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AJET

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Arts & Culture, Lifestyle, Language, Travel & Community

CONNECT

# LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Greetings lovely readers, and welcome to the fabulous February issue of **CONNECT**!

Winter is on the way out, spring is just around the corner, and **CONNECT** magazine is hot off the press—with the latest great articles about the expat experience of Japan!

Here are a few highlights I'd recommend starting out with this month:

The Art Section's Beauty is Agony: Drag Makeup Artistry in Tokyo is a fascinating interview with the immensely talented makeup artist and musician Ross Verik. I loved this insider's look at Tokyo's drag scene and how makeup can be a tool for breaking boundaries, building communities, self-expression, and transformation. (For more on the Tokyo drag scene you can check out an article written by Ross' own drag-daughter [here](#).)

The Community section's Exhausted and Worn Out: Plight of the Modern Day Japanese Teacher examines the working conditions of public school teachers in Japan. As an ALT myself, I've often worried about my overworked and overwhelmed Japanese colleagues, and I appreciate seeing some attention brought to the issue.

## **P.S**

If you have an interesting story you'd like to contribute, please get in touch! You can send article pitches directly to me at [connect.editor@ajet.net](mailto:connect.editor@ajet.net), or join CONNECT Magazine Contributor's Circle on Facebook to get updates from our editors when they're on the hunt for a story!

The Wellness Section's winter flavors column has yet another mouth-watering read this month with The Alluring Lotus Root. I admit I've underestimated the lotus root for years, but these two easy recipes and the useful info about how to pick a good root turned my perspective around!

Finally, If you're in need of some inspiration to reignite your wanderlust, read about **CONNECT**'s very own Fergus Gregg's trip to Nara in the Travel section. Let Ways Lead into Ways offers advice and recommendations for everything from breathtaking shrines and hikes to delicious eats and drinks. Although you hardly need us to tell you that Nara is a great travel destination, this lovely little article will remind you of the simple joys of getting lost somewhere strange and beautiful, and is one you won't want to miss.

Here's to the last breath of winter everyone, see you in the spring!

Cheers,

*Rachel Spain Fagundes*

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Head Editor

## HEAD EDITOR

connect.editor@ajet.net

### Rachel Fagundes

*"Those who don't believe in magic will never find it."*  
— Roald Dahl, *The Minpins*

---

## ASSISTANT HEAD EDITOR

connect.assistanteditor@ajet.net

### Monica Hand

*"I love feeling the rhythm of other people's lives. It's like traveling."* — Banana Yoshimoto

---

## HEAD DESIGNER

visualmedia.connect@ajet.net

### Lloyd Cruickshank

*"Big blanket mek man sleep late"* (A thick blanket causes a man to sleep late.)  
Meaning: An over-abundance of luxuries causes one to become lazy. — Unknown

---

## ASSISTANT HEAD DESIGNER

emilygriffith99@outlook.com

### Emily Griffith

*"It's fine. Luckily we're all English so no-one's going to ask any questions. Thank you, centuries of emotional repression!"* — Mark Corrigan, *Peep Show*

---

## GENERAL SECTION EDITORS

connect.generaleditor1@ajet.net

### Ryon Morrin

*"Not I, nor anyone else can travel that road for you. You must travel it by yourself. It is not far. It is within reach."* — Walt Whitman

## Samantha Marks

connect.generaleditor2@ajet.net

*"I don't know where I'm going from here but I promise it won't be boring."* — David Bowie

## Samantha Stauch

connect.generaleditor3@ajet.net

*"It could be said that in death, he has become a thing of love far greater than any living being could hope to be. Already, he does not hate, does not kill, does not steal. Is it not magnificent?"* — Friar Willibald, *Vinland Saga*

---

## HEAD WEBSITE EDITOR

connect.homepage@ajet.net

### Rhema Baquero

*"How long you been alive in this country? A rock and a hard place is what we call Monday."* — Trudy Smith, *The Harder They Fall*

---

## ASSISTANT WEBSITE EDITOR

connect.assistanthomepage@ajet.net

### Senie Calalang

*"Learn everything. Fill your mind with knowledge—it's the only kind of power no one can take away from you." Hansu never told him to study, but rather to learn, and it occurred to Noa that there was a marked difference. Learning was like playing, not labor."* — Min Jin Lee, *Pachinko*

---

## SOCIAL MEDIA

connect.socialmedia@ajet.net

### Katherine Wang

*"You miss 100% of the shots you don't take — Wayne Gretzky — Michael Scott"* — *The Office*

# CREDITS & CONTENT

**HEAD EDITOR**

Rachel Fagundes

**ASSITANT EDITOR**

Monica Hand

**SECTION EDITORS**

Sarah Baughn  
Sierra Nelson  
Marco Oliveros  
Samantha Stauch  
Dahlia Lemelin  
Fergus Gregg  
Kimberly Fitzgerald  
Jessica Craven

**CONTRIBUTORS**

Pierre-Hubert Leroux  
Marco Oliveros  
Ross Verik  
Jessica Craven  
Orrin Heath  
Carol Kavanagh  
Kaya Zepeda  
Kaki Okumura  
Ian Jason Dizon  
Fergus Gregg  
Dahlia Lemelin  
Titus Joel  
Sierra Nelson-Liner  
Cameron Peagler

**HEAD OF DESIGN & LAYOUT**

Lloyd Cruickshank

**ASSISTANT HEAD DESIGNER**

Emily Griffith

**ASSISTANT DESIGNERS**

Phoebe Jin  
Muriah Ellis  
Katherine Wang

**COPY EDITORS**

Natalie Andrews  
Day Bulger  
Dianne Yett  
Jon Solmundson

**GENERAL SECTION EDITORS**

Ryon Morrin  
Sami Marks  
Samantha Stauch

**HEAD WEB EDITOR**

Rhema Baquero

**SOCIAL MEDIA**

Katherine Wang

**COVER PHOTO**

Wren Chai

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Jaye Lasseigne

**ART & PHOTOGRAPHY**

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Orrin Heath  
Pierre-Hubert Leroux  
Naruto German House  
Susann Schuster  
Anna Shvets  
Roman Odintsov  
Grace O'Driscoll  
Rowan Chestnut  
David Ng  
Denise Metz

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# ARTS AND CULTURE

## ART EDITOR

connect.arts@ajet.net

### Jessica Craven

*"Don't you ever let a soul in the world tell you you can't be exactly who you are." — Lady Gaga*

## ART DESIGNER

connect.socialmedia@ajet.net

### Katherine Wang

*"You miss 100% of the shots you don't take — Wayne Gretzky — Michael Scott" — The Office*

## ENTERTAINMENT EDITOR

connect.entertainment@ajet.net

### Fergus Gregg

*"The darker the night, the brighter the stars. The deeper the grief, the closer is God!" — Fyodor Dostoyevsky*

## ENTERTAINMENT DESIGNER

visualmedia.connect@ajet.net

### Lloyd Cruickshank

*"Big blanket mek man sleep late" (A thick blanket causes a man to sleep late.) Meaning: An over-abundance of luxuries causes one to become lazy. — Unknown — Unknown*

## CULTURE EDITOR

connect.culture@ajet.net

### Marco Oliveros

*"Life is not a problem to be solved, but a reality to be experienced." — Søren Kierkegaard*

## CULTURE DESIGNER

### Muriah Ellis

*"Everyone should believe in something. I believe I will have another coffee." — Unknown*

## COPY EDITOR

connect.copy1@ajet.net

### Natalie Andrews

*"There was some sadness in how that could happen, Tai thought: falling out of love with something that had shaped you. Or even people who had? But if you didn't change at least a little, where were the passages of a life? Didn't learning, changing, sometimes mean letting go of what had once been seen as true?" — Under Heaven, Guy Gavriel Kay*

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“

Rather than be oppressed by meaningless societal expectations, isn't it more freeing to subvert them?

”

## BEAUTY IS AGONY

### DRAG MAKEUP ARTISTRY

Ross Verik (Tokyo)

interviewed by Jessica Craven (Saitama)

What comes to mind when you think of drag, aside from *RuPaul's Drag Race*? While the hit show is (for better or worse) largely the pop culture version of drag that has invaded the public consciousness, my chat with Ross Verik—a drag makeup artist, musician, and performer on the Tokyo drag scene—reveals how much more diverse and liberating the drag world can really be. For Ross, drag is about the goth scene rather than prim and polished pageantry—he is inspired by the lack of gender boundaries in the goth scene, as well as in the Japanese rock and *visual kei* scenes.

Drag is also something that has been incredibly sensationalized in pop culture—most people probably associate it with super-femme drag queens—but Ross believes that drag is for everyone. Even cis-gender people do not fit perfectly within traditional gender boundaries, which oppress everyone to some degree. Rather than be oppressed by meaningless societal expectations, isn't it more freeing to subvert them? Ross shares with us a little about his background and how he does just that.

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It's weird to say as of a drag house, identify as a drag first and foremost fatherly role . . . but I doubt that what I do sometimes wear m boots. I do wear n often been called a (referring to the fa biologically male v powerful male a



## J: HOW DID YOU COME TO BE INVOLVED WITH THE DRAG SCENE IN TOKYO?

R: R: I'm originally from Dundee, Scotland, and came to Japan six years ago after a short stint in Glasgow, Scotland. I am an openly gay artist, but I didn't come into the drag scene through the gay scene—I came into it through my music background, particularly through the goth scene . . . which really has no gender boundaries.

One of the bands that first inspired me was the Finnish alternative rock band H.I.M. (His Infernal Majesty), which was founded in 1991 and popular in the early 2000s. I distinctly remember the first time I saw them on TV—their visuals were striking to me. After that, I became interested in the high impact aesthetic element of visual rock bands, such as J-Rock and *visual kei*, and the gender-bending that is characteristic of these genres.

For many performers, wearing eyeshadow and lipstick has nothing to do with sexuality, but it's fun. These interests later led me to fall into the drag scene in a more indirect way.

It's weird to say as the father of a drag house, that I don't feel like a drag performer. It's a fatherly role . . . but there's no doubt that what I do is drag—I sometimes wear massive heel boots. I do wear nails . . . I've often been called a drag king (referring to the fact that I am biologically male with a very powerful male aesthetic).

This has often been a hot topic to me and my friends, that I am a "drag king". . . but I fundamentally consider myself to be an artist, musician, performer. . . for drag. But drag queen has a different connotation that I do not really identify with. My primary role in the drag scene is as a makeup artist. I segued into drag makeup from doing makeup for musical performers.

## IN TOKYO

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“ But nevertheless, that’s how Kat became my one-person PR who basically just goes about and tells all the gay people that I do makeup. ”

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I first came into contact with the drag scene in Tokyo in 2017. I met the mother of the drag house I belong to now at [Tokyo Decadance](#), which is an underground visual kei dance scene. Her name is Die Schwarze Frau and she is a prominent drag queen here in Tokyo for [Haus von Schwarz](#).

**J: COULD YOU TELL US ABOUT YOUR PROCESS FOR APPLYING MAKEUP TO YOUR MODELS?**

R: Well, I need to preface all this by saying that although I used to work in commercial cosmetics for companies such as Bare Minerals and Christine Dior, I never really considered myself a makeup artist until I offered to do

my now-drag child Le Horla (Kat’s) makeup because they wanted to learn how to block their brows. Until then, I just considered makeup something I did for a job while I was a musician—it was more of a side-gig. They thought I should do this for other people because I was good at it, and they started telling people I was a makeup artist. . . . I told them, “Don’t tell people that—it gives them too high of expectations!” But nevertheless, that’s how Kat became my one-person PR who basically just goes about and tells all the gay people that I do makeup.

About my process . . . first of all, it’s very intuitive. However, in order to really feminize and open up the eye, I need to raise the brow first by blocking it out and then draw a beautiful crease. These days, this is *everywhere* in makeup on Instagram—it’s not limited to drag. The winged eyeliner like you see in the West and especially the UK originally came from the drag scene. Drag has transformed mainstream makeup.

As for my next project, I have been told the color scheme at the design already so it does not involve too much improv. Sometimes the client just kind of already knows what they want. But generally, I have a very quick visual imagination and I use that as a baseline. . . . I may sometimes sketch a little, but I tend to work with the face structure and treat it more like sculpture, playing with light and depth, so the planes of the model’s face dictate what I’m doing. Overall, the model influences my work and it’s a very fluid process.

For about half of the process it looks like shit . . . and then you add this one highlight and suddenly it’s like the fantasy has just come to life. It’s very intense!



**J: WHAT IS ONE OF YOUR FAVORITE MAKEUP PROJECTS THAT YOU'VE COMPLETED TO DATE?**

R: Definitely the makeup I did which was inspired by the character Shiva from Final Fantasy X. I am a big fan of Final Fantasy X. Shiva is always female in the game, but I did makeup for a male based on them. The entire look took about six hours to complete.



**J: WHAT IS THE DRAG SCENE LIKE IN TOKYO?**

R: It's existed here for a long time, but it's more of a bar scene so it's more something you would have to seek out, as opposed to the pop-culture view of drag—i.e. *RuPaul's Drag Race*.

Traditionally, there are very tight-knit secluded communities and the drag mama-san plays more of a hospitality role. This type of drag is also a counter-culture in many ways. Although it sometimes involves less of a polished pageantry look—which is not necessarily a bad thing—it's more about presenting yourself as another gender and fulfilling that role than creating an idealized appearance.



On the other hand, pageantry is emphasized in Western drag. And that's how queens are different. They have a certain expectation. So it's not always the most liberating for most people.

Nevertheless, the drag scene here in Japan is undergoing a very swift transformation right now because of inspiration from the West and the influence of Ru Paul, so it'll be interesting to see how the fashions may change.

**J: ARE THERE ANY CHALLENGES THE DRAG OR QUEER COMMUNITY IS FACING IN TOKYO?**

R: Tokyo is set to recognize same-sex partnerships soon, which is a huge win, but Japan is about 20 or 30 years

behind many other countries. Quite a lot of my Japanese friends are out, but it's still a very difficult place to be gay. . . . For Japanese people who are about 40 years old or more, it's still impossible for them to come out because of the shame. However, as a foreigner, it's not so because we're already different. There's a very clear divide in most Japanese people's heads between Western culture and Japanese culture, and being gay is considered "Western" to most people. Additionally, gay performers are seen as commodities, and gay comedians are seen as something to laugh at or laugh with, and people don't want to come out because they don't want to be viewed like that. . . . They do not want to be viewed as very stereotypical hyper-femme men or drag queens or something like that.

Although there are reservations against it in Japan, gender expression here. Relationships on family and the marriage. We're all brought up to say we shouldn't express our feelings, saying he loves a man is a weakness because one of you must be the binary. Even in there is toxic masculinity, hating, which comes between hating who pressure from the st

People in Japan especially in more rigid categories prioritize upholding status quo above self, regardless of the reality to express your truth physically and mentally causes lots of emotion

Even though I am very of myself, there is shame for all LGBT head every now and to me that so many who identify as LGBT their own pain. Like the gay community, and I think the outer do is fabulous, but, the point of it is that I was empowered to be the

In my opinion, although people in Japan are drag is accessible, makeup can be armor every day and it can be you want—free of all boundaries. It does not coming out. There's looking in the mirror at face. There is power

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*It's horrific to me that so many Japanese people who identify as LGBT cannot relieve their own pain. Like many members of the gay community, I was once suicidal and I think the outer expression of what I do is fabulous, but, underneath it all, the point of it is that I want for people to feel empowered to be themselves.*

*Ross Verik is an electronic music producer, performer, and freelance makeup artist in Tokyo, usually working within the drag scene. He is best known for his band SURGYN and father of the freaks at Haus von Schwarz. Originally from Scotland, he has been in Japan for the last six years.*

*Jessica Craven is a fifth-year American JET living in Saitama. On weekends, she enjoys hiking in remote areas of Saitama or taking day trips to Tokyo. When not adventuring, she can be found reading or creating her own artwork, which can be seen on her [Instagram](#).*

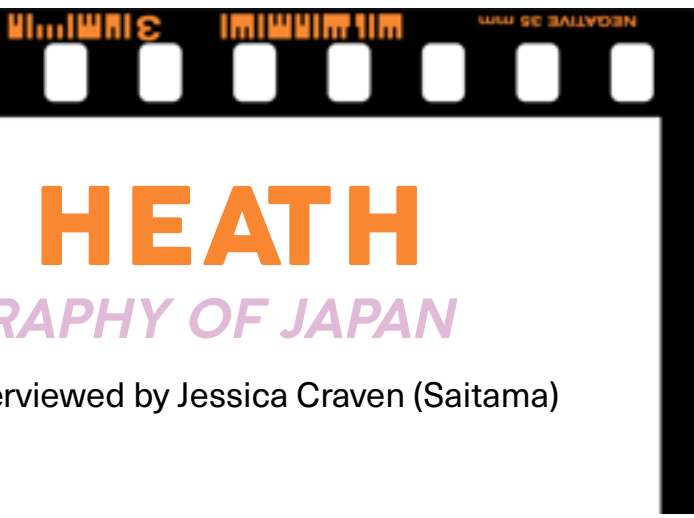




# ORRIN

FILM PHOTOGRAPHY

Orrin Heath (Nagano) interview



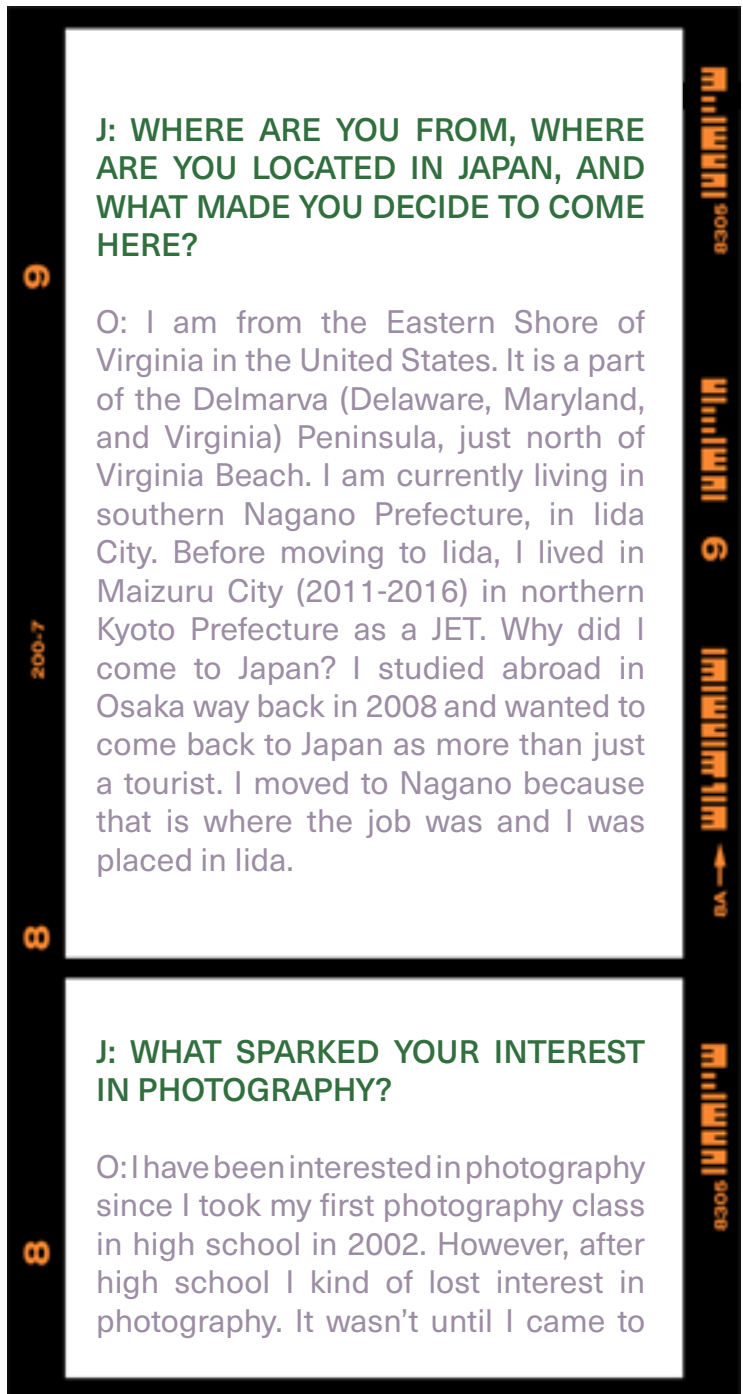
# HEATH

## PHOTOGRAPHY OF JAPAN

Interviewed by Jessica Craven (Saitama)



*It wasn't until 2017 when I was given a film camera from the late '70s that I became interested in film photography again. Here I am today with multiple film cameras ranging from 1960s models to others from the late 1980s. The latest camera I got is a pocket 110 film camera. I like photography but I also like cameras. Older cameras have a lot of style.*



**J: WHERE ARE YOU FROM, WHERE ARE YOU LOCATED IN JAPAN, AND WHAT MADE YOU DECIDE TO COME HERE?**

O: I am from the Eastern Shore of Virginia in the United States. It is a part of the Delmarva (Delaware, Maryland, and Virginia) Peninsula, just north of Virginia Beach. I am currently living in southern Nagano Prefecture, in Iida City. Before moving to Iida, I lived in Maizuru City (2011-2016) in northern Kyoto Prefecture as a JET. Why did I come to Japan? I studied abroad in Osaka way back in 2008 and wanted to come back to Japan as more than just a tourist. I moved to Nagano because that is where the job was and I was placed in Iida.

**J: WHAT SPARKED YOUR INTEREST IN PHOTOGRAPHY?**

O: I have been interested in photography since I took my first photography class in high school in 2002. However, after high school I kind of lost interest in photography. It wasn't until I came to



Japan in 2011 that I became interested in photography again. You know, being in such a different place, you want to take pictures of everything. I spent a couple of years with a point and shoot. My wife got herself a new DSLR and, after some time, I kind of adopted that as my own. I did get my own camera later on. It wasn't until 2017 when I was given a film camera from the late '70s that I became interested in film photography again. Here I am today with multiple film cameras ranging from 1960s models to others from the late 1980s. The latest camera I got is a pocket 110 film camera. I like photography but I also like cameras. Older cameras have a lot of style.

**J: HOW OFTEN DO YOU TAKE PHOTOGRAPHS, AND WHAT IS YOUR PROCESS LIKE?**

O: I try to take photographs as often as possible. However, with two young children, a lot of my photography is taken around them. So that means taking them with me when possible, or even choosing not to bring a camera because I want to focus on them. Maybe once a month or every two months I get a chance to go out without my kids.

I shoot a mix of both digital and film. It depends on the shot if I will bring both types of camera or just one. Sometimes I have an idea of what I want the shot to look like, but oftentimes I won't have an idea and just shoot.

However, when I am shooting a long exposure, I usually have a pretty good idea of how I want the image to look. Now, if I can achieve that look is a different thing altogether. There are a few nearby locations that I will visit throughout the year because I know them so well by now and can usually get what I want.

I don't like to spend much time editing my photos. I try my best to get what I want on camera and just touch up during the post-editing process. Just don't enjoy editing that much, so I try to spend as little time doing it as possible. The same is true for my film photography.

As for my film photography, I develop black and white film at home and then convert the film into digital images. It really isn't that complicated to do—all you need is the chemicals and a few tools. I order my chemicals online from [Yodobashi Camera](#).

Getting a good developing tank is important, and practicing how to load the film into the developing tank is essential. Luckily for me, I was able to remember how to do it from my photography classes in high school. The rest of the process is just following instructions as if you are following a recipe. After a day of drying the film in the bath, I will cut the film and load the strips into sleeves in a location as dust-free as possible. After that, I press them under some books. Finally, I can scan them and make digital copies. For color film, I send it off to a photo lab to get it developed and scanned into digital images.

*"Fire Fall" at Atago Inari Shrine (愛宕稲荷) autumn festival in Iida, Nagano. Digital long exposure photograph.*



*Moto-Zenkoji (元善光寺) in Iida, Nagano. medium format (120 film) with a TLR camera.*







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“ .....

*Yes, you can create that “film” look digitally, but I don’t think that is fun. When shooting with film, I find the whole tactile experience much more rewarding.*

”

**J: WHAT SORT OF THINGS INSPIRE YOU?**

O: What originally inspired me to pick up a camera in 2011 and take pictures was my surroundings here in Japan. I would say that is pretty true for today as well. I shoot whatever catches my attention. Also, I do find some inspiration on Instagram from other photographers here in Japan.

**J: ARE THERE ANY THEMES, IDEAS, OR OTHER ARTISTS THAT INFLUENCE YOUR WORK?**

O: Well, I like long exposures and double exposures. However, I haven’t created any planned double exposures in a while.

I have an idea for a series of double exposures, but I just haven’t been able to do it. Also, I have been wanting to try simple astrophotography on film . . . I just need a clear night and the motivation to go out. The only problem with this is that the clearest nights are cold winter nights. The Instagram page [Waterfalls\\_of\\_Japan](#) influences my waterfall photography. My family travels around Japan together looking for waterfalls in the absolute middle of nowhere.

**J: DO YOU HAVE ANY ADVICE FOR PEOPLE INTERESTED IN TRYING FILM PHOTOGRAPHY?**

O: If you are truly interested in film photography, find an affordable camera

from a recycle shop. The cameras from the late 90s and early 2000s are very similar to today’s digital cameras. These are great choices if you already have a DSLR. This hobby can be expensive with film prices and developing costs, but what hobby doesn’t have costs?

Yes, you can create that “film” look digitally, but I don’t think that is fun. When shooting with film, I find the whole tactile experience much more rewarding. Whether you decide to shoot with film or digital doesn’t matter as long as you enjoy your work. At the end of the day, it is just a medium to create on.

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*"Fox Bark." Fox statue and tree bark double exposure. 35mm regular film shot with an SLR camera.*

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*Location: Uriwari no taki (瓜破の滝) or "Breaking Waterfall" in Fukui. 35mm regular film shot with an SLR camera.*



*Orrin is an eleventh-year ALT (2011-2016 JET) from Virginia in the USA and is now living in Nagano. He is currently taking an online graduate course on TESOL. When he isn't busy with work or study, he enjoys being in nature with or without a camera. You can find him on Instagram [@nirro04](#). His photography has previously been featured on the Sept. 2014 and Sept. 2016 issues of **CONNECT**.*

*Jessica Craven is a fifth-year American JET living in Saitama. On weekends, she enjoys hiking in remote areas of Saitama or taking day trips to Tokyo. When not adventuring, she can be found reading or creating her own artwork, which can be seen on her [Instagram](#).*

With the Demon King in chains, the First Hero arrives victoriously to the kingdom, unaware that a tiny, adorable, multi-faced revenge would soon cut a swathe through the ranks of his allies over and over again—not to defeat him, per se, but because of the amount of entertainment each attempt would bring.

I am in my 200th+ run through of *Skul: The Hero Slayer*, a rogue-lite from Korean developer Southpaw Games, and I still have that strong “just one more quick game” feeling well into 2 a.m.

What keeps me going on my quest in this fast-paced 2D pixelated platformer is the hilarious and interesting main mechanic of being able to swap out the main character’s skull.

By changing skulls, *Skul* (the skeleton of a child, no less) can transform into one of the fallen allies of the Demon King and use their powers on his quest for revenge. There are over 30 skulls to choose from, including mummies, minotaurs, dark knights, and even the Grim Reaper itself.

There’s also numerous skulls that reference pop culture including ‘80s arcade and film classics, as well as my personal favourite: a certain fiery motorcycle-riding speed demon with a thing for chains.

You can wear two skulls at a time, which makes for fun gameplay, as each skull has two random abilities out of a pool of four. This means that every combination is unique and can be experimented with in dozens of scenarios. You can call down a devastating meteor as the warlock and then swap to the ninja skull to dodge attacks until the meteor skill is recharged.

Naturally, some of these skulls aren’t as strong as others. Why wouldn’t you choose the (checks notes) skull of the ghoul that lets you eat enemies and grow in size and damage output as opposed to (checks footnotes) . . . the archer . . . who shoots arrows . . . like, normal arrows (insert Hawkeye joke here)?

# Skull

— The Hero Slayer —

**Nintendo Switch, Steam**

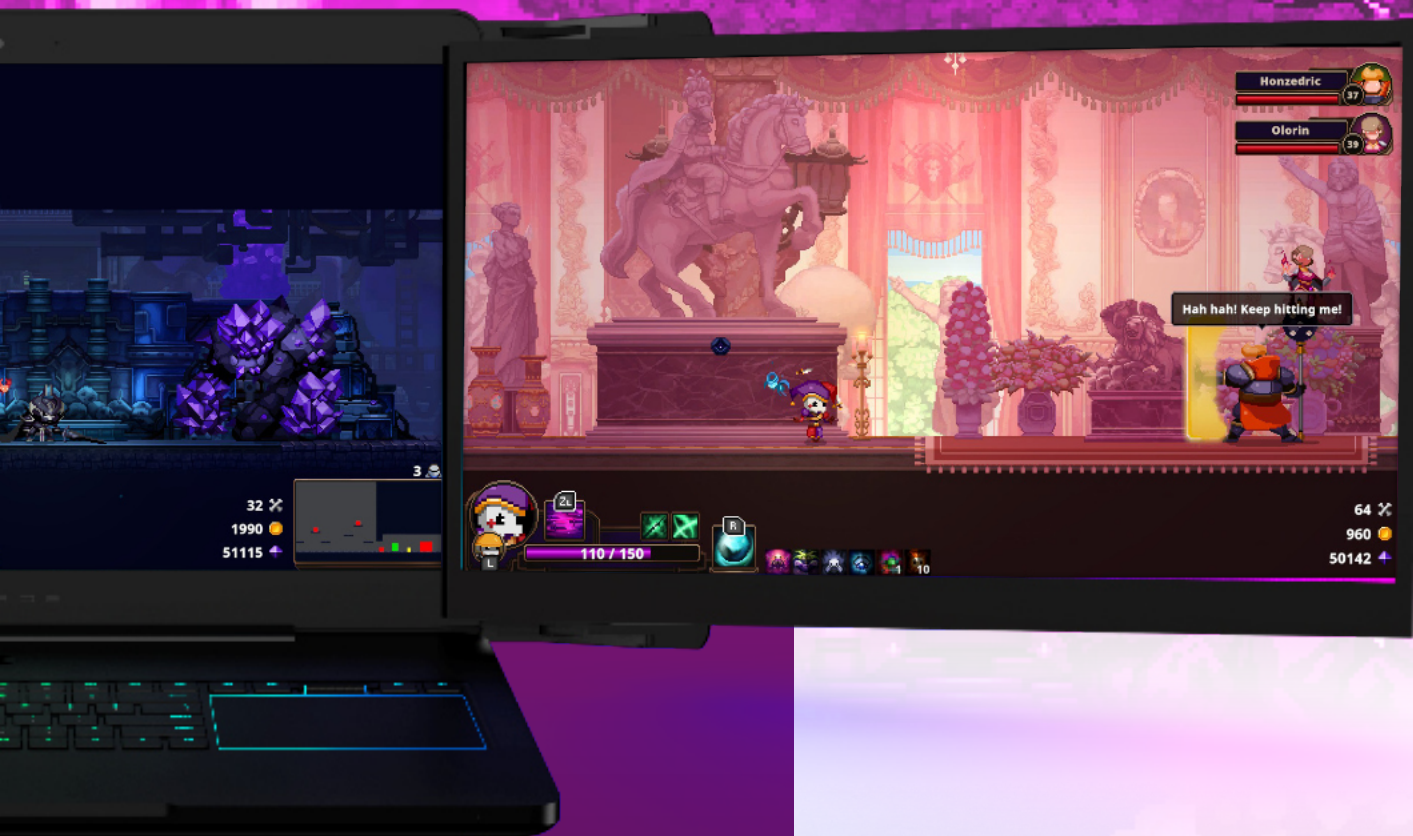
Atul Vidhata (Hyogo)

# INDICATIONS



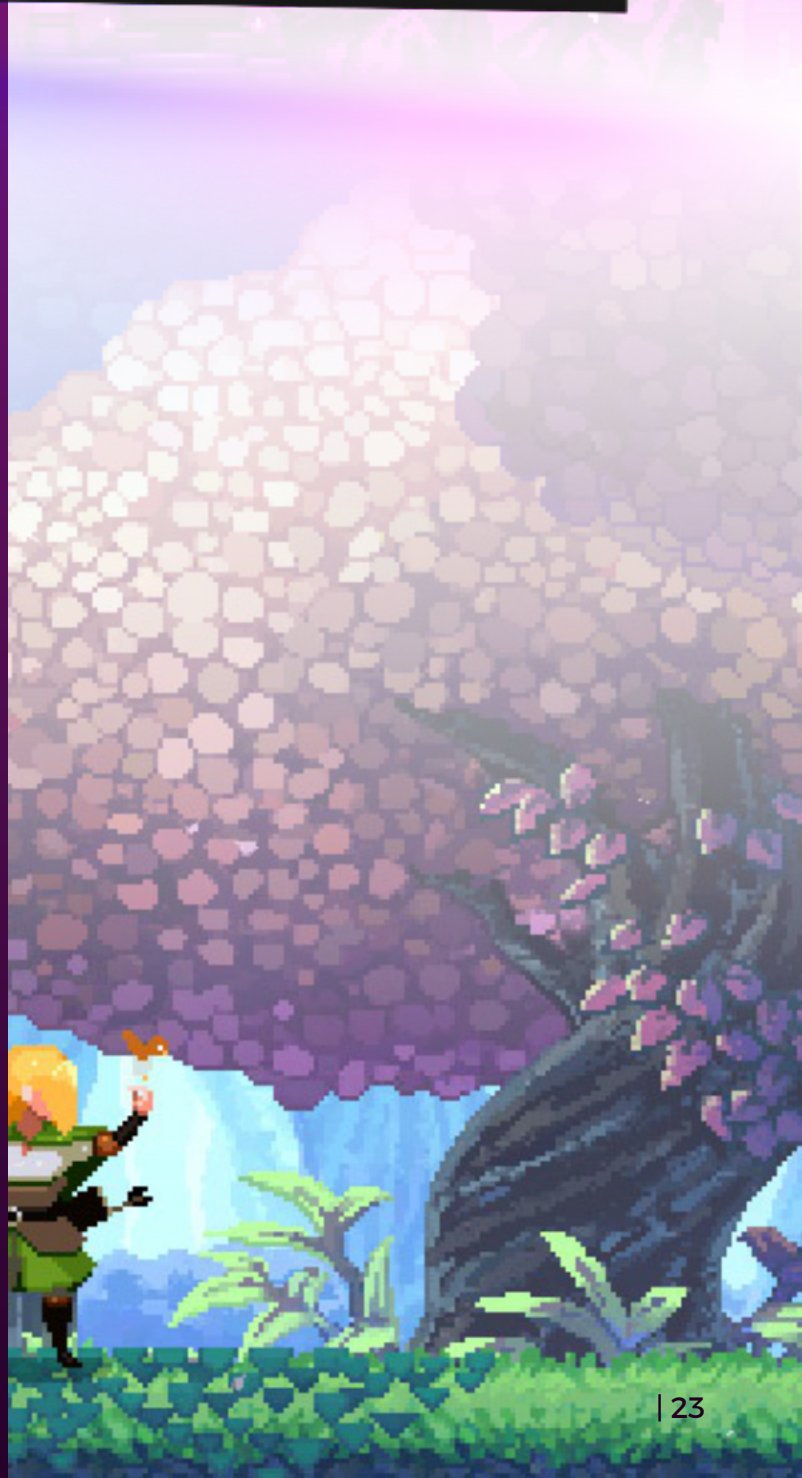
Skulls are randomly generated as a reward for clearing a stage which means that you might get something amazing, but if (probably) not, you are still able to use the rewards to upgrade the more common skulls to become endgame forces of nature. When I finally felt like upgrading the archer skull to the max, I found myself asking “Why didn’t I try this sooner?” and immediately had a few build ideas. This is something that will happen a lot during the game and that’ll inspire you to try different skulls.

But it gets better! There is a huge variety of random items to encounter with more that can be unlocked during the game. Like the skulls, some are basic and bump up your stats, while others will cause you to explode, dealing damage equal to the physical damage you’ve dealt since your last explosion.

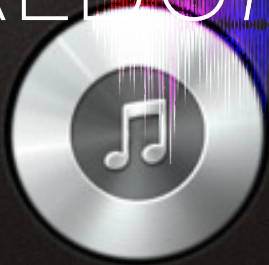


On top of that! Each item comes with two “blessings.” Like skulls, these blessings range from ones which provide simple buffs, to another that periodically summons the King of the Faeries to destroy your opponents. Blessings stack so the more you find of one, the better your blessings get . . . BUT, it might mean having to change out your items. Plan your build accordingly or go nuts and find new things with the same skulls over multiple runs.

The game is not easy and while the randomized levels are fun, you’ll quickly notice a lot of repetition after dozens of hours of failure. However, the head-swapping mechanic and combined item builds are so engaging, it makes the grind painless and keeps you coming back for just ONE more game . . . because what if a clown skull build that shoots lightning, poison, and fire gets you there this time? And even if it doesn’t, it’ll be a good time finding out.

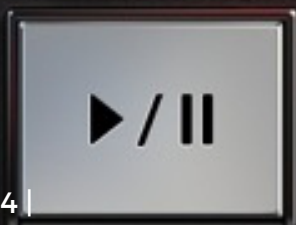


# ALBUM REVIEW



On their latest full-length album, Tokyo pop-rock five piece PASSPIED bring together generous amounts of danceable beats, rock and roll force, and sugary-sweet pop melodies. These songs are drenched in a nostalgic concoction of sounds from different eras, most notably the '70s and '80s, but the band re-envision these influences to create something that is uniquely their own.

The album opens with a burst of energy on “深海前夜” (“Shinkaizenya”), a blend of soundtracks from 2D-era sidescrollers and modern day Mario Kart. High-speed drumming paired with fleet-fingered bass lines keep tension high. “アンダスタンディング” (“Understanding”) turns the energy up another notch. It’s an instant time warp to the 1980s, when crunchy electric guitar and sparkling synthesizers ruled the world. Foot tapping, head bobbing, and even finger pointing at the stage are all game. “ミュージック” (“Music”) gives some room to breathe with a break from the speed at a danceable pace. Natsuki Ogoda’s velvety soft voice synchronizes with keyboardist Haneda Narita on a chorus that’s catchy as hell.







**Album:** Nui (ニユイ)  
**Artist:** PASSEPIED (パスピエ)  
**Release date:** December 8, 2021

Ryon Morrin (Hokkaido)



“雨燕” (“Amatsubame”) is possibly the best track on *Nui*. Narita’s sweeping low-to-high keyboard lick, which appears throughout the song, is a wildly addictive listen. Guitarist Katsuko Misawa’s tin can tone is high-treble and dirty, but feels oddly warm to the ears as he stylishly strums. Every member is in top form and the cohesion is evident. “影たちぬ” (“Kagetachinu”) sees the first dark point of *Nui*, a somber piano ballad laced with ethereal synths up top and bass sufficiently filling the bottom end. Ogada’s vocals become whispery at times, offering comfort in otherwise unsettling moments. “見世物” (“Misemono”) drifts away from the electric ‘80s pop, going further back in time: 1970s stadium rock. Misawa’s bluesy stylings pair perfectly with Narita’s organ licks. The chorus brims with feelings of power and triumph. “グッド・バイ” (“Goodbye”) is a return to the ‘80s with synths galore, electronic drums, and grooving bass lines from Yoshikuni Tsuyusaki.





“はらりひらり” (“Harahirari”) is *Nui*’s weakest song, mainly due to the forced inclusion of a trap beat, something that keeps surfacing in Japanese pop. It’s not all bad, as the chorus saves the song from itself, but the fact remains it feels like filler that could have easily been left out. *Nui* comes back in full force with “言わなきや” (“Iwanakya”), an unexpected turn to alternative rock with some pop punk leanings. Takuya Yao’s drumming on the track marches the band forward without hesitation, and Misawa’s simple, yet satisfying guitar solo towards the end fits perfectly in the mix. “BLUE” takes the edge off with a relaxed, understated hip hop beat and stripped down instrumentals before leading into the final song on *Nui*. “PLAYER” serves as a phenomenal closer that leaves spirits high, embracing what PASSEPIED does best: danceable, melodic pop rock that inspires feelings of nostalgia, even if it’s the first listen.





Valerie Osborne (Fukuoka)

Winner of Best Picture from the National Society of Film Critics and the Golden Globe for Best Non-English Film, Japan's 2022 Academy Award pick, Hamaguchi Ryusuke's *Drive My Car* is a quiet, unassuming film that never drags despite clocking in at almost three hours. An expanded adaptation of Murakami Haruki's short story of the same name, the film begins by introducing the audience to theater actor Kafuku Yusuke (Nishijima Hidetoshi) and his television writer wife, Oto (Kirishima Reika). Kafuku and Oto appear to share a close emotional and physical bond, a bond soon questioned when Kafuku discovers his wife has been having an affair with a much younger man. Choosing not to confront Oto, Kafuku finds himself questioning their relationship. These feelings are further confused when Oto unexpectedly passes away.



Two years later, Kafuku relocates to Hiroshima to serve as the resident director of a multi-lingual production of Anton Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya*, in which he casts his wife's former lover and now disgraced television star, Takatsuki Koji (Okada Masaki), in the titular role. Against his will, Kafuku is assigned a personal driver as a requirement of his residency contract. The driver, Watari Misaki (Miura Toko), is a young woman dealing with her own traumatic past. Kafuku, Takatsuki, and Watari become the central figures of the film as it explores their relationships to each other and their shared grief.

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The plot unravels in tandem with the production of *Uncle Vanya*, effectively reflecting Kafuku's own feelings and inner conflicts. Similarly, a story told by Oto to Kafuku (and Takatsuki) is woven throughout the film, its climax eventually serving as a powerful, veiled confession from one of the film's key players. Yet, despite this multi-layered storytelling, *Drive My Car* is minimal in both plot and style. Many of the film's key scenes occur within the confines of the titular car, Kafuku's red Saab. The film's most impactful moment takes place in the car's backseat: a conversation between Kafuku and Takatsuki. This confined space creates a shared intimacy between the audience and the characters. The camera lingers on the face of Takatsuki. As Takatsuki stares directly into the camera, it feels as if he's speaking to the audience, forcing us to listen, no matter the discomfort.

There is a shocking act of violence that occurs towards the end of the film. A lesser film might have honed in on this act, yet here it occurs off screen. This is not a film about action but is squarely focused on the things that occur internally. It's not so much the act of infidelity that bothers Kafuku, but the why. . . . What feelings and desires was Oto hiding from him? What truly bothers Kafuku is that there are sides of his wife that he can never know. So, too, *Drive My Car* is introspective, an exploration of the internal battles each character faces as they deal with their past traumas and try to understand their loved ones and themselves.

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*Drive My Car* is a somber film, but not a bleak one. The mutual respect between Kafuku and Watari that blooms into a father-daughter like affection is sweet and comforting to watch. The final few scenes of the film are ones of welcome catharsis. Towards the end, the film briefly dips into melodrama. The film is being gentle with its characters here, allowing them the space to confront their emotions and move on from their grief. As Sonia affirms in the final monologue of *Uncle Vanya*, "What can we do? We must live our lives. Yes, we shall live, Uncle Vanya."

*Valerie is a fourth-year ALT living in Fukuoka Prefecture. Originally from the US, she enjoys reading, traveling and karaoke.*





# MOVIES

### February 1

- Billion to One (2022)

### February 4

- Ghostbusters: Afterlife (2021)
- The 355 (2022)
- Post Mortem (2020)
- What to Do with the Dead Kaiju? (2022)

### February 11

- West Side Story (2021)
- Usogui (2022)

### February 12

- Ware Yowakereba (2022)

### February 18

- Extinct (2021)
- Fruits Basket: Prelude (2022)
- The Blue Skies at Your Feet (2022)

### February 19

- Rumble (2021)

### February 25

- Nightmare Alley (2021)
- Death on the Nile (2022)
- Cyrano (2021)

### February 26

- Welcome to Chechnya (2020)



Fergus Gregg (Kobe)

# FEBRUARY RELEASES





# GAMES

## February 1

- Life is Strange Remastered Collection (PC, PS4, PS5, Xbox One, Xbox Series X/S, Switch, Stadia)

## February 4

- Dying Light 2 (PC, PS4, PS5, Xbox One, Xbox Series X/S)

## February 8

- Sifu (PC, PS4, PS5)
- OlliOlli World (PC, PS4, PS5, Xbox One, Xbox Series X/S, Switch)

## February 9

- Diplomacy is Not an Option - Steam Early Access (PC)

## February 10

- CrossfireX (Xbox One, Xbox Series X/S)
- Kingdom Hearts HD 1.5 + 2.5 Remix, Kingdom Hearts HD 2.8 Final Chapter Prologue, Kingdom Hearts 3 + Re:mind (Switch [Cloud])
- Edge of Eternity (PS4, PS5, Xbox One, Xbox Series X/S)

## February 11

- Lost Ark (PC)
- Not Tonight 2 (PC)

## February 14

- Infernax (PC, PS4, Xbox One, Xbox Series X/S, Switch)

## February 15

- Dynasty Warriors 9 Empires (PC, PS4, PS5, Xbox One, Xbox Series X/S, Switch)

## February 17

- The King of Fighters 15 (PC, PS4, PS5, Xbox Series X/S)
- Total War: Warhammer 3 (PC)
- Assassin's Creed: The Ezio Collection (Switch)

## February 18

- Horizon: Forbidden West (PS4, PS5)

## February 22

- Destiny 2: The Witch Queen (PC, PS4, PS5, Xbox One, Xbox Series X/S)

## February 24

- Martha is Dead (PC, PS4, PS5, Xbox Series X/S)

## February 25

- Atelier Sophie 2: The Alchemist of the Mysterious Dream (PC, PS4, Switch)
- Grid Legends (PC, PS4, PS5, Xbox One, Xbox Series X/S)
- Elden Ring (PC, PS4, PS5, Xbox One, Xbox Series X/S)

## Sources:

<https://www.imdb.com/calendar/?region=jp>

<https://www.vg247.com/2021/01/22/video-game-release-dates-2021/>



# QUARRY CASES



# Find Your Zen in Fukui

Pierre-Hubert Leroux (Fukui)



Portrait of Dogen, founder of Soto Zen in Japan

As mindfulness and minimalism have become trendy, Zen has grown exponentially popular in the West. Many associate it with Japan and the beautiful dry Zen-inspired gardens of Kyoto, but Zen's roots actually go back to ancient India with *zazen*. Preceding even Buddhism itself, the practice of seated meditation, *zazen* in Japanese, would bring the mind and body together as one through the simple act of sitting and breathing. As a Zen monk explained to me when I first tried it out, *zazen* asks its practitioners to simply let thoughts come and go without concentrating on any of them.

Gautama Buddha—the historical Buddha on whose teachings the original Buddhist religion was founded on—adopted *zazen* as a way to share his teachings of reaching enlightenment through means other than speech or writing. Bodhidharma, the Buddhist monk famous for spending nine years doing

*zazen* while facing a cave wall (and the model behind the *daruma* dolls many Japanese people make wishes to), would later spread his form of Buddhism throughout China. That Buddhism

座禪  
ざぜん  
zazen

would eventually reach Japan and be called Zen Buddhism, with *zazen* being a part of it. There are three major schools of Zen Buddhism now, one of which is the especially *zazen*-centric Soto Zen.

It might come as a surprise that the center of Zen in Japan today is not in Kyoto, but in Fukui Prefecture, hidden deep in the mountains. Eiheiiji Temple in northern Fukui, established in the 13th century, is one of two main temples of Soto Zen and the largest Zen training site in all of Japan. To understand how this peaceful corner of the Japanese countryside became so important to Zen Buddhism, let me take you on a journey back in time to the beginning of this fascinating part of Japanese history.

### A Centuries-Old Tradition Comes to Life

It all began in the year 1200 with the birth of Dogen, the son of a prominent Kyoto family. A gifted child and an avid learner, Dogen experienced the tragic loss of both his parents at an early age. It awakened him to the impermanent nature of all things, one of the essential doctrines of Buddhism. It is said that this shock was the catalyst leading Dogen to enter the Buddhist priesthood at a young age at Mount Hiei.



Eiheiiji Temple

Throughout his training, however, Dogen became dissatisfied with the mainstream Buddhist thinking and methods he learned, and no one in Japan could cure him of his dissatisfaction. One priest advised him to go to China and seek different answers there, advice he accepted. However, before departing for China, Dogen first traveled to Kenninji Temple in Kyoto, a major Rinzai Zen temple, where he deepened his understanding of Zen.

In China, Dogen found a Buddhist master named Rujing. This master employed heavy use of zazen, and in a speech one day about zazen's importance in casting mind and body off from passionate and debilitating emotions to achieve tranquility, Dogen felt enlightenment. Rujing would task an enlightened Dogen to bring zazen-centric Zen Buddhism to Japan, Soto Zen. Before Dogen departed for Japan, Rujing warned him to stay away from established powers and live deep in the mountains.



Back at Kenninji Temple in Kyoto, Dogen began his missionary work for Soto Zen and published *Fukan Zazengi* (*Universal Recommendation for Zazen* in English), an essay and manual on the significance of zazen and how to practice it. The writing provoked a variety of reactions throughout the Japanese Buddhist world, including hostile ones, as Dogen's teachings—that the most important thing in Buddhist training is to practice zazen—differed wildly from mainstream beliefs at the time. After being accused of heresy by the Buddhist establishment and having his dwelling in Kyoto vandalized, he left the capital on self-imposed exile.

While in exile, Dogen started working on what would become his lifelong project, the *Shobogenzo*. In the *Shobogenzo*, he declared zazen to be the true Buddhist teaching, and that training through practicing zazen is in itself enlightenment, and not just a means to enlightenment. The publication of the first volume brought Dogen fame, and as an increasing number of followers gathered around him seeking his teachings, the need for Dogen to establish a place of training, a Soto Zen dojo, also grew.

Dogen first established Koshoji Temple in Uji to continue his teachings. Uji was near Kyoto, and Dogen continued to be harassed by the Buddhist establishment there. On the advice of one of his supporters, he later decided

to move even further away to Echizen (present-day Fukui Prefecture), away from the established powers.

The group made it to Kippoji Temple, nestled deep in the mountains of what is now Eiheiji Town in Echizen, to begin a more reclusive existence. Before long though, new disciples arrived, seeking training. In 1246, Kippoji Temple was officially renamed Eiheiji Temple and became the head temple of Soto Zen for the country.

The climate of this region was (and still is!) quite harsh; in the cold days of winter, heavy snow made travel impossible, making life at Eiheiji anything but easy. Dogen, however, wasn't after getting the most followers. He was happy to share his rigorous Zen with just serious followers, even if they were few. For this reason, the location of Eiheiji, away from the hustle and bustle of the city, was ideal. He loved his secluded environment and the surrounding unspoiled nature so much so that he wrote several poems about Eiheiji rustic's splendor throughout his life.

#### **A Centuries-Old Tradition Lives On Today**

A trip to Eiheiji Temple is a powerful experience. From the moment you enter the massive front gate, the size of the complex all makes an impression. Going through the 70 or so buildings visitors are allowed to freely roam around—some 120 quiet monks swiftly rushing by guests to get to their next



assignment, meal, or zazen session—it's almost like you've stepped into a whole different world, where different rules and customs apply.

What I like most about the place is how it's made very clear there that the temple was not built, and has not existed for over 700 years, to please tourists. It is still a place of worship and strict religious practice that they happen to generously allow us to get a glimpse of. All the monks there undergo training (zazen included) according to the strict several centuries-old doctrine of the Soto Zen master.

I also love how it's very easy for people with no prior knowledge on either Zen or Buddhism to more broadly get an idea of how things work around the temple, thanks to almost everything being translated into clear English for Zen newcomers. With all the little details and vestiges of the monks' daily routine hidden around the picturesque site, there is also something deeper for Zen aficionados too.



I once had the privilege to take part in the morning service among the Eiheiiji monks, at the crack of dawn as the sun slowly arose behind us over the mountain forest. Their precise, yet elegant, movements looked like some sort of beautiful dance to me. Add the religious chants, recited in a deep, almost trance-like fashion, and the whole experience was tremendously moving. You really don't have to understand the actual words the monks are uttering (I know I didn't!) to get a feeling of the sanctity unfolding before your eyes. It was truly a once-in-a-lifetime experience.

You can find out more about Eiheiiji Temple [here](#). Visitors who spend the night at the nearby Hakujukan Inn can also take part in the morning service at Eiheiiji among the monks (find out more [here](#)).

All across Fukui Prefecture, too, visitors can try zazen for themselves under the guidance of Zen priests, or simply take in the centuries-old spiritual traditions that have been cherished and transmitted from generation to generation around these parts. Dogen's teachings are still deeply relatable in this day and age.

*Pierre-Hubert is a third-year JET from Canada in Fukui Prefecture. His favorite activities include hanging out by the sea, discovering new soba places, comparing local sake, and trying his hand at various traditional crafts. Follow him through #ExperienceFukui on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), and [YouTube](#) for travel ideas, local tips, and everything else there is to know about Fukui.*

是 認  
為 甚 待 真  
掛 空 何  
壁 未 全 心  
通 元 忽 顯





# Ode to Joy



A Popular  
Traditional  
German Song  
in Japan

Marco Oliveros (Tokushima)

**H**ands tucked in warm coat pockets, scarf wrapped around my neck, I climb down the mountainside Japanese shrine in my neighborhood as the winter sun dims into the horizon. My breath is a condensed white as I exhale down already dark stone stairs. Clocks everywhere strike 6:00 p.m., and the loudspeakers around Naruto City play a song from, oddly enough, Germany: *Ode to Joy*. And on it plays, in every season of every day: from winter, spring, summer, fall, and winter, this hopeful ode plays.

It's kind of weird music to hear played to mark the beginning of evening, but *Ode to Joy* is a song with an interesting history in Japan, and a remarkable past in Naruto, Tokushima. Inspired by the poem of the same name by German poet and philosopher Friedrich Schiller, German composer and pianist Ludwig von Beethoven wrote up an whole section in his *Ninth Symphony* as an homage to it, turning the words of the poem into lyrics for his music.

*Ode to Joy*'s humanistic message of *freude*, brotherhood, and goodwill to all fits fairly neatly with the Christmas vibe, even if it wasn't explicitly written to be a Christmas song. December does happen to be Beethoven's birth month. Today in Japan, *Ode to Joy* and Beethoven's *Ninth* is sung and played in the choruses and



# And on it plays, in every season of every day: from winter, spring, summer, fall, and winter, this hopeful ode plays.

orchestras of Japanese schools and concert halls of every month, but especially during December, especially in Osaka-jo Hall with its 10,000 person *daiku* concerts, especially at the year's end *daiku* performances in Naruto.

How did Ode to Joy get to be so famous in Japan? Well, it first had to do with war. During World War I, as a military ally of the British Empire via the Anglo-Japanese Alliance (and by extension, the Allied Powers), Japan attacked and captured German holdings all across the Asia-Pacific—including the German-held Chinese city of Qingdao. German soldiers turned into prisoners of war, and the Japanese interned these German POWs in camps all over Japan. One of them was the Bando POW Camp in Tokushima Prefecture.

Not yet were the days of Japan's WWII-era concentration camps, with its myriad accounts of horrors visited upon the POWs therein, but there wasn't any guarantee that these German POWs of the First World War would be treated especially well either. One wildly notable exception to these expectations was the Bando POW Camp, whose commandant, Toyohisa Matsue, bid his German guests to enjoy their stay until peace returned, so long as they didn't cause trouble or leave the camp without his permission.

Many of the Germans sent to Bando were also men of various skills, trades, learning, and interests, and the camp commandant allowed them the freedom and resources to practice their pastimes. They grew crops, baked bread, made cheese, brewed beer, built furniture, swam in pools, played sports, sketched pictures, published newspapers, constructed a bridge, practiced instruments, and much more.



Naruto German House, Winter (top), Spring (center), Fall (bottom)

When some of his German guests passed away to natural causes, the commandant allowed the survivors to hold funerals for them. A cenotaph monument commemorating the German dead stands watch now, cared for today by Japanese locals.

By war's end, when the Germans were finally permitted to return back home, some decided to stay and make Japan and Tokushima their new one.

But before war's end, these grateful German POW-guests of Bando, with the commandant's leave, decided to organize concerts for the Japanese public. Interactions and exchange between curious Japanese locals and the interned Germans had occurred before and would occur in-between.

After both World Wars, the city of Naruto would later integrate the Bando area into its jurisdiction. The city has since taken active efforts to promote the intercultural legacy left behind by the Bando POW Camp. Blessed by both the Japanese and German governments, the Naruto German House (or *doitsukan* in Japanese) was established over the former camp grounds to serve as a museum and a center of cultural exchange between Japan and Germany. Naruto currently enjoys a sister city relationship with the German city of Lüneburg.

Little of the physical barracks the Germans lived in still survives, but dioramas of their living quarters along with other exhibits and artifacts detailing life at the camp can be viewed at the Naruto German House. The

## **The Germans of Bando played a concert of humanism for the Japanese; a song of freude, brotherhood, and goodwill to all; a Symphony numbered Ninth by Beethoven; an Ode to Joy.**

However, it's with these concerts and a certain song played during them that these Germans left their most memorable impact on Japan. Overcoming cultural differences and even the fact there was war going on between their two countries, the Germans of Bando played a concert of humanism for the Japanese; a song of freude, brotherhood, and goodwill to all; a Symphony numbered Ninth by Beethoven; an Ode to Joy.

Tokushima would be the first place in Japan the Ninth Symphony would be played live. Japanese concert renditions of the Ninth would later be called daiku in Japanese, and its popularity would continue to spread all over the country and into the decades beyond.

bridge the Germans built still stands, and so does the cenotaph monument dedicated to those of them who died there. During pre-COVID times, the city would put on 600-person Naruto-Daiku, or Naruto-Ninth, concerts in December. And in every season of every day, from winter, spring, summer, fall, and winter once again, it plays.

Clocks everywhere strike 6:00 p.m. as I head back from my regular winter walk down the mountain shrine, scarf wrapped around neck, hands stuffed into coat pockets. The loudspeakers of my neighborhood in Naruto come alive to a familiar frequency, an Ode of Joy, bidding me in the dark, welcoming me to warmth and home.

*Marco is a fourth-year ALT and the current Culture Section Editor for CONNECT. Living up to his certain Italian explorer namesake, he's traveled to over 25 prefectures in Japan so far, primarily to comb over places of historical significance. He really likes history.*

**Sources:**

Japan Travel

National Geographic

City of Naruto

Photos by the Naruto German House



House Exhibition Floor and Model of Bando POW Camp



Statue of Beethoven Outside Naruto German House



Ceremony celebrating the unveiling of the German POW cenotaph.



German POWs performing gymnastics



Japanese students from a classical music class taught by a German POW



German POWs performing gymnastics



Bill for Christmas Cards for POWs



Picture of Bando POW Camp's main gate



Japanese officer stationed at Bando POW Camp, posing with German POWs.



Concert by German



Group photo of Bando POW Camp



Toyohisa Matsue, Bando POW Camp Commandant



# LIFESTYLE

## WELLNESS EDITOR

connect.wellness@ajet.net

### Kimberly Fitzgerald

*"I used to think I was indecisive, but now I'm not so sure."* — Kimberly Fitzgerald

## SPORT EDITOR

connect.sports@ajet.net

### Samantha Stauch

*"It could be said that in death, he has become a thing of love far greater than any living being could hope to be. Already, he does not hate, does not kill, does not steal. Is it not magnificent?"* — Friar Willibald, *Vinland Saga*

## WELLNESS DESIGNER

### Emily Griffith

*"It's fine. Luckily we're all English so no-one's going to ask any questions. Thank you, centuries of emotional repression!"*

— Mark Corrigan, *Peep Show*

## SPORT DESIGNER

### Muriah Ellis

*"Everyone should believe in something. I believe I will have another coffee."*

— Unknown

## COPY EDITOR

connect.copy4@ajet.net

### Jon Solmundson

*". . . it was one thing to see the past occupying the present, but the true test of prescience was to see the past in the future."* — Frank Herbert, *Dune*



# Jeweled Without a Ring: The Curious Case of Shohei Ohtani

Ian Jason Dizon (Aomori)

The game of baseball has had many faces. You could argue that several of these athletes or all of them deserve to bear this ambassadorial role. Babe Ruth was a star pitcher who stunned the league by evolving into one of the greatest hitters the game has ever seen. As a fan of the Dodgers as much as the game, I'd be remiss to neglect Jackie Robinson, who not only broke down the barriers of color and became the first black baseball player in the Major Leagues, but also won the first Rookie of the Year Award, an accolade now named in his honor. Of course amongst the legends is Willie Mays, a 20-time All Star and two-time MVP who won the defensive Gold Glove Award 12 years in a row and was considered then to be "the greatest all-around player the game has ever seen." (1) The days of Mays, Ruth, and Robinson are gone now, and while the tradition of baseball is eternal, the game is ever-changing. In modern times,

however, there is almost unanimous agreement: the face of baseball today is Shohei Ohtani.

On paper, his statistics tell an all-star story, and he's assembled a trophy case of accolades that most players would only dream of having. But it is not in his accolades or his statistics where we find the heart of what Shohei Ohtani represents for the game of baseball and the legacy he hopes to leave on the sport; those are just the pieces of the player, after all. Bringing those aspects of his career into perspective only gives us a small look at the climb of a young athlete into athletic stardom, as well as the pressures of the spotlight and the pursuit of a championship.

Like most rising stars in baseball, the story of Ohtani and the sport began long before his professional career, when, as an 18-year-old high school student, he roared onto the radar of

MLB scouts by tossing a 100 mph (160 km/h) fastball (a speed most MLB pitchers struggle or fail to surpass) in the qualifying rounds of the Summer Koshien, Japan's national high school level baseball tournament. Unlike most rising stars from Japan, however, Ohtani would not only stun the MLB but the NPB (Nippon Professional Baseball) as well, by declaring that he would skip signing with any Japanese team entirely and opt to be drafted straight into the MLB system out of high school, the first Japanese player to do so. (2) Initially scouted as a potential pitcher for MLB, he would eventually be convinced to postpone his dream of playing in America when the Hokkaido Nippon-Ham Fighters offered Ohtani something no other MLB team would: the chance to "set the baseball world on its ear like no player had before" and develop him as both a pitcher and a hitter in a "two-way experiment." (3) The pressure was on. If they could succeed, Ohtani would





join the MLB with the chance of becoming baseball's first true "two-way" player since Babe Ruth.

They did.


In late 2017, with the weight of Japan's hopes on his shoulders, Ohtani announced that he would sign with the Los Angeles Angels, hungry to help a struggling franchise win a championship. It's Shotime.

As a Dodgers fan, I reacted to Ohtani's signing with the Angels with disappointment and trepidation. The Angels already had Mike Trout, arguably the best player in baseball, on their payroll, and now the Angels would sign a phenom that had twice passed on their crosstown rivals. At their signing, the Angels had put together terribly average seasons and, since their World Series victory in 2002, had won only two playoff series, losing each time in the ALCS. (4) But a glimmer of light

was on the horizon in the form of Ohtani. Garnering second place in the AL West that season and having just barely missed the playoffs in 2017, it was time for Ohtani to make his mark. The playoffs were in striking distance and after a three-year drought, it was time for the Angels to return to stardom.

Except they didn't.

Despite Ohtani's stellar rookie season, posting a .925 OPS (for reference, .700 is considered average and the AL MVP that season, Mookie Betts, posted a 1.078 OPS), 61 RBIs, and 22 HRs on his way to winning AL Rookie of the Year, the 2018 Angels would finish a distant fourth out of five teams, sitting on the same 80-82 record that earned them second place the previous year. (5) The road to stardom is paved with upset and failures, and Ohtani's would be no different. The Angels would be unable to produce the championship-level results he was expecting.



*OPS (On base Plus Slugging) The sum of a player's On Base Percentage (how often they will reach base per at-bat) and their Slugging (A weighted average of a player's batting productivity). Higher is better.*

*- RBI (Runs Batted In) How many runs (points) that player has allowed to score through hits or walks. Higher is better.*

*- ERA (Earned Run Average): The number of earned runs (points) a pitcher will allow the opponent to score through nine innings, on average. Lower is better.*

The next three Angels seasons would end in eerily similar disappointment. Despite Ohtani's efforts, in each of the 2019, 2020, and 2021 seasons, the Angels would finish in fourth place (out of the five teams in their AL West division). In 2020 they would record a .433 season win percentage, their worst since 1999. As of today, it has been seven years since the Angels have been to the playoffs, their longest drought since winning the World Series.

However, this is not the fault of Shohei Ohtani. By all accounts, he is an amazing player. In 2021, Ohtani led the MLB in intentional walks, triples, and at-bats per home run. Ohtani is a batting terror, and he did it all while being exceptional at pitching. Boasting a 9-2 record and a 3.18 ERA, recording 156 strikeouts through 130.1 innings, Ohtani put together a performance that earned him a spot as the first player to appear in the MLB All-Star

Game as both a hitter and a pitcher. (6) His Wins Above Replacement, or WAR, was 9.1, meaning that if it were not for Ohtani, and if he were instead a replacement player, the Angels would have lost 9.1 more games. (7) Finally, at the end of the season, with 639 plate appearances (PA) and 130.1 innings pitched (IP), Shohei Ohtani became the first MLB player since Babe Ruth in 1919 to record more than 200 PA and 100 IP in a single season. (8) In the wake of this achievement, Sports Illustrated would go on to call Ohtani a "once in a century player." (9) He would be "the next Babe Ruth," clamored the sports world, with the New York Times arguing that Ohtani may even belong to a new class of player entirely. (10)

The torch has been passed, and bright as it may burn, there is a marathon ahead and obstacles abound. On Ohtani's rise to stardom, sports analyst Stephen A. Smith said:



“This brother is special, make no mistake about it. But the fact that you've got a foreign player that doesn't speak English, that needs an interpreter—believe it or not, I think contributes to harming the game to some degree [.] [. . .] I don't think it helps that the number one face is a dude that needs an interpreter so that you can understand what the hell he's saying in this country.” (11)

While Smith ultimately walked back his discriminatory comments, this statement shows but one of the many pressures facing Ohtani as he continues to build his legacy in baseball: the pressure to conform to a predominantly American baseball market, the pressure of a nation rooting for him across the ocean, the pressure to learn and speak a language not his own, to perform at an elite level, and to produce a championship for a team in drought.

At the end of the 2021 season, Ohtani had earned, among

others, a Silver Slugger Award, a rare unanimous AL MVP award, the MLB Player of the Year Award, Associated Press' Athlete of the Year Award, and finally the first MLB Commissioner Historic Achievement Award since 2014. With these achievements you could call Ohtani by many names: MVP, star hitter, world-class athlete, etc. But despite all these, you still can't call him that title that the greatest baseball players share, that some consider to be greater than the rest, and that exemplifies the teamwork of the game he grew up loving: World Series Champion.

Baseball is a team sport unlike any other. Unlike many other team sports such as basketball, football, soccer, or hockey, baseball holds a unique place in that you cannot rely on any one player to carry your team to victory. You cannot feed the ball to your star hitter. He will come up to bat only once every nine players. You cannot rely on your pitching ace every

game. He will only pitch a game after several days of rest between starts. Shohei Ohtani cannot carry the Angels to a championship alone.

In an interview with the Japan National Press Club, Ohtani stated, “the team has not been winning and we didn't have much prospect of going beyond the regular season. So in the latter half of the season, psychologically it was more stressful.” (12) In the same vein, at the end of the Angels' last game of the regular season, Ohtani hinted at possibly departing the team in 2023 during free agency, stating through his translator, “I really like the team. I love the fans. I love the atmosphere of the team. But, more than that, I want to win. That's the biggest thing for me. I'll leave it at that.” (13) More than the individual achievements, more than the notoriety of being a star player, Ohtani's hunt for a World Series ring has come up empty, having not even a playoff appearance to make up for it.



On becoming the face of baseball, Ohtani said “that's very welcoming to me [ . . . ] [T]his was my first really good year. And it's only one year. So it gives me more motivation to keep it up, and have more great years.” At 27, his journey in the Major Leagues has just begun, and with his most recent successes, he has made a resounding statement into the player he hopes to be and the legacy he hopes to leave behind. The world is watching now. They, like Ohtani himself, expect greatness, and some will even share the dream of winning. Because when the expectations are this high, one thing seems evident: as legendary commentator Vin Scully once said, “losing feels worse than winning feels good.”

*Ian is a first-year JET from Los Angeles now living in Aomori Prefecture. Before JET, Ian was a TV cameraperson and videographer working with local news and esports. His camera is always in his backpack, ready for any opportunity to use it, but when he's at home he finds joy in cooking, writing, and video games (most notably FFXIV).*

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# My Egg Freezing Experience in Tokyo



Living solo in Tokyo can be daunting under normal circumstances, but during a pandemic, in your mid-thirties, this feeling is profoundly heightened.

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## Carol Kavanagh (Tokyo)

Everything is put on hold—including dating. This is one of the reasons why I decided to undergo oocyte cryopreservation, otherwise known as “egg freezing.”

Oocyte cryopreservation is a viable option for women who might not be presently ready to start a family but would like to give themselves some kind of hope of having one in the future. And it’s a topic that I think needs to be spoken about more.

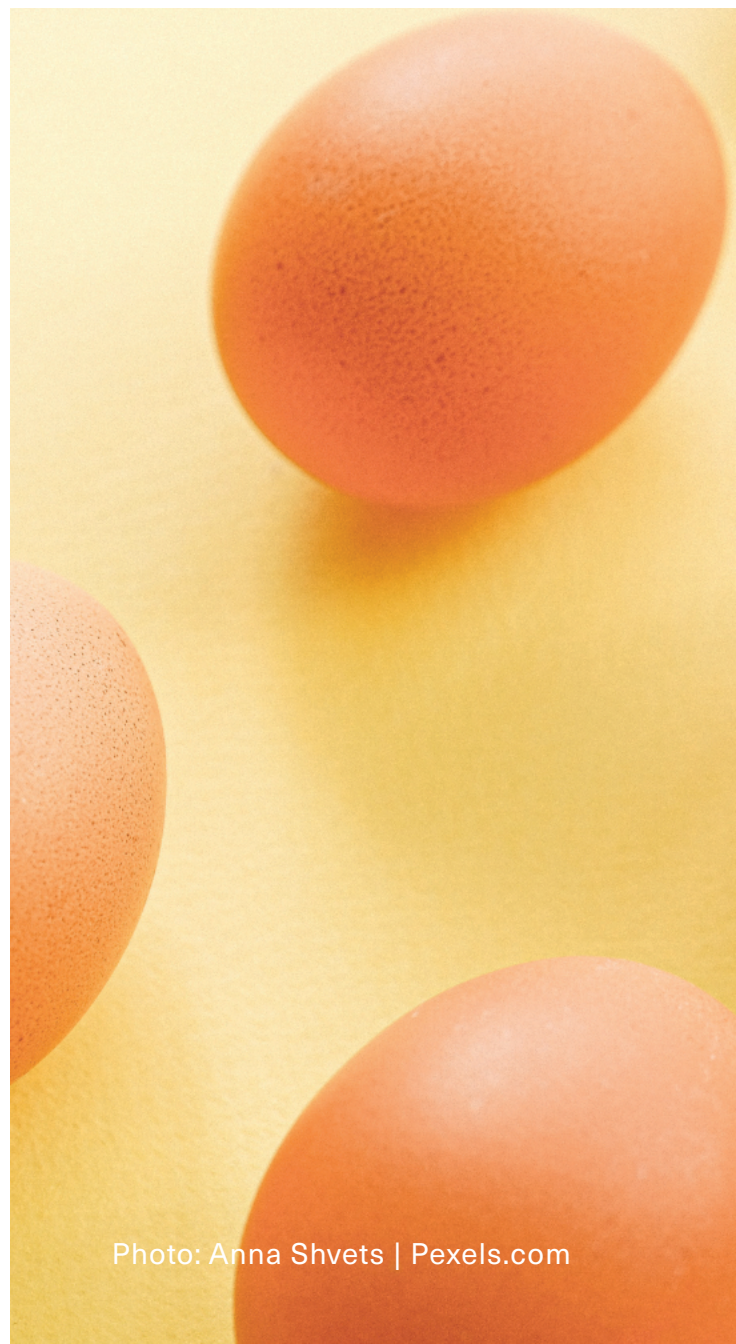
This procedure is a method that allows for a woman to get pregnant in the future. Essentially, oocytes (eggs) are harvested from the ovaries and are stored, unfertilized, in a freezer to be used at a later date. The frozen eggs can be thawed, combined with a sperm, and implanted (in-vitro fertilization) when the woman wishes to become pregnant.

# Despite many women giving birth at later ages in many nations around the world, it is still not a topic that is often spoken about.

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Science says it's better to freeze your eggs before the age of 35 as the amount and quality drastically decline after this age in most women. Having just turned 35 five months prior, I couldn't help thinking, "What if I'm five months too late?" However, as I had some decent savings from my job on the JET Program, I thought, "It's either now or never."

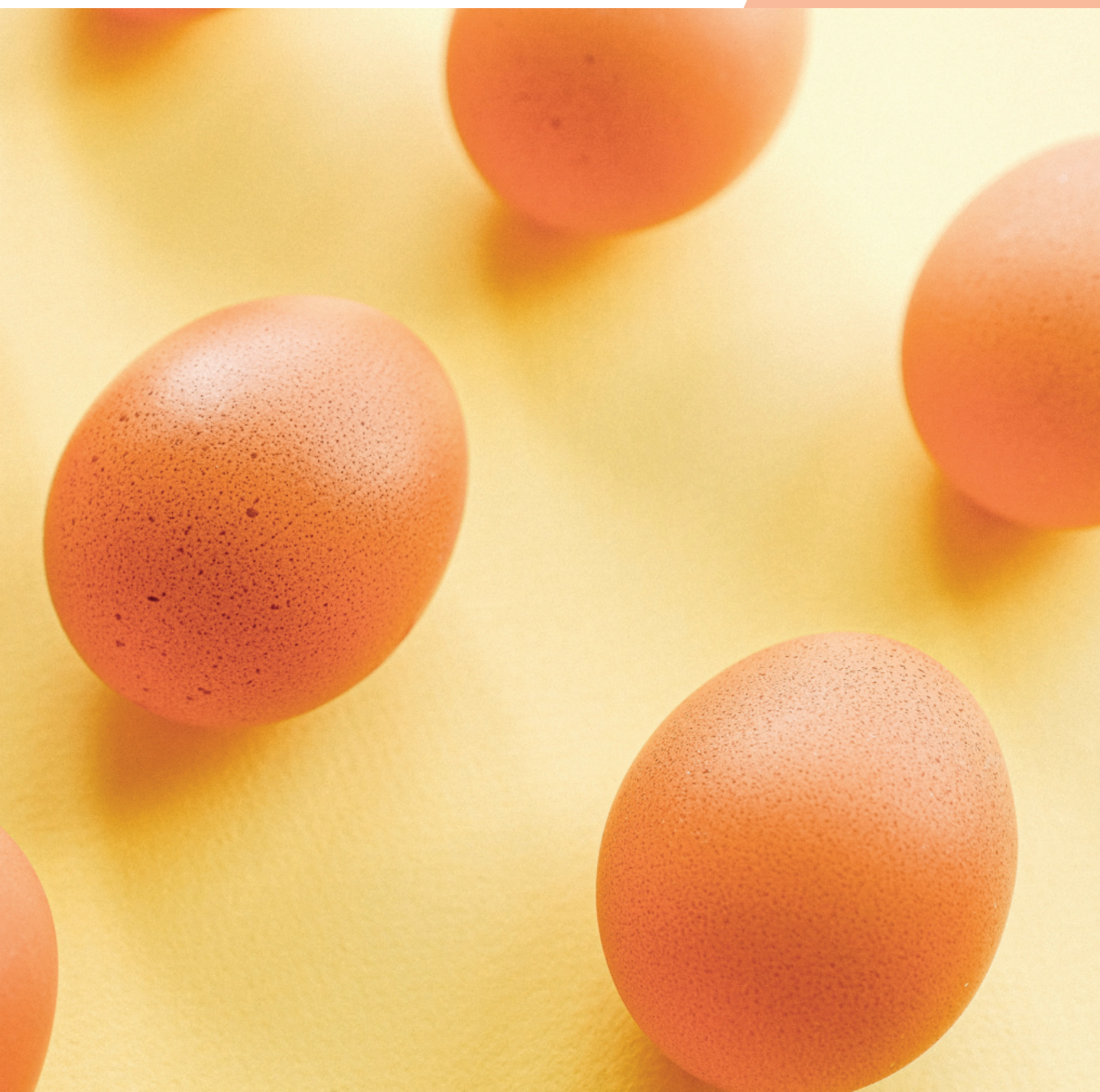
The whole process only took around two weeks, which was much quicker than I had anticipated. As I write this, it's exactly one week and two days since the egg retrieval process was performed. Now that the hormones injected into me are slowly dissipating and my body is more or less getting back to normal, I can fully feel proud for putting myself through this emotional process and taking some kind of control over my body and its reproductive clock.





While the whole process happened so fast, I'm not sure why it has taken me so long to feel this sense of pride in myself. It's not like other people haven't told me how proud they are of me, which I greatly appreciate, so why has it taken me so long to feel the same? One reason is possibly because all the new hormones swirling around inside of me from needles (I won't get into that) and oral tablets are slowly dissipating, and my body is more or less returning back to normal. What I do want to get into are the details of the whole process. . . .

On only my second visit to the clinic, the English-speaking doctor suggested I begin the process that day. My period had started early (I was on day four) and it turned out to be perfect timing. I was given some hormonal medication to take at home and had a blood test as well as a scan to check everything was good to go ahead. Instructions for self-injecting were given to me, and I'd be given a lesson in person within two days. "No problem," I thought. I'll study hard and show off my injecting skills on the day.





After I passed my “self-injecting examination,” treatment with the highest dose was supplied so I’d have the best chance of producing a larger number of mature eggs. Possible side effects were tiredness, headaches, nausea, and a sore stomach. Another side effect was feelings of anxiety, which I was lucky enough to also get. However, as I was teaching remotely from home with fewer classes and intermittent days off here and there, it could have been much worse. Instead of focusing on work, I could focus on the nerve-racking task of injecting myself in the stomach from home alone for the next eight days.

Bizarrely enough, a few days into treatment, I was feeling a strange sense of ease, which I hadn’t experienced much throughout my life. I believe this was because I knew this whole process was 100% something that I wanted and needed to do. It was challenging, of course. Some days, my heart felt like it was fluttering like

a butterfly. **Anxiety came in waves** and the only thing that helped was a very slow walk, which had the negative side-effect of completely wiping me out. I’d have to sit on a bench in my local park to rest. My jogging days were put aside for the time being, which was mentally hard for me.

During my next check-up, about a week later, the doctor informed me that my eggs were still smaller than they needed to be in order for the procedure to go ahead. So, I spent the next few days meditating for my

eggs to grow nice and big. My friends back home sent me text messages full of hand-praying emojis followed by eggs and little baby chickens as sweet gestures to keep me motivated.

Exactly 13 days after taking my first dose of hormones, the day of the actual egg retrieval procedure finally arrived. Strangely enough, I didn’t feel particularly nervous while waiting in the reception area. Instead, I felt ready for the eggs to be bundled out and set up in their new, freezing-cold homes. I was given intravenous sedation medication—my first time to have this. As I slowly walked into the treatment room, I felt dread for the first time that day. I was expecting a bed and not a chair, and as the nurses strapped my legs in place, I felt my body grow dizzy and presumed it was the sedative doing its job. . . . **I was very wrong. . . .**

My heart did a somersault, and I felt myself drift away into blackness. I awoke with a jerking movement and couldn’t control my body. I could hear the nurse’s words: “Deep breaths . . . in and out,” calmly in my left ear. I quickly followed her instructions and was surprisingly able to regain control and relax. I was told that my heart rate had dropped significantly, and I became unconscious, which was, obviously, not supposed to happen. I thought the procedure was finished, but it hadn’t even begun! They asked me if I felt OK with going ahead with it. “There’s no way I’m going to turn back now,” I thought. “Fire away!” This may not have been me talking, but rather the stimulants they pumped into me to bring me back to consciousness.





Photo: Grace O'Driscoll | Unsplash.com

The doctor did a quick check-up “down there” while also asking me if I wanted to go ahead; I always find it strange when a doctor asks questions while carrying out these kinds of procedures. This has happened more than once, and it never gets less awkward.

Then the suspiciously calm doctor proceeded to get his instruments ready while I sat wondering why I was still wide-awake! Wasn't I supposed to be in a delightful sleep by now? Had I ruined it all by blacking out earlier? Was I being punished for being such a baby? In a shaky voice, I tried asking as politely as I could if I would be put back to sleep. But before I could hear the answer, I was drifting off up into the fluffy clouds and sailing across the light blue sky.

## When I finally came to, all I could say was, “It’s over?”

with a lazy smile on my face. I was led back to my bed to sleep for an hour or so. I tried to find a comfortable spot on the bed but just ended up in an awkward side position with my hand looking like a crab’s claw with the IV drip poking out of it.

Everything had gone smoothly, apart from my blood pressure falling off a cliff. Apparently, it is very unusual for something like this to happen, and the nurses had been just as scared as I was. I realized that each person reacts differently to medication and everyone’s body is different.



I'm very happy to say that everything went as planned in the end, with them retrieving five mature, healthy eggs to be sent to the freezer. The next day, I went into work feeling relieved that at least some of my energy had come back. I was still weak but able to work with only slight discomfort. I still had four more days of antibiotics and medication to take to relieve my symptoms.

There is only one appointment left now; the one where I have a follow-up chat with the doctor about the storage and freezing process. This is an appointment I'm actually looking forward to and not one tainted by needles and scans.

Oocyte cryopreservation definitely isn't 100% foolproof, and there are many other complications with pregnancy in your upper 30s, but it gives me options and a bit more time to perhaps find a partner who is worth waiting for. Most importantly, I can finally pat myself on the back and feel proud of the fact that I took control of my future fertility.

*Carol Kavanagh is a fourth-year JET and horror podcast creator who likes to write, create art, and swim in her spare time. You can listen to herspooky podcast, "HorrorTherapy" on Spotify and check out her art on Instagram @ckworkart.*

Photo: Rowan Chestnut | Unsplash.com

# The Alluring Lotus Root

## Reignite your Love of Vegetables with the Lovely Lotus Root

Kaki Okumura

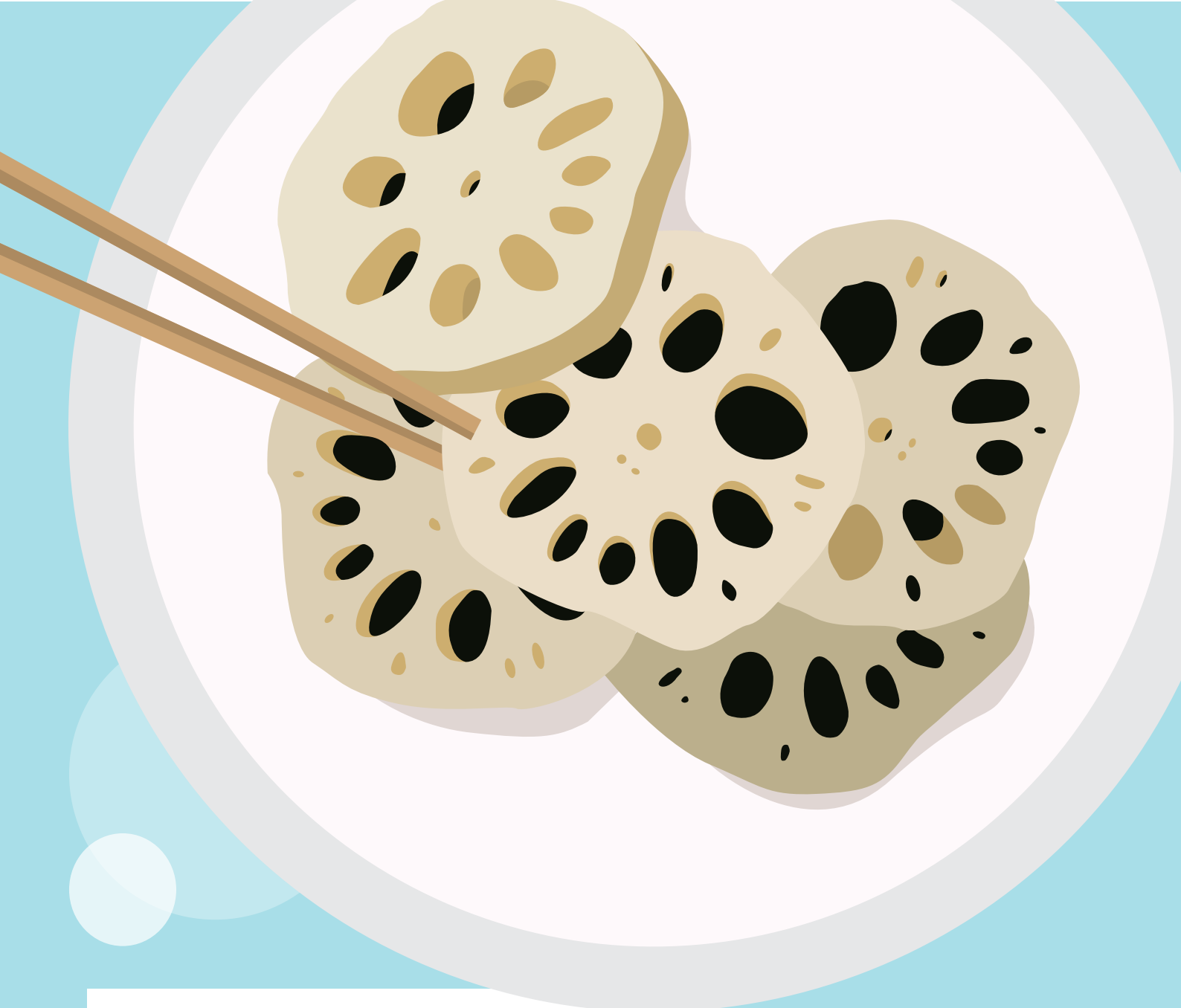
Dowdy whole, lovely sliced, the lotus root may be just what the doctor ordered to break you out of the winter food rut we all tend to feel this time of year.

I'm not here to tout lotus root as a superfood vegetable capable of solving all of our health woes. But incorporating a variety of nutritious and tasty vegetables into our meals is an essential part of a healthy diet. If you've become jaded by the vegetables available to you, don't find them exciting anymore, or simply don't enjoy them, some exposure to less commonly-known vegetables in unique flavor profiles may just be what you need to ignite your love for plant-based whole foods again. Because while there is such a wide variety of vegetables in the world, our exposure has become very limited. So why don't we try opening those doors again?

Lotus root (or "*renkon*" in Japanese) is the bottom, edible part of the lotus plant. It's crunchy, mild, and similar in flavor and texture to a raw potato. For centuries, lotus

root has been used in East Asian cuisines, particularly in Japanese and Chinese cultures. Lotus root is a versatile ingredient that can be used in several different ways. It can be deep-fried, stir-fried, braised, or steamed. It is also commonly used in traditional herbal medicines in dried and powdered form.

Lotus root is full of important nutrients, minerals, and vitamins. It's an excellent source of fiber, which is important to regulate our blood sugar, improve digestion, and manage our appetite. It is also a great source of vitamin C, a powerful antioxidant. Vitamin C is essential for maintaining a healthy immune system, keeping our blood vessels clean, producing collagen, and maintaining our organ and bone health. Lotus root also has a high iron and copper content, which is essential for red blood cell production and can be a great addition for people who may deal with iron deficiency anemia, a common source of headache and fatigue. (1)



While lotus root is a starch, its calorie content is moderate compared to other root vegetables at about 75 calories per 100 grams. (1) So calorie-conscious individuals will find lotus root to be in line with their goals while providing lots of nutrients and fiber to keep them feeling full.

In this month's issue, we've included some of our favorite and exciting ways to enjoy lotus root—pan-fried and wrapped in beef in a sweet-salty soy sauce glaze and loaded lotus root chicken nachos! Hopefully, with these two mouth-watering dishes, you'll be able to convince even your most vegetable-averse friends to give the lotus root a try.

## References:

(1) [USDA FoodData Central](#)

# Beef-Wrapped Lotus Root in a Sweet-Salty Soy Sauce Glaze

Kaki Okumura

To choose a healthy root for eating, make sure it feels heavy and firm. The color should be pale to indicate freshness and be free from any bruises or cracks. To ensure the best taste, we need to choose the best ingredients.

## Ingredients

- 200 grams (about a half-pound) lotus root
- 200 grams (about a half-pound) thinly-sliced beef
- 3 tablespoons soy sauce
- 3 tablespoons mirin
- 3 tablespoons cooking sake
- 2 tablespoons sugar
- Pat of butter (or oil of choice) for the pan



## Instructions

1. Peel the lotus if you choose. (It's relatively thin and doesn't make a huge difference, but the outside skin may feel a bit tough if kept on.) Rinse and cut the lotus root into moon-shaped discs and then put it in an ice-water bath for about five to ten minutes. This prevents oxidation to preserve the crunchiness and removes compounds that cause bitterness.



2. Boil water and blanch the lotus root for 1-2 minutes. Be careful not to overboil! Left in too long, it will become a soggy mess.

3. Remove lotus root, let cool. Then, take the thinly sliced beef and wrap it around the lotus slices.

4. Heat up a pan to medium-high heat and melt butter or oil. Cook until the outside is looking browned, about 2-3 minutes on each side. (More flavor is brought out when it's browned! This is not essential but makes a difference in my opinion).

5. Reduce to low heat. Add soy sauce, mirin, cooking sake, and sugar evenly over the pan.

6. Flip lotus root wraps several times until the sauce is incorporated into the beef and lotus root. At this point, the sauce should be simmering a bit so it reduces and thickens.

7. Remove the lotus root wraps from the pan and place onto a plate. Leave the sauce for a bit longer, until it reduces to a thick consistency.

8. Pour the sauce over the lotus root wraps and enjoy!



*Kaki Okumura is a Japanese food and wellness writer helping others discover simple ways to approach food, movement, and rest so they can reach higher levels of lifestyle balance and, ultimately, contentment. To read more of her writing, please check out her [website](#), [blog](#), and [Instagram account](#)!*



# Lotus Root Chicken Nachos

Kaya Zepeda (Niigata)

Having a hard time finding nachos in Japan? With these lotus root chips, you'll be able to make delicious nachos in the comfort of your own home!

All the seasoning in the recipe is approximate, so please season to your desired taste.

## Ingredients

• 1 renkon (lotus root)—A 5 cm wide by 7 cm long lotus root was used for this recipe, but any size will do! The longer the root, the more chips you can make!

### *Pico de Gallo*

- 1/2 red onion
- 1/2 red tomato
- 6-8 cilantro stems
- 1 jalapeño
- 1.5-2 limes
- 0.5 grams (0.02 ounces) garlic powder
- 0.5 grams (0.02 ounces) salt
- 0.5 grams (0.02 ounces) pepper

### *Guacamole*

- 1 avocado
- 1.5 grams (0.05 ounces) salt

## *Nachos*

- 2 skinless chicken breasts
- 1.5 grams (0.05 ounces) garlic powder
- 2.5 grams (0.09 ounces) salt
- 1 gram (0.04 ounces) pepper
- extra virgin olive oil (for oiling the pan)
- 1 renkon (lotus root)—A 5 cm wide by 7 cm long lotus root was used for this recipe, but any size will do! The longer the root, the more chips you can make!
- 500 ml (16.9 ounces) canola or vegetable oil
- 200 grams (7.05 ounces) shredded cheese (Any cheese is okay!)

First, prep the pico de gallo and guacamole.

## Pico de Gallo Instructions

1. Dice the red onion and tomato into small cubes. Place in a medium-size mixing bowl.
2. Finely chop the cilantro. Add to the bowl with the onions and tomatoes.
3. Slice the jalapeño pepper in half (going down lengthwise/vertically) and remove the core and seeds. Then dice the pepper into small pieces and add to the bowl.
4. Halve the limes and squeeze the lime juice into the bowl.
5. Add a pinch (about 0.5 grams) of garlic powder, salt, and pepper.
6. Mix all the ingredients together and put in the fridge while you prepare the other components.



## Guacamole Instructions

1. Remove the avocado pit and scoop both sides of the avocado with a spoon into a bowl.
2. Add 1.5 grams of salt to the bowl.
3. Smash the avocado with a fork until you reach your desired consistency.
4. Place the guacamole in the fridge.

Next, prepare the chicken!

# Lotus Root Chicken Nachos Instructions

1. Season both sides of your chicken breasts with the remaining garlic, salt, and pepper.
2. Cut both the chicken breasts into bite-sized pieces.
3. Add a swirl of extra virgin olive oil to a pan and set it to medium-high heat.
4. Once the pan has heated for about one minute, add your cut-up chicken. Cook the chicken on each side for about two and a half to three minutes. Per the U.S. Department of Agriculture, poultry is ready once it reaches the minimum internal temperature of 165°F (73.9°C).
5. After the chicken is done cooking, set it aside to rest while you prepare the lotus root.
6. Now, it's lotus root time! Rinse the lotus root with water and thinly slice it width-wise so that you are able to see the natural flower-like pattern. The slices should be about 2-4 mm wide. Alternatively, you can use a mandolin to slice the lotus root if available.
7. Pat the lotus root "chips" dry with a paper towel.
8. In a frying pan or pot, heat up 500 ml of canola oil or vegetable oil over medium-high heat. Your oil is ready when you put a tiny piece of the lotus root into the oil and it automatically bubbles up and floats to the surface.
9. Add six to eight pieces of sliced lotus root at a time into the oil. Fry for two to three minutes until golden brown/dark brown (depending on how crispy you want your chips), then remove the lotus root chips and add to a plate with a paper towel. The paper towel is used to absorb any excess oil.
10. Add a handful of your shredded cheese to the lotus root chips. The heat from the chips should melt the cheese. Every time you fry more lotus root chips, add more cheese.
11. After the cheese has melted on the lotus root chips, add your guacamole, pico de gallo, and chicken!
12. You have now successfully made Lotus Root Chicken Nachos! Enjoy!

*Kaya Zepeda is a first-year ALT out in the Niigata countryside vibing, thriving, and surviving. She is manifesting a life full of laughs and good times.*

# COVID UPDATE

## States of Emergency\*

Okinawa, Hiroshima, Yamaguchi, Hokkaido, Aomori, Yamagata, Fukushima, Ibaraki, Tochigi, Ishikawa, Nagano, Shizuoka, Kyoto, Osaka, Hyogo, Shimane, Fukuoka, Saga, Oita, and Kagoshima prefectures are under states of alert and are exercising preventive measures currently scheduled to last until February 20.

Wakayama prefecture is under states of alert and is exercising preventive measures currently scheduled to last until February 27.

Gunma, Saitama, Chiba, Tokyo, Kanagawa, Niigata, Gifu, Aichi, Mie, Kagawa, Okayama, Nagasaki, Kumamoto, Miyazaki, and Kochi prefectures are under states of alert and are exercising preventive measures currently scheduled to last until March 6.

\*All information is accurate as of February 14. For an up-to-date list of all prefectures under States of Emergency, please refer to the [Cabinet Secretariat Office's Website](#).

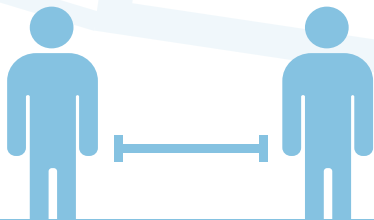
## The following recommendations remain in effect.

- Please avoid the “3 C’s” (closed places, crowded places, and close-contact settings).
- Wear a mask in public places.
- Keep social gatherings small and short.
- Exercise proper social distancing.
- Clean and disinfect common facilities, thoroughly wash hands, and disinfect with alcohol.

## Recommendations for Prefectures exercising Preventive Measures

*Including all of the above, please ensure to:*

- Refrain from visiting food and drinking establishments after 8:00 p.m.
- Please refrain from visiting establishments with karaoke.
- Residents are to refrain from traveling to prefectures under states of emergency.
- Do not drink alcohol in groups on the streets or in parks.
- Businesses are to reduce the number of employees commuting to work by 70%.



As of February 14, 74% of the population in Japan have received both doses of the vaccine.

## Vaccinations

The Japanese government recommends that all people over the age of 12 get vaccinated. COVID-19 vaccinations are available to everyone, including foreign residents, free of charge. After a second dose, vaccines provide significant protection against contracting COVID-19 and greatly reduce the risk of developing severe symptoms in those who do contract the virus. Getting fully vaccinated remains the best protection against severe illness, hospitalization, and death.

For up-to-date vaccination statistics, please visit the [Chief Information Officer's portal](#).

For information regarding *how to get vaccinated* or how to receive your vaccination certificate for overseas travel, please visit the [Ministry of Health, Labor, and Welfare's website](#).

## PCR Testing

PCR tests are covered by medical insurance (as of March 6, 2021).

If you believe you may have contracted the COVID-19 virus, please contact your prefecture's COVID call center to find the testing facility nearest you. ***Do not go to the hospital.*** For information on your prefecture's call center and other COVID resources, please visit the [Ministry of Health, Labor, and Welfare's website](#).

## Questions?

Japan Visitor Hotline: 050-3816-2787

The Japan Visitor Hotline, operated by the Japan National Tourism Organization (JNTO), is available 24 hours a day to answer COVID-related questions or direct you to appropriate mental health resources in English, Chinese, Korean, and Japanese.

## Resources

- For medically accurate, up-to-date information, check: [World Health Organization](#)
- For medical resources in your community, check the [JNTO Medical Institution Guide](#)
- For up-to-date news about COVID in Japan, check: [NHK WORLD](#)
- For information regarding international travel, check: [Immigration Services of Japan](#)

## Omicron Variant

The Japanese government has opened a call center for inquiries about the COVID-19 Omicron variant. The call center is open every day from 9:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m. English language support is available by calling 0570-550-571.

## Booster Shots

Vaccine booster shots (a third shot) for COVID-19 have become available as of December 1, 2021. For information regarding how to receive your booster shot and for further details, please see the [Ministry of Health, Labor, and Welfare's guide](#).

# Mental Health Support

## English counselling services

TELL is a not-for-profit organization that provides support and counselling services to Japan's international community through their in-person offices in Tokyo and Okinawa, as well as online services. They have professionally licensed neuropsychologists on staff to provide testing and assessment to individuals (children or adults).

TELL does not prescribe medicine, but they can refer you to psychiatrists and places to receive a prescription if needed.

TELL also runs LifeLine, a free and anonymous support communication system for English speakers in Japan. For anyone wanting to talk to someone, no matter what the issue, please call the number below or see the website for more information.

TELL Lifeline (every day, 9:00 to 23:00):  
03-5774-0992  
(regular phone call charges apply)

TELL Chat (Friday, Saturday, Sunday, 22:30 to 2:00)

## Additional support for JET Programme participants

With the aim of enhancing mental health support for JET Programme participants, CLAIR offers the JET Programme Mental Health Counselling Assistance Programme. This programme provides a partial subsidy (50%, up to 30,000 yen per year) for counselling costs not covered by health insurance.

As of April 2021, you can use this subsidy to pay for mental health services in Japan or those received online from providers in your home country. If you wish to use a service overseas, please consult with your contracting organisation supervisor for more information. If you wish to apply for the subsidy, you must do so through your contracting organisation.



CLAIR offers a toll-free telephone counselling service which does not require any advance reservation to use. The service generally operates twice per month, on the 10th and 20th (counselling days which would fall on a Sunday or holiday are instead held on the Saturday prior to that day). Operating times are from 17:30-21:00 on Weekdays and 13:00-16:30 on Saturdays.

**Counselling via Telephone\***

Phone number: 0120-810-803

(No advance reservation required. Calls are free of charge.)

\*Limited to one call per person per day (no annual limit)

\*CLAIR has prepared three telephone lines for this service; however, there may be times when the lines become congested.

In addition to the telephone service, CLAIR also offers free Web-Mail and Skype counselling.

Web-Mail Counselling

Login Password: jet2021mental

Skype Counselling

Login password: jet2021mental



# LANGUAGE

## LANGUAGE EDITOR

[connect.language@ajet.net](mailto:connect.language@ajet.net)

### Sarah Baughn

*"All things considered, being shot is not as bad as I always thought it might be, as long as you can keep the fear from your mind. But I guess you could say that about most anything in life: It's not so bad as long as you can keep the fear from your mind." — Dale Cooper, Twin Peaks*

## LANGUAGE DESIGNER

### Phoebe Jin

*"私は綺麗にオシャレしてる私が好きだ。強くあろうとする私が好き。"(I love it when I am dressed up and looking beautiful. I love myself trying to stay strong)*

*—Kugisaki Nobara, Jujutsu Kaisen*

## COPY EDITOR

[connect.copy2@ajet.net](mailto:connect.copy2@ajet.net)

### Day Bulger

*"The difference between the novice and the master is that the master has failed more times than the novice has tried."*  
*— Koro Sensei, Assassination Classroom*



北度

秋田の酒

登録

透

鈴木  
醸造

登録

名聲

希四液

酒牧野

名聲

登録

酒柴崎

名聲

名聲

酒八海

登録 商標

天神  
噺子

登録 商標

酒八海

酒八海

山海

TAMAGAWA

# Migaku: Breaking Down Barriers to Learning a Foreign Language

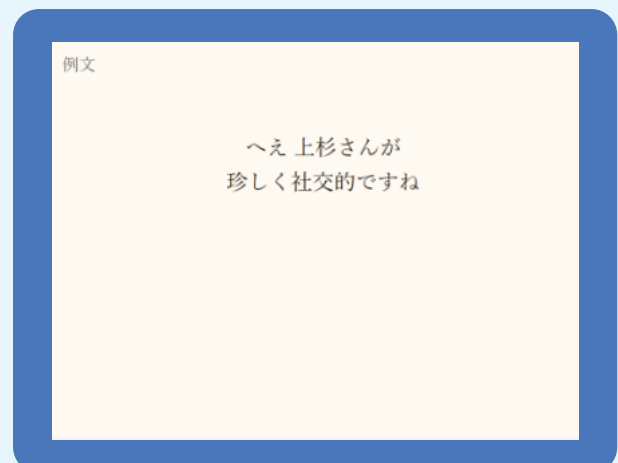
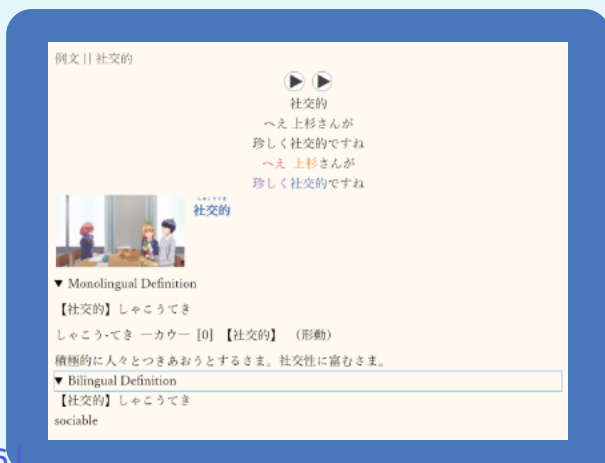
Ryon Morrin (Hokkaido)

In December, we discussed language immersion and its increasing popularity, especially in the Japanese-learning community. People are seeking the best tools for the job. There's existing freeware ranging from great to barely passable, but Migaku is raising the bar with their language immersion learning toolset. While it's still in development, Patreon backers and beta testers (like myself) have early access to this groundbreaking software. But what exactly is Migaku? It's nothing short of revolutionary.

Migaku is a collection of cutting-edge add-ons for Anki, Google Chrome, and more that make language immersion more streamlined, accessible, and efficient. They allow you to jump into native content without the hassle of manually looking up definitions thanks to the Migaku Browser Extension with mouse hover lookups. Say you're watching a show on Netflix, and you come across a word you don't know. Normally, you listen to the audio a second time to make sure you heard it correctly. Next, you take out your phone or open a separate webpage and proceed to manually look up the word by typing it into a dictionary. Finally, you return to the show and restart your program.

That's a lot of wasted time. Immersion becomes a chore rather than something you enjoy doing. Now imagine you can skip forward or backward one subtitle at a time instead of in 10-second increments. Then, you can hover your mouse cursor over a new word (which optionally can show furigana automatically if it's not added to your known word list) and hold the shift key, and a dictionary pop-up window appears immediately. The pop-up is entirely customizable; you can choose the order of your dictionaries, add pitch accent graphs and information such as word audio, font and text size, the size of the window, and more. Most importantly, it takes a fraction of the time compared to manual lookups, reducing interruptions to what matters most: immersion. Gone are the days of painstaking dictionary dives.

The Migaku Browser Extension allows for the use of default dictionaries, but importing your own is a popular option. Monolingual and bilingual dictionaries can be used depending on your preference, and you can decide what order dictionaries are displayed in the pop-up. For example, if you're in the process of a monolingual transition, you can have Japanese definitions





# Migaku

Become Fluent



display first. Give that a crack, and if it's still a bit fuzzy, scroll down for clarification from the bilingual dictionary below. If you're especially dedicated to the monolingual transition, you can do recursive lookups within the Japanese definition, too, creating child pop-ups for every new word you search within the dictionary.

In addition, when parsing text (more on parsing below), clicking any word on a subtitle line or sentence on a webpage will play an audio clip of the word, and pitch accent coloring can be toggled on or off for Japanese. The recently added Migaku Reader, which is built into the browser extension, allows for uploading of ebook files, which can be read with Migaku's text parsing and pop-up dictionary. This makes the daunting jump into the world of novels much smoother and enables you to spend more time actually reading than hunting down the reading of a kanji or the definition of a word.

Migaku's tools work in sync with Anki, too, saving you even more time. You can create Anki cards in seconds by exporting sentences, audio clips, and screenshots from your favorite anime or drama with a single click. With immersion, "sentence mining," or pulling sentences from content for Anki cards, is crucial, although it's a tedious process when done manually. Migaku's

browser extension, combined with the Migaku Dictionary and Migaku Japanese add-ons for Anki, allows for unbelievably efficient sentence mining workflows, so you'll be spending most of your time immersing yourself in the language instead of adding to your decks. The Migaku Dictionary allows you to add definitions to cards from any of your installed dictionaries of choice, related Google images, and word audio recordings from real native speakers. Migaku Japanese lets you customize your cards further by adding pitch accent graphs and coloring as well as generating word audio and furigana when hovering over words.

One of the more intelligent features is the word list. Your word lists syncs with Anki and tracks every word you are actively learning or have already learned. Word lists allow for one of the most powerful tools within the browser extension: *text parsing*. When mining sentences, it is vitally important to adhere to Krashen's Input Hypothesis: "i + 1." "i" is your current level of language ability and comprehension, and "+1" is a single, new, unknown element in the language, such as a word or a grammar point. When you understand everything surrounding that one unknown element, it is ripe for acquisition. To supplement this acquisition, mining sentences and making cards for active learning is common



practice. Here's where parsing comes into play. Manually searching for  $i + 1$  sentences can be a real drag. I've found myself hunting for sentences instead of focusing on the content as a whole. Amazingly, with the click of a button, the Migaku Browser Extension automatically identifies every single known and unknown word in an entire episode of an anime or a news article according to your synced-up word list. And if you click just one more button, it will automatically identify every  $i + 1$  sentence in that content and export it to Anki for card creation. Parsing options also include removing furigana for all learned words and only displaying it above new ones.

Currently, Migaku's subtitle parsing works with Netflix and YouTube. As an alternative to streaming, the built-in video player can parse your own content if you have video and subtitle files on your computer. As for text, many websites work seamlessly with it, and ebooks can be parsed without a hitch, too.

These are just *some* of the features and tools Migaku offers. With every update the team releases, they become more useful, more user-friendly, and more impressive.

It's important to note that the Migaku Browser Extension is currently only available to the Patreon Beta Tester tier (\$5 per month) and Backer tier (\$10 per month), the latter offering alpha releases as well as backer meetings and the ability to submit feature proposals for the team's consideration. Both tiers offer private Discord access, which includes support directly from the team and access to community channels. And, as with any beta (or alpha) release, there are bugs. While it is highly functional at the current moment, there are quirks here and there, with some users experiencing more than others. Over the past several months, I've been fortunate enough to have limited issues, and when I did run into any, they were usually due to my own mistakes.

If you're interested in Migaku's Immersion Learning Toolset, visit their website to learn more. Their YouTube channel also has videos demonstrating the software in action.

<https://www.migaku.io/>

<https://www.patreon.com/Migaku>

*Ryon Morrin is a third-year ALT based in Shintotsukawa, Hokkaido. In his free time, he enjoys discovering new music, hiking in the mountains, and playing rhythm games at the arcade.*

(kataomoi de kata omoi)

# 片思いで肩重い

## Unrequited love is heavy on my shoulders

Hey all! Welcome to February. This month's Japanese pun is pretty apt for the Valentine's season, though I hope all your love is requited.

For this month's vocabulary, I'll go a bit into the different kinds of chocolate given, though it is unfortunately up to you to figure out which type to give to whom!

### Vocabulary

Valentine	バレンタイン	varentain
Boyfriend	彼氏	kareshi
Girlfriend	彼女	kanojo
Gender-neutral romantic partner	恋人	koibito
Confession	告白	kokuhaku
Date	デート	deto
Friendship chocolate	友チョコ	tomo choco
Obligation chocolate (for your boss and coworkers)	義理チョコ	giri choco
"True romantic feelings" chocolate	本命チョコ	honmei choco
"Reverse" chocolate (given by a boy to a girl)	逆チョコ	gyaku choco
"Self" chocolate (chocolate bought for yourself—the most important kind)	自分チョコ	jibun choco

# TRAVEL AND COMMUNITY

## TRAVEL EDITOR

connect.travel@ajet.net

### Dahlia Lemelin

*"If they do not need you, it's okay. You do not live for other people." — Tooru Nishimura.*

## TRAVEL DESIGNER

connect.socialmedia@ajet.net

### Katherine Wang

*"You miss 100% of the shots you don't take — Wayne Gretzky — Michael Scott" — The Office*

## COMMUNITY EDITOR

connect.community@ajet.net

### Sierra Nelson-Liner

*"Study the teachings of the pine tree, the bamboo, and the plum blossom. The pine is evergreen, firmly rooted, and venerable. The bamboo is strong, resilient, unbreakable. The plum blossom is hardy, fragrant, and elegant. — Morihei Ueshiba*

## COMMUNITY DESIGNER

### Phoebe Jin

*"私は綺麗にオシャレしてる私が大好きだ。強くあろうとする私が大好き。"(I love it when I am dressed up and looking beautiful. I love myself trying to stay strong) — Kugisaki Nobara, Jujutsu Kaisen*

## COPY EDITOR

connect.copy3@ajet.net

### Dianne Yett

*"Monday for me is like waking up and stumbling very quickly down a flight of stairs only to land perfectly on your feet at the bottom and wondering how in the actual hell you managed that." — Self*



TY



# Let Ways Lead Into Ways

A SHORT HOLIDAY TO NARA

Fergus Gregg (Hyogo)



This year autumn was m...  
temperatures, only temper...  
that the only thing between...  
light jumper. The perfect we...  
I decided on Nara. I had be...  
capital before, but only stay...  
on to Himeji, leaving me...  
experienced all that the city...  
three days wandering amon...  
and traipsing through the h...  
that one night is not enough



I started on a Saturday, leaving my home in Kobe just after lunchtime. A friend had invited me to a gig in Nishinomiya, so my travel plan was altered to include an overnight stay in Osaka before I'd continue on to Nara early Sunday morning.

The venue was Casablanca, a comfortable 15-minute walk from Nishinomiya Station. Sitting by the harbor, Casablanca sits above another bar and offers two open air terraces to relax on and a main indoor covered bar section. Soft lighting graces diners and regulars as they sit down to some of the best Greek food it has to offer. The owner, Dmitri, walks among guests serving them himself and speaking amiably with friends, return customers and young expats like myself.

After thanking my friend for the invitation, I left Casablanca alone, easily making the special rapid from Nishinomiya to Tennoji Station in Osaka. My accommodation for the night was a simple hostel, [Peace House Suzunami](#). Situated right by Tennoji Park and barely a three-minute walk from the station, the hostel is an incredibly reasonable and convenient place to stay in Osaka for young travelers which was priced at 900 yen for the night for a dormitory bed. Thanks to the high online ratings of this hostel, many young and outgoing travelers come there to stay, making it a great place to meet new friends and have uniquely authentic experiences even as a solo traveler.



mild in Kansai. 18-degree  
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me and the elements was a  
rather to go for a little holiday.  
een to the ancient Japanese  
ed one night before rushing  
feeling as if I hadn't truly  
had to offer, and after the last  
ng the cobbled back streets  
ills, I can say with certainty  
to truly experience Nara.



## Now, onto the main event: Nara.

My accommodation was only 15 minutes of walking north from JR Nara and is a serviced apartment building called [Tarbo's House](#) with which I was extremely impressed. This one room apartment costs 6,336 yen for two nights and is complete with all the amenities a traveler could ever need—even a flatscreen TV, complete with the apartment's own Netflix account. This extremely well-equipped space makes for a perfect home base after a day of sightseeing, and with all the amenities it provides, you can decide yourself whether to enjoy a night out in Nara or a cheap night in.

Another great thing about Tarbo's House is that the staff are considerate, available and flexible. While I was unable to check in when I arrived, they graciously looked after my bags and deposited them safely in my room until I was back, alleviating me of the burden of luggage. With that dealt with, I set off. Tarbo's House, while comfortable and close to the train, is almost a 30 minute walk from Nara Park, but there are buses available close by. However, if you're looking for something different, it is close to Heijokyo and the Uwanabe area, which are a comfortable 20 minute walk from the accommodation.



While Nara is famous for [Nara Park](#), deer, and [Todai-Ji](#), I recommend doing what I did when you first get there: get lost. Nara is often described as Kyoto on a smaller scale, with many temples, well preserved cultural precincts, and historical monuments so, like with Kyoto, I think it's imperative to just let yourself get lost and explore.

I started off north from my apartment, along a picturesque canal and past broad rivers until, quite accidentally, I came to Uwanabe Pond. This scenic location, right by the Uwanabe *Kofun* (megaliths), provides an excellent opportunity for relaxation away from the crowds of the tourists. It also provides valuable insights into just how old Nara really is, as the Kofun were the imperial residences during the Nara Period (710-794 CE). Uwanabe Kofun is located just North of Heijomachi, about 20 minutes of walking from Kintetsu Nara Station. The megaliths of Uwanabe reflect the abandonment of Heijo-Kyo when the capital was moved and the population followed. However, in stark contrast, my next destination is still standing. The [Heijo Palace](#), once a complete complex, only remains as a majestic centerpiece in its own precinct. Mostly surrounding it are progressing archeological excavations, but there's work underway on the reconstruction of the South Gate building, so keep an eye out for its future completion. Otherwise, there's a Heijo museum which talks about the abandonment of the area, current excavations, and unearthed artifacts, all of which builds the atmosphere of living history, which followed me as I left the district.






Following the road eastward, passing by all kinds of temples, you come to Nara Park and the main attraction, the Todai-Ji. This broad temple complex dates as far back as the Uwanabe Kofun, having been completed in 728 CE. Yet this complex has been faithfully reconstructed and maintained to stand the tests of time. While seeing the Great Buddha here is vitally important, you mustn't stop after seeing it. If you continue onwards up the hill, you'll find something truly special. Featuring a panoramic view reminiscent of the one seen at Kiyomizu Dera in Kyoto, the Todai-Ji Nigatsu-Do commands an impressive and vital view across the temple complex, the park and Nara itself. This designated National Treasure is regarded as one of the most important cultural locations in the country, and it's easy to see why. Apart from its view, it acts as reliquary for artifacts that cannot be viewed by the public and used to act as the site of important repentance services.





There, behind the hill are several hidden shrines that tourists hardly ever visit. The Onyu Shrine stood out for me. While it may lack the views that Nigatsu-Do provides, the walk up from the main complex and to this quiet piece of history was a nice detour. Fun fact: The Onyu shrine commemorates the God of the Onyu River, who showed up late to the opening ceremony of Nigatsu-Do, of which 13,700 other Gods were invited. Feeling embarrassed, as I would be, he offered the scented waters of his river as recompense. According to the legend, this was the source of the spring from which the *Omizutori* "Water Drawing" Festival started from. These sorts of finds reward people who go beyond the tourist traps, so I strongly encourage you to follow my lead and wander up the path a little further in Nara. You might just find ruins, a shrine or sacred site where you can sit and let the ambience of Nara bring you to peace.



After working up an appetite for dinner, I recommend [OIL SLOPE](#), a five minute walk from Kintetsu-Nara Station, away from Nara Park, and a short walk from Tarbo's House. The 1,500 yen all-you-can-drink isn't the cheapest, but considering it includes wines and some cocktails under this 90-minute plan, it is certainly fair. The wood fired pizzas are definitely their specialty, and the amicable staff make for a great eating environment.

On my last day, I resolved to hike up [Mount Wakakusa](#). Wakakusa overlooks the entire city of Nara and, much like the rest of the Temple precinct, is dotted with deer. Fun Fact: on the fourth Saturday of January, every year, the mountain's dead grass is set ablaze in a tradition that supposedly emanates from a boundary dispute between two temples in 1760. The enmity may have been forgotten, but the tradition remains, so be sure to check this festival out next January.

On the way there, I was sure to check out [Kasuga Taisha Shrine](#). Bright vermilion columns support the roof of this Shinto shrine and stood out brilliantly among the overcast weather of the day. One special aspect of this shrine is the wisteria. Albeit, wisteria wasn't in bloom when I visited, but the willowy nature of this famous Japanese plant provides excellent shade on hot days, and on days when rain threatens, it becomes a welcome sanctuary. The shrine is home to over 3,000 bronze and stone lanterns, lighting the way in the latter hours of the day. Kasuga Taisha is dedicated to four Gods primarily of war aspects and this is reflected in the threatening *chigi* forked roof. Surrounding the main buildings are Kogami shrines, shrines for the offspring of Gods, so it's easy to lose time wandering from one to the other.

After properly paying my respects (walking with reverence is particularly important when dealing with war Gods), I finally made my way north through the wooded park towards the base of Mount Wakakusa.





Only one small problem: it was raining. Yet, with my trusty *konbini* umbrella in hand, I persevered. Walking up the hill, as the city disappeared into the fog behind me, I'd be forgiven for thinking that I was on a Scottish moor. The hills rolled out in front of me, trees cresting their tops and the deer grazed peacefully, undisturbed by the rain. As I reached the summit and looked out onto the shrouded city of Nara beneath me, I was greeted by yet another Kofun. While I've been unable to learn who's burial mound it is, one thing is undeniable, they rest with an extraordinary view.

Looking back at my time coming to Nara, being waylaid in Nishinomiya and losing myself halfway between Heijo-Kyo and Nara Park, I remembered the words of Robert Frost.

*Yet knowing how way leads on to way,  
I doubted if I should ever come back.* — Robert Frost.



*Fergus is a youthful first-year JET who has stepped into Japan bright-eyed and looking for adventure. When not obsessing over horror films and literature, he can be found exploring Hyogo in search of mystery.*

# TAKING THE OTHER ROUTE

Dahlia Lemelin (Gunma)

Very few of us have had the chance, or the guts, to go out and travel in the past months. Some have dared, hopefully carefully following our new lifestyle guidelines to be able to get at least a quick taste of the freedom of travel, even when limited to domestic exploration. You get up one morning and can't take it anymore. You have to go and discover new horizons! But what if the road to destination could also be new? And what if you can also save your precious hard-earned money for a future international destination or a fun exploration by trying out affordable but fun ways to move around?

Let's explore different ways to travel Japan.



## ON THE RIGHT TRACK

Night trains were popular in the early 2000s, but because of the expansion of the night bus services and availability of the shinkansen tickets, most railway companies stopped offering night services in 2016. The only remaining overnight service is with the Sunrise Seto-Izumo, a long haul train running the Tokyo-Okayama corridor before splitting to reach two terminals: Izumo in Shimane, and Takamatsu in Kagawa.



There are various ways to save on accommodation during your travels, and this is one of them. The westbound train leaves Tokyo around 10 p.m. and arrives at its final station of Izumo-shi just before 10 a.m., Or around 8 a.m. in Takamatsu. With the Sunrise sleeper train, passengers can get access to their own *nobi-nobi* seat, or a single carpeted space on a two-level sleeping area.

The cheapest of a few options, the open sleeping space is shared with other passengers but is separated by short partitions. Big enough for someone 180 cm tall to lay comfortably, it's a reasonable resting place. Even though no amenities or wifi are offered and clients who wish to have a more comfortable sleep should bring a personal item to use as a pillow, the price of about 16,000 yen makes it worth it.



The plus for this ride is that it is entirely covered by the [JRPass](#)! The sleeper train is a good deal to try and grab while you try to make the most out of your time and money. The reservation for the Sunrise Seto-Izumo is easy, but with only one trip daily, the tickets quickly get taken. As do most reservation-based train services, you can request tickets starting one month from your date of departure to make sure you can ride on your desired day. For people getting the JRPass, you can get the Sunrise Izumo tickets through the same

purchasing system. Other ways to get your hand on your moving accommodation ticket include the JR *Midori no Madoguchi* counters present at major transit stations in many cities, or the online Japanese website [Eki-net](#), as well as some travel agencies. Considering a shinkansen and train ride for the same stretch of rails will cut your day off by more than six hours and have you pay just over 20,000 yen, you'll still have to pay for accommodation at your destination and realistically will lose almost a day sitting at your seat, which makes the Sunrise an option to consider.



For those who are focused on time saving and are less crunched for coins can try to reserve one of the few higher grade rooms on the Sunrise line, which include a solo private berth, a small twin bed single room or even a double room with a small vanity! Most offer amenities you can keep as well. The price rises accordingly for each and the room surcharge is not covered with the JRPass, but you can get a solo berth for about 22,000 yen without the pass, which is equivalent to the normal shinkansen fare.

The train has a small lounge with drink vending machines, bathrooms and even showers you can have access to with a shower card that will let you get six minutes of hot water for a nice refreshing moment before you get to lay down for the ride! Check out JP Rail's extremely detailed [guide](#) on the Sunrise Seto-Izumo for all the information you could need!



As for more train tips, everyone knows about the fast, safe, reliable and comfortable Shinkansen service. With three options of speed, the Nozomi, Hikari and Kodama range of tickets can save you money or time, depending on your goal. Nowadays, for travel extending to cities a few hours away, flying can sometimes be a more affordable option depending on how far away you are from the departing airport. But with the [Platt Kodama](#) deal, you can get reductions on the bullet train fare.

The deal is valid on the Tokaido Shinkansen on the Tokyo-Shin-Osaka part of the track. Even if the Platt Kodama is the slowest of the

various bullet train services, it will only set you back one and a half hour compared to the Nozomi but comes with a nice saving of just over 3,500 yen for the whole ride to Osaka from the capital during the regular season. Their offer also includes an additional drink voucher you can use at selected shops in departure stations as well, since the train does not have any wagon service. Although you need to reserve and buy tickets at designated locations of [JR Tokai Tours](#) counters, making the choice to go for Platt can leave you with a few more yen to spend on a nice dinner or some gifts once you arrive at your point of disembarkation if you wish to.



## THE WHEELS ON THE BUS GO ROUND... ALL NIGHT!

Another option for those who want to save time is the extensive night bus services that go all over the country, even leaving from smaller local stations, ensuring everyone an almost direct way to their terminus. Again, there are various types of buses ranging from regular chartered buses to more luxurious spacious seats with on-board small bathrooms. But the ultimate comfort can also be found on four wheels, like the *Dream Sleeper* room from Kanto-Bus, or the *Reborn* seats from Willer Express.

Both tickets guarantee you a trip much more private than normal bus seats usually offer but still can make sure you will save money on your travel as you can peacefully snooze off and wake up at your destination.





[Willer Express](#) has a simple reservation system that can be paid in cash at convenience stores, or paid online. They have depots in most major cities and have one of the most varied route grids around the country. Their cheapest seats can bring a Tokyoite to Osaka for no more than 4,000 yen! But with [Reborn seats](#), which are their highest quality of tickets, you can reserve a single position for an almost fully reclinable seat in a bus that carries only 18 passengers at a time. Their best tickets are in the ballpark of 10,000 yen, but some weekday seats can be found as low as 7,500 yen, which definitely beats the price of a combination of other modes of transport when considering finding an accommodation that would become necessary. Leaving the city at the end of the day around 11 p.m., you can wake up in Osaka just before 7 a.m. and go exploring.

One more luxurious bus experience you might want to try is the [Dream Sleeper](#), from Willer bus. Entering the small cabin, you'd think you'd found yourself in a sitting capsule hotel. In this completely closed off room, you have access to your own reclinable seat with a privacy closing door for maximum privacy. You might be pressed to find a more comfortable mode of accommodation on the road.

Although their buses only serve Tokyo and Osaka, their price of around 19,000 yen is about 4,500 yen more than the Shinkansen, so if you can find accommodation at that price, the fare would be approximately equivalent, but the novelty is worth the fee!

If these two companies lack the routes you are looking for, or if you want to compare fees and routes, feel free to visit [Kosoku Bus](#), which can also help you book tours of the city you'll be visiting once off the bus, or [Japan Bus Online](#). Close your eyes and be transported!



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## OCEAN VIEWS

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Lastly, another less explored route is the marine one. Japan being surrounded by water and split into so many islands, it also has the maritime services to get to them, and anyone can take advantage of their routes to experience a new way to get somewhere.

Depending on your port of departure, some ferries are more worthy of the time and fare. Different companies run in different areas across Japan

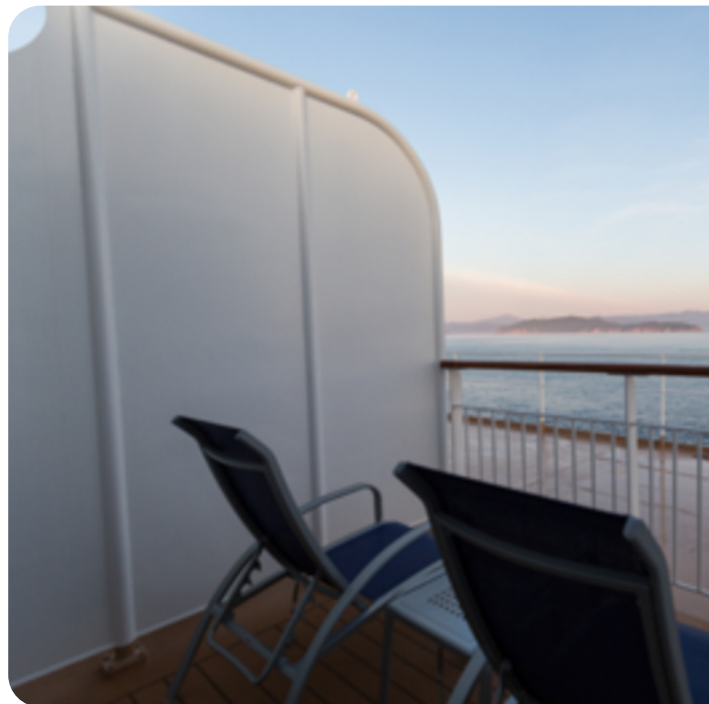
like [Shin-Nihonkai](#) on the Sea of Japan, or the Ferry Sunflower on the Seto Inland Sea and Pacific. Obviously, some locations are only reachable by boat, like the southern islands of Tokyo prefecture located in the Pacific, and smaller, closer islands like Sado in Niigata. But some mainland cities can also be reached through their ports! On Direct Ferries' [website](#), you can compare fares and search for routes easily in English. There's more choices than you might think!



For example, Ooarai City, in Ibaraki Prefecture, is just north of Tokyo and is connected to the Tomakomai Port in Hokkaido by overnight ferry. A single room on the [Sunflower](#) can be booked for the night for an average of 15,000 yen, depending on the season, which is almost 10,000 yen cheaper than the shinkansen fare, if you include the ride to Oarai Port from Tokyo by train. Of course, some flights might be cheaper, but the ferry saves you the time you'd spend at the airport during the day, so you can fill your schedule with only fun times!

Other routes include Osaka or Kobe Port to Kyushu cities like Beppu through the calm Seto Inland Sea. The [Ferry Sunflower company](#) has a deal for a dormitory flat bed for [10,000 yen round-trip](#) from Kansai to Kyushu, making the 12,000 yen toll road fee added to eight hours of driving an absolute deal breaker. The shinkansen for the same distance almost tops 20,000 yen, so twice the price of the Sunflower deal. It's a considerable saving!

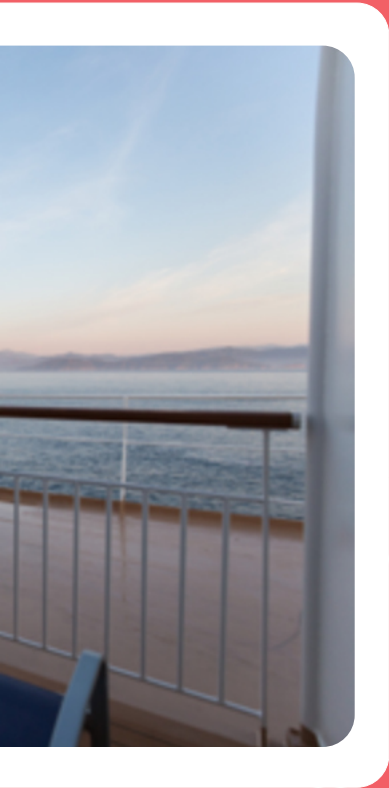
*Dahlia is the travel editor for **CONNECT Magazine** and a fourth-year JET living in Gunma, always looking for secret treasures to find on a lazy weekend of driving around in her tiny car.*



For those who want to spend a few days at their destination and bring their car, ferries also usually make this possible, with an additional fee. But with the calculations of the toll roads, gas money, time lost driving and the one night accommodation you'd need once at your goal, still give some consideration points to the overnight ferry service. Maybe you should see for yourself and wake up to the sunrise on the water!

No matter where you're headed and for how long, there is more to travel in Japan than trains and highway buses. Make sure to compare your options and check your budget to see if maybe, a new way of transport could become both a new adventure and a new way of saving money!





浅草 ASAKUSA

代々木 YOYOGI

有楽町 YAMAGUCHI

新橋 SHINJUKU

上野 UENO

品川 SHINAGAWA

池袋 IKEDAKU

渋谷 SHIBUYA

恵比寿 EBISU

新宿 SHINJUKU

原宿 HARAOKU

東京 TOKYO





Exhausted and Worn Out:  
*Plight* of the Modern Day  
*Japanese Teacher*

By Cameron Peagler (Yamaguchi)

“*Yabai, yabai* (oh no, oh no)”, a teacher utters after catching a minute of free time to drink coffee while running back to class, sneezing into one hand because of a cold and carrying a heavy basket filled with class materials. That same teacher just finished their fourth 11 hour shift last night and will be teaching tennis on Saturday. This is actually not an uncommon sight and why many teachers today are exhausted and worn out.

In 2019, Japan hit an all-time high of teachers taking mental health leave, totalling over 5,000 days, according to the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology ([Nippon.com](http://Nippon.com)). At the time, Sanraku Hospital Psychiatry Department head Makane Kaoruko reported that teachers were suffering from chronic depression due to the intense workload required by schools. “Even after taking breaks and returning to their jobs, some of these people find it so overwhelming that they have to take time off yet again” ([JapanToday](http://JapanToday)).

Teachers at various levels of schooling are faced with difficult and unique challenges. For example, elementary school teachers have to master and teach several subjects on their own and middle school teachers are tasked with running sports clubs after school, including on weekends. They also have several roles outside of teaching such as preparing for Sports Day or the Cultural Festival. On an average, teachers from elementary, middle, and high school end up

working 11 hours per day ([KyodoNews](http://KyodoNews)). A quick search online will reveal that there are many negative effects of working long hours, including increased chance of death from stroke or heart disease, increased risk of depression, and a decrease in productivity just to name a few ([BBC News](http://BBCNews)).

You may be surprised to also hear that according to a rule set up in 1966, teachers only receive a 4% top-up on their standard monthly salary for the overtime they put in ([The Mainichi](http://TheMainichi)). What may not be a surprise is the shortage of teachers that Japan is currently facing which is requiring even vice principals to help teach classes. It has been reported that the number of teachers who applied for jobs dropped from 122,000 in 2012 to 98,000 in 2019 ([The Japan News](http://TheJapanNews)). Another factor to consider is the actual salary of teachers in Japan compared to other countries. Despite working an average of 11 hours a day, primary teachers with 15 years of experience will make the USD equivalent of \$71,024 in Canada, \$60,185 in America, \$59,103 in Korea, and only \$47,664 in Japan ([OECD.org](http://OECD.org)).

Stressful work, unequivocal pay, and long hours have caused many modern day Japanese teachers to become exhausted. To paint a clearer picture of the plight teachers face, I conducted an interview with a native teacher who has chosen to remain anonymous and words have been translated.

# Interview

**Would you consider working as a teacher in Japan a stressful job?**

Yes, compared to other jobs, working as a teacher is more stressful.

**Why?**

Long work time and low payment. Also, there are too many expectations from parents. Thirty years ago, parents treated teachers well and stood by our decisions. But recently not so much.

**Do you think teachers are respected?**

A few parents respect us but not many. For example, parents yell at us sometimes or pass the blame for students' issues onto us.

**I'm sure it also doesn't help being tired from long shifts. How many hours do you usually work in a day?**

I usually work 10 hours a day and four hours on Saturday.

**How much time do you get to spend with your loved ones during the weekday?**

On weekdays I get two or three hours, in the evening only.

**What are some of the roles you have at work outside of teaching?**

I manage the classroom. For example, if students fight or have relationship troubles, I have to solve the problem.

**Do you think solving students' problems has gotten more difficult?**

Yes. Previously, it was easy to discover students' problems. Problems like students changing hair color or wearing the wrong clothes were easy to solve. Now because of social media, it's difficult to identify what problems they are having. So, we have to learn about new systems they are using and stay up to date. Also in the past, if a teacher told a student something was wrong, they would listen. Now students say no, and parents complain and question why we told a student to not do something.

**I didn't take into consideration that the complexity of students has changed because of technology. Back to talking about working hours, you essentially work 54 hours a week. That's a lot! Is it true you only get paid 4% on top of your monthly salary for this?**

Yes.

**Do you think it is fair?**

It's unfair. In other companies when workers do overtime, they get extra money per hour instead of one flat percentage.

**By the way, schools offer satisfaction surveys to everyone. Do you think these are answered honestly?**

Maybe not, because if the answer is bad, it means there is a complication and dissatisfaction with our boss. Japanese tend to not say bad things about our bosses because the situation won't change.

**Finally, If you could make one change that would make your job easier, what would it be?**

We need more teachers. With a lower student to teacher ratio, we can have more time to work with students, which we don't have now, because we are so busy.

**Do you have any additional comments you would like to include?**

For the children we need the system to change. Children are changing, we need to be able to give more time to individual children.

I want to thank the teacher who volunteered their time and their willingness to talk about such a complex and difficult topic. It is my hope that by providing readers with a teacher's perspective, it will spark change that will improve the lives of both teachers and students alike.

Based on the evidence presented above and this interview, teaching in Japan is truly a difficult job that has grown to be very complex over the years. Therefore, I challenge you, the reader, to two different tasks. First, if you work

with or know a teacher, take the time to perform a small act of kindness for them. Whether it be making a teacher a coffee or simply letting them know that you appreciate the work they do, these gestures are linked to an improved sense of wellbeing and may decrease some of the stress they incur. ([Health Direct](#)).

My second challenge is for you to think of ways to help with this issue in your own community. This could be writing a letter to your local board of education requesting teachers to become listed as official public servants to increase their pay or showing a gesture of kindness to teachers. While I believe this is a complex problem that requires a multi-faceted approach, we can all be part of what makes change happen and support our beloved teachers in Japan.

#### Sources:

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*Cameron is a third-year JET with extensive experience as a registered nurse in America. He is an avid writer and photographer with the goal of using these tools to help make the world a better place. You can follow his adventure [@truhiro](#) on Instagram.*



I'm Fine, Really



# Deeper Mud with Meaning

**Naturally Building Community (and Garden Beds)**  
Titus Joel with Sierra Nelson-Liner (Shizuoka)

It might be one of those things that happens when new ALTs still aren't comfortable with talking freely to the other teachers in the staff room (or indeed able to, what with the language barrier), but it was the case that I didn't know about the garden-building event at my elementary school until a couple of other ALTs (who, pointedly, don't work at my school) mentioned it to me. "Wait, what's the name of your school?" Sanarudai Elementary. "Isn't that the school we made eco-bricks for?" Eco-bricks? What are those? "They're going to use them to build a garden!"

... Huh. I see.

I found out the garden workshop was meant to primarily be an educational opportunity for the students, but was open to anyone who was interested. And, after some friendly prodding, I resolved to go. I'd only been on the job for a month at that point and I had yet to involve myself in anything community related. I'm generally nervous about joining things on my own, but here was a perfect opportunity where, even if I

didn't really know what was going on, there were bound to be a few friendly faces. And besides, JET is about having new experiences, isn't it?

I'm so glad I went.

There were a few surprised looks when I strolled up that balmy November morning—the teachers I'd told I was going were not the ones there that day, and the handful of students that did attend were shocked to see me.

Rounding out the group of about twenty or so people was our instructor and master plasterer Yamamoto-san, the event leaders, students from a university club, and an assortment of people from the neighborhood.

This gathering was one of many events coordinated by [Permaculture Design Lab](#). It is run by Jun Omura and Wakana Kawamura-san. Both qualified in Permaculture Design, they are working towards supporting natural projects in and around the Hamamatsu City area.

# Workshop | Day 1





To break the ice we started with a greeting, sitting in a circle, and one by one we introduced ourselves. We gave our names and the reasons for being there that day. In my broken Japanese I was able (I think) to say that I was excited to do something for my school. Thankfully, Kawamura-san spoke English very well, so whenever I stumbled she helped translate when I retreated back into English. After our introductions Jun and Wakana outlined what we were going to do for the day. We were to make three small garden beds by combining traditional techniques with new ones—namely making mud walls with bamboo skeletons, but also reinforcing one of them with eco-bricks, or bricks made from plastic bottles packed tight with more plastic.

Two months previously, volunteers had met at a “Share the Park” event near Lake Sanaru to learn about and create eco-bricks. Eco-bricks are a way to recycle discarded plastic bottles. The trick is to fill a bottle with small pieces of even more plastic until it weighs about 150 grams. This prevents microplastics from spreading into the environment, and creates a permanent use for a supposedly “single-use” item. In this case, that permanent use was to provide support to a naturally built wall. Furthermore, we wanted to show the elementary students ways of repurposing plastic waste through permaculture.

Permaculture is a method of farming that connects nature, people, and creatures in a way that is regenerative and supportive by design. It focuses on the abundant growth of food and soil organisms, as well as the intertwined space between humans and

nature. This ultimately leads to a community-based lifestyle which promotes rewilding and regaining connection to the earth.

The demonstrations were a very hands-on educational approach for the students. They were immediately taken in by the plasterer’s array of tools, which included shovels, hand boards, and numerous handmade trowels of varying shape and size. The first task was to wrap large bamboo tubes with jute rope, so that the straw-enforced mud would have something to stick to. The mud would be shoveled into a wheelbarrow from a pile and brought over to the garden area. To make the garden beds themselves, bamboo tubes would be used to form the wall outline, covered in mud, and then more tubes laid on top, to be repeated for several layers. The top layer would have the eco-bricks, with their ends revealed to show that they were there.

We all got a chance to participate in each part of the production line, and I spent my time either shoveling or piling mud onto bamboo to shape the walls. It was also the first real physical activity I’d done since coming to Hamamatsu, and I was happy to dig into it. Working side by side with the students was fun, and it gave them a chance to use a little bit of English outside the classroom. With the adults it gave me a chance to practice my Japanese. There were also a bunch of students who came to practice soccer on the school field, and every once in a while a few of them would wander over to see what was going on.





# Workshop | Day 2



My favorite part of the day had to be when my school principal, seeing that there were no available trowels, went wrist-deep into the mud with no hesitation to grab what she needed to make the wall. What else is there at that point but to follow suit? My hands caked in mud, it reminded me of when I built sandcastles with my friends during my own elementary school days. But these would be things made to last. It was a really satisfying feeling.

Near the end, we were given a preview of what we'd be doing the next time we would meet, a month later: plastering. A practice board was set up and we all got a chance to practice spreading plaster on its surface. It was mesmerizing to watch the speed and skill of Yamamoto-san's hands when the kids asked him how fast he could go.

When it was time to wrap up, we all went back to sit in the circle and give our impressions for the day. It sounded like everyone had a good time, and it was especially uplifting to see those young students putting so much effort into a worthy cause in their little corner of the world.

As it usually goes when it's time for kids to leave school for the day, the adults stayed longer to clean up and chat. It was honestly a nice way to end the event. I admit I was a little worried about the mud walls in the couple days' deluge that followed, but when I checked on the garden the next time I was at work they were totally fine. Of course, that's on me for not trusting those old tried-and-true building methods.

When we next met it was a blisteringly cold December day. The temperature was near freezing, and the wind made it pierce. Nonetheless, the kids were happy to be there. All the students who'd been present the first time were there again, along with a few new faces. I was happy to be able to introduce to my principal the ALT friends who had told me about the project in the first place.

We entered the front gates of the elementary school. Next to the camellia trees were the natural garden beds that had been constructed the month previously. We sat under the wisteria branches in an opening circle for our self introductions and expectations for the day.

The work was a little more straightforward this time: Mix the plaster, lay it on, smooth it out. Master plasterer Yamamoto-san was back to guide us through the process. He showed us how to make traditional Japanese *shikkui* plaster. This kind of plaster has been used in Japan for more than a thousand years. It is a pure and high calcium slaked lime plaster with additives typically being seaweed, soybean oil, natural plant fibers, and eggshells ([Shikkui.net](http://Shikkui.net)). The students had a blast mixing with the power drill. Each of the kids took turns teaching each other how to use the machine and mix the material together. It was a very interactive learning experience.

We were lucky enough to have Yamamoto-san there to teach us. As he'd demonstrated, I used my trowel to slide the plaster from a wooden board onto the earth wall, taking



care to use a smooth motion which avoided creating goopy, dripping piles of the paste. It was surprisingly sticky and resembled *tororo*, a kind of grated Japanese yam. This explained why children were turning to their friends waiting to scoop the plaster onto their boards and asking; “*tororo onegaishimasu*” (grated yam please) followed by exclamations of “*oishiisou!*” (It looks delicious!).

The garden bed I was working on had the eco-bricks visibly inlaid into the top portion of the wall. This made it a bit more challenging to apply the plaster around the bottom of each bottle, without covering them, so that we could see their presence in the overall structure. This work required a lot more finesse than last time, but there was something gratifying in making sure it looked right.

He encouraged us to keep working, as slowly but steadily, the walls were covered with plaster to protect them from the elements. Though my nose wouldn't stop running from the cold, between the chatting and the work and the overall good vibes, I enjoyed my time in the dirt.

As I said, I'm so glad I went. I got to meet a bunch of interesting people, spend time with teachers and students outside of the classroom, and learn about how the community is doing what it can to preserve the environment and passing that on to the children.

We finished the day with a closing circle. Everyone shared their feelings about the experience. From what I understood, most people assumed it would be difficult to plaster the garden beds, but they quickly realized how fun and engaging it could be. It was heartwarming to hear children explain how they were impacted from the experience. One student even described how he found there was “*人生の道が増えました*” (more than one way to live). I hope that feeling continues to inspire him, and more children, to do even more permaculture. It's not often you get to play in the mud with deeper meaning, and I encourage people to give it a shot. Building a community can sometimes be as simple as mixing water, shikkui, seaweed, and oil together. You can use this to build natural garden walls, and memories that will last a lifetime.

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*Titus Joel is a first-year ALT. He likes to walk up mountains, and is trying to visit every prefecture in Japan. He wants to deepen his understanding of Japanese pop culture and hopes to one day attend a Japanese university to further his studies.*

*Sierra Nelson-Liner is a third-year ALT who is the Community Editor for **CONNECT** Magazine. She enjoys eating plum blossoms and making plum wine in her apartment. She hopes to learn more about cultural exchange through farming. You can follow her farming experiences on her [@satoyama\\_stories](#) instagram.*

# CONTRIBUTING TO CONNECT

CONNECT is a magazine for the community in Japan, by the community in Japan. Everyone is welcome to write, no matter your experience or style! If you have an idea you want to see in these pages, reach out to our Head Editor, or any of our awesome section editors. We'll work with you to make it the best it can be and share it with our audience of thousands. Not every article needs to be an essay! We feature interviews, infographics, top-ten lists, recipes, photo spreads, travelogues, and more.

Contact the Head Editor of CONNECT, Rachel Fagundes, at [connect.editor@ajet.net](mailto:connect.editor@ajet.net) with your submissions, comments, and questions.

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