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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 April issue of **CONNECT**!

I hope spring has been finding you well, basking in cherry blossoms, and excited for the upcoming Golden Week holidays.

This month [CONNECT] Magazine has no shortage of exciting articles to keep you informed and entertained throughout the spring. Here are some of my top recommendations to get you started:

If you love learning about the manga industry, or just cool jobs in general, check out the Language section's International Hitmaker: An Interview With Localization Editor, Jennifer Sherman. This fantastic and fascinating interview gives a behind-the-scenes look at the translation and localization process responsible for bringing Japanese media to an international audience, and has some tips for folks looking to get into the industry as well!

While you're at it, become an expert in all things tea with this month's Wellness ingredient deep dive! Spring Flavors: Time for Tea takes you through a quick but detailed Tea 101 before presenting a curated collection of recipes. Sip and snack your way into a delectable spring season.

Skating fans should check out the Sports section's profile of Japan's own beloved "Ice Prince," Put Some Ice on It: Yuzuru Hanyu's Legendary Career Pushes His Physical Limit. This article offers a great examination of

Yuzuru's groundbreaking career, recent dramatic Olympic defeat, and the challenges faced by aging top-athletes in many fields.

Next, the Community section's Beyond the Ryokan explores the challenges faced by one Japanese as it finds its footing between historical and modern elements. It's a fascinating read, not to be missed!

Finally, it's time to start getting excited about The Art Issue! Every year **CONNECT** dedicates its June issue to promoting the fantastic creative work of the international residents of Japan! Submissions are now open for poets, sculptors, photographers, musicians, and artists of all kinds to submit their work for consideration!

I'm just in awe of the incredible creativity and talent of our community and can't wait to see what you all do next! You can check out our guidelines and submit your work here: C - The Art Issue website.

The deadline is May 13th!

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](mailto:connect.editor@ajet.net), or join CONNECT Magazine Contributor's Circle on Facebook to get updates from our editors when they're on the hunt for a story!

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

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*"Blossom by blossom, spring begins."  
—Algernon Charles Swinburne*

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*"Dawg no hol ef im ha bone." (The dog does not howl if he has a bone.)  
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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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*"If you would serve your brother, because it is fit for you to serve him, do not take back your words when you find that prudent people do not commend you."  
— Ralph Waldo Emerson, On Heroism*

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*"I'm not letting anybody in the Senate steal my joy...Don't worry, my sister. Don't worry. God has got you. How do I know that? Because you're here and I know what it's taken for you to sit in that seat."  
—Sen. Cory Booker to Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson*

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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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# ARTS AND CULTURE

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*"Animation is not the art of drawings that move but the art of movements that are drawn." — Norman McLaren*

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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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*"The bravest people are the ones who don't mind looking like cowards." — T.H. White, The Once and Future King*

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*"The entitled assholes of the world are sustained by girls who forgive too easily." — Iron Widow, Xiran Jay Zhao*

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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

Monica Gonzalez (Osaka) & Astrid Estrada Diaz (Okayama)

### ESPACE LOUIS VUITTON OSAKA Showcases Richter Collection in “Abstrakt” Exhibit

by Monica Gonzalez

The second exhibition held on the fifth-floor Espace art gallery of Louis Vuitton presents 18 pieces by German artist Gerhard Richter. The exhibit is free of charge and accessible during the store’s opening hours until April 17. You enter via a side entrance off of Midousuji avenue onto Sugalabo and take a direct elevator ride up. Two of the pieces, *940-4 Abstraktes Bild* and *941-7 Abstraktes Bild* (2015), are being exhibited for the first time.

I was intimidated at first because I thought a reservation was required; although we made a reservation with the Louis Vuitton store, it was unnecessary and easy to enter.

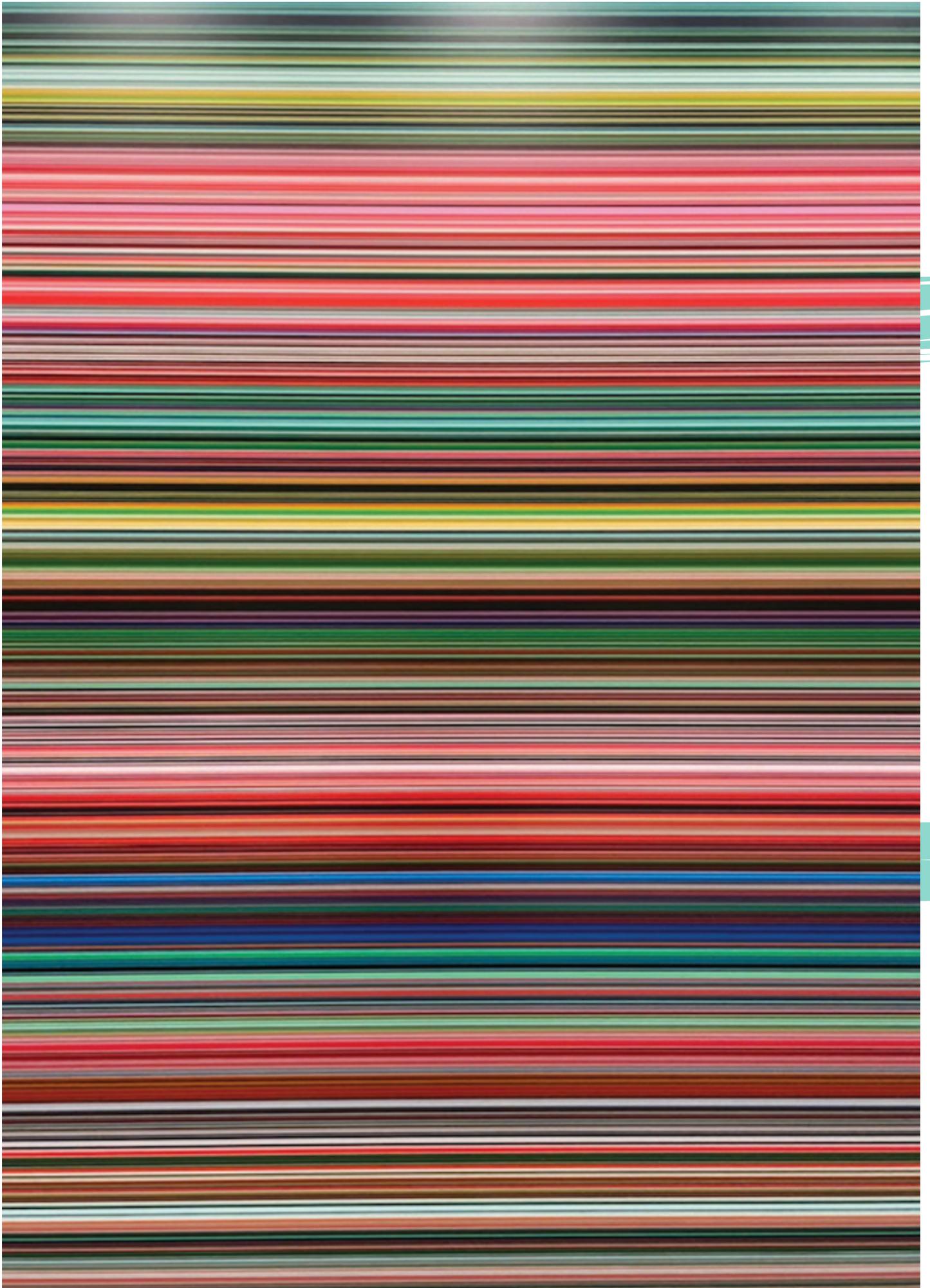
The space itself is a standard art exhibition space. The walls you first see as you exit the elevator explain some of the missions of the Louis Vuitton group and the history behind the works on display, in both English and Japanese. Beyond the first walls of the exhibition and to the left sit a few monitors and chairs running video footage of plays and musical performances that are also part of the Louis Vuitton art collections. Turn right, and you can see the first Richter works included in this exhibition.



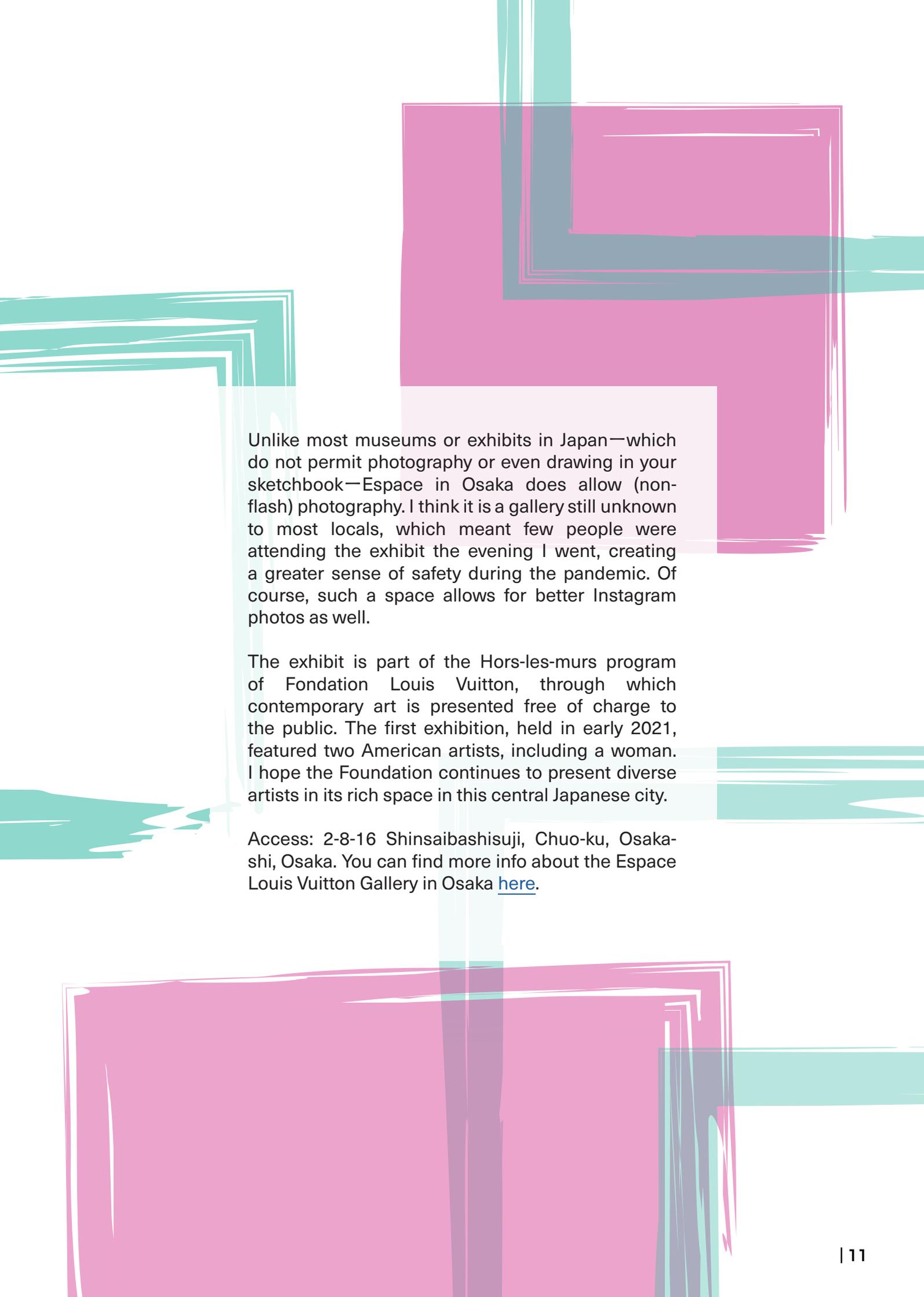
*Flow (933-4), 2013 (detail). Lacquer on glass. © Gerhard Richter.  
Photo taken by Monica Gonzales.*

The layout, in S-curve fashion, allows for observation of his interesting media changes and color palette development. I had only learned about Richter in the scope of his silver gelatin prints, but those are just his early works. It was a pleasant surprise to see the contrast between new silver prints, painted on with dull reds and dark greens, and some of his massive oil-on-canvas paintings, as well as colorful new pieces using other background materials or finishing surfaces. The oil-on-canvas works are heavily textured, and I spent most of my time trying to determine which strokes or splatters were the first layers and which came after. I enjoyed how Richter used uneven textures developed by previous layers to selectively add new colors. I always wonder how much of art is deliberate and how much is a result of good luck.

**I enjoyed how Richter used uneven textures developed by previous layers to selectively add new colors. I always wonder how much of art is deliberate and how much is a result of good luck.”**



*Strip (921-2), 2011 (detail). Digital print on paper. © Gerhard Richter.  
Photo taken by Monica Gonzales.*



Unlike most museums or exhibits in Japan—which do not permit photography or even drawing in your sketchbook—Espace in Osaka does allow (non-flash) photography. I think it is a gallery still unknown to most locals, which meant few people were attending the exhibit the evening I went, creating a greater sense of safety during the pandemic. Of course, such a space allows for better Instagram photos as well.

The exhibit is part of the Hors-les-murs program of Fondation Louis Vuitton, through which contemporary art is presented free of charge to the public. The first exhibition, held in early 2021, featured two American artists, including a woman. I hope the Foundation continues to present diverse artists in its rich space in this central Japanese city.

Access: 2-8-16 Shinsaibashisuji, Chuo-ku, Osaka-shi, Osaka. You can find more info about the Espace Louis Vuitton Gallery in Osaka [here](#).



**29. April '05**, 2005. Oil on color photograph. © Gerhard Richter.  
Photo taken by Monica Gonzales.



**Flow (933-6)**, 2013. Lacquer on glass. © Gerhard Richter.  
Photo taken by Monica Gonzales.

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## Teshima Island: Life Surrounded by the Sea and Art

by Astrid Estrada Diaz

Far from the busy metropolis of Tokyo, there is a secret art paradise just south of the Chugoku region of Japan in the Seto Inland Sea. The Setouchi islands south of Okayama prefecture and Hiroshima prefecture are known for their stunning views and art museums.

Having lived in Okayama prefecture for a while now, I have visited these islands many times. This is my guide to visiting one of these islands and what you can see, do and eat there!

Many have heard of the famous pumpkin . . . you know, that famous pumpkin created by Yayoi Kusama. You know, this one:





But have you ever heard of a smaller island right next to Naoshima? Teshima is an island in the Seto Inland Sea, known for having stunning seaside views, and is easily accessible by foot or bicycle. I headed there on a small commuter speed boat from Uno Port, right on the edge of Okayama prefecture. Just a short speed boat ride away is a beautiful art island where you can eat fantastic organic food and ride an electric bike all around the island to visit their cute eclectic cafes.

Renting an electric bicycle on the island is extremely easy. I recommend renting a bicycle or an electric bicycle because while walking around the island is possible, it can be very tiring. You can rent a bicycle from one of the various online websites for rentals on the island or wait until the day of and rent in person. I recommend reserving a bike beforehand because it might be difficult to reserve one when you arrive during peak season.



The sea views from this island on a bicycle are breathtaking. Riding down the hills and roads, I came across one of the [Benesse Art Sites](#), Teshima Art Museum. At this museum, you can see the works of Rei Naito, an artist known for her contemporary art, and Ryue Nishizawa, an architect who is known for his mix of modern architecture in natural environments.

Naito's famous work *Matrix* consists of water slowly moving out from the ground during different times of the day. You will be immersed with the sounds of wind, birds chipping, rain, and snow (depending on the time of the year), along with the changes in light coming from the opening in the ceiling of the *Matrix*. These sounds and

visual changes depict the meanings and expressions surrounding us as time passes. Many visitors around the hole of the exhibit spend their time taking in the sounds and feelings from this exhibit. This work is meant to be enjoyed in a quiet atmosphere.

As I sat around the *Matrix*, I could feel the ever-present feeling of being alive and the relief that I am still breathing and able to listen to these sounds. It's a profound experience to truly understand what it means to appreciate the fact I'm still alive to experience this sensation.





*Astrid on Teshima island*



*Umi Tota Restaurant*

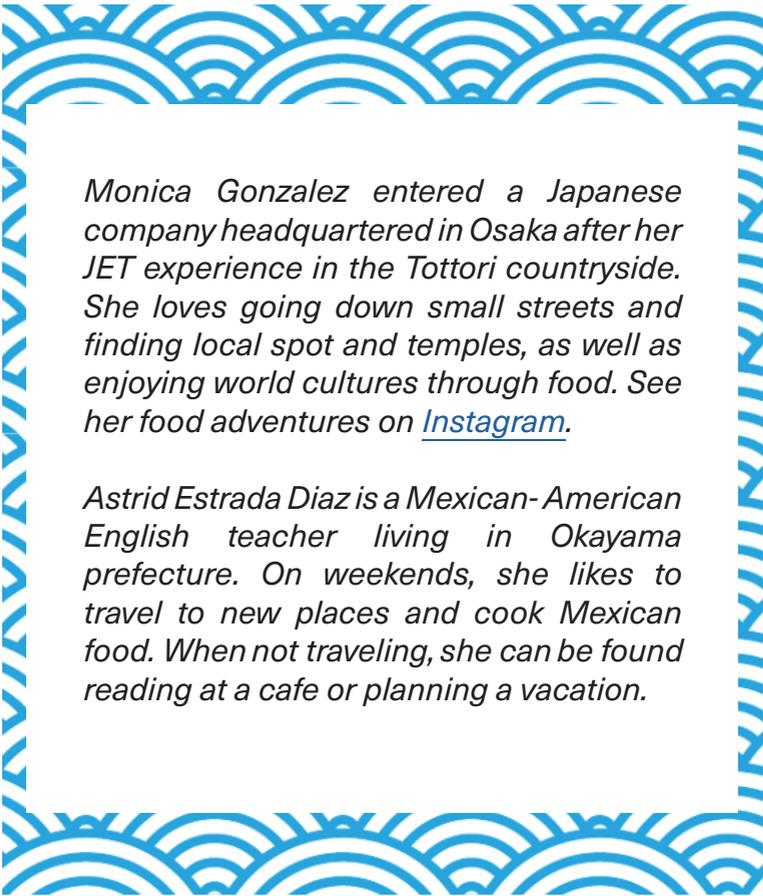
The museum contains a gift shop and a cafe that is minimalistic in design and sort of oval-shaped. Here, you can sit and enjoy the view of the artwork while sipping on a coffee or eating a small dessert.

In and of itself, Teshima Art Museum has a lovely garden surrounding it as Nishizawa's main focus of his work is to have modern architecture surrounded by nature. It is a beautiful yet interesting combination. This combination can also be seen in Tadao Ando's architectural designs at other Benesse Museums around Setouchi.

Walking around the museum gardens and taking in the expanding views of the sea gave me a sort of reflective peace and tranquility. After the museum, I stopped by

a famous cafe in Teshima—also known for its stunning views—Umi Tota Restaurant. The cafe features locally produced seasonal ingredients and has an outdoor terrace overlooking the port. Did I mention this island has a lot of cats hanging by the port? If you love exploring, I also recommend Commune Cafe & Bar, a cafe frequented by locals in the area.

Teshima island is a beautiful place that usually doesn't come to mind for most people when they think of the Setouchi Islands. Usually, it is overlooked by the famous art island, Naoshima, but I believe this smaller island has a lot to offer in terms of art and culture. I hope more people visit this island and enjoy zipping by on their electric bicycles. You might enjoy the ride!



*Monica Gonzalez entered a Japanese company headquartered in Osaka after her JET experience in the Tottori countryside. She loves going down small streets and finding local spots and temples, as well as enjoying world cultures through food. See her food adventures on [Instagram](#).*

*Astrid Estrada Diaz is a Mexican-American English teacher living in Okayama prefecture. On weekends, she likes to travel to new places and cook Mexican food. When not traveling, she can be found reading at a cafe or planning a vacation.*



## SPIRIT OF JAPAN

### Ukiyo-e Theater Installations from Paris

Jessica Craven (Saitama)

Most everyone who has lived in Japan for at least a year or two has probably seen a *ukiyo-e* exhibit—these woodblock prints are pretty uncontested as Japan’s most iconic art form. While the *ukiyo-e* (literally, “images of the [floating world](#)”) already display a high level of craftsmanship and capture dream-like images of the Edo period, “Spirit of Japan” exhibition by Danny Rose Studio makes the world and stories behind the prints more tangible than ever before.



The exhibition features twelve different video projections inspired by famous ukiyo-e prints, which are digitally projected and create the illusion of being inside the world of the prints themselves. The twelve short stories are complete with music and voice-over narration, allowing the audience to steep all of their senses in the world of ukiyo-e. The overall experience is much like watching animations come to life in a 3D space before your eyes—individual characters move in a stylized manner to depict the narrative, resulting in a kind of highly-elevated digital puppet theater.

A viewer can walk into the exhibition at any time, and the free audio guide will sync up with whichever projected video is currently playing. However, the stories are divided into twelve separate “acts,” a few of which I will cover in more detail.

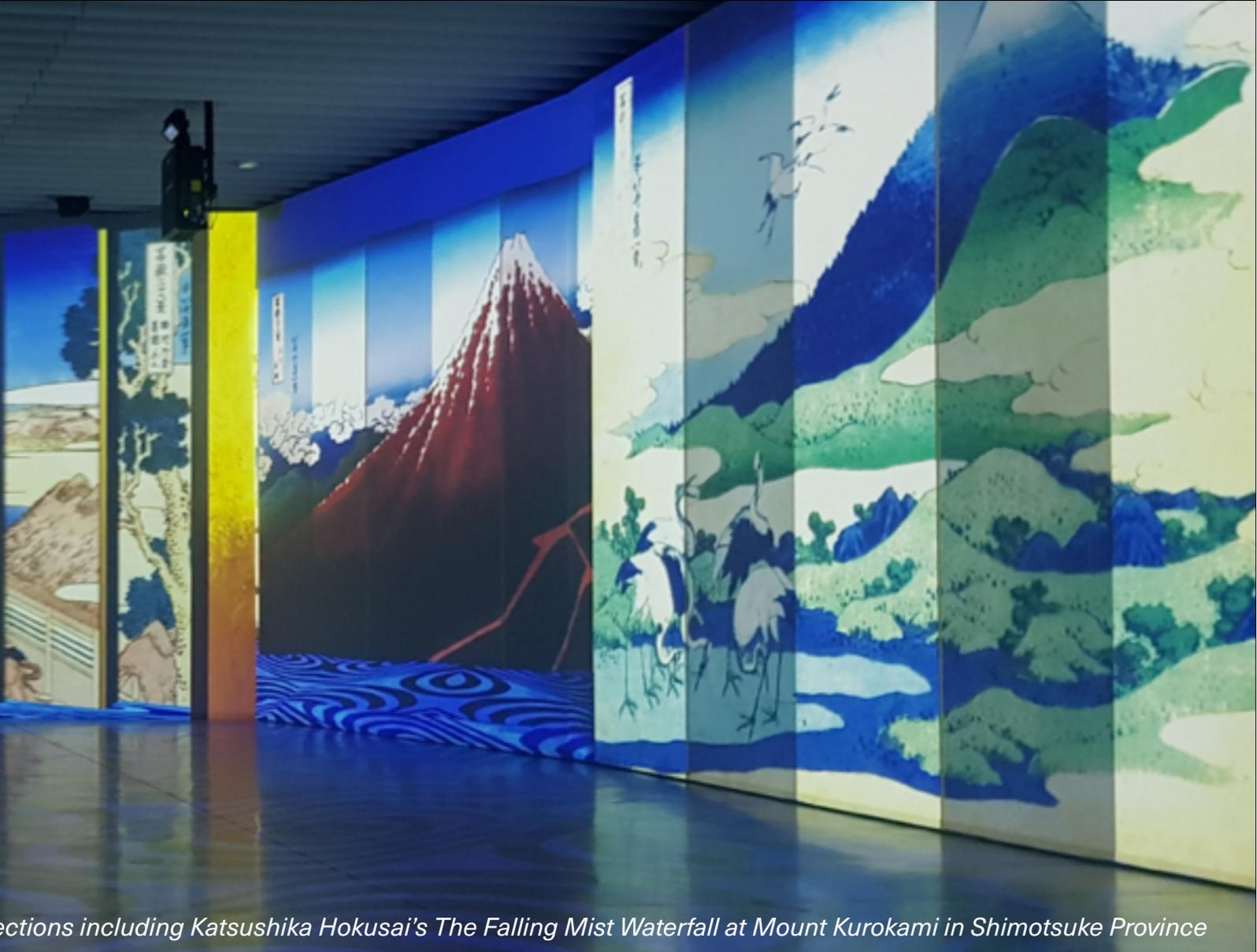


Ukiyo-e landscape proje

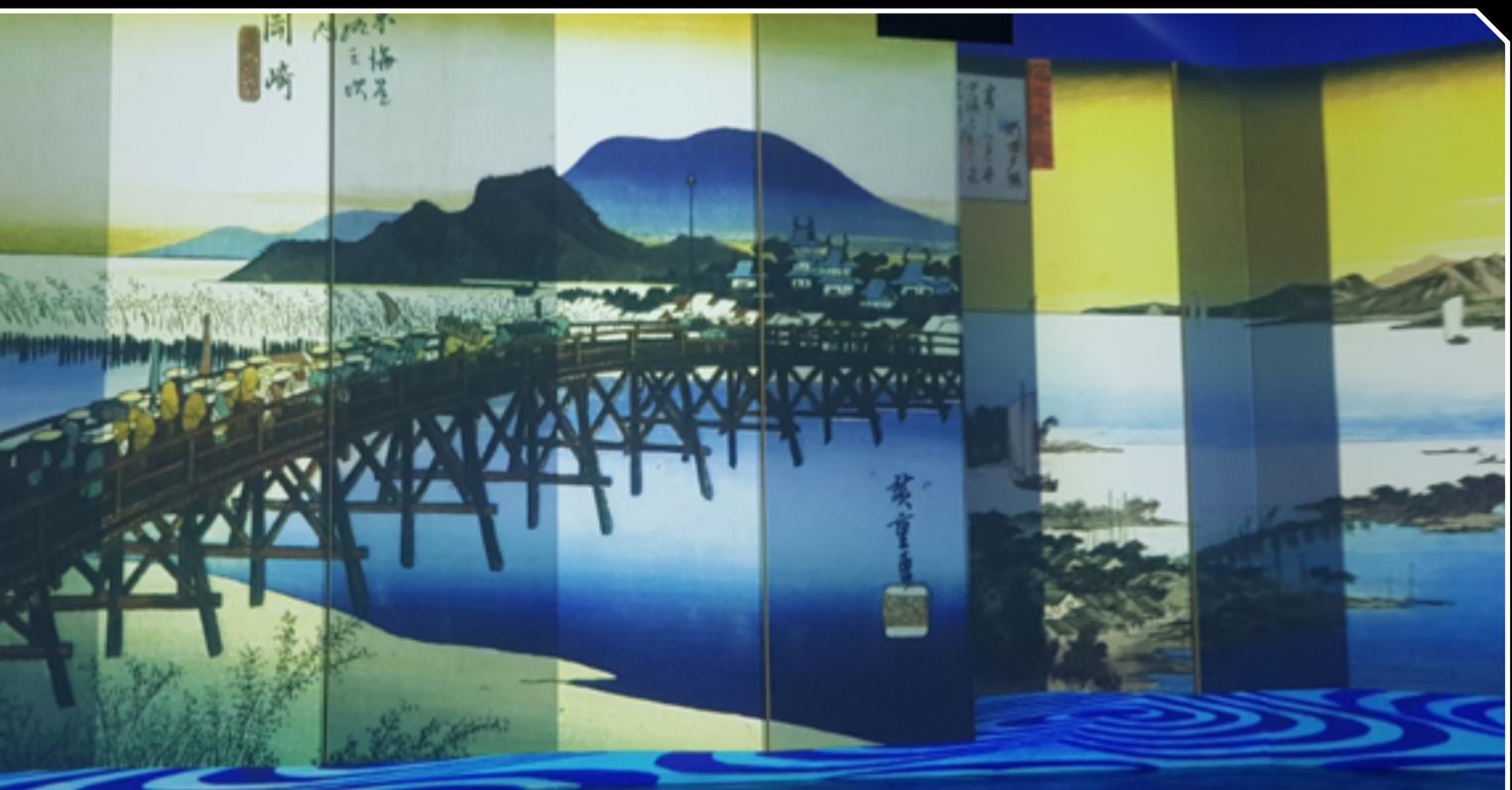
## ACT 1: LANDSCAPES

“Landscapes” brings many of the most famous prints of ukiyo-e masters to life, especially those of Hiroshige and Hokusai. Numerous prints are displayed simultaneously, filling the gallery’s entire walls and floor. As a result, the viewer is surrounded by the natural landscapes of Japan as they are depicted in ukiyo-e. Some of the most famous ones that I recognized as they came to life before me included Katsushika Hokusai’s *“The Falling Mist Waterfall at Mount Kurokami in Shimotsuke Province”* and Hiroshige’s *“Yahagi Bridge at Okazaki.”* This first act serves to steep the viewer into the idealized “floating world” as depicted in the stylized renderings of the ukiyo-e. The images unravel before you like traditional Japanese folding screens, which were how the prints were often traditionally viewed. However, the exhibition also contemporizes them through multimedia to create an entirely new viewing experience.





Projections including Katsushika Hokusai's *The Falling Mist Waterfall at Mount Kurokami in Shimotsuke Province*



Ukiyo-e landscape projections including Hiroshige's *Yahagi Bridge at Okazaki*

## ACT 4: THE SEA & ACT 5: FISHES

“The Sea” pays homage to the most iconic ukiyo-e print, recognized across the world— *The Great Wave off Kanagawa* by Katsushika Hokusai. The sound of ocean waves is quite a subtle touch, but along with the powerful instrumental music highlighting the majesty of the wave, gives an additional dimension to the work. “The Sea” transitions quite naturally into “Fishes,” whereas all of the other acts are largely unrelated to one another. Fish—a common subject of ukiyo-e—start to appear within the sea as the waves of Hokusai ebb and flow, and then various kinds of fish swim across the museum walls. The audience is transported from watching the waves of Hokusai crash above the sea surface to being submerged completely underwater and experiencing the oceanic world below.









## ACT 7: WOMEN

Although the women depicted in ukiyo-e are traditionally something beautiful to be passively gazed upon, the added dimensions of the video projections invite the viewer into the women's daily lives, which are merely a part of the background in the original prints. Although the audio narrative was only available in Japanese and my understanding of the story was limited, the figures of the women are enlarged and projected into the foreground of the digital images, clearly making them the active protagonists of their own story. While the empowerment of women during the Edo period, when the ukiyo-e prints flourished, was quite limited compared to contemporary times, the artists behind the video projections made a clear decision to go beyond the traditional objectification of women in artwork and empower them further. This was the right decision for our times, and why this act was my favorite of them all.



A trip to the [Kadokawa Culture Museum](#) disappoints—for both art lovers and fans alike. I especially enjoyed “Spirit of . . .” because it provided a new way to experience the quintessential Japanese art form of woodblock prints. The exhibition also points to the future of Japanese art and animation as it continues to evolve.



## ACT 11: KABUKI AND SAMURAI

What do kabuki theater and samurai even have in common? My general understanding is that kabuki was one of the first accessible forms of theater for the “common people,” and many samurai also came from a “commoner” background. As such, kabuki was a form of theater that was especially popular with the samurai. This act is complete with the sounds of swords clashing and quickly moving imagery that suggests a battle unfolding before you in real-time. The samurai quickly rise and fall in a stylistic way similar to the suggestive style of a kabuki performance. The visual scenes were broken up into panels similar to the way they are in contemporary manga, paying homage to the ukiyo-e’s influence on kabuki theater and the evolution of Japanese art forms as they exist today.

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*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](#).*

# Still Walking

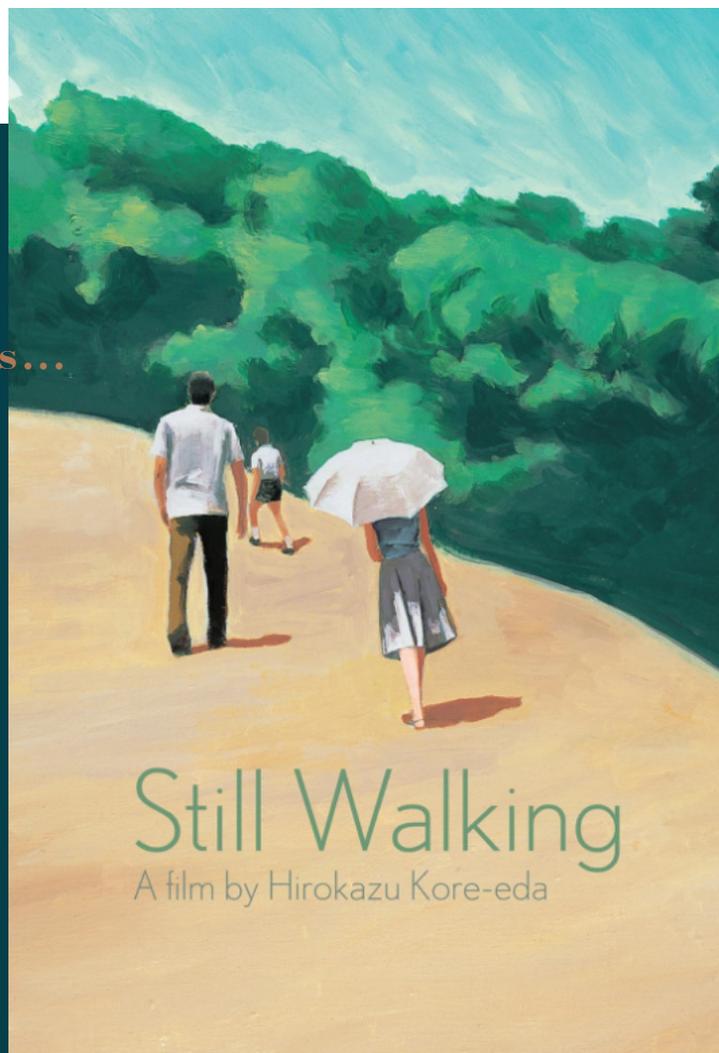
## Grief by Koreeda Hirokazu

Joe Jackson (Kochi)

### Accepting the impermanence of things...

Koreeda wrote, directed, and edited *Still Walking*, which came out in 2008 following his mother's death. It won eleven awards. His eight films since then are highly praised for their insight into family and everyday lives. A far cry from the Hollywood blockbuster, Koreeda has been likened to Japan's old master, Ozu Yasujiro, whose 1972 masterpiece *Tokyo Story* is regarded as one of the greatest films ever made.

Set in and around the Yokoyama family home in the seaside city of Yokohama, *Still Walking* revolves around Yokoyama Junpei's death. His siblings, Chinami and Ryota, return as custom on the anniversary of Junpei's death with their families, reuniting with their elderly parents—Kyohei and Toshiko are set in their ways; they haven't moved on like their children.





In *Still Walking*, we see each family member's vested interest come to light. For example, Chinami tries to expedite matters concerning her inheritance. Ryota, as the now eldest son, defies his responsibilities and expectations, going against both his father and Japanese tradition, discontinuing his father's life's work in the process. In terms of Yokohama's widowed wife Yukari, she copes with old prejudices and her son Atsushi must come to terms with losing his father.

Even after fifteen years, the anniversary of Junpei's death conjures up a host of emotions, resentments, and coping mechanisms which ebb and flow inside the Yokoyama's beautiful home like an ocean.

### **For Koreeda, the same things live on ...**

Like Ozu, Koreeda's subject matter centres around domestic, mundane places. His relationships are built up over time, are unique to his style, and so cannot be reproduced by others. Laziness then is certainly not the reason for reusing locations (as he does in *Our Little Sister* in 2015) or going without special effects. He cast Kiki Kirin—a veteran of Japanese cinema—repeatedly. Kiki famously refused roles she thought better suited somebody else. We know that Koreeda listened to her and Ehara Yukiko backstage, writing what they said into the script: "You have such a pretty forehead, you should show it off more." "What would make you uncomfortable?" "Commenting on my dimples." They have wonderful chemistry, bringing a light relief with their playful humour. (Kiki played Yokoyama Toshiko in *Still Walking*, sadly passing away in 2018.)

## Older generations struggle letting go...

Meticulous formal elements are put into action within the family scene. One such element is the Yokoyama's climbing arduous, steep steps to reach their home. We see Yukari struggle to climb them with baggage (literally). Kyohei and Toshiko, on the other hand, are used to scaling them and do so with relative ease. These stairs speak of ascension, a closeness to Junpei but also to old prejudices and the generational divide. The symbolism of steep steps plays a part in the Oscar-winning film *Parasite*, as well.

Koreeda said in an interview that "no one really says anything important." Though what's unsaid lingers in a congested and familial atmosphere. One way this is achieved is by "characters speaking their lines while doing something else." Underlying symbolism refers back to the elephant in the room.



For example, daikon radishes are phallic offerings to the Buddhist god of bliss. And, in juxtaposition, Chinami's children smack a watermelon behind a heated exchange. These are deliberate, obfuscating acts which allude to the family's bereavement.

In one scene, patriarch Kyohei interrupts his son in the foreground and scolds his grandchildren. "Don't hit the precious plant," he says. "It might break open."



## Even if we leave, it's still there ...

Though we might want to forget about grief, *Still Walking* shows us how the past lives on and why keeping it around us is helpful. This aggregation of contradictory ideas is seen through Koreeda's filmmaking techniques, too. The camera will follow a character leaving a scene, but the focal point remains the same. Accompanying Ryota as he sits on the bathroom floor, bending backwards (preparing a watermelon), we resume his conversation in the living room. This strained, claustrophobic moment shows the Yokoyama's as intimate and yet distant.

The narrator in Chris Marker's film *Sans Soleil* (a mediate meditation on memory in Japan) describes a similar scene where weary passengers are taking a ferry back from Hokkaido: "Small fragments of war enshrined in everyday life." Many of these passengers are contorted like Ryota. They are temporarily removed; in limbo.

This stepping away can be considered a displacement of time and it gives Ryota room to breathe. Take Atsushi too as he carefully observes Toshiko vehemently cleanse Junpei's grave. It's an experience that provides a glimpse into the future: what it may look like. By watching Toshiko grieve, Atsushi is more in tune with his new family and thus can better accept the world as it constantly evolves.

### **The Japanese entertain a closeness to death.**

Through the concept of enshrinement at Junpei's grave as well as their *kamidana* (household shrine), the Yokoyamas apply "the faculty of communing with things." This implies transportation; we can enter into and become something 'other.' *Sans Soleil's* narrator goes even further with a Japanese point of view that: "the partition that separates life from death does not appear so thick to us (as it does to a Westerner)." Besides the all-too-real threat of natural disaster, rituals such as the Tokorozawa Doll Memorial Celebration, where discarded dolls are brought to shrines to be burned, pervade Japan. (There are ceremonies for brushes, abacuses, and rusty needles, too.) Communing with these dolls not only mourns lost childhood (and therefore regains it, for a moment) but intercedes: the dolls are not forgotten, they are revered and remembered. By respecting the impermanence of things, these rituals bring us closer to death.

### **The innate uncertainty of life ...**

In *Still Walking's* final scene, the camera takes us up into the sky overlooking the sea; a body which "somehow remains unexplainable," as artist Wolfgang Tillmans says. "There's some kind of secret there. . . . the state of aggregation . . ."

By repeatedly using personal subject matter, Koreeda builds immense detail and deepens his bond as an authority in his field. The fact he made *Still Walking* following his mother's death makes it all the more poignant. I believe *Still Walking* gives us the sense that communing with things takes us out of non-linear time. Therefore, watching the Yokoyamas congregate is a great way to become closer whilst accepting the impermanence of things.

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*Joe Jackson is an ALT from England currently living in Aki, Kochi. He is an avid reader who enjoys playing football (soccer), practising calligraphy, and studying Japanese. An aspiring translator, Joe is keen for opportunities to write.*

# Let's Promise to Be Happy



ALBUM

RECOMMENDED



Artist: JYOCHO  
Release date: February 16, 2022  
Ryon Morrin (Hokkaido)

Formerly of quintessential math rock band Uchu Conbini, guitarist Daijiro and his bandmates in JYOCHO continue to pave a new path for the genre with their impressively technical, yet gracefully gentle new album, *Let's Promise to Be Happy*. Laden with soft, tender vocals from keyboardist Netako Nekota and percussive, flowing fingerstyle guitar from Daijiro, the combination proves to be genuinely beautiful. These songs are heavy and heartfelt, drawing deep emotions to the surface. This is not to say *Let's Promise to Be Happy* is purely melancholic. There are plenty of melodies that beam like the sun, lifting spirits. The final minute of "Measure the Dawn" is stuffed full with gargantuan-sounding drums, powerful dual vocals, room-filling piano chords, and a whisper-soft, yet still present flute; they join forces to create a grandly triumphant sixty seconds.

It's easy to get lost in the depth of the songs on *Let's Promise to Be Happy*. "All the Same" is a prime example of JYOCHO's knack for crafting dense songs with a seemingly uncountable number of layers. With each listen, a new detail can be discovered within the track. They're playing together, but oftentimes, they're meandering down their own unique route, straying from the main road, yet still reaching the same destination.

"Gather the Lights" features Daijiro's electric riffs at the forefront with copious amounts of two-handed tapping. It's reminiscent of his work with Uchu Conbini, and longtime fans should appreciate it. The song also features one of the strongest vocal performances on the album from Nekota, reaching high into her range at times. The vocal harmonies are also strong, filling out an already jam-packed track.

“The End of Sorrow” opens simply with some plucked guitar chords carrying an off-kilter rhythm, reminiscent of 90’s midwest emo. Before long, a subtle, but swift drum beat joins in, picking up the pace. It’s faster and more aggressive, but also stripped down in comparison to the other songs on *Let’s Promise to Be Happy*. The energy is stepped up, and it sets the stage for the wall of sound towards the end of “Measure the Dawn.”

The production on this album is crystal clear; there isn’t a blemish to be found. It is legitimately pristine audio. Guitar tones are sharp and always at the top but not to an excessive degree. Bass blends in the background well, but isn’t completely drowned out. Flute and keys float across the top of it all, keeping their presence known. Drums are prominent but not excessively so. Overall, the mix is balanced and crisp, allowing listeners to get at each layer of the songs.

JYOCHO’s *Let’s Promise to Be Happy* is both melodically gorgeous and technically impressive. Its technicality isn’t heavy handed or tacky; it’s a tasteful exercise in songwriting with the virtuosity of each member. It’s restrained enough to be accessible to those unfamiliar with the genre, but *Let’s Promise to Be Happy*’s layered complexity will still draw in die hard math rock fans.

You can stream *Let’s Promise to Be Happy* now on Spotify, YouTube Music, and Apple Music.



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

The gunfighter, rebel, pilot, and gambler stand before the entrance of a tomb. Soldiers aren't too far behind them but by the time they get here, the devastating weapon hidden behind these ancient locks will be long gone. The gunfighter looks blankly at the hieroglyphics and swears, "i knew i should have swapped one of my companions for the linguist . . ."

Brought to you by developers Robotality and publisher Chucklefish, of *Wargroove* and critically-acclaimed *eastward* fame, *Pathway* is tactical turn-based rpg roguelite set in an Indiana-Jones-esque 1930s Nazi invasion of Egypt. Anyone who knows me understands by that sentence why I couldn't wait to get my hands on this title while waiting for my next Fire Emblem fix.

You begin your expedition by picking a team of three adventurers from a pool of six. Each of these characters, as well as the further 10 that can be unlocked, come with a set of stats, skills, and perks that reflect the old-timey adventurer trope they represent.

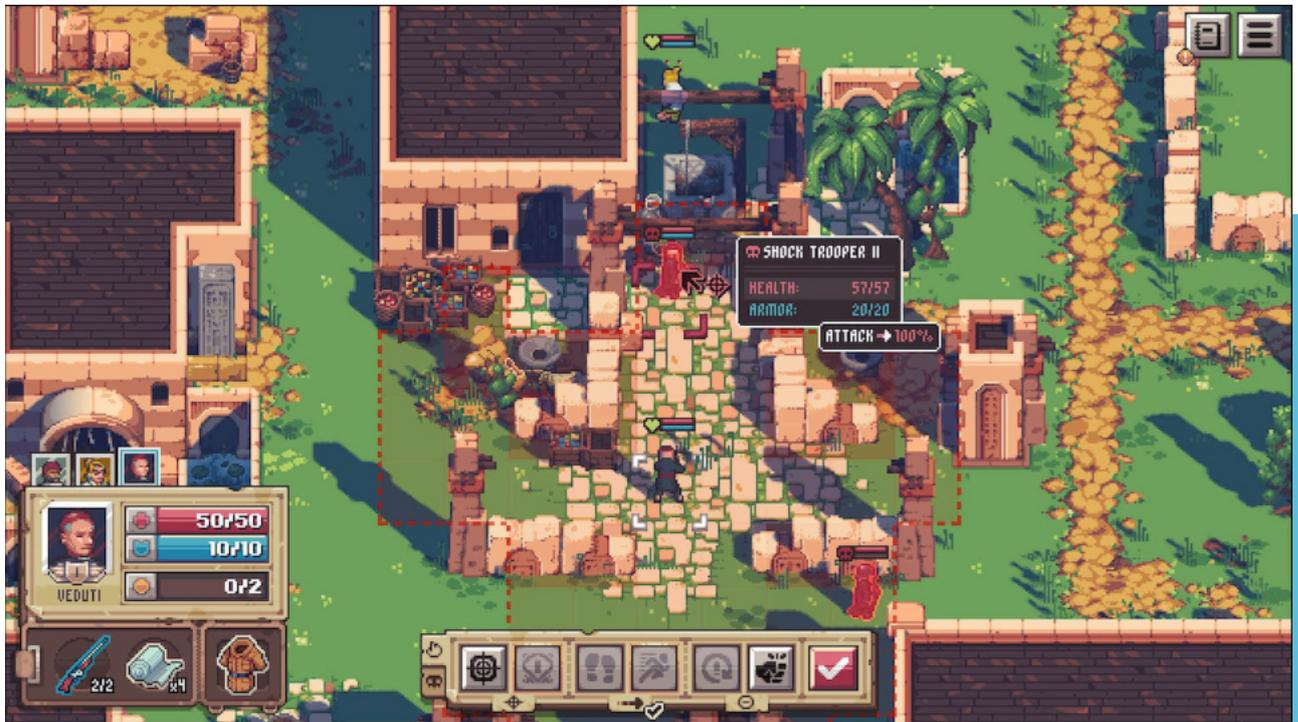
Character skills determine which weapon, armor, and item types can be used while perks are generally bonuses that provide passive in-battle benefits like extra damage against enemies or an event perk



which can provide you alternate story options. That ominous dark monolith inscribed with otherworldly hieroglyphs pulsing in eerie purple light? Thanks to your ancient language expert, you're able to leave without it melting the skin from your bones!

Characters can earn XP from explorations or battles to upgrade their skills or learn new ones. However, each character has a predetermined set of skills available on their skill tree and resetting those skills comes with a high cost, so choose wisely!

After choosing your adventurer and team, you'll be shown a map with many branching paths to explore. Each path leads to some kind of event like a trader, ancient ruins, villages, points of interest, and even the chance to recruit a fourth team member!



While you'll be tempted to visit every spot via an adorable driving animation accompanied by an epic soundtrack, you only have so much fuel to reach your goal. Sure, you might find extra fuel along the way or like me you might push your luck and end up with a really cool gun... stranded amidst the burning desert sand.

While traveling, some of the events on your chosen path will clearly be or potentially turn into battles. In a turn-based RPG style, you choose attacks, special abilities like healing, where to move, or to reload. Those last two really raise the tension as critical parts of the area provide cover (at the cost of line-of-sight ranged accuracy) and not keeping track of your ammo can quickly put you in a vulnerable position. The enemy AI, while sometimes annoying, is smart enough to take advantage of this. The design of the stages is fantastic and keeps things interesting despite the fact you'll often repeat maps.

The tricky part might be the death system. If a character is downed for too long without being healed, they'll die and require quite a bit of money to be revived. This can only be done at the loadout screen at the start of each adventure. Until the later stages where money and cost reduction perks are more available, you'll want to spend as much as possible on fuel and supplies instead of revivals.

Despite the relatively short campaign playthrough length (around 30 hours at normal difficulty), sometimes painfully small text and noticeable repetition, *Pathway* is an absolute bargain at \$16 aud. Even more so if you're like me and make up your own stories about the different character's relationships and what happens to them, making the replay value enormous. Onward! Into the glory beyond the sands!

*Atul is a traveling gamer whose curiosity currently has him stumbling around Japan chasing stories and inspiration—to the endless amusement of his students and to the eventual horror of those playing in his Dungeons & Dragons games.*



# APRIL RELEASES

Fergus Gregg (Kobe)

## MOVIES

### April 8

- Sonic the Hedgehog 2 (2022)
- Fantastic Beasts: The Secrets of Dumbledore (2022)

### April 15

- Hatching (2022)

### April 20

- Paranoid: Everything Wipe from the Beginning (2022)

### April 22

- Marry Me (2022)
- Dragon Ball Super: Super Hero (2022)
- Crayon Shin-chan: Mononoke Ninja Chinpuden (2022)

### April 23

- Petrov's Flu (2021)
- Terra Willy (2019)

### April 29

- XxxHolic (2022)
- Kikai Sentai Zenkaiger vs Kiramager vs Senpaiger (2022)
- Radiation House (2022)
- Gekijouban Re: cycle of the Penguindrum - Movie 1 (2022)



# GAMES



## April 1

- Terrorbane (PC, Switch)

## April 5

- Lego Star Wars: The Skywalker Saga (PC, PS4, PS5, Xbox One, Xbox Series X/S, Switch)
- MLB The Show 22 (Switch)

## April 7

- Chrono Cross: The Radical Dreamers Edition (PC, PS4, Xbox One, Switch)
- Out There: Oceans of Time (PC)
- Chinatown Detective Agency (PC, Xbox One, Switch)
- Forgive Me Father - official launch (PC)

## April 8

- Boreal Tenebrae (Xbox Series X/S, Xbox One, Switch)

## April 12

- 13 Sentinels: Aegis Rim (Switch)
- Hearthstone: Voyage to the Sunken City (PC, iOS, Android)
- Uragun - Steam Early Access (PC)

## April 14

- Road 96 (PS4, PS5, Xbox One, Xbox Series X/S)

## April 20

- Star Wars: The Force Unleashed (Switch)

## April 21

- Lumote: The Mastermote Chronicles (PC, PS4, Xbox One, Switch)
- MotoGP 22 (PC, PS4, PS5, Xbox One, Xbox Series X/S, Switch)

## April 26

- The Serpent Rogue (PC, PS5, Xbox Series X/S, Switch)
- King Arthur: Knight's Tale - official launch (PC)
- Zombie Army 4: Dead War (Switch)

## April 27

- Holomento - Early Access (PC)

## April 29

- Nintendo Switch Sports (Switch)
- Exophobia (PC, PS4, PS5, Xbox One, Xbox Series X/S, Switch)

## Sources:

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

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





# Living in Shikoku, Dealing with Disaster

Joe Jackson (Kochi)

**A** big part of life in Aki, Kochi, is disaster culture—and as it happens, I live there.

South-easterly situated on Shikoku, the smallest of Japan's four main islands, Kochi Prefecture is swelteringly humid, with some ALTs calling it "the Florida of Japan." Its tropical climate means Kochi is prone to storms and full-blown typhoons, with monsoons arriving in June and lasting until July. Thanks to global warming, this weather is becoming more extreme. Within Kochi, the City of Aki, with a population of 16,000 people, is right by tsunami-affected coastline.

To make matters worse, Aki faces the southwestern end of the Nankai Trough: an ocean trench created by the convergent plate tectonics of the Philippine Sea Plate and the Eurasian Plate. These plates are moving towards each other at a speed of several centimetres per year. Subsequent strain from this convergence gets released every 100 to 150 years in the form of mega earthquakes, more simply called *Nankai*, triggering massive

tsunamis. These Nankai often occur in pairs. Over 700 kilometres of Japanese coastline may be affected by the next Nankai, depending on its epicentre. Estimated to cost a whopping ¥215 trillion (£1.3 trillion) in damage, the next Nankai is 70-80% likely to happen within the next 30 years. The tsunami resulting from the next Nankai is predicted to be 34 metres high in Kochi, with an estimated arrival time of 2 minutes.

People, like me, who are from natural disaster-safe havens like England are unprepared for events like these. So how do the Japanese in Aki and elsewhere in the country deal with those all-too-real threats? According to Ono Tatsuo, a life-long Aki resident who survived the magnitude 8.4 Nankai in 1946, very practically. "It's important," Mr. Ono begins, "to have multiple evacuation routes and to know your local area." He said to identify boggy areas, to heed sirens, and to leave shoes and a torch by your bedside. "There's nothing to do apart from get on with it."

76 years ago, Mr. Ono lost his great grandmother in the house next to him. The house collapsed like many others due to intense shaking. He remembers someone shouting, “A tsunami is coming,” and having no choice but to run for higher ground. “You can’t stop to help people,” he said. “It’s a case of saving your own life.” At that time, Mr. Ono was 6 years old.

Of course, a single individual can only do so much when dealing with natural disasters—the Japanese state has funded numerous projects along the country’s Pacific coastline to protect key infrastructure, like in Shizuoka Prefecture where ¥33 billion was spent on a 15-metre-high, 17.5-kilometre-long sea wall. Elsewhere, and staggeringly, almost 50% of Japan’s 35,000 kilometre coastline utilises concrete tetrapods and other structures to mitigate coastal erosion. Seeing these brutalist-looking sea walls, however, is a stark reminder of Japan’s pervasive risk of disaster. As of right now, Aki’s and many other parts of the Japanese coastline are unobstructed by sea walls. During the Nankai in 1946, Aki wasn’t in need of tsunami protection like a



Tsunami Evacuation Sign on Postbox

sea wall due to Cape Muroto’s geography protecting it from the earthquake’s epicentre in the east, but who’s to say the Nankai Trough won’t rupture further south? There’s still much about the Nankai earthquakes that are shrouded in mystery.

North of Cape Muroto in Tokushima Prefecture, there is a tour hosted by Gunji Sanao from the Kaiyo-Cho Museum. Considered a pilgrimage like Shikoku’s famous *ohenro*, the path the tour follows is made up of shrines, temples, monuments, and memorials.

The Kaisho-Ki memorial, which is related to the 1854 Nankai, recounts the disaster: “Shaking increased around 10 p.m., and the people on the hill intoned in the Pure Land Buddha’s name, “*Namu Amida Butsu*” or “Take refuge in Amida Buddha.”

An epitaph in Kannon Jizo Temple, memorialising the 1707 Nankai, says, “After the earthquake, a tsunami with a wave height



of 9 metres arrived, reached the foot of the hill, and soon withdrew. Except for Senkoji Temple, all the houses were carried into the sea and about 140 people drowned.”

The recurring themes of awareness and humility in the face of disaster make their way into the records of places on Mr. Gunji’s tour.

“Some people were worried about this strange weather and brought their belongings to the top of the mountain (Asakawa-Tenjin Shrine, 1854 Nankai).”

“Even today, we must be vigilant when a great earthquake occurs and the temperature is not that expected for the season (Senkoji Temple, 1861 Nankai).”

“Though there were scarcely any goods shortly after the [Pacific] War, aid came to us from many areas. We establish this monument to remember with heartfelt gratitude the aid we received (Tenjin Shrine, 1946 Nankai).”

There is a detailed account in modern Japanese of the earthquakes and tsunamis which struck the town of Shishikui, entitled *Shin-Cho-Ki*. You can see it in the fishing village of Asakawa, which was also on Mr. Gunji’s tour. Its author, Haruyo Tai, was honoured in 1998 when *Shin-Cho-Ki* became a designated cultural asset of Japan.

Returning to Mr. Ono, when I asked him about *The Wave*, Hokusai’s famous woodblock print of a powerful surge of water towering over tiny people beside it, he laughed frankly at



Tsunami Evacuation Tower

my suggestion that it may hold deeper meaning. “It doesn’t have a message, it’s just a wave.”

I believe what Mr. Ono said summarises disaster culture in Japan: the frequency of natural disasters is so commonplace that being overwhelmed by them all the time wouldn’t make sense. Trains don’t come to a standstill when it snows here compared to a relatively disaster-safe place like England. Disasters aren’t rare in Japan, so the stakes are much higher. A practical mindset is necessary to survive and live normally after disasters. The onus is on all Japanese to be prepared in the event of disaster, and they work together to achieve this. Villages, towns, and cities have tannoy speakers that blare out warnings; schools and municipalities organise evacuation drills; and the government overrides radio



and smartphones to provide information in the nick of time. Japan's seismology is studied scrupulously around the world for its capacity to predict earthquakes earlier. Having said that, people here have also learned to be self-reliant whenever disaster strikes.

Empowerment from preparedness and practicality is a big part of culture here in Japan. A siren goes off everyday at noon in my city of Aki as proof of this. It may be cumbersome and stressful to be reminded to be vigilant all the time, but it goes some way into explaining how the Japanese are able to recover time and time again from disaster with their livelihoods rebuilt and dignity intact.



Tsunami Evacuation Sign, Aki City

*Joe Jackson is an ALT from England currently living in Aki, Kochi. He is an avid reader who enjoys playing football (soccer), practising calligraphy, and studying Japanese. An aspiring translator, Joseph is keen for opportunities to write.*

**Sources:**

[Official Youtube Channel for Disaster Management \(Cabinet Office of the Government of Japan\)](#)

**Image Credits:**

Photos  
Abstract vector created by rawpixel.com



# From Mount Koya to Shikoku

## Learning to be a Pilgrim

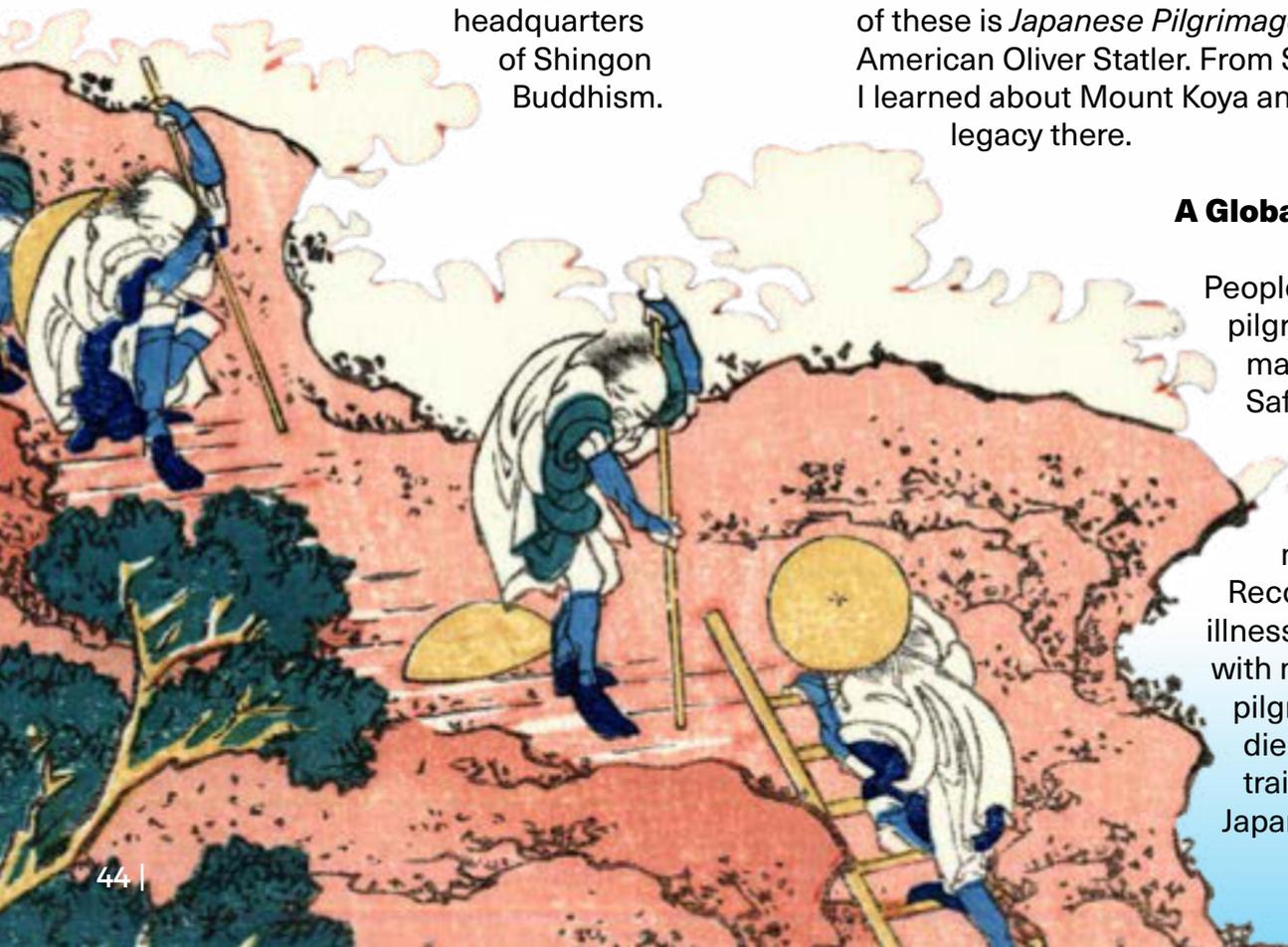
Daniel Cruse (Ehime)

For many of us, Kukai (774-835) is the most important Japanese man we've barely heard of. A renowned calligrapher, he is argued to have been responsible for the invention of Hiragana. As a religious leader (known posthumously as Kobo Daishi), he founded the Shingon (or "true word") sect of Esoteric Buddhism. Many of the most famous pilgrimage routes of western Japan, including western Honshu's 33-temple [Saikoku Kannon](#) and the [Shikoku 88](#), are connected to Shingon. From 819 until his death, Kukai lived and taught on Mount Koya, in the mountains of Wakayama. It remains, to this day, the headquarters of Shingon Buddhism.

I first heard about Kukai in 2019. I was preparing to move to Ehime in Shikoku from Iwate Prefecture, and the first thing I learned about the island and its culture was the existence of an 88-temple Shingon pilgrimage. For centuries, pilgrims from around Japan have walked, prayed, and meditated here. The Japanese experience of pilgrimage is well represented in the book *Musume Junreiki*. Its author, Takamura Itsue, a young upper-class woman, traveled to Shikoku from Kyushu in 1918. In recent decades, a substantial body of pilgrimage memoirs has been published by pilgrims from all around the world; the most famous of these is *Japanese Pilgrimage* by the American Oliver Statler. From Statler's book, I learned about Mount Koya and Kukai's legacy there.

### A Global Pilgrimage

People undertake pilgrimages for many reasons. Safe childbirth was one major historical motivation. Recovery from illness was another, with many sick pilgrims having died along the trail. One non-Japanese pilgrim



I had the pleasure to meet was Astrid Westerbeek, a Dutch-born New Zealander. She first came to Japan in 2016 to undertake a two-week walking pilgrimage. When I asked her about why she came all this way to visit Shikoku's temples, Astrid answered, "After recovering from a serious illness . . . I wanted to thank the gods above and the hospital staff for giving me a second chance at life and finding enlightenment. I also felt the need to do something big to acknowledge that I'd gone through a major event in my life and taken a side journey on my life's trajectory . . . Visiting the temples allowed me to express my gratitude, and I prayed for peace, health, and happiness . . . The pilgrimage made me a finely balanced person. It was the most amazing experience of my life."

Near the end of 2019, my partner moved from northern Japan to Nara Prefecture, one of the ancient centers of Japanese Buddhism. Visits to Japanese temples were mainly a fascinating cultural experience for me at first, but for her, they held a deeper religious meaning.

One day, while enjoying the plum blossoms on Mount Yoshino with friends, my partner and I decided to buy wooden *goshuincho* ("books of seals"). We wanted to collect temple calligraphy with the *goshuincho*, so together, we decided to explore the 13-temple [Nara Jusan Butsu Pilgrimage](#) and the 4-temple [Nara-Yamato Pilgrimage](#). One of the four Nara-Yamato temples is Muroji, a beautiful mountain temple known as the "women's Koyasan" because of its long history of welcoming female worshippers.



Statue of "Rubbing" Kobo Daishi with sign that says: "For each illness (head, eyes, hip, legs, etc.), touch the Daishi with your right hand, place your left hand to the part of your body that hurts, and make your request."



Entrance gate to the Danjo Garan Temple Complex



Kobo Daishi (left) and other religious imagery in Kongobuji Temple

My friend, Astrid, in Shikoku 88 pilgrimage attire



Approach to Kokubuji Temple



Temple office for the Oku-no-In Temple mausoleum at Mount Koya

**I also felt the need to do something big to acknowledge that I'd gone through a major event in my life and taken a side journey on my life's trajectory . . . Visiting the temples allowed me to express my gratitude, and I prayed for peace, health, and happiness . . .**

## The Mountain Temple

In January 2020, we took advantage of *Hatsumode* to get free admission to numerous temples. After going to Abe Monjuin Temple, our last stop on the Nara-Yamato Pilgrimage, we then decided to make a longer trip to the heartland of Shingon Buddhism: Mount Koya.

Leaving midmorning for Mount Koya, it was a ninety-minute drive from southern Nara Prefecture (two hours from Nara City). It had recently snowed in the mountains; we parked in a public lot lined with snow drifts. Across the main street was the front gate, and beyond it Kongobuji, the administrative center of Shingon Buddhism.

Thanks to *Hatsumode*, the temple offered free entry. I left my *goshuincho* at the temple office with the priests, who for ¥ 500 incised my first temple seal of the day. We were welcomed inside by a large cut-out image of “Koya-kun,” a diminutive robe-and-hat-wearing mascot character commemorating the 1200th-year anniversary of the opening of the holy mountain. The chilly wooden corridors were full of religious wall-paintings, ornate door carvings, and placards about the

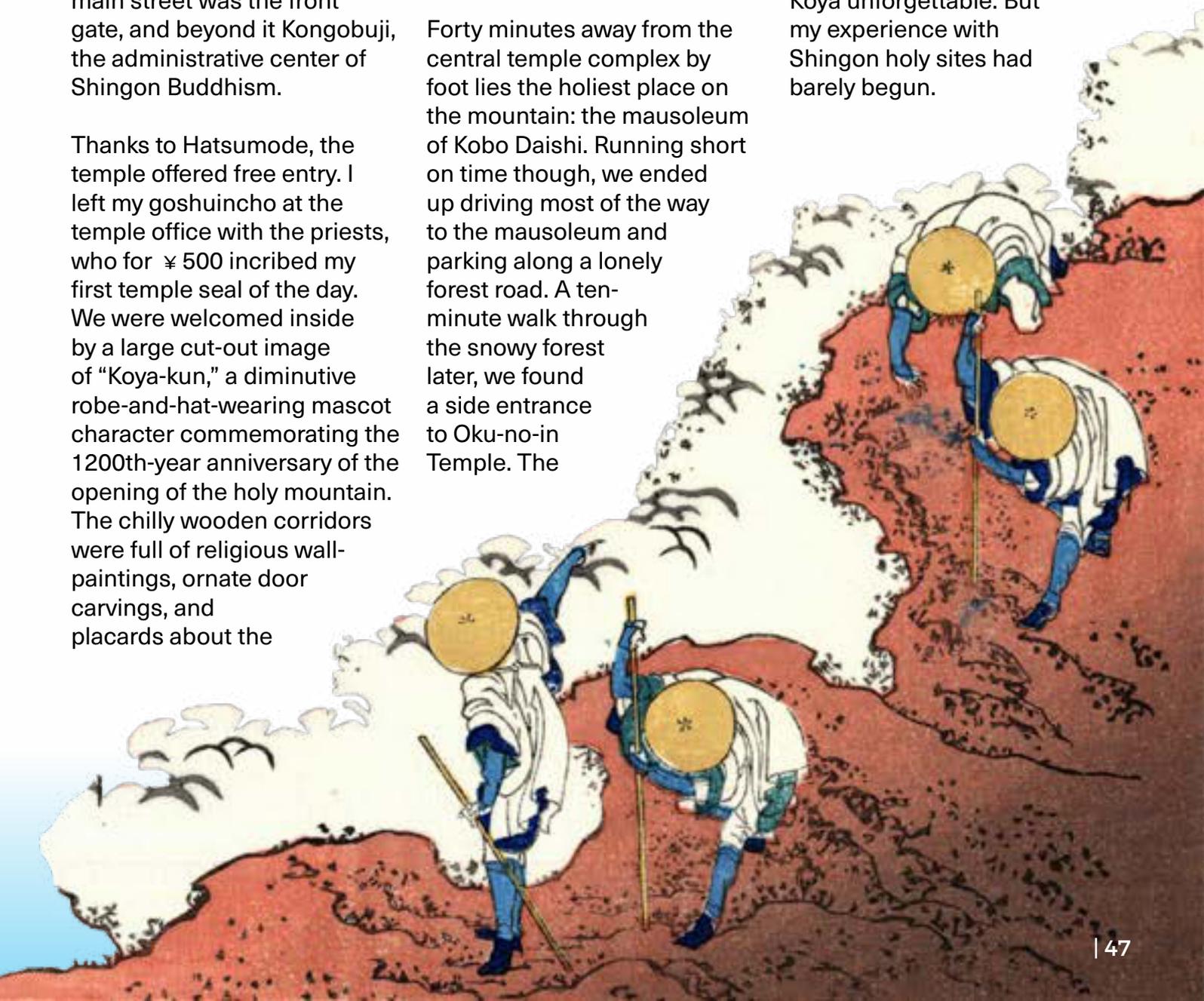
disciples of Kobo Daishi who had tended to the temple complex after its founder passed away. Outside the Edo-period gardens, the umbrella pines were blanketed in snow.

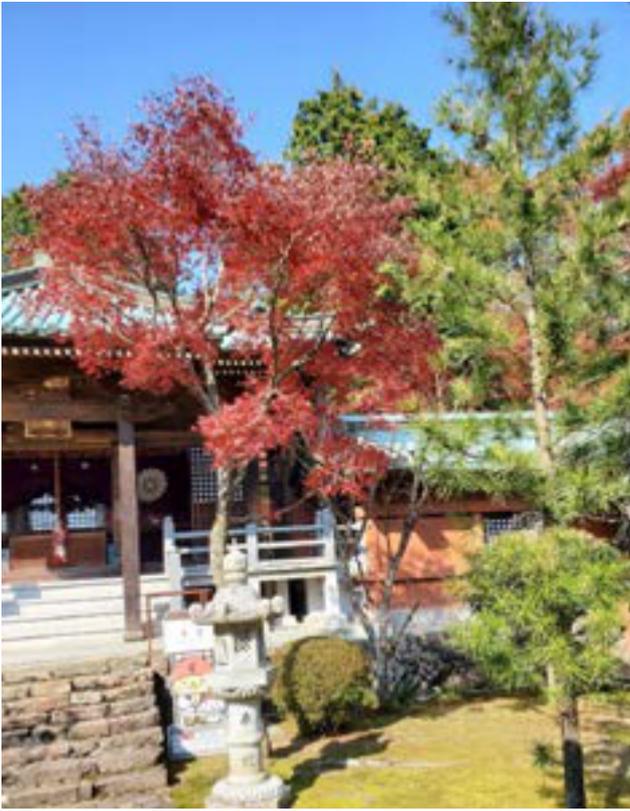
Continuing on foot through the Danjo Garan Sacred Temple Complex, we walked past brilliant orange-red pagodas and mausoleums and crossed a bridge over a frozen pond. One temple sold prayer candles for the [2011 Tohoku tsunami](#) and [2016 Kumamoto earthquake](#). I picked up another temple seal across from the Konpon Daito, a 49-meter two-storied pagoda.

Forty minutes away from the central temple complex by foot lies the holiest place on the mountain: the mausoleum of Kobo Daishi. Running short on time though, we ended up driving most of the way to the mausoleum and parking along a lonely forest road. A ten-minute walk through the snowy forest later, we found a side entrance to Oku-no-in Temple. The

temple office—its purple, green, yellow, red, and white cloth *goshikimaku* hanging from its wooden eaves—offered a choice of four temple seals with different Chinese character combinations. The stone path to the mausoleum was lined with pines, stone lanterns, *jizo* statues, and family graves, all covered in snow. The mausoleum inside the temple was well-attended that day, but despite the crowds, I felt immense calm.

The serendipitous sunny weather, snow-blanketed pagodas, and millennia-old religious architecture all helped make our visit to Mount Koya unforgettable. But my experience with Shingon holy sites had barely begun.





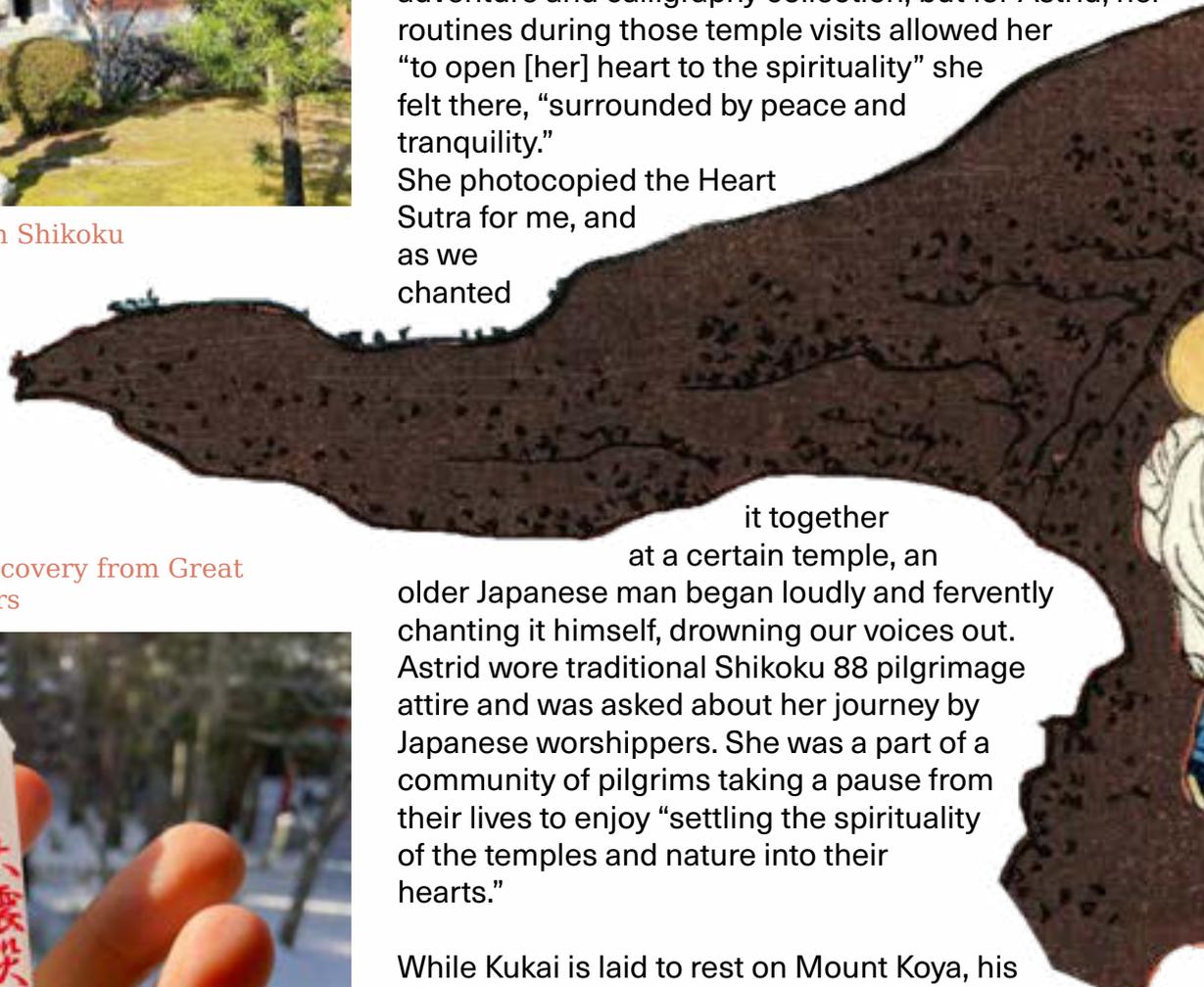
Shiromine Temple in Shikoku

## Sanuki Shingon

In late 2021, I invited my pilgrim friend Astrid to drive together to visit Shingon temples in Kagawa. I had picked out these temples based on Google map reviews raving about wonderful fall colors. Astrid had been a walking pilgrim, this was her first time “hopping” by car. She had been a bit of a purist about only walking pilgrimages, but we both ended up enjoying our pilgrimage very much. Astrid acted as my guide, teaching me the proper way to visit a Shingon temple: bowing upon entry, cleaning the hands and mouth, ringing the temple bell, praying the Heart Sutra in the main hall and the Daishi hall dedicated to Kukai, and then finally collecting stamps and calligraphy for our temple book.

I had previously seen temple visits as a chance for adventure and calligraphy collection, but for Astrid, her routines during those temple visits allowed her “to open [her] heart to the spirituality” she felt there, “surrounded by peace and tranquility.”

She photocopied the Heart Sutra for me, and as we chanted



Prayer candle for recovery from Great Earthquake Disasters



...it together  
...at a certain temple, an older Japanese man began loudly and fervently chanting it himself, drowning our voices out. Astrid wore traditional Shikoku 88 pilgrimage attire and was asked about her journey by Japanese worshippers. She was a part of a community of pilgrims taking a pause from their lives to enjoy “settling the spirituality of the temples and nature into their hearts.”

While Kukai is laid to rest on Mount Koya, his birthplace is in present-day Kagawa Prefecture in Shikoku. Months after our visit to Mount Koya, I purchased a textbook with a page for a calligraphy seal from each of the 88 Shikoku temples. The first page is reserved for Mount Koya. After spending two-and-a-half years in Ehime, I’m only a fourth of the way through visiting the Shikoku temples, but someday, I hope to fill my book. When that’s done, I’ll be due for another visit to Kukai’s holy mountain.

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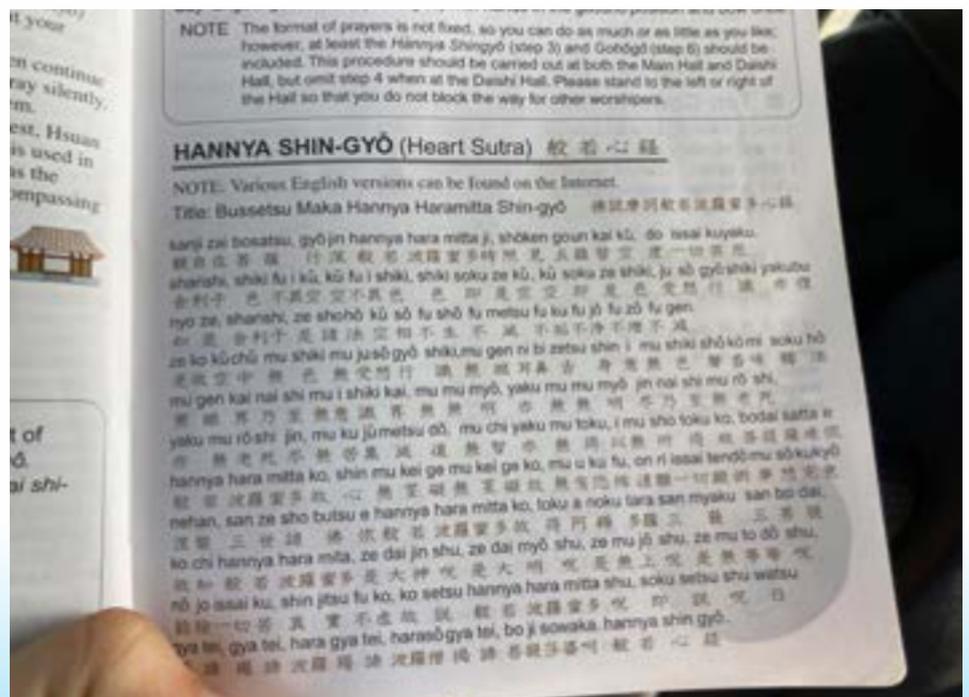
三十三景  
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 登山

*Daniel Cruse is a CIR in Shikokuchuo City, Ehime. He was a JET ALT in southern Iwate from 2016-2019. He hails from Oregon in the USA and enjoys music, mountains, and travel. His Instagram handle is [@dbasimc](#).*

Image vectors created from-  
*Fuji Pilgrim by Hokusai*

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Excerpt of Heart Sutra from a Shikoku 88 pilgrimage guide, written by Astrid



# LIFESTYLE

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### Kimberly Matsuno

*"I have an inferiority complex, but not a very good one."— Kimberly Matsuno*

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*"If you would serve your brother, because it is fit for you to serve him, do not take back your words when you find that prudent people do not commend you."  
— Ralph Waldo Emerson, On Heroism*

## 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*

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### Jon Solmundson

*"... good at making puzzles for other people, but not solving the ones she didn't make herself. I think she thinks—I don't know—side-wise." —Gene Wolf, Shadow of the Torturer*





Secret Santa event - Iemura Miki (家村美輝)

# MY FOOTBALL EXPERIENCE IN JAPAN

**James Purtil (Okayama)**



Ever since I was young, growing up in London, all I thought about was football. If I was not playing, watching, or reading about it, I would be talking your ear off about it for hours. I had played for several recreational teams (junior and senior), represented my school, and played regularly at university. I was never the best player, but I always loved the game.

I decided, even before my arrival in Japan, that I would pursue sports, preferably football, as a method of making connections in my local area. Football was a big part of my life and many of my closest friends in London were former teammates, some of whom



Fantastico Team Photo - Oda Yoshiko (小田美古)

struggled with English. Their actual spoken language was not the most important. Instead, it was their effort and commitment. So, I may not have known much Japanese, but football was a language I could speak.

After arriving in Japan in August 2019, I made my love of the sport apparent by including it in many of my self introductions, even at the teacher meetings, despite my very basic command of Japanese. This definitely caused a few sly smiles especially because, little did I know at the time, in Japan, it is not common to talk about your hobbies in that type of situation. Unfortunately, none of my colleagues played for a team, but I was advised to visit the local sports center. The kindness of the staff at the sports center who called local clubs on my behalf then provided me with the opportunity to train with a local men's team, called "Soja United."

I remember the feeling before the first training session. Nervous. Excited. I had no expectations, but playing on ground as opposed to grass was definitely not something I had accounted for on the plane over here. Nevertheless, I received a warm welcome from many of the players, especially the older ones. Players were from many different economic backgrounds, ranging from teachers and businessmen to university

students and even a peach farmer. But these differences were not felt on the pitch.

The same could be said of the language barrier: once the ball was in play, it was almost irrelevant. Before I knew it, I was training with them every week with the weekly message about training being sent in both Japanese and English, for my benefit. It really is the simple things that can make us feel welcome. Then, there were a couple of friendly matches and within a few months, I had registered for the upcoming season.

The season in Japan usually begins in March and runs until late autumn, but with the outbreak of COVID-19, the season did not begin until October 2020. In Okayama, the matches would take you almost all over the prefecture—which would have been a problem as I do not own a car and many of the venues are difficult to travel to using public transportation. However, one of the older players showed incredible kindness by taking me to all of the matches in my first season, picking me up and dropping me off at my place. This was despite the fact that in many of the games he did not even play because of the size of the squad! We spent the sometimes very long journeys communicating in a mixture of English and Japanese both practicing each other's language.

**So, I may not have known much Japanese, but football was a language I could speak.**

Despite your nerves, you have to throw yourself into these situations because they are often the most memorable, as this proved to be.

My league debut for the club is a personal highlight that I will never forget: the team performance, the location, all the different customs and squeezing into the “large” shirt. It was the first game of the season. We were playing on an artificial pitch, surrounded by some beautiful mountains. The shaking of hands before and after matches that I was accustomed to was exchanged with bows towards the pitch, match officials, and opposition bench. As I stepped on to the pitch, despite the team shirt chafing my armpits a little, it felt like home.

Within the first five minutes of the match, I had already set up a goal. I made an interception and went past a couple of players before squaring the ball to a teammate to score. It was a dream start for us and we went on to win the game 3-1, with me assisting another goal. That season we would go unbeaten, winning the league and securing promotion on penalties in a play-off match.

That year was also decorated with many other personal highlights. The biggest was scoring my first and still only goal for the club, which won us one of the final matches of the season. We needed to win and there were quite a few spectators watching. So, celebrating that goal in front of some of the locals was a special moment for me.

Last season, also affected by COVID-19 suspensions, we built on our previous success: purchasing a new kit (with my size), attracting many new, younger players, finishing mid-table in the new division, and becoming more well known locally. I was even recognized in public as a Soja United player! However, the season wasn't as successful on a personal level, as unfortunately, I had a few injuries, so I did not always feature. But I am excited for what the new season holds.

My experience with Soja United encouraged me to venture further. So, in September 2020, before my first football season had even begun, I jumped at the opportunity to join a mixed

Pre match rituals, before my debut - Kinami Sōta (木南創太)





Soja United team

futsal club via a Facebook post. Before Japan, I had played something similar, but this was serious futsal as I would find out.

It was not nearby—90 minutes by train—but I still went along. The club captain, Miki, who had spent time in England studying, picked me up from the station as she always has. For the first session, I had to rent a pair of futsal shoes because I did not own a pair and, amusingly, they cut my feet due to the size!

Nevertheless, again, I was warmly welcomed, contacted regularly about each session. It is not all futsal either as they celebrate different festivals throughout the year too, such as Halloween and Christmas, as illustrated in Picture 3. The language barrier was not as difficult in this situation because Miki has excellent English. She has become one of my dear friends and, along with the others, has made me a part of their very close futsal family. Surprisingly, I teach the daughter of one of the members, who frequently takes me home after futsal

very late at night. This is despite the fact that he has to wake up in the early hours for work.

Many of my closest friends in this group do not speak much English, despite their very best efforts to communicate. Nevertheless, I have been invited into other different football sessions by members within this club. This has led to developing further connections with locals here.

As a result, my life here in Japan has been very busy—working as an ALT and



playing football along with other commitments. I usually play three to four times a week with different groups of local people, far more than I have ever played in England. But I wouldn't have it any different.

I count myself as a blessed individual to be able to call this story my own. The experiences I have had, the people I have met and the kindness shown will stay with me long after I return home. Of course, my job has been extremely fulfilling, but football has added another dimension to my life. It will make it so difficult to eventually say goodbye to my now second home.

Team photo 2020 season - Kinami Sota (木南創太)

Miki (club captain) preparing for the Halloween event - Oda Yoshiko (小田美古)



There have of course been some challenges along the way. Adapting to the sizing of Japanese clothing is definitely one, and on occasion, I have felt targeted in matches. This is not easy, however, it is important to remember that you may be the first foreign person they have met. It is not a justification but can highlight our importance in cultural exchange and education.

Communication has been the most difficult to overcome, especially with my basic Japanese. It has improved, but this is not the only method of communication, as I have learned. This is because sport is a universal language. It has a remarkable way of uniting people behind a common purpose regardless of their social, cultural, or economic background. Football is no different and my footballing experience in Japan has epitomized this. It has provided me with many lifelong friends and unforgettable moments, but most importantly it has made a community, which was foreign to me, feel like home.



Team photo 2021 season - Yuta Hattori (優太服部)

*James is an Okayama JET participant from London, UK, with a passion for football and travel. On his days off, he is either kicking a ball around, enjoying a self-improvement book with a coffee, or exploring everything Japan has to offer.*

[Background vector created by dgim-studio](#)



Fantastico team badge



# Put Some Ice on It

## Yuzuru Hanyu's Legendary Career Pushes His Physical Limit

Samantha Stauch (Gunma)



For every athlete, there is an unspoken hourglass waiting somewhere in the background—at each practice, each match, each tournament. Every grain of sand that falls is leading up to the unavoidable truth that we will one day reach our limit. An athlete's love of the game may carry into old age, but for many their active participation ends much earlier. High-level athletes work hard to delay the inevitable: rigorous training, physical therapy, regimented diets—you name it. And as time has gone on, the number of athletes still pursuing competitive sports beyond the usual retirement age has grown significantly. Tom Brady only recently retired from American football at age 44 after leading the Tampa Bay Buccaneers to a Super Bowl win in 2021. Professional footballer Kazuyoshi Miura, 55, is still going strong for the Suzuka Point Getters. At age 37, LeBron James put up 56 points in a season high for the Lakers in March and “became the oldest player in NBA history to post 50-plus points and 10-plus rebounds in a game.” (1) Every sport has seasoned players and knowledgeable elders that defy the rule of time and seem to be only getting better with age. On the other side of things, most athletes struggle with injury at some point



Prix title. In 2015 and 2016, he finished second place in the world championships. The 2018 Olympic Winter Games in Pyeongchang, South Korea also showed Hanyu at his very best. Here, he received his second consecutive gold medal, “becoming the first man to win back-to-back Olympic figure-skating golds since Dick Button

did so in 1948 and 1952.” (2)

### Star Power

Enter the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics. Hanyu’s fans, the “fanyus,” from around the world are eager to see him skate. In a normal year, without the plague-that-must-not-be-named, fans would have poured into the arena in Beijing, ready to throw their Winnie the Pooh stuffed animals onto the ice after another phenomenal performance. (3) But fans showed up for Hanyu in a different way. Rather than covering the ice with tokens of their adoration, they brought their affections to the internet. His star power was clearly demonstrated by becoming the number one trending topic on Weibo, China’s social media site, even beating out the extremely popular 2022 Olympic mascot, Bing Dwen Dwen. Posts flooded in from Chinese users, discussing their “unconditional” support for Yuzuru the moment he

touched down in Beijing. (4) He was certainly the skater to watch.

Unfortunately for Hanyu, he would not be reaching the podium this time around. What happens when peak athletes have already reached the highest level in their chosen sport? They start experimenting with something new, something daring, something even more exceptional than the performances they’ve already given their all to before. That is what’s left at the top for exceptional athletes. Hanyu decided to leave it all out there on the ice by taking a risk and attempting to become “the first man to execute the quad Axel in competition at these Games.” (5)

He came up short.

A quadruple jump “requires a grueling four full revolutions in the air.” Taking it a step further, a quad Axel adds an even higher level of effort by demanding four and a half revolutions. Despite everything going for Hanyu, even with his own body dimensions according to Sarah Ridge, a biomechanist at Brigham Young University, he could not complete the move. (6) In one of his performances, Hanyu under-rotated his quad Axel attempt and ultimately failed. He later fell again during a quad Salchow—an error that brought him to an astonishing eighth place overall going into the men’s free skate of the competition. Although he finished fourth and left

in their careers and some are plagued by an on-again-off-again cycle of competing, injury, physical therapy, and repeat. One such athlete is Japan’s “ice prince” and modern figure skating legend Hanyu Yuzuru.

The two-time Olympic champion has certainly carved his name and legacy into the ice. The Sendai native began skating at four years old, and by age 19, he had claimed the Olympic men’s skating title at the 2014 Sochi Olympic Games. He was the youngest to do so since 1948. Sochi 2014 was astronomical for Hanyu. Not only did he become the first skater ever to earn more than 100 points in the short program, he also became “the first male skater since legend Yagudin to capture the Olympic and world skating titles in the same year.” Following an exceptional year in 2014, in 2015 Hanyu continued his winning streak and captured his third consecutive Grand



without a medal for the first time in his career, Hanyu made it clear that he had no regrets. Firmly, he stated “It is what it is. The Olympics was a challenge and I gave it everything I have.” (7)

### **An Achilles’ Heel in Skates**

On the ice, Yuzuru has been pushing the limits of the sport and his body. While working on another quadruple Axel just a day prior to his free skate, Hanyu was injured by the move. Determined to skate anyway, Hanyu was even administered a pain-killing injection moments before the event. Understanding the gravity of this moment—a chance to land the greatest move in skating history and land on the podium for the third time—Hanyu stated, “If it were a normal competition,

I would have withdrawn.” (8) His determination to give his all despite overwhelming pain is a truly admirable move.

While the Olympics are too glorious to miss, Hanyu has had trouble keeping on the ice in recent years. A repeat injury, Hanyu’s right ankle has stopped him from performing in “three of the last five seasons.” (9) In the aftermath of the Beijing Olympics, Yuzuru was suffering from the same right ankle sprain and made the decision to miss the world championships in France in March. (10) Given Hanyu’s injury and age, rumors of retirement have started to brew. Although Hanyu confirmed that he would not be retiring, he did reveal that he didn’t “know if these will be his last” Games. (11)

Hanyu is now 27 years old, well past the usual retirement age in figure skating—a sport known for its teen competitors and harsh consequences on the body. This was also deeply apparent among the women’s skaters at the Beijing Olympics. American skater Mariah Bell made history at age 25 for being the “oldest women’s figure skater on Team USA in 94 years.” It seems like skaters and gymnasts keep getting younger and younger. The reason being that the younger you are, the quicker and easier your jumps and moves tend to be. For skating specifically, many of the more difficult moves, including the quad jump, depend on the skater being “small and light.” However, as skaters age, the moves and strain they were able to put on their bodies become more difficult as the

skaters' bodies can no longer handle it without injury. (12)

Yuzuru may be getting older and his body may be catching up with him, but that fighting spirit he possesses as a top athlete shows no sign of slowing down. At the Olympics, he bravely stated: "I fell on the Axel, fell on the Salchow but nailed everything in the second half. It's about falling and getting back up again." (13) He may have fallen during his performances, but his attempt at achieving something as astonishing as the quad Axel is more awe-inspiring than shameful. It takes a special kind of perseverance to show courage in the face of injury, especially when you have millions of people tuning in to watch you.

When you're an exceptional athlete, the pressure never truly ends. It comes from coaches, from peers, from fans, from yourself, and even your own body. Your time as an athlete is finite. But for athletes like Yuzuru, you find a way to immortalize the hourglass. His accomplishments, his ambitions, and his talent will stand the test of time long after he leaves the sport.

*Samantha is a first-year JET from Gunma Prefecture who believes in living her life like a shōnen protagonist. Main characters have plot armor, after all.*

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# HIGHS AND LOWS

## LIFE AS A TYPE 1 DIABETIC IN JAPAN

Kimberly Matsuno (Niigata)

**Toothbrush, toothpaste, a change of clothes, alcohol wipes, medical tape, rubber tubes, glucose meter, short-acting insulin, long-acting insulin, a cooling tube to protect said insulin, and roughly eight to ten granola bars.**

No, this isn't an inventory list for a pharmacy. It's just the beginning of a packing list for a carry-on of a type 1 diabetic. Packing lists aside, moving abroad can often be as stressful as it is exciting. But for those moving to Japan with type 1 diabetes, it can be an even more stressful endeavor.

I had the opportunity to speak with Mary Tackett, John McCarthy, and Daniel Manzella, three members of *Dia-JET-ics*, a *Discord* community for diabetic expats in Japan, about their experiences beginning a new life in Japan while managing their T1D.

Type 1 diabetes (T1D) is a condition where the pancreas cannot produce enough insulin, the hormone responsible for regulating blood sugar. People with T1D need to take insulin several times a day to stay healthy and alive.

Mary Tackett, a first-year assistant language teacher on the JET program and the founder of Dia-JET-ics, explained to me the process of continuing treatment of T1D for new residents in Japan and the importance of getting set up with a local doctor right away.

“If you want to be able to get insulin, syringes, and/or other supplies, you will need a Japanese provider,” she explained. “In my case, I informed my board of education and my school’s principal right away that I am a type 1 diabetic, and they encouraged me to get established with a doctor as quickly as possible to prevent any issues later and to stay in good health.”

For those on the JET program, she recommended, “From the moment you fill out your application, please communicate that you a) have diabetes, and b) need to have easy, regular access to healthcare. I also discussed it in my interview. I ended up placed in a suburb of Osaka, with a diabetes specialty clinic as well as a doctor at a nearby hospital who not only is a diabetologist, but she also speaks English and is very familiar with insulin pump therapy, CGMs (continuous glucose monitoring), etc, which is apparently hard to come by in Japan. I thoroughly researched my placement as well, so I knew about my options ahead of time. . . . Because I openly shared my condition and concerns, one of the JETs already in my city offered to help me get set up with her doctor, who is the doctor I’m seeing now.”

While John McCarthy, who has been living with type 1 diabetes since he was 13, certainly recommends getting assistance from an employer or other expats in the area, he was still able to find a doctor on

WHILE IT’S RECOMMENDED FOR DIABETICS TO GET SET UP WITH A LOCAL PROVIDER AS SOON AS POSSIBLE, BUREAUCRACY MAKES THAT NOT ALWAYS POSSIBLE.

his own. The 24-year-old Colorado native admitted, “My Japanese is not great, but despite that, I was able to find a doctor by myself initially. Though, I did end up getting redirected from my first hospital to another in the area with a diabetic/endocrinology department.”

For those looking for providers on their own, the [Japan Diabetes Society](#) makes things easy with a full list of diabetologists sorted by prefecture. (1)

While it’s recommended for diabetics to get set up with a local provider as soon as possible, bureaucracy makes that not always possible. It can often take anywhere from one to three months to schedule an initial appointment due to the time spent waiting for medical insurance and other paperwork to be processed. Because of this, it is highly recommended for diabetics to bring as many supplies as possible with them on their flight over.

Daniel Manzella, a first-year ALT from Maryland, USA, stated, “I fit around three months of pump supplies into my luggage, as well as about a year’s worth of insulin. I was upfront about my situation with my endocrinologist [in the US], who helped me fight insurance to send me a frontload of supplies (about a month’s worth). That plus a lot of supplies that I had already stockpiled over the years was enough.”

The good news is that the actual process of bringing all that equipment to Japan is relatively straightforward. McCarthy assured that “as long as you have declared and brought only the medications on the *Yunyu Kakunin-sho* (the customs declaration form for medicine and medical supplies), Japanese customs should be a smooth process.”

But probably the most important thing, and the first thing that any type 1 diabetics using an insulin pump should do, is to make sure their pump is even allowed in Japan. Established in 1950, the Radio Law was designed to ensure fair and efficient use of the radio spectrum. The Radio Law requires government approval for all products which utilize the radio spectrum and operate under 3 THz. This includes anything from Bluetooth devices to microwaves, ultrasonic devices, and, yes, even the continuous glucose monitoring systems (CGMs) and pumps many T1 diabetics rely on. (2)

“If your pump is approved by the Japanese government, this means you can get pump supplies with medical insurance. If it isn’t, you’ll have to rent a Japanese pump to get pump supplies. The pump rental fees are about 4,000 yen a month, which isn’t terrible, but you have to go and physically pay at the hospital every month which can be a royal pain. So, if possible, I advise having a pump that is approved for use in Japan,” Manzella explained.

**BUT PROBABLY THE MOST IMPORTANT THING, AND THE FIRST THING THAT ANY TYPE 1 DIABETICS USING AN INSULIN PUMP SHOULD DO, IS TO MAKE SURE THEIR PUMP IS EVEN ALLOWED IN JAPAN.**

Tackett elaborated on the costs a bit more, stating that while they do average around 4,000 yen a month, some pumps, like the closed-loop system (*MiniMed + Enlite*) are substantially more expensive than others. Plus, there is a one-time fee of around 40,000 yen for the initial visit and pump setup.

But the costs don’t end there, with most patients paying over 10,000 yen a month out of pocket to manage their T1D. (3) There are tax rebates in place to help recover treatment costs of up to 100,000 yen a year. However, since T1D is classified as a childhood chronic disease in Japan, despite it being a lifelong condition, anyone over the age of 20 is not eligible for these benefits.



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Offering up some cost-saving advice, Tackett suggested getting an introduction letter (紹介状, *shoukaijou*) from your provider back home prior to coming to Japan. She explained, “The introduction letter offers an overview of your condition(s), current treatment(s), and medication, as well as any relevant medical history. . . . [The shoukaijou] saves you an additional 5,000 yen on your first appointment.”

The stress of worrying about having enough supplies, paying initial start-up costs, and finding a provider can certainly have a negative physiological effect on T1 diabetics. McCarthy admitted, “I think that my anxiety ultimately had the greatest effect on my blood sugars more than anything else in the first month. It goes without saying, but I’ve always believed that, for older diabetics, having good control and health can be a mental battle.”



But moving to Japan isn't all gloom and doom for T1 diabetics. Once the stress of the first few months is over and a daily routine can be established, life in Japan actually offers some benefits in terms of diabetes management—particularly regarding food. Food in Japan is typically consistent in terms of portion sizes and amount of rice and vegetables. This is especially true for those, like McCarthy, who are fortunate enough to eat school lunches.

“School lunch makes things so easy. I get a set portion of rice, and the rest of the meal is fairly low carb (10-30 grams). It keeps the math straightforward, plus it tastes great,” McCarthy stated. But there was a bit of an adjustment period for him.

ONCE THE STRESS OF THE FIRST FEW MONTHS IS OVER AND A DAILY ROUTINE CAN BE ESTABLISHED, LIFE IN JAPAN ACTUALLY OFFERS SOME BENEFITS IN TERMS OF DIABETES MANAGEMENT—PARTICULARLY REGARDING FOOD.

He added, “Back home, I didn't eat rice as ubiquitously as I do here, so learning the ratios for that did take a while. And I'm still being exposed to plenty of foods that I don't recognize. But I'm learning to read food labels and ingredients. So that, plus making educated guesses, has worked out for me.”

Another thing that reduces stress is the presence of vending machines and convenience stores on nearly every corner. With slightly over five million vending machines nationwide, roughly one per every 23 residents, it is safe to say that one is never too far away from an emergency sugar fix to treat periods of low blood sugar. (4)

“It's nice having the peace of mind that comes from knowing sugar is almost always accessible,” McCarthy said. “I do a lot of hiking in my spare time, and I really get a kick out of seeing a fully stocked vending machine at the base of a trailhead.”

While ever-present vending machines and convenience stores help in reducing the risk of T1 diabetics' sugars running too low, emergency situations can still arise. And in these cases, it's extremely important for T1 diabetics to be able to communicate their needs.

Most of the members of Dia-JET-ics have a medical alert bracelet in English, or a medical tattoo in the case of McCarthy, but they are all considering getting some sort of alert in Japanese as well. As paramedics in Japan are not allowed to go through one's personal belongings without the presence of a police officer, it's advisable to have an alert in a visible place rather than on a card tucked inside

a wallet or bag. (5) For those looking for more fashionable medical alerts, Tackett recommends [jasmine.39614](https://www.instagram.com/jasmine.39614) on Instagram who makes customized medical alerts featuring characters like *Elmo* and *Kuromi chan*.

But simply wearing a medical alert is not enough, as T1 diabetics often have to advocate for themselves and explain their condition to those around them. In which case, it is important to know some vocabulary related to T1D. Unfortunately, Tackett explained, this is easier said than done. “Currently, there’s not a comprehensive resource with vocab gathered in one place,” she lamented. But she is working hard to develop a document for all the members of Dia-JET-ics with useful Japanese vocabulary and phrases.

However, no matter how much Japanese a foreign T1 diabetic knows, they will likely still struggle explaining T1D to the people around them.

Manzella can certainly relate to this. He admitted, “I’ve attempted to learn some vocabulary relating to T1D, but the larger problem is that most people just have never heard of this disease, or if they have, they think it’s the same as type 2 diabetes.”

And as Japan has one of the lowest incident rates of T1D in the world, it’s easy to see why. (3)

“Since [T1D] is very rare in this country, I try to stick to explaining the things that might come up in day-to-day life, such as they shouldn’t worry if they see me testing my blood sugar. It’s something I do all the time, not just if I feel bad. I also explain that my pump is different from a phone. If I fiddle with it during class/meetings, I promise I’m not playing a game or chatting with a friend,” Manzella said.

HOWEVER, NO MATTER HOW MUCH JAPANESE A FOREIGN T1 DIABETIC KNOWS, THEY WILL LIKELY STILL STRUGGLE EXPLAINING T1D TO THE PEOPLE AROUND THEM.



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But things are slowly changing, and the members of Dia-JET-ics are not alone. Japanese organizations such as *The Japan Diabetes Society* and *Japan IDDM Network* are working to educate the public and advocate for T1 diabetics, offer financial support to adult T1 diabetics, as well as promote children's books and manga with T1 diabetic characters.

So for those who have T1D and are thinking about coming to Japan or are already in Japan and are looking for support, the members of Dia-JET-ics suggest reaching out to others and joining their group on *Discord*.

Offering some final words of advice, Tackett said, "Don't let your life with diabetes hold you back or prevent you from pursuing your goal of coming to Japan. You are fully capable. While you should be your own best advocate, you've also got people here who support you and want to help you. Get connected, ask questions, and always, always communicate with the people who are here to work with you. Have patience and grace towards yourself and others as you adjust to this huge life event, and enjoy your time in Japan!"

**DON'T LET YOUR LIFE  
WITH DIABETES HOLD  
YOU BACK . . .**

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*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.*



# Spring Flavors Time for Tea

## KIMBERLY MATSUNO (NIIGATA)

The world consumes over five million tonnes of tea every year, making it the most popular drink after water. (1) And when one thinks of tea in Japan, the beverage that comes to mind is, undoubtedly, green tea. But for those new to Japanese tea and tea culture, the varieties of tea can be as mystifying as they are overwhelming.

What you may not know is that all forms of green tea, and most tea in general, are made from the same plant, *Camellia sinensis*. The differences between white teas, green teas, oolong teas, and black teas are simply due to how much the tea leaves are allowed to oxidize. In other words, the amount of time between when the leaves are harvested and when they are heated. And the differences between the types of green teas come down to how the leaves are processed and how much shade the tea plants are given prior to harvesting.

So, in honor of the tea harvest season starting this month and continuing through May and June, we have put together a brief introduction of some of the most popular and common forms of green tea in Japan.





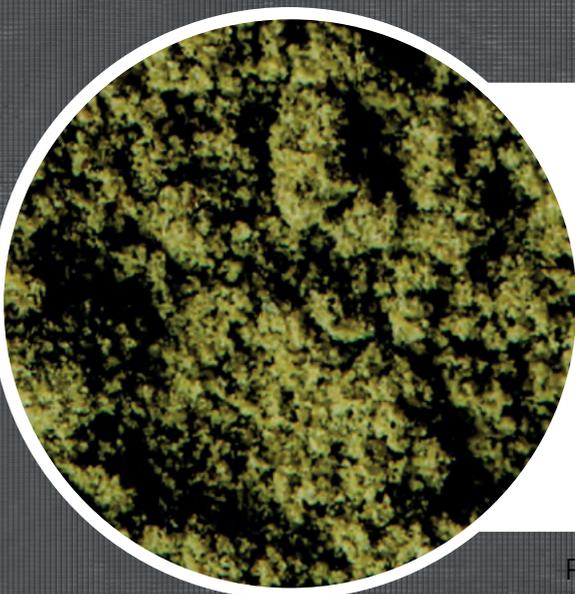
The most popular type of tea in Japan is **sencha** (煎茶). It is produced by steaming, rolling, and drying only the youngest leaves of a tea plant. Sencha is almost always sold as a leaf tea. It also has a surprisingly short steeping time—taking only 45-90 seconds to impart its full flavor. This allows tea drinkers to get three to five steeps from one serving of leaves. (2)

Photo by pictavio | pixabay

The most expensive type of Japanese teas is **gyokuro** (玉露), which, referring to the beautiful green color of the infusion, translates to “Jade Dew.” (3) Like sencha, gyokuro is a leaf tea produced by steaming, rolling, and drying the youngest leaves of a tea plant. The difference, however, is that gyokuro leaves are shaded from the sun for about 20 days prior to their harvest. The shading process contributes to the sweeter, less astringent taste characteristic of gyokuro tea.



Photo by Eva Elijas | pexels



Likewise, **matcha** (抹茶) leaves are also shielded from the sun, though for a longer time—anywhere from three weeks to one month before harvest. Rather than being rolled and kneaded, matcha is made by grinding tea leaves into a fine powder. Some of the constituents in tea are not water-soluble and only one-third of the antioxidants can be absorbed by the body from infused teas. Therefore, matcha—as a powder—has the highest caffeine content and health benefits of any green tea. (4)

Photo by Eva Elijas | pexels



Despite its reddish-brown color, **hojicha** (焙じ茶) is actually a green tea. Hojicha is made from roasted tea leaves and has a nutty, toasted flavor that is slightly sweet. Sold in both leaf and powdered form, hojicha is often advertised as a low-caffeine beverage perfect for a relaxing evening.

Photo by Eva Elijas | pexels

**Genmaicha** (玄米茶) is made from mixing green tea with roasted brown puffed rice. The resulting beverage has a yellow hue and a sweet, slightly nutty flavor. Sometimes, genmaicha is referred to as “popcorn tea” as occasionally some of the rice pops during roasting and looks like popcorn.



Photo by pictavio | pixabay

For those looking to incorporate more green tea into their life, you may want to consider enjoying this superfood through means other than your afternoon matcha latte. Tea, after all, is an herb and can be added to a wide variety of dishes just like other herbs—such as basil, mint, or sage. Read on for some great ideas for introducing green tea into your breakfast, dinner, or mid-afternoon snack.

## References

- [1. Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN—Emerging Trends in Tea Consumption Report](#)
- [2. Japanese Green Tea Co.](#)
- [3. Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries—Current Outlook on Japanese Green Tea](#)
- [4. Health Benefits and Chemical Composition of Matcha Green Tea](#)

Photo by Katelyn DePalmer



# Matcha French Toast

KATELYN DEPALMER (NIIGATA)

This easy recipe elevates a weekend brunch from standard to luxurious with just one simple ingredient: matcha (抹茶). Top this dish with fresh berries and honey for an extra colorful treat. This recipe makes four slices of French toast.

## Ingredients

- 3/4 cup (180 ml) milk (or non-dairy substitute)
- 1-1.5 tablespoons matcha powder (6-9 grams) (adjust to your preference)
- 2 eggs
- 1 tablespoon (15-20 grams) sugar (adjust to your preference)
- 1 pinch of salt
- 4 slices of bread
- Butter for the frying pan
- Fruit, honey, etc. for toppings

## Instructions

1. Pour the milk into a bowl and sift in the matcha powder. Mix well with a whisk. You will probably still have clumps of matcha—don't worry about them. They won't affect the flavor.
2. Add in the egg and mix, whisking well.
3. Add the sugar and salt to the mixture and mix. Once combined, pour it into a wide container (like a square cake tin).
4. Add one piece of bread at a time. Poke the bread with a fork a few times before flipping, allowing it to completely soak in the batter. Let the bread soak for at least two minutes.
5. Heat a frying pan on medium-low heat and melt some butter in the frying pan.
6. Cook the slices of French toast one at a time, flipping when the bottom is cooked and brown (about two to three minutes).
7. Serve hot with your favorite toppings.
8. Enjoy!

Tips: This recipe is extremely forgiving, and you can adjust all aspects of the ingredients. Looking too light? Add more matcha. Too thin? Add another egg. Avoiding sugar? Add half—or none—and enjoy the mature earthiness of the matcha. If you want to be very fancy, mix your matcha powder and a small amount of hot water in a small cup until smooth before adding it to the milk. This will cut down on the clumps of matcha in the batter.

For a *wagashi* style, you can serve the French toast with *anko* (sweet red beans), *kuri-no-kanroni* (candied chestnuts), and *kuromitsu* (brown sugar syrup).

*Katelyn is a first-year CIR in Niigata City. Her hobbies include embroidery, cooking, drinking craft beer, and complaining about the weather.*

# Roasted Green Tea Marinated Tofu



ELIZABETH WATSON (NIIGATA)

This is a super easy recipe that can turn standard tofu into a delicious meal! This recipe uses roasted green tea (*hojicha*, 焙じ茶) in a marinade. You can marinate the tofu for as short as 30 minutes, or if you really want to get the full effects, marinate the tofu overnight! By marinating tofu in hojicha, you can enjoy the nutty, slightly sweet roasted green tea flavor of the roasted green tea in the form of a simple weeknight meal!

## Ingredients

- 2 cups (475 ml) brewed roasted green tea (hojicha, 焙じ茶)
  - 1 garlic clove
  - 2 1/2 teaspoons (15 grams) ginger
  - 2 tablespoons (30 ml) sesame oil
- 2 tablespoons (30 ml) white wine vinegar
  - 1 package (150 grams) firm tofu
  - 1 tablespoon (15 ml) olive oil
- 1 1/2 cups cooked vegetables of choice\*

\*Note: The nutty, toasted flavor of hojicha pairs well with broccoli, squash, mushrooms, and other earthy flavors. However, this recipe is as adaptable as the tea it uses, so please feel free to experiment and find your own favorite combinations. When experimenting, please remember that different vegetables have different cooking times, so some vegetables may need to be cooked first.



Photo by Kimberly Matsuno



## Instructions

1. Brew roasted green tea per package instructions and let it cool to room temperature.
2. Mince the garlic and ginger and set them aside.
3. In a resealable container, combine the room temperature brewed tea, ginger, garlic, sesame oil, and white wine vinegar.
4. Cut the tofu into bite-size cubes. Place the tofu into the container with the green tea marinade. The tofu should be completely submerged.
5. Let the tofu marinate in the refrigerator for a minimum of 30 minutes, but the optimal time is overnight.
6. Once marinated, prepare your chosen vegetables. I recommend cutting your vegetables into roughly the same size as the tofu. Your vegetables can be cooked using whichever method you prefer (steaming, boiling, pan-frying, etc). The vegetables should be fully cooked at this stage, as they will only be reheated when they are combined with the tofu.
7. Remove the marinating tofu from the refrigerator. Drain the tofu.
8. Add the olive oil to your skillet and heat on medium heat. Once the pan is hot and the oil begins to glisten, add the tofu.
9. Cook the tofu on one side for two to three minutes on medium-high heat before giving the pan a little shake. If the tofu moves freely, then it is fully cooked on that side and can be flipped. Repeat the process until all your tofu has been cooked on two or three sides and is slightly brown and crispy.
10. Add the pre-cooked vegetables and stir to combine with the tofu. Once the vegetables and tofu have been thoroughly combined and the vegetables have been reheated, remove the pan from the heat.
11. Serve over a bowl of rice.
12. Enjoy!

*Elizabeth is a first-year JET who lives in Niigata prefecture. This is Elizabeth's first time writing a recipe; however, she loves finding new recipes and trying new foods. Since this is her first time in Japan, you can find Elizabeth exploring her new home on the weekends.*

# Green Tea Fudge

ROXANN MOUSSEAU (NAGASAKI)



Photo by Roxann Mousseau

This recipe is perfect for both novices in the kitchen and experts who wish to challenge themselves! This recipe uses powdered green tea (matcha, 抹茶) in a delicious afternoon dessert. You can use condensed milk and make the fudge in as short as three hours. Or, those up for a challenge can test their skills and use an overnight method to make *dulce de leche*, a condensed milk substitute. The best part of this recipe is that you can enjoy the rich, nutty, modestly sweet flavor of green tea or sub it out for whatever flavor you wish. It can be adapted however you would like to meet your cravings!

## Ingredients

- 2 tablespoons (12 grams) matcha powder
- 3/4 cup (175 ml) condensed milk or dulce de leche\*
- 1 1/2 cups (265 grams) white chocolate
- 1 1/2 teaspoons (5 ml) vanilla extract
- 1/2 teaspoon (3 grams) salt

\*Note: If desired, the condensed milk can be replaced with dulce de leche.

## Instructions

1. Prepare a pan of your desired depth and shape by covering it with parchment paper.
2. Combine the matcha powder and condensed milk\* in a saucepan and heat over medium-low heat until mixed approximately, one to one and a half minutes. For the best result, sift the matcha in.
3. Once combined, add in the white chocolate and stir until fully melted, approximately three to four minutes. Then add the vanilla extract and salt and remove from the heat.
4. Pour into your baking pan and bang it flat to spread evenly. Let cool on the counter until room temperature (about 15 minutes) then cover and place in the freezer for two to three hours.
5. Remove from the fridge and slice into your desired shape and size for serving. When serving, you can also sift some more matcha powder over the top for added presentation.
6. Enjoy!

## \*Dulce de leche fudge

This is an optional step for those who cannot find condensed milk where they live or would like an additional challenge. Dulce de leche's nutty flavor helps to bring out the natural, subtle nuttiness of matcha.

## Dulce de leche Ingredients

- 4 cups (945 ml) whole milk
- 1 cup (200 grams) sugar
- 1/2 teaspoon (3 grams) salt
- 1 1/2 teaspoons (5 ml) vanilla extract

*Roxann is a first-year JET who lives in Nagasaki prefecture. Roxann loves all food and is always excited to try out new recipes. Unfortunately, due to the pandemic, Roxann hasn't traveled as much as she would like to, but she has many plans to when she is able.*

## Instructions

1. Pour milk and sugar into a medium-sized saucepan. The sugar level can be adjusted to suit your preferences—add more for a sweeter end product or reduce it down up to 1/4 cup. For the matcha flavor, I think a little less sugar suits better.
2. Add in the salt and vanilla. Traditional dulce de leche calls for more vanilla, but since the fudge itself uses vanilla, I feel that adding more vanilla than the recommended one and a half teaspoons overwhelms the matcha flavor.
3. Stir the mixture over medium heat until the sugar dissolves—approximately two to three minutes. Give it a brisk mix until the milk is edged in bubbles but not completely bubbled over.
4. Let the milk mixture boil for approximately one and a half to two hours while stirring occasionally. The color will eventually go from white to tan after around an hour. Once it does, the color will quickly darken to a caramel-like color, and as it does, it will become thicker. Once your mixture is a light caramel color, melt your chocolate in the microwave or another saucepan.
5. After the dulce de leche reaches an almost caramel color, add in the matcha and stir until combined, then remove from heat. Mix in your pre-melted white chocolate.
6. Continue with steps four through seven listed in the standard recipe above.





# COVID UPDATE

## States of Emergency\*

There are currently no prefectures under a State of Emergency or exercising Priority Preventative Measures.

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 April 4. For an up-to-date list of all prefectures under States of Emergency, please refer to the Cabinet Secretariat Office's [Website](#)

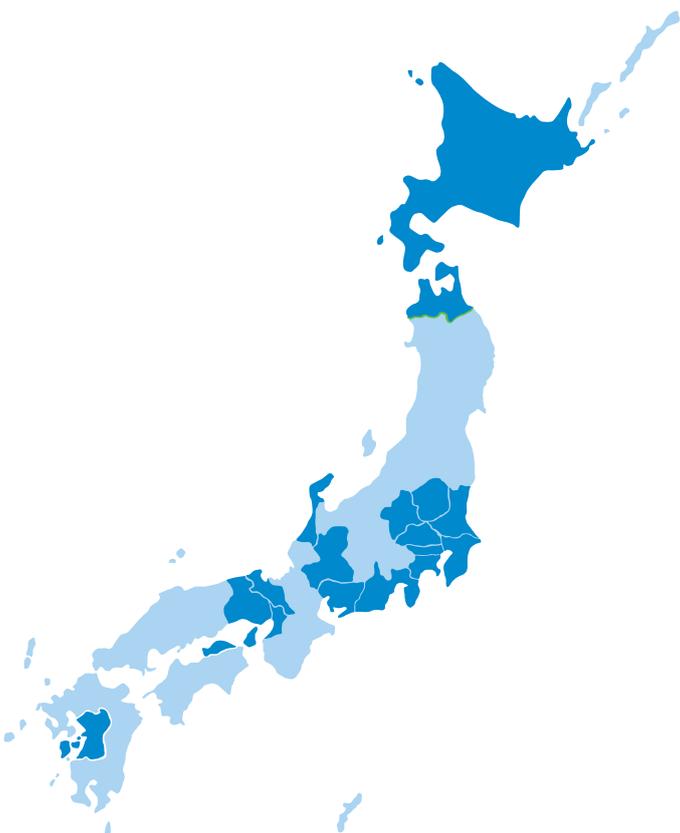
## The following recommendations remain in effect.

- 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 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.

## 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](#).

## 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.

# Mental Health Support

## English counselling services

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

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

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

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

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

## Additional support for JET Programme participants

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

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

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

**Counselling via Telephone\***

Phone number: 0120-810-803

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

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

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

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

[Web-Mail Counselling](#)

Login Password: jet2021mental

[Skype Counselling](#)

Login password: jet2021mental

# LANGUAGE

## LANGUAGE EDITOR

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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*



## An Interview With Localization Editor, Jennifer Sherman

# INTERNATIONAL HITMAKER

Jennifer Sherman, interviewed by Kimberly Matsuno (Niigata)

Jennifer Sherman is the force behind ensuring best-selling manga in Japan become best-sellers in the United States as well. She has worked on many popular manga, such as *Demon Slayer: Kimetsu no Yaiba—Stories of Water and Flame* and *Dragon Quest: The Adventure of Dai*.

In her role as a localization editor, she works to make sure that manga and light novels from Japan are not only translated into English but are also adapted to be more easily understood by American audiences. I had the pleasure of interviewing Ms. Sherman about what exactly her role as a localization editor involves.

### What is the difference between localization and translation?

Hooboy, this could be a whole hour-long discussion itself!

Debating what “localization” is as opposed to “translation” can be a hot topic with wide-ranging opinions. And even if you want to follow the model of giving them separate meanings, there is no translation without localization.

“Literal” translations, or exactly recreating the “original” experience in another language, is functionally impossible. In my mind—as well as many others in the J-pop localization sphere—there really is no difference between “translation” and “localization.” And I’ve noticed a progression in more recent years favoring the term “localization” over “translation” among many in our community.

“Localization” better encompasses the full scope of the work we do because there are many other areas of consideration involved in transforming works from one language and culture into the language and culture somewhere else. There are so many more processes involved than some kind of mechanical word-for-word substitution, which is what some fans may imagine is all that’s involved in releasing a translated work. Part of the reason I like to use “localization” is because it suggests more of the complexity of the process.

**So, it sounds like, in the simplest terms, a literal translation would be writing something like *いただきます (Itadakimasu)* as “I humbly receive,” while localization is knowing that no one would actually say that, so it should be written as “Thank you for the food. Let’s eat.” Plus, on top of that, you have to explain pop culture references and other slang. It does seem like it would be impossible to define where translation ends and localization begins in that sense.**

## So what is the role of a localization editor in the whole localization process?

The title of localization editor can have different definitions depending on the company and what kind of work is being transformed between languages. I can only provide details from my own experience.

At many manga and light novel publishers in North America, the in-house editor is more of a project manager for a set of localization projects. I probably spend less of my time on actual editing than I do on all the other tasks I'm responsible for. I oversee a project from the point that it's licensed all the way until we ship it off to the printer.

As you might imagine, this involves various meetings, an endless string of emails, and working together with various teams to make sure each book comes together. I'm responsible for everything from hiring the freelancers (usually translators and letterers) to editing all the stages of the book to composing the back cover copy and making sure each team has the files they need at any given time.

In the Japanese-popular-culture world, there are some forms of localization editors for any localized work, whether it's anime, games (including visual novels), or books. Whether or not someone in the process will actually have the job title "localization editor" may be another story.

**So, not only are you editing translations and explaining what a kotatsu is to people who may never have seen one before, but you're also working as a project manager and helping to design covers. You sound busy!**

## Tell me about what your typical day looks like.

Each day, I need to evaluate all of my projects, check what stage they're at, and prioritize my tasks based on what's most urgent. Because weekly releases run on tight schedules, I might edit a script for one *Shonen Jump* series, edit lettered pages for another series, and move files for all of my projects around to the various places they need to go in the morning.

I like to get as many of the faster tasks out of the way as I can early in the day before settling into the bulkier, more time-consuming editing processes for graphic novel (manga) releases in the afternoon. Throughout the day, I send and respond to a variety of emails, solving problems and answering questions as they arise.

As for the actual editing process, I find light novels to be much more straightforward because it's just me and the words! Manga is much more multifaceted, and editors are responsible for making sure all of the visual aspects, including the art and speech balloons, look the way they should. You'd be surprised at how many ways things can go wrong!

## What projects have you worked on in the past?

Some of my manga for VIZ includes *Demon Slayer: Kimetsu no Yaiba—Stories of Water and Flame*, *Dragon Quest: The Adventure of Dai*, *Kubo Won't Let Me Be Invisible*, and an upcoming set of three *Demon Slayer* light novels.

My work for Kodansha Comics includes certain volumes of *Sweat and Soap*, *UQ Holder!*, and *Hitorijime My Hero*.

For J-Novel Club, I edited *A Lily Blooms in Another World* and the first volume of *She's the Cutest . . . But We're Just Friends!*, as well as completing many proofreading projects.

## Do localization editors need a high level of Japanese (N2 or N1)?

Opinions on this can vary greatly depending on your company. Some companies require a high level of Japanese fluency, while others require none.

Personally, for someone in the type of editing role I have with manga and light novels, I believe it's best for someone to have around N2 abilities or higher. There are so many things I notice while editing my projects that I would never be able to catch if I didn't have the Japanese abilities I do. That said, most companies wouldn't actually care whether you have a particular level of the JLPT as long as your actual abilities can accomplish what you need to do.

## Do you think your past experience living in Japan benefits your ability to be a good localization editor?

It goes without saying that the linguistic and cultural understanding I gained while living in Japan is invaluable to my work. However, I also utilized many soft skills while teaching on the JET Program that still come into play today.

ALTs have to think on their feet, quickly solve problems, and adapt so that class can move forward sometimes. Similarly, almost no project goes 100% smoothly, so there's a lot of responding and adapting to change under time constraints in what I do.

JETs are also known as cultural ambassadors, and providing a bridge between cultures through media is what's so exciting about localization to me!

## **You seem to really love what you do for work! What do you like most about your job?**

I love being able to connect people on different sides of the planet, people who have completely different cultural backgrounds, through the appreciation of impactful works of fiction. Opening people's eyes to worlds they previously knew little to nothing about is so exciting and fulfilling.

## **What has been the biggest challenge during your time as a localization editor?**

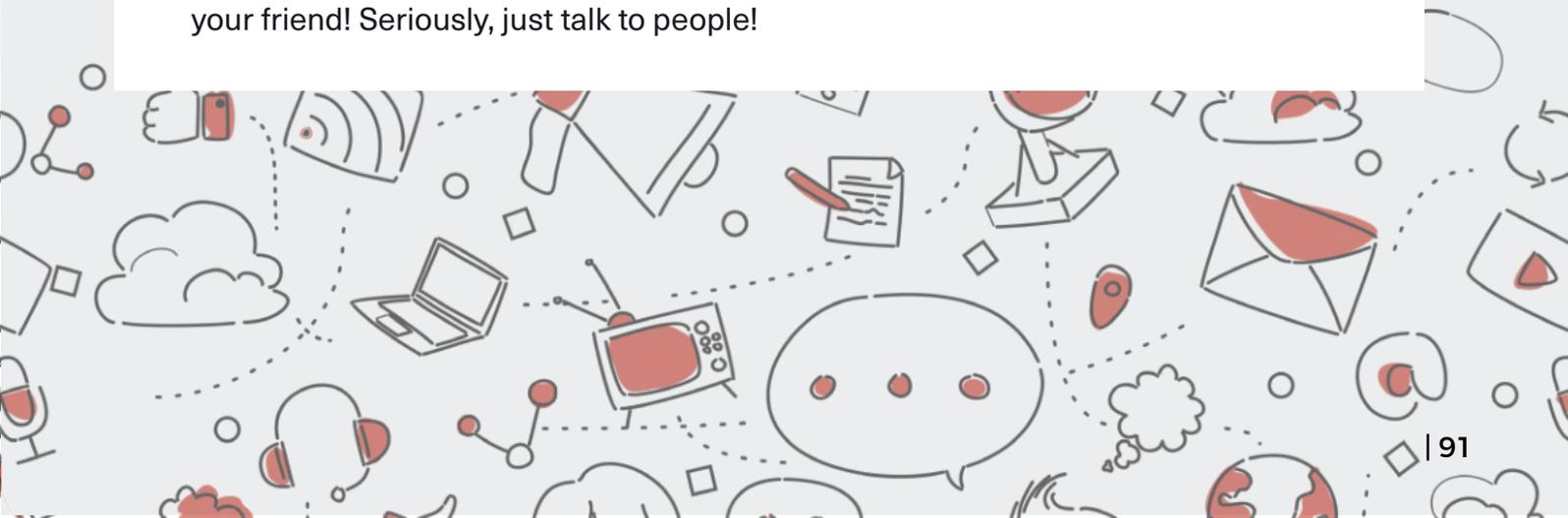
As someone who is purely word-oriented on a basic level, one challenge is finding a balance and rhythm in accomplishing all my various tasks while my biggest aptitude is for working with the words on the page. Growing in the leadership and project management aspects of my role has actually been one of the most rewarding and empowering aspects of working at VIZ this past year.

## **It's wonderful that you have found a career that fits your aptitudes so well, while simultaneously challenging you and providing you with opportunities to grow. What advice would you give job seekers looking to get into the world of manga and Japanese light novels?**

As with any writing or editing field, read and write as much as you can. But you already knew that, right?

Certain classes and certification programs can also help you build your skills. Also, study style guides like *The Chicago Manual of Style*. If you're confident in those linguistic abilities already, start networking with people in the industry on social media. I've found both Twitter and LinkedIn helpful. Also, try to get some articles posted online or do some editing practice on your own that you might even be able to show a prospective employer as a sample of your work.

Most importantly, don't sell yourself short! You can cold email potential employers from their jobs pages; in many cases, even if there are no listed openings. In this niche of the publishing world, you'll just have to pass an editing test, and that may be enough to get your foot in the door with some initial assignments. But again, networking is your friend! Seriously, just talk to people!



**Thank you so much for your time. I'm sure many of our readers find your job as fascinating as I do, so we truly appreciate you sharing your knowledge with us. I know many people are eagerly awaiting your next releases.**

If you are interested to hear more of what Jennifer Sherman has to say or would like to read some of her work, feel free to follow her on [LinkedIn](#) or [Twitter](#) and check out [VIZ](#) for a list of their latest releases.

*Jennifer Sherman worked as an anime journalist and freelance manga and light novel editor before joining VIZ Media as an editor. She was a JET in Mie Prefecture from 2012 to 2016. Her JET-induced wanderlust may lead her to relocate again, but she currently lives in her home state of Ohio.*

*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.*



(konyaku wo konya kuu.)

こんにゃくを今夜食う。

I'll eat konyaku tonight.

Welcome to the monthly language corner and the beginning of a new financial/academic year! I've got a few vocabulary words that I feel are repeated more often than most at the beginning of the school year.

This month's oyaji gag is dedicated to konyaku, also known as konjac in English.

## Vocabulary

April	四月	shigatsu
entrance ceremony	入学式	nyuugakushiki
school term	学期	gaki
school event	学校行事	gakkougyouji
pay attention	気を付け	kiwotsuke
stand up	起立	kiritsu
bow	礼	rei
sit down	着席	chakuseki
stand up (please)	立ってください	tatte (kudasai)
sit down (please)	座ってください	suwatte (kudasai)

# TRAVEL AND COMMUNITY

## TRAVEL EDITOR

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### Dahlia Lemelin

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

## COMMUNITY EDITOR

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### Sierra Nelson-Liner

*"Sometimes I need only to stand wherever I am to be blessed." — Mary Oliver*

## TRAVEL DESIGNER

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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*

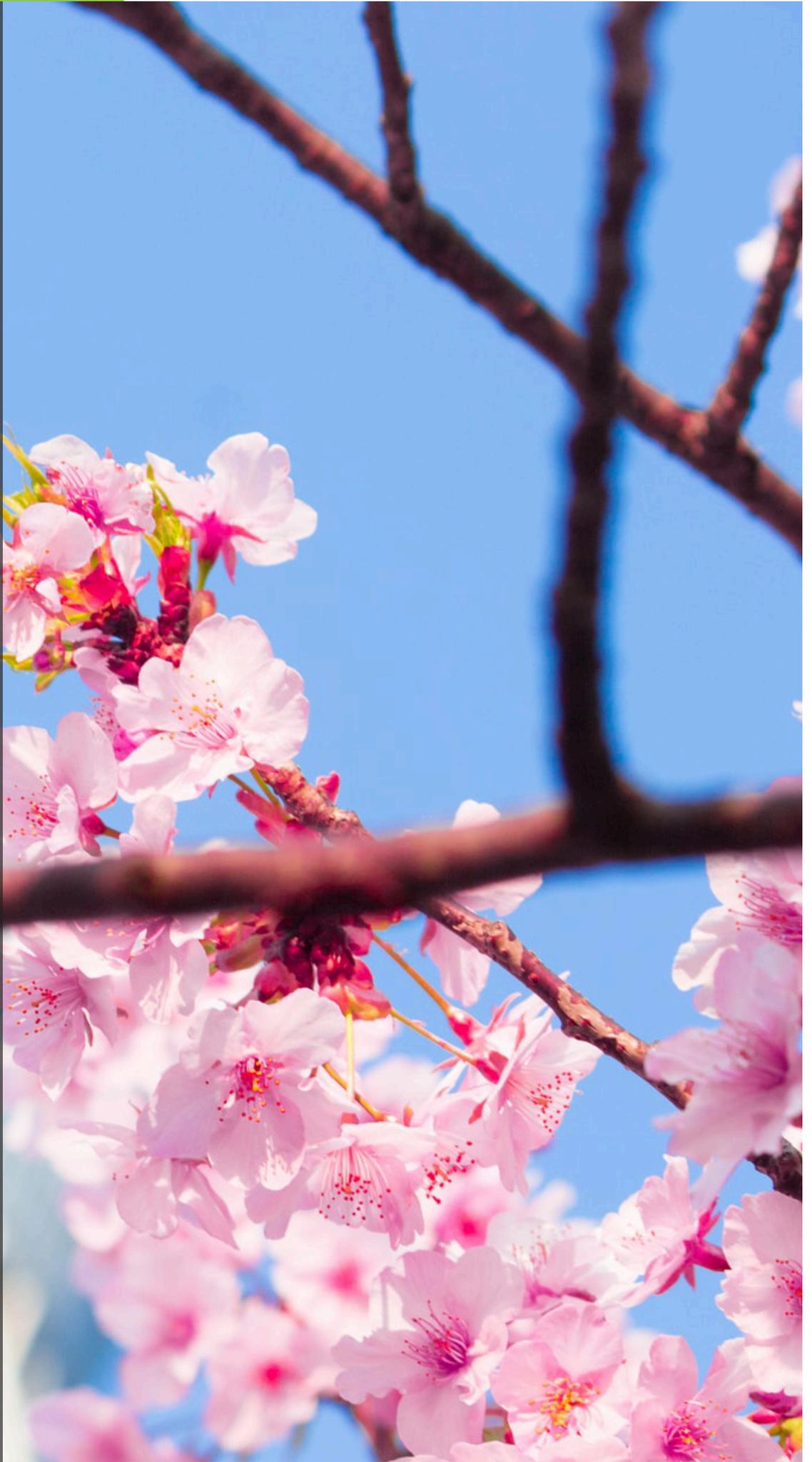
## COPY EDITOR

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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



男性



# Beppu Onsen

A TRAVEL DIARY

Fergus Gregg (Kobe)

女性



“Let’s go to Fukuoka and have a nice long weekend trip to Kyushu.” The long weekend was in mid-February, with the proposed departure on Friday the 10th, after work. However, the reality of COVID emergency measures had set in. Venues closed from 9 P.M. in a town where we didn’t know the right nightlife spots. So another, more adventurous, idea was floated the week before our holiday: “Let’s visit Beppu Onsen in Oita, and catch the overnight ferry to get there.” So we left Osaka at 8 P.M. on the overnight ferry. Our tickets cost 9000 yen, and within the hour we were sailing past our homes in Kobe on our way to Kyushu. The destination: Beppu.





So, why Beppu? This small city in Oita often gets overlooked by tourists due to its location away from the shinkansen train lines, which is a real shame because Beppu is one of the most famous geothermal hot spring spots in the whole of Japan. So me and a few friends eschewed the expensive shinkansen and complex local trains and caught the overnight ferry from Osaka.

The overnight ferry, [the Sunflower](#), is a great method of getting from point A to point B. The sleeping arrangement we picked was the shared cabin, where passengers are provided with a mattress, some sheets for

bedding, and a curtain to separate their sleeping area from the other passengers. While other travellers might find this accommodation basic, there are other options, some of which include capsule hotel style bunks and entirely private cabins, so there's something for everyone. The ferry also boasts an onboard onsen and a fantastic dinner and breakfast buffet, so all in all, the Sunflower is worth every penny.

As the ferry treks across the peaceful Seto Inland Sea, I advise you watch as the boat goes beneath the Awaji Suspension Bridge and enjoy as the night view of Kobe and Osaka fade behind the horizon.

## DAY 1

As we awoke aboard the Sunflower, we checked out the gorgeous sunrise views of Oita Bay. The ferry arrived at 7 A.M., and after a short bus ride to Beppu Station, we were ready to start our day. From here we checked into our hotel, the [Beppu Daichi](#), a great hotel that cost 5000 yen for one night's stay with breakfast. The staff here are friendly and were more than happy to store our luggage until we were able to occupy our rooms. They also lent us onsen towels, which was a God's send as I'd forgotten mine.

*The sun welcomes us to Oita Bay and Beppu.*



Now, in order to best experience Beppu, I'd highly recommend renting a car. If travelling with friends, your expense should be as little as 3000 yen for two full days of driving. This car was instrumental in our next step: Touring all of the [Seven Hells of Beppu](#).

Beppu is situated close to the active Tsurumi Volcano, so the geothermally heated waters bubble up to the surface all over town, in some places coming up dramatically in the form of geysers. We first experienced these geysers at [Tatsumaki Jigoku](#), aptly named the "Spout Hell" in the Shibaseki District in

the northern hills of Beppu. There is a bus that you can catch to get there, but it's incredibly inconvenient if you wish to see all the sights, so we drove. Here, every 40 minutes, a geyser erupts for as long as 10 minutes. Its full power is hindered by a stone plate, but it's still an amazing sight.

Right next door is the [Chinoike Jigoku](#), the "blood pond hell" famous for its blood-red colouring. Besides the palpable sulphur smell and complimentary foot bath, there's not a lot to see at this particular hell besides its colouring, so we moved on to the Kannawa District.





Now might be a good time to mention that while you can get individual tickets to each hell, it's far better to get the 2000 yen pass, which you can buy at any of the hells and use moving forward. Visiting each hell is far more of an experience than visiting just one. However, this goes hand-in-hand with my car recommendation. While the Kannawa hells are within walking distance of each other, the other two hells are about 10 minutes away by car, 20 by bus, and if you want to fit them in along with numerous onsen stops, it's much better to have a car. Otherwise, you're likely to spend most of your precious day waiting at bus stops. Here in Kannawa, we found the

other five hells of Beppu. Some of them are a little similar to one another, so I'll just highlight the ones I find to be particularly enjoyable and enhance the Beppu travel experience.

[Umi Jigoku](#), the "sea hell" is easily the most beautiful of the seven. It's a pond of boiling, bright blue, spring water upon which lotus flowers grow. Some of these lily pads grow so big that they can even support small children. Here, we tried the famous onsen eggs of Beppu, which are hard boiled in the onsen waters. This spacious garden space, with its billowing natural steam, is an absolute must visit for anyone travelling to Beppu.



*It's difficult to get a good photo through the cage that confines the Crocodiles.*

Next is the [Oniyama Jigoku](#), the “monster” hell, which is the one I have conflicting feelings about. While the hell in and of itself is a beautiful blue, it is also home to over 100 crocodiles kept in abominable conditions. Some are afforded their own cages, yet in the main concrete enclosure, they are piled on top of one another. By all appearances, the animals don't seem to be kept in good health. Although I would like to recommend each of the seven hells, I cannot speak to the level of care these animals are treated with, and the enclosures that I did see did not seem fit for captivity, so I'd say steer clear of this one if you are an animal lover.

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visited stood out in terms of environment and atmosphere: [Fushibozu Jigoku](#) “the mud hell” is a thick viscous grey clay bubbling in an amazing display. The bubbles to the smooth faces of buddhist monks, not to agree with their while you may not be able to experience these geothermal waters, something almost in my next destination,



Located up in the hills surrounding Beppu lies one of the rarest onsens in Japan, a mixed mud bath. While the hotel it's attached to is a little old, the onsen itself is made from old wood which, when coupled with the billowing steam of the onsen and its offshoot geothermal vents, evokes an aesthetic similar to that of a Ghibli film. It's encouraged by the staff that, once inside the outdoor pools, you scoop up the mud and smear its exfoliating mineral composition onto your skin, which makes for a fun experience. The mixed aspect of this onsen is handled delicately, as partitions block view from both sides, up until bathers are fully submerged in the water. This means that if you're travelling in a group, you can speak to your friends from beyond a short wooden fence and enjoy a fully inclusive onsen. With a waterfall bath, a steam hill almost comparable to Silent Hill, and a huge selection of indoor and outdoor pools, Hoyoland is not only one of the most memorable onsens in Beppu but in the whole of Japan.

## DAY 2

Day Two starts with a trip to [Hyotan Onsen](#). While my friends booked a private onsen for 2,150 yen and found it to be an altogether enjoyable experience, I was left to enjoy the rest of the bath house. While I would love to talk about the comfortable cedar tub or the floral outdoor bath, the highlight (and where I spent the full hour and a half of my 780 onsen ticket) was the waterfall bath. While very shallow, the main appeal of this outdoor bath is the spigots, suspended five metres above, which distribute warm water at a nice pressure onto bathers. This provides a therapeutic and massaging feeling that relaxes the muscles. It's an addictive feeling and one that makes the entry price all worthwhile. Hyotan Onsen does also offer a sand bath, where you are covered in sand warmed by subterranean heat, but this one is a little disappointing. For the added price of 500 yen, you're expected to dig your own hole and then bury yourself. In an already hot room, this physical exertion can make for a far from luxurious experience, and frankly isn't worth the labour in my opinion.



One sand bath that is not disappointing, however, is the Beppu Beach Sandbath. This one is famous for its black volcanic sands, excellent service, and gorgeous view of Beppu Bay that visitors luxuriate in. Once you pay the entrance fee of 1500 yen (worth every penny), you'll be guided to a 20-metre stretch of sand by the attendants. Once there, clothed in a yukata, they'll bury you up to your head in the sand so that you can relax easily. Time goes by too quickly. Fair warning to anyone looking to enjoy this attraction: get there early as visitors have been known to wait an hour even during the off season for a chance to truly enjoy the Beppu sand bath.

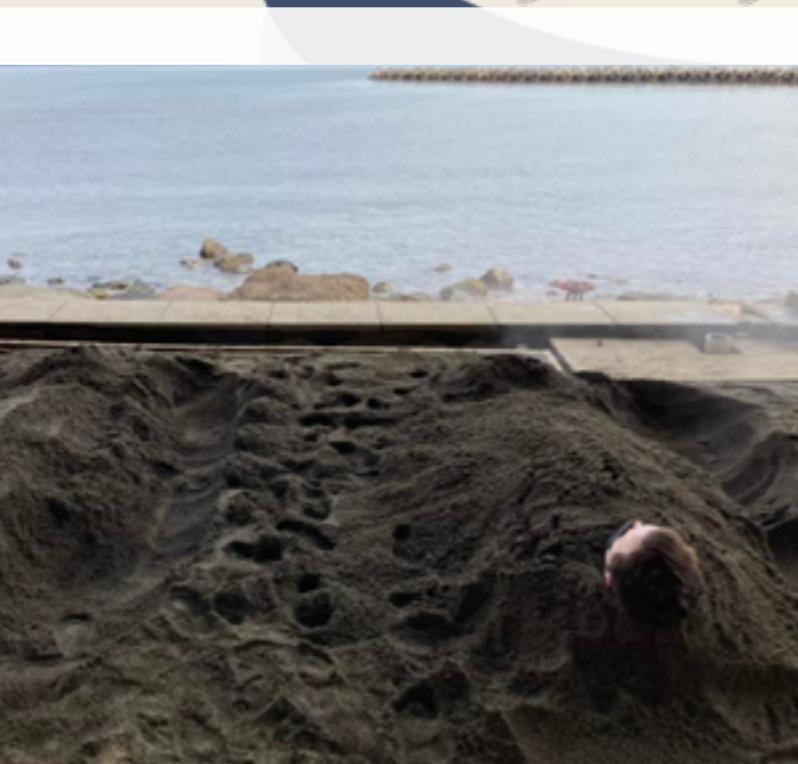
Running out of time for our final day in Beppu, we hotfooted it back to the Sunflower Ferry, where our capsule dormitory awaited us. Thankfully we were the only ones inhabiting this dorm, so we enjoyed having the run of the fully-equipped suite. Each capsule is kitted out with a comfortable bed, blackout curtains, and even a private TV you can plug the complimentary headphones into. However, tuckered out by the days of sightseeing and onsen enjoyment, we allowed ourselves to sleep early.



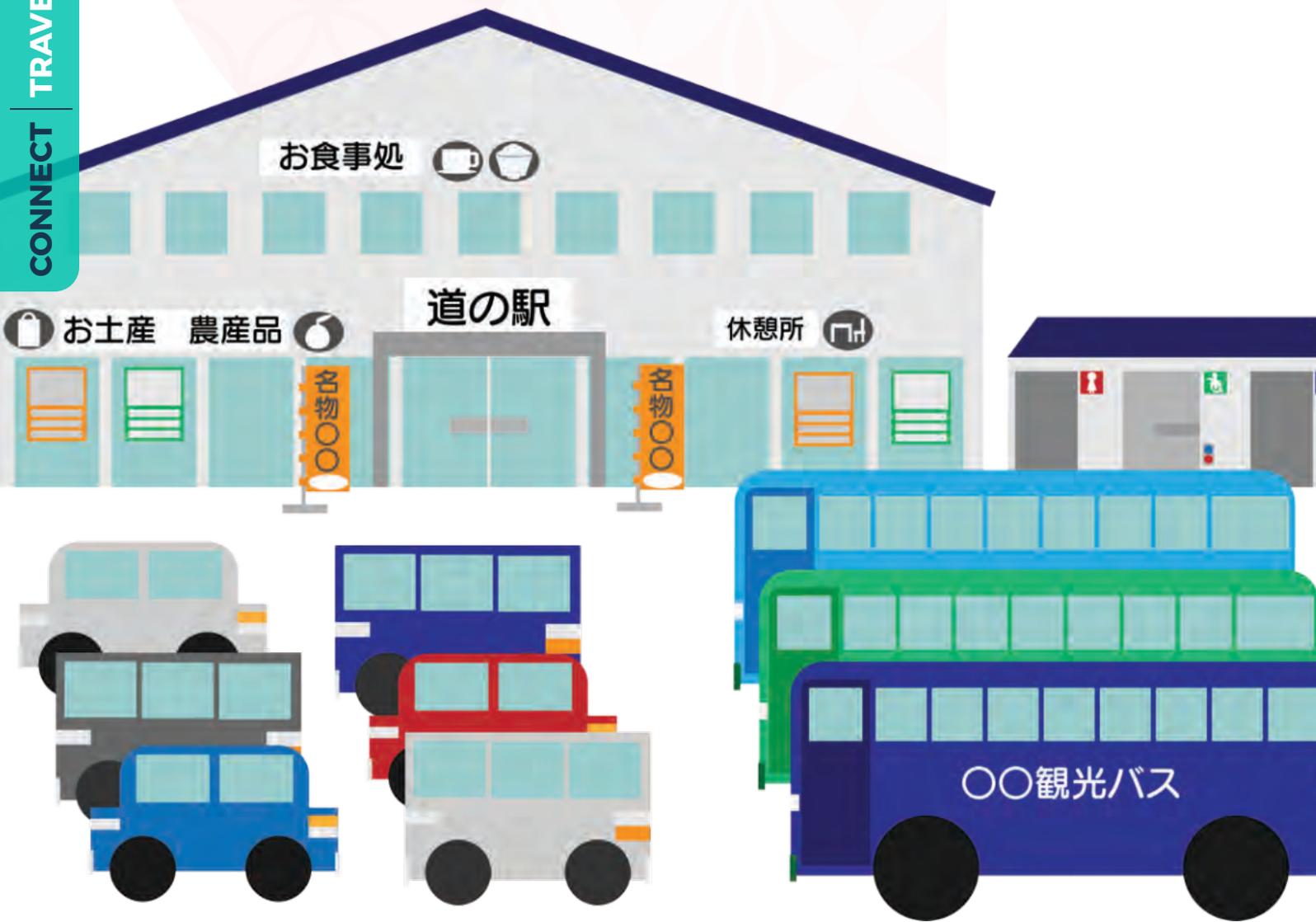
### DAY 3

All I have to say about the third day of this odyssey was that we awoke at sunrise to see once again the Awaji Suspension Bridge in the cold light of day. With Kyushu far behind us and Kobe's Harborland drawing near, we reflected on our journey.

Beppu is an overlooked tourist destination due to its distance from the major train lines. Yet sometimes looking for a different route can be all the more rewarding. The overnight ferry trip was cost effective and fun, and at the end of the voyage was a city left almost entirely to the locals, with too much to do in just the two full days I had. Close by is a mountain given over entirely to two monkey troupes, called Takasakiyama. Oita also features its own onsen and offsprings. Too many things to fit into two days and far too many to fit into this one article. So I'll leave you with a reiteration of my advice to rent a car and a final recommendation that if you travel to Beppu, pack light and make sure you reserve more than two days.



*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.*



# GOTTA SEE 'EM ALL!

## COLLECTING MEMORIES AT ROADSIDE STATIONS

Dahlia Lemelin (Gunma)

Moving here as a fresh vehicle-less resident of Japan, I had barely heard of service areas in Japan, and much less about *Michi no Eki*, roadside stations. I first discovered the charm and uniqueness of Japanese service areas on a trip with coworkers in March of 2019. Invited to a three-day trip to Shikoku, I joined the gang, since seeing this part of Japan along with Japanese coworkers would allow me to see it in a way I probably couldn't if I went alone. Another plus was that we'd rent a car and drive to go around a total of three prefectures, making the experience different from the long lonely train rides I was used to. That's when I saw the Great Seto Bridge for

the first time and could set foot on the small island of Yoshima, where we stopped at their [Service Area](#), sitting outside eating some lemon-flavored sweet, looking at the sea spreading before us. The breathtaking view, along with the facilities, seemed incredibly better than what I had in mind when I was told we'd make a round-trip detour in the middle of the Seto Inland Sea with a service area as our only goal. This detour would be the first of many I'd take during my travels to check out the beauty of various rest areas all around the country.



Since then, I have taken to driving my own car, with which I have visited both expressway rest areas as well as local roadside stations, for a short stretch or a full afternoon of fun. What is it about these locations that are so special? There is more to it than you might think.

## MICHI NO EKI: A COMMUNITY HUB

If you live anywhere except Central Tokyo, chances are there is a Michi no Eki close by. Nowadays, there are 1194 of them, with anywhere from one to more than 100 in each of the 47 prefectures.

Searching for something to do on a sunny afternoon, I fell upon pictures of a beautiful place with a pond, activities such as blueberry picking, hot springs, as well as local craft beer factory, yogurt, and ice cream makers on top of a few local restaurants in a wide natural setting, perfect for a little day trip. I set my car navigation system to drive to [Kawaba Denen Plaza](#), in Northern Gunma, which to my surprise turned out to be a roadside station! As a first encounter with the concept, I was quickly charmed.



I was used to sharing my time in unkept places because of the lack of comfortable services as a last resort or emergency only. The top prize in Japan really leveled and made me want to. Popular with tourists, frequented by several for their fresh products, the farmer's market crafts from their own catching up with the restaurant. Turns out a road stop for tired



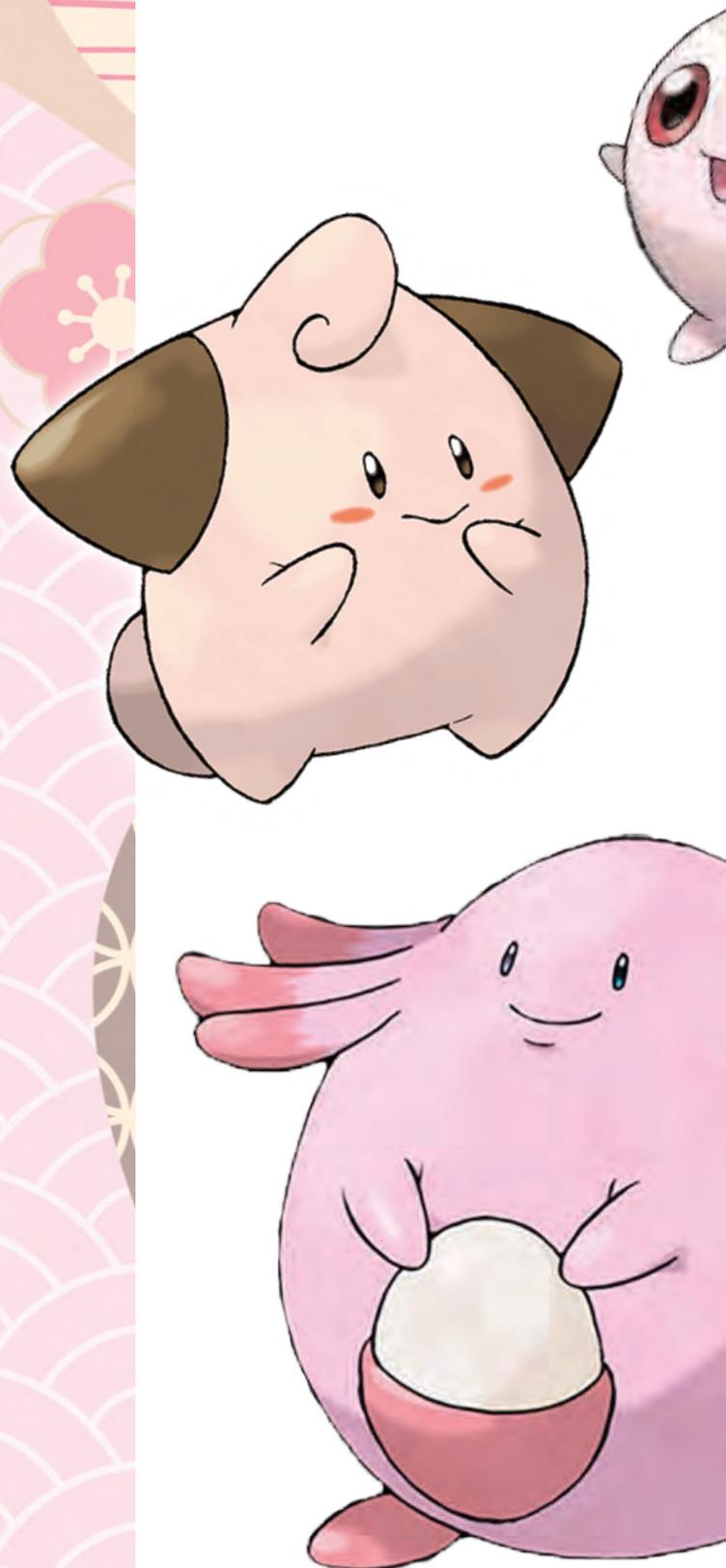
by, sometimes quite that few people visit lack of convenient and ces, often stopped at for necessary natural y. So ending up at one roadside stations in ed up my idea of them nt to visit many more. urists, they are also veral locals coming roduce selection at arket, selling some community, or simply friends at the local out, it's more than a d drivers.

Created in the early '90s, they are community-built and often self-sustainable hubs of jobs, meeting points, trade spots—and nowadays bustling tourism attractions. They also serve as an important tool to revitalize countryside communities through collaboration with universities by offering internships, employment, and development opportunities through the promotion of local food, crafts, and culture. Most are found in smaller cities around the country, but a lot are also along important arteries like prefectural roads that cross through regions, so you will most likely find one on your drive to the next city over. Keep

an eye out for the white and blue icon sign showing a facility surrounded by trees on the road!

Some roadside stations have even become favorites. Most have the basic services like 24-hour parking, well taken care of bathrooms, as well as road information. Sometimes a small convenience store or stall will offer some food to keep you going on your trip. But some of them are now actual destinations with hectares (!) worth of fun, including hot springs, hotels, museums, ferris wheels, and various cultural activities to experience.

I have good memories of a few stops I have made in the past years. Of course, my first visit to Kawaba, when I tasted delicious yogurt sitting by the pond looking at adorable ducks. Another I like to visit is [Nakayama Bonchi](#), in the mountains of North Gunma. There, I tasted a special way of making *kakigori*, where they freeze entire *yayoihime* strawberries in a block and make shaved ice with it instead of plain milk or water. Eating the frozen treat with my feet resting in their warm foot bath, overlooking rice field art in the paddies all around was a calming experience. At the time, they also had a musical event with a rockabilly group jazzing up the valley with their sound, kids dancing without a care in the sun while parents stocked up on fresh vegetables. I went home that night, not without wishing I could stay a night in their [mini cottages](#) in the quiet countryside just around the corner. Events like music shows or discussions might be happening at your Michi no Eki nearby, so keep an eye open for your city's website or social media for a hint of what might be going on.





## ONE FOR EVERYONE

Since there are over 1100 Michi no Eki in Japan, you are sure to find one you'll enjoy. Most are also accessible by bus or nearby train stations, so even without a car, you can visit them. They are also welcoming to cyclists, so if you like to take the road on your bike for long rides, check if there is a rest stop on your way! A few also are on the route of buses going out to touristic attractions in their area, which makes them a nice place to have lunch before or after spending time visiting.

Even though most of the roadside stations I have visited are in the Kanto area, I do have a list of ones I want to visit in other regions of Japan. A few honorable mentions that caught my attention include the newly built [Lucky Park Namie](#), on the coast of Fukushima, where one can find giant *Pokemon* figures of various pink adorable creatures like Chansey, whose Japanese name is "Lucky." After trying to revitalize cities affected by the March 2011 Earthquake in the region, people have done their best to attract visitors to the city of Namie, where the father of Satoshi Tajiri, *Pokemon's* creator, is from. Plans seem to be in the works to get more *Pokemon* playgrounds in Fukushima roadside stations in the future, so make sure to go around and maybe plan a little detour on your next road trip.

Another highly-ranked stop is in Hyogo, at the [Kobe Fruits Flower Park](#). There, an entire afternoon (or overnight stay) worth of fun awaits, with an outdoor pool, a go-kart track, mini golf, fruit picking, and even a ferris wheel with fruit-shaped gondolas overlooking the area.

In Chiba, you can park your car, stretch, and even stay the night in a renovated elementary school building at [Hotasho](#), where futons are arranged in classrooms for accommodation. You can also take cooking lessons, or steep in their *onsen* for a while.

As the last example of the variety of activities and interests the roadside stations can offer, there is [Fuji-Kawa Rakuza](#), in Shizuoka. Being close to Mount Fuji, you can ride their 60 m (197 ft) tall ferris wheel for stunning views at any time of the day. The same rest stop, which is also a service area for the expressway, has a planetarium with a projection dome on-site, as well as the possibility to try making *hojicha*, a staple in tea producer Shizuoka.



## ZOOM THROUGH THE COUNTRY ON TOLL ROADS

For those driving longer distances, you might be hopping on the expressways, which also have numerous rest stops known as service areas (seen as “SA”) all over the country. Every 50 kilometers or so, you can find service areas on both sides of the highway, accessible 24 hours a day. Just like Michi no Eki, some have attractions, stunning views, and most have choices of chain or local restaurants. Some are actual destinations people will go to on a weekend, like the [Umihotaru Service Area](#) in the middle of Tokyo Bay, [Kariya Highway Oasis](#) in Aichi, and the [Beppu Bay](#) Service Area in Oita.

For those who make long trips or road trips that go on for days, some might sleep in a rearranged car, cozy van, or recreational camper. Even though some are required, sleeping overnight at roadside stations is pretty common and free. With some facilities even offering showers on-site, travelers can take advantage of the last hour or so of the rest stop's hot springs before snoozing in their vehicles. Most stops now have a few charging points for those who need them. Road information, vending machines, and bathrooms available all night long make some traffic passing by even more makes for a relatively safe night. It's worth considering to keep your car parked far away and not use bathrooms for washing dishes or getting into the car too long so as not to disturb other visitors. Park close to a structure, keep your doors locked, and be aware of your surroundings. Experienced car campers recommend stopping at a Michi no Eki just before closing hours, leaving before midnight hours as to not use the parking lot longer than necessary, and to take advantage of facilities for visitors. I have personally stayed at a few service areas on the Tohoku Expressway after I made a very bad decision to drive north from Southern Gunma to Sendai one day, finding myself dangerously sleepy at past 2 A.M. . . . I pulled over for a quick snooze and stretch on the way, parked near a light behind a truck, and felt safe.

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## GOTTA STAMP 'EM ALL: A NEW TRAVEL CHALLENGE!

A lot of people in Japan have the goal to see all 47 prefectures, some keeping notes by coloring maps, collecting local items like mugs, or photographing manhole covers. Collecting is a very popular hobby in Japan, and now you can even challenge yourself to collect rest stops stamps!

Both service areas and Michi no Eki (as well as most train stations!) in Japan have a small stamp desk available for you to keep track of where you have visited either to keep as a memory ticket, or to make some fun collage with pictures of your trip. You can even enter the official stamp rally for visiting Michi no Eki!



Although their [website](#) is exclusively in Japanese, you can get more information by visiting a roadside station near you. You can get a notebook or pad of your choice to keep a personal record, but you can also purchase the official Michi no Eki Stamp Rally booklet, which includes a map, a few coupons and vouchers valid for your area, and information about each of the stops around. The country is separated into nine regions ([Hokkaido](#), Tohoku, [Hokuriku](#), [Kanto](#), [Chubu](#), [Kinki](#), Chugoku, [Shikoku](#) and [Kyushu-Okinawa](#)) which each have their own booklet to complete. A lot of the rallies finished last month, but soon enough they will restart this year's round, so let's join!

Finishing one makes you eligible to enter a raffle for some prizes like trips, overnight stays, vouchers, or local products. You will also receive a certificate of completion for your hard work, with the ultimate goal being to collect all nine certificates to get your name on the Michi no Eki official website as well as entering a contest. So far, only about 175 people have completed the national challenge!

April 22 is Michi no Eki Day in Japan, so now would be a good time to think about starting your collecting adventure if you do wish to participate. Every region's rally has specific dates (lasting about a year) during which you must complete the booklet, usually starting around the end of April. On April 22, there might be events or deals to take advantage of at your local roadside station, so be on the lookout! There are plenty of memories to collect in your area.

Will you collect them all?

*Dahlia is the travel editor for **CONNECT** magazine and takes great pleasure in getting lost in the countryside to get away from people and boast about the greatness of the inaka.*

# BEYOND THE RYOKAN

## A RYOKAN THAT BOASTS RICH HISTORY AND A MARKETING DIRECTOR ON A MISSION

Monica Hand (Ehime)

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Golden sunlight streams through the street-facing windows illuminating tatami mats, simple low tables, and designer furniture alike. Calligraphy scrolls drape down in the traditional decorative alcoves, or *tokonoma*, with local art or fresh flowers. Transparent acrylic floors replace tatami mats upstairs. Decades old carpenter's kanji grace the exposed beams of the roof, emphasized by LED spotlights. The early afternoon lights up all of Kiya Ryokan, a gem in coastal Uwajima, a southern town in the Ehime prefecture on Shikoku island.

It's easy to see how, having just turned 110 years old, staying at the ryokan feels like floating through time—at once marked by both the deeply traditional and ever modern sides of Japan. Even the bath has dark modern tiles that emphasize the lighter ones, still left from the original design. It's an experience unlike any other, and in the same way that a stay in a ryokan is vastly different from a hotel, so is a stay at the Kiya to the countless other breathtaking inns across the country.

"We want the guests to be able to sit and feel the past," Barthelous Greb, the ryokan's manager and marketing director explains. "To take in the depth of history while still using modern comforts and artistic additions."

Perhaps the most popular example of this in the ryokan is the roof beam viewing area. Designed by architect [Yuko Nagayama](#), guests are invited to sit or recline on the transparent floor and use a remote to control the color of the spotlights that shine upwards onto the exposed wooden beams throughout the ryokan.

"Screens lower down to allow the experience and light to be fullest," Greb says. "Looking up at the markings from the carpenter's blade and hand, I think that, if you're open to it, you can feel the past there with you."

Greb, originally from Poland, was hired on to the ryokan 12 years ago just after it was bought and transformed from the abandoned ryokan into what it is today. He explains that the full experience and philosophy of the Kiya Ryokan goes beyond that of the amenities and rich beauty of the ryokan itself. Like many rural towns in Japan, Uwajima is no exception to the current population crisis. Young

people are leaving small communities for bigger cities and industries that once made the towns rich are now searching for ways to stay sustainable and relevant. Tourism industries included.

Over the years, he's learned a thing or two about the region and the tourism industry in rural Japan. Now he not only runs the ryokan, but also publishes a blog called [Uwajima Deep](#) for attracting tourism, works with the local tourism office, teaches at an international business course in Matsuyama, and was even named a [Cool Japan Ambassador](#). Clearly, he's regarded locally and nationally as an expert in hospitality and tourism. Why? Because his philosophy *works*.

"The idea is to create connections between people and the place," he explains. "A connection that is unique will stand out in their mind, and they will remember their time much more fondly. It will mean much more to them."

By this he means that when the ryokan, or any tourism destination, creates unique memories for guests, they are more likely to return or more likely to urge others to take the trip. Creating those moments is a bit of an art, and one that can't really be manufactured too much. Instead, it's more about facilitation.

"The thing is that these connections happen organically when people go out into and interact with the community," Greb says. "Instead of eating meals at the ryokan, we recommend places and experiences that fit with the guest and what they're looking for or interested in. Everyone is different."

Luckily for the guests, Greb is also an expert in all things Uwajima. He can paint a vivid picture of just about anywhere and anyone in town, from a famous *koinobori* painter to the haunted dolls at a local shrine. It is easy to become caught up in his passionate tellings of all that the town has to offer.

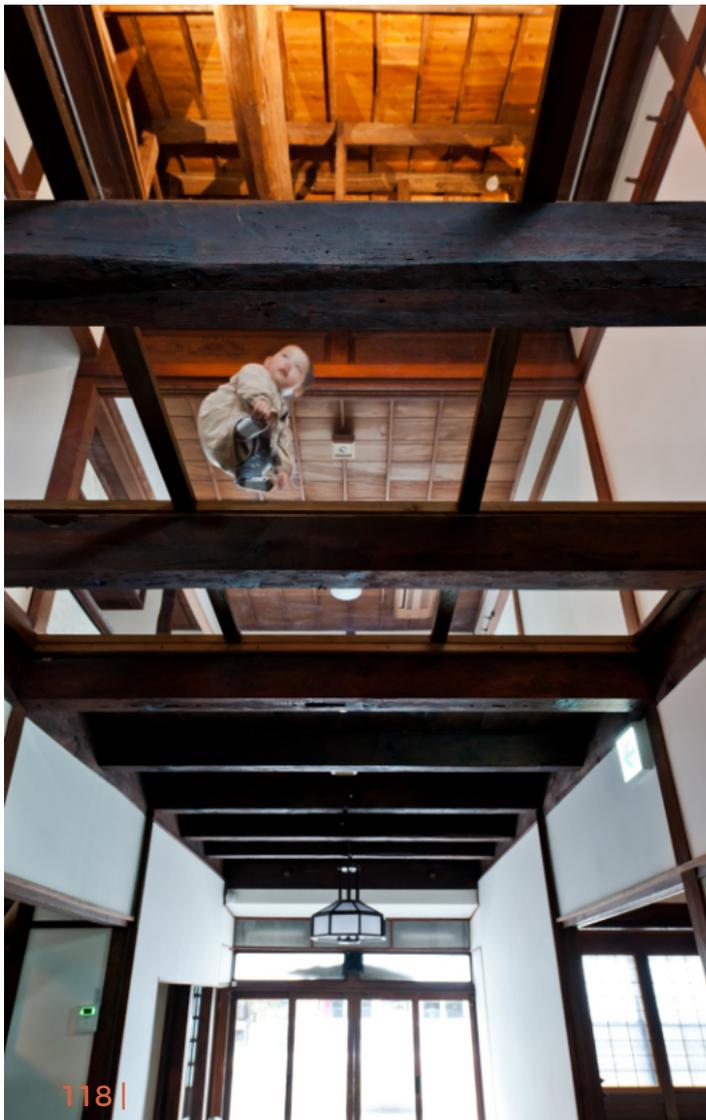
“You know, it’s these details that mean the most, that separate one shrine or building from the next,” Greb says. “It’s the people, the stories and the histories that make any place much more than just a place.”

Since [booking a stay at the inn](#) means getting the entire place to yourself, the Kiya Ryokan also offers people a chance to experience a traditional Japanese style

home and architecture in a personal and intimate way. Greb emphasizes that though this is a draw for international tourists, it is one that often resonates with the ryokan’s Japanese guests in a much deeper and significant way. In fact, Greb prides the inn on its ability to facilitate the connection between people and these often-overlooked cultural traditions.

“Japanese people who stay here, many of them have never stayed in a home with tatami before, they’ve only known city apartments, modern housing,” Greb explains. “Many leave saying how they hope to have a home with tatami of their own one day. A reconnection to culture.”

This reconnection is just another important piece, Greb believes, to revitalizing rural communities and the



once rich traditions. Bringing people back to the simple and family-centric lifestyle.

Now, having spent 12 years watching the city grow and change with the times, Greb wants to help other communities like Uwajima to learn to flourish as well. He believes that tourism, an industry that is already so vital to Japan, could be utilized in stronger ways across the country using attractions that many may not even know exist. But above all, Greb emphasizes the importance of connections to the region. Not just for tourists, but for the community itself as well. It is part of the reason he so passionately talks about the history and wealth of the city to everyone he meets, because even the locals deserve to feel the wonder and pride that comes with each curiosity and legend.

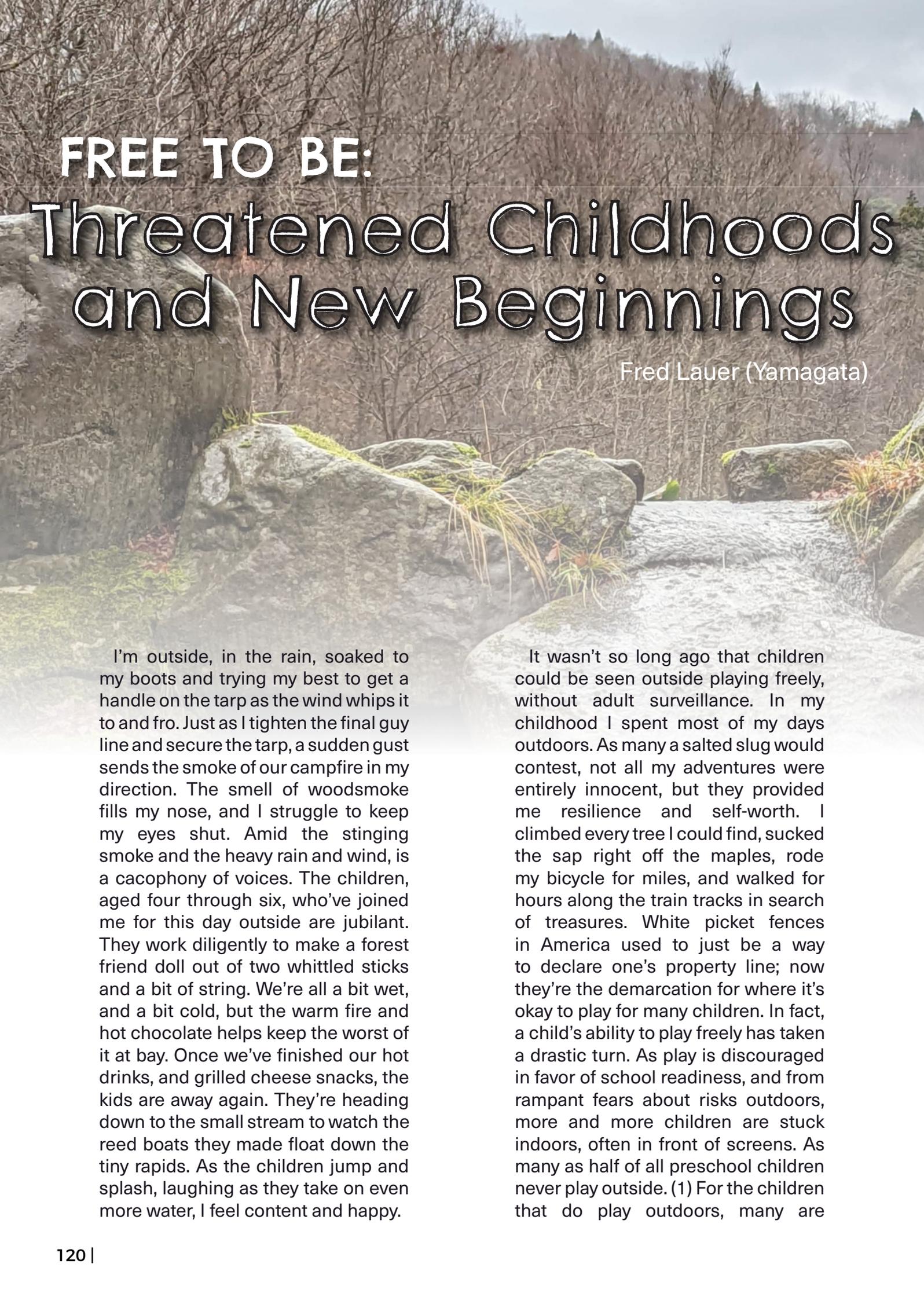
“I really believe that in order to get a town to grow or attract tourism, you have to first make the people that live there happy,” Greb says. “Then, people will come from all over to find out what it is that has made these locals so happy.”

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*Monica Hand is a first-year ALT and the Assistant Head Editor of **CONNECT Magazine**. When not out exploring all that Shikoku has to offer, you can often find her at her cozy apartment trying out a new recipe or watching anything sci-fi related. Working as a freelance writer and editor, you can find samples of her past works [here](#).*

Photos: Kiya Ryokan





# FREE TO BE: Threatened Childhoods and New Beginnings

Fred Lauer (Yamagata)

I'm outside, in the rain, soaked to my boots and trying my best to get a handle on the tarp as the wind whips it to and fro. Just as I tighten the final guy line and secure the tarp, a sudden gust sends the smoke of our campfire in my direction. The smell of woodsmoke fills my nose, and I struggle to keep my eyes shut. Amid the stinging smoke and the heavy rain and wind, is a cacophony of voices. The children, aged four through six, who've joined me for this day outside are jubilant. They work diligently to make a forest friend doll out of two whittled sticks and a bit of string. We're all a bit wet, and a bit cold, but the warm fire and hot chocolate helps keep the worst of it at bay. Once we've finished our hot drinks, and grilled cheese snacks, the kids are away again. They're heading down to the small stream to watch the reed boats they made float down the tiny rapids. As the children jump and splash, laughing as they take on even more water, I feel content and happy.

It wasn't so long ago that children could be seen outside playing freely, without adult surveillance. In my childhood I spent most of my days outdoors. As many a salted slug would contest, not all my adventures were entirely innocent, but they provided me resilience and self-worth. I climbed every tree I could find, sucked the sap right off the maples, rode my bicycle for miles, and walked for hours along the train tracks in search of treasures. White picket fences in America used to just be a way to declare one's property line; now they're the demarcation for where it's okay to play for many children. In fact, a child's ability to play freely has taken a drastic turn. As play is discouraged in favor of school readiness, and from rampant fears about risks outdoors, more and more children are stuck indoors, often in front of screens. As many as half of all preschool children never play outside. (1) For the children that do play outdoors, many are



unable to experience the freedom and independence of years past.

In 2014, five years after moving to Chiba to work as an ALT on the Chiba Wisconsin Program, my wife and I moved to Montana where I finished my Master of Science degree, published my work, and welcomed our eldest son to the world. Despite working in a career that lined up with my values, our family soon came face to face with increasing gentrification, exorbitant healthcare and childcare costs, and a foreboding feeling that America was holding us back. We moved back to Japan in 2018. That first year back, life being as unpredictable as it is, brought us our second miracle in life, our youngest son, and I ended up taking a position as an English Consultant for a small village in Yamagata.

In my new role, I started paying more attention to childhood environments. At school, every day is the same

tidal activity in the classrooms. The period between classes is loud and festive. Students are bustling about, sharing stories with their friends, boasting about their most recent accomplishments in their favorite endeavors. They're laughing, immersed in deep conversation, finishing up the last chapter in a book, and then invariably they're given negative feedback about their inability to check the clock, sit down, and pay attention. The children cast their eyes downward, ashamed that they've once again mismanaged the day. Even though they're just children, doing what children ought to do, for the teachers it seems the kids almost always get it wrong. After some harsh reprimands, class begins, feet start to fidget, and children cast their disinterested stares elsewhere.

In schools and early childcare centers, unadulterated free play is mostly gone, giving way to



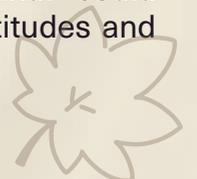
highly regimented days with numerous transitions, where teachers create and direct nearly all activities for children. Young children are made to sit, listen to instructions, stand in straight lines, move and talk in unison. In elementary schools, children have less and less time to move their bodies, and classrooms are filled with bored, and often aggravated children. Walk into many junior high school classrooms and the conversations rarely revolve around learning. Students are mostly concerned with their test scores, fearful that any performance lapse might provoke the ire of their teachers or caregivers.

That isn't to say that the professionals working at the institutions aren't working hard, they do that almost to a fault. It's just that in lieu of best practices for early childhood, most contemporary education favors scientific-management, curriculum-based management, and classroom management, all of which tend to trivialize the individual in favor of quantitative metrics on tests. It's no secret that teachers and administrators are under enormous pressure to deliver high standardized test results, and it's also no secret that overly focusing on outputs in education tends to undermine valuable learning.

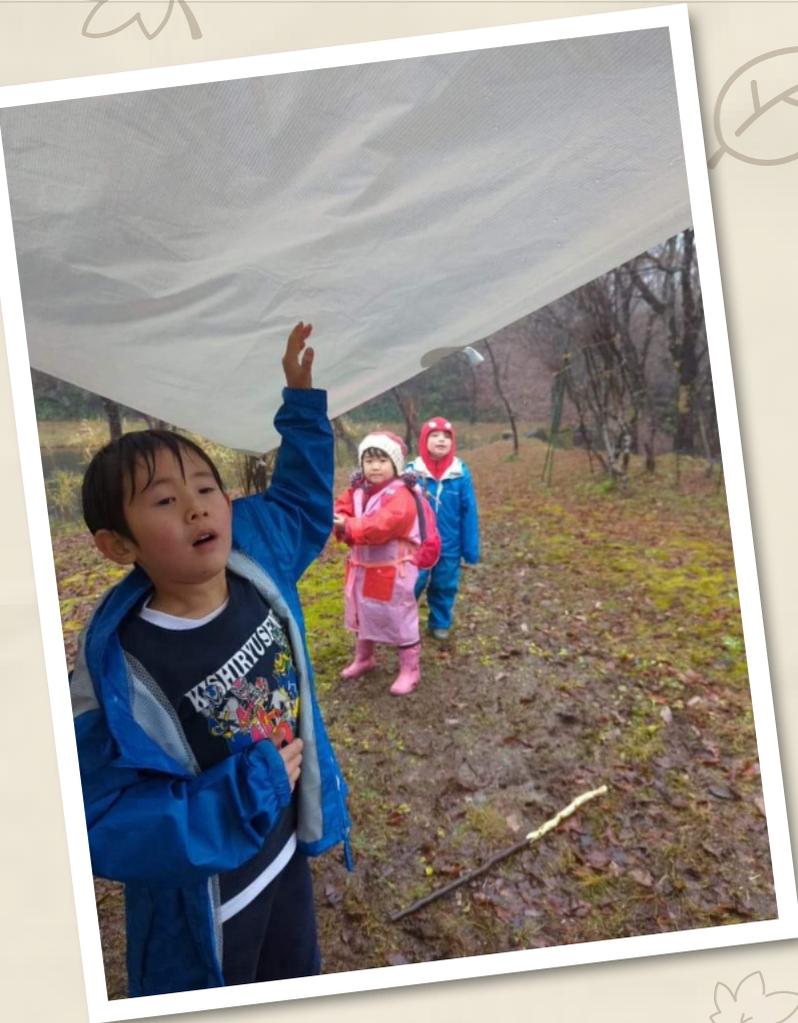


So what do these highly regulated environments mean for the children in Japan? Unfortunately, Japan has seen a generally negative shift in many indicators of healthy childhoods. Children's physical fitness is at an historic low. (2) Among rich nations, Japan ranks near the bottom in terms of child well-being, with children reporting low life-satisfaction. (3) School is often a source of toxic stress for children, which is associated with negative health outcomes in adulthood, and often leads to anxiety and depression. (4, 5) This results in children who become disillusioned in schools, with many either choosing suicide or truancy. (6)

Japan's childhood crisis is by any definition a wicked problem. As Japan becomes increasingly risk averse, children are prevented from any type of wandering and free play. One consequence of this is decreased play time outdoors, and increased time spent in front of screens and devices. (7) And herein lies the rub, notwithstanding all the anxieties surrounding climate and land-use changes, our children aren't being given the opportunity to spend their free time outdoors, where they might form the critical natural connections that could increase pro-environmental attitudes and behaviors in the future. (8)



Experts generally contest restrictive childhoods, arguing that children learn best through self-directed play, which has no adult influence. (9) Learning happens best when we cultivate curiosity, and wonder. (10) Learning stays with us more when it's self directed. (11) Risk taking in childhood leads to a sense of self-worth and accomplishment alongside better risk management in adulthood. (9, 12, 13) Researchers also note the simultaneous rise of medical and behavioral problems as outdoor play disappears (14), while others are concerned that academically focused early years programs may have negative impacts for many children. (15) Put more simply, as we focus more on academic achievements, children are not receiving what they need to develop the strength, physical and mental resilience, self-worth, self-reliance and trust in themselves, creativity, curiosity, and other necessary mental traits needed to solve the many problems of this century and beyond. (14, 16, 17)



After a year of organizing outdoor play events, I founded Kamui Kids in 2021 and joined the growing numbers of practitioners throughout Japan (18) who are providing sensory rich, developmentally appropriate programming to children in the form of nature schools, forest schools, and forest kindergartens in an effort to save childhood. Our forest kindergarten spends six hours of the day entirely outside, in any weather, and our schedule is determined almost entirely by the children's interests and play objectives. For me, Kamui Kids is the start of a vision that I have been developing my entire life. It was born from deep observation of my own children and those I now serve having returned to Japan, and deep questioning of my own motivations as an educator. It continues with a fervent desire to do better by children. And it's supported by an army of researchers and professionals who all write at length about the benefits of self-directed learning, and free play in the outdoors.

At [Kamui Kids](#) we view each child as an individual, on their own path to discovering their own interests. We chose our name to honor the indigenous Ainu of Japan who once also called Mogami home. We hold a deep reverence for nature, and hope to connect children to the natural world by giving them the space and time to form attachments with it. For the staff at Kamui Kids, our children are a constant source of awe.

The children at Kamui Kids climb what they want, run in the halls, yell all they want, explore who they are without harsh judgements or reprimands, participate in decision making, and use tools like

saws and axes to accomplish our full days outdoors. Our work at Kamui Kids is the work that children need. It's an environment free of toxic stress, and full of challenges; dedicated adults who love the children deeply, and understand they all take different paths; rich natural environments with no rules so that children can delve deeply into them to form natural connections; a celebration of humanity, where every child and every child's voice matters; and a chance to slow down and appreciate living in the moment. Kamui Kids provides environments that let children find their humanity, in the hopes that one day those children will help lift us all up toward greater aspirations.



*Fred Lauer is the co-founder and facilitator of Kamui Kids, an English Consultant, and a former ALT. He's a passionate early childhood educator, who loves being outside with his two young children. He hopes to create more environments for outdoor free-play for children. He loves cycling through the countryside and learning about regenerative agriculture. You can read more about his work [here](#), or on his organization's [Facebook page](#).*

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