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AJET

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Arts & Culture, Lifestyle, Language, Travel & Community

CONNECT

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Hello Lovely Readers, and welcome to the marvelous March issue of **CONNECT**!

Long awaited spring is finally upon us, and I hope you are enjoying the fine weather and beautiful blossoms as much as I am.

Here are a few fantastic articles to enjoy under the cherry trees this spring.

This is the perfect time of year to take a break among the trees and soak in the beauty of nature, so my first recommendation is the Wellness section's neat article on the benefits of A Bath in the Forest which seems to be like hiking, but more chill.

Next the Culture section's lovely and contemplative Cha-no-Yu and Mornings with My Dad is a thoughtful look into tea ceremonies. Just reading this article feels like a warm cup of tea for the soul.

In the Community section you can find Getting Married in Japan: A Guide. If you or someone you know is considering tying the knot, this is a great resource to navigating the bureaucratic process.

The Language section's Harnessing the Power of Powerpoint presents an interesting interview full of great teaching resources and ideas to help the ALTs among us get prepped for next school year.

These and other delightful articles await you within the pages of this month's **CONNECT**! Happy Reading!

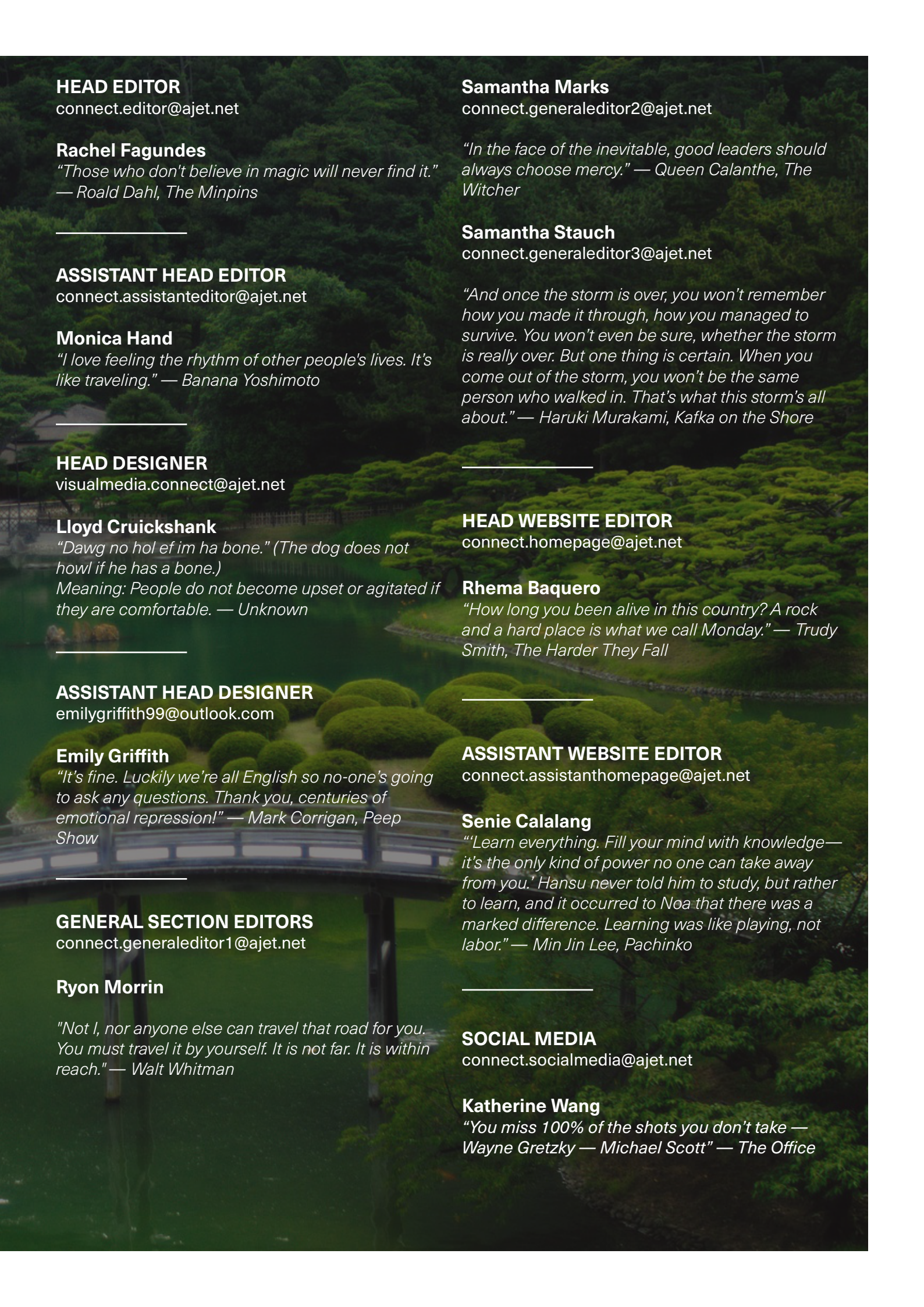
Cheers,

Rachel Spain Fagundes

Head Editor

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, or join CONNECT Magazine Contributor's Circle on Facebook to get updates from our editors when they're on the hunt for a story!



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

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

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"Dawg no hol ef im ha bone." (The dog does not howl if he has a bone.)
Meaning: People do not become upset or agitated if they are comfortable. — Unknown

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"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*

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"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

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"In the face of the inevitable, good leaders should always choose mercy." — Queen Calanthe, *The Witcher*

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"And once the storm is over, you won't remember how you made it through, how you managed to survive. You won't even be sure, whether the storm is really over. But one thing is certain. When you come out of the storm, you won't be the same person who walked in. That's what this storm's all about." — Haruki Murakami, *Kafka on the Shore*

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"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*

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"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*

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

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"Real museums are places where time is transformed into space." — Orhan Pamuk

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

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"When we are tired, we are attacked by ideas we conquered long ago." — Friedrich Nietzsche

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"Behold, as a wild ass in the desert, go I forth to my work." — Dune, Frank Herbert

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Meaning: People do not become upset or agitated if they are comfortable. — Unknown*

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



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Art Now

RECENT ART EVENTS ACROSS JAPAN

Ericka Selenski (Fukuoka) and Amanda Eke (Kagoshima)

THE ART OF DC

by Ericka Selenski

Jordan and I have always bonded through our love of film. In the year leading up to my JET departure, I spent even more time together with my best friend than usual, and this included watching DC Comics entertainment. In 2016, there was a lot of DC to take in: the two now-infamous movies, *Batman vs. Superman* and *Suicide Squad*, and an abundance of DC television series like *The Flash*, *Arrow*, and *Gotham*. Not to mention rewatching the Tim Burton *Batman* films before binging the *Justice League* cartoon and *Batman: The Animated Series*.

Even before arriving in Japan, I expected the DC fandom in this country to be quite small, and I felt my assumption was proven true: my students preferred Marvel, and the movie theaters were near-empty for films like *Aquaman*.

Imagine my surprise in 2021 when I saw that “The Art of DC: The Dawn of Super Heroes” was coming to Japan in the late fall! And it was coming to Fukuoka, my prefecture! I went to the exhibit held at the Fukuoka City Museum as soon as I could. It was everything I had hoped for and more. The exhibition contained the actual costumes from films spanning decades: the Riddler from the 1960s Batman TV series, Christopher Reeves’ Superman from 1978, The Joker and Penguin from the ‘90s Burton films, and Harley Quinn and the Peacemaker from *The Suicide Squad*—just to name a few. I was able to look at film props up close and admire all the small details. They even had the Batpod from *The Dark Knight* film. There was gorgeous concept art for major films like *The Justice League* and *Wonder Woman*. The exhibit also included concept art for the comics themselves, including original

comic book covers that had notes from the art directors scrawled across them. One of my favorite installments was Bruce Timm's original black and white drawing of Harley Quinn, complete with notes on how he wanted her coloured.

The friends that came with me weren't major DC comics fans, so I could put my DC knowledge to use, introducing the different characters to them that they weren't familiar with, such as Hawk Girl and Martian Manhunter. Luckily for me, they were happy for my impromptu guided tour. However, I had a second job to do as well—taking pictures and videos of absolutely everything so I could send them to Jordan. He didn't know I was going to do that, so he was surprised when he woke up to nearly 50 notifications from me. Afterwards, we discussed all the different costumes, props, and art that “we” saw. Although I was not able to see this exhibit with Jordan in person, I am very grateful that DC comics can unite us, even when we are separated by an ocean. Sharing one's experiences with friends and family back home in this way is something I would recommend to everyone.





The original comic book cover for **Action Comics** (no. 44)



Bruce Timm's original black and white drawing of Harley Quinn



Concept art for the **Wonder Woman** film



The Joker costume from the '90s Burton films



The contestants gather round!



Yuri Miki (winner of the Poetry Slam Japan Championships in 2017 and 2018) takes the stage!



A contestant gets his words out!



Behind the scenes!

KOTOBA SLAM JAPAN

by Amanda Eke

Welcome to KOTOBA Slam Japan, the National Slam Poetry Championships of Japan!

KOTOBA, literally meaning “words” in Japanese, is an annual event birthed in 2020 and founded by Yuri Miki (winner of the Poetry Slam Japan Championships in 2017 and 2018) and Jordan A. Y. Smith (editor of the Tokyo Poetry Journal). KOTOBA welcomes the best slam poets in Japan to compete on the main stage. The inaugural season in 2020 included 114 participants from all over Japan who competed in the tournament. This year’s slam, despite the surge of COVID, was full of exciting performances and slam poetry. The rules are simple: the time limit for each performer is three minutes, the winners are decided by the audience (who can vote and score either online or at the venue), and all works performed must be original. Oh, and one more thing, the winner of KOTOBA gets to go to the Paris World Cup to compete in the Slam Poetry Championships with poets from all over the world!

For Japan, poetry-rooted performance style is nothing new, as oral tradition has been alive for centuries. However, KOTOBA brings to the forefront the culture of slam poetry, a performance style that’s new to Japan. Those involved with the event hope that the culture of slam poetry will continue to take root, evolve, and motivate everyone to get their words out! This year’s competition took place in Tokyo, within a temple on a bright and early Saturday morning. Poets from all over Japan came and gathered to compete with others, and most of all, celebrate all that is slam poetry!

Click the link below to watch as *The Poet Speaks* podcast host, Amanda Eke, takes you behind the scenes of KOTOBA! Join Amanda as she goes behind the scenes of the biggest poetry event in Japan, meets the poets, watches amazing slam poetry in Japanese and listen in as the winner is crowned! Also, be sure to check out *The Poet Speaks* podcast on [Youtube](#) and all [streaming services](#) available worldwide!

Currently in her fifth year on JET, Ericka Selenski is a Canadian currently living in Fukuoka Prefecture. When she's not at home playing games or watching movies, she is usually out enjoying cafes and restaurants. She loves fashion and photography, which can be seen on her [Instagram](#).

Amanda is a Nigerian American artist, spoken-word artist, poet, film-maker, and scholar. She is currently a first-year JET in Kagoshima. Also a Fulbright and UN Award winner and author, she uses both her love for poetry, film, writing, and music to address socio-political issues and contemporary culture prevalent in society today. Her globally touring workshop series, "The Poet Speaks" is an engaging experience into the culture of the spoken word, rhyme, and tradition, held for all ages. Find her work on all her socials: [her website](#), [personal Instagram account](#), and [The Poet Speaks](#) podcast account on Instagram.



ARTIST SPOTLIGHT

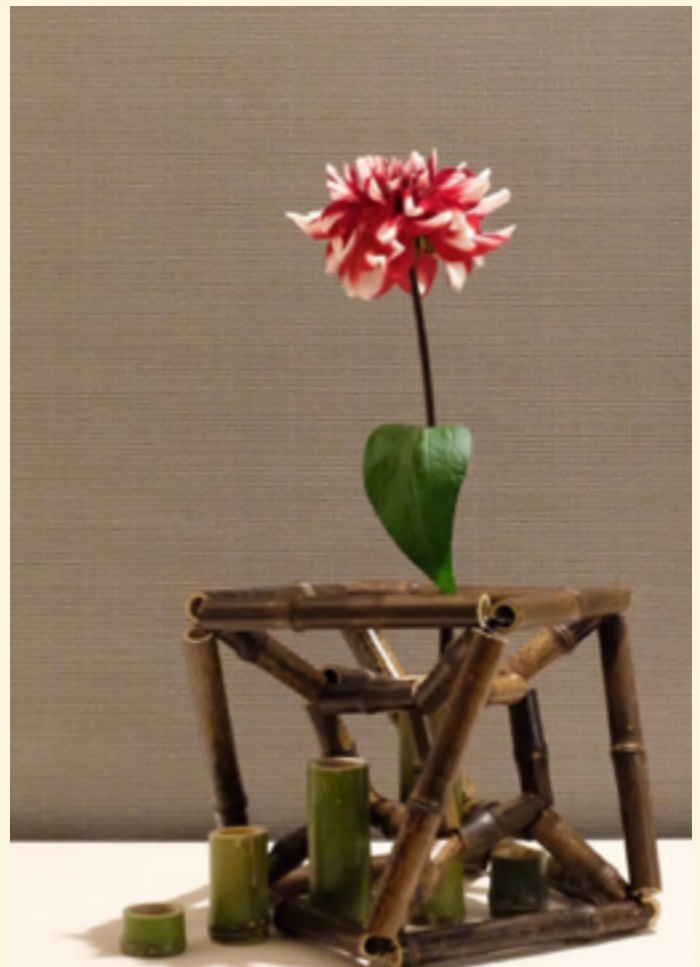
The Architectural Ikebana of Ryoji Nakayama

Ryoji Nakayama (Tokyo) interviewed by Jessica Craven (Saitama)

"I've never studied art formally, I played a lot outside when I was small, and I think I naturally acquired the skills to make things out of natural elements such as wood or bamboo."



Sogetsu Ikebana constructed out of twigs and camilla flowers.



Sogetsu Ikebana featuring a dahlia flower and constructed bamboo.

Ikebana is the Japanese art of flower arrangement. To describe the artwork of Ryoji Nakayama, it first helps to know a little about the Sogetsu School of Ikebana. Founded in 1927, it is one of the youngest ikebana schools in Japan and one of the most avant-garde.

Sogetsu Ikebana is based on the philosophy that anyone can do ikebana; anywhere, anytime, and with any material. Conventional plant material, as well as unconventional man-made materials, can be used in Sogetsu Ikebana. For Ryoji, “unconventional man-made materials” are synonymous with architecture, and his ikebana works innovatively blend floral and architectural elements.

J: WHERE ARE YOU FROM IN JAPAN, AND WHEN DID YOU START STUDYING ARTS?

R: I was born in Hokkaido and grew up in a rural area of Saitama surrounded by beautiful nature. I've never studied art formally, I played a lot outside when I was small, and I think I naturally acquired the skills to make things out of natural elements such as wood or bamboo.

I studied landscape design at my second university (after studying chemistry and biology at my first university) around eight years ago. Since then, I have been working part-time as a landscape designer. I have also studied ikebana and received certification as a master of ikebana five years ago.



Sogetsu Ikebana featuring cosmos flowers.



An example of Ryoji's landscape design and gardening work—a small garden he recently completed in Shibuya.

*“Flowers become human in ikebana.”
—Sofu Teshigahara
(founder of the Sogetsu Ikebana School)*



Sogetsu Ikebana made of only camilla flowers and bamboo.

COULD YOU TELL US WHICH ART AND ARCHITECTURE PROJECTS YOU ARE INVOLVED IN NOW?

As you may know, I have my own landscape design company, so creating something new is my routine. However, this is different from other art projects, so I am always looking for opportunities to make things project outside of work.

DO YOU HAVE ANY INSPIRATION FOR YOUR WORK?

My surroundings have an enormous influence on my work, such as where I live, how I live, and with whom. . . . Also large-scale trends and the direction the world is moving towards at the time influence me. A lot of my inspiration and the things surrounding me become connected and a part of my artwork.

WHAT IS YOUR PROCESS LIKE WHEN CREATING A NEW WORK OF ART?

I always start with inspiration and work hard to create a shape from that.

YOUR IKEBANA IS INSPIRED BY SCULPTURE, RIGHT? IS THERE ANY PARTICULAR SCHOOL OF

IKEBANA YOU ARE INVOLVED IN? IS SCULPTURE PART OF THE SCHOOL'S PHILOSOPHY, OR IS THIS YOUR OWN INTERPRETATION?

R: I learned Sogetsu Ikebana. My art style developed out of the school's philosophy: "the flower becomes me." It means that anything we make is a reflection of ourselves.

"Flowers become human in ikebana." —Sofu Teshigahara (founder of the Sogetsu Ikebana School)

J: COULD YOU TELL US ABOUT ANY EXHIBITIONS OR INSTALLATIONS YOU HAVE TAKEN PART IN?

R: I have participated in several ikebana exhibitions. Also, I exhibited my gardening artwork in the renowned "Hibiya Gardening Show" in Tokyo, where I received first prize in 2017 and third prize in 2018.

J: DO YOU HAVE ANY ADVICE FOR PEOPLE INTERESTED IN LEARNING MORE ABOUT IKEBANA, GARDENING/LANDSCAPING, OR ARCHITECTURE?

R: Please don't hesitate to ask me anything anytime. You can contact me through my [website](#).



A small garden Ryoji made in 2018 for Narita Airport. He completed it in just one night.

Ryoji Nakayama is a landscape designer and multi-disciplinary artist and architect living in Tokyo. You can see his landscape and gardening work through his website listed above. You can also see more of his ikebana work on his [Instagram](#) and his urban sketches on [another Instagram](#) account.

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](#).

*Sogestsu Ikebana featuring baby's breath
and constructed bamboo.*



*Ryoji's prize-winning
artwork for the 2018
"Hibiya Gardening Show."*



*Interior detail of the
construction from the 2018
"Hibiya Gardening Show."*



*Sogestsu Ikebana
featuring red pine
branches.*

MARCH

REVIEWS
RECOMMENDATIONSTHE
MATRIX
4
Marco Cian (Hyogo)

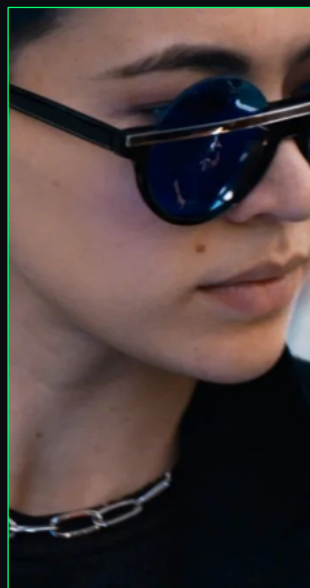
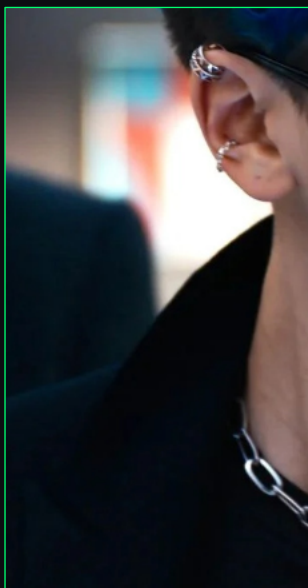
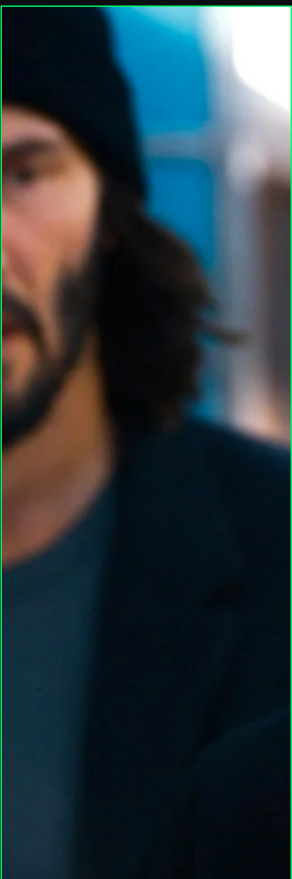
Brass Against's *Wake Up* is angrier than Rage Against the Machine's. This might not seem important, but the differences between these two songs mirror the differences between the original *Matrix* and the new *Resurrections*. While *The Matrix* is a film about waking up, shocking the system, and all that revolutionary jazz, it is also slick and clean. The system its characters rail against is soulless, corporate, '90s office space, which, far from being oppressive, offers security and comforts that can seem positively idyllic in today's economy. *Resurrections*, in contrast, is rawer and more passionate, but feels messier and more chaotic compared to its predecessor, with the system Neo fights reflecting how tech giants have soured the '90s dream of internet freedom.

With sequels, one must answer why the adventure continues. But *Resurrections* has an equally difficult question to answer—why does the adventure continue *now*, after all this time? Thankfully, this question is answered skillfully, without overwritten character arcs or overridden happy endings. Neo's sacrifice really did make a better world, even if there is still conflict to drive the plot. More than that though, *Resurrections* is a movie about the cultural impact of *The Matrix* itself, with a good portion of *Resurrections* dedicated to grappling with the question of how an artist even *can* make a worthy sequel to their most iconic work (while also throwing copious shade at movie executives who see art purely as something to increase profits).

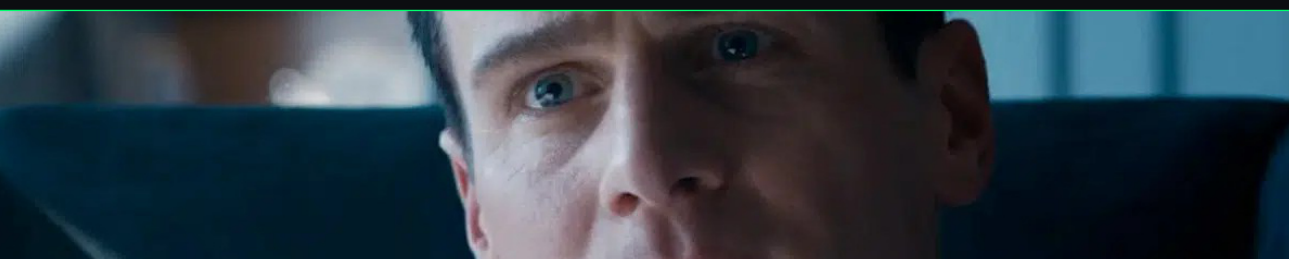


Not everything works. By Lana Wachowski's own admission, this story was not planned, and some plot points feel rushed or sloppy. The anti-executive humor is very hit-or-miss, the fights are messier and nastier than in the original, and the film's constant call-backs and easter eggs make *Rise of Skywalker* look subtle (and Hugo Weaving's tragic absence only more obvious). The only place where these callbacks serve the narrative effectively is in the film's strongest asset: Neo and Trinity's love story.

In *Resurrections*, Neo and Trinity's love is powerful enough to alter reality, and Keanu and Carrie-Anne make you believe it. They look at each other with the same intensity as they did twenty years ago, with the same passion and admiration, not one whit less intense. And we know this, because the film's callbacks to its predecessor juxtapose these two periods of their love. That is something you almost never see in Hollywood movies, a love that has *endured*. We saw them get together, but now we see that they have stayed together. Even after twenty years, their love is just as strong, and we have been with that love from the beginning, so its lasting is all the more impactful.



Resurrections as a film is too shambolic to warrant a full ticket price. And it relies too much on the first three films and offers little for newcomers to the franchise to enjoy. But the passion of the cast and crew has not dampened in twenty years, as reflected by the even angrier cries of "Wake up!" in the end. So, if you have HBO Max or a Five-Dollar Movie Night at your theater, I'd say this is the ideal way to plug yourself back into this cultural icon.



Marco Cian is a first-year ALT in Toyooka, Hyogo. His students call him "Rich Man," though he still does not know why. He reads a lot, and you can find him on his YouTube channel, [È quasi milione](#), where he talks about fantasy works.

RECOMMENDED **ANIMATED SERIES**



THE LEGEND OF **VOX MACHINA**

Meg Luedtke (Fukui)

The Legend of Vox Machina is an animated show made for adults that combines the crass humor of *Deadpool* with the animated violence of Netflix's *Castlevania* in a Tolkienesque fantasy world. The series is based on the misadventures of the popular D&D live-stream group, [Critical Role](#), and turns this role-playing tabletop adventure game into a fun and humorous series with a colorful cast of characters. Luckily for viewers, you don't need to have watched any of Critical Role's live streams or games to understand the plot. The mercenaries known as Vox Machina, motivated primarily by a love of gold and booze, take on a job to save the kingdom—only to end up fighting dragons, vampires, zombies, and giants along the way. The first few episodes of the show are used to introduce viewers to our group of to-be heroes, but episode three introduces an enemy from one of our hero's past, which reignites his lust for revenge and sets a darker, epic tone for the rest of the season.

The cast of Critical Role is made up of some pretty notable voice actors who have had roles in quite a few popular franchises such as the *Final Fantasy* series, *Yu-gi-oh!*, *Sailor Moon*, *Dragon Ball*, *One Piece*, *World of Warcraft*, *Bleach*, and a lot more. The series hired other popular talents like Grey DeLisle-Griffin, the voice of Azula from *Avatar the Last Airbender*, David Tennant of *Doctor Who* fame, and Stephanie Beatriz, who voiced Maribel Madrigal in Disney's new movie *Encanto*. So the show is full of familiar voices for major anime and gaming fans.

The series is a combination of 2D and 3D animation, which may or may not be everyone's cup of tea. I think that this particular series would have benefited from sticking to 2D, but it's clear there was still a great deal of effort put into it and the show's animation is fluid and clean, giving viewers the opportunity to watch our rag-tag group of heroes cast spells and throw daggers around to slay hordes of enemies in clear detail.

The music and sound production are also good and are well-utilized within the show, used at the appropriate times to heighten the content of the story. The overall flow of the story is done pretty well too, though it can feel a bit clunky at times. A single game session of Critical Role's D&D live stream takes around three to four hours, and the Vox Machina series has to condense that content down into consumable 20-minute episodes, which can lead to some important information or worldbuilding being glossed over. However, I find this mostly only happens during minor moments, and the overall plot is relatively unaffected and remains clear.

Overall I've been greatly entertained with watching this team of misfits getting into nothing but trouble and look forward to watching the rest of it as it comes out. For anyone interested in joining along on Vox Machina's fantastical adventure, you can find the series streaming on Amazon Prime!

Meg is a third-year JET living in Fukui. She spends a lot of her free time enjoying watching anime, listening to music, playing games, or going out on photography trips and enjoying nature.





THE RETURN OF THE QUEEN

Nathan Post (Saitama)

It's Been How Long!?

As the Metroidvania genre has taken the game industry by storm these past few years, you'd be forgiven for not realizing it's been an unbelievable 19 years since the last all-new traditional *Metroid*. That would of course be 2002's *Metroid Fusion* on the GameBoy Advance, which went on to become a cult classic and inspiration for many games to come.

How is it that the namesake of such a popular genre has been all but absent for the past two decades? You'd have to ask Nintendo. But I'll try to answer an even bigger question here: can a sequel that far removed from its predecessor really satisfy a modern audience? Let's find out.

Dreadful Developments

Before diving into that though, the insane development history of *Metroid Dread* simply must be addressed. After all, this is a title that was first announced for the Nintendo DS back in June of 2005. Since then, it has undergone multiple cancellations, revivals, teasers, and yet more cancellations. This was a title that every serious Metroid fan had heard of, but no one thought would ever actually see the light of day. But lo and behold, during E3 of 2021, Nintendo announced that not only was *Metroid Dread* real, but it would be releasing on the Nintendo Switch very shortly.

What's New is Old Again

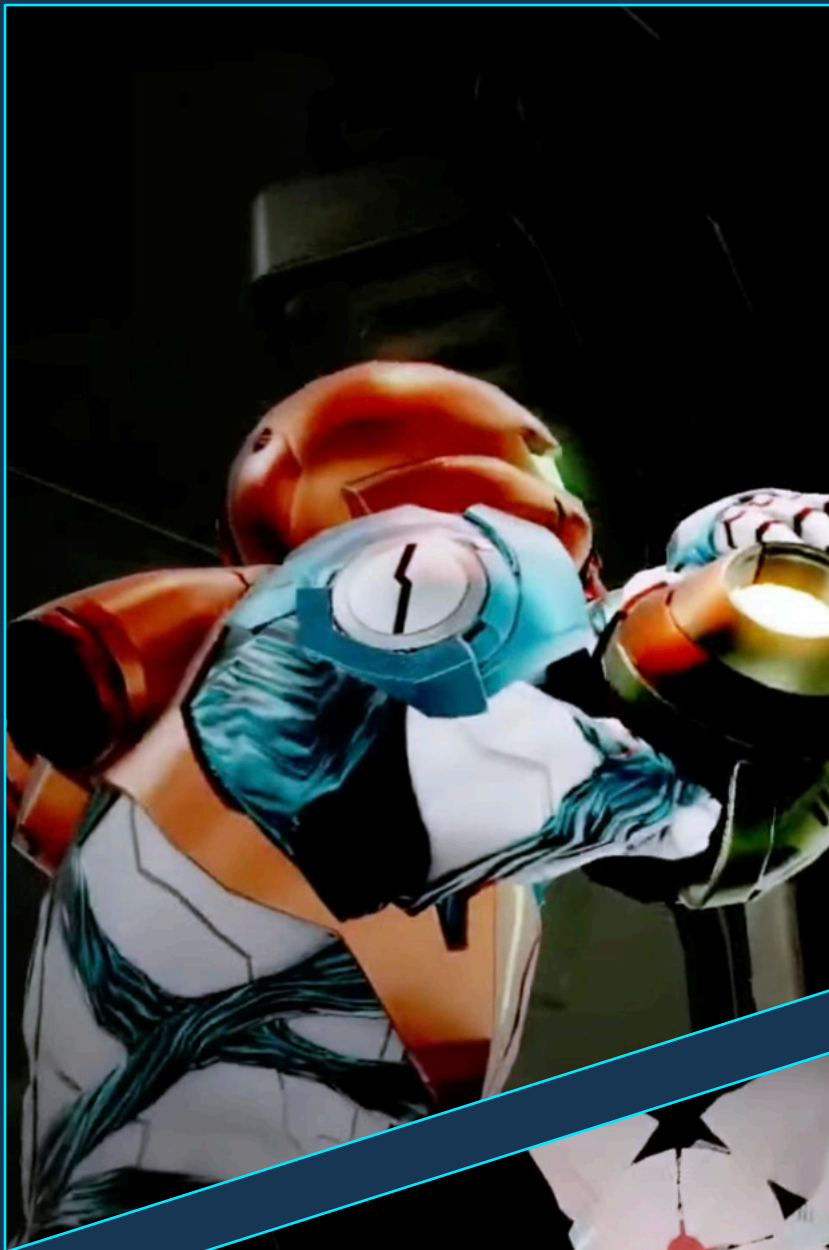
So how does *Metroid Dread* stack up to its now-ancient forebears? Surprisingly well, in fact. *Dread* builds upon the successful *Metroid(vania)* formula of fighting and exploring your way through a sprawling 2D labyrinth of sci-fi goodness in search of upgrades that will increase your combat and traversal abilities, allowing you to reach new zones, acquire more upgrades, reach more new zones, rinse, and repeat. But *Dread* brings a handful of welcome improvements to the series.

2D-3D-HD-60

The first and most striking difference is how darn good the game looks and feels in motion. Though it's more than a little late to the party, this is the first HD *Metroid* title. Plus, the whole game is rendered in beautiful 2.5D, meaning it's a fully 3D environment that you traverse in two dimensions as a sidescroller.

This is also the first *Metroid* game to run at a buttery smooth 60 FPS, adding to that sense of fluid motion. In addition, main character Samus Aran has more animations than ever for moving through the world. Stop near a hole in the wall, and she'll rest her hand on it while she shoots at baddies. Run over a small ledge and she'll quickly drop her hand for balance. Everything feels like it's been polished to a sheen that establishes a new level of visual quality for the series.



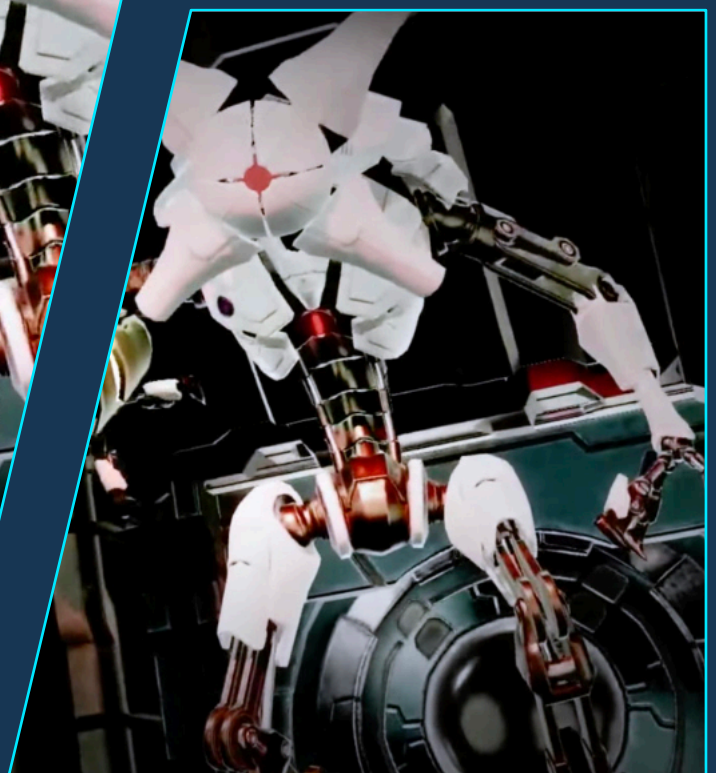


D is for Dead

The second big change is the “dread” implied by the name. Both to its benefit and perhaps detriment, this is not an easy game. There are no quest markers or icons to follow as you explore this world; every last discovery is up to the player to make. You’re not completely alone though, as smart level design will mercifully nudge you in the right direction, whether you realize it or not.

Death comes quickly and easily in this world, especially from the vicious EMMI robots who will relentlessly pursue Samus through certain zones and kill her in a single hit. The normal enemies can also prove surprisingly lethal, making quick work of the unprepared spacefarer.

Dread feels satisfyingly old school in its combat design, as almost everything is a matter of pattern recognition. You might find yourself getting smoked by a seemingly impossible boss on the first few attempts, but you’ll quickly learn its patterns. And when you beat it, you’ll often do so in a beautiful dance of call-and-response without taking a single hit.





See You Next Mission!

Dread has so much more to offer than can be summed up in a short-form review like this, from the creative new twists on Samus' powers, to the best-in-series boss fights, to the badass melee counters, to callbacks to classic series moments, to its incredible lore implications (ever wondered what's up with the Chozo? Just . . . you should probably play *Dread*).

So can an all-new 2D *Metroid* work nearly two decades removed from its predecessor? Well, in this purist's opinion, the answer is a resounding "yes!"

Dread marks the glorious return of one of the most influential series in gaming and is a must-play for anyone with even a passing interest in the genre. Do note, though, that it's not for the faint of heart, as *Dread* undoubtedly lives up to its name.

Nathan Post is a former JET who now works as a game translator at Gumi Inc. He has been self-isolating with his Switch since before COVID made it trendy.



The Zombie Genre. An unapologetically bloated genre that, much like its namesake, refuses to die. While in recent years the hype train for Western zombie movies has been non-existent, South Korean zombie cinema has exploded onto the scene with the extreme velocity of one of East Asia's high-speed rail networks and successfully revived the failing subgenre.



So let's talk about the starting point for all of this. While it's generally acknowledged that *The Last Man on Earth* (1964) was a precursor to the subgenre and its elements, it is no secret that George Romero (The Godfather of Zombies) perfected these elements and cemented zombie cinema as an essential subgenre among horror cinema. However, Romero's slow moving zombies have since been eclipsed by the fast moving undead first introduced by Danny Boyle's *28 Days Later* and woven into Romero's legacy by Zack Snyder in 2004's *Dawn of the Dead* remake. While Boyle's "infected" served the narrative by reinforcing the antagonist's villainous rhetoric and the greater moral questions that the plot proposed, Snyder's interpretation took a far more simplistic approach. Yet, in an almost Darwinian set of circumstances, Snyder's new form of zombies, derived from Boyle's, have dominated pop-culture for the better half of a decade, with *The Walking Dead* being one of the few hold outs of Romero's legacy.



How Korea IS RESURRECTING the Zombie Genre

Fergus Gregg (Kobe)

Since 2004, zombie films have either fallen under the definition of “style over substance” Hollywood blockbusters or works of comedic films, with very little being added or changed from the formula and style, barring a few exceptions. Yet where Western zombie cinema has grown stagnant, turning them into fodder for schlocky blockbusters starring Brad Pitt, Korean filmmakers did the one thing no one expected—they did something original.

Enter the hero from stage right: *Train to Busan*. What early 2010s zombie cinema (particularly *World War Z*) introduced to the formulae, Director Yeon Sang-Ho has perfected, creating a satisfying blend of new tropes and elements, while also utilising his movie to shine a light on cultural, social, and class issues in Korean society.

The synopsis is neat and simple. A father, who has become alienated from his family, is forced to take his role as guardian seriously for the first time in years, and while travelling with his young daughter, his high speed train to

Busan becomes overcrowded with a mass of the bent undead. What this concise summary leaves out is the critique of South Korean classism and the consequences of capitalism that are woven into the narrative inconspicuously yet effectively. Let's start with the more overt criticism of classism, which can be found in the film's secondary antagonist, Yon-Suk.

Yon-suk, portrayed by Kim Eui-sung, is a businessman and by and large represents the upper class echelons of South Korean society. He is pragmatic to a fault, distrusting, and overall devalues the lives of those around him, particularly those whom he believes to be of a lower stature to him. He's self-serving and will sacrifice those around him in order to preserve his own survival and wellness, often to the detriment of other survivors. Here, parallels can be drawn to Romero's original *Night of the Living Dead* where the character Harry frequently put his own family's well being above the other survivors, used them as tools, and frequently belittled Sam on



account of his being an African American and belonging to a social class that Harry perceived as being beneath his own. It is in this correlation of social commentary between Romero's work and Yeon Sang-ho's that we can see what contemporary zombie cinema may have been missing: higher ideas and thought-provoking themes. This is echoed in Seo Seok-woo's (our protagonist and the father to Kim Su-an) personal narrative.

Seok-woo, played by Gong Sook, is portrayed as selfish to a fault initially, this being the catalyst for his marriage failing and his struggle with being a father. Yet this character trait goes deeper, as it's revealed that Seok-woo had ordered the offloading of volatile shares in a chemical waste management company, leading indirectly to initial infection. Throughout the movie we see Seok-woo come into contact with a subordinate of his, who has realised that they were the cause of the disaster, and snubs responsibility. However this further moral burden, when coupled with the focus on his relationship with his daughter, makes the subsequent character arc all the more satisfying.

When compared to its contemporaries, *Train to Busan* succeeds in proving that zombie cinema can still be refreshing to audiences, through its balance of themes and intricate use of the *mise-en-scène* of a high speed train keeping action from ever feeling stale or repetitive. In the scheme of things, however, *Train to Busan* was just the beginning.

Kingdom is a show that many in the West have slept on, which is a true crime. Set in Korea's Joseon era, *Kingdom* is the story of a disinherited Crown Prince fighting against the corruption in his court and a mysterious virus that brings his subjects back from the dead. Screenwriter Kim Eun-hee initially wrote *Kingdom* as a webcomic in 2011 and had little hope that it would be adapted, yet with the success of *Train to Busan*, suddenly there was new interest in the zombie genre.

Kingdom proves that *Train to Busan* was not a fluke in terms of the utilisation of the zombie genre as a capable method of delivering societal critiques. Kim Eun-hee's primary intention was to write a story that can encapsulate today's problems in a Joseon setting, with a focus on hunger and blood as primary themes. Hunger as a theme refers to the extreme gap between the Yangban (ruling class) and poverty stricken underclass. Food is often referred to and used as a motivator in *Kingdom* and there's a stark juxtaposition between how aristocratic characters treat food as an amenity, whereas the poor know the value of even the most meagre staples. This disparity is then further reinforced as the aristocrats are devoured by the peasants that they previously looked down upon. Overall, *Kingdom* tries to discuss the growing wealth disparity that is present in South Korea and the emergence of the new upper class in the form of the corporate dynasties of modern day South Korea.



Supplementing *Train to Busan* and *Kingdom* are the movie *#Alive* and the recently released series *All of Us Are Dead*. These two tackle social isolation and the pressures put upon adolescents by class structure, the education system, and puberty in general, respectively. While overall I personally found both of them to be weaker stories than *Train to Busan* and *Kingdom*, they manage to communicate familiar zombie themes such as adolescence and loneliness, in new and insightful ways and further cement Korea's dominance in new zombie cinema.

If you're a zombie enthusiast like me, I highly recommend checking out each of these pieces of media. With so much choice right now, there should be at least one that resonates with you.

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.

So while the West putters on with more *The Walking Dead* spin-off series, and the odd gem such as *The Girl with All the Gifts*, it would appear that the future of the zombie genre in the global zeitgeist is in the hands of the bone-snapping, jaw-jabbering and veins-blackening zombies of South Korea, as directed by some of the most proficient storytellers to grace streaming services in recent years.



A decorative header featuring a cluster of colorful balloons, a small house, a character hanging from a rope, a movie camera, a film reel, a popcorn bucket, and a film strip.

MARCH RELEASES

Fergus Gregg (Kobe)

An illustration of an elderly man with glasses and a mustache, wearing a brown jacket and pants, holding a small airplane.

MOVIES

March 10

Totsukuni no shôjo (2022)

March 11

The Batman (2022)

Cannibal Lake (2022)

March 12

West Side Story (2021)

Usogui (2022)

March 18

Gunpowder Milkshake (2021)

Kappei (2022)

March 25

Belfast (2021)

Eiga Osomatsusan (2022)

March 28

Sing 2 (2021)

GAMES

March 1

- Shadow Warrior 3 (PC, PS4, Xbox One)
- Conan Chop Chop (PC, PS4, Xbox One, Switch)
- Puzzle Quest 3 (PC, iOS, Android)
- Elex 2 (PC, PS4, PS5, Xbox One, Xbox Series X/S)
- FAR: Changing Tides (PC, PS4, PS5, Xbox One, Xbox Series X/S, Switch)
- Pants Quest (PC)
- Little Orpheus (PC, PS4, PS5, Xbox One, Xbox Series X/S, Switch)
- Instruments of Destruction - Steam Early Access (PC)

March 2

- Zombie Rollerz: Pinball Heroes (PC, Switch)
- 35MM (PS4, Xbox One, Switch)
- A Musical Story (PC, PS4, PS5, Xbox One, Xbox Series X/S, Switch, Android, iOS)

March 3

- Babylon's Fall (PC, PS4, PS5)
- Beholder 3 (PC)



March 4

- Gran Turismo 7 (PS4, PS5)
- Triangle Strategy (Switch)
- Survival Quiz City (PC)
- What Lies in the Multiverse (PC, PS4, PS5, Xbox One, Switch)

March 8

- Have a Nice Death - Steam Early Access (PC)
- Core Keeper - Steam Early Access (PC)

March 10

- Chocobo GP (Switch)
- Submerged: Hidden Depths (PC, PS4, PS5, Xbox One, Xbox Series X/S)
- No Place Like Home (PC)
- Aztech Forgotten Gods (PC, PS4, PS5, Xbox One, Xbox Series X/S, Switch)

March 11

- WWE 2K22 (PC, PS4, PS5, Xbox One, Xbox Series X/S)

March 15

- Phantom Breaker: Omnia (PC, PS4, Xbox One, Switch)
- GTA 5 (PS5, Xbox Series X/S)
- Lingo Legend (iOS)

March 16

- Tunic (PC, Xbox One, Xbox Series X/S)

March 17

- The Settlers (PC)
- Persona 4 Arena Ultimax (PC, PS4, Switch)

March 18

- Syberia: The World Before (PC)
- Who Pressed Mute on Uncle Marcus? (PC, PS4, PS5, Xbox One, Xbox Series X/S, Switch, iOS, Android)
- Stranger of Paradise: Final Fantasy Origin (PC, PS4, PS5, Xbox One, Xbox Series X/S)

March 22

- Rune Factory 5 (Switch)

March 24

- Norco (PC)
- Highrise City - Steam Early Access (PC)
- Lumote: The Mastermote Chronicles (PC, PS4, Xbox One, Switch, Stadia)
- A Memoir Blue (PC, PS4, PS5, Xbox One, Xbox Series X/S, Switch)

March 25

- Kirby and the Forgotten Land (Switch)
- Ghostwire: Tokyo (PC, PS5)
- Tiny Tina's Wonderlands (PC, PS4, PS5, Xbox One, Xbox Series X/S)

March 28

- Nightmare Reaper (PC)

March 29

- King Arthur: Knight's Tale - official launch (PC)
- Ikai (PC, PS4, PS5, Switch)
- Abermore (PC)
- Crusader Kings 3 (PS5, Xbox Series X/S)

March 30

- Death Stranding Director's Cut (PC)
- Uragun - Steam Early Access (PC)

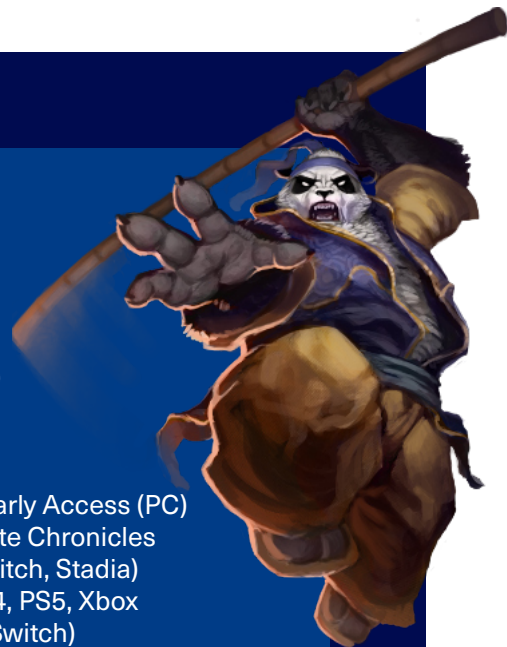
March 31

- Weird West (PC, PS4, Xbox One)
- Coromon (PC, Switch)
- FixFox (PC)

Sources:

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

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





Matcha tea bowl,
or chawan

“Tea ceremony is full of little expressions of gratitude and respect like that—respect towards the hosts, respect towards the guests, and respect towards the tea and even the utensils used.”

In the words of Rikyu, the Japanese Way of Tea, no-yu, just make the way is prepared, simply drink.

Growing up as a Chinese, I was introduced to tea. Every weekend, we would boil a pot of water for his tea. He would choose between one of the teas to use for that day. He'd put the tea in a *biluochun*, *tieguanyin*, or *pu-erh* and pour the water in, and all

There's a process to making tea. You should let the leaves steep in the water, and even the temperature of the water. When I first started the tea ceremony club, at my school, I was one of those mornings with no similarities in the tea. The *matcha* commonly used was from the teas my dad would use in the ceremony behind it. I would time deliberately set aside to sit down and *enjoy* tea.

Cha-no-Yu and Mornings with My Dad

Evelyn Yun (Tokushima)



the founder of *cha-no-yu*,
tea: "With respect to cha-
water boil; and after the tea
ink it."

Canadian, I am no stranger
without fail, my dad would
s morning tea. He would then
his many red clay teapots to
t in his tea leaves of choice—
r *huang guanyin*. He'd then
low the tea leaves to steep.

king tea, he told me: how long
s steep, the temperature of
type of clay pot you should
attending *chado*, or tea
hool, I couldn't help but think
my dad. It's not because of
a preparation or even taste;
sed in *chado* is quite different
ould make and drink. No, it was
that made me nostalgic—the
de for people to simply sit

Two years ago, I was new to the school and new to Japan. I spoke little Japanese, and was very far from home. I was still getting to know the teachers and students I would be working with. I was also getting used to the idea that this country would be my home for now. It was my first time in Japan, and while research from books or the Internet could give an idea of what to expect here, I was still anxious about how much I didn't know. Cha-no-yu felt like such a uniquely Japanese experience. I felt that trying it through *chado* could help me connect not only to my school, but to this entirely new country, if only just a little.

I am pleased to say that *chado* was able to help me do that, and more.

In the beginning, I attended *chado* as a guest. Guests have a special spot reserved for them to sit in the tatami room, and they are treated with the utmost respect. However, there are also expectations on the guests to act in a certain way. For example, after the *wagashi* (sweets) has been served, the first guest will bow, say "*Chodai itashimasu*" (I will partake of the sweets), and then turn to the next guest and say "*Osaki ni*" (Excuse me for going before you). While

eating the sweets, guests can enjoy watching the host or hosts prepare the matcha.

After the tea has been served, guests give thanks to their hosts, pick up their tea-filled *chawan* (tea bowls), and bow their heads to express thanks once more. The guest must turn the *chawan* (typically twice, clockwise) to avoid drinking from the front. Tea ceremony is full of little expressions of gratitude and respect like that—respect towards the hosts, respect towards the guests, and respect towards the tea and even the utensils used.

One of the greatest challenges of one who wishes to attend a tea ceremony is mastering *seiza* (correct sitting). No matter if you are attending the ceremony as a guest or as a host, this form of sitting is expected. Unfortunately for me, my legs would be pins and

needles after ten minutes or so, and I would have to sit out of position for a bit, struggling to get the blood flowing again. The teachers were never cross at me for doing so, merely chuckling and asking “*Ashi daijoubu?*” after which I would hastily answer “*Daijoubu!*” while trying not to let my legs die.

As with all things, I got better with practice and could sit *seiza* for longer periods of time, and soon, I had the opportunity to play the “host” myself—though after two years, I still feel like I’m a complete beginner to *chado*. There is an order to the preparation of the tools used and in the steps to the tea made that the host must remember. Even after memorizing the steps, there’s still a large gap between my abilities and those of the teachers and even students who have done this for years. For them, the motions of *chado* seemed to come as naturally as breathing. The tools were an

extension of their own. Every motion looked so graceful and refined. It’s all because preparation is a perfecting of its own right.

The tools of *chado* include the *chakin*, a small linen cloth to wipe the *chawan*, the *chasen* to whisk the matcha, the *chawan* or tea caddy that holds the matcha powder, and the *chashaku* scoop. I was given my own *fukusa* cloth, called the *fukusa*, to ritually “purify” the tools and the *natsume*. All tools used in this purification process can be used to prepare the tea. The process reminded me of those weekend mornings my dad. Since he had so many tools, using each one was a ritual because, as he said, they were meant to be used. In the full value of the pot, you use it as often as you can.” I feel that *chado* treats

Various items used in *chado*, including the red *fukusa* cloth



n body and
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cloth used to
e *chasen*, used
the *natsume*,
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many teapots,
necessary
“These pots are
order to get the
ou must use it
I can’t help but
its own tools



Mixing matcha
in the chawan
using a *chasaku*
whisk, next to the
ro sunken hearth,
the *kama* kettle,
and wooden
hishaku ladle

“It does not matter that I
have not mastered the art to
perfection, or that I sometimes
forget the steps. What matters
is the time I spend with these
people and the attitude I put
towards chado. There are no
failures, simply a continuous
process of learning.”

similarly. Tools are so important to chado that there's even time allotted for guests to admire the design of their chawan after they have enjoyed their tea.

I was given an English guidebook by one of the teachers in chado and an English translated volume of Rikyu's *Hundred Verses*, a set of rules for how to host a traditional tea ceremony penned by the founder of chado himself. Over time, as I attended more and more club meetings and got to know the members of the club better, I was introduced to more of these traditions. Soon, I was reading some of Rikyu's verses aloud in English to the students before club would begin.

The teacher told me how chado connects people together, even when there is a language or cultural barrier. Everyone can sit down and enjoy tea. Even with a written set of traditions, it's not as though new ones can't be created. All that one needs to participate in chado is an open mind and a willingness to learn. It does not matter that I have not mastered the art to perfection, or that I sometimes forget the steps. What matters is the time I spend

with these people and the attitude I put towards chado. There are no failures, simply a continuous process of learning.

When I drink matcha in the tatami room here in Japan, I am transported back to those mornings with my dad, all the way back in Canada. Rikyu is right; even with all the miles that separate me from home, anywhere I go, tea is tea. Boil the water, prepare the tea, and drink it. You can apply the same concept to other aspects of life. Despite all the miles that separate me from all I have known, and the differences in how my dad and the club members prepare tea, fundamentally, things are not that different. The familiar can always be found in the foreign. Something can always connect us.

Evelyn Yun is a current Tokushima JET who has finished her third year of teaching in Japan. Aside from learning about tea ceremonies, Evelyn enjoys doing arts and crafts, playing video games, and exploring the city.



Various items used in chado, including the chawan

“*All that one needs to participate in chado is an open mind.*”



Hanging scroll, or
kakejiku

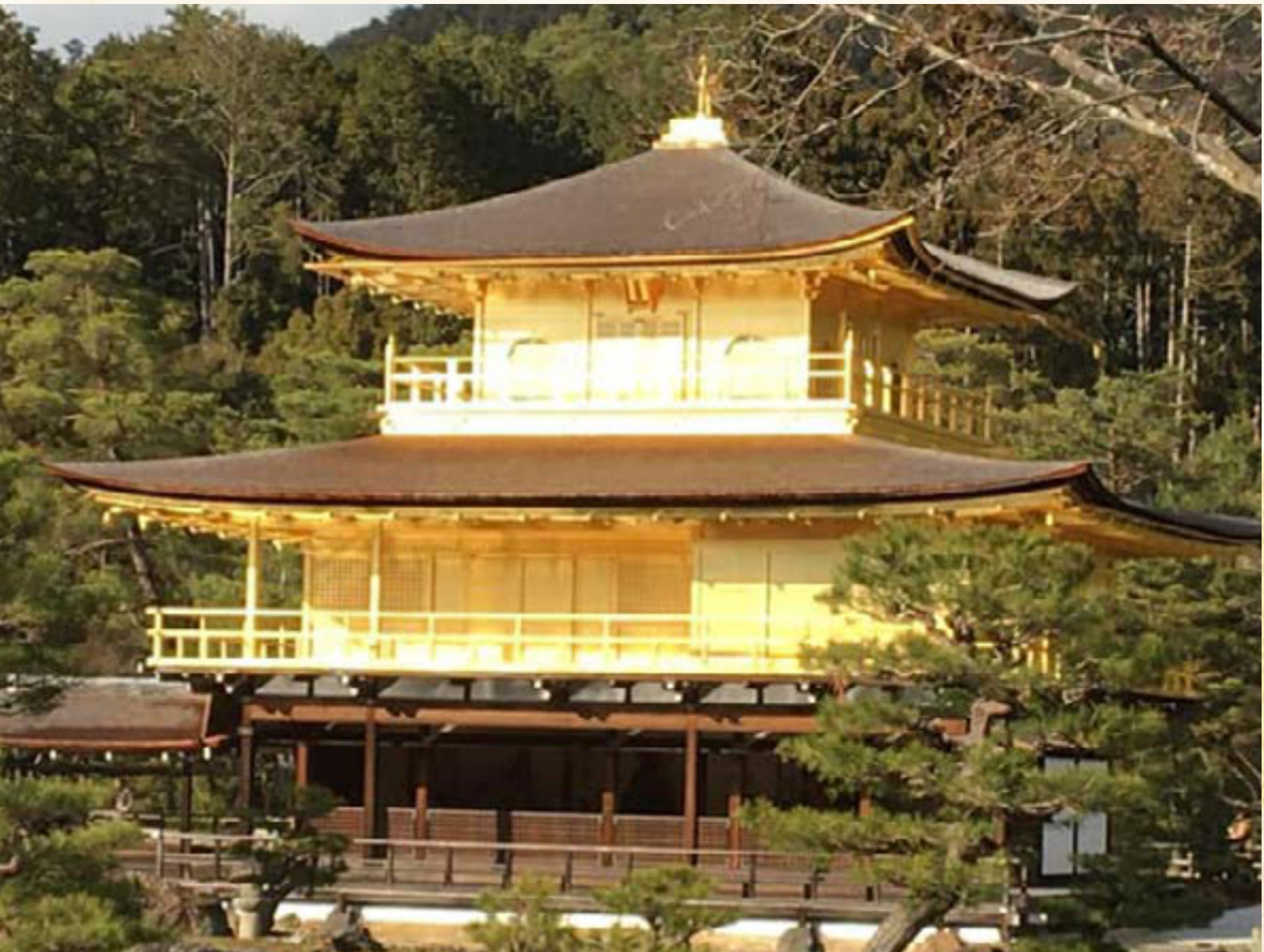


Japanese sweets,
or *wagashi*

Reflections from the Golden Pavilion

Marco Cian (Hyogo)

“The novel’s protagonist is told tales of Kinkakuji’s beauty for years and years, to the point that when he finally sees the temple with his own eyes, he finds it thoroughly disappointing.”



“So are you going to Kinkakuji?” asked every friend, every co-worker, every family member when I told them that I intended to visit Kyoto for Christmas. And every time, when I calmly replied, “No,” I was greeted with amazement or disappointment. After all, Kinkakuji is one of, if not the, most famous of Kyoto’s landmarks. How could I *not* visit it?

What they didn't realize was that this fame was precisely why I *didn't* want to go. My very first exposure to Kinkakuji was through a novel by Yukio Mishima, *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion*. The novel's protagonist is told tales of Kinkakuji's beauty for years and years, to the point that when he finally sees the temple with his own eyes, he finds it thoroughly disappointing. I didn't want to put myself through that. The image in my mind would surely be more beautiful than the



reality on the ground, so I had resolved to never see Kinkakuji. Instead, I had a completely different travel course planned out. From start to finish, my day was meticulously mapped. Nothing would be left to chance. It would all be immaculate.

But then, God laughed at the plans I'd made. It turned out Google Maps was notoriously anti-bus, so I ended up lost before reaching my first

planned stop. A walk Google assured me would take 20 minutes ended up taking an hour. The museum Google swore was open ended up being closed for the holidays. And, to top it all off, my phone died just as I managed to get on the bus for Kitano-Tenmangu. At this point, I was tired, cold, blistered, starved, and all-around exasperated. And as soon as I got off the bus, I went to the nearest restaurant I could find. I needed a break.

The mom-and-pop place was small, but not crowded. And the mom and pop were kind enough to let me use an outlet by the kitchen for my phone. It'd take at least an hour to charge though, so in the meantime, I had nothing to do but wait and eat, with my thoughts as my only company. And while my first thoughts were shame over my failed plans, eventually, they turned to old times.



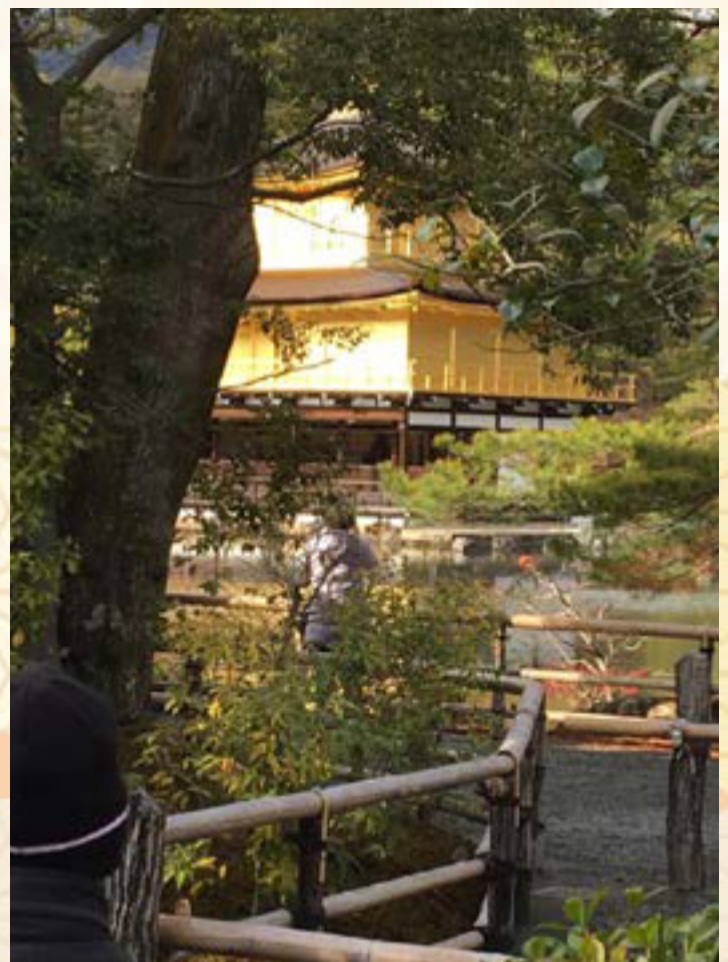
my worries slowly fade. There was still plenty of time for me to see what I wanted to see, and a whole day for new, good memories to overwrite my stressful morning ones. Then, just as my dessert arrived, a group came to sit at the table next to mine, and we had a pleasant chat. It was then, talking about life, the new Matrix movie, and other topics, that I suddenly realized. The morning may have been unpleasant, but if it hadn't happened, I wouldn't have been there, at that exact time and place, having that wonderful conversation.

I am not someone who believes that happy thoughts lead to good fortune. That's the sort of snake oil that implies you're only miserable because you deserve it. But by letting go of my carefully crafted plans, and simply appreciating the moments as they come, my day started to turn around.

When the group and I parted ways, they handed me a much-needed map, and asked that same, familiar question: "So are you going to Kinkakuji?"

I thought of how angry and upset I was, and wondered why I couldn't simply be like my Buddhist monk friend, Muichi-san. I'd had the opportunity to live with him at his temple for a month, and had always marveled at his calmness and control, while also envying his ability to meditate, something I'd always failed at doing. I'd never known what to think, how to sit, what the meaning was behind the chants we read, and Muichi-san had never tried to correct any mistakes I'd make. I hadn't been able to understand, and I'd felt stupid for it. And yet, somehow, as I was feeling stressed and embittered, my mind kept wandering to Muichi-san and the way he would sit. Like a phone plugged into a charger, sitting would rejuvenate him.

With all the issues I'd faced that day, I wouldn't have expected a simple sitting break to make them all disappear. And yet, with no phone, no company, no obligations save those I'd made up, sitting there—alone, with only my thoughts—was peaceful. I breathed more deeply, let my mind wander freely, and felt



For the first time, I hesitated to answer. Maybe this was a chance. Not a sign from the universe, but an opportunity I could take of my own volition, to have a new, exciting experience. Kitano-Tenmangu and Kinkakuji happened to be very close to each other. It would be no trouble to hop on over.

So this time, I said “Yes,” and soon found myself at the entrance to the Golden Pavilion. I would go into Kinkakuji with no expectations, no assumptions, only appreciation for whatever happened.

From the outset, I noticed something unique. Unlike all the other temples and shrines I’d visited that day, this place was crowded—as crowded as COVID restrictions could allow. More than that, it was a pre-planned, pre-structured course. You had to pay to get in, you couldn’t stray from the set path before you, and the whole thing was as smooth

and mechanical as they could make it.

This all didn’t surprise me too much, since most of the old, famous temples in Japan are supported largely by the travel industry. Tourism is more lucrative than tithing, so if you are passionate about preserving your old monuments, it makes sense to utilize the tourist market to your advantage. That might sound cynical, but so was Mishima’s novel, and so far, my Kinkakuji experience was matching my old, cynical expectations. Maybe coming here had been a mistake. Still, at least I now knew that for certain. I thought I had a good idea of what was in store for me.

But then, as I walked among the current of visitors, I noticed something shining, peeking out from behind the trees. As I stepped closer, I saw it was the Golden Pavilion itself, and at once, I was *struck* by its beauty. I can’t describe the feeling in another way. I was simply . . . struck.



And yet, with no phone, no company, no obligations save those I’d made up, sitting there—alone, with only my thoughts—was peaceful. I breathed more deeply, let my mind wander freely, and felt my worries slowly fade.”

“We keep trying to mold people and situations into the preconceptions we have in our heads, instead of simply appreciating them for who or what they are.”



I took a picture right then and there. Not to show off, but to remember that moment and that feeling. The way the sun and water danced along its auric frame. The warmth that radiated from its golden glow. The imperial phoenix that stared down at me, like a guardian angel. Words cannot describe it, and pictures cannot do it justice.

My journey to Kinkakuji was a profound one, shaped by all the little frustrating and enlightening moments I experienced that day and from my past with Buddhism. Life is suffering. This is the essence of the Buddha's Four Noble Truths. But maybe, the reason we suffer isn't because of life itself, but the expectations we attach to it. The perfect partner, the perfect career, the perfect trip, the disappointing temple . . . We keep trying to mold people and situations into the preconceptions we have in our heads, instead of simply appreciating them for who or what they are. When I stopped expecting disappointment, and went in with an open mind, I found Kinkakuji all the more beautiful, and my day all the more enjoyable.

I confess, I don't think I have things all figured out. But I do know that, since my visit to Kinkakuji, I've set aside time each day to sit like Muichi-san. And this simple act of sitting has made me appreciate my life even more. Should you visit it yourself, I can't say what you'll find at Kinkakuji. But I can say that anything of value you gain from such a visit will largely come, not from the place, but from you. It will all boil down to your expectations going in, and your reflections upon leaving.



Marco Cian is a 1st-year ALT in Toyooka, Hyogo. He is very glad to have taken his Kyoto trip before Omicron showed up. He also reads a lot, and you can find him on his Youtube channel, [È quasi milione](#), where he talks about fantasy works.

Japanese Background Vectors by Vecteezy

LIFESTYLE

WELLNESS EDITOR

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Kimberly Fitzgerald

"I was addicted to the hokey-pokey, but then I turned myself around." — Kimberly Fitzgerald

SPORT EDITOR

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Samantha Stauch

"And once the storm is over, you won't remember how you made it through, how you managed to survive. You won't even be sure, whether the storm is really over. But one thing is certain. When you come out of the storm, you won't be the same person who walked in. That's what this storm's all about." — Haruki Murakami, Kafka on the Shore

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

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Jon Solmundson

"He wondered what it would be like, working all your life for one Zaibatsu. Company housing, company hymn, company funeral." — William Gibson, Neuromancer

ふびま
さんち

小料理
水車

酒処



Kendo's and Kendon'ts

A Look Into Kendo Clubs During COVID-19

Zac Carr (Niigata) and Andrew Richards (Niigata) interviewed by Samantha Stauch (Gunma)



What inspired you to join your school's kendo club? Did you have any prior experience?

ZC: Actually, I had no intention to join initially. I have only a little martial arts experience and I just wanted to watch kendo, to see how it was done. However, after sitting for about 10 seconds, sensei handed me a *shinai* (flexible bamboo kendo sword) and ordered me to join the class. After that, he asked me to come again, and again. I decided it was fun and a great way to learn a martial art for free, so I stuck with it.

AR: I practiced kendo for about five years in Maryland before I came to Japan. My love for kendo was one of the reasons that I wanted to come to Japan. I found the kendo community to be kind and welcoming. I always made a few new friends whenever I went to a tournament or a test in America. Soon after I came to Japan, a coworker of mine introduced me to a local club that practiced at a junior high school. I was the only adult that practiced at the club. The other members were elementary and junior high school students. Occasionally, some of the parents who also practiced kendo came and practiced with me as well. When I came to Japan, I was a second *kyu*. The sensei encouraged me to test for first *kyu* and first *dan* as soon as possible. For reference, the *kyu* rankings typically start at sixth or fifth *kyu* and work their way up to first *kyu*. They're like the colored belts of other martial arts. *Dan* ranks start at first *dan* and work their way up to eighth *dan*.

They're like black belt degrees. Kendo practitioners don't wear any visual markings of rank. Following his advice, I tested for both my first kyu and first dan during my first year in Japan. The sensei wanted me to get my third dan before I left Japan but the pandemic threw a wrench into those plans.

When COVID-19 first hit and restrictions were being implemented, how did your school handle club activities?

ZC: All clubs have run normally up until we experienced an outbreak in Arakawa a couple weeks ago. Since then, school clubs have been discontinued until February 14th. Most clubs did not seem to require masks during training, but I noticed everyone wearing masks in kendo class. However, some participants wear a plastic cover inside their helmet to act as a barrier instead of a mask.

AR: Schools reacted to the number of cases in the area. I live in a rather secluded little mountain town so there isn't much outside traffic coming through. We've been spared the worst of the pandemic. When cases do rise in town, there's normally a short-term suspension of club activities.

Most students look forward to their after school club practices since they usually act as a stress release after a long school day. Did you notice a change in the morale or attitudes of your students?

ZC: I have not noticed any change in the students that are in kendo club since kendo has been cancelled. That being said, as kendo is a rather serious club activity, the kids themselves tend towards a serious and stoic disposition. If they have strong feelings one way or the other, they certainly do not show it in front of me.



Zac Carr out and about in Niigata.



Andrew Richards holding the first place medal for his division at a tournament in the US just before moving to Japan.

AR: During periods where school clubs are cancelled, I do notice my students are a bit more high strung in class and I have to put more effort into classroom management. They seem to explode in between classes while clubs are cancelled. As soon as class finishes they all (mostly the boys) sprint out of the classroom, run down the halls, tackle their friends and cause all sorts of mayhem. Too much pent up energy.

Schools across Japan have been in a bind as COVID-19 cases break out on campuses. Did you ever feel the pressure to possibly quit your kendo club activities due to rising cases or restrictions?

ZC: I personally have never been pressured to quit kendo (until club activities were shut down, of course). If anything, the teachers here highly encourage my participation, and they have even lent me equipment to use. The

principal sometimes comes to watch me practice, like one might watch a clown at the circus.

AR: Unfortunately, I haven't been to kendo practice in a little over a year for a couple of reasons:

I'd say the primary reason for me going on hiatus was the age group of the other members of the club. I am a lot stronger and taller than most of the other members of the club (elementary and junior high school aged) and while 'size matters not' to a certain extent, I cannot practice the same way with the kids the way I would another adult without the risk of hurting or scaring them. If there were a club for adults or a high school kendo club in the area I'd be interested in practicing there.

Another reason for me going on hiatus was that due to *sakoku* 2.0 and the resulting English teacher shortage, the junior

high school I practiced at became one of my schools (I also began teaching at other elementary schools that the club members attended). Initially, I was pretty excited about it. I'd joke with my students saying, "You get to beat up your English teacher" but I soon found that I couldn't really be myself at practice anymore. The students became more formal with me and I found it difficult to drop my teacher persona while I was there.

The last reason relates to the pandemic. The club itself is not restricted to one school so kids from all over town come to practice at the kendo club. I'm trying my best to keep myself from contributing to the spread of this thing. There's also been a lot of prejudice and stereotypes against foreigners living in Japan at this time. There's a narrative that foreigners are the ones spreading the virus and while



The shrine inside the temple at Andrew's kendo News Year's party.

“The principal sometimes comes to watch me practice, like one might watch a clown at the circus.”



Mochi making scenes from the party.

I know that's just prejudice, there's a part of me that doesn't want to give anyone justification for their beliefs.

How have you been able to stay motivated during all the difficult times and confusion?

ZC: I suppose I don't find these times particularly difficult. While I am looking forward to the resumption of club activities, I am content to exercise in other ways until they do. I observe sanitation and social distancing precautions in my daily life, but currently I do not allow the pandemic to stop me from going out with friends and other ALTs. I have not been ordered or pressured to do otherwise by colleagues or supervisors as of yet.

AR: I stay motivated by reminding myself that this whole mess isn't going to last forever. I also remind myself that I was lucky enough to make it into Japan before the borders closed (August 2019). I've got a stable job, stable income and a roof over my head.

What advice would you offer to teachers currently in or interested in joining club activities during the pandemic?

ZC: I don't have any particularly insightful advice in regards to the pandemic's impact on club activities. Perhaps it's a little obvious, but I recommend keeping an eye on the club schedule and watch for memos regarding COVID-19 at work. Have your JTE help you read these memos so you know if or when club activities will be cancelled, or if there are any other precautions you are expected to take.

AR: I'd say joining club activities is a great opportunity while living in Japan, especially budo. Being able to practice kendo, kyudo, or judo in Japan is a unique experience because finding a club for those sports abroad can be difficult depending where you come from. It's also a great way to connect with the community and also practice your language skills. Some of the best memories I've made in Japan have been while spending time with the kendo



Andrew at kendo practice before the pandemic

community here. Just be mindful that if you go to club activities at a school you work at, depending on the ages of the kids, it may be difficult to drop your teacher persona.

Once the world's got a handle on this virus I fully intend on returning to my practice. Kendo is a big part of my identity, and I feel like a part of me is missing because I haven't practiced in so long.

And to end on a positive note, in light of all that's going on in the world, what experience was most memorable for you while participating in kendo club?

ZC: Kendo is sort of a surreal experience in general because nobody knows English and I am definitely not *nihongo jouzu* enough to understand kendo instructions. Every session is a new misadventure where I have no idea what sensei is saying and I just do my best to mimic everyone else.

One day in particular was rather interesting. Sensei was trying to get me to fine tune my swing a little bit, to put it simply, and was getting sick of me not understanding his verbal instructions as usual. So, he had a student (13 y.o. boy) stand in front of him. He would then swing down at his uncovered head and stop just before making contact. Think William Tell but with a stick instead of a bow and arrow. Nerve-wracking, but the kid didn't even blink. Full confidence in sensei. Then, sensei hands the shinai to me, and says "Douzo." Now, both the kid and I are sweating. Thankfully, I managed to pass this little test without smacking the poor kid, and it really did improve my swing. Maybe the potential hazard helped me focus? Sensei knows best, right?

Then, he pulled out a bokkto and told me to do the same thing. Unlike the shinai, the bokkto is a solid piece of wood, a proper training katana. It would be the equivalent of swinging a 2x4 at the kid's head. At that point, I had to insist otherwise because I couldn't risk sending this kid home with a concussion.

AR: Perhaps my favorite memory with the kendo community in Japan was when I was invited to a New Year's Party held by one of the community members. The house I went to was really fascinating because it was also a Buddhist temple so next to the dining hall was a large shrine room that was filled with all sorts of golden statues and other decorations. The night started out with all of us making mochi, which was a lot of fun. Before we ate dinner the sensei gave a speech and handed out gifts to everyone who recently passed their grading tests. I had just passed my first *dan* so he presented me with a new *shinai*. As the night went on, the kids roped me into playing *onigoko* (tag) with them and holding a mock sumo tournament inside of the shrine room. It was a lot of fun, and I hope I can go to another party like that soon.

“Kendo is a big part of my identity, and I feel like a part of me is missing because I haven’t practiced in so long.”

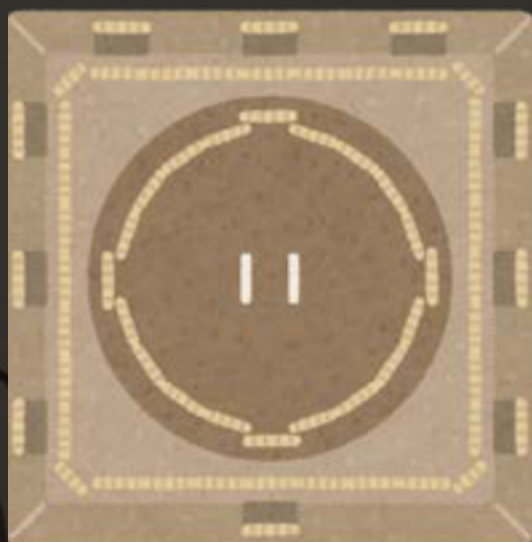


Zac is a first-year ALT in Niigata who hates tomatoes, seriously despises them. He spends much of his free time hiking, sight-seeing, lifting weights, looking for obscure video games, and arguing politics over the internet. When he gets bored of that, he switches focus to his language studies, which typically involves flipping flashcards and struggling to play old Japanese dating sims. He also practices piano on occasion, and misses his chihuahua back in Florida terribly.

Andrew is a third-year ALT in Niigata with a passion for linguistics, sci-fi, and video games. After a hard days work, he can normally be found playing Final Fantasy 14 on a PC he paid too much for, reading old canon Star Wars novels or trying in vain to remember the difference between 知 and 和 on Wanikani. One day he hopes to work as an ESL teacher in the States and perhaps teach a little Kendo on the side.

Samantha is a first-year ALT in Gunma Prefecture who has once been described as “a volcano, with energy flowing everywhere.” She spends most of her day scrolling through the best fantasy-romance webcomics and hate-watching crypto nerds.

Kendo Vectors by [Vecteezy](#)



The Big

The Current World Takes an Interest

Samantha Sta

The appeal of sumo might be lost on people who are new to the sport. The visuals themselves are jarring: abnormally large men in small undergarments, with their hair perfectly set in a top knot, slapping, pushing, and thrusting each other inside a ring of rice-straw bales. At the same time, there is something awe-inspiring about the dynamics of the fast-paced matches and the wrestlers themselves. Their chosen craft requires a high level of speed, power, technique, and dedication, which makes following the sport so gripping. On top of the skills each wrestler, or *rikishi*, develops, there is a refined pageantry and showmanship that they display during each of the six grand tournaments, which are commonly known as *honbasho*. Before the start of each tournament, they begin with the ring entrance ceremony, the *dohyo-iri*, donning large, colorful, and expensive loincloth garments called *kensho-mawashi*. (1) What first seems like a vulgar sport, suddenly becomes quite regal and complex. After paying close attention to the meticulousness and grace



Hakuho (2012)

that goes into each facet of the sport, it is clear that sumo is so much more than meets the eye. It is not always clear to newcomers, but sumo's charms are many, indeed. If there was ever a time to dip your toe into the sport of giants, now is certainly a good time to start.

A glossary of sumo terminology can be found using this link: [Translation Dictionary](#)

In a Competition With Himself: Sumo Legend Hakuho

It is an especially interesting time for fans as a new landscape is being etched into the sumo world: the winningest wrestler in modern times, and perhaps the most impressive in all of sumo history, announced his retirement after an influential 20-year career. Coming from Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, Mönkhbatyn Davaajargal, known professionally as Hakuho, has become a titan in his own right against his contemporaries and even among his predecessors.

Attaining sumo's highest rank as a *yokozuna* at age 22, Hakuho's

Leagues

of Sumo Wrestling

taking New Shape

uch (Gunma)



dominance in sumo is nothing to sneeze at. ([The Japan Times Archive](#)) If you check any list of achievements, you will surely find his name towards the top, if not at the top. Sumo's most dominant foreign voice and prominent commentator, John Gunning, explains the need for praise for the truly unmatched Hakuho:

"The numbers are staggering: 45 Emperor's Cups, 16 perfect 15-0 championships (as many as legendary yokozuna pair Taiho and Futabayama combined), 1,187 career wins, 86 victories in one year—twice—and over 1,000 wins in the top division (the only person ever to manage that), in addition to several other marks of note." ([The Japan Times](#))

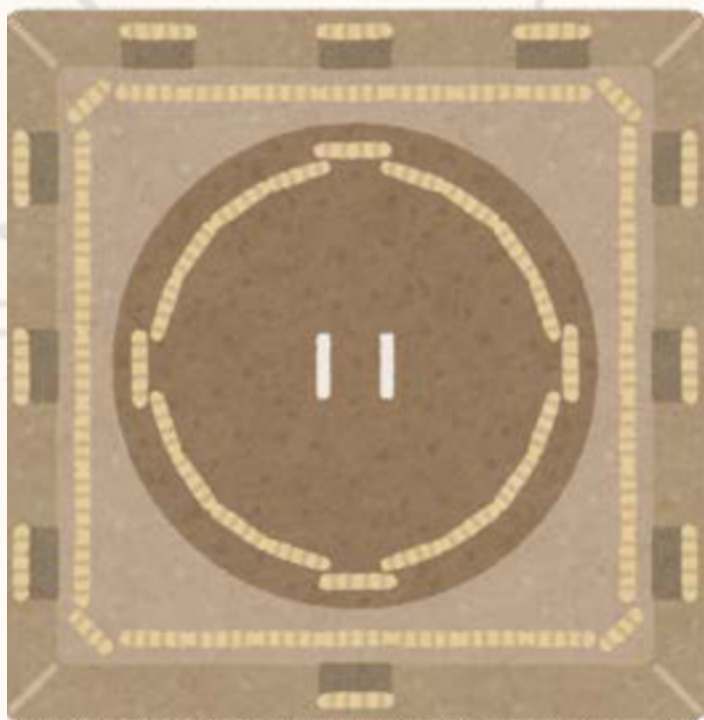
You may wonder, is there a rival out there to match Hakuho? Well, his most formidable potential opponent actually comes from a different period in sumo's 2,000 year-long history. Legendary wrestler Raiden began his career in . . . 1790. With a Secretariat-like lead in front of his competitors in what could be a parthenon of records, Hakuho's place in sumo will be marked for the ages. The rikishi, now 36 years old, announced his retirement in 2021. He has since assumed the name Magaki and now offers his wisdom and service off the world stage as a sumo elder and stablemaster. ([The Mainichi Shimbun](#))



Terunofuji 2017

A Tournament to Turn Heads

The six honbasho tournaments take place in January, March, May, July, September, and November of each year. With official rankings released in the days prior to the start of each round-robin style tournament, each match offers wrestlers a chance to shake up the standings. The system in place dictates that the wrestlers' performances can result in promotion (more wins than losses, known as *kachi-koshi*) or demotion (more losses than wins, known as *make-koshi*). ([The Japanese Sumo Association](#)) Any sumo matches you see on major television, and the ones most sumo fans look forward to, will consist of the sports' top brass—the *Makuuchi* division. The elite Makuuchi showcases the five highest ranks of rikishi. The Makuuchi class begins with the rank-and-file *maegashira* members. Presently, these 35 wrestlers are fighting for the opportunity to climb from their current level up to *komusubi*, then to *sekiwake*, then to *ozeki*, and ultimately, to the coveted *yokozuna* position. To put this into perspective, there are only 42 spots total in the *Makuuchi* division out of the approximate 550 wrestlers in the entire sumo wrestling apparatus. ([Sumo Talk](#))



Sumo ring (illustration)

With Hakuho out of the ring, the remaining yokozuna and fellow Mongolian national Terunofuji was the man to watch for the first tournament of the new year in 2022. Speculation from sumo commentators about the *New Year's Basho* seemed to point to 30-year-old Terunofuji or 25-year-old ozeki Takakeisho coming out on top. Terunofuji had already made a name for himself after he skyrocketed through the ranks in a matter of 12 months, leaving behind his title of komusubi and taking on the yokozuna title. ([The Japan Times](#)) Takakeisho, on the other hand, has been consistent in his work as an ozeki since his promotion in May 2019 with a slew of accomplishments under his belt. ([The Japan Sumo Association](#)) Needless to say, even without modern sumo's biggest star, there was still great potential to be seen among the remaining rikishi.

However, once the January tournament was underway at Tokyo's historic Ryogoku Kokugikan Arena, sumo's heartland, a different picture was being painted. Takakeisho had bowed out on day four of the 15-day-long tournament due to a sprained ankle. His standing is now in peril as he now faces potential demotion to sekiwake. Only in the case of eight consecutive wins can he save face. ([Kyodo News](#)) As for Terunofuji, he would enter the final day of the tournament with an 11-3 record after losses to third ranked maegashira Tamawashi, sixth ranked maegashira Abi, and sekiwake Meisei. ([The Japan Sumo Association](#)) The last day of the tournament would host the final bout between 11-3 yokozuna Terunofuji and 13-2 sekiwake Mitakeumi.

A Rising Star: Mitakeumi

In the end, our lone yokozuna could not best the sekiwake. By maintaining a low stance and a grip on Terunofuji's belt, Mitakeumi was able to force him out of the *dohyo*, clinch a victory, and win the championship. This win not only secured Mitakeumi his third career title but also ensured him a promotion. The bout was his 33rd win over the past three basho, which satisfies the Japan Sumo

Association's (JSA) criteria to move up the ladder one more notch for the title of ozeki. ([The Japan Times](#)) According to *The Japan News*, "Mitakeumi had gained a reputation for being consistently inconsistent, managing to stay in the *sanyaku*—the three ranks below yokozuna—for 10 straight tournaments, but never putting together enough wins to get over the wall to ozeki." The JSA greatly appreciated Mitakeumi's momentum due to instability among the upper brass: Hakuho had retired and the two current ozeki are currently under the threatened *kadoban*, or demotion, status as a result of injuries and losses at previous tournaments. ([The Japan News](#))

Hakuho's sudden retirement and Mitakeumi's late success demonstrate just how quickly sumo's landscape can change at any given moment. When asked about his future, Mitakeumi explained, "There is still one higher level to reach, so I have to make that my goal." ([The Japan Times](#)) Hakuho may be gone but that has not stopped the fighting spirit that is central to the world of sumo. After all, in a round-robin, high-stakes sport like this, anything can happen. It truly is the big leagues.



Mitakeumi 2022

Samantha Stauch is a first-year JET and CONNECT Magazine's sport section editor. In her free time, she enjoys critical thinking and being a hater.

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A Bath in the Forest

Victoria Clayton (Miyazaki)

“BEWARE OF BEARS, SNAKES, KILLER BEES, AND OTHER BUGS.”

As I approached the hiking trail, I was greeted by many signs warning of the forest’s dangers. Having spent most of my life in a concrete jungle, I’d become more accustomed to hooded figures in alleyways and the distant sound of sirens than the shadows of creatures in the woods rustling behind me. Stepping through the arches of trees, I let out a sigh of relief as the crisp, cool air of the forest provided my body respite from Japan’s smothering summer heat. That moment of relief, however brief, resolved me to push forward with my journey into the forest.

The reason I was even on this journey was because I had heard from a friend that the Japanese practice of “forest bathing” was supposed to have many physical and mental benefits.

“BUT UPON STARTING MY WALK, I BEGAN TO DOUBT HOW A FOREST FILLED WITH THINGS THAT GO BUMP IN THE DAY COULD BE OF ANY BENEFIT TO ME.”

If you, too, can move past the often exaggerated warnings, you’ll uncover the magical healing powers that lie deep within Japan’s forests. I am not talking about enchanted forests that hide princesses waiting for a prince’s life-changing kiss, nor magical swords trapped in stone that, if pulled, will ascend you into royalty. What I’m talking about is the humble power of what is known as “forest bathing”—walking through nature.

Forest bathing is the English translation of the Japanese practice of *shinrin-yoku* (森林浴), which is sometimes also called “forest therapy.” Today, these terms are often used interchangeably.

Forest bathing has been scientifically proven to improve your mental and physical well-being, creativity, and



ability to connect with others. (1)
The term was first introduced by the Japanese Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries in the 1980s to both counter the tech-boom fatigue and to encourage Japanese people to connect with the forest to help preserve the country's rich and vast wilderness. The Japanese embraced this practice. And in recent years, following an ever-growing body of scientific evidence to support benefits to our health, forest bathing has spread all over the world.

Most of the current research regarding forest bathing is (of course) from Japan but also other parts of Asia. The most notable researcher is Dr. Qing Li, who has been studying the benefits of forest bathing since 2003 and later, in 2012, established the medical science known as Forest Medicine.

His research team at the Nippon Medical School has found some interesting results.

“50% OF THE BENEFICIAL HEALTH EFFECTS OF FOREST BATHING COME FROM THE CHEMISTRY OF FOREST AIR.” (2)

This is due to increased oxygen concentrations and other organic compounds that come from plants. (4)
The other benefits come from physical and psychological factors, such as the sounds, humidity, and temperature, as well as the bather's own reaction to the different colors, sights, and feelings associated with being in the forest. (4)

“THE BENEFITS OF SIMPLY BEING IN THE FOREST ARE HUGE.” (4)

It has been shown to reduce blood pressure and stress, improve your mood, concentration, and sleep, as well as speed up recovery from illness and even boost your immune system. (4)

If you are wondering how you, too, can reap these benefits, the premise is simple: go out into nature of any kind—it doesn't necessarily need to be a large, wooded forest; even an unpopulated urban park works just fine—and bring your awareness to what is around you. Forest bathing is a type of mindfulness meditation in which you “connect to nature through all five senses” rather than sitting and focusing on your breath. (3)

If you are curious where to start, you can join a forest tour group or listen to a guided walk. My recommendation for a guided walk is the free podcast, [*A Forest Walk—a guided practice*](#) by Kimberly Ruffin, and you can embark on a “walk of faith” to start your connection to the natural world. (6)

If you want to give it a try without a guide or listening to a podcast, there are a few steps you can follow:

1. Resist the urge to bring (or at least use) your phone. In order to be fully present, it is best to limit distractions.
2. Leave behind any expectations and goals. This is not a hike to reach a summit but rather a stroll to engage all your senses as you wander through the forest.
3. Take it slow and stop often. Take your time to appreciate all that is around you, taste the clean forest air, smell the trees, feel the soil under your feet, listen to the wind rustling the leaves, and watch the life of the forest unravel before your eyes.
4. Focus on your breathing. If you find yourself lost in thought, take a moment and return to your breath. This will help return your awareness back to the forest.
5. Stay as long as you want to. Even if you only have 10 minutes to spare or get caught in the rain without a jacket, forest bathing is to be enjoyed, and even a short walk can give you some benefits.

And as for my own walk, despite my original skepticism of nature and fear of coming face-to-face with a bear or killer wasp (I came across neither), my fear dissipated as my own walk progressed. I listened to the birds, the river flowing, and the crunch of dried leaves underneath my feet, and I started to relax.

“UNABLE TO CONNECT TO WI-FI, I FOUND MYSELF CONNECTING WITH LOCALS I BUMPED INTO ON THE PATH.”

A group of old Japanese women introduced me to the vast variety of blooming flowers in my local forest. Their knowledge of the forest and kindness to share their knowledge reminded me that forest bathing isn't just about improving your health or connecting with nature, but also connecting to those around you.

Victoria is a third-year Miyazaki JET. She is an optimistic fatalist with a passion for art, surfing, and exploring. You can read more of her writings on her [blog](#).

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Spring Flavors

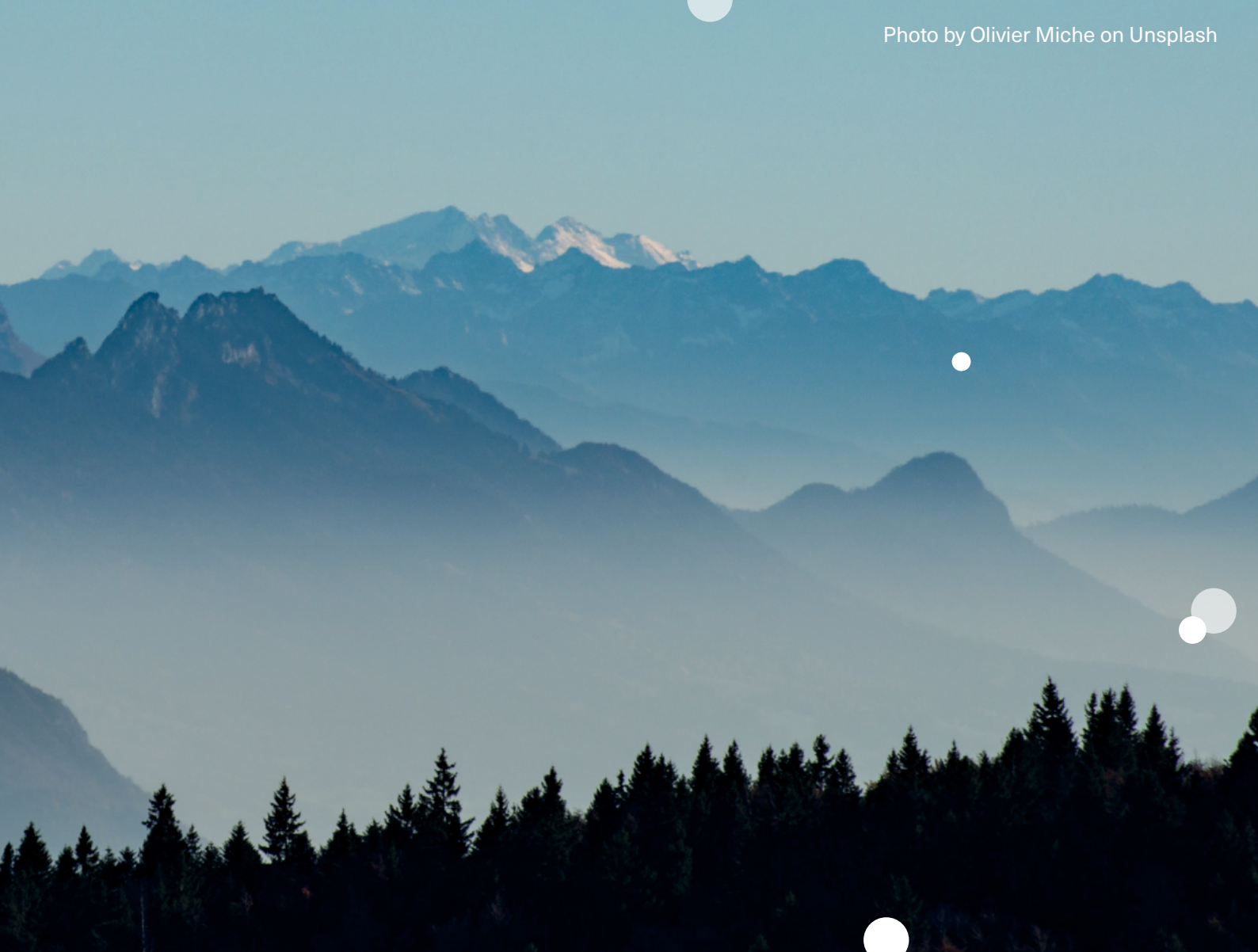
Mysterious Mountain Vegetables

Kimberly Matsuno (Niigata)

The sight of young mountain vegetables slowly peeking out of the last remaining piles of snow is a classic scene promising the coming of spring. However, perhaps one of the most amusing sights of the season is watching whole families, touting plastic bags, crouched over along roadsides picking said mountain vegetables.

These mountain vegetables, collectively called “*sansai*” in Japanese, are not only harbingers of spring but are also nutrient-packed ingredients that are thought to be full of medicinal properties. Distinctly earthy and often bitter, *sansai* are featured in many springtime Japanese dishes ranging from the humblest of *shojin-ryouri* (Buddhist cooking) to the fanciest *kaiseki-ryouri* (Japanese multi-course meals). *Sansai* can be eaten raw, sauteed, braised, boiled, or battered and fried. And with over 300 different varieties of *sansai*, the possibilities are endless.





While it's not recommended to go out on your own to harvest mountain vegetables, many guest houses in the countryside, such as [Iromusubi no Yado](#) in Murakami, Niigata, are starting to offer “sansai harvesting experiences” as part of your stay. In experiences such as these, a local guide will take you to a place surrounded by nature and teach you how to harvest sansai that will be prepared by the guest house for dinner the very same day.

Whether you are out foraging with a guide or are just perusing your local farmer's market, identifying different varieties of sansai and figuring out how to prepare them can be overwhelming. Here is a list of some of the more common and popular sansai to get you started on your mountain vegetable journey.

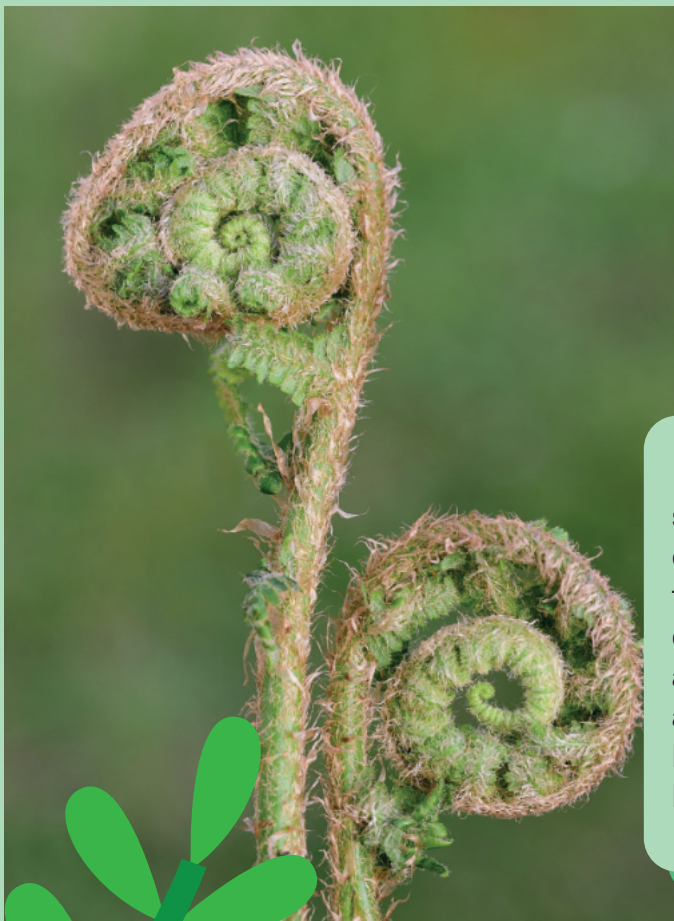


Photo: Ulrike Leone | Pixabay.com

Perhaps the most famous and recognizable sansai is **kogomi**. In English, these tightly coiled sprouts are known as fiddlehead ferns or ostrich ferns. Raw, these ferns are quite bitter and difficult to digest. However, after boiling, they develop a taste similar to asparagus. Kogomi are typically served after being simmered in dashi and soy sauce or battered and fried as tempura.



Photo: Kimberly Matsuno

Wasabina, or wasabi mustard greens, take after the wasabi root that they are named after. These greens develop a spicy, wasabi-like flavor as they mature. Young wasabina, with their milder flavor, blend in well with leafy salads. While more mature wasabina, with their curlier leaves, can be cooked into stir-fries or soups.



Photo: 1443435 | Pixabay.com

Butterbur stalks (*fuki*) and their buds (*fukinotou*) have a taste similar to celery. Fuki are one of the main components in those bags of pre-cooked sansai in water that are commonly found in grocery stores year-round. Fresh fuki stalks are typically prepared by being rolled in salt and then boiled, while the buds are typically served as tempura or sauteed and tossed in miso.

No list of mountain vegetables would be complete without *takenoko*, otherwise known as bamboo shoots. These baby bamboo shoots are harvested just after they appear out of the ground. Due to the short time frame in which they can be harvested, fresh takenoko are coveted items at any Japanese grocery store—though you can usually find them pre-cooked or canned throughout the year. Fresh bamboo shoots are usually simmered with soy sauce, sake, and sugar. But they can also be boiled and sliced for a salad or prepared as tempura.



Photo: Powerkutte | Pixabay.com

Now that you, hopefully, feel a little more confident identifying sansai at your next trip to the farmer's market, read on to discover two healthy and hearty dishes that are as simple as they are delicious. These recipes can both use your pre-boiled sansai of choice or packaged *sansai no mizuni* (sansai in water)—so that you can enjoy the flavors of spring year-round.



Photo by Kimberly Matsuno

Sansai Soba

Juno Valerio (Niigata)

Have you ever wandered around a Japanese supermarket and noticed a bag of vegetables in the produce section and wondered, “What is that? I want to eat it!”? One of those bags is sansai, which are Japanese mountain vegetables. I got in touch with my inner Japanese mountain dweller and made this warm mountain vegetable dish.

This recipe makes two large or four more restrained portions.

Ingredients

- 100 ml (7 tablespoons) homemade or store bought *mentsuyu* (noodle soup stock)
- 300 ml (1 1/4 cup) water
- 1 bag of boiled sansai in water (山菜の水煮—Sansai no mizuni)*
- 150 grams (5.3 ounces) soft tofu
- 200 grams (7 ounces) soba noodles

*I used a 200 gram (7 ounce) bag, but you can use a smaller bag without changing the other ingredients. A smaller bag just means less delicious mountain vegetables.

Juno is a first-year JET in rural Niigata, originally from the state of Oregon in America. Due to food allergies, she learned to cook at a young age and is on a mission to make and eat as many allergy-friendly Japanese dishes as possible. Juno writes a [blog](#) about her experiences as an ALT in rural Japan.

Instructions

1. Put *mentsuyu* and water in a pot. Taste the stock for strength and add more *mentsuyu* or water as you see fit. You do want it to be a little strong right now because you will be adding a lot of mildly flavored things.
2. Drain the sansai and add them to the *mentsuyu* mixture.
3. Cut the tofu into pieces you can reasonably fit on a spoon or pick up with chopsticks. Soft tofu does tend to break up a bit in the pot, so it's better to go for a little bigger than a little smaller. Add the tofu to the pot with the *mentsuyu* and sansai.
4. Turn the stove on medium-high and bring your soup mixture to a boil. While you are waiting for the pot to boil, make your soba according to the package instructions. I suggest stirring the noodles while they cook; otherwise, they can stick together.
5. When the soup mixture starts to boil, turn it down to a simmer for five to eight minutes (or approximately how long it takes you to cook the soba). Taste again and adjust by adding more *mentsuyu* or water as necessary. You do still want it to be a little strong because you are adding it to noodles.
6. Divide the soba into bowls and use a ladle or large spoon to add soup mixture over the noodles. This dish is best enjoyed immediately. いただきます (*itadakimasu*)!

Sansai Okowa

Tanima Biswas (Tokyo)

We are always looking for tasty but quick and easy meal ideas in our busy lives. So, I will share a recipe from my Japanese friend's mom's kitchen. This vegetable rice is ideal for those who like to cook their meals hassle-free. As a plus point, this dish is also super healthy. The premise is simple; just incorporate mountain vegetables into your plain, regular rice to make it into a delicious, quick, and healthy meal.

This recipe makes four portions.



Photo by Kimberly Matsuno

Ingredients

- 1 portion white rice (up to the 180 ml mark on a rice cooker cup)
- 1 portion mochi rice (up to the 180 ml mark on a rice cooker cup)
- 1/2 to 1 packet boiled sansai in water (山菜の水煮—Sansai no mizuni)
- 1/2 to 1 piece deep-fried tofu (油揚げ—Aburaage)
- 75 ml (2.5 ounces) shiro dashi (白だし—Shiradashi)
- 1.5 grams salt
- 300 ml (10 ounces) water

Notes

Using mochi rice with white rice gives this dish a better texture. Both the bite of white rice and the chewiness of mochi rice can be enjoyed at the same time.

Both the packet of mixed boiled mountain vegetables (sansai) and shiro dashi can be bought at supermarkets all year round. Feel free to add more or less vegetables to your dish according to your taste. The amount of vegetables will not affect the cooking time or amount of water required.

Instructions

1. Mix the white rice and mochi rice, then wash the mixture well under running water. Set it aside.
2. Drain the sansai mix and cut the vegetables into bite-size pieces.
3. Pour hot water over the deep-fried tofu and drain the water. This sounds counterintuitive, but it helps to remove the excess oil from the tofu and improves the flavor.
4. Cut the tofu into one-centimeter cubes.
5. Place the washed rice into the rice cooker, followed by the vegetable mix, shiro dashi, and salt.
6. Mix everything together well and add the tofu pieces to the top. Finally, add 300 ml of water, then close the lid and turn on the rice cooker.
7. Once the rice is done, open the lid and fluff the rice—mixing all the ingredients, including the tofu, well. This dish is best served hot.

Tanima has a doctorate in organic chemistry and is currently working in a Japanese food company. Cooking is one of her passions besides reading, traveling, and photography. Add her on [Facebook](#) to follow along on her journey.

COVID UPDATE

States of Emergency*

Aichi, Aomori, Chiba, Gifu, Gunma, Hokkaido, Hyogo, Ibaraki, Ishikawa, Kagawa, Kanagawa, Kumamoto, Kyoto, Osaka, Saitama, Shizuoka, Tochigi, and Tokyo prefectures are under states of alert and are exercising preventive measures currently scheduled to last until March 21.

There are currently no prefectures under a State of Emergency.

Local authorities may still impose restrictions, especially on dining and entertainment establishments. Please check with your local authority regarding specific restrictions in your region.

*All information is accurate as of March 12. 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%.

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 neuro-psychologists 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

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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

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Day Bulger

"Doubt kills more dreams than failure ever will." — Suzy Kassem



御詠歌奉納於山
民族舞蹈

説教於日相

坂下雅裕夫 保阪正

薩間弘清夫 金富清

月の言葉

Interview

HARNESSING THE POWER OF POWERPOINT

AN INTERVIEW WITH THE FOUNDER OF TAY'S TEACHING TOOLKIT, TAYLER PAYNE
KIMBERLY MATSUNO (NIIGATA)

We've all been there. When you first started teaching as an ALT, everyone was excited to talk to you. You were bursting with ideas for fun and exciting games and activities. By the seventh time you were playing Jeopardy for review, however, you began to realize that your lessons just didn't have the same spark as before.

Enter Tayler Payne, the force behind [Tay's Teaching Toolkit](#). Tayler's website provides beautifully designed PowerPoint templates for a wide range of classroom games.

I had an opportunity to communicate at length with Tayler about her background, website, and tips for what makes a great PowerPoint game.

The 31-year-old gave up a career as a graphic designer and moved from the US to Korea to become an ALT five years ago. As an ALT herself, Tayler understands what is necessary in a game that is not only exciting, but is also educational, fits the constraints of

a classroom setting, and can be adapted for a wide range of topics and grammar points. And with her background in design, Tayler's games are as beautiful as they are fun.

Like many new ALTs, she relied heavily on materials provided by others on online resource-sharing platforms. She stated that "The resources were well thought out, effective, and there were so many of them (which I was very grateful for). However, I noticed almost all of them were just missing that finishing touch aesthetically from a design perspective, especially the PowerPoint games, which my students absolutely loved to play. Pretty much everything I downloaded, I spent extra time redesigning. Furthermore, when you did find and download those games, often they required extra time and effort to edit them—whether it be updating the design, fixing animations and fonts, correcting mistakes, etc. That's where Tayler's Teaching Toolkit comes in."

"THE RESOURCES WERE WELL THOUGHT OUT, EFFECTIVE . . . HOWEVER, I NOTICED ALMOST ALL OF THEM WERE JUST MISSING THAT FINISHING TOUCH AESTHETICALLY . . ."

“With my website, not only can you find all those different types of games in one place, but you can also have the confidence that the PowerPoint game you’re downloading is ready to play once you edit it with your lesson’s target language. You don’t need to touch anything else in the PowerPoint (if you don’t want to).” Tayler also takes it one step further by dividing the games into different skill sets, such as listening, speaking, reading, writing, and general review games.

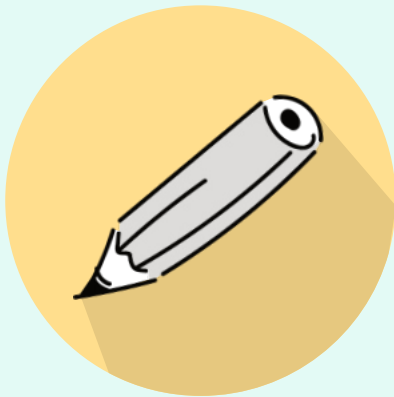
But the best part about it is that all the templates on Tay’s Teaching Toolkit are provided for free without any sort of subscription! When I asked her why she decided not to charge people for something that she worked so hard to create, Tayler

stated that “. . . while the designs of the games I take full credit for, I do not own the rights to most of the game images, sound effects, and fonts I use. The templates and games I create are unofficial and designed for personal use only. However, if a teacher enjoys my games, finds them helpful for their classes, and would like to show their appreciation, I do have a “Buy Me a Coffee” button on my website.”

While Tay’s Teaching Toolkit is a great resource for any busy ALT, sometimes the needs of your particular classroom require you to create your own games. So for these cases, I asked Tayler to share some of the things that she has learned from her experience.



TAYLER’S TIPS FOR GETTING STARTED CREATING YOUR OWN POWERPOINT GAMES:



Give your game a theme.

Tayler believes that the number one thing you can do to improve any PowerPoint game is to give it a theme. Many of the games on Tay’s Teaching Toolkit are themed around popular games and movies, such as *Among Us*, *Fortnite*, *Harry Potter*, and *Pokemon*. Fun and interesting themes such as these are not only popular with the students, but

they also provide a strong backbone when it comes to putting the game together.

Tayler states that “Once you have a theme, your game will have a clear direction and all elements you use in your game will relate back to it, whether it be graphics, fonts, sound effects, etc.”

But themes don’t always have to be related to pop culture. They can focus on broad concepts like a particular sport or a season. Themes can also be centered around simple things like your favorite food or even your prefecture’s mascot character.

Tayler admitted, “There are some games on my website without themes, and honestly, while the game concepts are fun, I admit putting a theme on them would really take them to the next level.”



Let your passions shine through.

Choosing a theme not only provides structure and excites students, but it also allows you the chance to share what you are passionate about. Tayler said that choosing a theme you know well has the added benefit of allowing you to be able to incorporate special elements into the game that only someone familiar with the topic will know.

You might be surprised to find some of your students share your same interests. And introducing a new topic or idea in a game format can spark curiosity and initiate future conversations.

“Trust me, your passion will come through using a theme you know and love, and it will affect the end result too! You may even introduce your students to something new and cool!”



Use what you know.

While passion is powerful, knowledge is necessary. When it comes to using a theme, you must first understand the topic you are referencing. You don't want your students to cringe at the sight of you misrepresenting their favorite game or character.

“My games with themes like *Super Mario*, *Pokemon*, and *Animal Crossing*, I had background knowledge of because they're all video games I've played and are still relevant today, especially with my students. Same goes for my PowerPoint games based on shows and movies like *Harry Potter* and *Zootopia*. I've seen both of those movies, loved them, and with that background knowledge, was able to create detailed, immersive games based on them.” Tayler said.

She went on to say, “For me, I think having some background knowledge is so important when making a PowerPoint game because it really enhances your students' experience with your game when you're able to add gameplay elements, fonts, and sound effects from the original game, movie, or show you're basing it off of.”



Use what your students know too.

Sometimes, something is so popular among your students that even though you don't know much about it, you know it would make for a successful theme. Tayler has also been in that situation.

She stated, "There are times when I create a PowerPoint game where I don't have the background knowledge . . . I only knew about Among Us because my students couldn't stop talking about it. With those games, I did some research to familiarize myself with the basics of how to play and the different themes and characters involved in the games. This just entailed me looking up Wikipedia articles and watching some YouTube videos about them or people playing them."



Understand how to use PowerPoint to its fullest potential.

Tayler believes that it is important to have some knowledge of how to use PowerPoint and the different tools it has. She explained that this ". . . not only makes the game-creating process easier, but it also allows you more opportunity to experiment and be creative when making your game. For example, you may find using two animations simultaneously makes a really cool new animation. Also, having this knowledge helps you look at PowerPoint games other people have created and immediately know how they did something you may not have done before."

For people with little experience using PowerPoint or those who are working on an office computer in a foreign language, playing around with the multitude of different features can be a time-consuming process. But your efforts will eventually pay off. For people who are really looking to get into game creation, Tayler recommends looking for tutorials on YouTube or taking classes through sites like Coursera or Skillshare.



There's no need to reinvent the wheel.

Sometimes, it's best to stick to the games that you remember from your time as a student. Not every game needs to be new or complex—especially when it comes to saving time figuring out the ins and outs of PowerPoint. In fact, “A simple game style means you won’t spend as much time figuring out the mechanics of PowerPoint and instead spend more time working on the game design and experience,” Tayler stated.

And chances are that if you found something fun and interesting as a child, it will be fun and interesting to your students as well. Tayler explained that often her inspiration comes from games she played as a child or saw on TV. “For example, I came up with Swarm’s game concept after remembering a game I used to play on the website *Neopets* when I was younger, *Extreme Potato Counter*. For Pi-Gru’s concept, I took inspiration from a hide-and-seek-style game I watched on the TV show, *Big Brother*.”



Study your peers.

There is no shame in finding great game concepts online and building off of them. Tayler admitted that “I actually take a lot of inspiration from games other teachers have created on online resource sharing platforms . . . My website is essentially a compilation of all the games I’ve discovered on those forums over my five years teaching. I’ve either made the games my own by adding new rules/gameplay and putting a completely new theme on them, or I’ve just given them a design overhaul.”

She suggests that you not only use other teachers’ games for inspiration but that you should also take a look at how they constructed the game. She recommends ALTs “study how other PowerPoint games you have used were made. Look at the animation sequences, font choices, transitions, etc. I know I’ve learned so much just from studying games other people have made.”

And if you create something great, share it with others! “Honestly, I love seeing the games other people create . . . I take just as much inspiration from them as they do from me,” Tayler stated. “If my website can be a jumping-off point for that, I’m all for it.”

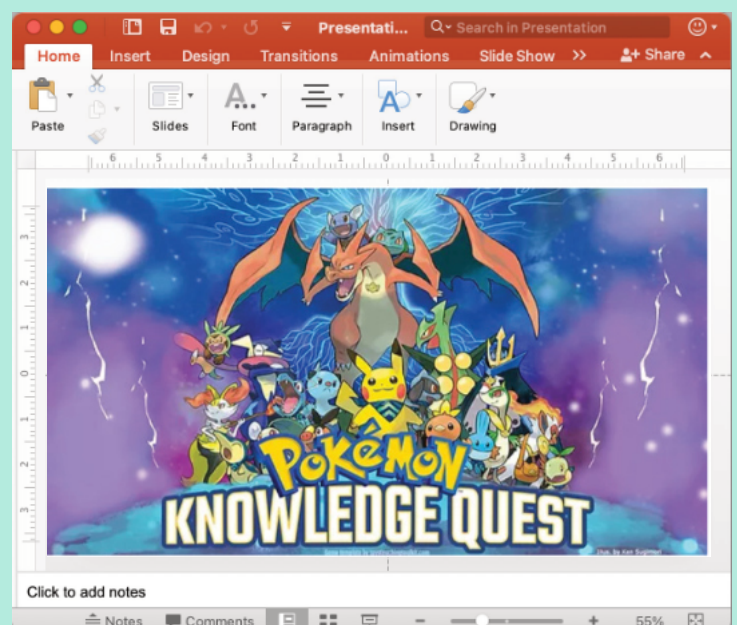
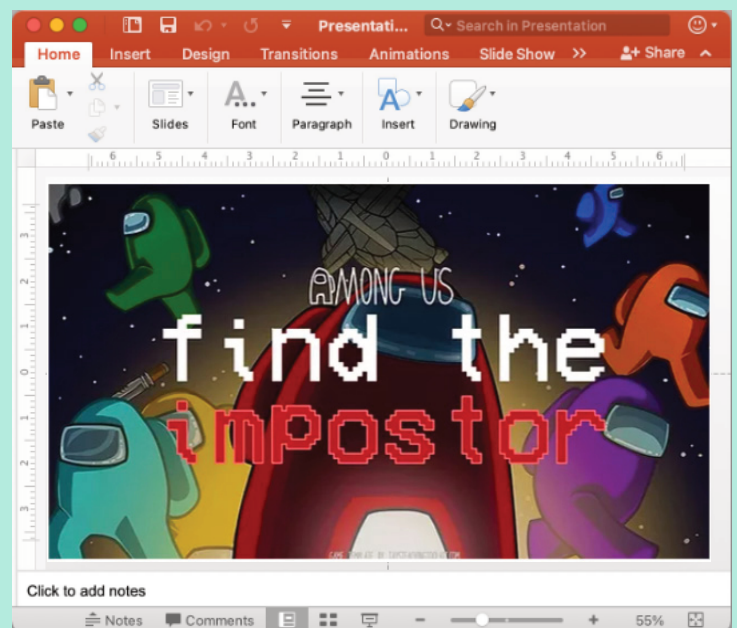
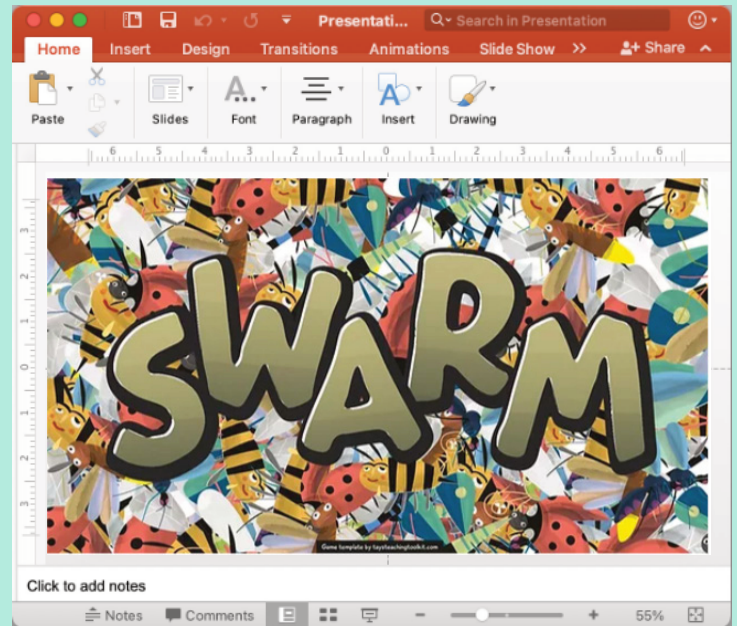


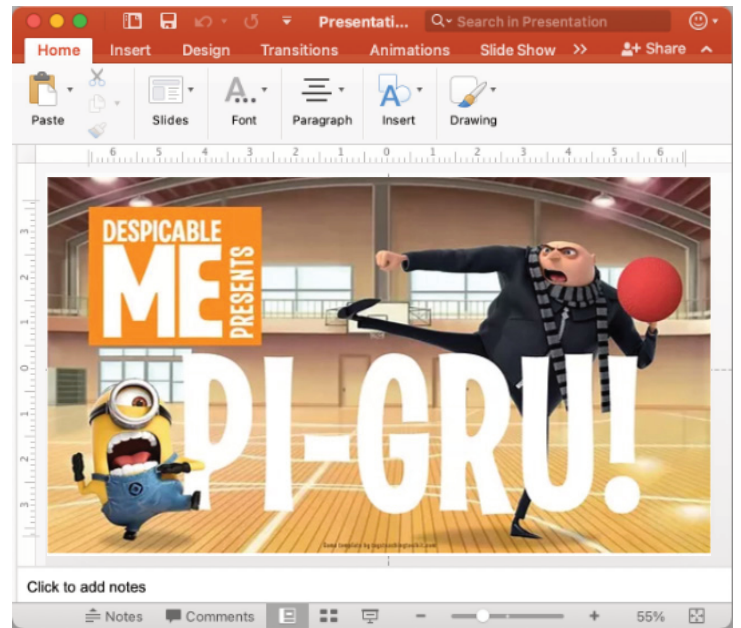
Don't forget to add sounds.

Finally, something that Tayler suggested adding to really bring your games to the next level is sounds. She said “You’d be so surprised at how much adding sound effects really upgrades a game’s playing experience, especially for students. Think of when you ever played a video game on mute versus with the sound on. It’s a completely different experience! Sound effects really just help set the tone for the game and make it more exciting to play.”

Tayler told me that designing PowerPoint games has been one of the most fun aspects of being an ALT. “It really reinvigorated my love for design again, especially seeing my students’ reactions to the games I would create.”

Hopefully, you will be able to use some of her suggestions to make games of your own that excite students and impress co-teachers. In the meantime, please visit [Tay's Teaching Toolkit](#) for more PowerPoint tips and tutorials from Tayler. You can also follow along with all her adventures inside the classroom and out on [YouTube](#) and [Instagram](#).





Before moving to South Korea, Tayler Payne worked as a graphic designer for the American fashion company, Express—designing in-store marketing and windows for their 600+ stores nationwide. While she had made peace with the fact that she was probably putting design behind her, Payne was surprised when she almost immediately noticed an opportunity to use her skills in the classroom. She has since combined her skills as an educator and a graphic designer into the website [Tay's Teaching Toolkit](http://taysteachingtoolkit.com), which provides quality PowerPoint game templates and training materials to ESL teachers.

Kimberly Matsuno is in her third year in Japan and has loved every minute of it. She enjoys hiking and exploring everything Japan has to offer. When not planning her next trip or trying to recreate that one thing she ate at that one restaurant, you can find her spending way too much money on stationery at her local LOFT.

(mushi wa mushisuru)

虫は無視する

Ignore the bugs

Welcome to the March Language Corner! It's me, your host, Sarah Baughn! (Please clap, as the esteemed meme Jeb Bush would say). Personally, I'm looking forward to spring. There's also *Hinamatsuri*, so I'll include some vocabulary for that.

This month's pun is dedicated to a bit of advice that will soon become relevant again.

Vocabulary

Doll's Festival/Girl's Day	ひな祭り	hinamatsuri
Doll	人形	ningyou
Emperor and Empress Doll	内裏雛	dairibina
Mixed sushi ingredients in a rice bowl	ちらし寿司	chirashi-zushi
Cherry Blossom viewing, which usually includes a picnic with friends	花見	hanami
Three-colored dango (rice cake sweet) that's eaten this time of year	花見団子	hanamidango
Cherry Blossom Front ie where you should be to view peak sakura season	桜前線	sakurazensen
Cherry Blossom Blooming Forecast	開花予想	kaikayosou
"Flower Snow Storm" aka when the flower petals fly everywhere and it looks very romantic	花吹雪	hanafubuki
Pollen allergies aka the downfall of the beautiful flowers	花粉症	kafunsho

TRAVEL AND COMMUNITY

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

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"When it's over, I want to say: all my life I was a bride married to amazement. I was the bridegroom, taking the world into my arms." — Mary Oliver

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Katherine Wang

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

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

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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



Iki Island: Land of Gods and Adventure

Trevor West (Nagasaki)

Iki Island will forever be a special place for me. I worked and lived on Iki Island, Nagasaki Prefecture, from July 2019 to July 2021. I worked as a Coordinator for International Relations (CIR) through the Japanese Exchange and Teaching (JET) Program.

I came fresh from college, having studied International Relations, Japanese, Chinese, and Philosophy for three and a half years at Seton Hall University. I've had a lifelong interest in spirituality, religion, and philosophy. I love reading about the various creation myths of different religions and find there is often great value and wisdom in these ancient writings. With Japan, their creation myth is written in the *Kojiki*.

The *Kojiki* forms the basis of the original Japanese religion, Shintoism. In modern day Japan, most people observe both Shinto and Buddhist religious practices. My Japanese teacher in high school would always say, "Shintoism is for fun festivals and Buddhism is for funerals." I've always been interested in esoteric and mystical things. This passion was accelerated by the powerful spiritual energy of Iki Island, which connects to its interesting roots with Japan, such as with the *Kojiki* and local folklore. My time in Japan was the deepest initiation I've had into becoming an adult. Totally cut off from family and friends, I made new friends and found new family as I made my way on Iki Island.



What is Iki Island?

Iki Island is a mystical place that reaches back to the earliest creation myth of Japan written in the *Kojiki*. It's one of the many islands in the archipelago of Nagasaki, just off the northern coast of the prefecture in the Tsushima Strait, and was a major point of interest in the past for those traveling from the East Asia mainland (e.g., Korea, China, etc.). Since ancient times, Iki Island has been considered a sacred and mystical place. From local folklore it is said that Iki Island, specifically Ondake Shrine, was where some of the first deities of Japan, such as the deity of the moon, Tsukuyominomikoto, descended for the first time on Earth. Iki Island is also known as being a deity called *Ame no hito tsubashira*, which literally means that Iki Island was a “pillar of heaven” linking the Earth to the divine. Officially, Tsukiyomi Shrine on Iki Island is known as the original shrine of all the Tsukiyomi Shrines in Japan.

In the *Kojiki* it is written:

“Having descended from Heaven on to this island, they saw to the erection of a heavenly august pillar, they saw to the erection of a hall of eight fathoms. Then Izanagi, the Male-Who-Invites, said to Izanami, the Female-Who-Invites, ‘We should create children’ . . . Next they gave birth to the Island of Iki, another name for which is Heaven's One-Pillar.” (Kojiki, 5-6)



Iki Island is the fifth island created by the deities Izanami and Izanagi, the creator gods of Japanese mythology. Beyond having tangible mythological origins in print, the living folklore of the island is even more interesting. It is said that Iki used to be overrun by *Oni*, ancient and cruel ogres. Then, the samurai warrior Yuriwaka came to defeat the oni along with their leader, the *Akudokuo*, Evil King.

There is also the *Legend of the Eight Pillars*, which states that after Iki Island was created by Izanami and Izanagi, the island would drift away from its original spot. The island was alive and would move. To keep the island from moving around the ocean, the gods erected eight pillars around the island to halt its movement. Many of these pillars are popular tourist spots today, such as Sakyobana, *Saruiwa* or Monkey Rock, et cetera.

If you're up for a greater adventure, there is a beautiful pillar located on one of the Mishima islands. These three islands include: Oshima, Nagashima, and Harushima. You can take [a short 20-minute ferry](#) from Gonoura Port to get there, or you can swim there!

Adventure awaits!


My real joy on Iki Island began my second summer and winter there. I would go adventuring with a good Australian friend and Japanese friend. We were part of an adventuring group called “Meow Meow Team.” We would swim, climb, explore! We swam to some nearby islands, and I will never forget any of our swims.

When we swam to Oshima Island, about a kilometer or two off the main island coast, there was the giant ferry boat that connects Iki Island to mainland Japan coming right at us! We were well-gearred: snorkels, climbing gloves, amphibious shoes with fins attached to our feet, a visible color float bag with some gear. I was also wearing a large, black waterproof backpack with gear. I looked down and saw the sand reef, and estimated the ferry wouldn't come

as far as I was. But my two friends were behind me quite a way. I continued to swim, feeling the tension of the backpack eating into my skin as friction rubbed it into the burning sea salt. I felt nervous, but as the ferry approached it was clear that it was far away from my friends and myself.

When we landed on the shore my whole body was quivering from the cold. I rushed to get a towel out of my gear bag, dried myself, and changed quickly. Walking inland, we approached a nice old lady. My Japanese friend explained how we had just swum from the mainland to there, and the old lady laughed incredulously. Even I couldn't fully believe we did it, so I could fully empathize with her belief, except for the cold in my bones that spoke of the truth of the deed.





Keep in mind, we did this swim in December. It wasn't as cold as Chicago, but it was likely below 50F. I recommend swimming during the summer. The best beach on Iki Island is Ohama Beach, not simply because it has beautiful tidal patterns that completely change the beach view, but because it has it all! It is also literally right next to the Iki Island airport (direct flights from Nagasaki Airport). When I first arrived on Iki, I went right from the airport to Ohama Beach, only a few minutes drive away. Other beaches I recommend are Tatsunoshima Beach (uninhabited island) and Tsutsukihama Beach. More info on the beaches can be found [here](#). For those crazy enough to swim around to the island (rather than take the provided transportation), make sure you have all the proper gear. Everything is done at your own risk. The ocean is beautiful, but it is also dangerous. I love the ocean, but I have never forgotten my fear and respect for it.

After our cold swim, we went on to show our Japanese friend what my Australian friend and I discovered on our first visit to Oshima: wonderfully beautiful, magical, plant-overgrown ruins from World War II. A part that looks like a huge front entrance is so oddly enchanting that, when we first saw it, I thought we had wandered into an Indiana Jones movie. To get there, if you get off the boat at Nagashima, then you have to cross the bridge over to Oshima. After crossing the bridge, head southeast keeping to the outermost street shown on Google Maps. A little before the middle of that southeast street, you have to wander around off road. From what I remember, the road itself is more of a basic paved path. Depending on the time and season, a lot of the area can be overgrown with plants, so be careful of falling into a hole. The giant entrance is near the coastline.

All pictures courtesy of [Discover Nagasaki](#).

[Kyushu Yusen Ferry Information](#)
[Nagasaki Tourism](#)
[The legend of Iki no Onigashima \(video\)](#)

Trevor is a former CIR (Coordinator for International Relations) at the Iki City Tourism Division who likes meditation, philosophy, and exploring the strange experience of life. Read more about his ongoing shenanigans on his substack, [Radiant Tantra](#).



Why Iki Island is the best place in Japan

If it's your first time in Japan then Tokyo is a great place to visit, sure. But Iki Island is infinitely greater than Tokyo skylines and attractions. The big buildings of Tokyo are the same steel-gray slabs you can find anywhere. On Iki Island, you not only get to breathe in nature of a living, mystical island; you get to enjoy this mystical connection with breath-taking sunrises and sunsets. For great sunrises, visit the east side of the island, such as Sakyobana or Ohama and Tsutsukihama beach, and for sunsets, visit the west side such as Monkey Rock. You can do some great stargazing as well. I've found the road leading up to Dolphin Park is great.

The island hosts a genuine connection to a mystical past, and through this connection you can taste the ancient mystery of existence. The residents of the island and tourist information proclaims the existence of many power spots, or spiritually potent areas that heal oneself and one's soul.

Having lived on the island for two years, I can vouch for this personally. Through my time on Iki, I reconnected with nature in ways I had never imagined, discovered a spirit of adventure that is driving my life even now, and kindled my heart towards the divine mysteries of existence.

Sliding out from Under the Kotatsu in Komatsu

AN AFTERNOON EXPLORING A CITY'S HIDDEN GEMS

Katie Hawkins (Ishikawa)



Growing up in the Sonoran Desert located in the southwestern United States where 299 out of 365 days are sunny, I had no concept of seasons, apart from the changing leaves at the tail end of January, which quickly changed two weeks later for spring. I had always seen pictures of the beauty of fall leaves and a quiet winter snowfall. But to now live in Ishikawa prefecture, which receives an annual 186 centimeters (73.23 in) of precipitation annually, has been a challenging adjustment. I can count an aching back from shoveling snow, frozen toes, wet socks, and unending damp laundry on my frozen fingers.

All that being said, this winter has brought a few days of heavy snowfall which has blanketed the quiet countryside in a winter wonderland. After dragging myself from the warmth underneath my *kotatsu*, I was able to explore some of the hidden gems of Komatsu, a city nestled in the southern part of Ishikawa near the foot of Mount Hakusan.

Natadera Temple is located just outside Komatsu City and is open all year round.

Admission fee:

600 yen (adults) or
300 yen (Children 7-12 years old)

Access:

By car: Less than 10 minutes outside Komatsu City, or 20 minutes off Katayamazu Interchange of the Hokuriku Expressway. Free parking is available on site.

By train: 20-min bus ride from Awazu Station on the Hokuriku Line.

Hours:

March 1 to Nov. 30, 8:30 a.m. to 4:45 p.m. — Dec. 1 to Feb. 28
8:45 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

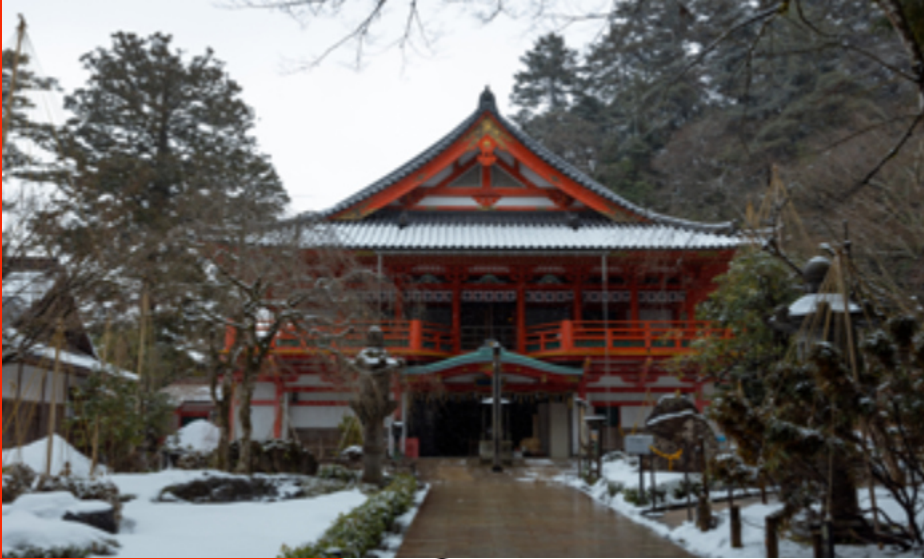


NATADERA TEMPLE IN WINTER

Said to have originated in 717 C.E. from the great monk Taicho, Natadera Temple is sheltered among the low hills of Komatsu City. 2017 marked the 1300th anniversary since its founding. The grounds of the temple feature natural caves which have been revered as places of *Umarekiyomaru*, the cycle of death, purification, and rebirth. Natadera is also a place known for its simple but inspiring beauty throughout the seasons. During the Edo Era, the master haiku poet Matsuo Basho visited the temple grounds and left words of admiration, "*Ishiyama no ishi yori shiroshi aki no kaze*" ("The autumn wind is whiter than the white cliffs of the stony mountain").

I was able to enjoy the tranquil beauty of Natadera's *wabi-sabi* during a winter day which brought snow quietly but built up steadily. I recommend a day like this to enjoy the height of the winter's serenity. And a few words of warning from a lifelong desert dweller: Be sure to suit up with thick socks, gloves, and an umbrella for the dynamic snowfall. Walking around, I could not feel my toes! Please protect your lil' piggies.

Leading up to the main shrine, you are dwarfed by a cluster of cedar trees standing quietly in a field of moss. Especially during winter, the contrast of the red *kondo keo-den* (central worship pavilion) is awe-inspiring. Only a handful of people were also here at the same time so I was able to enjoy the quiet of a deep, deep breath of icy air and exhale to see it escape among the tops of the cedar trees.



Although there was a sense of isolation in the quiet winter grounds of the temple, it wasn't lonely. I feel like during the winter months, in places of reverence for nature such as Natadera, you are able to experience a true rare moment of peace surrounded by the intimacy of frost covered leaves and moss.

One of my favorite moments from my wintertime visit was a small break in the clouds above which led to a stream of sunlight filtering through the cedars guarding either side of the walkway leading to the main shrine. Yet, in a true testament to the fleeting beauty of *mono no aware* (awareness of the impermanence of transience of things), the clouds returned and the falling snow quickly began again.



I walked deeper into the forest and greeted the sleeping koi at the foot of the famous cedar. The koi were so still that it felt like the moment was paused in time, being from the quiet snow and the stillness of the water.



With frozen toes, I continued to walk through the temple grounds and passed a row of red, stoic *torii* gates and climbed to the main shrine, built partially into a large cave. While you aren't allowed to photograph the inside of the main shrine, there is an observation deck which oversees the entire temple grounds.



Following the path along the rocks to the other side of the temple grounds, I was greeted by the contrasting red of the *chinju-do* observation platform, which offers a beautiful perspective of the caves and torii gates resting on the rocky cliffs. Having come full circle to meet the sleeping koi once again, I made my way to say goodbye to the gentle, giant cedars dressed in snow.

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i fish nestled in a pond
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made me feel like that
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The entire grounds of Natadera take at least 30 minutes to over an hour to explore. Each turn and corner frames a perspective of another area of the temple. The accumulation of culture is rich, and each piece of architecture contains a piece of history about the area, featuring characteristics which can be enjoyed throughout the changing seasons. I can't wait to see it in the spring and greet the koi fish once again. Until then, let me take you along to the next gem Komatsu has to offer.

BRIDGE CAFE

If you're craving a delicious, warm cup of coffee, head to Natadera, I recommend you visit this cafe. A sweet couple situated in a beautiful building. You can tell a lot of thought went into the building because the exterior is stunning. The inner designer is no less talented. Visit this cafe!



K-POP AND DOGS PRINTED ON CUP OH MY!

And if you're a fan of Korea, bonus! The cafe features K-pop decorations and a menu. The husband of the couple is Korean, so I've heard their lunch menu has something for everyone. My favorite is the adorable bear waffle and cafe latte. I had a french bulldog printed on my cup. The cafe offers you the option to print a custom design on your cup (via LINE, but I was not expecting to have a french bulldog of BRIDGE) sitting on my latte. And I was taking a million pictures of my menu.

m drink and lunch after your visit
visit BRIDGE, a cafe owned by a
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and interior design are absolutely
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DRINKS AND BEAR WAFFLES,

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nd I'm pleased to report that after
eal, the flavors were delicious.



OUT FROM UNDER THE KOTATSU

I have since slid from the blanket of snow outside to the blanket of my kotatsu. But I look back on the wonders of my mini winter season adventure with the feeling returning to my toes and smile. Living in a smaller suburban city nestled in the southern reaches of Ishikawa has allowed me to really explore the nooks and crannies of my city throughout the seasons to find hidden gems that I will return to time and time again. I just have to drag myself out from under my kotatsu. Wish me luck!

Born and bred in the Sonoran Desert of the American Southwest, Katie is a graphic designer by trade but is currently exploring her passion for education as a first-year ALT on the JET Programme slowly adjusting to the rainy climate of Ishikawa. She likes travel, anime, exercising, photography, live music, studying Japanese, drinking coffee and on the side is an avid but destructive chef in the kitchen plowing her way through Japanese cookbooks. See what she's up to on Instagram [@katiehawk.jpg](https://www.instagram.com/katiehawk.jpg).

Getting Married In Japan:



A Guide

Alex Takahashi (Gunma)



Disclaimer

The contents of this guide were written based on one American woman's personal experience of getting married to a Japanese citizen while on JET. Please note that your situation may differ in any number of ways, so this guide is not necessarily a complete list of all required documents and procedures. You should contact your nearest embassy, regional immigration authority, and local city hall for the information most accurate to your particular situation. Furthermore, the links provided in this article provide examples of American forms and embassy information, as well as information for Takasaki City in Gunma Prefecture.

You've Said "I do!"... Now What?

First of all, congratulations on your engagement! Or at least, wedding bells might be ringing in your future if you've come to this guide. Whether you're already engaged and preparing for the next step or just trying to plan ahead in general, the process of getting married abroad may feel overwhelming at first. If you're lucky, your fiancé will be taking an active role in helping you throughout the long paper route that awaits. But, if you need to get the ball rolling yourself, then this guide should be able to help point you in the right direction.

There are three major topics covered: Firstly getting married in Japan, secondly changing your name after getting married, and finally getting a spouse visa. You can skip through this article to any sections which apply and see roughly what procedures and paperwork you'll need to complete.

① Getting Married

The good news is that getting married in Japan is a fairly straightforward process. Did you already know that you don't need to have any kind of ceremony in order to tie the knot? In typical Japanese fashion, however, there is a long list of paperwork you need to take care of before you can declare yourself legally married.

Step 1: The first half of the process is outlined clearly in the [U.S. Embassy website](#). You need to make an appointment to visit any of the U.S. Embassies or Consulates in Japan and acquire an Affidavit of Competency to Marry. Take note that there are forms to download and fill out in advance; you don't need these translated by a professional. You, your partner, or a friend can do it instead.

When you enter the embassy, look for the check-in box and put your appointment paper inside. Take a seat and wait quietly until your name is called. Then, hand over your papers, repeat an oath, pay, and leave with your notarized affidavit.

- Tips for Visiting the U.S. Embassy in Tokyo
 - The nearest station is Tameikesanno Station. There are coin lockers available to keep any items that the [Embassy prohibits you from bringing](#).
 - There are cafes nearby to kill time if you want to arrive early for your appointment.
 - When you arrive, approach the nearest security guard and show proof of your appointment. They will direct you to the entrance and security checkpoints.
 - When you enter inside, there is little guidance for what you're supposed to do. The staff will ignore you if you try to ask for help. Just find the appointment sheet box and wait your turn, but don't expect any staff to answer questions while you're there.
 - Prices are listed in dollars but you can pay in yen if you prefer.



Step 2: Next you need to go to city hall and submit your 婚姻届 (*Kon-in Todoke*), which is a document expressing your request to get married to your partner. Exact requirements (including what your Japanese partner needs to submit) vary from city to city, so you will need to check with your local city hall to confirm what documentation you need specifically.

For reference, Takasaki City's requirements can be found [here](#). Notice that the footnote at the end indicates that when marrying a foreigner, you or your Japanese partner needs to contact them directly to confirm additional requirements. In Takasaki, you need to bring your passport as well as fill out some forms regarding family information, including writing your parents' names in katakana.

If you or your partner are able, it's tremendously helpful to visit city hall and confirm what documents you need in advance. A city worker can give you an example of a pre-filled Kon-in Todoke and explain how to write it, line by line, while confirming tiny details (such as when to write names in English vs katakana, what order to write said names in, etc.). Takasaki does not provide any language support, so the forms will need to be filled out entirely in Japanese.

While there, you could double check what documents your Japanese partner needs too, particularly if their hometown is not where they live now. Your partner will probably need their family register (戸籍謄本, *Koseki Tohon*) but they can only get a copy from the city hall where it was registered (most likely wherever your partner was born/where their parents live). If you legally live together and their family register is officially registered in that city hall, you're able to request the Koseki Tohon on your partner's behalf. If not, either your partner or one of your in-laws will need to go get a copy and send it to you.

Then, you and your partner need to choose the day you want to be officially married on. The day you submit your Kon-in Todoke becomes the day you're officially married, so if you're hoping for a specific date make sure you have everything filled out correctly when you drop it off. You can also opt for you and your fiancé going to city hall

together to fill out the Kon-in Todoke with the help of a city worker; in fact they even encourage you to do so, to avoid any mishaps that would result in your application being denied.

It's likely going to take a long time to get through everything, so you should be prepared to spend at least a couple hours at city hall, even with your Japanese partner there. But, once you've submitted your Kon-in Todoke, you're legally and officially married in Japan. So, congratulations!

While you're there you might want to get some copies of your marriage license (婚姻届受理証明書, *Kon-in Todoke Juri Shomeisho*). **Note that you can only get a copy from the city hall where you submitted your Kon-in Todoke**, and you'll need to know the date you submitted it on when you go to buy another copy in the future. While you should keep some copies on hand just in case, please also note that for other points during the name change and spouse visa process, you'll need to submit a copy of your marriage license that was issued within 3 months of applying. So make sure you don't order a ton of copies at once only for them to expire before getting to use them later.

Finally, take note that the U.S. government doesn't issue marriage licenses for citizens who married abroad. There will be times when you're asked for your American marriage license in addition to your Japanese Kon-in Todoke Juri Shomeisho, **but you won't have one**. When that happens you need to explain why; it's easiest to pull up the U.S. Embassy page, find the paragraph that states that they don't issue one, and switch to the Japanese version of the same page. Then you can have the staff read the explanation in Japanese, and it's fine.





Step 3: Tell your school once you're officially married. There are a lot of important forms you need to fill out from HR that are related to your taxes, etc. If you plan on changing your name, you'll need to do that first before you can complete them, but if you'll be keeping your maiden name then you can go ahead and get them done right away.

- Document Checklist

- Affidavit of Competency to Marry (一人用の婚姻要件宣誓書, *Hitori-yo no Kon-In Yoken Senseisho*)
 - Download, fill out, translate in advance, get done at a U.S. Embassy/Consulate
- Your U.S. Passport
- Request of Registration to Get Married (Kon-in Todoke)
 - Needs 2 witnesses to sign it (they can be your partner's family, foreign friends, etc.)
 - You'll need your officially registered seal (印鑑, *hanko*) if you have one
- Other forms deemed necessary by your city hall
- The forms required for the Japanese partner
- Your marriage license (Kon-in Todoke Juri Shomeisho)
 - Available after submitting your Kon-in Todoke
- Any forms given to you by your Board of Education (for JETs)



② Changing Your Name

After becoming legally married in Japan, you have the choice of changing your name or not. When two Japanese people marry, one of them must change their last name to match their partner's, but as foreigners you aren't required to. It's up to you and your partner; if you aren't planning on changing your name, you can skip this section, otherwise read on.

Step 1: In order to change your name in Japan, you must first change your name on your passport. The U.S. Embassy website has guides on how to do so found [here](#). Luckily, the process has changed in recent years so you're now able to apply for your new passport via mail, which can save you an inconvenient trip to the Embassy. Of course you can go in person too, if you prefer.

When you submit your application for a new passport, you're required to also mail in your current one with it. Therefore, you won't have a passport on you for the entire processing time (it could be anywhere between one to three months). Keep that in mind, as it would be incredibly difficult to get home for an emergency situation without your passport.

Step 2: Once your new passport arrives in the mail, you're legally required to go to immigration and city hall within two weeks to update your new name. In Takasaki, the Immigration building and City Hall are quite near each other, so you may be able to do both in one day. Go to immigration, get your residence card updated, and then go to city hall to register your new name.

While you're already at city hall, update as many things as possible: your registry (住民票, *juminhyo*) and your hanko. Please note that your legal name, at this point, is still based off of your passport and residence card. That means you aren't officially allowed to use your partner's kanji name. You may have already registered your katakana name back when you first arrived in Japan, but **on legal documents you still need to use your English name.**

One way people get around this is registering a legal alias (通称名, *tsushomei*). If you register your last name in kanji, you can use it on most legal documents, barring some banking and other things that require your proper legal name. Think carefully before you decide to register one though, because it's next to impossible to change it after you do, even under circumstances such as divorce. You can choose any name you like; for example, making your last name match your partner's kanji, cutting out your middle name, etc.

If you do decide to register a legal alias, you may need to bring some kind of mail that has your desired name printed on it, as proof that you go by that name. Takasaki doesn't accept handwritten mail (so no letters from friends with your kanji name on the envelope), but you can change your name on a utility bill and use that as proof. If you want an official record of your legal alias, make sure to get a copy of your updated registered seal form (印鑑登録証明書, *Inkan Toroku Shomeisho*), where it will show your English name, registered katakana name if you have one, as well as your legal alias.



Step 3: As you begin the process of changing your name on everything else, be sure to confirm if they'll accept your legal alias (if applicable), or if they need to go by your legal name. It'll be easiest if you start with your Japanese driver's license, if you have one. Once you've updated that, you can use it as ID rather than having to bring your passport/residence card for everything. If you have a legal alias, they can print it on your license along with your legal name (it will be written on the backside).

The list of things you need to change your name on is seemingly endless. Plus, you'll need to make it a point to update the same things in the U.S. as well! Be sure to check with each country about what documentation you need to submit, but for a lot of things your updated driver's license or a copy of your marriage certificate (Kon-in Todoke Juri Shomeisho) will suffice. Common things that need your name changed include:

- Your bank account (Japan+US)
 - Transferwise, or some method to send money back home
 - Utilities
 - Health insurance card
 - Credit cards (Japan+US)
 - ETC card
 - Online shopping accounts
 - Your social security card
 - Your driver's license (Japan+US)
 - Insurance Policies
 - Your Japanese "My Number" Card (if applicable)
-
- Document Checklist
 - Old and new U.S. passport
 - Double check that you have all the required forms/envelopes, correct photos, etc.
 - Residence card
 - Japanese driver's license (if applicable)
 - Marriage Certificate (Kon-in Todoke Juri Shomeisho)
 - Your registered hanko/inkan/seal, old and new (if you have one)
 - Don't forget the nkan Toroku Shomeisho form if you want proof of your registered names



③ Applying for the Spouse Visa

This section concerns the process for switching from an instructor visa to a spouse visa. The spouse visa, sometimes colloquially called a marriage visa, is called the 日本人の配偶者等ビザ (*Nihon Jin no Haigusha Nado*).

You're so close to being done! But unfortunately the application for a spouse visa has even more paperwork than either of the previous sections. For added peace of mind, you can opt to hire a lawyer to help with the process, but if you follow the [Japanese government's online guide](#) you should be able to do it yourself.

Step 1: The list of required documents for changing from a working to a spouse visa can be found on Immigration's website [here](#) and [here](#). You can get almost all of them in one trip to city hall. Bear in mind that you'll need some of your partner's forms, which as a legally married couple you're allowed to get on their behalf, if they can't go with you. However, just like when you got married, if their family register is from a different city, you'll need one of your in-laws to get the form for you (or send your partner to get it themselves). Immigration requires recent copies, so **everything has to have been printed within three months of applying.**

• Tips for Filling Out the Forms

- It's hard to reach Immigration via phone due to the line being continuously busy
- Many questions about how to fill out the forms can be found by Googling in Japanese: "form's kanji name" + 記入 (*kinyu*) + 例 (*rei*) / 書き方 (*kakikata*).
- Immigration's English site is not 100% accurate, so it's recommended that you follow the Japanese version regarding what forms you need

Here is a breakdown of all the required documents:

Required Documents	Remarks
在留期間更新許可申請書 (<i>Zairyu Kikan Henko Kyoka Mosesho</i>)	This is a downloadable application to change your visa from Instructor to Spouse. Don't confuse it with a Certificate of Eligibility application (在留資格認定証明書交付申請書; <i>Zairyu Shikaku Nintei Shomeisho Kofu Moseisho</i>).
A recent photo (4cm x 3cm)	Can be taken at those photo booths you use for printing out other application photos. Costs around 800 yen. Write your name on the back before you glue it onto your application.
配偶者(日本人)の方の 戸籍謄本(全部事項証明書; <i>Koseki Tohon</i> with all items listed)	Your partner's Koseki Tohon needs to show you listed under 'marriage'.
婚姻届受理証明 (<i>Kon-In Todoke Juri Shomeisho</i>)	A copy of your marriage certificate.

Required Documents	Remarks
<p>日本での滞在費用を証明する資料:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 課税証明書, <i>Kazei Shomei Sho</i> 2. 納税証明書, <i>Nozei Shomei Sho</i> 	<p>Proof that you/your spouse don't owe any money for taxes.</p> <p>You each need one copy of both forms. It needs to show one year's worth of tax information, starting from January of the current year.</p>
配偶者(日本人)の方の身元保証書	A letter from your guarantor, who hereafter will be your spouse.
配偶者(日本人)の住民票 (<i>spouse's juminhyo</i>)	When you ask for a copy you have to check the boxes for which pieces of information you want displayed on the <i>juminhyo</i> . Be sure to check every box possible to have them all displayed.
質問書 (<i>questionnaire about your relationship</i>)	Fill it out with as much detail as possible, including plenty of supporting documents (pictures, social media posts, etc.) as needed.
外国人患者に係る受入れ証明書 (<i>a medical form</i>)	Only necessary if you've been hospitalized. Filled out by your doctor.
Photographs	Three candid photos of you and your spouse together. Can't be edited with filters, stickers, etc. Content should be easy to understand from looking at the photo.
*Self-Addressed and stamped envelope	Please attach 404 yen worth of stamps. Write your name and address as normal, then write “簡易書留用” in red ink left of the stamps.
Your passport	You need to show it to staff at city hall.
Your residence card	You need to show it to staff at city hall.
手数料納付書 (<i>Certificate for Payment of Fee form</i>)	Will cost 4,000 yen; paid to Immigration after you receive the postcard in the mail confirming your visa change has been approved.

*U.S. Immigration's website says it's necessary, but at the Takasaki branch they provide a postcard to self-address and submit with the application.

Step 2: Once you've triple checked that you have everything filled out, it's time to make a visit to your local immigration branch. It's best to arrive with plenty of time to spare, as you could be sitting for a couple of hours until your number is called. Due to COVID-19, Takasaki's Immigration branch is open from 9:00-15:00 as of October 2021.

Your partner doesn't need to be present, unless you think you'll need help talking to the immigration officer. Tell them you've gotten married to a Japanese citizen and are there to apply for a visa change. The officer will take your forms, passport, and residence card and check that you've gathered all the necessary documents. If everything looks good, you'll be asked to fill out a postcard with your name and address in Japanese; immigration will use it when they notify you about whether your visa change was approved or not. It usually takes a couple of weeks for your application to get processed.

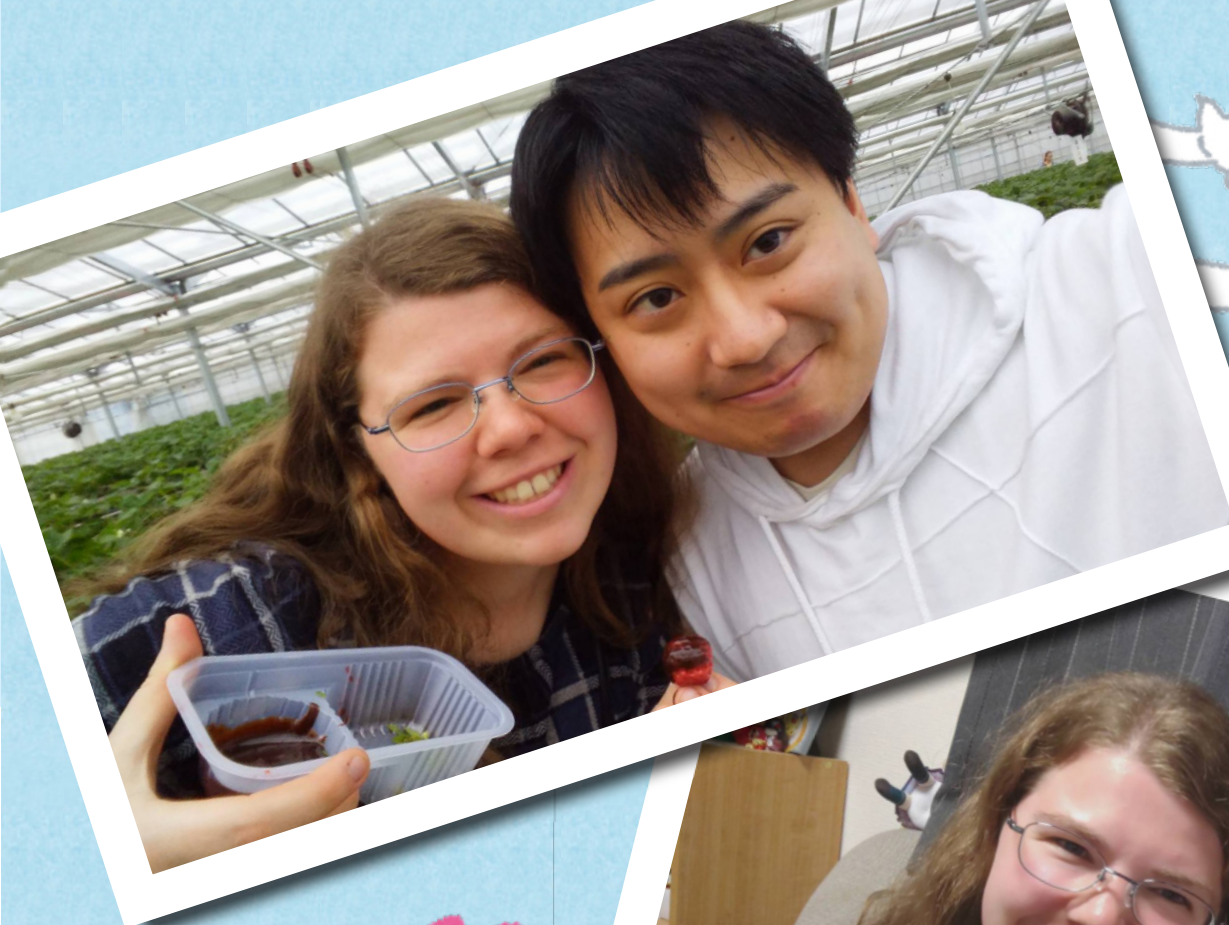
Step 3: Once you get the postcard and have confirmed that your visa change has been approved, you need to fill out the Certificate for Payment of Fee form.

Simply go to the Post Office and buy revenue stamps (収入印紙, *shunyu inshi*) for the amount designated on your postcard. Apply the stamp to the form, circle #1 (change of status), then sign and date the form.

Finally, go back to immigration and get your residence card updated. That's it, you're done! If you're a JET, make sure to tell your BOE that your residence status changed; you'll need to send them a copy of your new residence card.

- Document Checklist
 - See chart above
 - Revenue stamps (shunyu inshi)
 - Residence card





Congratulations

Don't forget to renew your visa as needed, but otherwise you're done with everything. Good luck, and may you and your partner enjoy this new chapter in your lives together.

Sources

1. [US Embassy and Consulates in Japan: Marriage in Japan](#)
2. [US Embassy and Consulates in Japan: Visiting the Embassy or Consulate](#)
3. [Takasaki City Marriage Session](#)
4. [US Embassy and Consulates in Japan: Change or Correct Passports](#)
5. [Immigration Services Agency of Japan: Application for Permission to Change Status of Residence](#)
6. [Application for Permission to Renew Period of Stay](#)
7. [Application for Permission to Change Status of Residence](#)

Alex Takahashi is a fifth-year ALT. She likes playing badminton, reading J-horror novels, and snuggling under the kotatsu with her hedgehog. She thoroughly enjoys life in Gunma and enjoys promoting local hidden gems online; you can check them out on her [Instagram](#).

CONTRIBUTING TO CONNECT

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ARTICLES

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