



SUMMER SPECIAL

Editors Letters and Our Favorite
Articles of the Year

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CONNECT



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LETTER FROM THE HEAD EDITOR

After being a part of the **CONNECT** team for the past three years it's time for me to say *sayonara* to the magazine and the rad team behind it! It has been a truly fulfilling three years together volunteering for this magazine and I have learned so much about publishing; I also learnt so much about Japan that I previously wouldn't have had the chance to, and I hope you did too! Even though my Japan chapter has already closed, reading **CONNECT** allows me to digitally travel back to a place that I will always be extremely fond of, flaws and all. Whether you spent two weeks holiday here or lived here for five years, Japan has a way of stealing a small piece of everyone's heart.

If you are still awaiting for your Japan journey to begin, my first pick of favourite articles is ["To Pack or Not to Pack"](#) which was carefully put together by our Fashion Editor, Shannon, for all hopeful folks as we wait for borders to re-open fully. I love this article because it gives recent information about the things you really *need* and the stuff which is available for purchase online and offline. I was in the same boat when I first arrived and I definitely could have skipped buying all the cheap stickers and keyrings that I never used. I was so scared of this foreign concept of *omiyage*, but in reality you could bring nothing and it'd be totally fine. It's always better to buy your work clothes in Japan because they are already made in work-appropriate cuts, which was an area of confusion for me. At the end of the day you can always repurchase things if you leave them at home, however it's a pain when you've overpacked.

Japan has many famous and timeless horror films which are definitely not my cup of tea. However, Japan has a lot of creepy written folklore and is a heavily superstitious culture which I am very into. I have loved learning more about this lore through a podcast called [Uncanny Japan](#). With Obon just a month away I have chosen ["For Love or Vengeance"](#) as my second article to get you in the spirit of this major Japanese holiday. It delves into *hyaku monogatari* which is Japan's version of telling chilling stories in the darkness.

My noteworthy choice is a satirical piece written by our Community Section Editor, Cameron, poking fun at the Go 2 Campaign which was the infamous domestic travel campaign by the Japanese government. Read more about it in ["Go 2 Campaign"](#).

It has been a pleasure being the Head Editor for two years and I am so grateful for the two different teams that I led and the people I met along the way. I wish the best for the 2021-2022 team and I can't wait to see where **CONNECT** will go in the future.

Alice was an ALT for Fujioka City for two years before returning to her home country of New Zealand. She recently completed a season of kiwifruit picking in the beautiful Bay of Plenty area. She has been thoroughly enjoying relearning her country and telling stories of her times in Japan to whoever will listen.

Alice Ridley (Gunma 2018-2020)

To Pack or Not to Pack, That Is the Question

FASHION AND BEAUTY
ADVICE FROM
CURRENT JETS



After months of pandemic-induced closure, Japan's borders are now loosening restrictions and welcoming new residents. This is a particularly joyous moment for me, a long awaiting 2020 JET Programme participant, as we are finally preparing to arrive at our placements over the next few months. In anticipation of our packing struggles, **CONNECT** have enticed a number of current JETs into sharing their experience, knowledge, and hindsight regrets.

Shannon Stocker
(Hyōgo)



ALL THAT GLITTERS IS NOT GOLD

Packing is like Marmite, it can induce an intense fear or excitement, depending on the type of person you are. I am often tempted to pack every single piece of clothing I own *just in case*, but sometimes it serves to remember that old saying; 'all that glitters is not gold'. So, to avoid the perils of over- or under-packing, here's some valuable advice from people who have done both . . .

Come as light as possible because you're going to accumulate a lot of stuff while you're here. Seriously consider selling a lot of your stuff too if you think you'll be in Japan for a while. I packed all of my belongings and put them in storage. I know that when I go back a lot of things I thought would be important to me aren't anymore. The most useful thing you can bring is money. **KAYLA FRANCIS (TŌKYŌ)**

Underwear and bras. I'm busty and the underwear here look like doilies. I also order from Victoria Secret and they arrive very quickly.

Towels (on your first night you might be so tired and you just wanna take a shower and then you'll realize I don't have a towel ... bring a towel!) **ELVIA VALLES (SAGA)**

MUST BRING ITEMS

“Toothpaste and travel-size deodorant. I don't know of Japanese versions that do the job as well as the American versions. Western deodorant is effectively treated like gold among my friends. **IZUMI HANSEN (TŌKYŌ)**”

“I'm glad I bought my favourite perfume, deodorant, toothpaste and makeup. I'm also glad I brought my leather jacket and a comfortable pair of heels (that I barely ever wear) for my annoyingly wide feet. **KAYLA FRANCIS (TŌKYŌ)**”

“DEODORANT! For the people in back deodorant!! Zero waste haircare. Clothes that made me feel myself. **ALICE RIDLEY (GUNMA)**”

PACKING REGRETS

I regret bringing a lot of clothes . . . I did so because I'm a chubby person and thought Japan would not carry plus size clothes. They do. But I'm also not living in an inaka area. So, it depends on your placement and availability.

I also brought summer wear that I never wore lol if you know you won't wear it don't bring it. Don't second guess or try to talk yourself into it. If you do regret not taking a clothing item you can always ask your family to send it to you later on. **ELVIA VALLES (SAGA)**

I would think about perfumes as Japanese people can be quite sensitive to smell. When I wear perfume I get anxious that it's too strong. Japanese people favour neutral smells. **ALICE RIDLEY (GUNMA)**

Outfits for wearing at home, T-shirts, warm sweaters. Japan has lots of seasonal goods made from the material that keeps you cool in summer heat and warm in winter cold. **NATALIA ORSHANSKAYA (NAGANO)**

I regret about 80% of the clothes I brought with me and think constantly about the things I chose to leave at home. For example, why did I bring three pairs of black heels that I never wear because they will probably kill me on my way to the train station? **KAYLA FRANCIS (TŌKYŌ)**

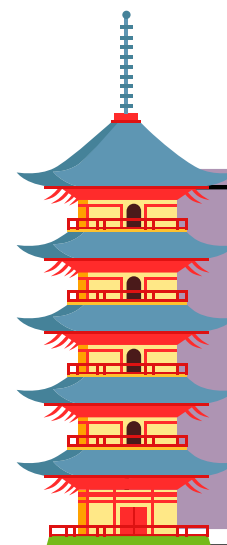
DRESS CODES

I'm at a private school and the dress code is a bit stricter than my friends' schools. When I first arrived I had to wear suit pants, a proper button down shirt and a necktie with a blazer on hand. Things have kind of relaxed since then as we've had a change of management and now things like polo shirts are more acceptable and we no longer have to wear neckties. I have definitely tried to push the limits at times, wearing turtlenecks and bright prints. I would definitely recommend testing the waters when you become comfortable at your school. **DAMIEN LEVI (TŌKYŌ)**

I wasn't told about the dress code. I was quite confused when I arrived and I would advise feeling it out of your own school once you arrive. Play it safe and then try new things. **ALICE RIDLEY (GUNMA)**

Semi-professional dress. A nice blouse and knee-length skirt with Oxfords were fine, but a put-together sweater and dark jeans with sneakers were also okay.

Suits were required for special events, like graduation or visits by delegations. I did stick to the dress code since it's respectful of the work being done in the school. **IZUMI HANSEN (TŌKYŌ)**



I assumed business and showed up in a blouse and dress pants. The other female teachers were in cool biz so the next day I dressed more comfortable for the weather but still professional. Never had a problem. **ELVIA VALLES (SAGA)**

I wasn't told my school's dress code before I left and it turned out there is no dress code at my work. Zara is my go to quick work attire store, but I recommend shopping thrift as much as you can. Standing out is not a bad thing. Be confident in your clothing choices! **ROBERT MCDONALD (TŌKYŌ)**

People in my office dress very smartly even the PE teachers when they're not in gym clothes. One of the PE teachers sometimes wears a waistcoat . . . I would say that I stick to the dress code but I have a lot more leeway since I am a woman and don't have to wear a suit. I normally wear a dress or a shirt with trousers/skirt. **KAYLA FRANCIS (TŌKYŌ)**

FOUR SEASONS

I packed only for the weather I was arriving in as I could only bring one suitcase on the flight I had. I packed a box of winter clothes and other stuff I might need later and got my family to send it once I found an apartment. **KAYLA FRANCIS (TŌKYŌ)**

I packed only for the season [that I arrived in] as I had no idea what to expect in Japan and never regretted it. **NATALIA ORSHANSKAYA (NAGANO)**

I'm from Wisconsin and never really liked summer so most of my clothes were more fall and winter clothing. I did buy light weight summer clothes for Japan but the bottoms weren't school appropriate so I never really wore them. **ELVIA VALLES (SAGA)**

IS THERE SOMETHING ON MY FACE?

Cramming a year's worth supply of your favourite skin and make-up products *might* seem like the logical thing to do but our sources tell us that Japan has some great alternative options for your faves. Before you stockpile and leave your local Superdrug half empty, have a read of our current JETs wise words, and you might be able to save some pennies.

WHAT BRANDS AND PRODUCTS HAVE YOU DISCOVERED THAT YOU CAN NO LONGER LIVE WITHOUT?

DHS is a popular brand here for a reason. I love their cleansing oil. It's cheap, effective and you can buy it in most drug stores.

I highly recommend going to the dermatologist here if you have any skin issues. Before I arrived in Japan my skin got really bad and the stuff my doctors gave me didn't help. I was heartbroken to get acne as an adult because I never had bad skin growing up and I take skincare very seriously (I love the Korean 10 step routine). My skin issues were caused by stress and also my hormones going crazy after I stopped taking the birth-control pill (no regrets) which apparently is super common. Moving here made it even worse and until I started going to a dermatologist it didn't get better. I was really worried they would tell me to go on the pill because it made me depressed. They did but thankfully after I explained the situation they were able to prescribe some vitamins and cream. The dermatologist is very cheap here and 70% is covered by our insurance. It took a long time for my skin to completely clear up (I'm talking months) but since then I haven't really broken out, not even on my period!

KAYLA FRANCIS (TŌKYŌ)

Innisfree. They have a green tea line and it's very nice and soothing. They also have gel creams which is great for oily skin because gel/jelly creams are moisturizing without being greasy.
ELVIA VALLES (SAGA)

CLEANSING OIL!!! I use the softymo speedy cleansing oil which is very gentle. What I like about this cleansing oil is that you don't have to double cleanse like other cleansing oil. Always check if it's required to do another cleanser after oil. **ALICE RIDLEY (GUNMA)**

Japan has a huge number of affordable skin care products with respect to local climate and environment. I would recommend bringing only the minimum things for your daily beauty routine. As soon as you settle in, you can buy everything you need from local drugstores. **NATALIA ORSHANSKAYA (NAGANO)**

I am currently using a significant amount of Elta MD, Thayers, Glossier, and Derma-E. For Japanese products, the onsen at home bath salts kits are significantly better than anything you could ever find at LUSH as well as the face masks here are such a higher quality for the price than outside Japan. Kose Q10, an amazing face cream I discovered in Japan, and Honpo eye cream are my current Japanese based skincare additions to my lineup. Honestly, Muji makes some great quality and affordable skin care products. I use their herbal facial mask that you apply after your cream and it locks in that lotion all day. Just an added barrier between your skin and the dry air.

ROBERT MCDONALD ((TŌKYŌ))



HAVE YOU HAD ANY DIFFICULTY FINDING YOUR FOUNDATION SHADE?

“It was easy for me because I took a picture of the MAC foundation I normally use and took it to the store. I then paid probably more than double what I did back home for it. I'm mixed race and my complexion changes in the sun. It's not easy here and you may end up just going to a store you know you can buy it from. It exists, you just might find yourself paying more for it. **KAYLA FRANCIS (TŌKYŌ)**”

“It has been easier for me because I have yellow undertones. I haven't seen much by way of tan, brown, or black shades in Tōkyō, so if you have a darker skin tone, you may want to consider bringing your own foundation. **IZUMI HANSEN (TŌKYŌ)**”

“Personally I don't often wear foundation because it's too hot in Kyushu. But I've never had a problem finding a shade. **ELVIA VALLES (SAGA)**”

WHAT IS THE PROTOCOL WITH TATTOOS AND PIERCINGS?

It is all ESID. I have pierced ears, four earrings and always wear them. I have three schools and so far no-one ever said anything to me, on the contrary, my teachers often show interest towards my accessories. As for the tatoo, I have it on my back, so it does not affect my daily life, but, for the onsens I have to cover it with a patch. **NATALIA ORSHANSKAYA (NAGANO)**

I have a septum piercing that I always had flipped up. I would never wear it down at school. Sometimes kids at elementary school would see it up my nose and ask questions but that's just kids being kids! I would try to avoid going to public events where I was wearing my ALT hat with it down. I would occasionally wear earrings in my ears but I felt this sometimes got side-eyes. **ALICE RIDLEY (GUNMA)**

A no go in my case, I was wearing a piercing in my ear during school in my first year and at the end of the day before I went home my supervisor very nicely asked me not to wear it again. I wasn't aware at the time that the school has a no-piercing rule. I was a bit surprised considering female coworkers had piercings in their ears! In terms of tattoos, mine are covered almost all the time by my clothing, however, when I wear sportswear or short socks they can show sometimes. I've never had anyone say anything about them being bad, just general interest when someone does notice. **DAMIEN LEVI (TŌKYŌ)**



IS WEARING NO MAKE-UP ACCEPTABLE IN WORK?

I think in inaka it's probably fine but I work in a private school in a very expensive/chic part of Tōkyō. Most of my coworkers wear some makeup and have their nails and hair done. That is nothing compared to how amazing the residents I see daily look. However, I simply do not have the time, money and patience to look like that every day. I love makeup and fashion and when I first arrived I wore makeup everyday. I live an hour away from my school and it was only a matter of time before I prioritised 10 minutes extra of sleep. My students were genuinely shocked to see me without makeup the first time. I mean that they full-on reacted, it wasn't rude or anything they just weren't used to it. It made me realise that they don't get to see women look casual very often and I thought it was important that they see that especially with any self-esteem issues they might be facing. So since then I rarely wear makeup to work unless I have plans afterwards. I'm sure my skin thanks me for it too. **KAYLA FRANCIS (TŌKYŌ)**

It's very uncommon to not wear at least a little foundation, eye shadow, and maybe some lip color, even to the grocery store. I always feel out of place without makeup on at work or a long day out doing activities, though I've gotten over wearing no makeup to the grocery store if that's the only place I'm going that day. If you want to get away with just a little makeup (or no makeup), just put on a mask. **IZUMI HANSEN (TŌKYŌ)**

THINGS ARE GETTING HAIRY

My wavy hair freaks out in the humidity, freezing temperatures, or even changes in water. If you're anything like me, you'll be worrying, almost daily, about how on earth you will tame your tresses in an entirely new climate . . .

I have always dyed my hair at the hairdresser's and upon coming to Japan I started struggling with my hair somewhere after six months. My European hair is thin and it was hard to find the Japanese hair colour that would suit me. Please remember that in case you are blonde or have a light hair colour, the local bleach will be too strong for you. Fortunately, after experimenting with local shades, I am back to my light pink hair again. **NATALIA ORSHANSKAYA (NAGANO)**

I have mildly wavy hair and Japanese people would often be confused about how much my hair varies day-to-day. **ALICE RIDLEY (GUNMA)**

If you have curly and texture hair, I definitely recommend bringing your comfortable shampoos and conditioners with you but also double check to see if maybe you can order it on Amazon.

Also depending on your placement you might be able to find your brand in stores! The weight from shampoo and conditioner bottles add up in your suitcase so save it as much as possible! **ELVIA VALLES (SAGA)**

To Pack,
or Not to Pack
That Is the
Question



To Pack
or Not
That
Question

THAT TIME OF THE MONTH

For those of us who menstruate, the fear of not finding the right products can be daunting. We all have our preferred pads, tampons, or cups, and a life without them can feel uncomfortable. I have heard horror stories about having to adapt to a tampon-free world, but is that really the reality?

“ Japan has a variety of period products although you may find they are thicker and longer than in your own country.
NATALIA ORSHANSKAYA (NAGANO) ”

You can buy everything here. I'm not going to lie, I think the products suck either way too thin/small or thick. However, it's still useable and the answer to those questions depends on how picky you are about it.
KAYLA FRANCIS (TŌKYŌ)



WOULD YOU RECOMMEND BRINGING PERIOD PRODUCTS THAT YOU ARE USED TO?

You can definitely find pads in multiple sizes at local drugstores. Some menstrual cups are available online, but not as widely as in the US. **IZUMI HANSEN (TŌKYŌ)**

“ I brought a cup and I have never had to take a second glance at the horrid pad sections in Japanese supermarkets. **ALICE RIDLEY (GUNMA)** ”

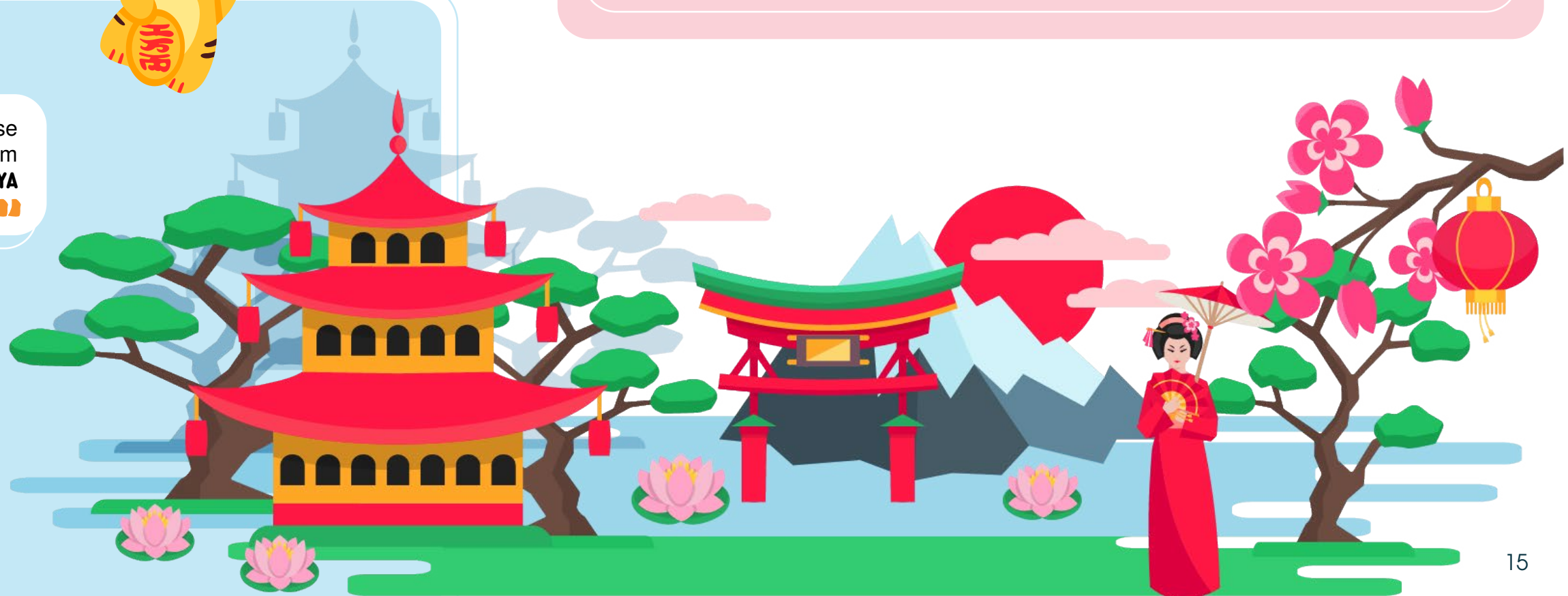


ARE TAMPONS HARD TO COME BY?

“ Yes! Bulk the tampons if you use them regularly. My parents send them to me in bulk. **NATALIA ORSHANSKAYA (NAGANO)** ”

“ Yes, I have never seen tampons being sold. **ALICE RIDLEY (GUNMA)** ”

“ Drugstore Mori and I think any drugstore has them but not a lot of options for tampons. **ELVIA VALLES (SAGA)** ”



SAY YES TO THE DRESS

No, we're not talking about walking down the aisle. We're talking about whether I should *really* have a packing list that is 50% dresses? Inevitably, some of them will have to go, but how did current JETs fare with the clothing decisions?

Tall, petite, plus-sized, and everything in between

In Europe my size was S/M, in Japan I need to buy clothes of M/L/LL sizes. However, I struggle to find clothes for my teenage daughter because Japanese kids and women are slim.

I regret not bringing more underwear along. I tried to find something from local stores but it's either the design or the size issue that I don't like. **NATALIA ORSHANSKAYA (NAGANO)**

There's a store called Rodeo. I got my winter coat there for a Hokkaido trip it was in the men's large and tall section and for nice prices!

I'm busty so I order [bras] online.
ELVIA VALLES (SAGA)

I am fairly petite (5ft 2in) and Japan has been kind of great for me in that respect. I'm sure the tall girls struggle. However, I'm also quite curvy and the style here is very baggy/straight (I hope that makes sense) which looks awful on my body, I like things that go in at the waist. There are thousands of stores in Tōkyō but sometimes it can all feel very similar.

I would actually highly recommend you don't buy any clothing in advance unless you know you're going to struggle due to your height/size. I bought a few things from H&M before I arrived here and honestly, you don't know what the style or weather is going to be like until you get here. A lot of things I thought would be OK weren't. You need the money more than anything.

KAYLA FRANCIS (TŌKYŌ)

I brought [bras] from my home country. My friend noticed that she had a hard time finding unpadded bras anywhere, so I followed her advice and brought ones I knew would fit without padding. If you have bigger breasts, you will have a harder time finding a properly fitting bra. An aside: Wacoal is now available in some places in and around Tōkyō. **IZUMI HANSEN (TŌKYŌ)**

OUTSIDE OF WORK HOURS, HOW DO YOU DRESS CASUALLY?

“This depends on where you live, but dressing to the level of sweatpants anywhere in Japan (unless it’s late at night) isn’t very common. You probably won’t be called out for dressing in sweatpants, though you’ll notice very fast that nobody else is wearing them. I tend to dress smart casual (knee-length skirt, a blouse or nice T-shirt, and sneakers) when I’m not working.”

IZUMI HANSEN (TŌKYŌ)

Living in Tōkyō gives you the chance to have fun with fashion and most clothes are fine. I literally saw two girls in Shibuya yesterday wearing bright pink sweatsuits and blonde dreadlocks. I will say that a lot of people dress really well here though like some people manage to make a pair of jeans and a T-shirt look elevated. I don’t see that many people wearing leggings as pants, they normally wear shorts or something over them. That hasn’t stopped me from wearing leggings if I’m just going to the supermarket.

KAYLA FRANCIS (TŌKYŌ)



I have definitely changed the way I have dressed outside of work. If you are placed in a smaller city it is safe to assume that you will constantly be recognised as ALT sensei. I cover up my cleavage up fully at all times now, I often notice the size of my breasts more than back in New Zealand. Sad face. Thanks Japan for making me feel like my body is no longer mine. No matter what you wear you will automatically look more “sexy” than your Japanese counterparts.

ALICE RIDLEY (GUNMA)

“I’ve really enjoyed being able to mix up my style a lot while in Japan. I lost 10 kg in my first year here so I ended up having to buy pretty much a whole new wardrobe. I’ve been experimenting with different styles and cuts, last winter I got really into turtlenecks. Summer is always a mission though, it’s so hot that it’s hard to feel comfortable in anything but I’ve found a combination of light denim shorts with a tank-top underneath a short sleeve button down looks good and gives you breathability.”

DAMIEN LEVI (TŌKYŌ)

Thank you to those of you who submitted questions and those who took the time to answer in such honest and thoughtful ways. If you have read this article and still have some nagging questions, please email us connect.fashion@ajet.net and we will be happy to find an answer for you.

*Shannon Stocker is an incoming Assistant Language Teacher on the JET Programme and the Fashion & Beauty Editor for **CONNECT**.*



Rebecca Paterson
(Kyoto)

愛や復讐のために

THREE HAUNTING TALES TO START YOUR HYAKU MONOGATARI

Cooler temperatures, crisp autumn skies, and shorter days—the traditional spooky season of Japan has long passed with the end of Obon in mid-August, but, for many of us, this gradual decline into the lifelessness of winter brings with it the anticipation for our own festival of the dead. For this year's Halloween, how about something a little different? Japan is well known as a country of rich paranormal traditions, diverse folklore, and terrifying filmography that both haunts and delights the imaginations of all. For those of us who enjoy the thrill of fear, one ghost story isn't enough. But what about one hundred?

Hyaku Monogatari (lit. one hundred stories) is a form of entertainment that grew in popularity during the Edo Period (1603-1868). A group of friends would bring a mirror into a dark room, then light one hundred different candles around it—though nowadays electric lights, TVs, and phones also suffice. One by one, each person would tell a ghost story. Upon finishing each story, a light would be extinguished.

Much like a seance, tension, excitement, and fear escalate with anticipation as the room slowly dims. When all 100 frightening tales have been completed and the storytellers are finally enveloped in darkness, a spectre is said to appear in the mirror.

If you'd like to try *Hyaku Monogatari* yourself this Halloween, here are three of Japan's extraordinary supernatural tales to start you off:

YOTSUYA KAIDAN

In Yotsuya, Tokyo, there was once a masterless samurai named Iyemon who desired to marry a beautiful woman, Oiwa. However, her father was aware of Iyemon's unsavory character and refused his request. In a rage, Iyemon murdered her and blamed the crime on bandits. Iyemon then convinced Oiwa to marry him by promising to avenge her father's death.

Their marriage was not a happy one. Growing increasingly frustrated with his life of poverty, Iyemon began to direct his pent-up anger onto Oiwa. As his feelings of resentment grew, he began an affair with a wealthier woman, Oume. Together, they conspired to murder Oiwa in order to marry. Oume prepared some poison and Iyemon then gave it to Oiwa, claiming it was makeup. However, the poison did not kill Oiwa, and instead left her face mangled and bleeding; her left eye began to sag, her skin scarred, and her hair fell out. Disappointed with his failed attempt to kill her and growing disgusted with his wife's face, Iyemon bribed a local man, Takuetsu, to rape Oiwa to provide a grounds for divorce. On the night Takuetsu attempted to commit his crime, he

was put off by Oiwa's ghastly appearance. In response to her disbelief, Takuetsu showed her a mirror, and she flew into a rage, grabbed the nearest sword, and attempted to kill him. In the ensuing struggle, Oiwa fell and cut her own throat.

Iyemon finally succeeded with his engagement to Oume, but on the night of their wedding an apparition of Oiwa appeared before him. Panicked, he unsheathed his sword and cut off the spectre's head—before the vision disappeared, revealing the decapitated body of Oume. Iyemon was shocked at his heinous mistake and fled the room. Before him, again, appeared Oiwa, and, again, he slashed at the phantom. This time, however, Iyemon had slain his father-in-law. With no way to redeem himself, Iyemon purged his bride's family and fled from the town. Wherever he went, he was pursued by the ghost of Oiwa, her face manifesting in lanterns, and her dishevelled hair attempting to ensnare him.

Descending into madness, Iyemon fled into the forest, where he was eventually hunted down and killed by his brother-in-law.

It is said that Oiwa still haunts to this day.

Yotsuya Kaidan's ghastly imagery and relentless haunting of the wronged Oiwa make this one of, if not the most, famous ghost stories in Japan. First told in a masterful and grisly Kabuki production, *Yotsuya Kaidan* gripped the imagination of the masses of the 19th century. Even now, Oiwa's image has defined what we associate with modern Japanese ghosts—vengeful, unrelenting, and grotesque.



BOTAN DŌRŌ

On the first night of *Obon* many years ago, a man named Hagiwara Shinzaburo was out walking, enjoying the local festivities. On his way home through the dark woods, he saw a peony lantern moving slowly in his direction. The owner was a maid accompanying her mistress—a young, beautiful woman—on a nighttime stroll. He was immediately enchanted by this woman, Otsuyu. They arranged to meet again, and before long, Hagiwara and Otsuyu had fallen passionately in love and spent every night together.

One night, a neighbour, woken by the light of the peony lantern and concerned at Hagiwara's visibly deteriorating health, went to visit Hagiwara's dwelling. Peeping through a gap in the sliding doors, he saw Hagiwara nestled in the bones of a skeleton. Terrified of the sight, the neighbour hurried to find a Buddhist priest for advice. The priest warned Hagiwara of the perils of mingling with the dead and gave him a talisman to protect his home against evil spirits. It proved to be effective.

Distraught with being separated from her love, Otsuyu came to Hagiwara every night, calling his name beneath his window and beckoning him to reunite with her. Eventually, Hagiwara was no longer able to resist the temptation and left the safety of his home. He disappeared into the night. The next morning, his body was found laying over a gravestone, embracing the skeleton of a young woman.



Botan Doro (lit. The Peony Lantern) originated in China as one story of the Buddhist moral text "Jiandeng Xinhua." It came to Japan in the 17th century and rose in popularity after its publication in Asai Ryōi's "Otogi Bōko." Part of its popularity was thanks to its unique balance between passion and horror—juxtaposing beauty and romance with terror and death. Beginning with what sounds like a delightful love story, the story transforms with the neighbour's nighttime investigation, shocking audiences with the striking image of a human skeleton. Some audiences may have even felt sympathetic to Otsuyu—unable to move on and stuck lingering in the world of the living in hopes of finding love. All these emotions make *Botan Dōrō* an unforgettable tale.

MUJINA

Long ago, on Akasaka road, Tokyo, there was a slope called *Kii-no-kuni-zaka*. On one side was an imperial residence surrounded by a deep, wide, old moat. After nightfall, the slope was poorly lit, so the darkness was quite unnerving. Despite its convenience as a shortcut, people would avoid this slope because of the *mujina*, and the most recent account is as follows:

One night, an old merchant was hurrying up the slope when he saw a woman by the moat, weeping profusely into her kimono sleeves. Afraid that she might be contemplating drowning herself, the merchant ran over to see what was wrong. She ignored his questions and continued sobbing, so instead, the man urged her to go home, fearful of what might be lurking in the dark. She slowly turned around, still covering her face, and turned towards him. She slowly removed her sleeve from her face and revealed nothing—no eyes, no mouth, no nose. The man screamed and scrambled up the slope, fleeing into the darkness. Not once looking back, he eventually saw a light ahead and ran over to it, only to find a soba-seller setting up a stall for the night. The seller, concerned, asked him what was wrong and whether the merchant had been attacked, to which the merchant replied that he had only been scared. The soba-seller asked what scared him, but the merchant could not explain what it was.



“Was it something like this?” asked the soba-seller, stroking his face and revealing a smooth surface with no features.

The lantern went out.

This version of the *mujina*, also known as *nopperabō*, came to prominence thanks to its inclusion in Lafcadio Hearn’s famous collection of ghost stories—“*Kaidan*” (1904). Although the *mujina* initially appears as a beautiful young woman, evoking imagery from stories like *Yotsuya Kaidan* and *Botan Dōrō*, this may not be the true form of the *mujina*. In fact, many would not call her a ghost at all. The *mujina* can shapeshift—we see it here as both the young woman and the male soba-seller. Rather than being classified as a ghost (*yūrei*), the *mujina* is a monster or ghoul (*yōkai*), much like the *kappa* or the *rokurokubi*.

Now you have the first three of your 100 tales. Will you move onto the fourth? For those who do, when you go to turn off the final light, just be wary of what might be lurking in the darkness, listening to your stories. . . .

Rebecca Paterson is a first-year PhD student living in Kyoto. After studying Japanese Studies in the UK and finishing her undergraduate studies with a dissertation about Japanese ghosts, she came to Japan to pursue her passion for language-learning and psychology. Rebecca still enjoys a good ghost story but can't bring herself to watch any films because the visuals are too scary.

LETTER FROM THE ASSISTANT EDITOR

Dear Friends and Enemies of **CONNECT**,

It's me, your Assistant Editor Damien. I'd like to thank you all for another year packed full of your stories, art, photography, recipes, poetry, adventures, and everything in between. Most of all, I'd like to thank you for the time you have given us. Here's to those who have stuck around with us for these crazy two years, we wouldn't be here sharing international life in Japan every month without you.

It's definitely a bittersweet time for me—I'm wrapping up my three years in the Tōkyō Metropolis and trading them in for the decidedly, non-metropolis streets of Auckland, New Zealand. Being a part of the **CONNECT** team for the last two years has had its ups and downs, but I'm proud of the work I've done and I'm really excited to put these new magazine skills to good use as I try to establish my own publication back home.

Enough about me, let's get into the articles that I've chosen to republish for our special July retrospective issue! They actually both come from the same issue and that's got nothing to do with the fact that I got to pick my favourites last out of all our editors (maybe just a little).

The first piece is Janine de Villa's dive into trying to understand the ongoing cultural juggernaut that is *Kimetsu no Yaiba* (*Demon Slayer*). It's a force to be reckoned with that shows no signs of slowing. This article, "[An Open Taishō Secret](#)" was originally published in our December 2020 issue but continues to be relevant now in July of 2021. You can't go into a supermarket or convenience store without seeing some snack-food brand collaborating with the series. If you're one of the few who's still yet to watch the anime or read the manga and are confused by its overwhelming presence in the cultural lexicon, this is a read you can't miss. So here's your second chance to get your eyes on it!

My second choice also comes from our December 2020 issue, and it's one that will aid the incoming assistant language teachers (ALTs) hopefully heading to Japan this year to take over

for those of us heading home. "[Nihongo Lingo](#)" from our very own General Section Editor Sarah Baughn, is a crash course guide in indispensable and essential Japanese for ALTs. Sarah breaks things down for you in sections like People and Places (know who's who and where to be), Classroom Language (keeping the eyes and ears on you), Greetings (beyond the simple "*konnichiwa*") and Asking, Giving and Receiving (I can eat this *omiyage*, right?). She also goes the extra mile with a variety of detailed studying resources. If you're a beginner Japanese speaker headed over to *nihon*, it's worth your time to give this one a good read.

Gonna go all in and give a special shout out to another December 2020 article, "[Dungeons & Dragons in the Digital Age](#)" by our Entertainment Editor Rachel Fagundes and Reese Mills. I know many friends who had to take their tabletop games online over the last few years and it's an interesting new way to play with a lot of fun opportunities for story-telling. Don't let distance be an obstacle in your way to role-playing!

Well that's me for our 2020-2021 cycle. It's been a wild one but I wouldn't change a thing. A highlight for me was definitely when we decided on a new stylistic direction for the cover and inside of **CONNECT** and I hope you all enjoyed our fresh look. Can't wait to see what shape the 2021-2022 cycle takes! じゃね!

Damien is finishing up his time as an ALT in Tōkyō, slowly clearing out his apartment and saying sad farewells to his friends. He is excited for the new things on the horizon as he returns to New Zealand for a new chapter, with the hopes of starting his own publication. Keep in touch with him and get access to his quest to eat at every cool new restaurant in NZ over on Instagram [@damienlevi](#).

Damien Levi (Tōkyō)



AN OPEN TAISHŌ SECRET: THE POPULARITY OF “KIMETSU NO YAIBA”

Janine de Villa (Wakayama)

I can't speak for other Assistant Language Teachers, but one of my favorite seasons to go all out in a lesson is Halloween. Every year, I try to figure out what's popular among my students and base my Halloween costume on that. This year was a no-brainer. I decided to go as Kochō Shinobu, a character from the hit show *Kimetsu no Yaiba* (*Demon Slayer*) and, needless to say, the kids (and even the adults!) went crazy for it.

In this article, armed with my humble observations, knowledge of the first season, and my love for all things *shōnen*, I want to tackle what makes *Kimetsu no Yaiba* so special.

But first, let me clear some things up: Shōnen (少年) is a Japanese word used to describe young boys under 15 years of age. As a manga term, it encompasses a whole genre of anime and manga targeted towards that demo-graphic. The majority of works in this genre are action-based adventures, typically undertaken by a male protagonist and his cohort, in a fictional setting. Though some titles, especially sports-centric ones, ground themselves more on reality, a common feature in every shōnen work is climactic battle sequences.

Kimetsu no Yaiba fits this description well. Serialized in the popular *Shōnen Jump*, a weekly manga anthology magazine, *Kimetsu no Yaiba* tells the story of Kamado Tanjirō, the eldest son of a coal-mining family. Tanjirō's world is teeming with demons, who eventually attack his family while he is away for work. Tanjirō goes home to find his little sister, Nezuko, the only one with her life spared, but at the cost of having been turned into a demon. From here, Tanjirō joins the Demon Slayer Corps in the hopes of finding a way to bring his sister back to normal.

So, how did *Kimetsu no Yaiba* become so popular?

THE UNIQUE SIBLING DYNAMIC

One of the reasons I gravitated towards the shōnen genre at such a young age was how straight-to-the-point its premise is. *Dragonball* is about a boy set out to collect magical wish-granting dragon balls, *One Piece* is about a boy in a journey to discover the ultimate treasure called One Piece; and *Kimetsu no Yaiba* is about a young boy who slays demons. What makes *Kimetsu no Yaiba* stand out among the rest, however, is the relationship between Tanjirō, and his little sister, Nezuko.

The classic shōnen protagonist is viewed as the courageous underdog by society. He is usually accompanied by a group of equally formidable friends that he would take a bullet for. However, whenever the show calls for a major battle scene, the main character faces the enemy alone. Tanjirō, however, is always

Janine de Villa dressed up as Shinobu



accompanied by Nezuko, hidden in the box he carries on his back. Only when the going gets tough for Tanjiro does she spring out, using her demon powers to aid her brother against other demons. She *literally* has his back.

Tanjiro and Nezuko, Ace and Luffy, Sasuke and Itachi, Edward and Alphonse: siblings in mainstream shōnen titles are quite abundant. However, the emphasis tends to be on the bond between brothers. Tanjiro and Nezuko's relationship is akin to that of Romeo and Juliet, in that they are two people from two very different worlds who care about each other deeply. However, instead of star-crossed lovers, they are brother and sister. The risk of them being together is further explained in the show, but their dynamic just pulls on your heartstrings and you can't help but cheer them on from the sidelines. Whereas most protagonists' call to adventure revolves around a more self-centred goal, Tanjiro's is simply to protect his sister, his only remaining family, at all costs.

AN OPEN LOVE LETTER TO THE JAPANESE INAKA

Most foreigners' basic knowledge of Japan can be attributed to three major eras: Edo, Meiji and Shōwa. A lot of shōnen manga draw inspiration from Edo period Japan (1603-1868). Economic growth paired with strict isolationist foreign policies made for a period of relative peace and a vibrant cultural scene. Manga artists look to the Edo period when they want their work to showcase that signature "age of samurai" flair (e.g. *Gintama*, *Samurai Champloo*). The Meiji era (1868-1912) brought with it a lot of political and social change in Japan, which in turn also provided plenty of material for manga artists to work with (e.g. *Rurouni Kenshin*). Finally, the Shōwa era (1926-1989) gave birth to pop idol culture and, although there are not many anime set in this era, one cannot deny the insane popularity of more recent anime focusing on idol groups (e.g. *Love Live!*, *Uta no Prince-Sama*, etc.).

Which brings us to *Kimetsu no Yaiba*, which is set in Taishō era Japan. The Taishō era is a lesser-known period in Japanese history, sandwiched between the Meiji and Shōwa era, and spanning only 12 years! Despite this, I find the juxtaposition of old feudal villages and a slowly Westernizing urban backdrop to be a smart means of story progression. The story starts off in the remote mountains, heading down to small agricultural towns and finally to the city capital with a myriad

of residents, both in traditional kimono and Western suits, alighting steam-powered passenger trains. The settings not only provide an endless roster of fun backdrops to gawk at, but also give Tanjiro and the gang a chance to be more relatable to those living outside Japan's major cities.

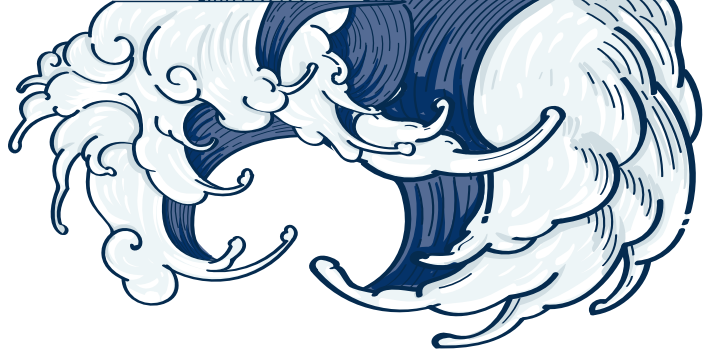
As an ALT in the countryside, I can see glimpses of the Kumano Kodo, an ancient pilgrimage network in my placement prefecture, in the mountains where Tanjiro lives and eventually does his training. Though *Kimetsu no Yaiba* creator, Gotōge Koyoharu, didn't specify where the story is set, many believe that he drew inspiration from his home prefecture of Fukuoka. Coincidentally, there is a place called Kamado Shrine in rural Fukuoka that was established to protect the Dazaifu government from a "demon gate." If I could find familiarity in the show, I could only imagine how my students, who have lived in the inaka (countryside) for their whole lives, feel. The scenes where Tanjiro and friends find themselves in Tōkyō, dazzled by the bright lights of the big city must especially strike a chord.

MARKETABLE CHARACTERS

Each character in *Kimetsu no Yaiba* has a distinct look, from the patterns on their haori (jackets worn over kimono) to the color palettes of their hair, which makes for a cornucopia of merchandising options. Promotion for anything *Kimetsu no Yaiba* parallels even that of any *One Piece* promotion I've seen. Unlike *One Piece* though, *Kimetsu no Yaiba* is a fairly short series, with only 26 anime episodes and one movie so far. However, that doesn't stop them from making sure that *Kimetsu no Yaiba* is seen literally

I find the juxtaposition of old feudal villages and a slowly Westernizing urban backdrop to be a smart means of story progression.





everywhere you go. I bet you've seen at least one kid repping their favourite character's haori pattern with a homemade *Kimetsu no Yaiba* face mask.

PRODUCTION QUALITY OVER QUANTITY

It's a well-known fact that successful shōnen titles try to churn out as much weekly content as possible. Take, for example, *One Piece*. With over 900 episodes and counting over the span of two decades, it is not feasible for animators to prioritize clean animation with a weekly deadline. As such, dedicated fans don't necessarily watch the show expecting a visual masterpiece. However, there was a shift in the early 2010s from the typical long-running series format of anime to more seasonal works which, in turn, gave animators more leeway to work on aesthetics.

A series with a solid story and charismatic characters is one thing, but add crisp, fluid animation into the mix, and you've got yourself a hit. I have to give major props to Ufotable, the studio that produces *Kimetsu no Yaiba*, for bringing this show to life so beautifully. The last time I was this impressed with an anime adaption was back in 2013 with *Shingeki no Kyojin* (*Attack on Titan*). Coincidentally, similar to *Shingeki no Kyojin*, the art in the anime adaptation of *Kimetsu no Yaiba* had a wider appeal compared to the manga.

As with any shōnen battle series, the climactic fights make or break the continued interest of fans. Each demon was written with a backstory, to garner sympathy and a unique power, keeping each encounter fresh, but it wouldn't be as effective if it weren't for how much care was put into making it look aesthetically pleasing as well.



KIMETSU IN THE CURRENT TIMES

If I told my 9-year-old self how readily available manga and anime would be online in 2020, she wouldn't have believed me. Streaming sites like Netflix and Amazon Prime make for easy watching (and rewatching) of *Kimetsu no Yaiba*. The fact that they are also legal methods is a big deal in Japan, with its strict copyright laws. Despite these easy online access methods, physical manga sales of *Kimetsu no Yaiba* are also on fire, breaking *One Piece*'s 2011 record for most copies sold within a year.

As someone who only just watched the anime last summer, I admit I was late to the party. With *Kimetsu no Yaiba*'s weekly manga serialization ending last May, I wasn't sure if the Kimetsu hype would last until Halloween, thus rendering my costume irrelevant. However, following the release of the movie sequel, *Demon Slayer: Infinity Train*, on October 16, which promptly smashed the box office record previously held by none other than Studio Ghibli's 2001 mega-hit *Spirited Away*, the series' popularity has reached an all-time high.

Janine is the very first Philippine JET in Wakayama and no one will ever hear the end of it. She is an ordinary person with an extraordinary talent for binging shows, making to-do lists and doing her best.

Photos by Janine de Villa.
Media by Ufotable and Koyoharu Gotōge.
Graphics from Freepik

If I told my 9-year-old self how readily available manga and anime would be online in 2020, she wouldn't have believed me.

日本語用語 Nihongo Lingo:

Getting a Jump Start on Words to Know

Sarah Baughn (Ishikawa)

According to the government of the United States of America, the Japanese language is categorized as a "Category IV—Super Hard" language. In that category, it stands out from the other languages with a little asterisk indicating that it's even more difficult than the others.

This is all to say that for English speakers, Japanese takes a long time to learn. If you're coming to Japan in the next few months and find yourself filled with the fear that you won't understand anything, I am here to confirm that no, no you won't understand anything.

What you do with that knowledge is up to you! You can try self-studying Japanese, which I highly recommend if you have any interest in it, or you can punt and learn just these few select phrases and try and coast by as best you can.

Here's a list of useful school-related words for Assistant Language Teachers (ALTs) who are just starting out:

People and Places

Knowing who is who and where you need to be is very valuable information!

- 校長先生 / こうちょうせんせい / *kōchō sensei* - school principal
- 教頭先生 / きょうとうせんせい / *kyōtō sensei* - vice principal
- 担任の先生 / たんにんのせんせい / *tan'nin no sensei* - homeroom teacher
- 職員室 / しょくいんしつ / *shokuinshitsu* - staff room
- 事務所 / じむしょ / *jimusho* - office
- 教室 / きょうしつ / *kyōshitsu* - classroom

Classroom Language

Without learning too hard into Japanese in the classroom, here are a few things to say to your kids when, inevitably, they are rowdy and you have to pretend you know what's going on and are a valuable authority figure:

- 止めて下さい / やめてください / *yamete kudasai* - please stop
- 静かにして下さい / しずかにしてください / *shizukanishite kudasai* - please be quiet
- 聞いて下さい / きいてください / *kiite kudasai* - please listen
- 座って下さい / すわってください / *suwatte kudasai* - please sit down

*nihongo lingo getting a
jump start on words to know
sarah baughn*

Greetings

Called あいさつ (*aisatsu*) in Japanese, this group of phrases require some situational explanations. I have included a smiley face to indicate the tone that the phrase will be said in, but the meaning is a bit more direct.

- おはようございます / *ohayō gozaimasu* - Good morning.

As you enter your school and the staff room, say this. Also, the first time you see someone every day, you should say this, it's polite. It means good morning, but it is common for this to be said throughout the school day if someone is just arriving at school for the first time.

- お先に失礼します / おさきにしつれいします / *osakinishitsurei shimasu* - Pardon me, I'm leaving now.

Say this at the end of the workday when you're leaving the office! Directly translated, it means "Sorry to be rude," but the situational translation is more "I'm leaving, goodbye! Do not ask me to do anything else today. 😊"

- お疲れ様でした / おつかれさまでした / *otsukaresama deshita* - Thank you for your hard work.

This is the appropriate response to someone else saying "Osaki ni shitsureshimasu" when they leave the office. Directly translated, it means "You look tired," but the situational translation is more aligned with "Good job, you worked hard!"

- よろしく願います / よろしくおねがいします / *yoroshiku onegaishimasu* - I look forward to working with you.

This phrase is used often and has a ton of different meanings. Say it at the end of your self-introduction to mean "Please treat me kindly." After that, I most often hear it after doing the greeting at the beginning of class. Or immediately after being asked to do something. If your coworker talks about doing something and then says "yoroshiku onegaishimasu," just assume that they're telling you "You Must Do This. 😊" I also hear it from students when asked to grade or give advice on their English directly.

Asking, Giving and Receiving

Being overly polite is always a good default if you're unsure when asking questions. Teachers at your school/schools are likely to be very busy so politely asking if they have time to talk to you will get you some brownie points.

- 今お時間は大丈夫ですか / いまおじかんはだいじょうぶですか / *ima ojikan daijōbudesuka* - Do you have a moment?

A good way to ask if someone has the time to talk to you, more directly translated: "Is your time okay now?"

- お仕事中に失礼します / おしごとちゅうしつれいします / *oshigotochū shitsureishimasu* - Sorry for interrupting your work.

- これを頂いてもいいですか / これをいただいてもいいですか / *kore wo itadaite moiiidesuka* - Is it okay for me to have this?

This is a polite thing to say when getting a gift or receiving *omiyage* (gifts) if you're not sure.

- いただきます / *itadakimasu*

If you plan on eating that little snack you just received straight away, this is another little polite thing to say. Generally said before partaking in a meal, so also good if you are in an elementary or junior high school where you will be eating 給食 / きゅうしょく / *kyūshoku* (school lunches) with the students.

Another thing to keep in mind is that every school and person you meet will use the language differently. If you make a mistake or misunderstand, just apologize. In Japan, I've found that it's better to apologize for anything if there's even the slightest possible chance that you maybe could have caused some difficulty. For example, if you're late to work, then you should apologize and say why you made the mistake and why it won't happen again instead of blaming traffic. This feels unnatural to a lot of people! But I think it helps to keep in mind. It also means that some apologies are said to fit into this social expectation instead of always being entirely genuine. Gotta keep that social harmony!

Taking Things Beyond the Basics

So, you want to delve further into Japanese? Self-studying Japanese is a difficult mountain to climb. Combined with the numerous obstacles of kanji, grammar and verbs that conjugate based on politeness level, Japanese takes a time and effort that not many people are willing to put in.

I will say that learning Japanese is genuinely one of the most enjoyable experiences I've had with a language though, and will fill you with confidence if you want to learn literally anything else after it. For ALTs, learning Japanese while your students learn English will also give you a weird ability to relate to your students. I usually joke about how difficult Japanese is with my students when they complain about how difficult English is. This can lead to some pretty cool conversations.

Over the years, many people (especially on the internet) have found ways to fast-track the Japanese learning experience. It still takes a long time, of course, but it's possible to self-study in ways that people have never been able to before. There's a ton of wonderful articles on the internet about learning Japanese, but here's a simplified list of steps and resources you can use to help.

Step one: Learn *hiragana*. It's the basis of the language, and learning the sounds of Japanese is so helpful for learning the other alphabets. A lot of signs and names will have *furigana* (characters to show how kanji is read) that are written in hiragana. There are many apps (seriously, just Google "hiragana learning app").

Step two: Learn *katakana*. Katakana is used for loan words, from French to German, English and Portuguese. If you can read hiragana, then move on to katakana. A ton of food items in grocery stores are written in katakana, so it's super useful.

THEN, you can start looking at grammar and vocabulary and kanji.

Studying Resources

Here is a list of resources (you have to pay for) to study with:

1. Genki textbook series: Though better-suited for classroom use, it's a beginner textbook series that'll help walk you through the basics in a good way. Get it with the workbook!
2. WaniKani: A popular web-based kanji learning service that takes you from the basics all the way to barely used kanji (learn hiragana and katakana first though!). You have to pay a subscription fee for this on either a monthly, yearly or one-time lifetime basis.

3. Bun Pro: Japanese grammar resource and review site. The resources for each individual grammar point can be beneficial, but it's a bit overwhelming if you're starting with minimal Japanese.
4. Kitsun/Memrise/Tori/literally any flashcard service for vocabulary: There are so many of these. Find one you think is interesting and just try it out! I like Kitsun, but I've heard good things about all of them.
5. Italki: You can sign up for online lessons with a ton of different Japanese tutors if you want some help figuring out what to study.

And a special section for the "I don't want to spend any money" dude.

There are several free resources across the internet, but it's a daunting task to pull them all together to make a coherent Japanese learning experience. If you think your time is better spent doing that then paying for services, then here's some recs for you.

1. [Tae Kim's Grammar Guide](#): It's free and covers a lot of grammar! I use it as a resource to check grammar points occasionally.
2. [Japanese Test 4 You](#): A great free website that introduces JLPT grammar of all levels and offers lots of mock tests for practice.
3. [Japanese Ammo](#): This YouTube channel has a lot of good explanations and grammar for a lot of different levels.
4. [Anki](#): Anki is the free flashcard app that has a ton of different customization options. I find that intimidating personally, but a lot of people use it for flashcards.

This information comes from someone who's self-studied, as well as from a few other ALTs with a higher level of Japanese understanding. I've tried a variety of methods to learn the language and I'm prepping to take Japanese Language Proficiency Test at level N3. It is not an end-all-be-all source, but hopefully, it'll help other people who came to Japan with "none Japanese and left English" to get a few basic phrases and cultural context in their repertoire.

Sarah is a second-year JET from the USA now living on the tip of the beautiful Noto Peninsula in Ishikawa. She is eagerly awaiting the day she can once again travel across the country collecting goshuin, in the meantime, she's gearing up to take on the JLPT at N3.

LETTER FROM THE LANGUAGE EDITOR

As an incoming JET, one of the first things I wanted to do in preparation of moving to Japan was to learn Japanese. After spending a semester abroad in Hong Kong, I understood how isolating the experience of living abroad can be without knowing the language. Even with English as one of the two official languages, it felt painfully obvious how much of an outsider I was. For me, I couldn't reach the level of immersion that I wanted without a better grasp of the language.

When I started learning Japanese, vocabulary came a bit more easily to me, thanks to years of Chinese school (thanks, Mom and Dad!) providing me with a decent foundation to learn *kanji*. Grammar, on the other hand, was a totally different beast. As entertaining as it was to learn about Mary and Takeshi's adventures, I found it difficult to motivate myself to read the chapters and get through the workbook. Meanwhile, using a spaced repetition software (SRS) learning system, like WaniKani (check out the interview for [that one](#) too), worked a lot better for me as there was a quantifiable goal to reach everyday.

The need for a SRS platform focused on grammar ultimately led me to Kistun, which finally brings me to the first article from the Language section that I want to highlight: [“Meet the Ultimate SRS Study Platform, Kitsun.io”](#) by Shea Sakamoto (Chiba) from the May issue. This article does an amazing job of providing a comprehensive look at Kitsun, its features, and the story of how it came to be. Best of all, there are links scattered throughout to help you navigate every topic talked about and get more information and resources.

Given what a crazy year this has been, the second article I'd like to highlight is [“Teaching in the Age of Social Distancing”](#) by Rishma Hansil (Tōkyō) from the October issue. This article provides concrete examples of ways to turn a difficult situation to your advantage and ensure that students can still have a positive, educational experience despite the challenges of learning during the pandemic. From socially distanced one-on-one essay reviews to listening comprehension practice, there are many opportunities to adapt and find the best way to work with the constraints to maintain a safe learning environment.

The idea of finding the positives in a rough time leads me to the last article I'd like to highlight: [“Wholesome Tales from Japan: Foreign Residents Tell their Stories”](#) by Clare Braganza (Fukushima) from the April issue in the Wellness section. Homesickness can sometimes be unavoidable, especially during a pandemic where isolation is key. This article was the dose of happiness I needed after coming out of a brutal winter of quarantine and isolation. Even though the light is very much at the end of the tunnel as we go into summer, I would still recommend this wholesome content at any time.

Finally, thank you to all those who contributed and sourced articles! I'm so grateful to have CONNECTed (pun intended) with so many creative and knowledgeable people over the course of this experience as the Language section editor. I hope that this section has provided our readers the same joy and insight into language learning and teaching as it has to me.

Lara Yi

Meet the Ultimate SRS Study Platform,

Kitsun.io

Shea Sakamoto (Chiba)

In the past four years that I've been studying Japanese and copying the study techniques of the people I look up to, what has been clear to me is that the more earnest a language learner is, the more essential [a spaced repetition software \(SRS\)](#) is in their independent study arsenal. Compared to frequently reading (and re-reading) notes and other learning materials, routinely going through a deck of words set up to make full use of [the spacing effect](#) is a faster and more efficient strategy to study vocabulary until you've memorized them.

SRS are computer programs modeled after [the evidence-based learning process](#) of using physical flashcards. I have first discovered its power and effectiveness through [WaniKani](#), a web app with a cult-like following that helps you learn most of the 2,000 jōyō kanji and almost 6,000 vocabulary words in as little as a year's time through a gamified SRS experience. However, after living and teaching in Japan for a while, I wanted a program that I could tailor to my lifestyle. While WaniKani has been a great foundation, there were things I would come across again and again in real life that I needed to learn sooner than [the Crabigator](#) would let me. With this, I turned to [Anki](#), which has regrettably made me want to throw my computer

out the window because of my lack of basic coding knowledge and my need for efficient yet still visually-appealing study materials. Even if it is a free product (with an iOS app for \$25 that can be substituted with [AnkiWeb](#)), it just made more sense to me to direct all the time and energy it took towards learning something new to my actual Japanese studies.

Luckily, I discovered [Kitsun.io](#). Kitsun, to me, is basically what Anki could have been initially if it weren't for the high learning curve. Kitsun is an SRS-based study platform that makes the process of creating personalized study decks uncomplicated while also pleasing you aesthetically and experientially. It's cheaper than [WaniKani](#), and is basically the smarter, cooler, and way better version of Anki. They have a 14-day trial, [different price plans](#) and [an annual lifetime sale](#) at the end of each year.

Incorporating Kitsun into my study routine has contributed to my motivation, flow, and overall ability to keep valuable knowledge. In fact, it is because of Kitsun that I have developed a habit of reading native Japanese material daily and have just recently read for 100 days straight—something that I have never done before (and never thought I could do).

Kitsun's Origin

Like a lot of people who started learning Japanese, Lucien Bos grew up playing Japanese RPGs, watching anime, and reading manga. After graduating from university, he immediately found a job as a full-time web developer, which gave him the opportunity to make his childhood dream of traveling to Japan a reality. From there, he became more serious in learning the language. As he was reaching the last few levels of WaniKani, he started looking for a service that had similar features, but there wasn't anything to his specific liking at the time. With his background in game design and a desire to hone his programming skills, it just made sense for him to make one himself.

The 29-year-old from the Netherlands shares, "My initial goal was to create something that's easy to use and looks pleasing, but can also offer very advanced options for people who love to customize their studies. Of course, my game design background would also come in very handy here, as gamification is an important part of keeping learners motivated."



In the three years since its conception, Kitsun's focus has been helping its users learn languages through immersion. Bos and his now team of seven have been hard at work to make consuming content in your target language as painless as possible by loading Kitsun with several practical features that help language learners learn their materials of choice.



Kitsun's Core Features

Dictionary Tool

With an integrated dictionary feature, creating a flashcard is as simple as a dictionary lookup. All you need to do is search for a word you'd like to learn, and with just a few clicks, it can add all the relevant information that you need to your card. I find this especially handy whenever I hear words I'm unfamiliar with when talking with Japanese people. Since the mobile site of Kitsun is easy to access, I just whip out my phone and add those to my deck to study for later.

Community Decks

Aside from having the ability of creating your own decks, Kitsun has a variety of original decks and user-made ones. Currently, there are decks for Japanese fiction, textbooks, JLPT words, and core vocabulary available. With a feedback system of sending suggestions and corrections back to deck creators, they are constantly improved and updated to ensure high-quality learning material.

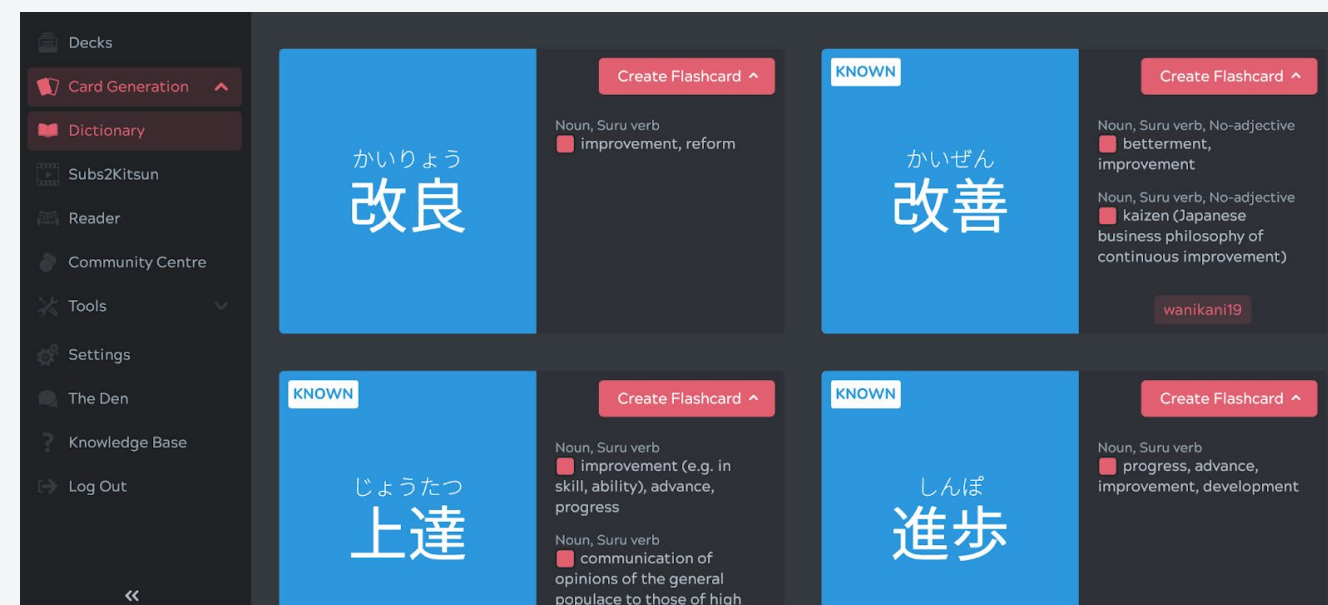
As someone currently going through Tobira in my spare time, I greatly appreciate that there is a deck available to help reinforce my learning. I can even pre-learn the words if I wish for a more seamless reading experience.

Reader

By copying and pasting any Japanese text or even complete books into Kitsun, the reader will parse it for you and give you information like definitions, parts of speech, frequency in text, and JLPT levels for vocabulary and kanji. Anything that you don't know can, of course, be added to a deck. To me, this is my most heavily used Kitsun feature, as it is perfect for [both intensive and extensive reading](#).

Subs2Kitsun

You can also make flashcards from watching your favorite movies, series, and other videos. This is an amazing (and again, painless) feature to have access to if you are trying to incorporate [Sentence Mining](#) into your study routine. There is something so satisfying about being able to watch something for entertainment purposes and still having the ability to turn it into a learning opportunity by instantly creating flashcards for newly encountered words and phrases at the same time.



Kitsun dark mode

Known Words System

By being able to keep track of the words that you already know, the Known Words System enables you to start new decks and easily filter them out. Used with the Reader, you will be able better gauge how easy or difficult the material is for your level. This allows me to choose which book is good for intensive or extensive reading and forces me to try a little harder to recall words when I know I've already learned them!

Kitsun's Community

With its growing community and fanbase reaching across the globe, Kitsun has also begun adding Russian, Korean, and Chinese content, which is perfect for aspiring polyglots. Their online forum, [The Den](#), as well as their [Discord server](#), is a friendly and supportive community of people passionate about language learning who are always happy to help you along your way by sharing resources, experience with language use, and developing your language learning skills. Whenever I get stuck trying to figure something out, I usually just pop in the server to ask for assistance and always get the help that I need.



Kitsun's Future

Kitsun's future looks promising, not only because a mobile app is already in the works, but because the team is also creating a knowledge base, helpful blog articles, and interactive tutorial widgets for its users. "Perhaps most exciting of them all," Bos shares, "are all the custom decks they are currently working on (and will continue to do so in the future). We plan on creating the ultimate decks to learn with for not just Japanese, but also other languages. We are starting with Japanese, Russian, Korean, and Chinese to begin with, and we have native speakers to help us with creating the content."

There are also things coming up such as a browser extension that will allow you to create flashcards from any website and add further gamification features. They are also planning on releasing a separate app focused on reading native Japanese material that will integrate Kitsun's Reader for books, texts, and manga. Looking forward to these features is really stirring the budding language geek in me as they seem set on finding ways of making learning enjoyable. If you are interested in a more detailed list of the developments that they have underway, a more detailed list can be found [here](#).

As Kitsun gets updated with more useful additional features and languages, it has the potential to be the only SRS program you'll ever need to study with. Whether you're coming in as a beginner or are someone more advanced, there will certainly be something that you can use to your benefit. Even [non-language learning such as STEM works well with SRS](#), so the possibilities of learning with Kitsun are endless. I even plan to use it to study my TESOL classes when I get the chance. And who knows—maybe once I get to a Japanese proficiency level I'm satisfied with, I may just pick up Spanish once it becomes available.

Shea is a licensed Japanese public elementary school teacher, M.Ed. in TESOL student, and a Japanese language learner from Los Angeles, California. In her free time, she likes to write about her teaching and language learning experiences on [PenPenPenguin](#). You can follow her on Instagram [@penpenpenguin.jp](#)



TEACHING IN THE AGE OF SOCIAL DISTANCING

Rishma Hansil (Tokyo)

For many ALT teachers across Japan, there have been massive changes to our language learning lessons post COVID-19 lockdown. Students have returned to schools with a strict list of measures in place to reduce the spread of infection. In many schools, activities such as group work, speaking activities and interactive games are strictly prohibited. On the other hand, many other teachers are still teaching remotely. Our role as ALTs has always been to adapt to the needs of our classes, and this situation is no different. I'd like to share four tips from my social-distancing classrooms:

1. EMBRACING TECHNOLOGY

Amidst the lockdown, teachers had no choice but to take their show on the "digital" road. Classes were taught through an array of digital platforms, using anything that could help students and teachers connect in a meaningful way. For classes with over 30 students, teachers used Zoom and Google Classroom to conduct lessons by separating the classes into teams and sending them to "breakout rooms" in Zoom in order to better facilitate essay writing and discussion. For students who couldn't make the

live sessions, videos were uploaded to YouTube via a private link. Having a digital database of resources helped students study on their own time and gave teachers some fluidity in preparing lesson materials. In these situations, the ALTs' primary roles included assisting the JTE with video recording, modeling grammar and starring in interactive skits.

Club activities, like our school's Language Club, relied on LINE to communicate with each other, share resources and even send voice notes for pronunciation practice. ALT teachers would also make themselves available for one hour a day on a zoom call, during which students could join the meeting for free conversation practice and get help with any assignments they were working on. Meetings were scheduled by grade to ensure the same level of students were participating in the conversation.

2. LISTENING INSTEAD OF SPEAKING

In the first month back at school, speaking in the classroom was prohibited. This was challenging as ALTs predominantly did speaking and conversation practice with students. To work around this, we decided to replace our speaking practice with more focused listening practice in our lessons. For a bit of fun, we watched YouTube videos, which were used as listening comprehension practice and gap-fills for the higher level students. Some videos included Aesop's Fables, scenes from popular movies and snippets from National Geographic documentaries.

Another listening practice we used in our lessons was shadowing. The ALT would read a few sentences and students would map out the pauses, highlight the intonation of words and underline the points of emphasis in each sentence. This technique made the students hyper aware of the ALTs speech, and over the course of three weeks students were able to listen to more complex pieces of dialogue. This activity was repeated again when speaking was allowed in the classroom and students were able to reproduce the patterns of speech modeled by the ALT.



3. GOING THE (SOCIAL) DISTANCE

How can we replace the high fives and good morning greetings with students in the hallways? Perhaps an elbow touch? ALTs needed to find new ways to connect with our students despite the distance. At our school, we used a simple hand wave and threw in some fun expressions like "stay safe" and "wash your hands". With the Language Club cancelled, we decided to meet once a week at lunch time for an event called "English Table". The classrooms were set up with enough space between students, and we invested in games that could be played from a safe distance while still using English. Games like Apples to Apples, Scattergories Categories, Scrabble and Pictionary were some student favorites. All of these games were bought online from Amazon Japan and delivered directly to the school.

Additionally before COVID-19, ALTs would usually meet students for one-on-one essay reviews after school in the staff room. With social-distancing restrictions in mind, we decided to build a safe "language bubble" in the hallway, consisting of two desks and chairs divided by a large sheet of clear, sturdy, plastic. We could safely review essays, provide feedback and chat with our students from the comfort of our bubble.

4. INTERACTIVE LEARNING AND PAIR WORK

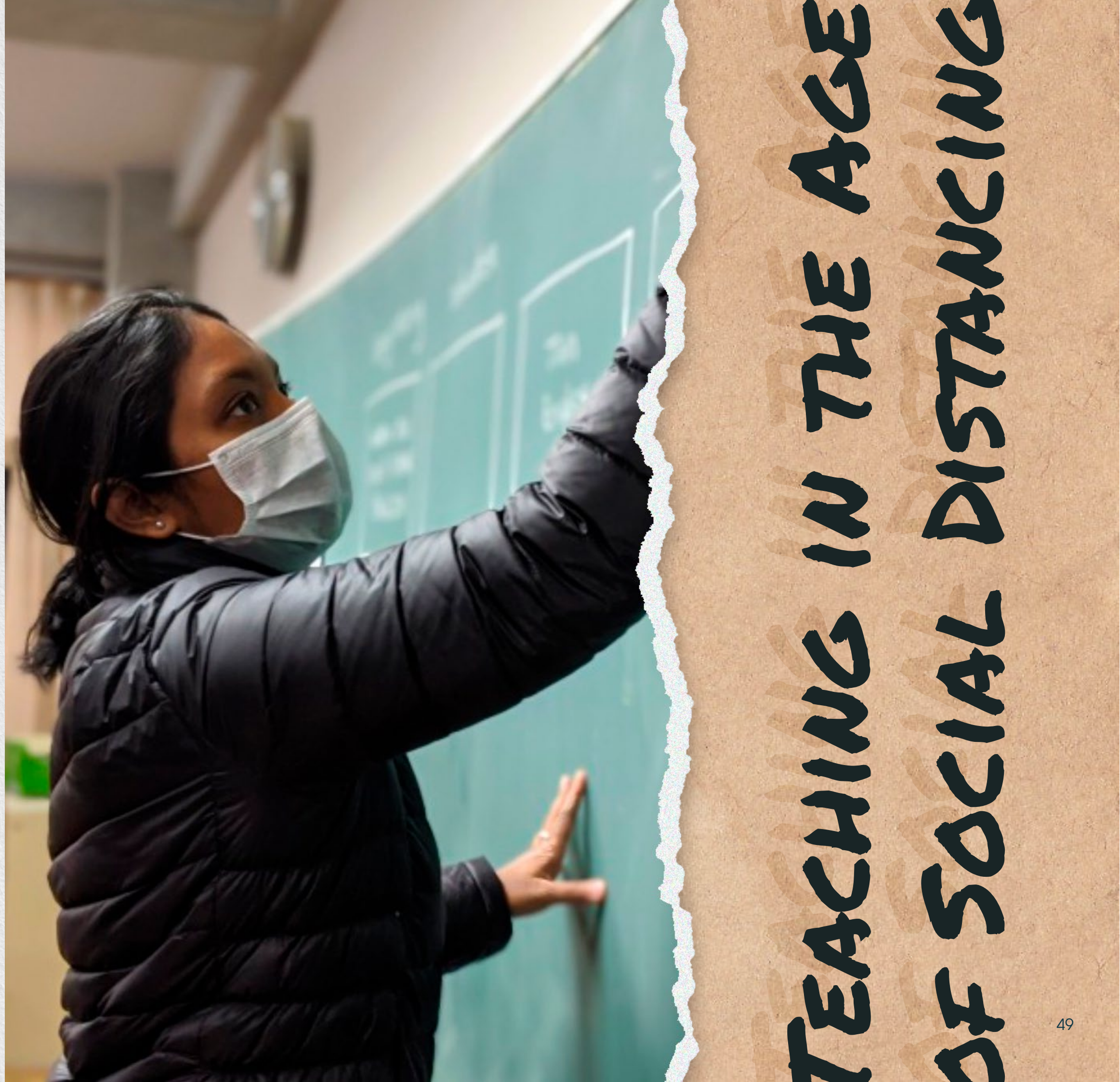
Peer-to-peer learning has always been a successful model in the language learning classroom. To encourage socially distancing friendly peer-to-peer learning, we retooled our usual classroom set up to ensure a safe atmosphere for the students. With desks spaced out, students were positioned back-to-back and did information gap activities. For example, 2-4 students would be listening for the missing words with their back against one student doing the reading. In other scenarios, an aisle was made down the middle of the classroom or diagonally and one student would speak one at a time from across the class to their partner or the ALT positioned on the other end of the classroom.

As ALTs we were also encouraged to make our own lesson plans and activities while using the textbook as a guide to review the grammar points and target language students were currently learning. One successful activity was based on Unit 4 Book 1 of the New Horizon Textbook. Students had to review the grammar point “I want” and the counters, like “one cup” and “one pack of”. We created a mock fast food menu board for our restaurant “BurgerMcChicken” with its own unique items and prices, while the ALT played the role of the cashier and the students were the customers. Students were spaced out as per social distancing guidelines and would come up one by one to the imaginary counter and place their order in English. This activity requires some prep work, but it was certainly worth it as it got the students moving around the classroom safely.

It's been challenging navigating this new style of social-distancing friendly learning. Our role as ALTs in the classroom may have changed, but we will continue to find new ways to engage, interact and inspire our young learners, all the while wearing warm smiles behind our masks. There's no telling how long these measures will have to be observed, but as time goes on we will continue to adjust and find new creative solutions.



Rishma has been living and working in Tokyo since 2017 as an Assistant Language Teacher and Tokyo Prefectural Advisor to the JET community. She holds an M.A in Future Media from Birmingham City University. She is the author of “[Animal Adventure](#)” an activity book for children set in her home country, the sunny Caribbean island of Trinidad & Tobago.



TEACHING IN THE AGE OF SOCIAL DISTANCING

LETTER FROM THE BUSINESS EDITOR

Since I started on this series last year, I have interviewed almost a dozen people with almost a dozen separate businesses, organizations and foundations, and each one of them has inspired and touched me in a deep way. I do not exaggerate when I say that I stand in awe of the accomplishments and passion of every single person I interviewed on this brief journey of mine, and it is no understatement when I say that choosing two profiles was extremely difficult. At the end of the day however, my goal for writing for **CONNECT** magazine was to locate and profile what I can consider exceptional businesses run by exceptional people--businesses that push the boundaries of what people expect foreigners to be doing in Japan, and businesses that are filling niches I didn't even know existed. It was no easy thing, but at the end of the day, I feel confident with the two I chose.

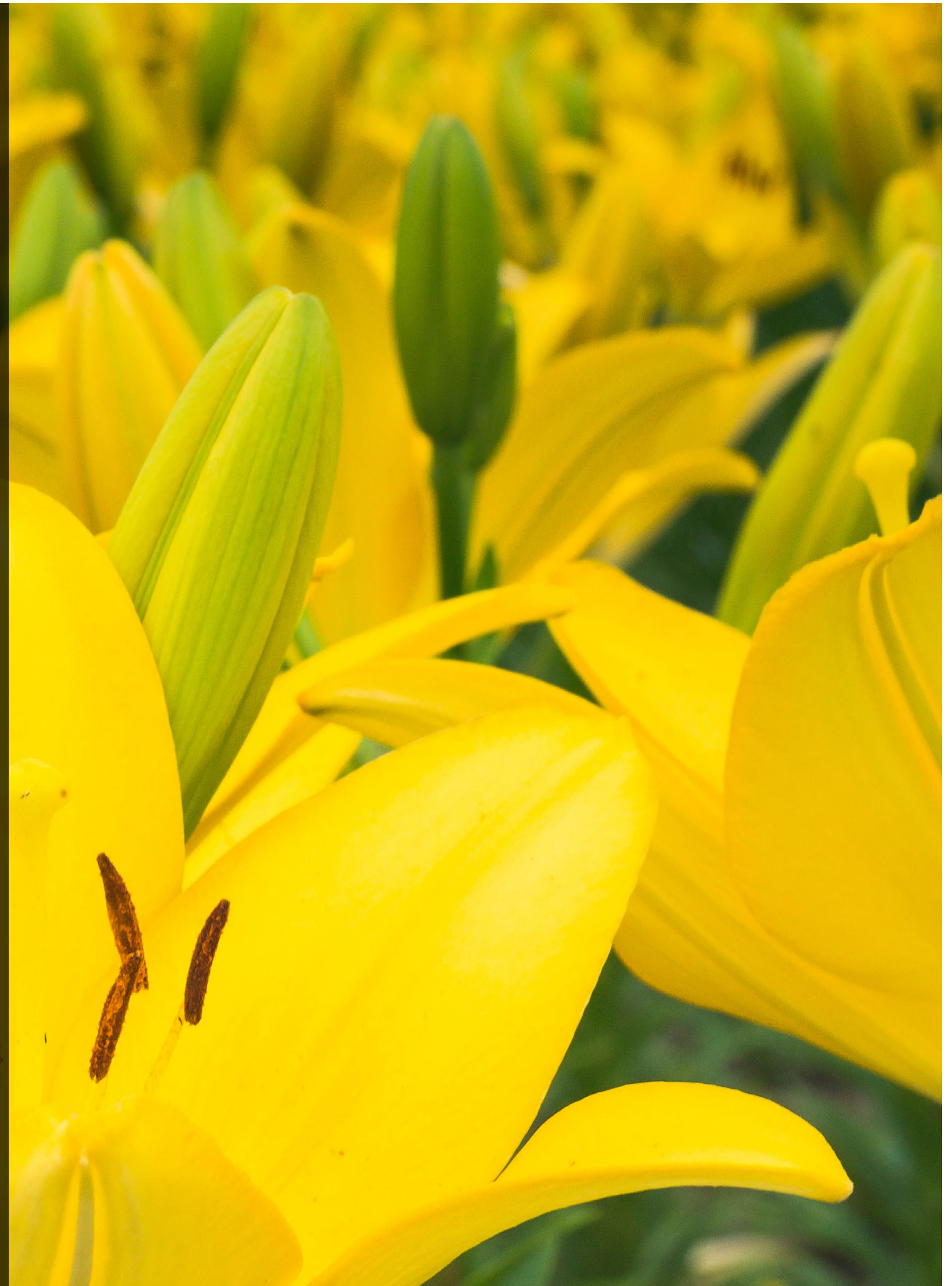
I met Bruce McCullough in the summer of 2019, right after I had moved to Hawaii. He was visiting with his wife and two children for the summer, and was renting the downstairs vacation rental in my mother's house in Kailua. I remember thinking to myself, "What the hell is this guy doing that he can just take three months off?!" Of course, at the time I was working full-time as the academic coordinator for an International school in Honolulu, and had very little free time outside of work, so the idea of someone being able to work remotely (this was before COVID-19, mind you) from halfway across the world was high unbelievable to me. I *had* to interview him, and in fact, Bruce was my first interview for **CONNECT**, in "[Making a House a Home: Real Estate Investment in Japan](#)". Bruce is a guy who pretty much came to Japan with no plan and ended up absolutely crushing it in pretty much everything he set his mind to. His real estate company manages almost two-dozen properties all over Tokyo, though concentrated mostly in Shibuya, and also runs a boutique fashion brand on the side. More than that, he's a practical, highly logical businessman who knows how to cut loose. We've stayed friends these past two years, and I am really looking forward to seeing what kinds of new things come down his pipeline.

Rob McMannon, on the other hand, is living the kind of life I used to daydream about when I first came to Japan. Perhaps that's the reason I was so taken with his story, which can be read in "[Ride. Relax. Repeat.](#)" Operating out of Gunma prefecture, he spends his days leading people on amazing bike tours all over the beautiful countryside, and then relaxing at Japanese inns at night. I love biking, always have, and I love Japanese inns. Rob pretty much made a living out of two of my greatest passions. His company, Bike Tour Japan, is probably one of the most innovative adventure businesses I've ever come across, and it seems his customers couldn't be happier. The business is growing year over year in spite of the pandemic, and the kinds of things he has planned are incredible. I will definitely be going on one of his tours once I am able, and I would encourage anyone with an interest in the outdoors and biking to look him up as well.

The final article I wanted to highlight was not one of my own. Entitled "[Hiding in Plain Sight: Homelessness in Tōkyō](#)", it was an eye-opening and sobering expose of another kind of epidemic that is ravaging Japan: homelessness. Coming from the U.S., I admit I always thought the issue of homelessness in Japan as essentially being a non-issue; the country, compared to my own at least, simply didn't grapple with the kind of social sores like truancy and poverty that is tragically endemic to North America. Like everyone else who has taken a stroll through Tokyo late at night, I saw the makeshift tents and shelters, but until reading Lisa Paper's incisive article (published in the April 2021 issue), the true scope of the problem simply didn't register with me. After reading her article, I have realized that the issue of homelessness speaks to a far deeper and larger problem in Japanese society, which sadly I can't discuss here for lack of space, but I would highly recommend everyone give Lisa's article another read. You'll be glad you did.

It's been an incredible journey writing for this magazine, and I have enjoyed my time immensely here. Thank you for having given me this incredible opportunity, and I hope you will all stay safe and healthy in the days ahead.

Derek Hurst



Making a House a Home:

Real Estate Investment in Japan

Derek Hurst (Nagano) interviewing Bruce McCullough (Tokyo)

Anyone who's spent time in Shibuya-ku may have seen a red Volkswagen Bus from time to time, driving around or parked in high-traffic areas of the trendy ward. The bus belongs to Bruce McCullough, and serves as the boots-on-the-ground face of his new fashion venture, Shibuya Republic. Bruce, however, has a much bigger portfolio than just a VW. When he arrived from Canada some twenty years ago, he never imagined he'd end up where he is today: managing almost two dozen properties in both Tokyo and his hometown of Vancouver, running his own fashion brand, and all-around enjoying life with his two children and wife in their beautiful home in Shibuya. After graduating from Simon Fraser University in Vancouver with a degree in economics, Bruce spent the first part of his twenties as an entrepreneur, first selling cars and then starting his own nightclub/restaurant, Ankor, with friends. The nightclub eventually went bankrupt, but Bruce remained undeterred, and if anything, was enlivened by the failure of his first foray into hospitality. Bruce came to Japan soon after and began teaching at a private high school, where he would remain for the next fifteen years, all the while gradually amassing his own portfolio of condominiums and apartments in the Tokyo metropolitan area. By the time he finally left teaching, he had gained not just a monthly cashflow from his properties that dwarfed his teaching salary, but also permanent residency status in Japan.



How exactly did you get in the real estate business?

There's nothing super unique about it. Back when I was in Vancouver, I was running Ankor [the Nightclub] with my buddies, and we were making money, sure, but the thing was, the rent was so damn high for the place. We finally had to close it because of that, but it made me realize that if you don't own your own property, you're wasting your mental energy and time. I came to Japan on a working holiday visa and about fifteen grand Canadian and started teaching at the high school. The good thing was, over the fifteen years I ended up working at that school, I was buying up properties in the area, and by the time I got downsized, I was making way more through my rentals than at the school. The school knew that, and pretty much told me, "Hey, since you're doing well enough without us, would you mind if we didn't renew your contract?"

What has been the biggest joy of your work?

I got to say it's just the freedom it allows me. But I also am getting to learn a ton of new skills I never had before, I mean when you're managing so many places you have the right skills, carpentry, plumbing, etc. I've really become a tradesman in the second half of my life, and it's been great. But I also love making old places look fresh and new, you know, breathing a second life into them. I just get excited about real estate, from finding the places to polishing them up and finally to renting them out. It's all a joy, but, for sure, the freedom of not having a boss or being tied to a single company is great. I love working for myself.

How about the biggest challenge? What's that been?

There's always things, you know? I believe in Murphy's Law, you gotta plan for the worst but expect the best. Something always can always go wrong, but if you've done your work you'll always come out alright. Coronavirus has definitely been tough, more so for Shibuya Republic [the fashion brand]—I mean the economy's been just so wrecked by the virus. Fortunately I've only lost one renter, and was able to replace them soon enough after a couple of weeks. But, you see, that's the good thing about working for myself and owning my own properties: if something goes south I know I'll always be able to land on my feet. If you're tied to a single workplace with a single income source, you're taking a huge risk. At least, you're able to own your own places, you've got more of a safety net. I know not everyone's got that luxury, but that's the reason you've got to start building some equity before it's too late.

Are there any resources you'd recommend for people wanting to get into the real estate business?

Like I said, you just got to start somewhere; size doesn't matter. I didn't exactly grow up with money, and it was only by working hard and keeping my eyes forward that I got to where I am today. I'm just a regular guy at the end of the day. I started by saving up enough just to buy my first place, and then I moved out, rented it out, and went to the next one. After fifteen years of doing that it created a base to let me leave teaching. It's really that simple. Of course, having permanent residency

definitely makes things easier, especially on the financing side. Banks are much more willing to give mortgages and what-not when you've got PR, so that would be the first thing I'd tell other foreigners wanting to get into the real estate business. 'Course, if you got enough capital, it doesn't really matter if you got PR or not, but if you were like me, and didn't have a ton of free cash to throw into a couple of condos, you have to get a bank to give you the money.

Any other tips you'd tell someone?

You really don't have to go post-grad these days, and overall I'd say you have to really ask yourself if college is right for you. Coming to Japan, yeah, you're going to need a four-year degree, but beyond that, I really don't think it's worth it. Compared to when I went to school in the 90s, information is a lot more accessible these days—a lot less centralized. Back then, the only place you could get information was the university library, that was the whole reason you went to college; you couldn't get that info anywhere else. Today you got YouTube, Google and Kahn Academy. It's all out there for free. But, in terms of real estate tips, like I said before, you got to learn how to do basic carpentry, plumbing and painting. You have to know what to look for in a property and be able to spot any red flags. Knowing what areas have growth potential is important in Japan, since a lot of places the real estate market's kind of dead here. But there's always opportunities if you look hard enough and are willing to put in the hard work. More generally, I'd say it's really important to build multiple income streams, not just for real estate but for life in general. It's all about mitigating risk. If the economy tanked tomorrow

and all my renters moved out, yeah it'd be bad, but I've got enough other sources of income now that we'd (my family and I) be alright. That's the freedom I was talking about before, if you got one job and one income source, you're really putting yourself in a dangerous position. All it takes is one talk with your boss and you're out.

What does the future look like for you?

I'm trying to grow Shibuya Republic at the moment, and we're doing well there, despite COVID. But I'd really like to buy more properties in the American midwest at this point, especially in Milwaukee, for instance. There's so many places in the midwest that are great buys right now in high-growth neighborhoods. I'd like to be able to split my time more evenly between Canada and Tokyo, especially now that my kids are getting older. They're still in school, but I'd really like it for them to have the exposure to Canadian and American life. Hopefully, things in the world can return to normal soon enough, and I'll be able to travel more freely. But again, you never know. Like I said: Murphy's Law.

Bruce McCullough is a Canadian real estate developer and entrepreneur who lives in Shibuya, Tokyo with his wife and two children. His website is <https://shibuyarepublic.org>. You can also find him on Instagram [@shibuyarepublik](https://www.instagram.com/shibuyarepublik).

RIDE. RELAX. REPEAT.

COMBINING BIKING AND LUXURY IN RURAL JAPAN

Rob McManmon (Gunma) interviewed by Derek Hurst (Nagano)

[Bike Tour Japan Website](#)

Forging something from scratch is never a simple endeavor, but for Rob McManmon, building a business comes as easily as breathing. As a serial entrepreneur who founded everything from phone-repair businesses to a bike resale outfit in his early years, coming to Japan and building a biking company was simply the next logical step. After graduating from the Eastman School of Music in upstate New York, he came to Ōta, Gunma Prefecture in 2003 and began teaching music at Kokusai Gakuen Academy. Still the mountains and handlebars continued to call to him, and he soon pivoted away from the classroom to focus on the open road. Heading up Bike Tour Japan, Rob now leads a passionate group of tour guides from their offices in Kiryū City.

GIVE ME AN OVERVIEW OF WHAT YOU DO.

We lead “off the beaten path” cycling tours that center around premium stays and accommodations. That means we don’t focus on the typical tourist areas like Tōkyō, Ōsaka, and Kyōto. We want to show people the side of Japan that is often neglected by the typical tour packages. This country has so much rugged, natural beauty, and we feel the best way to present that to people is on the saddle of a bike. After beautiful rides through the Japanese countryside during the day we unwind and indulge in the exquisite luxury of traditional Japanese inns at night.

HOW DID YOU GET STARTED WITH BUSINESS?

During my time teaching at Gunma Kokusai, I spent a lot of time exploring the nature surrounding me on my bike. I enjoyed the teaching but it wasn’t where my passion truly lay. I’d often ride for hours to new places on the weekends and then return to Ōta on the train. After returning to the U.S., I spent time in California leading bike tours there. So I learned a bit about the business and thought I might be able to replicate something similar back in Japan. The thing was, I found myself constantly dreaming about Japan and the nature there, and I just couldn’t shake it. That’s how Bike Tour Japan was born.

WHAT KIND OF EFFECT HAS COVID-19 HAD ON YOUR WORK?

Covid really changed our timeframes and what we now consider reasonable growth. Though we’ve had to push some of our more ambitious plans back, we plan to start expanding to other areas in Japan, even as far as Hokkaido. We are also planning to launch ski bike tours soon. They are hybrid tours where we’d offer 4 days of world-class skiing in Nagano followed by 4 days of biking back in warm Gunma. There’s a lot in the pipeline at the moment, and we’re confident that once things return to normal we’ll be able to launch these initiatives.





WHAT DO THE NEXT FIVE TO TEN YEARS LOOK LIKE?

COVID really changed our timeframes and what we now consider reasonable growth. Though we've had to push some of our more ambitious plans back, we might start expanding to other areas in Japan, even as far as Hokkaidō. We are also looking into ski bike tours that are hybrid tours at the moment, where we'd offer four days of world-class skiing in Nagano followed by four days of biking back in Gunma. There's a lot in the pipeline at the moment, and we're confident that once things return to normal we'll be able to launch some of these initiatives.

WHAT'S SOMETHING THAT WOULD SURPRISE PEOPLE ABOUT YOUR WORK?

During a normal year, I spend literally 120 full-days on a bicycle. That's one third of the year outside, on a bike and doing what I love doing. But I love every minute of it. Not just the riding, but the planning & guiding as well. For every single itinerary I have spent literally dozens of hours planning and looking at maps to determine what the best routes and ryokans would weave the perfect trip.

ANY WORDS OF ADVICE FOR PEOPLE LOOKING TO BREAK INTO YOUR INDUSTRY?

It's incredibly important to find a niche, especially in Japan. Believe it or not, the adventure-tourism industry is actually a very mature one in Japan, so anything that sets you apart will be of benefit. For us, our niche is nature plus luxury. Also, it's super important to leverage what you've already got. I started small and looked at what I already had in terms of inventory and assets. We did eventually partner with a local company, but I never actively sought outside funding. You want to be able to retain control of the business, and learn how to scale organically. Also, I'd try getting some experience doing smaller ventures before breaking into Japan. You've got to have an idea of what you're getting into; entrepreneurship isn't for the faint of heart. Still, if you can manage to find that niche and grow sustainably, you'll definitely succeed.

Rob McManmon is the founder of Bike Tour Japan. He is driven by curiosity and the desire to create unforgettable cycling trips for BTJ guests. He loves surprising travelers with unique and immersive experiences that exist just outside the international hubs of Tōkyō, Kyōto, Ōsaka and Hiroshima. In addition to creating intimate adventures throughout Japan, Rob also previously worked with Duvine Cycling in Northern California. When he is off the bike, he enjoys teaching classical guitar to students around the world.

LETTER FROM THE ENTERTAINMENT EDITOR

It's been a weird year for entertainment. With large gatherings now a biohazard, everything from traditional Japanese festivals to rock concerts have been shut down for the sake of public safety, but that has done nothing to impede the human desire to be entertained—for thrilling stories, lively music, and friends to share these experiences with.

Over the last year, **CONNECT**'s Entertainment section has covered game conventions, music festivals, and traditional folk performances, as they attempted to switch to online formats, adapting to the times to reach audiences that could not safely come to them.

We've also been very privileged to get to interview many talented and creative members of the expat community, from DJs to podcasters, TikTokers, and musicians, as they've shared their experiences as entertainers, and given their best advice on how you can break into the scene and start making content yourself.

The first article I want to highlight is [“Dungeons & Dragons in the Digital Age.”](#) In a year where many of us have had to make our own entertainment, D&D has been experiencing a renaissance. In particular, D&D's extensive online resources have made it surprisingly easy to play while quarantining safely at home, and made D&D a great way to make friends in a new country, especially for ALTs with isolating rural placements. We hope the resources compiled in this article will allow friends to come together to tell their own stories, go on their own adventures, and spend time being playful and creative together, long after the necessity for quarantine is over.

The second piece I'd like to highlight is an [“Interview with DJ Sean Sophiea.”](#) I really enjoyed talking to Sean and getting to learn about Niigata's lively music scene, the life of a DJ, and unique ways in which Japan's DJ scene differs from American norms. I hope readers will find it of interest as well.

Picking a single piece to recommend from another section is difficult, but I'm biased towards the fashion section's [“Fashion, Foxes, and Furisode: An Interview with Kimono Model Makiko Takayama.”](#) I love kimonos and learning more about them, and enjoyed the sweetness of this interview.

Cheers,

Rachel Fagundes

DUNGEONS & DRAGONS

IN THE DIGITAL AGE



So, What is D&D?

If you're really lost so far, don't panic!

Dungeons & Dragons is a fantasy role-playing game inspired by fiction like *The Lord of the Rings* and the works of Robert E. Howard. Basically, a group of (usually 4-6) friends will get together to tell a story. One person will act as the **DM** (Dungeon Master), who will run the game and describe the environment, people, and obstacles that the players encounter. The other players each invent a character, whose actions and choices they describe throughout the game. Dice rolls are used as a fair way to determine whether a character succeeds or fails at actions they attempt to take. And thus, a story emerges.

The tone of games can vary wildly from group to group, from wacky shenanigans to epic adventures, mystery, drama, horror, and everything in between. Ultimately, it's a game crafted by your imagination, and a great chance to spend time with your friends in a fun, creative, and collaborative way.

Rachel Fagundes (Okayama) | Reese Mills (Okayama)



Dungeons & Dragons is awesome and you should be playing! If you aren't already, good news: D&D is now easier to play than ever before, and Reese and I have assembled lots of excellent online resources to help you get started. Even better, new developments have made it possible to play D&D *online*, making it the perfect way to stay creative, connected to friends, and having fun while quarantining at home or struggling with an isolating rural placement. So, without further ado, here's our guide to some handy resources for D&D that can help you set up a game online whether you are an old pro or a complete beginner.



D&D Beyond

[DnDBeyond.com](https://dndbeyond.com) is D&D's official website, and it's a treasure trove of useful tools and info, whether you are playing in person or online. They have everything from a basic intro for new players [here](#) to a pretty extensive free guide to the rules [here](#). (If that looks intimidating don't worry! It's ok to just jump in and learn as you go!) There are searchable and sortable lists of spells, feats, monsters, magic items, and more just waiting for you to explore. They also have a great [Quarantine](#)

[Resources](#) section to help folks play online, that features free campaigns your group can use to get started. D&D Beyond also has a great step-by-step walkthrough of character creation and (my favorite feature!) absolutely outstanding digital [character sheets](#). You can click any feature on the character sheet for handy rules explanations, and automatic calculations make leveling up a cinch. This is honestly a fantastic tool for both new and experienced players and makes D&D easier and more accessible than ever before.

DM Tips

As the DM, you can create a game group on D&D Beyond in the **My Campaigns** section. When players join your game group, you can see all their character sheets, making it easy to help players check rules and keep track of information.

While most basic content on D&D Beyond is available for free, some options and abilities are only available if purchased in the online store. You can get around this by either not using those additional

features or by manually adding them using the **Homebrew** option on the site. Members of your group will have access to any **homebrew rules** you've added, and any **rulebook content** you have purchased, giving the players the opportunity to get around paying for content.

If you want to purchase rulebooks or a campaign adventure, you can do so [here](#). The online versions have handy hyperlinks, allowing you to access the relevant information more easily than in a PDF file or a print edition.

Online Tabletops

D&D is usually played around a table, snacking and laughing with a group of friends. Some DMs provide maps or drawings to help the players visualize the space they are in. And of course, everyone has dice to roll when the action starts heating up. So how do you transfer these things into playing online?

Online tabletops are set up specifically to recreate your cozy kitchen table online, and provide all the tools you need to play in one place. There are a few different online tabletops to choose from, but we recommend [Roll20](#) since it's free and awesome.

The players and the DM can all log into Roll20 together to see shared maps and character placemarkers. There is also a digital dice roller that allows everyone logged into your game to see the rolls, which keeps the game honest. Roll20 has a Skype-like video and audio chat option built into its toolbox, so everyone can see and speak to one another throughout the game. There are even nifty tools that your DM can use to add background music to your adventure. You can check out Roll20's [video guide for players](#) for a more in-depth explanation of their various cool features.

DM Tips

As the DM, you gain the ability to give players control over tokens, prepare multiple map pages to switch to, play music, hide or reveal maps and tokens during game, and give out informative notes or handouts. They have a great [video guide for DMs](#) to help you get set up.

When setting up, you can manually add everything, or you can purchase a campaign adventure in the [Roll20 Shop](#), which will give you access to the PDF and the ready-to-play pre-made Roll20 maps for that adventure.

Note: While online tabletops can be helpful tools to enhance your game, they are not actually necessary in order to play D&D online. Less tech-savvy groups may be happier skipping all that and just sticking to the three basics:

1. Character sheets (shared with your group on D&D Beyond)
2. Dice (like this [digital dice roller](#) if you don't have our own)
3. Friends (you can just Skype with your group members or use any other similar service)

And let your imaginations do the rest!

Finding Friends to Game With

Starting a gaming group is a great way to get to know other expats in your area! If you're struggling to make connections in a new country in these isolating times, invite some acquaintances to play D&D with you. After running amok and slaying dragons together for a few sessions, you'll be tried and true companions! Gaming is also a good way to stay in touch with friends back home (time zones allowing). It can be hard to keep up with old friends while living abroad, but if you are in a weekly online game together, the time to see one another is already scheduled in.

However, if you're still struggling to find folks to game with, there are resources that can help you connect with online players too. Both [D&D Beyond](#) and [Roll20](#) have forums for players looking for groups and vice versa.

Reese Mills has also started up a Facebook group [Expats - Okayama Gaming Hub](#) that can help folks (anywhere in Japan!) interested in playing D&D find one another. He will even help people set up their group or find one to join.

Watching a Game

Still nervous about getting started? Intimidated by the weird dice or lots of new rules? Don't worry! You definitely don't need to have everything memorized in order to play. Most people learn as they go, and more experienced players in the group can always give newcomers a helping hand. Still, many beginners find it helpful to watch a game in action before they get started, to get a better picture of what playing a D&D game is actually like and how the game mechanics actually work.

There are quite a number of YouTube videos and podcast recordings of D&D groups that can be a great starting point for getting into the game.

In particular, we recommend [Critical Role](#). This D&D game, played by a group of voice actors, has done a lot to demystify D&D and make it seem exciting and accessible to beginners. It may help new players, or those friends still on the fence about giving it a try, feel more comfortable getting started. Critical Role is also available as a podcast and can be watched live every week on Twitch.

[Dice, Camera, Action](#) is another great option. This game is run by a lead D&D designer and takes players through the gothic *Curse of Strahd* campaign.



So, You Want to be a DM

Great! We can help you out with that too!

Dungeons & Dragons has tons of pre-written scenarios that will provide you with all the tools you need to run a great adventure for your friends. These campaigns are composed by professional writers and game designers, and range from high seas adventures to heavy metal dungeon crawls. Want to run a high fantasy heist? There's a campaign for that. Want to punch a dinosaur? There's a campaign for that too.

You're also welcome to just, you know, *make shit up*. D&D is a game about imagination, and if you don't see what you're looking for in a pre-written adventure, you can always modify the material to your liking—or make up completely original worlds, monsters, and adventures of your own. Want more Afrofuturism in your fantasy? Sweet, put it in there. Want to create a gritty political thriller with elves? You can do that too. Want to send your players on a quest to rescue Lord Guy Fieri from the gangsters of Flavor Town? I have a friend who is playing in one such campaign right now, and it sounds fuckin' *wild*.

Whatever makes your game easy to manage and fun to play, it's all okay!

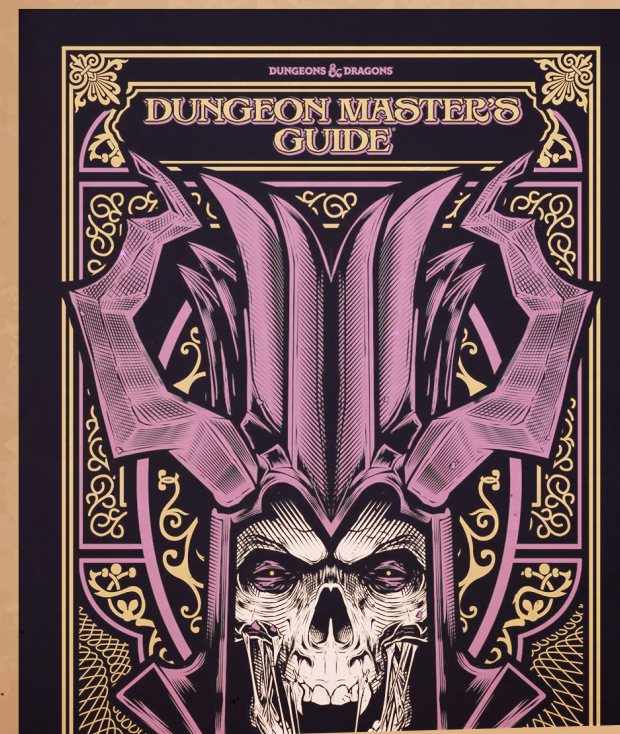
DM Tips

Here are some additional resources specifically to help new DMs get started.

THE CORE RULEBOOKS

There are three core rulebooks to the game, but you can start off by using the free basic rules on [D&D Beyond](#), then use google to find obscure rules as needed. Still, you may want to buy the three rulebooks once you're invested in the game.

These include the [Player's Handbook](#) for player rules, the [Dungeon Master's Guide](#) for the game rules, and the [Monster Manual](#) for listing all the monster stats. You definitely don't need to read all three books from cover to cover; just skim at the start, then pick the relevant pages as you need them.



THE DM SCREEN

A tool for the DM to hide dice rolls and use as a cheat sheet for looking up key rules or information during the game. You can get a physical one, or use google to find a free online version, like on [D&D Compendium](#).

BOX SETS AND MORE

Now if, like me, you are feeling a little overwhelmed when starting out, I recommend getting the [D&D Starter Set](#). It contains a pre-made adventure, a set of dice, a DM screen, character sheets, a world map, and basic rules to start with. The pre-made adventure [The Lost Mines of Phandelver](#) can last for around 15 games or more, giving the DM everything they need to reference in the booklets for rules, story, maps, character and enemy information, and progression guidance. Using this, I can say it helped me and my players learn the basics, giving us a fun adventure to grow and progress from. The [Essentials Kit](#) includes similar material but has the adventure [The Dragon of Ice Spire Peak](#), which can be more difficult to run as a starting DM because of the sandbox approach to the quests.

You can also supplement these adventures with D&D Beyond's free [Encounter of the Week](#) and other free official material [here](#).

Now gather your party and venture forth!



Adventure Awaits

We hope that these resources can set you on the path to adventure, and help you build friendships and tell fantastic stories of your own. Good luck, and have fun storming the castle!



*Rachel is the Entertainment editor of **CONNECT** Magazine. When she isn't pretending to be an anxious goblin wizard in D&D, she's terrorizing her friends with eldritch abominations in Call of Cthulhu. She also likes the Italian Renaissance, Japanese festivals, morbid folk ballads, and good books. She will steal your cat.*

Reese is a second-year British ALT in Okayama Prefecture, formerly a game designer in Scotland, UK. He can be found on the Facebook group "Expats - Okayama Gaming Hub," updating the group with gaming news and sales, or playing D&D online with the members. Otherwise he is tinkering with gaming projects in UE4 or practicing 3D art in Blender—oh, and I guess a bit of Japanese too.



INTERVIEW WITH DJ SEAN SOPHIEA

Q: PLEASE TALK ABOUT WHAT MUSIC YOU LIKE TO PLAY! HOW WOULD YOU DEFINE YOUR DJING STYLE?

Probably a jack of all trades, master of none. I listen to a ton of music over a pretty wide variety of genres; funk, soul, jazz, hip-hop, disco, house, techno; the list is pretty endless. My main goal in whatever genre I'm playing in is to expose people to stuff that they may not have heard before, so playing a lot of deep, underground stuff although still never neglecting the classics while I'm at it. In terms of DJ style, my ultimate goal is to make everything flow as smoothly as possible, either by mixing or finding a throughline from one song to the next, be it through the drums, beats per minute, melody, mood, or any other musical aspect.

SEAN SOPHIEA (NIIGATA)
RACHEL FAGUNDES (OKAYAMA)

Q: YOU'VE BEEN DJING FOR OVER 15 YEARS NOW. HOW DID YOU FIRST GET STARTED?

A friend of a friend had a set of CDJs (CD turntables) that I got a chance to test out, and after that, I was hooked. A few years later, I bought a set of turntables for myself and started DJing at other people's houses whenever the opportunity presented itself. After moving to Japan, I hit the ground running and started looking for places to DJ and get involved in the DJ community.

Q: WHAT IS THE MUSIC SCENE LIKE IN NIIGATA? HOW DID YOU FIRST GET INVOLVED THERE?

It's very segmented. One of the cooler aspects of Niigata's music scene is that there's basically a scene for whatever your taste of music is. If you're into hip-hop, there's an event or place for that. If you're into house and disco, there's an event or place for that, too. Repeat this for basically every genre you can imagine. The one downside to this is that there's very little crossover, meaning that rarely will you see a house music party-goer over at a rock party, for example.

Not to toot my horn too much here, but that's actually what I did. From the get-go, I went to every single event that I knew about, regardless of genre: punk, techno, house, hip-hop; whatever. And being one of the few foreigners who would show up at these events made me instantly stand out for better or worse. Over time, as I started playing out with some of the more entrenched local DJs, I kind of organically infiltrated the local DJ scene.



Q: CAN YOU TELL ME ABOUT THE DIFFERENT DJ COLLECTIVES THAT PLAY TOGETHER?

I can't say this for certain if this is true all around Japan, but in Niigata, most events are organized and performed by a group of DJs rather than a single individual. The group will share a particular musical genre and style, and their group name is usually also the name of the regular (usually monthly) event they will throw. In most other countries the venue will hire a DJ and put only that person's name on the bill or flyer. Here, the DJ group has control over everything: the venue (which, once that's settled, it rarely changes), the schedule for when the party will take place, the style of music, and how many people will be in the group.

When the party takes place, depending on how many group members there are, a timetable will be decided, everyone gets around half an hour to an hour to play their set. This will continue until the end of the evening or the early morning. If there's any time left and if anyone is still alive (DJs or customers), there's a good chance for a back-to-back set, where anyone in the group who wants to participate will play a song or two until the venue finally kicks us out.

Q: PLEASE TELL ME ABOUT THE TWO GROUPS YOU ARE A PART OF.

One is Key of Life, a house and disco-focused DJ group of loosely six members that's been going for 15 or 16 years. I was invited to join that group about eight years ago by the lead organizer, DJ Honda, after we had done a bunch of shows together.

The other was a hip-hop-centric group called Natty, also roughly made up of about six or so members. Sadly though, this group is currently on indefinite hiatus due to COVID-19.

Q: CAN YOU TELL ME ABOUT THE DIFFERENT VENUES YOU PLAY AT?

Around town, I've done gigs everywhere: small bars and restaurants, gigantic warehouses, mid-sized clubs, and everything in between. Preference-wise though, I love doing small bar gigs the most since they tend to be a bit more personable, a bit more friendly, and it's a bit easier to gauge the audience's reaction.

Q: WHEN YOU'RE PLAYING FOR A PARTICULAR AUDIENCE, SAY, ONE THAT IS MORE ROCK-ORIENTED VERSUS ONE THAT IS EXPECTING HIP-HOP, DO YOU CHANGE YOUR STYLE AND SOUND TO FIT THE AUDIENCE? OR DO YOU HAVE A PARTICULAR BRAND OR SOUND THAT IS YOUR OWN THAT YOU BRING TO EVERY SHOW?

My sort of overarching ethos to any event that I do always starts with the question, "What can I do to stand out?" If it's a rock party, for example, maybe I'll bring some obscure covers to keep people on their toes. If it's a hip-hop focused event, I'll try to find some songs that everyone can get behind, even if they don't know what it is. There's always a bit of a balancing act because you never wanna go so obscure that you go over everyone's head, but at the same time, I don't wanna just play all the hits that everyone knows because a playlist can do that. It's a bit of a high-wire act of playing stuff that you want to share with the crowd; giving them things you think they should hear, but also giving them what they want to hear at the same time too. It doesn't always work, but it definitely keeps things interesting.



Q: HOW DO YOU CHOOSE WHAT TO PLAY NEXT? IS THERE A LOT OF PLANNING INVOLVED, OR IS IT MOSTLY IMPROVISATION?

There's always a lot of improvisation because I always like to switch gears if I feel like the audience isn't necessarily into what I'm playing. If I'm doing a gig, I'll usually pick records based on what I want to play at an event, but that's about as much planning as I put into it. The livestreams on my YouTube channel are a whole other can of worms; half the time, before I start streaming, I don't have a clue what I want to play or where I want to go with my music selections. But normally after about two or three tunes, I'll start remembering some songs that will work together, and from there I settle on sound for the stream. There's always a little eureka moment where one song is playing and it'll point me to the next I want to play. Those little moments are really what make DJing still fun for me after doing it for about 16 years.

Q: IN YOUR OPINION, WHAT MAKES A GREAT DJ?

Ultimately, at the end of the day, mixing skills—the ability to play two songs simultaneously and blend them into one—are great and definitely help you stand above the crowd of other DJs, but song selection is absolutely paramount to me. Having the spider sense to know exactly what song is perfect to play next is the most important thing. As an example, going back to DJ Honda, I invited him to play an event with me a few years back. Not knowing at all what he was going to play, the first song he picked was "My Sharona" by The Knack, and everyone went ballistic. No one told him to play that, he just knew that was the song that would set the party off. So, to me, you can have the most seamless transitions or could be the Jimi Hendrix of scratching, but if your song selection is boring, you're not gonna make it as a DJ.



Q: WHAT IS THE EXPERIENCE LIKE OF PLAYING FOR A LARGE AUDIENCE? WHAT DOES IT FEEL LIKE WHEN A SET IS GOING REALLY WELL?

Intimidating and exhilarating at the same time. Exhilarating that I found an audience for the type of music that I'm into. Intimidating because there's always that feeling that one wrong track could screw everything up.

Q: WHAT HAPPENS WHEN A SET IS GOING POORLY? HOW DO YOU GET AN AUDIENCE BACK?

It's absolutely soul-crushing. I'm not ashamed to admit that I've had gigs where I've completely cleared the dance floor by playing something that was either unagreeable or just too obscure. To your second question, theoretically you'd play something that everyone can get behind, be it a popular song of the time or a classic that everyone knows. Sadly though, usually when I've cleared the dance floor, there's no salvaging the situation.

Q: CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE MONETARY SIDE OF BEING A DJ IN JAPAN? HOW DO YOU WORK OUT CUTS WITH THE VENUES?

Most places in Japan work on a pay-to-play-like system referred to as "hakodai." Basically, the organizer of the event and the owner of the venue will negotiate a certain amount of money, say 20,000 yen, that the event has to raise for the venue. Whatever the door charge to attend the event, the venue keeps the first 20,000 yen raised (in addition to any money made in drinks and bar tab). If the event raises more than 20,000 yen, or whatever the agreed-upon hakodai, the event organizers get to keep the excess. But if they don't raise enough money to meet the hakodai, then the organizers have to pay the difference to the venue out of pocket.

The result is that almost no one supports themselves financially, full time, by being a DJ. There are a few very rare exceptions for the very top tier DJs, who usually get paid upfront.

Q: CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE EQUIPMENT INVOLVED?

Most venues have their own equipment with all the essentials: a DJ mixer, two turntables, and two CDJs. The equipment varies in condition, but all a DJ has to do is bring their own music—records, CDs, USBs, laptops, or whatever your preference may be.

One interesting aspect of Niigata is that there are still a ton of DJs here who still play on vinyl, which the vinyl nerd in me loves.

Q: YOU ALSO HAVE A YOUTUBE CHANNEL. CAN YOU TELL US ABOUT THAT?

The YouTube channel is an extension of my WordPress blog that I started back in 2015. The blog I use for highlighting new and upcoming releases that have caught my attention, whereas I use the YouTube channel for a whole host of things: live streaming DJ sets, VLOGs talking about the new records I’ve been buying, recommendations, and occasionally doing historical deep dives into old, obscure records that I think are worth more attention. I try to get a new video uploaded once a week on Tuesdays, and the DJ livestreams, entitled “Live From The Record Room,” I do every Sunday night at eight.

Q: WHAT FUTURE PROJECTS DO YOU HAVE COMING UP?

Mostly YouTube-related stuff: more mixes, more livestreams, more blog posts, more music-related stuff.

PLAYLIST
DJ Sean

My top ten song recommendations of 2020.

Created by: Spotify • 20 songs, 1 hr 9 min

PLAY FOLLOWING

FOLLOWERS
142,941

Q: CAN YOU RECOMMEND 10 GREAT TRACKS FOR OUR READERS TO LISTEN TO?

Since it's 2020, I'll point you to my top 10 songs of the year so far (in no particular order):

Browse

YOUR LIBRARY

Recently Played

Songs

Albums

Artists

Local Files

Podcasts

PLAYLISTS

DJ Sean

Sundara Karma

Nothing but Thi...

Oliver Riot

Glass Animals

+ New Playlist

Filter

	TITLE	ARTIST	ALBUM	
+	<u>SMILE</u>	Swarvy	Interview with DJ Sean...	3:42
+	<u>Yonaguni</u>	Greg Foat	Interview with DJ Sean...	3:21
+	<u>I Love Louis Cole</u>	Thundercat	Interview with DJ Sean...	3:40
+	<u>Probably Broccoli</u>	Suff Daddy (ft. S. Fidelity)	Interview with DJ Sean...	2:47
+	<u>Social Experiment</u>	Elaquent	Interview with DJ Sean...	2:53
+	<u>fkfkfkfkfkf</u>	Lee (Asano & Ryuhei)	Interview with DJ Sean...	3:59
+	<u>Star</u>	Machinedrum (ft. Mono/Poly & Taner�lle)	Interview with DJ Sean...	3:42
+	<u>Mr. Wu</u>	Kamaal Williams	Interview with DJ Sean...	3:43
+	<u>Fight! Fight! Fight!</u>	Two Fingers	Interview with DJ Sean...	3:52
+	<u>Rubex</u>	El Michels Affair	Interview with DJ Sean...	2:52

SMILE +
Swarvy

1:10 3:41

Sean Sophiea is a Chicago-born, Niigata-residing amateur DJ/record collector/music enthusiast of all genres. When he's not playing out locally, he can be found writing for his own [music blog](#) or talking about and playing music on his [YouTube channel](#), both titled Raw Select Music. That or obsessively buying new music to add to his ever-increasing record collection. You can also find him on [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#), and [Facebook](#).

Rachel Fagundes is a fourth-year JET and the entertainment editor for **CONNECT** Magazine. She likes fantasy, science fiction, and badly-behaved cats. She has been going through terrible withdrawals from Mexican food since moving to Japan from California and would gladly murder you for a burrito.

LETTER FROM THE CULTURE EDITOR

They say that variety is the spice of life, and if that is true then the Culture section this year has been the journalistic equivalent of a scotch bonnet chilli. From lavatories to literature and salamanders to symphonies, I'm proud to say that Culture has covered every nook and cranny of Japanese culture that the **CONNECT** community has to offer. In a year where many things have been uncertain and a lot of us have been missing normality, I hope that the Culture section (and the whole of **CONNECT**) has offered some well-needed escapism to you all. Thank you for sticking with us throughout what has been quite a rollercoaster of a year!

Asking me to choose a favourite article from my section is very much like asking a mother to choose her favourite child: I couldn't possibly. However, there are a couple of pieces that hold a special place in my heart, the juxtaposition of which perfectly represents the chaotic energy that has governed the Culture section this year.

First, please cast your minds back to the November 2020 issue of **CONNECT**, and my "[Smashing the Patriarchy, One Podcast at a Time](#)" article, which introduced Fahreen Budhwani and her SuperSmash Hoes podcast. When I took up the position of Culture Editor last summer, my main aim (as well as producing state-of-the-art cultural content, of course) was to incorporate feminism and social activism into my section as much as possible. I was therefore incredibly excited to have the opportunity to interview Fahreen, of whom I was a huge fan, and provide her with a platform to talk about her podcast and feminism in Japan in general. As Fahreen mentions in the article, "feminism," as most of us know it, is essentially a Western import in Japan, and therefore there is always a risk of "whitewashing" Japanese feminist discourse. Keen to avoid this, SuperSmash Hoes provides a platform for feminist and social activists in Japan, focusing on what is going on domestically at a grass-roots level, rather than just super-imposing Western feminist ideals on to Japanese society. Such a platform is hard to come across in Japan, which is why I was so eager to shine a light on Fahreen's efforts in **CONNECT**. If you haven't yet, please give SuperSmash Hoes a listen. Since the interview was published in November, Fahreen has diversified the podcast to include more topics such as racism, sex education and much more, and has also expanded beyond Japan to feature guests from all over the globe, so whatever your interests, there will be an episode for everyone!

Second, and at the slightly more frivolous end of the cultural spectrum, I'd like to draw your attention to the Culture section's "Love Hotel investigation," which was also published in last year's November issue. The enigma that is the Japanese love hotel is something that I have always been intrigued by, but have not yet had the chance to try for myself. My motivation for the "[Fifty Shades of...Weird?](#)" piece was therefore, primarily, a selfish desire to abate my own curiosity. Little did I know that so many of our readers (and fellow members of the editorial team) were just as thirsty for the dirty details as myself. I am eternally grateful to all the contributors (who will remain anonymous, but you know who you are) for allowing the less experienced among us a glimpse into their love hotel memories. Special mention goes to the author of Story One, whose confusion of a vibrator for a karaoke microphone still has me in hysterics eight months later. When the time is right, I am still determined to dip my toe into the rather murky waters of Japan's love hotels, and I hope to check back in with you all when that happens. In the meantime, we can all live vicariously through this iconic article.

As much as I would happily ramble on about my own section, it is impossible to overlook the multitude of fantastic articles that have graced the pages of **CONNECT**'s other sections this year. When I haven't been listening to feminist podcasts or fantasising about love hotels, I have spent a good portion of this year hiking the mountains of Yamagata Prefecture, where I am based. In September last year, I finally ventured outside of Yamagata for a road trip along the Sanriku coastline of Iwate Prefecture. As if in preparation for my trip, the Travel section's article on the [Michinoku Coastal Trail](#), thoughtfully put together by Anna Thomas, came out in our September issue. Anna's concise and engaging summary of the trail, accompanied by brilliant photographs, came in very handy. I highly recommend everyone to have a read of her guide, and also to visit the Michinoku Trail once travel restrictions have been lifted!

I will finish by saying a big thank you to all contributors, editors and readers of **CONNECT** this year. The last twelve months have been challenging for Japan's international community, and I think that the collaborative spirit of **CONNECT** is exactly what the doctor ordered. I wish you all a fruitful and, hopefully, vaccine-filled year going forwards!

Alice French

SMASHING THE PATRIARCHY, ONE PODCAST AT A TIME

Fahreen Budhwani, host of Super Smash Hoes podcast, talks to CONNECT's Culture Editor

Alice French (Yamagata)

The greatest plans are always those hatched over a late-night McDonald's . . . right? *Super Smash Hoes*, the feminist and social activist podcast hosted by law student Fahreen Budhwani, is certainly testament to this theory.

"I had always been a feminist, and always been aware that gender inequality existed, but it wasn't until I went to study in Japan that I really saw proper sexism in action," explains Fahreen, speaking from her home in London. "I was just frustrated by the gender inequality I was seeing and experiencing everyday in Japan. One night, after a night out in Roppongi, my friend and I were ranting about sexism together in McDonald's, and suddenly we just thought, 'Why don't we try and actually *do* something about this?'" And thus, Super Smash Hoes (henceforth, SSH) was born.

Fahreen first became interested in feminism in Japan after doing a year abroad at Sophia University, Tokyo, as part of her degree in International Politics at the University of Birmingham in the UK. Her year living in Tokyo inspired her to write her undergraduate thesis on Japan, which ensured that she was always keeping up to date with the Japanese feminist movement, even after moving back to England. She started SSH with a Japanese friend, Erika, last year, and the podcast is now on its 23rd episode. "The great thing about Japan is that everyone is so helpful and kind. So many people helped us get our name out there and invited us to events and stuff when we first started. The team at Tokyo Speaks (a Tokyo-based podcast that features voices from the international community) were especially supportive." Erika has recently stepped down as host owing to work commitments, but Fahreen is determined to keep SSH going alongside her studies.

The main aim of SSH is to "diversify the global feminist discourse." Each episode features a guest who is involved with feminism and/or social issues in Japan. Through providing these guests with an internationally-accessible platform (the podcast), Fahreen hopes to bring Japanese issues more to the forefront of the global discussion around feminism. "Feminism in the West, or feminism in general, is very euro-centric," she says. "Western feminist icons, such as the suffragettes, feature so heavily in feminist discourse, whereas Japanese figures, for example Yosano Akiko, are overlooked. This whitewashing of feminist history is something we need to change."

As Fahreen very eloquently explains, feminism (or feminism as we know it in Western terms) in Japan is often viewed as a Western import, and awareness of homegrown feminist activism is fairly low. "A lot of people in the West don't realise that there actually is a lot going on at the grassroots level of feminism in Japan. Japanese feminism doesn't need white saviours," she says. As SSH demonstrates, there is a lot that the West can learn from the Japanese feminist movement, both past and present. As Fahreen asserts, "it is hard to create global solidarity in feminism if you only know what's going on in your own country." Through listening to SSH, listeners can broaden their feminist horizons, and apply perspectives and techniques from the Japanese movement to their own feminist activities back home.

That being said, Fahreen is very aware of her own identity as *gaijin* within the Japanese feminist community, and the limitations that come with it. "I love Japanese culture and am very interested in it, but it's not my culture," she says. "I'm aware of the fact that I'm an outsider; I am not here to judge." Fahreen insists that the

JAPANESE FEMINISM DOESN'T NEED WHITE SAVIOURS



YUME MORIMOTO,
EDITOR OF B.G.U.



FAHREEN BUDHWANI,
HOST OF SUPER SMASH HOES

**SUPER
SMASHHOES**
スーパースマッシュホーズ



I THINK THAT INTERSECTIONALITY IS ESSENTIAL FOR THE FUTURE OF JAPAN.

Japanese feminist movement “does not need [her] voice,” and is very conscious not to try and “speak for Japanese women.” Instead, she hopes to act as a sort of middle-man (or, rather, middle-woman) between activists in Japan and the global feminist community: “my role is to provide the microphone for my guests, not to give my own opinions.”

So, for those of us who are less clued-up on feminism in Japan, where’s a good place to start? Fahreen suggests reading up on the Protection of Motherhood Debate (*bosei hogo ronsō*), a dispute between four Japanese feminists about the role of motherhood and the role it plays in women’s identity and social status, which came to the fore in the early

20th century. The debate showcases the diversity of feminist perspectives in Japan, and presents four different definitions of female empowerment, which can be applied to feminist discourse in any country.

If a more contemporary insight is what you’re after, any of SSH’s recent guests would be a great starting point. Fahreen’s personal favourite is Yume, Editor in Chief of *B.G.U* magazine. *B.G.U* is a queer and intersectional feminist zine based in Tokyo and published in both English and Japanese. Fahreen first met Yume whilst on her year abroad in 2017 and has been a fan ever since. “Yume is so intelligent and so dedicated to genuinely helping the queer and feminist community in Japan. As you will hear from our conversation on the podcast, she is able to take gender theories from the West and apply them to Japan without making them seem like an import, whilst acknowledging the limitations of using Western terms and theories in a Japanese context.” You can find Fahreen and Yume’s conversation on Episode 22 of SSH, and it really is a must-listen for anyone wanting to find out more about Japanese queer history and the contemporary experiences of the queer community in Japan. The absolutely fabulous *B.G.U* zine can be accessed [here](#).

When asked who would be her dream podcast guest, Fahreen answers that she would love to interview Shiori Ito, the journalist who made headlines for going public with her experience of sexual assault in 2017, and has since become a figurehead for Japan’s Me Too movement. “Shiori has been reduced to an assault victim by the media. Her name has become synonymous with Me Too, when she is so much more than that,” she elaborates. “It would be great to interview her not as a victim, but as the successful and influential journalist and amazing producer that she is. Her production company is female-centric, and I think we could have a really interesting discussion about that.” Let’s watch this space for SSH featuring Shiori Ito in the (hopefully not too distant) future!

The wide range of themes that feature on SSH, from periods, to sex education, to the gendered impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, demonstrates the diversity of social issues and perspectives in Japan. Fahreen is particularly passionate about “interrogating the idea of homogeneity” that is often associated with Japanese society. “If we believe that Japan is homogeneous in terms of ethnic identity, gender, sexual orientation etc., it is easy to think that Japanese feminism doesn’t need intersectionality,” she tells me. “But homogeneity is

a fallacy that protects the privileged elite. I think that intersectionality is essential for the future of Japan.”

So how can we get more involved in Japan’s increasingly intersectional feminist movement ourselves? Aside from listening to SSH (which is highly recommended), Fahreen suggests seeking out local and national activist groups via social media and finding like-minded activists and thinkers through those. Groups such as Tokyo Period, FEW Japan, Voice Up Japan and SpeakHer can all be found on Instagram and are brilliant places to start. For those wanting to go one step further and start a podcast yourself, Fahreen’s advice is “don’t think about it too much! You don’t need fancy microphones, just a laptop and something to record on. If there’s something you have a passion for and want to talk about, don’t worry about the logistics, just go for it.” It sounds like there is no excuse for anyone not to start a podcast and, if the success of SSH is anything to go by, it’s definitely worth taking the plunge!

Alice French is a second-year CIR from Cambridge, England, based at the Prefectural Office in Yamagata. When she is not singing in the shower or taking pictures of sunsets for Instagram, she can be found hiking one of Yamagata’s many mountains.

Fahreen Budhwani is currently studying for a Graduate Diploma in Law in London, having recently completed a Masters in Gender and Public Policy at London School of Economics. Super Smash Hoes is available for free on Spotify, Apple Podcasts, Anchor and Google Cast.

Story 1

IT WAS AN ACCIDENT, I SWEAR . . .

My friend and I were planning an enormous road trip of Kyūshū. We used a mixture of Airbnb and Booking.com to find places to stay, and we didn't look into what we booked too closely. One of those places was a 'resort hotel' we found on Booking.com. The picture showed a grey and glass skyrise and said breakfast was optional—a nice, no-fuss business hotel. Good enough for two nights in Kagoshima.

The red flags were raised when we found it in a deserted part of the dockyards, and tacky plastic camels and cacti greeted us as we drove inside. The lobby was dim except for a neon screen showing all the rooms available, and each floor had a theme: fantasy, city, ocean. I'd seen YouTube tours of love hotels, so I was now pretty certain we'd messed up. We were in a state of disbelief as we got our keys from an anonymous hand poking from under a screen, and said our usual friendly *konnichiwa*'s to a middle-aged couple that immediately hurried away. Even the cleaners quickly pretended they hadn't seen us. We should have been embarrassed, but we knew we hadn't booked it on purpose, so we proudly strolled up to our rooms.

They were huge. I had the Italian room, my friend the British one. The beds were king-sized and super comfy. The bathroom had an enormous bath, shower, and herb-scented shampoo and skin oils. There was a little box beside the bed with condoms, and the TV had adult channels. A control panel behind the bed controlled the lighting and music—for that romantic ambience—and we spent the evening playing cards and ordering food. It was fried, oily and not great, but the staff's confusion as they came in and saw two girls playing cards on the bed was pretty funny.

The biggest shock for me, though, was what I found beside the bed. I'd recently seen *Weathering with You* where the runaway kids hide in a love hotel and sing karaoke in their room, so when I found a microphone-looking device in plastic hooked onto the wall, I got naively excited for karaoke. My friend had to explain what it was: a device used for pleasure, and not for your mouth. Scandalised, I tried not to think about it as I laid in my cloud-like bed. Somehow, I slept super well, but we still cancelled our second night and stayed in a trusty APS instead. We'd had enough shocks for one trip.

The lesson to be learnt from this: not all love hotels are called 'love hotels.' Some of them are 'resort hotels' called Kagoshima Intelligence.

Story 2

WAY TO KILL THE MOOD

I went to a love hotel when I was 19 with my partner at the time. It was a 1950s themed place with a modern console bed. We got the keys from a disembodied pair of hands, and it was all so weird and a bit of a mood killer. We had unsatisfying sex and then checked out very early in the morning. It was a fun experience and I'd recommend it for a laugh, but it wasn't exactly romantic.

Fifty Shades of Weird?

Our readers tell us all about their experiences in the wacky and wonderful world of Japanese love hotels



Story 3

AN UNWELCOME SURPRISE

I knew what love hotels were supposedly meant to be like, but I had never used one myself, and with my boyfriend being thousands of miles away, I didn't see us trying one. He first came to visit me a few months into my first year here. During his stay, we decided to take a trip to Fukuoka to see his favourite Japanese band, Radwimps, live for our fourth anniversary. We booked a hotel only 20 minutes by bus from the concert hall with a massive room and breakfast included.

We found said hotel a short walk from a nearby train station and walked past a beautiful water feature at the entrance. A gorgeous piano stood in the lobby, and enormous flower arrangements greeted us at the front desk. We waited a few minutes for the concierge to appear to help us check-in, but no one came. All of a sudden, the phone on the customer's side of the check-in counter rang. I answered hesitantly and was immediately asked whether we were the Booking.com reservation. After confirming that we were, I was directed to the lobby's elevator which I was assured would open in a few seconds. True to the staff's word, the elevator did open, and my boyfriend, still smiling from ear to ear, ushered me inside with a chipper "come on, let's go see our room." I started to get a niggling feeling that something wasn't right, but painted on a smile for him.

The mysterious voice on the telephone had told us we could identify our room by the blinking red light above the door. As soon as the elevator doors opened, my boyfriend all but ran to the only doorway in the hall with a pulsating red light above it. It was unlocked.

As I explored the room, the reality of the situation started to set in. The payment system in the wall beside the door; the solitary slit of a window no wider than a foot; the ridiculously oversized bathtub complete with jacuzzi and light settings; the equally as massive bed facing a flat screen TV larger than any I'd seen in Japan before; even the hair straightener and curling iron beside the bathroom vanity. The last piece of the puzzle fell into place when I spied what lay on the bedside table, encased in a velvet drawstring bag: a

vibrator complete with a note asking patrons to use the provided condoms if they utilised the toy. I realised what kind of hotel we had booked and turned to face my boyfriend. I sat down slowly on the coffee table in front of him and asked him not to freak out. "Babe . . . this is a love hotel. We booked a love hotel by accident. That's why it was the only property left available."

To say my boyfriend freaked out is an understatement. He stood in the middle of the room, not touching anything, for an hour as he desperately searched the internet for a different hotel we could move to. I, on the other hand, had quickly made peace with the situation and had already drawn a bubble bath, complete with disco lights. My boyfriend was disgusted with it all and refused to even sleep on the bed without being fully clothed—including shoes. His sour mood ruined the entire trip. I'm pretty sure Radwimps was the only thing that saved our relationship that weekend.

Story 4

WELL WORTH A VISIT

When my girlfriend and I were searching for a place to stay in Kobe, we happened upon a 'resort hotel' that, after googling, was clearly a love hotel. After discussing it, and seeing the listed karaoke machine, big bath, king size bed and, most importantly, the cheap price, we decided it would be the best and most interesting option. When we arrived, the lobby was gorgeous, decorated with a chandelier. There was a chocolate fountain with various things to dip in it along with different kinds of bath salts. The room itself had a huge TV and an incredibly classy design. The whole situation definitely felt a bit strange, owing to a few of the more "unique" items you find in love hotels (i.e. a massage wand, the ability to buy bizarre costumes from your room, and condoms), but we had a great time watching movies and checking out all the weird things in the room over the course of our three-day stay. And we got free breakfast! It really wasn't a scary kinky sex dungeon place in the least. All things considered; it was a really cool experience that I'm glad I took a chance on.



Story 5

BUSINESS IS BUSINESS

For me, the most surprising thing about going to a love hotel was how nice the room actually was. The outside seemed pretty run-down so I was expecting the same of the room, but that was very much not the case. Most notable was how good the air conditioning was (it was late July). Other than being a tad ornate, it felt like a pretty nice room. Interestingly, they wouldn't let people only stay for a few hours if it's late at night. We arrived at around 2:00 a.m., and we had to pay until the morning. I don't know if that's to avoid having to kick out drunk naked people who have fallen asleep, or just shrewd business practices.

Story 6

WILL I BE STUCK HERE FOREVER?

It took me two years and the right partner to finally tick going to an *inaka* love hotel off my bucket list. Most people use love hotels for a convenient night of passion. However, my stay was actually quite a practical experience. It was silver week, an extremely popular holiday in Japan, so many hotels were fully booked in advance. We weren't going to let that get in the way of enjoying this long weekend, so we thought *fuck it* and started driving in the direction of our destination. On the drive, my partner read out some poorly translated information about love hotels found on Google Maps. We chose the tastefully named "Ice & Cream." Upon arrival, the room prices were clearly shown by the room number which was a nice touch, so there were no surprises. There was an option for a curtain to conceal our identity further but, as the famous quote goes, "Not my prefecture, not my problem!"

One *important* thing to remember about love hotels is that you cannot leave and come back. That is how they make money from food and drink. So remember to buy any alcohol and snacks beforehand if you wanna save some yennies. But do not fear! Most love hotels have a fully decked out menu to ensure you have all the comforts you need at the touch of a button. Our hotel even offered a wide range of medicines free of charge to make sure you were at peak performance. How thoughtful of them.

Once we made it into our room for the evening and the door closed behind us, a sudden wave of anxiety came over me. Were they going to lock the door behind us? How am I supposed to pay? I couldn't see any information about how to pay. What if I couldn't understand what they were saying to me and I would be trapped here forever? Then the phone rang . . . the dreaded phone call in Japanese. I picked up the phone and the anonymous female voice said a word I wasn't familiar with, which I parroted back to her, "Shi-ha-rai . . ." She picked up my confusion and asked if I was paying by card or cash. "*Genkin de!*" Phew. I placed my 10,000 yen note onto the tray by the door and watched as a silent hand gave back my change. It was over. I had survived the interaction. Now I could explore the room in peace, the highlight being a large bath, which could comfortably accommodate two people. A serious upgrade to my ancient bath at home. The room was massive and was fully kitted out with everything you could imagine.

After a comfortable sleep and a munch on some 7/11 breakfast, we departed at around 10:00 a.m. I would recommend setting an alarm as those windows are *completely* blocked out from natural sunshine. Nice way to earn some more yennies from customers oversleeping.

Overall, I would definitely stay at another love hotel overnight as it was a really unique experience and a must-do for anyone visiting Japan.

Thank you to everyone who submitted their stories. Do you have an entertaining tale to tell about Japanese love hotels? Email it to connect. culture@ajet.net and it might just appear online!

LETTER FROM THE ART EDITOR

The past year has certainly been an unusual time for the art scene with many events being cancelled or modified and museums often closing for short periods of time, but as always, the art community has been resilient and creative in coming up with new ways of experiencing art.

As I look back on the past year of **CONNECT**'s Art Section, the articles that I most resonate with are the ones that capture a new way of experiencing art and provide a community uplift in spite of the social distancing measures. I selected to republish Mark Christensen's interview with Shinpei Takeda, "[Memory Undertow](#)", because although Takeda's art installation was site-specific, it also featured a website where anyone in the world could connect with others and experience the memories buried in Nagasaki. Although the nuclear bombing is a tragic topic, people across the world could come together to remember and heal. I imagine similar on-site and online gatherings will happen in the future as a way to remember those that have been lost to COVID-19. There is a beauty in this sort of human resilience, although it is born of tragedy. I also selected Rhiannon Hasseltine's "[Inimitably Eiko](#)" article about the Japanese costume designer Eiko Ishioka because her artwork in films is something that can be enjoyed easily in our own homes. I would also like to mention another one of my favorite articles from this year's **CONNECT** Team: the December 2020 Fashion Section Article "[All Dolled Up: Understanding Japanese Lolita Fashion](#)" is another beautifully written and insightful piece by Rhiannon Hasseltine.

Finally, I would like to thank all of those who have contributed to this year's art section your articles about Japan's art scene and all of the artist spotlights have really showcased the foreign creative community in Japan and uplifted us all in a difficult time. I have continuously been inspired by you all!

Jessica Craven

MEMORY UNDERTOW

Interview with Shinpei Takeda

But what always unsettled me was the dehumanization of the deaths. Nagasaki lost upwards of 80,000 people in the nuclear strike, with countless more maimed and injured. Try as I might, I realized I couldn't comprehend the scale of human loss, and I found it unsettling.

Shinpei Takeda (Ōsaka)
interviewed by Mark Christensen (Fukuoka)

In the West, Nagasaki is a name synonymous with disaster and death. For many, it brings to mind images of nuclear mushroom clouds or cold numbers of casualties. Beyond its cruel fate 75 years ago, though, the city is seemingly overlooked.

When I researched the final days of the Second World War as part of my degree, I took a special interest in studying the morality and use of nuclear weapons. I had to write arguments pertaining to and against the usage of such devices, their moral relevance to Just War theory, as well as their speculated role in what some have called “the Long Peace” (the unusual absence of a hot global conflict in the last seven decades). But there was something that always bothered me about the calculations.

You see, in discussions on the usage of the weapons, many issues have been examined. The length of the war, the planned invasion, deterrence against Russia, economics, the number of civilian casualties . . . to name a few. But what always unsettled me was the dehumanization of the deaths. Nagasaki lost upwards of 80,000 people in the nuclear strike, with countless more maimed and injured. Try as I might, I realized I couldn't comprehend the scale of human loss, and I found it unsettling. I decided that, if I ever had the opportunity, I would attempt to visit the city and see the cost for myself. Several years later, I was placed in Fukuoka with the JET Program, and I made the journey to learn the city's story.

In Nagasaki, I found that the Nuclear Museum is a very powerful place. It preserves a number of relics from the attack and helps to convey the dangers of nuclear weapons, and also discloses some of the graphic horrors that

victims experienced. It was very hard to witness the burns and irradiation that people suffered. Probably the most disturbing feature was seeing the “ghosts” of people flash-burned as images on objects.

The museum also notes how the victims of nuclear weapons include those who created them—and, in a twist, had a plaque for other locations, including my state. Washington State's Hanford Facility produced the fuel for the Nagasaki weapon and now suffers terrible contamination, earning it the nickname, “America's Chernobyl.” The consequences of nuclear technology reach far and wide.

There was a lot to digest, so afterwards, I took a trip to the nearby Peace Park. Shortly upon arrival, I noticed something unusual. Radiating away from the epicenter monument were mysterious white chalk seismic lines and QR codes. I began talking with a man about them

and discovered that he was Shinpei Takeda, the artist behind this remarkable project. He told me of the project's connection to the voices of the survivors, the project's symbolism, and the danger of nuclear technology. He agreed to an interview, and here are his thoughts on the project.



The QR code marker

M First, for those unfamiliar with the “Memory Undertow” project, what is it, and what is its purpose?

S It is a site-specific public art project at Nagasaki’s Hypocenter Park, otherwise known as “Ground Zero”—the center of the atomic bomb explosion on August 9th, 1945.

To this day, it is said that many victims are still buried underneath the ground since the entire neighborhood was completely destroyed, and soon after the war, the occupying US militaries came in and bulldozed over it with soil.

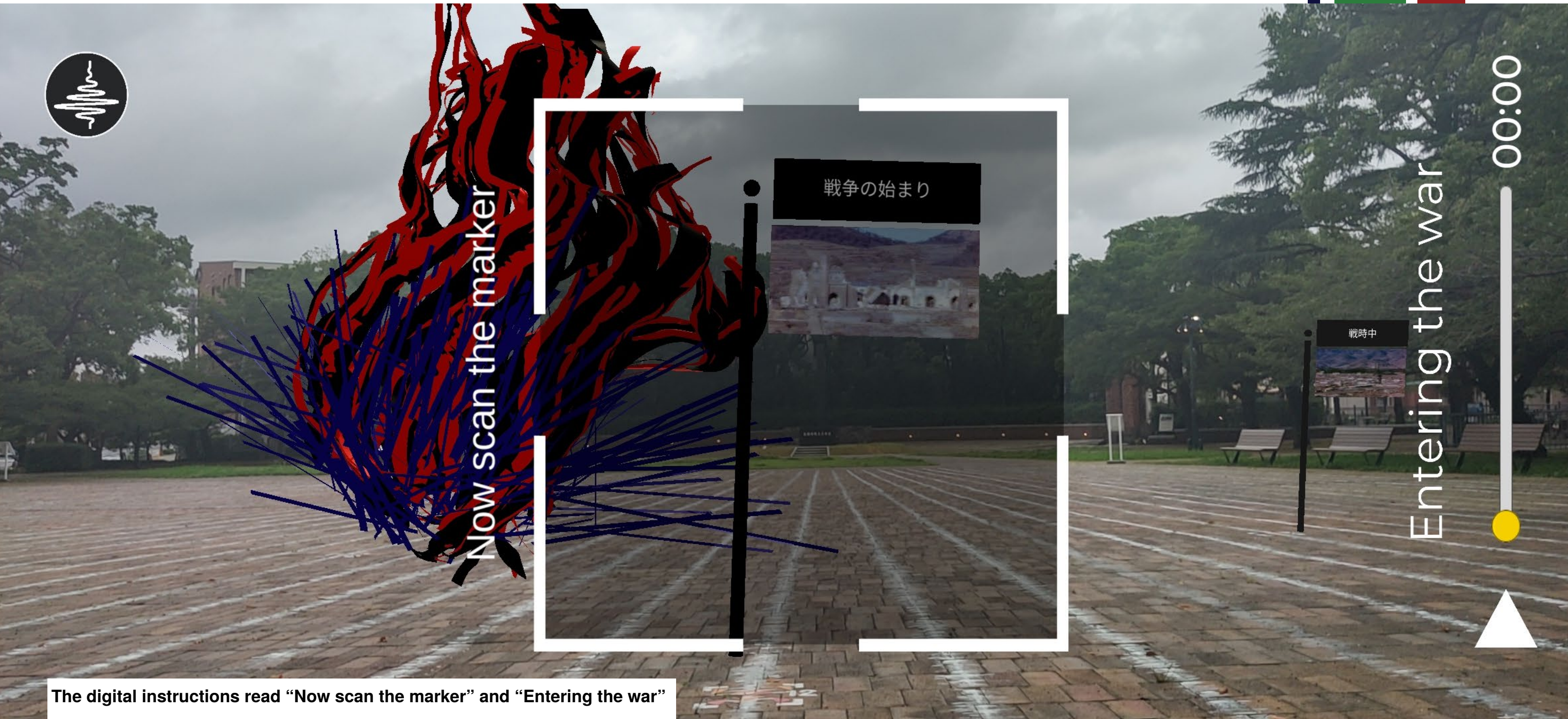
There, directly on the ground, I hand-painted the “voice vibration” from the interviews I have done with the survivors of the atomic bomb that have left Nagasaki and went abroad to countries like the USA, *Brasil*, and Bolivia.

The work lasted about one month before the 75th-anniversary commemoration of the Nagasaki atomic bombing and was later erased. I also developed an app called “Ground Zero,” where you can scan the voice patterns and listen to these voices via smartphone. The work culminated in a performance event on the evening of August 9th before it was erased

completely. My priority was that I wanted people to listen to and see the voices of the survivors as they stood on the “Ground Zero” and wanted people to imagine what their experiences were like.

M What inspired you to create this project, and how has Nagasaki influenced your art?

S I have been working on archiving the stories of the atomic bomb survivors abroad since 2005. Listening to them, I always questioned how these human stories were not quite communicated in the monuments in Nagasaki, so I wanted to find new portals into these human stories. This was the origin of the idea.



The digital instructions read “Now scan the marker” and “Entering the war”

A memorial ceremony



Shinpei Takeda on the exhibition site



M Nuclear weapons left a tragic mark on Nagasaki's community. With this in mind, how have residents reacted to your project? How have visitors?

S First, many people were worried about the fact that I would paint directly on the Hypocenter Park, because it is often considered sacred as a place of contemplation, and also because many people are still buried there.

However, I believe by my being there every day painting it with my hand, it showed my sincerity, and most people reacted positively to my project. For some, it gave them a new way of relating to these stories, and for others, it gave them new possibilities and new parameters to talk about the project.

M For those reading today, what is the message you would like them to take away from this experience?

S There is still a website that was made for this project. You can go [here](#) and click on (3), and there is a way to listen to the stories without the app.

I would like people to visit Nagasaki and find out more about this complex issue that seems like history, but still is a big part of our contemporary lives if you think about the amount of active nuclear weapons there are in this world and the problem we have with radiation and nuclear reactors. Also, some survivors are still alive, and it is important not to forget that this incident is not such a distant past and that it could be repeated anytime. I also would like people to find new possibilities in ways to talk about this difficult and complex matter.

Shinpei Takeda is a visual artist and filmmaker who was born in Ōsaka. His works involve a wide range of themes regarding memories and history. He has also worked in Mexico, the US, Germany, and Austria. The diverse topics of his films include pre-WWII Japanese immigration to Tijuana, Mexico, and the atomic bomb survivors living in the Americas (Atopus Studio). More of his work can be seen on his [website](#).

Mark Christensen is a second-year Fukuoka ALT hailing from Snohomish, Washington. Aside from the adventures of being an ALT, he enjoys mountaineering, cosplay, and photography, which can be seen on [Instagram](#).

Listening to them, I always questioned how these human stories were not quite communicated in the monuments in Nagasaki, so I wanted to find new portals into these human stories. This was the origin of the idea.



Inimitably Eiko

A Look Back At
The Costume Designs
of Ishioka Eiko

Rhiannon Haseltine (Hyōgo)

There are two common themes to the work of Ishioka Eiko: “big” and “red.” This is, of course, a massive oversimplification of her decades of legendary design work. In her early graphic design through to her later costumework, Eiko (as she preferred to be called) favoured boldness and intensity. She aimed, too, for timelessness—not in the sense of classic simplicity or minimalism, but in evoking both the future and past at once. Her ingenuity suggested a future not yet known; her use of the grotesque and erotic appealed to the most primitive parts of human emotion. And then there was the red, her signature colour—one a collaborator described to be as “strong, intense, [and] brilliant”[1] as Eiko herself. In a world that so often teaches women to make themselves small and unheard, Eiko and her work have commanded attention and space from the start.



Eiko Ishioka: Blood, Sweat, and Tears—A Life of Design

石岡瑛子

血が、汗が、涙がデザインできるか

"Can West Wear East?" Promotional Poster on the
Mot Art Museum Website found [here](#).

A Life in Four Chapters

Eiko, born in Tōkyō in 1938, began her career in graphic design at cosmetic giant Shiseido in the 1960s. Her father, otherwise encouraging of her creativity, had strongly discouraged it; being a graphic designer himself, he understood the hostility she would face as a woman. Indeed, Eiko had to insist even in her interview that she receive equal treatment to her male colleagues. Young women at the time were seeing a sudden increase in their power as consumers, and Eiko's ad campaigns called to this newfound independence; empowering women who had been brought up “to listen rather than speak”[2] to see themselves as the directors of their own lives and experiences.

The women Eiko featured in her campaigns were, invariably, “big, big, big”[2] in both presence and visual impact, frequently nude, and emblazoned with slogans like “Girls Be Ambitious!” and “Don’t Stare at the Naked; Be Naked”[1]. She was known to feature models from India, Morocco, and Kenya, presenting a striking new ideal of beauty to a country notorious for its exaltation of porcelain-white skin.

A favoured muse of Eiko's was American actress Faye Dunaway, pictured here in the 1979 poster “Can West Wear East?,” produced for department store Parco. Dunaway, clad in robes of shiny, silvery satin and an exaggerated headdress reminiscent of a nun's cornette, stands (with wing-like seraphic, voluminous sleeves) between

two young Japanese children. The little girls, Eiko's nieces, have eyes daubed with red shadow and wear long, full red skirts tied at the chest that call to mind the *hakama* trousers worn by *miko* (shrine maidens). The effect is heavily evocative of religious iconography—a dreamlike image seeming simultaneously futuristic and primal. This seamless blend of western and eastern cultural motifs with archetypal imagery can be seen time and time again through Eiko's work.



Free-use image of Ishioka Eiko found on Wikipedia

Can West Wear East?

Fearful of becoming stuck in a creative rut, Eiko left Japan for Manhattan in 1980;—a 15-month hiatus followed before she turned her attention to the cinematic and theatrical worlds of production and costume design. Between budgets, practicalities, and conflicting creative visions—not to mention the pressures from above to not stray too far from the profitability of safe, mainstream ideas—design for film and theatre is usually an exercise in compromise. Director Francis Ford Coppola, who worked with Eiko on *Bram Stoker's Dracula* (1992), wrote: “When you make a movie, you don't get exactly what you want—you never do—you get percentages[.] Except for Eiko. She got what she wanted.”[1]

Eiko's unyielding determination to realize her design ideas exactly as she envisioned them only made her more desirable to collaborate with. She was sought out time after time specifically for her uniquely surreal artistic vision; director Tarsem Singh stated that he “fell down on [his] knees” to get her to work with him.[1]

The themes of eroticism and spirituality evident in Eiko's earlier work were also infused in her costume designs, from the gothic sexuality and decadence of *Bram Stoker's Dracula* to the ominous Pagan mysticism of opera *Der Ring des Nibelungen* (*The Ring of Nibelung, or The Ring Cycle*). She played with gender, cultural influences, and the human body itself, and also liberally incorporated animal motifs, historical elements, and references to other artistic works, seeking to visualize those most primal and visceral parts of the human psyche and experience. Her costumes reflected this even in their construction—being sometimes impractically heavy or otherwise uncomfortable to wear but always serving to represent the character's psychology. Jennifer Lopez, while filming Singh's *The Cell* (2000), requested that the hard plastic collar Eiko had designed for her be made more comfortable, only for Eiko to respond, “No—you're supposed to be tortured.”[1] And although safe in practicality,

Eiko's spiked, angular costumes for the Cirque du Soleil acrobatic show *Varekai* (2002) were designed to provoke a sense of fear and danger in the audience.

“It was sometimes difficult for actors to wear Eiko's costumes[.] They were heavy and constricting, and it could take three people to carry a coat. But look at the film in the end.”
-Tarsem Singh, 2012.[1]

If it was a risk to hire “a weirdo outsider with no roots in the business”[1], as Coppola described Eiko, it was certainly one that paid off. Eiko's innovation and unique imagination were handsomely rewarded, first in 1992 with an Academy Award for Costume Design (*Bram Stoker's Dracula*), then in 1998 with two Tony Awards for Stage and Costume Design (*M. Butterfly*), and finally with a posthumous Academy Award nomination in 2012 for Costume Design (*Mirror Mirror*). Even those projects that proved less popular with audiences and critics could not be faulted on the basis of Eiko's work—notorious Broadway failure *Spider-man: Turn Off The Dark* (2011) still saw praise for her surreal, sculptural costume design.

Blood, Sweat, and Tears

Analysing Eiko's entire body of costume work in-depth would fill this entire issue of **CONNECT**, so let's focus on the two films that earned her the attention of the Academy: *Bram Stoker's Dracula* and *Mirror Mirror*.

Bram Stoker's Dracula, conceptualized by Coppola as “an opera with sex and violence”[3], took its sartorial influences primarily from Victorian garb—but by no means exclusively. This is evident in perhaps the most famous costume of the movie: the sumptuous, billowing scarlet cloak worn by Dracula (played by Gary Oldman). With gold phoenix and dragon embroidery on silk of Eiko's signature red, the dynastic Chinese inspiration is clear. The rich fabric and trailing length exude power, wealth,

“It was sometimes difficult for actors to wear Eiko's costumes[.] They were heavy and constricting, and it could take three people to carry a coat. But look at the film in the end.”

— Tarsem Singh, 2012.



Eiko Ishioka, Costume design for the movie, *Bram Stoker's Dracula* (Directed by Francis Ford Coppola, 1992)
Photograph of Lucy ©Helmut Newton (December 1992)

and sensuality, and—of course—the bloody colour evokes vampirism without resorting to more well-worn costume tropes.

Another particularly enduring image from the movie is that of Lucy's (Sadie Frost), post-vampiric transformation. Her enormous lace colour calls immediately to mind a frill-necked lizard's mid-threat display, evoking ideas of danger and cold bloodedness. She wears what had been her pre-transformation wedding dress—a shapeless, lacy bohemian gown. Pre-transformation Lucy is a flighty, flirty socialite, quite in violation of Victorian social norms. Her seductive nature is represented with sheer fabrics, bare shoulders, and even cleavage—gasp, shock, *quelle horreur*. . . . Her later fate is hinted at with reptilian touches, such as the embroidered snakes patterning one of her gowns.

Flipping to the other side of the Madonna-whore coin, Winona Ryder's Mina is the poster child for Victorian femininity—a pure and innocent ingenue clad in soft greens and leafy motifs. Given that she is the (spoiler alert) reincarnation of Dracula's centuries-lost love Elisabeta, the crown of acanthus leaves she wears in one scene is a nice touch, as acanthus symbolizes immortality and eternal life.

Mirror Mirror, in stark contrast, has the timeless fantasy feel of “a true fairytale”[3], a delightful mix of eras. Costume elements were chosen not for historical accuracy but instead for establishing character. Snow White (Lily Collins) appears first in pastel colours and festooned with flowers, the bust-flattening 16th century bodice and 19th century poofy sleeves serving to emphasize her innocence and childlike nature. This is further emphasized later in her ballgown of purest white with angelic wings and a swan headdress.

The swan imagery works primarily to underscore the contrast between the understated elegance of Snow White and the extravagant vanity of the evil Queen Clementianna (Julia Roberts). The Queen's crimson ballgown features silvery peacock motifs and an absurd feathered collar. Her costumes throughout the



movie pull mostly upon the fashions of Tudor and Elizabethan nobility, with huge collars, voluminous sleeves, and skirts up to eight feet in diameter. As it was throughout history, this ostentatiousness is a demonstration of immense power and wealth—a silent message to potential enemies that the Queen is not one to be trifled with.

Timeless, Original, Revolutionary

In both her graphic design and costume design, Eiko viewed art's purpose as not for its own sake but for the visual communication of a message. Eiko described it as “a language to convey oneself.”[4] Nevertheless, collaboration, rather than limiting her self-expression, opened new avenues for the realization of her vivid ideas.

Eiko died, before the release of *Mirror Mirror*, of pancreatic cancer at age 73. Singh reported her as being seriously ill during filming, but no less intense and dedicated for it: “Her work kept her alive—it was her reason for being.”[1]

Eiko recounted once being told by a male designer that she was only famous because she was a woman in a male-dominated field, implying that her work was otherwise insignificant. [1] The body of work she left behind proves this statement laughably false. Her bold, visceral design language was inimitable, going far beyond anything expected or safe. She made her big, red mark on the design world, and it's one that won't be forgotten.

Sources

1. <http://bit.ly/2ONhZwT>
2. <http://bit.ly/3csmLb9>
3. <http://bit.ly/38yJxqi>
4. <https://bit.ly/2NcAJoS>

Rhiannon recently returned to her hometown of York, UK, after spending 2.5 years on the JET Program. She has a degree in Costume Design & Making, a fact that still surprises her given how bad she is at sewing. She enjoys traumatizing herself with horror movies and misses Sushiro more than words can say.

Top photograph: Photo found on Mot Art Museum website - Eiko Ishioka, Costume design for the movie *Mirror Mirror* (Directed by Tarsem Singh, 2012) ©2012-2020 UV RML NL Assets LLC. All Rights Reserved.

Bottom photograph: Photo found on Mot Art Museum website - Eiko Ishioka, Costume design for the movie, *Mirror Mirror* (Directed by Tarsem Singh, 2012) ©2012-2020 UV RML NL Assets LLC. All Rights Reserved.



LETTER FROM THE WELLNESS EDITOR

I think we can all agree that this has been a crazy year of ups and downs. From the global news stories that seemed to come straight from a dystopian novel, to the Olympic committee's blunders, it has been a harder year than most for foreign residents in Japan. If the homesickness and daily challenges of living abroad weren't enough, we had to cope with it all during a pandemic. As the Wellness Section Editor, I kept this in mind as I searched for articles and contributors. If this past year has taught me anything, it's that there isn't just one way to look after our physical and mental wellbeing. Here are two Wellness articles I found particularly inspiring.

9.5 hours south of the southernmost tip of Kyushu, Caleb Dunaway teaches English on a tiny island with 89 people. The only way off the island is on a ferry that comes twice a week, and with no *conbini*—normally a staple of Japanese life—or reliable internet, Caleb truly has an isolated placement. But instead of letting the loneliness get to him, he tackles it with determination: by taking up old and new hobbies. He carries on hiking and gaming, but also learns to fish, prepare his own sashimi, and garden. These new hobbies seem to be popular on his island, and it's Caleb's willingness to try these things that let him bond with the locals—they teach him which fish is in season, and give him suggestions on growing habaneros. (Read the full article [here](#).)

Most of us probably don't live on a tiny island in the middle of nowhere, but Caleb's idea of taking up hobbies would work anywhere. Trying new sports or attending community events connects you with like-minded people, and will hopefully give you the sense of belonging many foreign residents struggle to find in Japan. I myself have joined a local choir and also do Japanese dance, where I can chat with my lovely *sensei* for hours. If you spend your evenings silently at home, consider trying out a new hobby or returning to old ones. And if COVID-19 keeps raining on your parade, search for online events. You're bound to make new friends.

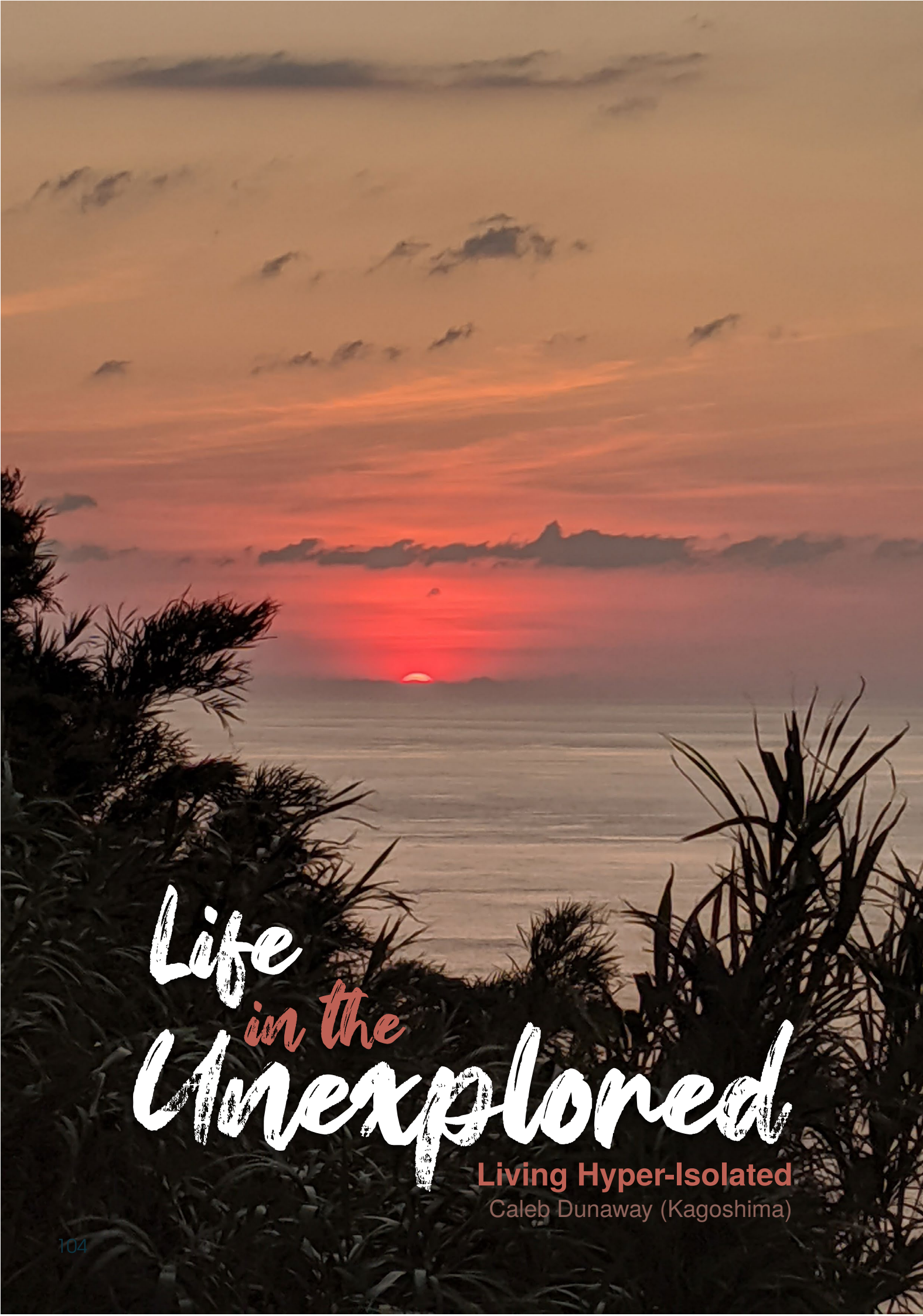
Keeping busy is important, but that won't mean anything if we forget to look after ourselves. Food = love, especially in Japan. I'm sure we've all seen anime where the girl makes an extravagant bento for her crush, or the older sibling/parent makes omurice with a ketchup smiley face for the youngest child. While the Wellness section had nothing on ketchup faces this year, it did have a whole article on [bento 101](#). English teacher Michelle Maczka was growing sick of conbini lunches when she decided to give bento-making another shot. She shares her tips with us, such as splitting up portions for the week and how to choose the correct box size. Along with her mouthwatering photos and descriptions of the contents, her article made me want to try my own bento creations. Most importantly, she advised the reader not to stress themselves out. We don't have to rise at five to make a 10-dish bento every day—buying premade sides to help us out is enough.

The Wellness section wasn't the only place to find ways to feel content with ourselves and our adoptive country. The Community section covered the story of [Richard Pearce](#), an Englishman who turned an abandoned home into a guesthouse as part of the local community's revitalisation project. Japan's coastal towns are dying out, but Richard and the international visitors he's drawn to Mikuriya have given the residents a ray of hope.

With this year's inspiring articles wrapped up, I'll end this with a huge thanks to our readers for sticking with us over the bumpy year. I hope the Wellness section (and the rest of **CONNECT**, too) have helped cheer you up, inspire you, and let you know that you're not alone. In these stressful times, don't forget to make time for yourselves—and for good food, of course.

*Clare is a second-year JET in the inaka of Fukushima, but she's originally from England. When not editing **CONNECT**'s Wellness section, she spends her days reading fantasy books, writing stories, and hiking up random mountains in northern Japan. You can follow her travels [here](#).*

Clare Braganza (Fukushima)



Life *in the* Unexplored

Living Hyper-Isolated
Caleb Dunaway (Kagoshima)

South of Yakushima and North of Amami Oshima, deep in Kagoshima prefecture, sits Japan's longest "village" Toshima. Toshima Village, known as "Japan's last unexplored region", is a group of 7 inhabited islands and 5 uninhabited islands that altogether make up the Tokara Archipelago. The inhabited islands include, from north to south, Kuchinoshima, Nakanoshima, Suwanosejima, Tairajima, Akusekijima, Kodakarajima, and Tokarajima. I live on Tairajima, the centermost as well as second-smallest inhabited island. The population of Tairajima is a mere 89 people. Like most islands in Toshima, it is the leftover of a now inactive volcano. Surprisingly, there is an ALT on each of the inhabited islands in Toshima. Our schools are combined elementary and junior high schools with the largest number of students being 17 in any school.

Life in Toshima isn't quite like most other placements on JET. There are no airports or active charters in Toshima, making the only way on and off the islands a ferry that runs twice a week—if the weather is good. There are no conbinis, grocery stores, or gas stations in Toshima. The only way we get food is by ordering our groceries online which come on the Saturday ferry. Tairajima, being the centermost island, is 9.5 hours away from both Kagoshima City and Amami Oshima.

As I'm sure you can imagine, a placement in Toshima comes with its own challenges and hurdles to grapple with, social isolation being one of the hardest. Being the only foreigner and living on an island consisting mostly of older people has been an exercise in both patience and figuring out how to spend time by myself. Like most JETs, I had



*There are no conbinis, grocery stores,
or gas stations in Toshima.*



compile a general list of the things I wanted to do and places I wanted to go while on the Program. But, even before Covid-19, because I'm placed so far away from any sizable city or airport and limited to the twice-a-week ferry, it's been difficult—if not impossible—to tick off my bucket list. Touching on the current pandemic, luckily Covid-19 has barely affected my island life: due to the small population I can go walking, trekking in the jungle, and swimming at the beach just as often as before.

Living in such an isolated place has taught me that finding what makes your placement special (something you can experience that others living elsewhere can't) is crucial to both gaining an appreciation for your surroundings as well as handling being away from the people you know. A few of the things I've come to appreciate about my small island are the deserted beaches where you can go swimming, the incredible year-

round fishing, the beautiful sunsets, and the local festivals that you can't find anywhere else in Japan. One such annual festival is Kasedauchi; an islander dresses up as the local deity, the Futtokojin, and comes to each house to eat sushi, drink sake, and then rub black ink on your face as a sign of good luck for the year. While the Futtokojin is travelling between houses, children run out from hiding places to drench the deity with buckets of water.

Another necessary practice I've found in dealing with the isolation is spending your time in ways that you enjoy. I've spent this time continuing to learn Japanese, as well as picking up hobbies I didn't have time for in the past. It helps if you are genuinely interested in what you are doing to pass the time. I've experimented with multiple different hobbies trying to find things that I both enjoy and can share with my neighbors and coworkers, one of the big ones being gardening. This year I planted habanero and jalapeno peppers. Unfortunately, only two habaneros came up and only one has fruited so far. But I've had a lot of fun figuring out what I did wrong this year as well as talking to my neighbors about what they suggest growing. I've planned out next year's garden and am looking forward to sharing the spoils of my hard work with my fellow islanders.

Fishing is another hobby I've picked up thanks to the islanders. Growing up in Tennessee, a land-locked state, I never really had a chance to do much sea fishing. For the islanders however, fishing is an interesting mixture between a hobby and a way of life. They've taught me what fish are in season, what is edible and what isn't, as well as the different types of lures used for certain fish. They've also taught me how to make my own sashimi, which is something I'll have a hard time giving up after I leave the island.

While finding the time to take up new hobbies is important, I've found that making the time to continue hobbies you had before JET is just as, if not more, important. Before coming to Tairajima I spent a lot of time reading, hiking, and playing video games. Living the island life has given me just as much time to pursue those hobbies as well. Luckily there are no snakes living on this island, so I go on near-weekly hikes up into the jungle on my island. The expansive banyan trees create a cathedral effect throughout the jungle which echoes the sounds of the birds and goats moving about. I've even purchased a hammock I take into the jungle and hang in when it's not unbearably hot. Along with hiking, I also try and spend a little time every weekend playing games online with my friends back home. Unfortunately, we are in the midst of typhoon season at the moment, so it's not uncommon for the WiFi to go out and be out for days on end. But, I try to make the most of my time disconnected and either read or study some more Japanese.



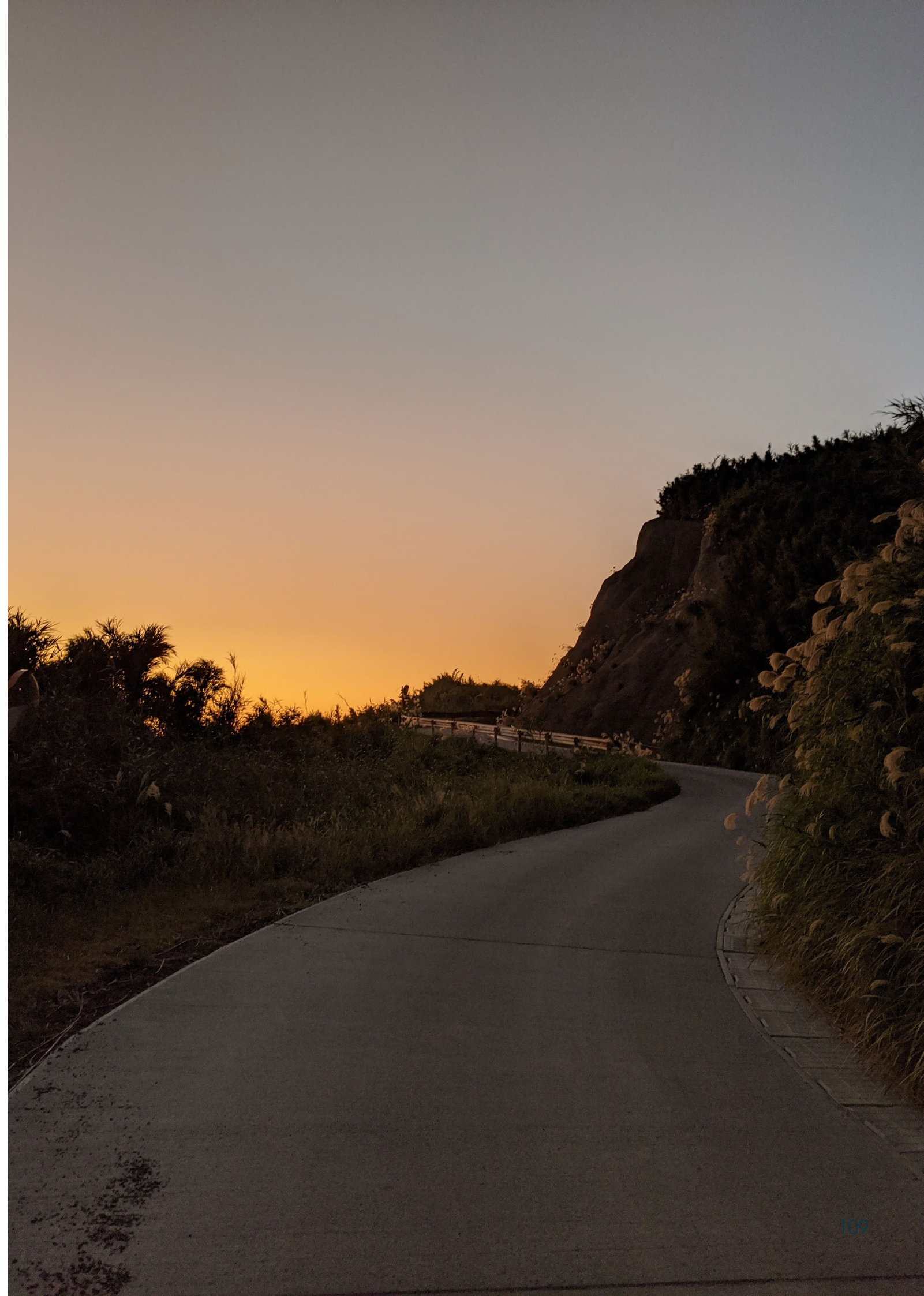
While hobbies are good for keeping you occupied and focused on things other than being alone, I've realized that they can never really replace interacting with others. Despite taking up new hobbies and continuing old ones, I've still found myself desperately missing my family and friends as well as just going out to restaurants or stores to be around other people. There really is no replacement for being around people. Talking to my family and friends a few times a week and planning out the times out in advance helps me both feel a bit less out of the loop.

I'm also constantly thinking about my next trip off the island. Whether it's just to simply hop on the ferry one weekend to visit an ALT on another island, or planning out next year's Golden Week vacation. I try to keep myself focused on the future. I also spend lots of time planning and prepping for my post-JET move.

Unfortunately however, there are no “quick fixes” for social-isolation. Living in a foreign country, especially on a barely inhabited speck of land, will inevitably cause you to feel incredibly isolated and separate from the world you’re used to. As with any negative feeling, it’s necessary to first acknowledge it and understand that it’s a totally normal feeling. And although it’s inevitable, there are definitely things that can be done to lessen the feeling and help you move past it once it arrives. The things I’ve listed above are the practices and thought-processes that have helped me. They are in no way a sure-fire fix to the feelings of isolation, but they have helped me cope with living on a little rock in the middle of the ocean.

Caleb is a second-year JET on a little island in Kagoshima Prefecture. Originally from Tennessee, he spends his time relaxing on the beach and watching the sunset. His criminally near empty blog can be found [here](#).

Photos: Caleb Dunaway



SIMPLY

BENTŌ

A QUICK-START GUIDE FOR BEGINNERS

Michelle Maczka (Chiba)

Universal truths are fairly rare when it comes to experiences on the JET Program, but one thing is certain: when the sun rises high in the sky and the clock ticks past noon, rumbling tummies can be heard from Sapporo to Sasebo. Some of us have only to settle down in a classroom while carrying a tray of freshly prepared *kyūshoku* (school lunch) which, depending on the day's menu, may be highly anticipated or deeply feared.

As a seafood hater, I had a love-hate relationship with these lunches during my tenure on JET. Whole fried fish, gritty clams, and seaweed graced my plate far too often for my liking. When I started teaching high school post-JET, I could finally eat anything I wanted! However, even convenience store *bentō* grew dull with time, and when I could no longer bring myself to eat another bite of soggy *karāge* or meat sauce pasta, I started packing a bentō.

My first ever bentō looked beautiful and garnered lots of praise from my co-workers, but it took me almost three hours to prepare and left me with a sinkful of dirty dishes. The next day, I made a completely different one, with slightly less dish washing and a time savings of 20 minutes. Suffice to say, I quickly gave up and resigned myself to cup noodles and mini salads again.

Miso cabbage stir fry; benishoga (pickled ginger); julienned carrots with cumin and black pepper; kiriboshi daikon with carrot and fried tōfu; macaroni salad; black sesame over rice



I couldn't quite figure it out in those early days of my bentō attempts. I packed my supplies away and forgot about it until last year, when I started again in earnest. The impetus came from the most unlikely of places: my students' textbook. One of the first chapters was an overview of bentō and how it has spread and been adapted to local tastes around the world. Most of the students couldn't have cared less about the topic, but it was the spark I

needed to give it another shot.

The benefits of bentō are numerous and widespread, from money-saving, to maintaining a balanced diet, and even to posting that humble-brag on Facebook, so here is my Bentō 101 for you. Hopefully you'll be able to avoid the mistakes I made as a novice and develop a fun new hobby perfect for your lifestyle. Let's dig in!



Above: Nikujaga (simmered beef, potatoes, shirataki noodles, onions, and snow peas); spicy pickled cabbage; carrot slices in white miso dressing; sliced apple with peanut butter; camembert baby cheese; whole grain roll

Right: Chicken meatballs with thai sweet chili sauce; yellow peppers, chives, and bean sprouts in spicy oil; julienned carrots with cumin and black pepper; steamed green beans; black pepper mini cheese; rice with a mini pickled plum



Left: Soy sauce riceballs with edamame and cheese bits; spicy pickled cabbage; carrot slices in white miso dressing; nikujaga (simmered beef, potatoes, shirataki noodles, onions, and snow peas)

Below: Braised pork belly over rice; mixed vegetable pickles; black sesame candied satsumaimo; spinach and carrot stir-fry; green beans with ground sesame dressing and flower-shaped carrot



Bentō Defined

If you ask anyone familiar with bentō-making to define what exactly a bentō is, you'll get a wide variety of responses. The most general definition will be along the lines of a container filled with several different dishes. Japanese cooking theory holds there to be five colors, five flavors, and five cooking methods. *Washoku* (Japanese-style) meals aim to include as many of these as possible, and it's also a good rule of thumb for bentō. This not only balances nutrition but also gives variation that satisfies us

and, if I'm being perfectly honest, yields a beautiful photo to upload to social media.

There's really no wrong way to bentō and no need to confine it to just Japanese dishes either. In fact, these days Japanese bentō cookbooks include recipes for sandwiches, pastas, and even soups. There's also no reason to stress about how "homemade" your lunch is, as long as it works for you. I usually focus on

cooking a main dish, a simple side dish, and then buy one or two things at the supermarket to round out my lunch. For example, if I made teriyaki chicken thighs as my main dish, I'd pair it with a cabbage and mushroom saute, then buy some daikon pickles and grapes from the store to finish it off.

The Box

What is a bentō without a bentō box? There are myriad options out there in every price, material, size, and color imaginable. But before we get ahead of ourselves, at its core, a bentō box is

just a container. Not much separates the fanciest, high-end *monbento* made in France from any old tupperware from your neighborhood Daiso. As a beginner, I had little idea which size would work best for me. Most bentō boxes are quoted in milliliter capacity. Generally speaking, aim for 600-800 mL; adjust accordingly if you have a big appetite or are a light eater.

Before buying a bentō box, do a week or two of test runs using containers you have on hand. You can find out their capacity by filling them with



Fried tōfu, mushroom, and carrot simmered in soy sauce and mirin; cabbage and ham slice sauté; chicken meatballs in sesame ponzu sauce

Ribbon carrot and raisin salad; boiled salted broccoli; ham flowers; cheesy cream pasta with bacon, carrot, and onion



Pork, onion, and garlic stir fry; spicy sesame oil dressed greens; kiriboshi daikon with carrot and fried tōfu; sautéed green peppers with canned tuna

water from a measuring cup—just make sure you write it down somewhere. You can also pop over to the 100-yen shop and grab two or three differently-sized food storage containers, which should have their capacities written on the label.

If you're ready to invest in a fancier box, you should also consider the material. If you plan on eating your bentō without reheating it, you can choose any kind you like: wood, metal, or plastic. However, if you want to warm your lunch before eating, it limits your choice to plastic. In most cases, plastic bentō boxes should be reheatable in the microwave without their lids, and I recommend heating them for no longer than two to three minutes.

The Fillings

Browsing Pinterest or YouTube, it's far too easy to be drawn into the world of *kyaraben* and other complicated arrangements. Before you know it, you'll be up past midnight cooking or running out the door with a half-packed bentō. For first-timers, consider your cooking skill, available time, and clean-up motivation before committing to any recipe or menu. Re-creating Doraemon out of blue and white rice with *nori* cutouts for a face may look cute, but it's also time-consuming for little yield. The idea here is to pick just one recipe that's new or more time-intensive, and keep all other elements as uncomplicated as possible.

Basic bentō guidelines suggest half of a bentō be carbohydrates, one quarter a protein, and the remaining quarter reserved for one to two sides or accents like pickles, sliced fruit, or mini sausages. You might want to keep these guidelines in mind if you're

completely new to meal planning but don't feel restricted by them. Rather, use it as a basis for adapting bentō to your needs. Some people prefer to reduce carbs by subbing in shredded cabbage, while others may need half of their lunch to be protein to stay full until the end of the day.

This is also where a strategic store-bought side or plain old fruits and veggies can become your biggest allies. Mini tomatoes and steamed broccoli florets are often used to fill oddly-shaped spaces left behind after packing in other foods. Dishes that require the one-two punch of long preparation time and small amounts of many ingredients—I'm looking at you potato and macaroni salads—are something I almost always buy rather than make. If you time your purchases right, these premade sides will keep in your fridge for two to three days and can be used over multiple bentō. This actually ties into my next point.

Eat Twice But Cook Once

You've likely heard of batch cooking before, and luckily we can apply this to bentō too! Referred to in terms such as *tsukurioki* or *jobisai*, this technique saves both time and money. While just starting out and building up your repertoire, consider also simply making an extra portion or two at dinner to save for future bentō.

Before you haul off and quadruple your recipe, you should know that not every ingredient or dish yields well to this method. Some foods, like tōfu and eggs, are fairly sensitive. They have a relatively short shelf life once cooked, and their textures will change when frozen and reheated. Pickles keep five days or more in the fridge but can't be frozen.

When in doubt, try to eat up or freeze any recipes within two days. If you're also questioning whether you'll enjoy the food after a freeze and reheat cycle, start off by freezing just a portion or two to minimize waste in case the worst happens. Once I made the mistake of freezing, untested, a large batch of egg quiche—it was not pretty (or tasty).

If you try this system out yourself, here are just a few food safety tips. The biggest rule is to always have clean utensils and containers when portioning out food. Use a fresh pair of chopsticks or new spoon to pack each dish, or wipe them off well before touching a different food. Avoid directly touching or licking your utensil before putting it back into the container. It's also recommended to cool hot foods, such as rice, to room temperature before packing them alongside leftover cold foods to prevent bacteria growth. Above all, if you have any doubt about the freshness of the food, better to toss it than to risk it.

Final Touches

If you have an extra few minutes, you can add a bit of pizzazz to your lunch quite easily. Browsing the bentō supply aisle of stores will uncover a range of whimsical plastic picks, mini sauce

holders, shaped silicone containers, nori seaweed punches, and even hard boiled egg molds.

My go-to tools for that extra touch are shaped bentō punches, which look like tiny cookie cutters. I have them in flower and leaf designs as well as a bevy of holiday-themed ones too. Sliced carrot or cucumber, bell pepper halves, and even cheese make for perfect materials to cut out shapes to your heart's desire.

Want something even simpler than those ideas? Keep on hand black or white sesame seeds as well as some *furikake* seasoning. Just a quick sprinkle of these on rice can help add some amazing visual appeal with zero effort.

With that, you're now ready to craft your own delectable bentō. Above all, if it's tasty and satisfying, then you've done it right. Let's get cooking!

A Massachusetts native, Michelle came to Japan via JET in 2014 and spent two years in Murakami, Niigata before moving to Chiba. She enjoys searching out regional specialties and "B-kyū" gourmet restaurants with her spouse. She also likes sumo wrestling, board games, and studying kanji.

Three-color rice bowl with ground chicken meat; *benishoga* (pickled ginger); boiled edamame; and sliced omelet strips



LETTER FROM THE SPORTS EDITOR

It has been an interesting year for sports. In a year that has been tough for most of us, cultural and political effects have a way of rippling into everything, sports are no different.

It was difficult to decide what articles sum up the entire year. Naomi Osaka has been mentioned consistently in our articles. She remains a great example of how athletes can be a positive force for change. She has recently been in the news for refusing to speak to the press at the French Open due to her mental health. She was also impactful in the Black Lives Matter movement as mentioned in the [“Naomi Osaka: From Love All to Ace”](#) article (published in the November 2020 issue) by Joby Zhang.

I wanted to pick an article that mentioned Naomi. In the end, I have settled on Lisa Paper’s article on beauty standards in Japanese sports. [“The “Ideal” Woman: Defying Beauty Standards in Japanese Sports”](#) (published in February 2021). The article details the effects that Japanese standards of female body images have on sports and vs versa. Discussing suicide, sexism, racism and eating disorders this article is a poignant and revealing read.

I couldn’t republish any articles without mentioning the upcoming Olympic Games. So it should be no surprise that Joby Zhang’s article on [“The True Cost of COVID-19 and the 2020 Summer Games”](#) is featured. Zhang does an excellent job detailing the catastrophe behind the shiny exterior of the Olympics. Despite an overwhelming backlash and the vast majority of the population being against the Olympics, it does look like it will be going ahead. But is that a good idea? Read his article to find out just how unhinged the games are.

For another insight into the Olympic Games check out our [May 2021 issue](#) where you can find two interviews by our previous sports editor Rashaad Jorden. One with the legendary Billy Mills and another with Olympic ambassador DeeDee Trotter. The interviews were conducted before the postponement of the 2020 Olympics and offer an interesting perspective into what was and what could have been.

If this previous year has taught us anything, it is that representation matters. Whether it be race, gender, sexuality, mental health and regardless of the industry, our voices need to be heard and now is not the time to be silent. I hope that we continue to report on the issues that matter not just in Japan but globally. Thank you for your continued support of our magazine and I hope you continue to do so in the future.

Kayla Francis (Tōkyō)

The "Ideal" Woman:

Defying Beauty Standards in Japanese Sports

Lisa Paper (Tōkyō)

Female athletes in Japan may face a plethora of similar, subtler stigmas in their daily lives when it comes to narrow, contemporary beauty standards.

TW: The following article discusses suicide, sexism, racism and eating disorders.

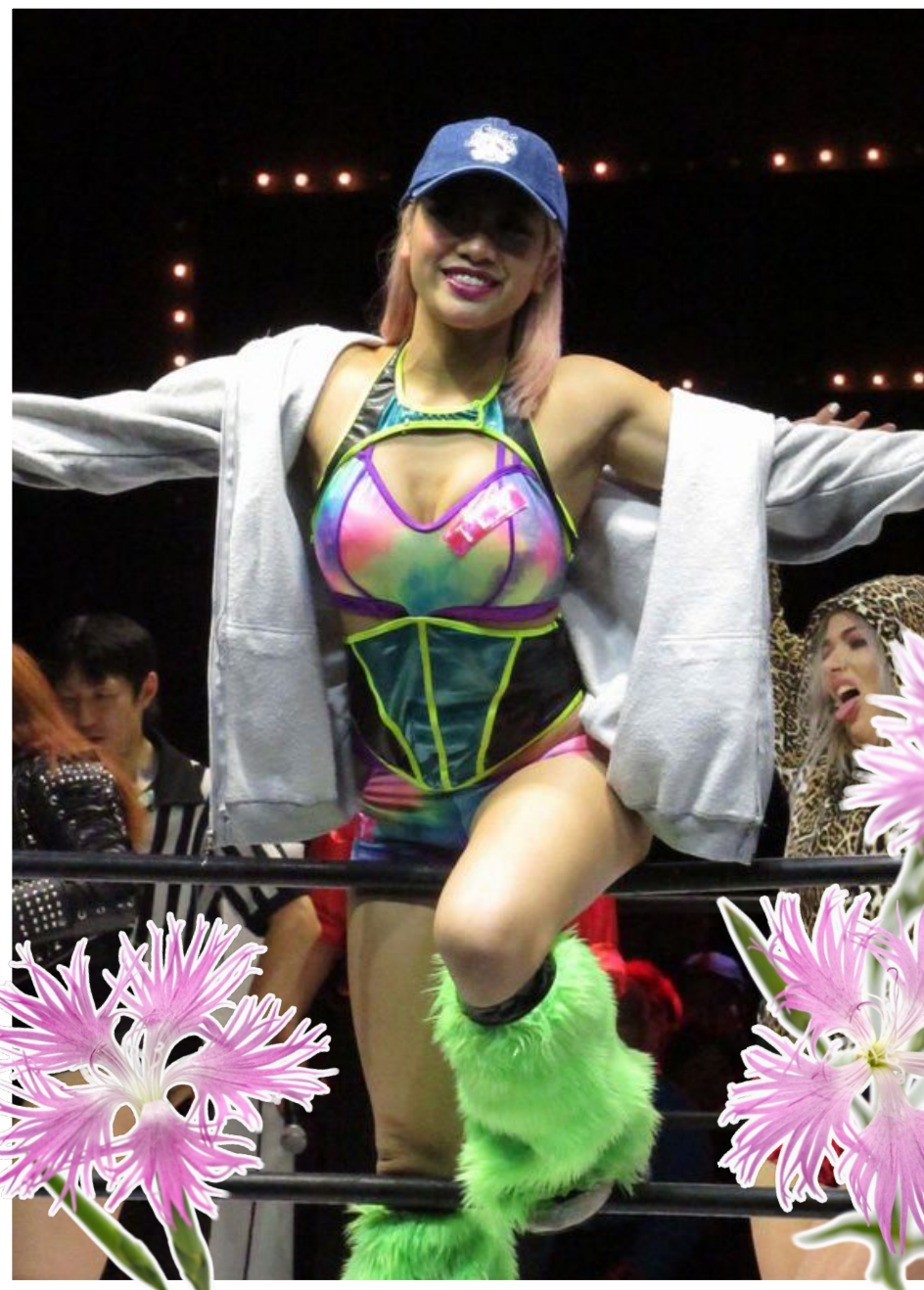
The Japanese term, “*yamato nadeshiko*”(1) refers to the personification of an “ideal Japanese woman.” It covers a lot of ground: she’s beloved for her beautiful, pale skin (*bihada*), willowy hips (*yanagigoshi*), and her modesty (*okuyukashisa*), among other attributes. She’s also, perhaps unsurprisingly, considered increasingly rare. While many argue that modern Japanese culture is gradually ditching traditional gender norms such as these, the leftover pressures of embodying the ideal of

being appropriately “feminine” while balancing the sometimes (seemingly) contradictory kinds of personal attributes needed to rise to the top of their fields in competitive sports can create a strain on female athletes. This expected duality seems as pervasive as ever: even the Japan women’s national soccer team is affectionately nicknamed(2) “*Nadeshiko* Japan.” The struggle of juggling being both “feminine women” and “athletes” is not new—but many female athletes grapple with these seemingly conflicting pressures in silence, which can have devastating effects on their mental, emotional, and physical health.

On May 3, 2020, Japan was rocked by the tragic death of 22-year-old *Terrace House* star and pro-wrestler, Hana Kimura(3), in what was deemed an apparent suicide(4). Kimura and her teammates openly discussed the difficulty of dating as an athlete in Japan on the show, citing concerns that they didn’t want to intimidate men. They would often go so far as to keep their careers a secret(5) when navigating the ins and outs of a budding new romance. Kimura’s wrestling teammate, Jungle Kyona, told her that, “You should want to be with someone who accepts you and your work, who likes you for who you truly are.” Kimura

was an inspiration to many and was able to shed some much-needed light on life as a biracial female wrestler in present-day Japan. The beloved pink-haired star and successful second-generation female wrestler wrote to followers on Twitter that she only ever “wanted to be loved in life.”(6)

Instead, Kimura faced a wave of online cyber-bullying. In particular, she was targeted after an episode aired in which she had a confrontation with a male roommate over one of her wrestling outfits. Following Kimura’s death, there was an outcry against bullying which spanned the international community, and *Terrace House* was deemed “toxic” by many avid former fans. Her apparent confidence as she body-slammed opponents while decked in bright colors undoubtedly made her a role model to many young, aspiring female athletes who watched the show. Her loss was a tragedy, and some argue there is culpability in the way in which she was portrayed by producers. Pro-wrestler, Chigusa Nagayo, stated(7), “She was an athlete, a professional wrestler with a future. She just played the villain. In reality, she was a polite and kind junior professional wrestler.” In response to the tragedy, *Terrace House* suspended the 2019-2020 season, issued an apol-



Kimura Hana, 2019 (Yoccy441, Wikicommons)

ogy, and posted a note of condolence on their website. Still, many wondered if this was enough.

Kimura is not the only female athlete to have struggled with warped representations in the spotlight. Naomi Osaka, a professional Japanese tennis player who’s been consistently ranked as one of the world’s top players by the Women’s Tennis Association, spoke out about controversial cartoon representa-

tions which have received notable backlash. Noodle company, Nissin(8), ran an animated advertisement of the Haitian-Japanese star with lightened skin and muted brown hair in “Hungry to Win” in January 2019. The company was quickly accused of “whitewashing”(9) Osaka. At the Australian open, she told journalists, “It’s obvious, I’m tan. It’s pretty obvious.” She was forgiving, saying that she didn’t think the company had “whitewashed”(10) her on purpose and that “. . . next time . . .

I feel like they should talk to me about it.” (Surprisingly, this wasn’t the first time Osaka had faced this situation—in September 2018, an Australian cartoonist depicted(11) Osaka as a blonde-haired white woman). The ad has since been removed from YouTube.

Osaka has been known to push back against negative comments on her personal photos, famously clapping back at internet trolls who had made disparaging comments about her bikini

body in July 2020 by tweeting(12), “You don’t know me, I’m 22, I wear swimsuits to the pool. Why do you think you can comment on what I can wear?”

Female athletes in Japan may face a plethora of similar, subtler stigmas in their daily lives when it comes to narrow, contemporary beauty standards. In particular, muscles are often viewed as unfeminine, while being ultra-thin is “in:” according to one government survey, just 10% of Japanese women in their twenties and thirties engage in



Osaka US16 (si.robi, Flickr)

regular exercise(13), instead choosing to diet to achieve a specific body type. Diet culture is very popular among Japanese women, which has sometimes been documented as a rise in disordered eating(14). Athletic builds sculpted by training tend to be more muscular, which is a body type that doesn't "fit" in with this ideal.

Meanwhile, female athletes who "fit" within these societal and beauty standards tend to receive largely positive press and high praise—take Hinako Shibuno(15), for example, a professional golfing sensation who has won the Japan LPGA four times. She has been dubbed as "Smiling Cinderella" in the world of professional golf due to her cheerful disposition and the fact that she is always sporting a demure smile. However, maintaining this facade has taken its toll on Shibuno. Shibuno has come forward during the U.S. Women's Open to say that she has only recently felt as if she could come out of her shell as a celebrity and is working on the ability to "be herself again" in the face of celebrity pressures.

Despite all of these hurdles, there's a growing admiration for women's fitness in Japan. Fitness trainer, Aya Osanai(16), has reached celebrity status as a fit fashion model. Her Instagram(17) account features photos of Osanai proudly displaying sculpted abs and arms as she models for her over 400,000 followers. Osanai thinks that Japan has the potential to become the "next fitness nation." There is momentum growing behind a female fitness movement, which is usually promoted with a focus on women's overall health. Tomoko

Katagiri(13) from the PR department of the fitness company, Curves Japan, in an effort to promote female fitness, commented on the benefits of exercise by saying that, "Maintaining muscle strength is a key for prolonging healthy life expectancy."

There are also a number of body positivity bloggers and influencers who are fighting back against the traditional idealization(18) of the Japanese female figure as being petite and light-skinned, including plus-size fashionista(19), Naomi Watanabe(20). One YouTuber personality, Ryo(21), gained mass attention by addressing viewers on her channel, Ryo :3(22), where she speaks candidly about her experience as a tanned and taller woman in Japan. She encourages Japanese women to not let negative remarks bog them down and to instead have confidence in themselves and their bodies.

One former female athlete is looking to reshape the narrative surrounding female athletes' bodies and empower future Olympians when it comes to women's healthcare. Retired Olympian swimmer, Hanae Ito(23), is working publicly to destigmatize menstruation for female athletes. Ito has said that, had she known about ways to manage menstruation (specifically, she has talked about birth control), she believes she would have performed better as an Olympic athlete. She has stated that she believes that lack of access to information had an effect on her ability to compete up to her full potential during the Beijing Olympics in 2008, as she was competing while on her period. It wasn't until after returning from the

games that the professional swimmer was presented with the possibility of period-managing contraceptives. Ito is now working in the Tōkyō Olympics and Paralympics committee PR department and hopes to support the health and wellbeing of sportswomen.

Sayaka Nose(23), an OB-GYN who specializes in female athlete care at the University of Tōkyō hospital, said that, according to one study, only 27% of female athletes representing Japan were using a contraceptive during the 2016 Rio Olympics, a number she finds "shockingly low." Furthermore, very few female athletes return to careers in sports after childbirth, according to Nose. Nose has said that "there is a lot more work to be done in terms of scientific and cultural change" in regards to educating and supporting Japanese female athletes. Nose feels that Japan should be doing more in terms of reproductive education for teens, saying that "These girls are potential future Olympians."

From cyber-bullying to "whitewashing," from access to education regarding contraceptives to supporting Japanese female athletes who happen to be mothers, there is still a great deal of work to be done when it comes to helping female athletes in Japan to feel empowered and positively represented in the media. The year is 2021. Perhaps it's time to destigmatize women's bodies in Japan and start applauding them instead—for their ability to golf, swim, wrestle, dominate the tennis courts on a global scale, and so much more—all while representing Japan. At the end of the day, the stats and world records won't be based on skin color or muscle

mass, BMI, whether an athlete has had a child, or whether or not an athlete was taking birth control to manage her symptoms. The only important factor will be that athlete's ability to compete effectively in her field. Maybe *yamato nadeshiko*, and its personification of the ideal woman, is due for an update.

Lisa Paper is a Tōkyō JET and a returned Peace Corps volunteer. She studied English and Telecommunications at the University of Florida.

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How much trust is there in the officials?

As the total number of COVID-19 cases surpasses 400,000 in Japan, Tōkyō accounting for about a quarter of that, and an extension of the second state of emergency to Mar. 7, the fate of the 2020 Summer Olympics and Paralympics, which was already pushed back to July and August 2021, is again under considerable spotlight. Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga and his cabinet are scrambling to make last-minute decisions and reassurances to combat the sharp downturn of public opinion.

According to a survey from Kyodo News, conducted over the weekend of Jan. 9–10, “around 80 percent of people in Japan believe the postponed Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics [...] should be canceled or rescheduled.”

The same survey also found that 68.3 percent were “dissatisfied” with the implemented COVID-19 measures, and 79.2 percent said that the second state of emergency was declared “too late.”

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The True Cost of COVID-19 and the 2020 Summer Games

Joby Zhang (Tōkyō)

Only 14.1 percent support holding the Summer Games this year.

Despite having such detrimental numbers being reported, the International Olympic Committee (IOC), the Tōkyō Games organizing committee, and the Japanese government are adamant on the games happening this summer.

The previous Tōkyō Games organizing committee president, Yoshiro Mori, has been quoted saying that another postponement is “absolutely impossible,” in an event organized by Kyodo News on Jan. 12.

“Having the slightest sense of uncertainty impacts everything. All I can say is that we will go ahead with our preparations. There will be morning even after a long night. Let’s work together to overcome this major challenge,” Mori assured.

Following a resolute statement from Mori, the IOC President Thomas Bach also voiced certainty of the Games opening on July 23. But skepticism surrounds Bach’s own comment, where he said, “[. . .] there is no plan B and this is why we are fully committed to make these games safe and successful.”

In regards to the possibility of reducing the number of spectators, or outright having none, Bach then went on to mention, “You may not like it but sacrifices will be needed. This is why I’m saying, safety first, and no taboo in the discussion to ensure safety.”

“(We) encourage all the Olympic and Paralympic participants who are offered vaccination to accept it, also as an act of solidarity with the Japanese hosts and their fellow participants [. . .] [but] vaccination will not be obligatory,” Bach said.

In a meeting with the Japanese Olympic Committee (JOC) councilors on Feb. 3rd, Mori’s response to the question regarding the JOC’s policy to increase female board members by more than 40 percent made headlines worldwide.



Yoshiro Mori, Wikimedia Commons

The Asahi Shimbun reported on Mori’s demeaning comments stating that the increase of women will make “meetings drawn out” and how the current seven women board members “all know how to behave.”

The comments were met with public outcry, forcing Mori to announce his resignation a week later. Despite the scandal, he pointed to former president of the Japan Football Association, 84-year old Saburo Kawabuchi, as the replacement for the next head of the JOC.

This move proved to be terribly erroneous. Public backlash over “closed-door politics” promptly cleared the drawing board as the selection panel, headed by Canon Inc. Chairman Fujio Mitarai, worked to find the next president.

Despite the JOC’s and PM Suga’s guarantee of an open and transparent selection process, meetings of the selection panel were off-the-record. The committee also refused to confirm the members that make up the panel.

As the start of the domestic leg of the torch relay is soon to begin in Fukushima, the 56-year old House of Councilors member, Seiko Hashimoto, was chosen as the captain to weather this storm. Hashimoto has a wealth of qualifications: from being the first female head of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party’s upper house member, to being minister in charge of the Olympics, women’s empowerment and gender equality, to a seven-time Olympian. However, there is still an air of uncertainty that surrounds her.

Although sponsors and a majority of the public support the appointment of Hashimoto, some of them, notably the president of Toyota Motor Corp., Akio Toyoda, have voiced concerns about the lack of communication between the athletes, the public, and the selection panel.

There are also questions about Hashimoto’s personal connections to Mori as she was a member of the intraparty faction that was headed by the former PM, as well as other scandals.

In 2014, Hashimoto was embroiled in a sexual harassment scandal where she forcefully kissed Vancouver Olympic figure skater bronze medalist Daisuke Takahashi. Takahashi later denied such harassment, but the public believes that he was pressured into making the statement.

Again, in September 2020, then Olympic minister, Hashimoto spoke to The Japan Times saying, “I think we have to hold the games at any cost. I want to concentrate all our efforts on measures against the coronavirus.”

Fast forward 3-months to December, Hashimoto admitted to having dined out with five other people in a high-end sushi restaurant. This was only 6 days after the Japanese government implemented new COVID-19 restrictions in an effort to curb the spread.

Hashimoto’s comments over holding the games were in response to remarks made a day prior by IOC Vice President John Coates, head of IOC’s coordination commission.

“It will take place with or without COVID. The Tōkyō Games will start on July 23 next year,” Coates told the French news agency Agence France-Presse.

From another survey conducted by Kyodo News in July 2020, about 23.9 percent responded in favor of holding the Summer Games as scheduled in 2021.

About 70 percent of respondents think that the Tōkyō Games should be postponed or canceled.





Vaccination is the key, but is it too little, too late?

Contrary to what the Japanese and IOC officials are trying to paint, experts are hesitant to agree with them.

The director of the Infectious Diseases Center at Rinku General Medical Center, Masaya Yamato, is unsure whether the games can continue, especially with the “Host Town Initiative” in place.

According to a statement from the Cabinet Public Relations Office, the initiative is to encourage “globalization, revitalization of local areas and promoting inbound tourism [. . .] [by] trying human, economic and cultural exchanges with the participating countries/regions.”

“I worry about the emergence of a new variant spreading rapidly through interactions between athletes and local communities of the team’s host towns,” Yamato said.

In regards to vaccination, Yasuhiro Kanatani, a professor of clinical pharmacology at Tokai University, warns that different vaccines will provide different outcomes so “it’s important to determine in advance which type of vaccine to use” and “stricter control measures will have to be taken” with international visitors.

Kanatani says, “Giving athletes access to vaccines, having them take multiple tests and restricting their movement upon arrival in Japan” are measures which can be taken to protect them and the Japanese public.

As much haste as the government is making, vaccination in Japan will be a monumental task due to the recent vaccine shortages and the deeply rooted skeptical outlook about vaccines in general.

So far, only the vaccine made by Pfizer and BioNTech has applied for emergency approval. If all goes well, the inoculation program can be started as early as late February, said Health Minister Norihisa Tamura.

The Japanese government also has contracts with the companies that produce the Moderna and AstraZeneca vaccines.

Clinical trials of the Moderna vaccine will begin in late January, with the second doses concluding in early March, and blood samples sent and analyzed in April.

But recent news of Pfizer halving vaccine deliveries until mid-February to upgrade its plant and AstraZeneca’s announcement of cutting deliveries in February and March by 60 percent has disrupted vaccination plans of governments around the world.

In a study published in the Lancet in September 2020, Japan is consistently ranked among countries with the lowest confidence in vaccines. With only 8.9 percent strongly agreeing that vaccines are safe and 14.7 percent strongly agreeing that vaccines are effective.

Japan’s distrust in vaccines can be found in the early 1990s inoculation of a combined shot of measles, mumps, and rubella (MMR), which some suspected led to higher rates of aseptic meningitis. Despite no related link between the two, lawsuits were filed against the Japanese government. The unease worsened with the mishandling of the human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine in 2013 by government officials. The vaccination for HPV dropped from about 70.6 percent in the late 1990s birth cohort to 0.6 percent in the 2000 birth cohort.

“Japan has had a negative history with vaccines for the past 30 years, with the government lacking sufficient efforts to enlighten the public. Mass media is also to blame for overemphasizing the risks of vaccines and all but ignoring the benefits brought about by them,” Dr. Kentaro Iwata, professor and head of infectious diseases department at Kobe University Hospital, said.

“So it’s not easy to change people’s mindset all of a sudden, but if you look at the data, it’s clear as day that it’s better to have the shots,” he added.

According to a poll by the Yomiuri Shimbun in December of 2020, 84 percent said they would be vaccinated for COVID, but an overwhelming majority of 69 percent said they wanted to wait. Only 15 percent of the respondents said they would opt to receive it immediately.

If a special exception is made for the Summer Games and vaccinations are not a requirement for athletes as Bach has previously said, “all the

economic and emotional pain caused by closing the borders and restricting domestic movement and activity could be wasted,” reports Joel Fitzpatrick of Kyodo News.

“Conquering the coronavirus comes before everything else. If you don’t like the lockdown or other measures that severely restrict our social lives, then the best thing would be to get a vaccine,” Iwata stresses.



Are the numbers in the right places?

The total cost of the Summer Olympic and Paralympic Games has been raised by 294 billion yen (\$2.8 billion) to 1.64 trillion yen (\$15.8 billion), announced the Tōkyō Games organizing committee on its fifth budget release.

The 294 billion yen increase is mostly for the setup of venues and maintenance of the athletes village, including the installation of countermeasures to prevent the Games from becoming a super-spreader event. Part of it is directed towards the opening and closing ceremonies, as labor costs and the added expense of storage for the completed structures increases.

As the numbers for the Summer Games rise, so does the number for everything else. The restaurants and bars that have been following municipal requests to cut business hours short will be able to tap in a 741.8 billion yen (\$7.15 billion) reserve fund for subsidies of up to 60,000 yen per day.

On Jan. 28, the Japanese parliament authorized a third extra budget for fiscal 2020 totaling 19.18 trillion yen (\$185 billion).

Among the third increase is a 1.03 trillion yen (\$9.79 billion) for the extension of the controversial travel subsidy program, the “GoTo Campaign,” to late June.

But what’s missing from these budget hikes and

talks are the support for people who now rely on the welfare system due to layoffs and severe income drops.

During the House of Councilors Budget Committee session on Jan. 27, Michihiro Ishibashi, of the Constitutional Democratic Party of Japan (CDP), asked PM Suga, “Are you telling people in dire economic straits (due to the pandemic) to just help themselves?”

“First of all, (people) should try whatever they can on their own. If that does not work at all, then the government will step in to help with the social safety net,” Suga replied. “There are various measures in place and, in the end, the government has the welfare system.”

Ayako Oguni, a writer for The Mainichi, reports that the welfare system should be the first step toward self-reliance, but only 20 percent of those who are eligible receive it. There are continuing efforts on the municipal and the prefectural level which aims to hinder the whole process.

What should be the “first step toward self-reliance” has become “the final safety net,” Oguni writes.

Tomoshi Okuda, president of the nonprofit organization Hoboku, emphasizes, “There should not be hierarchy or order among self-support, mutual support, or public support. Public support should not come in last.”

According to a study published in Nature, researchers at Hong Kong University and Tōkyō Metropolitan Institute of Gerontology reported that suicide rates rose 16 percent during the second wave of COVID-19.

Notably, among women and children, rates spiked 37 percent and 49 percent, respectively. The prolonged pandemic increased the burden on working mothers, while domestic violence increased, the study found.

The study reports a correlation between the children suicide rate and the period after the nationwide school closure.

What’s the play?

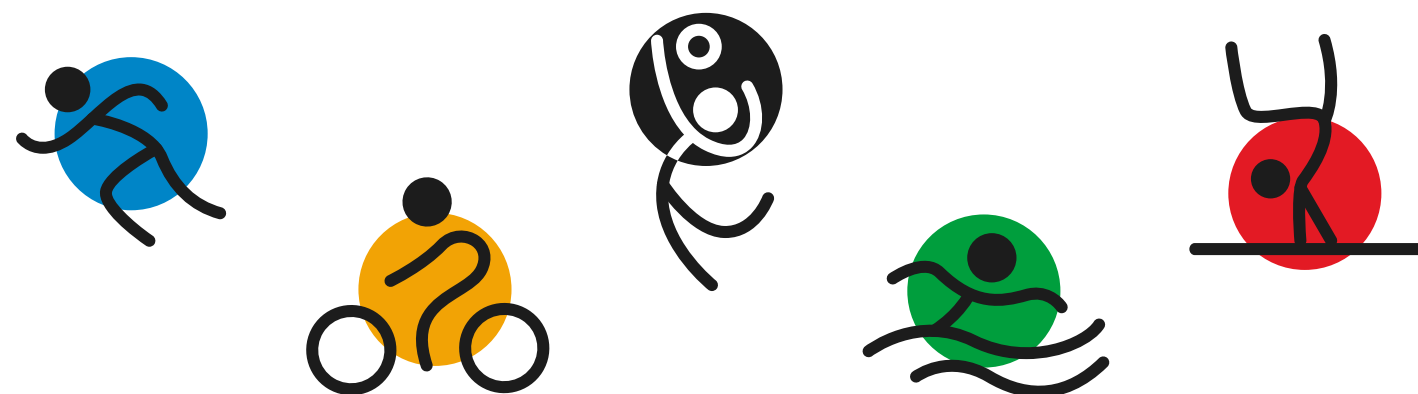
Scandal after scandal are breaking out about senior bureaucrats **dining out lavishly** in Ginza with Suga’s eldest son or ruling lawmakers **visiting hostess bars**.

As the confidence in officials decreases, suicide rates surge, and the job market shrinks, the Japanese public is quickly growing weary and progressively questioning whether PM Suga and his cabinet have the best interest of the Japanese people in mind.

Perhaps Tōkyō doesn’t want the glory of declaring “victory over COVID-19” falling into the laps of Beijing as the 2022 Winter Olympic Games nears.

Perhaps the Japanese government simply doesn’t want to lose face.

Whatever the final dance that Suga and Bach have imagined it to be, one thing is certain. Borrowing from the article title in The Sydney Morning Herald, “Tōkyō Olympics plan is tempting disaster.”



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Yuebo (Joby) Zhang is a second-year ALT from America living in Tōkyō. His favorite spots are the small shops found in the back alleys from the likes of Nakameguro, Omotesandō, and Ebisu. Since graduating from university and working at his parents’ restaurant for two years, he’s delighted to be living in such a foodie metropolis.

LETTER FROM THE TRAVEL EDITOR

Since I took up the mantle of Travel Editor last summer, it has been an odd year for travel in Japan and across the world in general. With borders closed and mandatory quarantines in place, travelling abroad has been off the table and visiting home an arduous process involving twirling, jumping, and leaping your way through increasingly convoluted hoops. Domestically, things appeared alright at first with many people taking advantage of the oddly named Go To Travel campaign, but as we entered 2021, cases have rollercoaster-ed up and down through three seemingly endless State of Emergencies.

These border closures also mean that very few of this year's JET cohort were able to arrive in Japan over the past year. Luckily, it seems that this year it will be different, with new JETs scheduled to arrive this June and also between September and December. I'm sure everyone is very excited to finally make it to Japan after a tortuously long wait, but thinking back to when I was about to depart three years ago, I'm sure many of you have lots of questions as well. For this reason, I'd like to highlight my favourite non-travel article from the past year, ["To Pack or Not to Pack, That is the Question"](#) from the December issue by our very own Fashion & Beauty Editor Shannon Stocker. This article is chock-full of great advice for preparing to move to Japan that I'm sure every new JET will be excited to read!

As Travel Editor during this time, I have tried to highlight outdoor, activity-based travel across lesser-known areas of Japan, but as the year progressed it became harder and harder to find people with any travel experiences to share. With the JET Programme being the only time some people have to explore Japan in depth, I tried to introduce natural destinations that could still be enjoyed even during this pandemic as long as you followed strict Coronavirus prevention measures. In particular, I have tried to source articles on the Tōhoku area and northern Japan in general as I have come to love this unexplored rural region I currently call home.

Unsurprisingly, my two most memorable articles from the past year align with these two aims. The first article is ["Cycling to Cape Soya"](#) by Regan McAllister from the October issue, a hilarious recount of a fellow Aomori JET's experience cycling to the northernmost tip of Hokkaidō during *Obon* last year. As someone who feels faint after cycling over a mile and who hates the idea of being in a tent, her tale of cycling up steep inclines and camping in rain storms was inspiring and also slightly terrifying.

The second article is ["The Michinoku Coastal Trail"](#) by Anna Thomas from the September issue. The Michinoku Coastal Trail is a 1000 km long trail that runs along the coast of Tōhoku, connecting Aomori to Fukushima. Anna's article provides the perfect guide for anyone looking to hike sections of the trail or to attempt the full trail, though hopefully not in one go. The trail follows the coastline that was struck by the 2011 Tōhoku earthquake and tsunami, simultaneously showing the beauty of the Sanriku Coast and the tragedy the local communities have been courageously trying to overcome in the decade since.

I would also like to thank all the contributors who introduced both me and our readers to a wide variety of new destinations across Japan over the past year, and I hope that once the pandemic comes to an end, we'll all be able to go out and explore the many wonderful hidden destinations that Japan has to offer. Until then, I'll be online reading about the many new places I would like to visit and adding them to my neverending bucket list.

Clarissa Combe (Aomori)
Instagram: [@ontheedgeofforever](#)



Regan McAllister
(Aomori)



CYCLING TO CAPE SOYA

BIKE-PACKING HOKKAIDO

Sitting in my town office on the first day of summer vacation, I realized it was the day I had planned to travel to Tokyo for the Olympics. After seven months of suppression, my adventure bug no longer wished to lie dormant. However, living in a pandemic, I recognized the necessity of abiding by social distancing guidelines. This is how my plan for biking to the northernmost point of Japan came to fruition.

“Is it okay if I visit Hokkaido next week? I am going to travel by 自転車 (*jitensha*) and camp the entire time,” I asked my supervisor.

“You mean 電車 (*densha*)? Sounds a bit risky,” he responded, assuming I mispronounced the word for train.

“No, no, 自転車,” I said, stressing the *ji*. Others in the office looked up, and once more, I was corrected,

“電車? Train?”

“No, with my チャリ (*chari*), I want to bike to Wakkanai.” I used the slang word for bicycle as I acted out riding a bike. A moment of silence passed as my office looked at me quizzically, during which I explained my intent to bike-pack Hokkaido.

Cape Soya
Hokkaido's northernmost point



I planned to complete my 10-day trip without the use of public transportation (besides a couple of ferries—I’m a good swimmer, but not that good) or hotels. I arrived at the port of Tomakomai around 6 a.m., and as I rolled onto Hokkaido, with no concrete plan aside from the goal of reaching Cape Soya, I had one thought on my mind: I had ten days—how hard could it be?

My first day gave me quite the cycle for my money. I first headed east to Noboribestu to visit Jigokudani, or Hell Valley. Having never bike-packed before, I took my time getting acquainted with my loaded bicycle. After a quick foot dip in the famous Oyunuma River natural footbath, I felt eager and energized and decided to continue to Lake Toya for the night. I took the most direct route to get to the lake, which cut through the mountains.

Rookie mistake #1:

overestimating my ability, or, as I prefer to say, underestimating the difficulty of the terrain.

I started ascending the road, going slow but steady. 15 minutes turned into 30, then an hour, and the incline kept growing steeper and the road windier. My legs soon turned to jelly, I conceded defeat, dismounted my bicycle, and committed to walking up the rest of the mountain, which at this point felt vertical. Soon, my weak arms were also on fire, and I largely contemplated turning around, but my stubborn self wanted to retain some degree of pride. Luckily, cars on this route were thin, limiting the number of people who witnessed this pitiful sight.

Finally, after what felt like summitting Everest, I reached the top. I walked over hoping for a nice view, but as I approached the look-out, a downpour began. Not just a shower, but the type of run-to-cover rainstorm with ferocious raindrops that sting when they hit you. I quickly strapped on my poncho and thought 'at least it's downhill from here.'



Rookie mistake #2:

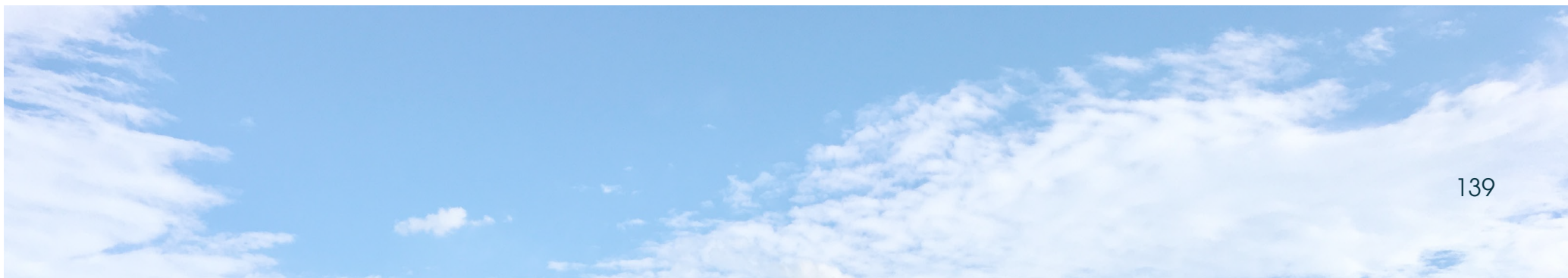
not having adequate, or really any, rain gear.



Rishiri Island

What I didn't think through was the physics of wearing a poncho while racing down a windy, slippery hill. Between the rain washing sweat into my eyes and obscuring my vision, my poncho turning into a parachute, my feet slipping and the pedals whacking into my shins (**rookie mistake #3; not having clip-in pedals**), and puddles spraying dirty road water up into my face, this was definitely not the idea of fun that I had envisioned. Nevertheless, I made it to the lake. Never

have I appreciated the warmth of an onsen so much in my life. The rain let up briefly for me to pitch my tent and promptly fall asleep. The nice thing about exhaustion is that you don't have the mental energy to worry, or even think about, the future and how many more miserable, mountainous rain encounters lie ahead. I was just happy to have survived day one.





Hokkaido Rice Fields

The following days were much more enjoyable, albeit still filled with some unfortunate weather. In six days, I cycled up to the northern town of Wakkanai, averaging about 150 km a day, often waking up before the sunrise in an attempt to beat the rain. Spoiler alert: mother nature won every time. From Lake Toya, I passed through Lake Shikotsu and Chitose, then spent a day soaking in the beautiful lavender-smelling flower fields of Furano and admiring the pristine blue

lake of Biei. From there, it was a fairly straight shot north through endless fields of rice and corn. I was warned by many that this section of Hokkaido is ‘boring.’ Though the terrain and landscape aren’t the most diverse, I find rice paddies to be one of the prettiest parts of the Japanese countryside. I also feel slightly indebted to the rice fields due to the sheer amount of rice I consume daily, so it feels unfair to belittle them.

On my fifth day, I was enthusiastically greeted by rain again in Otoineppu. Accepting that it wouldn’t let up in the foreseeable future, I set to work pitching my tent next to the one other soul braving the weather. A kind man emerged to assist me and pointed out a small splinter in my tent pole. It hadn’t caused me any trouble thus far, so I ignored it and took refuge from the rain.

Rookie mistake #4: not carrying duct tape, which fixes everything.

At about midnight, the wind picked up, and I awoke to my tent feeling like the big bad wolf was outside huffing and puffing, and then yes, blowing my tent down. A huge gust caused the splintered pole to snap, and my tent began flooding with water. Luckily, an awning that offered about half a meter of rain coverage stood not too far away. I hadn’t sprinted that hard since high school basketball drills.

My misery was quickly overshadowed by victory when I reached Wakkanai the following day. My final destination of Cape Soya was still 30 km further, but I decided to first detour to Rishiri and Rebun islands. Rishiri Island boasts a volcano, lovingly referred to as Rishiri Fuji, which is the icon of the popular Shiroi Koibito cookies. The volcano steals the spotlight and is even prettier up close; however,



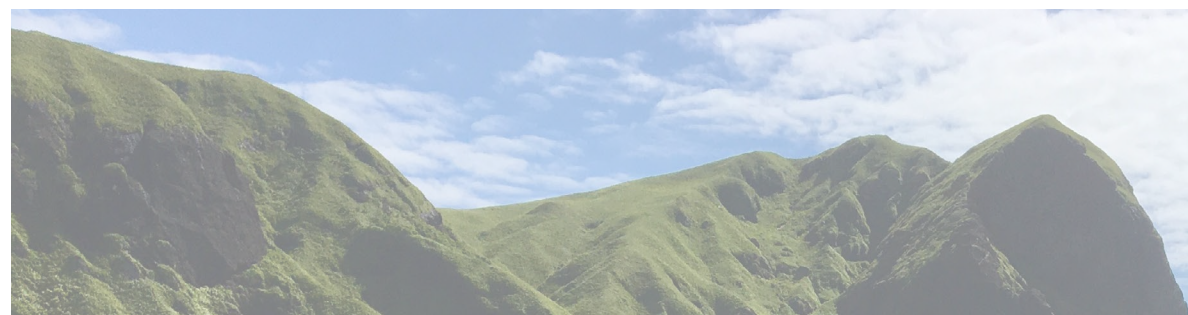
it was Rebun's unanticipated rugged beauty that stole my heart. With the best weather of my trip, a stunning view of Mt. Rishiri, dramatic cliffs that felt like the Scottish Highlands and bright green vegetation everywhere, Rebun is a nature lover's dream. As I settled into my campsite that evening, I remembered the meteor shower set to occur that night. With minimal light pollution, the sky looked like a planetarium. For the next hour I lay with my head poked out of my tent, marveling at the brightest shooting stars I have ever seen, surrounded by the sound of laughing families and the smell of sizzling barbeque meat, feeling the good sensation of tired muscles from a day of use. It was in this moment that all the hours of wet, windy cycling and tent mishaps became worth it.

Upon returning to Wakkanai, I battled the gnarly winds that frequently plague the coast, snailing my way up to Cape Soya. I didn't have big expectations for what reaching the "finish line" would feel like, but this probably ranks as the most anticlimactic finish to anything I've ever completed. I took a picture, spent a few minutes hoping to catch a glimpse of Russia (she was being quite shy), and then got back on my bike and started pedaling my way back down south.

Hokkaido was a challenge, both physically and mentally, but it was also without a doubt one of the best travel adventures I've had. It wasn't the arrival at the northernmost point of Cape Soya that left me feeling triumphant, but the simple moments throughout the journey that evoked the most joy; the sun peeking out after a storm, a thumbs up from a motorcyclist or “頑張つて” from a driver as I crawled up a steep hill, a soak in an onsen after a day of riding, the man who helped me pitch my tent in a downpour, stumbling upon a sunflower field in the rain, or my shoes finally drying after being wet for 2 days straight. Bike-packing Hokkaido allowed me to be present, without regular daily distractions, and develop a deep appreciation for the stunning beauty and kindhearted people of Hokkaido, Rishiri, and Rebun islands. It was a welcome reminder that slowing down can be a powerful tool to connect with yourself and cultivate gratitude for the small things that we often overlook in our busy and stressful lives.



Regan McAllister is a 2nd year ALT in Rokunohe, Aomori. Having spent 7 years of her childhood living in Tokyo, she is enjoying the opportunity to experience a new region of Japan as a working adult. A nature enthusiast, she spends her free time running, hiking, cycling, skiing and partaking in just about any other outdoor activity. She also enjoys eating copious amounts of ramen, reading about the world and planning for her next travel adventure.





THE MICHINOKU COASTAL TRAIL

Lush Nature,
Unforgettable Food,
and Lessons from Disaster

Anna Thomas
(Shibata Town, Miyagi Prefecture)

In 2015, I got word of a new 1000 km long-distance hiking course being made in Tohoku. Tohoku's Pacific coast was seriously damaged by the 2011 earthquake and tsunami that caused the death of almost 20,000 people, and this "Michinoku Coastal Trail" was created to attract people to the coastline to enjoy its nature, history, culture and cuisine, as well as to meet local people and learn about natural disasters. Previously, I'd spent most of my time at the coast as a post-tsunami volunteer, but this was my chance to enjoy these areas as a tourist! I've hiked bits and pieces over the years, and in this past year, I've section-hiked 700 km of the trail. I've done English translations for the MCT for years and now work part-time at the trail's headquarters in Natori, Miyagi. In short, I love this trail, and I'm here to invite you to come when you can and enjoy it for yourself.

top: Samuraisishi Rock in Kuji



"Hiking this trail has been more about becoming comfortable with who I am already and working within my limits."

Boulder washed up by tsunami in Karakuwa, Kesennuma

GIFTS THE MCT HAS GIVEN ME

When I started section-hiking the trail, I expected a journey to "find myself" and push beyond my limits, but I found that that was not necessarily what was on offer. Hiking this trail has been more about becoming comfortable with who I am already and working within my limits. I am the same person I was when I started my journey, with a couple of extra tools up my sleeve.

One tool is camping. I had never expected to even tolerate camping. In fact, my first night camping on the MCT was miserable. It rained all night. I lived on nuts and bread because I had expected a campground store that wasn't there. In the morning, I flung my sleeping bag across the empty campground in frustration because it wouldn't fit back into the microscopic bag it came from. Now, I've grown to love it. With a tent, you sleep in the open air, hearing

the sounds of waves, ducks having an evening quack, or the occasional shrieking deer, and yet you're protected from the less pleasant parts of the outdoors like mosquitoes and rain.

Another tool I gained on the trail may someday help save my life. It was the accumulated effect of what we'd heard about the 2011 tsunami that led my husband and I to evacuate to higher ground during Typhoon 19 last year. At the time, I wanted to deny there was an emergency, to believe that our area was safe because it had never seriously flooded before. Those thoughts reminded me of stories we'd heard on the coast, and I remembered the moral of all those stories: we needed to err on the safe side and act to save ourselves now. Possibly we would feel foolish later, but feeling foolish is always better than dying. (Our apartment suffered no damage, but we made the right choice. Some houses in our area were flooded past the first floor.)



WHAT BRINGS ME BACK

While I've benefited a lot from the trail as a person, I don't return again and again for an ongoing education in disaster safety.

I go because it's pretty. About a quarter of the trail goes through a national park called Sanriku *Fukko* (Reconstruction) National Park. The iconic scenery of this area includes jagged rocks, turquoise blue waters, and green pines along the zigzag coastline. The trail also goes through a variety of other landscapes: tranquil rows of houses with knickknacks and potted plants, vast flat fields, thick forests, and mysterious misty islands.

I go for the food and the hot springs. I regularly have intrusive daydreams about this octopus rice bowl and crepe lunch I had in Rikuzentakata. Once, I had this boiled crab that was so good that part way through eating it not only did I completely forget about table manners, but I also stopped caring whether or not I was eating the shell. Usually, after a hike I'm hungry enough that eating a cardboard box would probably taste good, so having top-shelf seafood washed down by some cold beer? Absolute heaven.



SUGGESTED COURSES

As a starting point for planning, here are two courses based on hikes I've done. Each one is about a week long, most are under 20 kilometers per day, and the start/end points for each day are either accessible by train/bus or are near several places to stay.

Hachinohe to Kuji

Day 1: Same Station to Oja Station, 19 km (add an extra two days here to go up Mount Hashikami if you make a reservation at the campground).
 Day 2: Oja Station to Taneichi Seaside Park, 10 km.
 Day 3: Taneichi Seaside Park to Rikuchu-Noda Station, 22 km.
 Day 4: Rikuchu-Noda Station to Kitasamuraihama Campground, 11 km (don't attempt the river crossing, use the detour).
 Day 5: Kitasamuraihama Campground to Kuji Station, 20 km.
 Day 6: Kuji Station to Kosode Ama Center, 14 km (return to Kuji Station by bus).

Ofunato to Kesennuma

Day 1: Sanriku Station to Ryori Station, 14 km.
 Day 2: Ryori Station to Ryori Station (walk around the peninsula), to Rikuzen-Akazaki Station, 23 km.
 Day 3: Rikuzen-Akazaki Station to Goishi Coast Campground, 17 km.
 Day 4: Goishi Coast Campground to mid-Hirota Peninsula (stay on the peninsula or take a bus to Otomo Station), 19 km.
 Day 5: Mid-Hirota Peninsula to Wakinosawa Station, 19 km.
 Day 6: Wakinosawa Station to Karakuwa Sogoshisho-mae Bus Stop, 21 kilometers (bus to a campground or local inn), 21 km.
 Day 7: Karakuwa Sogoshisho-mae Bus Stop to Karakuwa Sogoshisho-mae Bus Stop (walk around the peninsula), 20 km.
 Day 8: Karakuwa Sogoshisho-mae Bus Stop to Kyukamura Kesennuma Oshima/Kesennuma Oshima Campground in Oshima Island, 14 km.

津波
浸水高
15.4m

"The tsunami came up to here"

I go for the people. The old fellows managing the campgrounds I stayed at were always wordlessly handing me handfuls of candy or cans of juice. In especially outgoing areas, anyone from a construction worker on a break to a gentleman enjoying fishing with his poodle would sidle over to chat about my hike and recommend sights. I've also been given a ride in a police car in Onagawa (not that kind of ride!) and a free place to stay in Ofunato.

Finally, I go to witness history: another snapshot in time as Tohoku continues to recover from the tsunami. The barren landscapes of wrecked buildings and hills of rubble I remember from volunteering have already mercifully disappeared and transformed into places with clean sidewalks, restaurants, and train stations. Progress towards recovery continues. Today's rows of saplings will someday become forests. Bare patches of construction are waiting to become shopping streets, parks or hotels.

left: Octopus rice bowl at Senkaen in Rikuzentakata

TIPS

Get the free paper maps.

These are in Japanese, but you can mark them in English as necessary using the online English PDFs. Get the [maps sent to you](#) via postal mail to addresses within Japan, or get them in person at the Natori Trail Center and other facilities along the route. New maps should be released in autumn 2020. These will cost money but will be much more durable and contain updated information in Japanese and English.

Decide your schedule.

How much time will you have? What experiences appeal to you? How many kilometers per day will you walk? (Remember: hypothetical kilometers are easier than actual kilometers!) Once you've got your general parameters down, contact the [Natori Trail Center](#) or connect with other hikers in the [unofficial English Facebook group](#) to see which courses would be a good fit.

Arrange your lodging.

An unofficial map showing lodging information is [here](#). This might be one of the most difficult parts of planning since lodging is scarce in some areas. Having trouble? Try basing yourself in cities with more places to stay, like Hachinohe, Kuji, Miyako, Kamaishi and Ishinomaki, and do nearby day hikes. If you prefer camping, you can base yourself at a campground near a train station instead.

Prepare your gear.

At a minimum, this means maps, food and water, hiking clothes, a bear bell, a compass, rain gear, and a cellphone.



Pine saplings and Millenium Hope Hill No. 13 in Iwanuma



Get the downloadable GPS files.

Some sections still have little official signage, so along with paper maps and a compass, I highly recommend using the official GPS files with an app. That way, you'll be able to double-check where the trail route is related to where you are in real-time. For apps, I recommend Gaia GPS, which is free and available for iPhones and Android.

Check Natori Trail Center's website for advisories.

Don't skip this step! There are enough detours due to construction or typhoon damage scattered along the trail to throw a wrench into your plans, and many advisories are important for safety. Go to the [advisory page](#) and choose the area you plan to visit. You can also look at the detours in map form [here](#).

THE TRAIL ISN'T GOING ANYWHERE

Any time you're able to visit, the Michinoku Coastal Trail will be here, ready to welcome you with rich nature, kind people, tasty food, and wisdom born from hardship that could change your life!

Anna is originally from Oregon in the United States and has enjoyed life in Tohoku for 10 years. She enjoys knitting, bird watching, programming, and (thanks to the MCT) camping.

[Section hiking blog](#)

LETTER FROM THE COMMUNITY EDITOR

Wow! What a year it has been as editor of the Community section. I have truly enjoyed the privilege of communicating with local leaders and adventurers on how they have navigated their local community and bringing that story to life via print. For this issue I have chosen the [“#Experience Fukui”](#) and [“A New Flavor of Music”](#) pieces because they did an excellent job at highlighting what the Community section is all about.

“Experience Fukui” details the accounts of several people discovering what makes Fukui special. It gives different perspectives while showcasing what Fukui has to offer. It was also a pleasure hearing these different authors confirm in one article a similar lesson mentioned in previous published articles. . . Some of the best experiences come from trying something new and unexpected.

“A New Flavor of Music” ventures off the discovery path and discusses the impact one can make in their community. I specifically picked this piece because that author not only went through trials and tribulations to become successful, but used his success to help others like himself.

It is my earnest desire that you will enjoy these pieces as they portray my personal aspirations for the Community section this year!

Cameron Peagler



#ExperienceFukui

Stories about
Community
Experiences

WHERE THE FUKUI?

Introduction by Meg Luedtke

(Finally finding a way to use this old joke that was told to me *over and over* again when announcing my JET placement. All in good fun, of course.)

On the western coast of Honshu, along the Sea of Japan, sits a relatively small and unassuming prefecture, one that most people probably don't know much about. Especially not tourists. Fukui doesn't have many of the big and loud claims to fame, like Harajuku's bustling streets or Fushimi Inari's sea of vermillion *torii*, which draws in foreign visitors from near and far. And until recently, Fukui didn't even have a shinkansen line (expected to open in 2022), which serves as a tourist's primary form of travel and the catalyst for exploring places they might not have visited otherwise. Needless to say, the little(ish), remote prefecture is probably off the radar for most visitors. But that's what makes it a bit of a hidden gem, tucked away in the countryside of Japan.



Fukui has many things to offer. An abundance of nature, lots of history, renowned seafood, beautiful coast lines, and a wide selection of traditional crafts such as pottery, knives, paper, and even glasses! So, how does Fukui try and drive tourism to such an "off the radar" prefecture?

In 2016, the prefecture's Department of Business, Industry, and Labor launched "Fukui Reporters," a program designed to bring foreign and Japanese residents together. Their goal is to promote and share the cuisine, sights, trades, and attraction of Fukui. Through the program reporters meet and learn from locals or receive community benefits, like discounted prices at tourist attractions or invitations to special events. Reporters can also participate in and provide feedback for moni-

tor tours, which are tours that local travel agencies hope to provide Fukui visitors in the future. In exchange for these benefits, a reporter agrees to the job of posting about their experiences on their social media to promote the prefecture and its culture. Reports can also post about their daily life like new foods they have tried, a new location they've discovered, or interesting events in their area. Together, all the reporters and the program coordinators use the hashtag [#ExperienceFukui](#) to share all of the wonderful things in Fukui!

So with all the technical description out of the way, here are three stories from different Fukui reporters about some amazing community experiences they had thanks to the program.

DRESSED TO IMPRESS: EXPERIENCING HEIAN ERA CLOTHING

Written by Nyssa | Instagram [@echizenmochi](#)

My “Fukui Reporters” experience taught me that taking risks and just saying yes to experiences in Japan is well worth it. The email I received for my experience simply said we would get a free lunch and see Heian cosplay. Even though I had no idea what that entailed, I signed up immediately.

The process was far more involved than I had imagined: we were to be part of the cosplay. They designated our costumes, gave matching helmet-like human-hair wigs, and distributed each costume by height so each participant had something different. We were each then sent to our own team of customers to be dressed. My taller friend was able to wear the *jūnihitoe*, or, “12-layered kimono.” This kimono involves so much silk that the kimono can retain its shape even without a person inside! The woman in charge of the costumes explained that if a suitor was coming to visit a woman, but she had no interest in him,



she would escape from her robes leaving them behind as a decoy. I don’t know how true that story is, but it sure is fun to think about.

My costume was no less tame despite its fewer layers. The style I wore, though I don’t recall the name, was reserved for young women and girls who had not yet come of age. It had long trailing tails that were meant to symbolize a long life in a time when children often died very young. I was told that this style was popular with Murasaki Shikibu, author of *The Tale of Genji*. Rumor has it, she wore something very similar when she met a handsome young man who inspired her world-changing novel. This was written during the time she spent in Fukui, of course.

Though the silks were heavy, it wasn’t uncomfortable to wear. I think I could easily get used to the lifestyle of a Heian court.

Once everyone was fully in costume, the news crew appeared and we were set free to take pictures as we pleased and answer some interview questions. I did my best to express, with my limited Japanese, how pleased I was to look like a Girl’s Day doll. After about an hour we removed our costumes and wigs to enjoy some tea. We learned about the Fukui materials and craftsmanship of the teahouse as we enjoyed an informal tea ceremony. All in all, this experience was amazing and is why I still sign up for anything that will help me **#ExperienceFukui**.

**THIS EVENT WAS
BROADCAST
ON FUKUI TV!**



AN OVERNIGHT IN ECHIZEN

Written by Iram | Instagram [@iramiram1230](#)

Many of you might not have heard of Fukui, but I promise, it's a lovely and charming place! It might be small, but there's so much here—delicious food, gorgeous nature, and a fascinating history. In this tour, I was able to experience all of this, along with the charms of Echizen City and Echizen Town.

Our day started with a quick tour of the Echizen Pottery Museum in which we learned a bit about the history of pottery in this area and its transformation throughout the

ages. Afterwards we had a bike tour throughout Echizen Town and had a chance to talk to three artisans. They told us about their craft and showed us some of their work. It's amazing how creative people can be! Later in the day, we had a chance to visit one of the oldest known kilns in Japan. It was a bit mind boggling how there are still remnants left after so many centuries.

Once we finished, it was time to check out the renovated old house we were lodging

in. Soon it was time for dinner, which was of course, delicious! We also tried some local produce cooked by a restaurant owner. What a happy evening it was!

The next morning, we took off on our electric bikes again and visited a roof tile factory. That sentence in itself might not sound very fascinating, but there is so much that goes into making the traditional Japanese roofs we see! We had a chance to learn about the tiles going from sand found in the area to the roofs.

Afterwards, we biked to a temple and had a walking tour of the town around it. There were many beautiful and delightful views in the area. Once the walking tour was completed, it was time for lunch at the temple. It was a vegetarian lunch made from local produce. It was scrumptious!

After lunch, we had a short tour of the temple. The back of the temple had a lot of Jizō statues. When asked why, the owner told us that decades ago, these statues used to be all around Echizen Town. However, once development started, they were in the way and the developers had to

throw them out. Her father started collecting all of the Jizō statues, and gave them a new home at the temple. A lovely story, isn't it?

The tour ended shortly afterwards, but what a fun experience it was. I'm so glad I had a chance to join and **#ExperienceFukui!**



A TASTE OF TAKEHAMA

Written by Leah | Instagram [@leapacrosstheworld](#) | YouTube: [Leap Across The World](#)

Settled in the deep south of Fukui along the Sea of Japan sits a small fishing village. At first glance Takahama may not seem like much but don't let its quiet appearance fool you—there is more than meets the eye. The stretch of golden beaches, sapphire waters, and an abundance of fresh seafood would lure in

any nature enthusiast. However, the real charm of Takahama is its residents.

The absolute best way to explore Takahama is by bike! The only way to feel connected to the community around you is to slowly explore the sights and talk with locals along the way. Starting at Wakasa Sta-

tion, I rented myself a bike for the day and rode towards the sea. Usually the main beach, Wakasa Beach, is crowded with beachgoers, but during the off season it's nearly empty. This allows for the perfect opportunity to search the shore for sea glass commonly found in the area. I bottled a few pieces of bright blue and faded green sea glass to take home before continuing my leisurely ride through the town.

Weaving around corners and stopping in local shops, the town's charm gradually revealed itself to me. First, with the liquor store whose owner writes his daily thoughts out on a board outside the shop. Second, at a mochi shop operated by an elderly woman and her son that was once visited by the Emperor of Japan. Then at a [kamaboko](#) shop, which created a new canned variety of kamaboko to make up for the loss of business due to COVID-19. And lastly, at a small local bakery that sells the most delicious triangle-shaped pastry, which practically oozes gooey and warm cream cheese.



However, the most noteworthy part of my whole tour of Takahama was experiencing its rich fishing culture—Takahama is a fishing town, after all! With a basket of the day's catch fresh off the fishing port and a fillet knife in hand, I was taught the variety of ways in which fish is prepared in the region by a group of very able and friendly women. Some of the most popular methods were cutting and splaying fish to soak in soy sauce before cooking and making a fish kabob. They used three different kinds of fish with marinades and skewered each of them on a stick. Once the fish had been cut and marinated, it was ready to be cooked and eaten! Because the weather outside was perfect for a barbecue, everyone gathered outside to enjoy all our hard work.

To finish off a near perfect day, I trekked up a nearby mountain to discover an old local shrine. I had arrived at the shrine just as golden hour was approaching so the wooden structure was bathed in a heavenly glow (which seemed eerily appropriate). At the edge of the shrine stood a tall archway that made for the perfect window to view the town from. As I stared down at Takahama below me, I could think of no better way to end my Takahama tour.

#ExperienceFukui

To see more awesome things in Fukui, check out the official [#ExperienceFukui](#) hashtag on [Facebook](#), [YouTube](#), and [Instagram](#).

Meg is the Head Designer for CONNECT and a second-year JET living and enjoying her life in Fukui. She enjoys spending her free time playing games, binging the odd anime or two, and going out on little photography excursions. You can read about her own Fukui experiences on her instagram [FukuiFinds](#).

Nyssa Giangregorio is a 5th year JET ALT staying in Fukui for a 6th. She is greatly food motivated and interested in the traditional clothing and music of Japan.

Iram Amin is a Fukui ALT who is enjoying her time in Japan.

Leah Burkett is a 3rd year JET ALT who enjoys venturing off the beaten path and jumps at the opportunity for a good adventure.





Michael Herrington (Tōkyō)

The number one question people from back home ask me is, “How did you get so lucky?” But let me tell you, the journey here was anything but luck . . .

A NEW FLAVOR OF MUSIC: ONETWENTY.

I come from Brunswick, a small town on the coast of Georgia about six hours driving from Atlanta in the USA. The first memories about my childhood that come to mind are lots of church, frequent beatings, and an extreme sense of boredom. That was just life growing up in my generation, but it wasn't all bad. From an early age, my grandmother encouraged me to pursue education as well as participate in the performing arts. This meant church plays, writing poetry, things like that. At the age of 10, I met my father who spurred my interest in hip-hop music.

It was love at first sight. As soon as I got my first computer, I used that passion to create my very first studio. The three “real” recording studios around town were constantly being shot up or raided by police. Having my own gave my friends and me a safe place to vent our frustrations. Nevertheless, outside of my oasis, life in this environment was dangerous. Having to survive through these conditions only made me hungrier to become successful. Seeing other children at school who were afforded the opportunity to live comfortable lives further fueled this desire. To seek this success, I needed to get out and see what else the world had to offer. However, it wasn't until I had enrolled in community college, failed miserably, and ended up staring down the barrel of a pistol that I decided to make a real change in my life. It was at that point when I decided to enlist in the United States Marine Corps.

“STARING DOWN THE
BARREL OF A PISTOL
THAT I DECIDED TO
MAKE A REAL CHANGE”

NEW COUNTRY. SAME APPETITE

My first duty station was Okinawa, Japan. Up until then, I knew absolutely nothing about Japan. I'd been seeing anime on television and wasn't even aware that it was Japanese; I just thought that it was much cooler than American cartoons. I lived in Okinawa for two years and began to grow into the person I am today. Okinawa was the first place I performed live. It's where I first started believing I had a chance at getting away from life as I had known it. So I took the chance to learn Japanese (mainly to make friends) and built relationships within the artist community around the island. By that point, I had a much better studio in my barracks room than back in Georgia. I kept telling myself that I had to build my craft if I wanted a better future. I left Okinawa in 2012 and returned to California where I finished my enlistment. At that point I made a critical decision; I decided to go back to college. However, this time was different. I was armed with discipline, a little bit of cash, and I was as hungry as ever. I made my rounds to visit family in Georgia and New York and then booked my ticket back to Japan.

“I WAS AS HUNGRY AS EVER”



During my time in Okinawa, I'd never actually visited Tōkyō. The military had far too many restrictions for me to comfortably go and enjoy the city. So when I returned, I was determined to live in Tōkyō. I knew that it was the New York equivalent of Japan, and I wasn't about to waste the small network I'd been building up until that point. So I got a place in Tōkyō and started college. At the same time, I tried to gather all of the misfits I would meet around Tōkyō—nyone odd at college, anyone interested in music, and anyone who wanted to be a part of something. I called the group LOKYO. I think when I finished college, we had done over 60 shows all over Tōkyō. We were known for coming to a venue in a large group and always sticking together. If I was at a venue you'd better believe the crew was with me, and we came to make noise. This taught me a lot about management and how to work well in a team. However, at the end of my college enlistment, disaster struck. I was deported!

BEFORE YOUR OBACHAN KNEW ME

My visa had run out. I knew that if I left Tōkyō three months shy of graduation then I'd never finish. I was also tired of being institutionalized after the military and was at my wit's end. So I stayed and finished college. I went to immigration the following week and was promptly deported. This was a heavy blow as it took all of my savings away and landed me in a situation similar to when I was in Brunswick. I'd reached out to a friend in Arizona for a place to stay. I just couldn't return home with my tail between my legs. But upon living there, I discovered that the situation was not what was originally promised. At my worst point, I decided to take a bus back to Georgia after my dad agreed to let me live with him. My first week back in Georgia I got a job at a restaurant as a busboy. My job was mainly cleaning glasses, but I made sure to clean them better than any other employee there.

“IF I WAS AT A VENUE YOU'D
BETTER BELIEVE THE CREW
WAS WITH ME. AND WE
CAME TO MAKE NOISE”

After a year and a half at that restaurant, I'd worked my way onto the line and was looking to take the sauté station next. As soon as I'd collected enough to afford a ticket back to Tōkyō, I hopped on a bus to LAX (Los Angeles International Airport) and got out of town.

Present-day, I am a photography assistant and professional recording artist. I've gotten married and work with my wife on our very own multimedia brand. As you can gather, it wasn't luck that got me this far in life. As cliché as it sounds . . . it was hard work and a positive attitude. All of the experiences I've had led me to a point where I can give opportunities to other creative people around the world. I love giving back to the

creative community as it's very difficult to be a freelance artist. It requires a huge amount of sacrifice and enough people who believe in your vision. We spend so much time making our creations, yet more often than not, the product goes unappreciated and undervalued. COVID-19 made it even tougher for artists to earn a living wage since small-time musicians can't perform in front of large audiences without safety issues. There's never been a

more important time for artists to be able to earn online income and maintain an optimistic attitude. To do my part and help, I used my voice and influence to positively impact the artist community. By creating "[Tokyo Flavors](#)", a music video, I was able to do so.

“WE SPEND SO MUCH TIME MAKING OUR CREATIONS, YET MORE OFTEN THAN NOT, THE PRODUCT GOES UNAPPRECIATED AND UNDERVALUED”

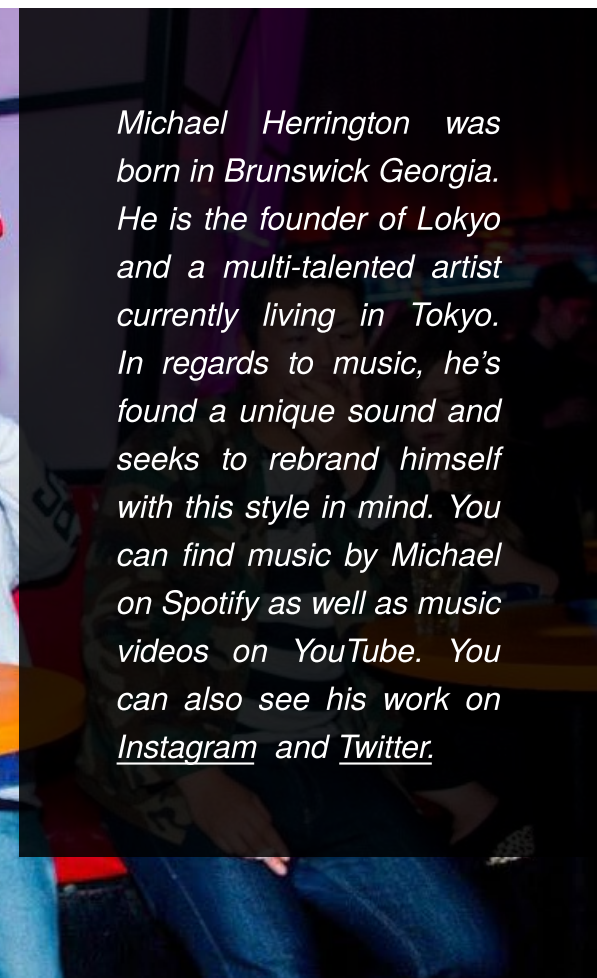
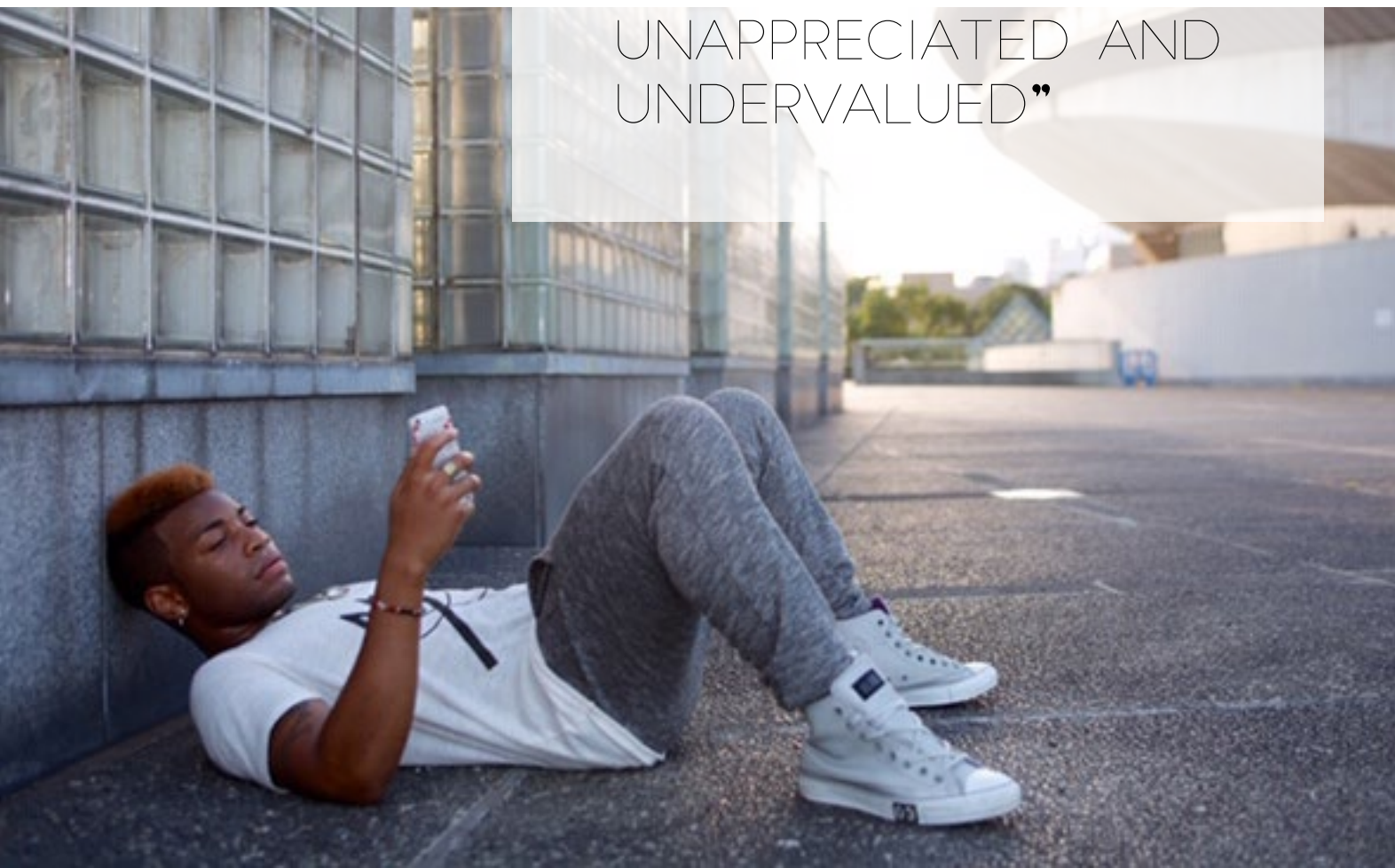
FROM JAPAN WITH LOVE

To inspire and uplift listeners, the lyrics of "Tokyo Flavors" talks about how patience, good vibes, and trustworthy friends helped me to succeed as a musician. One of the lyrics says, "Takusan no ai kudasai mainichi cuz the love is forever." It means, "Give me lots of love each day because love is forever." For me, being surrounded by love and support each day has helped me make it through tough times. To a musician, this could be something as simple as someone sharing your music or giving it a listen. Actually, in nearly all of my music I avoid using vulgar language, profanity, and offensive

terms in order to promote a more positive image of hip-hop music in general. There is so much music out there that talks about things that don't necessarily positively impact people's lives, and I wanted to make something different. However, I understand that the community needs more than inspiration to become successful.

With that in mind, I've created a Spotify playlist titled "Tokyo Flavors" intended to elevate musicians I feel are incredibly talented but underrated or simply undiscovered. 100% of the YouTube proceeds from the "Tokyo Flavors" music video will go towards pushing the playlist as far as I can take it! I'm not saying I stand above anyone

or have some incredible power. However, it's one small way I can give back to the artist community and help them gain the exposure they deserve without taking anything from the artists. Streaming services heavily favor artists featured on several playlists, and by simply listening to our music, you can give back to the creators around the world who work so hard simply to be heard. If you're interested in hearing new music from great artists around the world, check out the playlist. If you're on social media and you know someone who has good music or just would like to be featured yourself, also feel free to drop me a line. I'm always excited to hear new music and even more excited to make a new friend!



Michael Herrington was born in Brunswick Georgia. He is the founder of Lokyo and a multi-talented artist currently living in Tokyo. In regards to music, he's found a unique sound and seeks to rebrand himself with this style in mind. You can find music by Michael on Spotify as well as music videos on YouTube. You can also see his work on [Instagram](#) and [Twitter](#).

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Contact the Head Editor of *CONNECT*, Alice Ridley, at connect.editor@ajet.net with your submissions, comments, and questions.

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Write about something you're doing. Write about something you love. Tell us a story.

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Tell us about someone in your community who's doing something neat and noteworthy. Cooks, collectors, calligraphers — we want to hear about the inspiring people around you.

PHOTOS

Members of the JET community contributed to the photos you see in this issue. If you're an aspiring photographer and want your work published, please get in contact with the lead designer, Meg Luedtke, at visualmedia.connect@ajet.net.

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