徒はその数字の点数をもらう。

Set a time limit and have the students keep track of how many points they find. The student with the most points is the winner of that pair.

4 時間制限を決めて、時間になるまで続ける。ペアで得点の多い生徒が勝ちとなる。

Remarks

The example grid below is for the question form "Does [person] [action]?"



備考

「Does [人] [動詞]？」の例：

	like fruit	run fast	have a dog	watch TV	play tennis
you	5				
he				2	4
they					
she		3			
I	1				