

AJET

# CONNECT

News & Events, Arts & Culture, Lifestyle, Community

04.2015

**JAPAN'S ANIMAL ISLANDS**



**PLUS**

**THE PRICE OF PEACE**

**CRICKET IN JAPAN**

**BIKING THE INLAND SEA**

**FASHION IN FILM**



The Japanese Lifestyle & Culture  
Magazine Written by the International  
Community in Japan

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## LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Steven Thompson  
Head Editor  
4th-year Fukushima ALT



## LETTER FROM THE AJET CHAIR

Sandy Cheng  
National AJET Chair  
4th-year Kobe ALT

CLICK ME TO SEND YOUR THOUGHTS ON ANY ARTICLE IN CONNECT!

**SPRING HOLIDAYS ARE DRAWING TO A CLOSE**, and it's time to launch into a new semester and/or financial year here in Japan. Workplaces across the nation are full of new faces, and everything is feeling refreshed and new. Unlike the fleeting sakura blossoms, here and gone in two short weeks, let's all hope that whatever blooms in this new year is both beautiful and lasting. It's the perfect time to start up new projects, take new directions, and make some new friends.

Here at AJET, we've also got changes on the way. Not only are there 11 new Block Representatives, we've also got 15 brand-new members who will be solely performing appointed duties. In the past, the 11 block representatives performed representative duties in conjunction with an extra assigned job. Splitting this up means that Block Representatives can now focus on organizing community events and representing the people in their prefectures, while the new appointed members can dedicate all of their time to jobs like social media, advertising, alumni relations, and more.

We'll learn more about this new group dedicating their free time to the national community in May's issue, including an introduction to Connect's next head editor. Until then, you're stuck with me!

We hope you enjoy this April issue, maybe flipping through it on your phone while drinking under the cherry blossoms in your local park. Some of the neat stuff this month includes comparisons of Japanese and foreign takes on street art, the TPP's impact on farming, and involvement in the Middle East. We've also got lighter fare, like travel destinations and *hyuganatsu*.

**IT'S HANAMI SEASON!** Gather all your mates, grab some umeshu, and enjoy all the beautiful pinkness that is Japanese spring! There's no better time than now to make use of National AJET's new and improved Tatami Timeshare! With many thanks to Hokkaido AJET for cooperating with us to make it work, we now have a fully functioning nationwide couchsurfing network for JETs! If you haven't already, make sure you sign up and get traveling!

Not ready to travel because you're busy job hunting? Check out the new [AJET Job Listings Facebook group](#)! AJET has officially partnered up with JETwit to bring to you a fantastic listing of jobs suitable for JETs whether they want to stay in Japan or return home. Don't forget to sign up with [JETwit's Google group](#) to get direct updates and have a look at all the other excellent resources JETwit offers. Remember, we are always working on bringing you exclusive AJET offers, so stay up-to-date with what's great on our [partners' page](#)!

Last but not least, I'd like to wish a massive congratulations to our newly elected and appointed National Council for the AJET year of 2015-2016! We're so excited to see where these energetic guys are going to take AJET and the JET community this coming year!

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COMMENTS

# COVER SUBMISSIONS



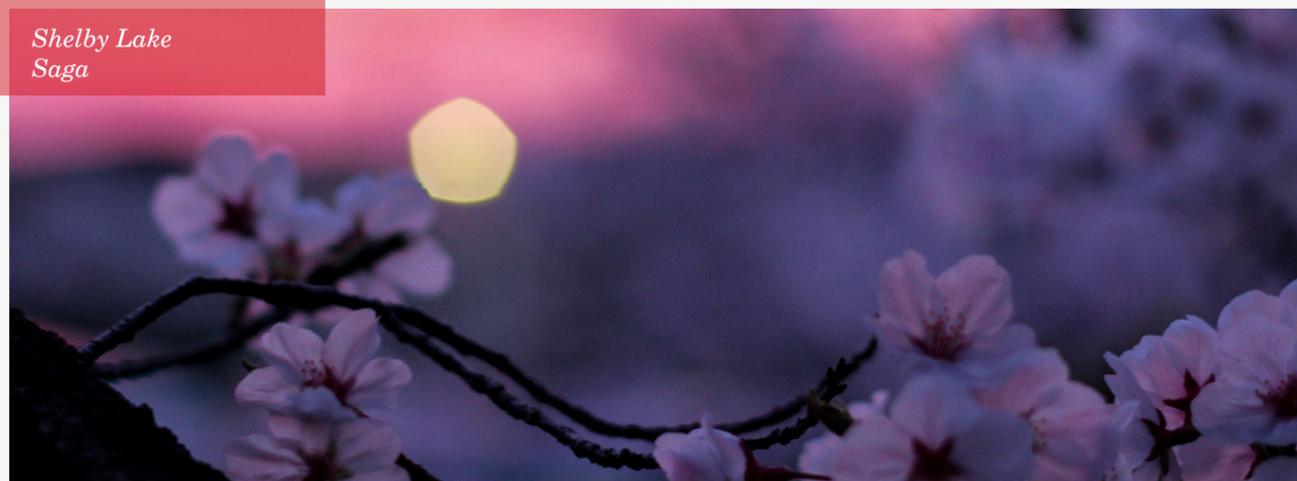
Send your photos for next month's cover to [connect.editor@ajet.net](mailto:connect.editor@ajet.net). Photos must be submitted by the 25th of the month and include your name, prefecture, and title (if applicable). Photos must belong to you, and be of high resolution (1280x720, 300dpi, or higher).



Kseniya Vaynshtok  
Toyama



Larissa Milo-Dale  
Miyazaki



Shelby Lake  
Saga

# NEWS & EVENTS



**ERIKA KLEIN**

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

There's so much to look forward to in April--hanami, Golden Week, and finally, finally warm weather! For Golden Week I'll be heading to Taipei and Kuala Lumpur in a dual effort to explore new places and escape the masses convening on popular areas in Japan. (I briefly visited Tokyo this time last year, mistake; going for something hopefully a bit less crowded this time around.) Whatever you're up to, enjoy spring!



**LACEY LEE**

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

After those long winter months spring is finally here! I went for my first walk of the season in the park with simply a hoodie on, and it's a sign of warmer things to come. Graduation just finished, and I like to think I've helped send another batch of students to their next stage of life. Now I've just got to finish up that spring cleaning I've been trying to accomplish...

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Events Calendar



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Hitting JETs for Six



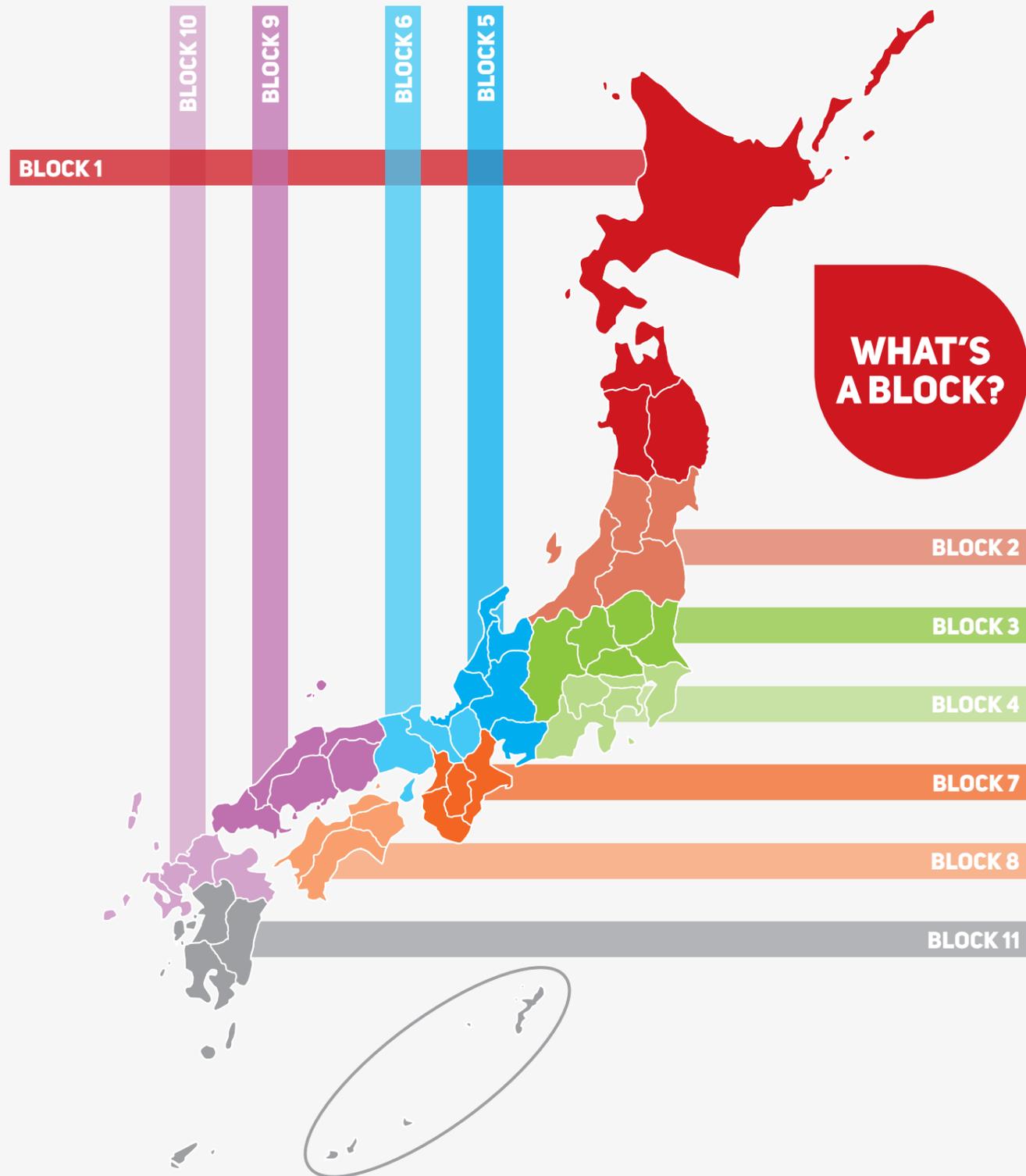
# EVENTS CALENDAR

## APRIL - MAY



Greetings event-goers! We've finally made it to spring, and it's a happy event, indeed. Let the sakura viewings and other assorted outdoor events begin! Perhaps you attended Hina Matsuri and have plans for Golden Week already in place. If not, there's a wealth of things to do this time of year. Happy spring!

If you'd like to see your area's events included on this calendar, [contact us](#) or see the [AJET events calendar](#).



### 28TH JOZANKEI KEIRYU KOINOBORI

Jozankei, Sapporo  
4/19-5/18 - [Website](#)

### HIROSAKI SAKURA FESTIVAL 2015

Hirosaki, Aomori  
4/23-5/6 - [Website](#)

### HIDAKA HIBUSE FESTIVAL

Oshu, Iwate  
4/29 - [Website](#)

### 8TH SADO SPRING ENTERTAINMENT FESTIVAL

Sado, Niigata  
4/24-26 - [Website](#)

### 60TH TENDO SAKURA FESTIVAL "NINGEN SHOJI"

Tendo, Yamagata  
4/25-26 - [Website](#)

### FUKUSHIMA RAMEN SHOW 2015

Koriyama, Fukushima  
5/1-6 - [Website](#)

### 26TH KOEDO KAWAGOE SPRING FESTIVAL

Kawagoe, Saitama,  
3/28-5/5 - [Website](#)

### KEZOJI PARK FLOWER FESTIVAL

Isesaki, Gunma  
4/1-5/20 - [Website](#)

### KOMORO-JOSHI KAIKOEN SAKURA MATSURI 2015

Komoro, Nagano  
4/11-4/29 - [Website](#)

### 68TH MATSUMAE SAKURA FESTIVAL 2015

Matsumae, Hokkaido  
4/29-5/20 - [Website](#)

### SPRING FUJIWARA FESTIVAL 2015

Hiraizumi, Iwate  
5/1-5 - [Website](#)



### MISATO MOSS PHLOX FESTIVAL 2015

Takasaki, Gunma  
4/11-5/10 - [Website](#)

### NORN MINAKAMI FLOWER GARDEN DAFFODIL FESTIVAL

Minakami, Gunma  
4/25-5/17 - [Website](#)

### VIVA LA ROCK 2015

Chuo Ward, Saitama  
5/3-5 - [Website](#)

**FUJI MOSS PHLOX FESTIVAL AND FOOD COURT 2015**

Minamitsuru, Yamanashi  
4/18-5/31 - [Website](#)

**NYAN FEST 2015**

Minato Ward, Tokyo  
4/19-5/9 - [Website](#)

**WORLD THEATRE FESTIVAL SHIZUOKA UNDER MT. FUJI 2015**

Shizuoka, Shizuoka  
4/24-5/6 - [Website](#)

**ROPPONGI ART NIGHT 2015**

Roppongi, Tokyo  
4/25-26 - [Website](#)

**BATTLES OF KAWANAKAJIMA EMAKI SAMURAI PARADE 2015**

Fuefuki, Yamanashi  
4/26 - [Website](#)



**2ND SAKE-1 GRAND PRIX IN MATSUNO GRAND SHRINE**

Nishikyo Ward, Kyoto  
4/19 - [Website](#)

**WINGS FOR LIFE WORLD RUN JAPAN 2015**

Takashima, Shiga  
5/3 - [Website](#)

**KAMEOKA SPRING FESTIVAL**

Kameoka, Kyoto  
5/3 - [Website](#)

**NABEKANMURI MATSURI**

Maibara, Shiga  
5/3 - [Website](#)

**CINCO DE MAYO PARTY IN JAPAN 2015**

Shibuya Ward, Tokyo  
5/3-4 - [Website](#)

**SATO ZAKE FESTA FOR WOMEN**

Chuo Ward, Tokyo  
5/9 - [Website](#)

**AKABANE BAKA MATSURI 2015**

Akabane, Tokyo  
5/9-10 - [Website](#)

**CURRY FESTIVAL IN YOKOSUKA 2015**

Yokosuka, Kanagawa  
5/9-10 - [Website](#)

**SAGAMIHARA WAKABA FESTIVAL 2015**

Sagamihara, Kanagawa  
5/9-10 - [Website](#)

**400 YEARS OF TOYAMA CITY**

Toyama, Toyama  
3/7-5/10 - [Website](#)

**FUKUI SPRING FESTIVAL 2015**

Fukui, Fukui  
4/1-30 - [Website](#)

**BELGIAN BEER WEEKEND 2015**

Nagoya, Aichi  
4/23-5/6 - [Website](#)

**MIGOCHI HIKIYAMA FESTIVAL**

Nodagawa, Kyoto  
5/3-4 - [Website](#)

**SHINODA FIREWORKS 2015**

Omihachiman, Shiga  
5/4 - [Website](#)

**AOI MATSURI**

Kamigamo and Shimogamo Shrines, Kyoto  
5/15 - [Website](#)

**NON-VERBAL PERFORMANCE "GEAR"**

Nakagyo-ku, Kyoto  
Selected regular dates  
[Website](#)



**2015 NAGANO SAKE MESSE (TOKYO)**

Minato Ward, Tokyo  
5/13 - [Website](#)

**TONAMI TULIP FAIR 2015**

Tonami, Toyama  
4/23-5/6 - [Website](#)

**MINO OUTDOOR FESTIVAL 2015**

Mino, Gifu  
5/2-3 - [Website](#)



**7TH TAKAGAI-ISHIZUMI SHIBAZAKURA FESTIVAL 2015**

Yoshinogawa, Tokushima  
4/1-26 - [Website](#)

**4TH UCHIKO WINE FESTIVAL**

Ozu, Ehime  
4/18-19 - [Website](#)

**TOSA AKAOKA DOROME FESTIVAL 2015**

Konan, Kochi  
4/26 - [Website](#)



**RA-SAI OSAKA RALLY 2015**

Fukushima Ward, Osaka  
2/1-5/31 - [Website](#)

**20TH NABARI SAKURA MATSURI 2015**

Nabari, Mie  
3/27-4/18 - [Website](#)

**IGA UENO NINJA FESTA 2015**

Iga, Mie  
4/4-5/6 - [Website](#)

**2015 NAGANO SAKE MESSE**

Kita Ward, Osaka  
4/20 - [Website](#)

**FLOWER AND SPRING FESTIVAL**

Tokushima, Tokushima  
late April

**SANUKI POTTERY EXHIBITION**

Ritsurin Garden, Kagawa  
late April - early May

**AZALEA VIEWING AT MT. TOMISU**

Ozu, Ehime  
April - May - [Website](#)

**UNNAN CITY CHERRY BLOSSOM FESTIVAL 2015**

Unnan, Shimane  
3/21-4/21 - [Website](#)

**JUNMAIDAMASHII 2015**

Yonago, Tottori  
4/26 - [Website](#)

**MCAS IWAKUNI'S FRIENDSHIP DAY 2015**

Iwakuni, Yamaguchi  
5/3 - [Website](#)

**OSAKA WINE FEST 2015**

Habikino, Osaka  
4/26 - [Website](#)

**TADO FESTIVAL (AGEUMASHINJI)**

Kuwana, Mie  
5/4-5 - [Website](#)

**CINCO DE MAYO PARTY IN JAPAN 2015**

Osaka Castle Park, Osaka  
5/4-6 - [Website](#)



**HIROSHIMA FLOWER FESTIVAL 2015**

Naka Ward, Hiroshima  
5/3-5 - [Website](#)

**THANK YOU VERY MUCH, 45TH ANNIVERSARY! ALL SAZAE-SAN EXHIBITION**

Matsue, Shimane  
5/14-24 - [Website](#)

# IN THE NEWS

## FEBRUARY - MARCH

**COLOR RUN IN KITAKYUSHU**  
Wakamatsu Ward, Fukuoka  
4/18 - [Website](#)

**TULIP FESTIVAL 2015**  
Taketa, Oita  
4/18-5/6 - [Website](#)

**NAGASAKI TALL SHIPS FESTIVAL 2015**  
Dejima, Nagasaki  
4/25-29 - [Website](#)



**DONTAKU PORT FESTIVAL**  
Hakata, Fukuoka  
5/3-4 - [Website](#)

**BELGIAN BEER WEEKEND 2015**  
Chuo Ward, Fukuoka  
5/8-17 - [Website](#)

**KODOMONOKUNI FLOWER FESTIVAL**  
Aoshima, Miyazaki  
3/14-5/17 - [Website](#)

**HARU NO KIICHI**  
Kotsu River  
3/15-5/5 - [Website](#)

**KAGOSHIMA SPRING FESTIVAL 2015**  
Kagoshima, Kagoshima  
4/25-26 - [Website](#)



**2015 MIYAZAKI MUSIC FESTIVAL**  
Miyazaki, Miyazaki  
4/29-5/17 - [Website](#)

**SUIZENJI PARK PEAK SAKURA VIEWING**  
Chuo Ward, Kumamoto  
late March - mid April  
[Website](#)



**SUBMIT YOUR LOCAL EVENT HERE**

### FEBRUARY 23

Following the ISIS hostage crisis, Japan will set up a consulate in Irbil, northern Iraq, “to improve the government’s ability to protect Japanese nationals and counter terrorism through enhanced information gathering.” ([Source](#))

### FEBRUARY 25

An Amnesty International global human rights report declares that Japan has “continued to move away from international human rights standards,” citing Japan’s failure to pass legislation outlawing hate speech against ethnic minorities, the government’s “refus[al] to officially use the term ‘sexual slavery’” in regards to WWII “comfort women,” and the state secrets act which could limit transparency. ([Source](#))

### MARCH 1

Although the genetic screening of embryos is currently banned in Japan due to “concerns its use might lead to eugenics and the screening of lives,” the Japan Society of Obstetrics and Gynecology approves a clinical trial to determine whether pre-implantation genetic screening can detect chromosomal abnormalities—more likely in older women’s pregnancies, which are common in Japan—and potentially improve Japan’s birthrate. ([Source](#))

### MARCH 4

First “boxercise” class aims to help provide motivation and exercise to students in Fukushima, where children’s obesity rates have become the highest in Japan since the 3/11 nuclear disaster curtailed their outdoor activities. ([Source](#))

### MARCH 5

Misao Okawa, recognized in 2013 as the world’s oldest woman, turns 117. Japan has the world’s highest life expectancy for women (86.61 years) and the fourth highest for men (80.21 years). ([Source](#))

### MARCH 6

Japan rises to 113th from 127th place on a world ranking of women in legislature, though it still ranks last among industrialized nations. ([Source](#))

### MARCH 8

Government survey reveals that a record 29.9% of Japanese favor increasing the capabilities of the Self-Defense Forces (SDF), though a majority (59.2%) prefer SDF capabilities to remain unchanged. 92.2% also reported a good impression of the SDF, “the highest since the survey began in 1969.” ([Source](#))

Photo - Fiona Park

# KIDNAPPED CITIZENS HOW SHOULD NATIONS RESPOND?

OCTAVIO SEIJAS (KOBE)

**WAR IS TERRIBLE, AWFUL,** despicable, painful, and arguably unavoidable. Even countries which play the pacifist or isolationist game can't always help but get dragged in. Such was the case for Japan recently in the international war against the terrorist group, the Islamic State of Iraq

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe rejected the ransom and within 10 days of the proposed deadline, both hostages were beheaded (2).

These recent events have sparked much controversy in Japan between a pacifist society that embraces Article 9—the post-WWII

for the safe return of their kidnapped citizens or should they refuse negotiations to hopefully discourage future abductions?

According to an agreement signed at the G8 Summit of 2013, member countries pledged not to pay ransom to any terrorist group. This further supports the American-held belief that “the United States does not negotiate with terrorists” (4). The United States even goes as far as prosecuting any person or company that tries to pay the ransom for the release of their loved one

US has made deals which have involved prisoner exchanges. These have been as recent as May of 2014 with the exchange of American soldier Bowe Bergdahl for five Taliban combatants held in Guantanamo Bay (8). Although many countries have been taking somewhat of a hard stance against ransom negotiations, none are without exception. They do, however, appear to be moving in a stricter direction.

Prior to the 2013 G8 agreement, some industrialized nations have successfully paid ransom money for hostages. France, Germany, Spain, Italy, and other European nations have made many deals throughout the years. However, every time a ransom is paid, the price of the next one has been shown to increase. Ransom amounts have in recent years grown past the point where individual families can afford them, and thus it comes down to the state to pay. On

the other hand, every time a ransom is paid, nationals of that country abroad are put at higher risk (9). According to Fernando Reinares, a terrorism expert and former anti-terrorism advisor to the Spanish government, “It is a moral dilemma, but it's a political decision because the public is not ready to accept that the government has not done everything in its power to protect its citizens, despite the long-term consequences of paying ransoms” (10). These long-term consequences could become quite catastrophic, however. An investigation by the New York Times found that “al Qaeda and its affiliates netted at least \$125 million in ransoms since 2008,” closely resembling “a 2012 US Treasury estimate that \$120 million had been paid to terrorist organizations during the previous eight years” (11).

Every ransom paid could (and probably is) funding the next one. The decision made

by Prime Minister Abe this year following the agreement of the 2013 G8 Summit is the right choice for a better tomorrow. However, nations must not restrict that decision to only monetary ransoms. Prisoner exchanges, weapons, and all other negotiation with terrorists should stop so as not to encourage this behavior. Although morally difficult and debatable, and as tragic as Japan's recent losses of life were, the sacrifice of a few will be for the benefit of many.

*Octavio is a 2nd-year ALT in Kobe. He has three weather settings: baseball when it's warm, snowboarding when it's cold, and ping pong when it rains. He is crazy about baseball and supporting the Boston Red Sox and the Hanshin Tigers. His dream is to see a game in every stadium in the US and Japan. If you're also a baseball enthusiast or you'd like to catch a game together, shoot him an email at [octavio.seijas@gmail.com](mailto:octavio.seijas@gmail.com).*



Photo - [Wikicommons](#)

**WHILE INTERPRETATION OF THE LIMITS OF MILITARY ACTIVITY ACCORDING TO ARTICLE 9 CONTINUES, THE QUESTION OF HOW COUNTRIES SHOULD HANDLE HOSTAGE SITUATIONS STILL LINGERS. SHOULD GOVERNMENTS PAY RANSOMS FOR THE SAFE RETURN OF THEIR KIDNAPPED CITIZENS OR SHOULD THEY REFUSE NEGOTIATIONS TO HOPEFULLY DISCOURAGE FUTURE ABDUCTIONS?**

and Syria (ISIS/ISIL). Two Japanese citizens, Haruna Yukawa and Kenji Goto, were captured by ISIS militants in August and October 2014, respectively. On January 20, 2015, a video of the two hostages was released, which included a militant asking for a \$200 million dollar ransom to be paid by the Japanese government for the release of their two citizens. The number mirrors Japan's pledge to support U.S. and allies' military efforts against the Islamic State (1). Japan's

Constitution's clause which outlaws war and any offensive military—and those hoping Japan would further support national allies by becoming a more active player on the world stage against such crises (3). While interpretation of the limits of military activity according to Article 9 continues, the question of how countries should handle hostage situations still lingers. Should governments pay ransoms

(5). However, not all countries are so severe. The UK has been known to look the other way on such occasions, one example being the case of Judith Tebbutt in Somalia for 900,000 GBP (over 1.5 million USD) in 2012 (6). The rules seem a bit more relaxed when responding to non-monetary demands. Israel, for instance, released over a thousand Palestinian prisoners for an Israeli corporal, Gilad Shalit, in 2011 (7). Even the

**ALTHOUGH MORALLY DIFFICULT AND DEBATABLE, AND AS TRAGIC AS JAPAN'S RECENT LOSSES OF LIFE WERE, THE SACRIFICE OF A FEW WILL BE FOR THE BENEFIT OF MANY.**



# THE PRICE OF PEACE

## ARTICLE 9 AND JAPAN'S ROLE IN INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY

MOEKO KAWAMOTO (KOBE)

**SUNDAY MORNING ON** January 25, Japanese people woke to the shocking news that journalist Kenji Goto was killed by ISIS, becoming the terrorist group's second Japanese victim after Haruna Yukawa. Now, the opposition party, the Democratic Party of Japan, is in the process of assessing Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's governmental response to this issue. In the National Diet, debate on February 4 included a congressional probe into Japan's participation in the coalition of the willing (1). Over 60 countries belong to the coalition of the willing against ISIS, agreeing to work together to provide mutual military support, halt ISIS's funding, and offer humanitarian aid (2). However, I personally disagree with Japan's involvement in the coalition.

According to Foreign Minister Fumio Kishida, Japan has been a part of the coalition since the United Nations Security Council debate on Iraq on September 19, 2014 (3). At that time, few people realized that Japan was no longer an outsider on the war on ISIS because this fact was not highly publicized. However, Japan's participation obviously demonstrated Japan's opposition to ISIS even if Prime Minister Abe insisted

that Japan was involved only in humanitarian aid, rather than a military operation. Moreover, although Abe accused ISIS of targeting countries offering humanitarian aid, his accusation overlooks the fact that Japan's membership in the coalition meant that its humanitarian aid still benefited countries engaged in military operations against ISIS. Thus, Japan's participation in the coalition waves the bloody shirt for ISIS, putting Japan at unnecessary risk.

Of course, ISIS's extreme acts are unforgivable and cannot be justified for any reason. However, in this unstable world situation, it sometimes seems impossible for international society to eliminate these kinds of extreme groups. ISIS leaders were united by their hatred for countries involved in the Iraq War (4). Therefore, violence aimed at destroying terrorism may only perpetuate the cycle, causing even more loss of life. I am not saying that ISIS's existence is therefore defensible, but in my opinion, viewing them as an absolute evil prevents us from seeking peaceful resolutions.

I hope that the Japanese government will continue to stand by our Constitution's anti-war pledge embodied by

Article 9, as peaceful actions may bring better results than continued violence. As an example, on April 15, 2004, three Japanese hostages were successfully released by an extreme group in Iraq (5). One reason for their release was that they were from Japan, whose commitment to Article 9 and peaceful resolution had helped it in establishing a strong trust with Arabic countries (6). This demonstrates that in emergency cases, the "Article 9 brand" can not only protect Japanese citizens, but also help Japan play a role in harmonizing international society. I think that every Japanese citizen should consider the international impact of our actions, and focus on building on Japan's example in using nonviolent efforts to promote peace around the world.

*Moeko Kawamoto is a 3rd-year student at Kobe City University of Foreign Studies (Kobe Gaidai). She loves traveling both internationally and domestically within Japan, and has been to all the prefectures except for Shimane. Last year she took a gap year and studied in Canada. Now she's doing shukatsu and looking for something fun to do for a break!*

COMMENTS

# HITTING JETS FOR SIX!

## THE JAPAN CRICKET ASSOCIATION & AJET PARTNERSHIP

ALAN CURR (TOKYO)

**CRICKET IS NOT A SPORT THAT** is especially well known in Japan. Baseball and soccer tend to dominate, while the quaint English game has historically been seen as too complicated, too long, and too boring. However, that is all starting to change.

This year, the Japan Cricket Association (JCA) and AJET have been working together to help spread the junior program to schools throughout Japan. The JCA junior program, *Cricket Blast* is based on the Australian model, centered purely on

creating as enjoyable an experience as possible to introduce the game to kids.

As the man in charge of the Cricket Blast program, I've been delighted with the reception cricket has received. It has been a really pleasant surprise to see the way the kids have taken to the game. The JCA are trying very hard to introduce fun and, dare I say it, some organised chaos into sport here. We want to

Celebrating a Cricket Blast Game

Photos - Alan Curr

be different and to get away from sport being run in such a strict and almost militant manner. Kids having the chance to express themselves and develop the skills and muscle memory that is so important for any sport is great, and we always leave with the same question in our ears: when are we coming back?

The partnership with AJET began with a training course

### CONTACT THE JCA

- Website: <http://www.cricket.or.jp/eng/>
- Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/cricketjapan>
- Twitter: @CricketJapan
- Email: [a-curr@cricket.or.jp](mailto:a-curr@cricket.or.jp)



Volunteers, Parents and Players at the Akishima Cricket Blast Centre in Tokyo.



Japan Cricket Assoc.  
@CricketJapan



Dear @ECB\_cricket, this might not be a great time, but as there's room in your schedule, fancy a game in Japan on the way home? #challenge

RETWEETS 9,808 FAVORITES 3,973



5:21 AM - 9 Mar 2015

**THIS TWEET "CHALLENGING" THE ENGLISH CRICKET TEAM TO A MATCH AFTER THEIR EARLY WORLD CUP EXIT WAS RETWEETED BY KEVIN PIETERSEN, FORMER ENGLAND SUPERSTAR BATSMEN, WHO OFFERED TO COME TO JAPAN AND PLAY THEM BY HIMSELF!**

in Tokyo for JETs in early January, with others planned in Hokkaido and Kansai in May. The follow up to that is the JCA donating startup equipment to all 11 of the AJET Blocks for JETs to use in schools with kids of all ages, in hopes they can bring it to schools and events.

Aaron Gilling, a JET in Saitama who attended the event said, "As an Englishman, I was obviously delighted when I heard that there even was a Japan Cricket Association. When I saw what they were doing, and how the game was being combined to teach English and promote a healthier, more social lifestyle to kids, I was even more impressed. I think that highlighting the physical, educational and cross-cultural benefits of cricket is what will help get the sport into schools."

One of the JETs in attendance was Kira Conley, an American JET from Saitama, who said, "Having never picked up a cricket bat before—or even being sure if it was a bat—and walking into a gym mostly containing burly men

throwing a ball to each other, I was a little intimidated at first. However, once the session got going I soon found out that the sport is actually really fun. What I liked best was that the session wasn't just 'Here are the rules, let's play cricket', it actually introduced smaller games and activities that mimicked the movements in cricket and were really fun. It then stepped up to a simplified version of the game that was fun and useful for all. I took a lot away from the day and feel equipped to introduce cricket into my school. I hope more JETs get involved in the upcoming events that the JCA and AJET have planned!"

This all begs the question, are there any Japanese people currently playing the game? Indeed, it looks like there is a bit of talent around, especially in the women's game, as Japan took a bronze medal at the Asian Games in 2010. The JCA themselves achieved a boon recently with

a tweet "challenging" the England National Cricket team to a match going viral and achieving coverage on several major international news outlets.

If you would like to know more about what is being done then you can contact the JCA via their website, Twitter or Facebook page, all of which are listed on the previous page, along with Alan's email address.

At Connect, we are particularly keen to hear how this project develops and would welcome any stories or photos from people running cricket in their schools. Provide us with something really good and you never know, maybe we can convince the JCA to give away some more equipment.

Current JETs can find out more information about the free cricket equipment and fill out a sign-up form by clicking [here](#).

*A Cornishman who spent most of his adult life in London, UK, Alan is now Head of Junior Cricket at the Japan Cricket Association. A fan of all sports and avid traveller, Alan once combined his love of trekking and cricket to organise the highest ever match on Mount Everest, and then wrote a book about it. You can follow his adventures on [Twitter @alan\\_curr](#) or his [blog: samuraicricketer.blogspot.com](#).*

COMMENT

# FREE CRICKET EQUIPMENT EXCLUSIVELY FOR JETS!!

**CLICK HERE FOR MORE INFO -AND- TO FILL OUT THE SIGN-UP FORM!!**

The Japan Cricket Association (JCA) has kindly donated **11 SETS OF EQUIPMENT** for distribution to JETs in each AJET Block.

The equipment presents JETs with a fantastic opportunity to receive equipment that shall allow their students to gain a great sporting, cross-cultural, and English language experience.

### WHY TAKE UP THIS SMASHING OFFER?

- It's free
- It's suitable for students of all ages/levels
- It comes with resources and activities from the JCA!

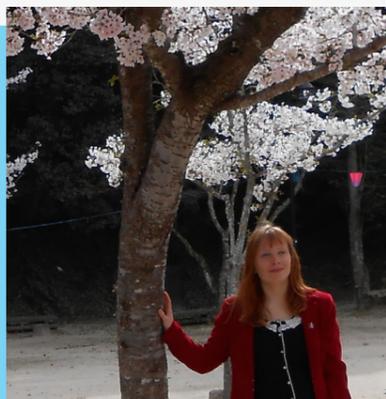


日本クリケット協会  
Japan Cricket Association



THE ASSOCIATION FOR JAPAN EXCHANGE & TEACHING  
CONNECTING JETS SINCE 1988

# THIS MONTH IN... ARTS & CULTURE



**VERITY TOWNSEND**

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

I'm looking forward to seeing the beautiful white walls of the restored Himeji castle wreathed by cherry blossoms this month. I'm also off on my annual trip to Kyoto to see the Miyako Odori trainee geisha dances. With the most expensive ticket being only 4800yen, this is a wonderful chance to be served tea by a real maiko and see a spectacular performance.



**COLIN O'NEILL**

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

There's plenty of man and nature in this pic to get you in the spring spirit. A throwback photo from my spring vacation 3 years ago to Europe, I'd survived my first Japanese winter and felt like a damn prince out there on that mossy log. Many of you will be enjoying the change of season & school year with travel plans – my only advice is show more skin in your personal calendar photo shoot. Mine didn't sell enough copies.



**ERICA GRAINGER**

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

It's Spring time and one of my favorite seasons! April means, sakura picnics, sakura wine and sakura onsens! Basically, I'm a sakuraholic this month. I also plan to wear lots of pastels, especially pink! 'Pretty in Pink' isn't just a movie, it's a dresscode, (but not the 80's style). I'll be wearing predominantly pastel pinks this month, and living by the motto, 'Think Pink'! I urge you all to be brave and wear a bit of pink this month!

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Fashion in Film



**P.25**

Spring into Normcore



**P.28**

Ama



**P.30**

VS



# JAPANESE FASHION IN FILM

## 1960s AND 70s - THE NEW WAVE

VERITY TOWNSEND (HYOGO)

Photos - Verity Townsend, YouTube, & Nikkatsu

JAPANESE CINEMA OF THE 60s and 70s was a rebellion against established styles of filmmaking. Major Japanese film studios began to promote young assistant directors to helm their own features—about young people and aimed at the youth market. This move

delivered a kick of creative revitalisation into Japanese cinema. They would also tackle challenging themes—sexuality, political radicalism, social inequality—all against the background (whether literally or figuratively) of Japan's post-war identity struggle. This would become

known as the New Wave of Japanese cinema.

### NO MORE HEROES

In many of these *seishun eiga* (youth films), the main characters are often young people who are up against an adversary who is worse than they are. The circumstances in these films often reflect real issues and happenings from the time they were made. A good example of this is Kinji Fukasaku's *Blackmail Is My Life* (1968), where a fashionably dressed gang of blackmailers come up against government corruption.

### ACTION!

In the '60s, Japan's oldest studio, Nikkatsu, specialised in dramatic action films, influenced by everything from *Spaghetti Westerns* to *Jean Luc Godard*, and featuring sharp-suited actors from their star line-up.

Hasebe's *Black Tight Killers* (1966) follows handsome Nikkatsu star, Akira Kobayashi, through a series of intriguing and brightly coloured set pieces, as he tries to save his kidnapped girlfriend.

### SEARCHING FOR IDENTITY

Japan's search for a new identity out of the ashes of World War II is also a

noticeable theme in films of this period, with Hiroshi Teshigahara's haunting *The Face of Another* (1966) as a prime example. The sharp black and white visuals and minimalistic set design strengthens the film's commentary on the isolation created by society and how people are judged by their appearances.

Although Japan went through an amazingly fast economic recovery in the 1960s, not everyone benefitted. Many films, especially independent ones, portray the expanding socioeconomic gaps that arose. A good example is Kinji Fukasaku's *Rage: If you were young* (1970).

There were also many films that depicted life outside mainstream society. Both Shohei Imamura's films from the 1960s and his documentaries from the 1970s, deal with the working classes and social outcasts. A great example being the self-explanatory *History Of Postwar Japan As Told By A Bar Hostess* (1970).

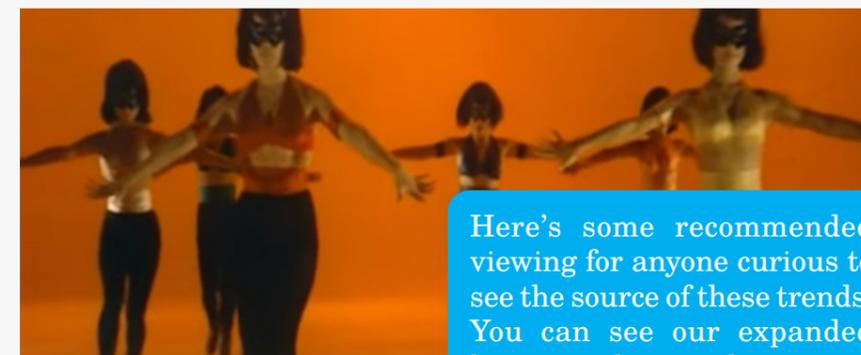
### SEX SELLS

In the early 1970s, cinema audiences for Japanese films had declined due to the increase in television ownership and an influx of American productions being shown on cinema screens. In response to this, the major studios ramped up sexual and violent content in their releases to attract audiences.

One major studio, Nikkatsu, began to solely produce adult films, termed *roman-poruno*. Toei also did this with several different series of "pink-



Hasebe's *Black Tight Killers*



Here's some recommended viewing for anyone curious to see the source of these trends. You can see our expanded list, complete with posters, links, and summaries, online only at [AJET.net](http://AJET.net).

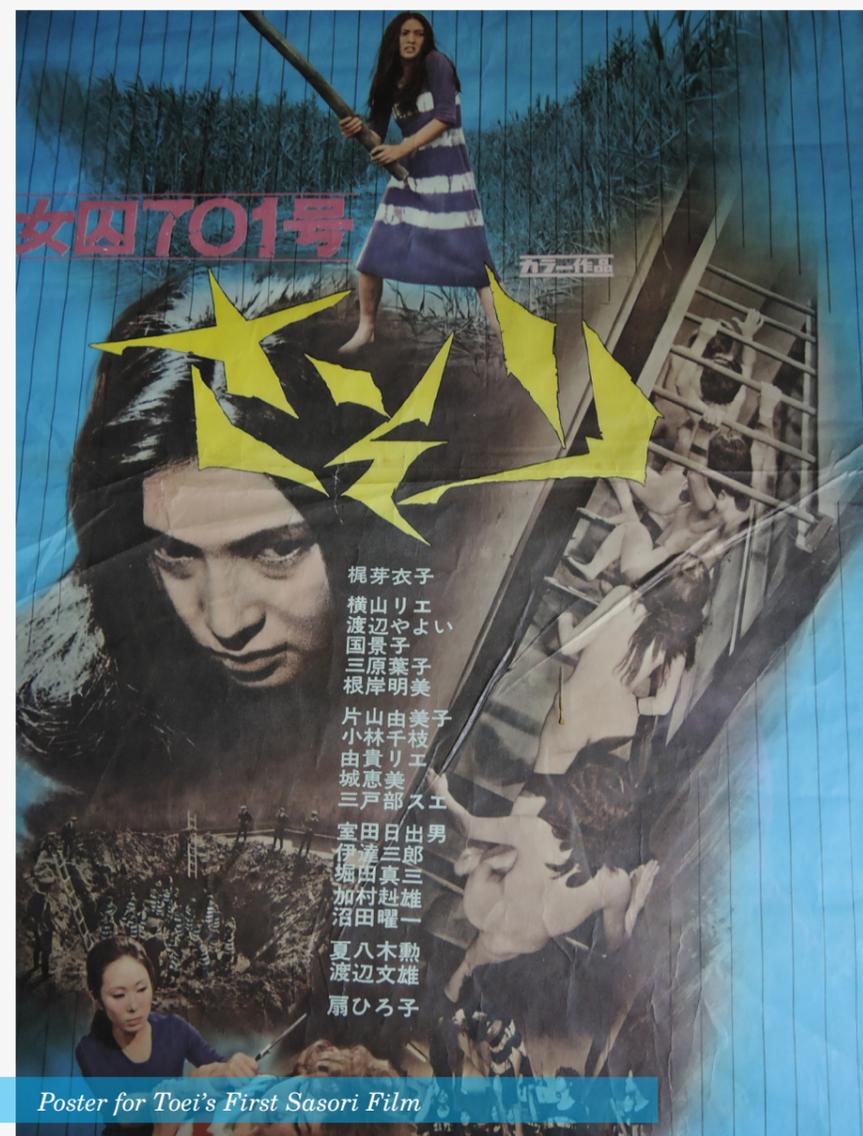
### RECOMMENDATIONS

- Pale Flower (Masahiro Shinoda, 1964)
- Red Angel (Yasuzo Masumura, 1966)
- Cruel Story of Youth (Nagisa Oshima, 1960)
- The Naked Island (Kaneto Shindo, 1960)
- Black Lizard (Kinji Fukasaku, 1968)
- Female Convict Scorpion: Jailhouse 41 (Shunya Ito, 1972)
- Vengeance is mine (Shohei Imamura, 1979)
- Funeral Parade of Roses (Toshio Matsumoto, 1969)
- Battles without Honor and Humanity (Kinji Fukasaku, 1973)
- Double Suicide (Masahiro Shinoda, 1969)

violence" sexploitation films. Studio-bound directors had more freedom with their films, but they had to contain a minimum of four sex or nude scenes per hour. One director, Norifumi Suzuki, used this formula to deliver arty melanges of sex and violence with sharp cinematography and an abundance of flashy style. Others, like Tatsumi

Kumashiro, used the restrictions of the *roman-poruno* genre to explore the lives of sex workers and the treatment of women in modern society.

As Japan's cash-strapped studios made directors churn out films on increasingly low budgets, directors were forced to become more



Poster for Toei's First Sasori Film

LISTEN  
HERE



Meiko Kaji's Iconic Style

WATCH  
HERE



Matsubara in Tokyo Drifter

WATCH  
HERE



Funeral Parade of Roses



Joe Shishido and Jerry Fujio

© 1967 NIKKATSU CORPORATION

resourceful and creative. Director, Norifumi Suzuki, mentions the tight costume budget on his films, and therefore the outfits that the characters wore came out of the actors' own wardrobes. Thus, actresses like Miki Sugimoto and Reiko Ike who played the bad girl characters of his *Sukeban* films brought their own sense of style to the screen.

### REVENGE FILMS

In the 1970s, revenge films were a very important component of violent films. One icon of these extreme films is, Meiko Kaji—who starred in the *Lady Snowblood* series and the *Sasori* films. An enka singer and an actress, she had an uncluttered, smart style, often favouring simple cuts—monochrome polo necks and bell-bottomed jeans. Her most iconic outfit is the stylish long black coat and wide brimmed felt hat that her character wears when she takes revenge in the *Sasori* films. Her style is such a memorable image of cult cinema, that directors like Quentin Tarantino and Sion Sono have paid homage to it. One can see how these Japanese films from the 1960s and 70s continue to influence films to this day.

### SOURCES

- (1) Desjardins, C., *Outlaw Masters of Japanese film*, IB Taurus, 2005.
- (2) Johnston, M., *Syndromes of corruption: Wealth, power and democracy*. Cambridge University Press, 2005.
- (3) Schilling, M., *No Borders, no limits: Nikkatsu Action cinema*, Fab, 2007.
- (4) Norifumi Suzuki interview ([YouTube](#) - NSFW!)

COMMENTARY

# SPRING INTO NORMCORE!

STASIA CHOLEWA (TOKYO)

Photos - [jp.styleanda.com](http://jp.styleanda.com)

**HAVE YOU HEARD ABOUT** 'Normcore' yet? If you're out of the loop, it's a combination of the words "normal" and "hardcore". It probably made you wince, but normcore is the hottest word in fashion this season! Being "basic" won't be seen as an insult any more. You can be as basic as you like, and no one can actually call you unfashionable. This spring is all about oversized tops, plain shirts, slacks or your usual denim pants, hippie cardigans, running shoes and slip-ons. There's a

significant 'back to the past' trend going on, so you might find yourself sporting flares and a turtleneck at some point!

### SPRING TRENDS

At some point in our lives, we all find ourselves surrounded by a mountain of outfits thinking, "I have nothing to wear!" However, the upcoming trends for spring will reduce dressing time to a minimum. Who would have guessed that a simple white t-shirt (or striped items), '80s

style jeans coordinated with chunky black boots, or worn out sneakers would be such a hit? Don't forget about the hardcore part of normcore. Add a stronger touch to your simple outfit, like an interesting neon clutch, a hat or a heavy bracelet. Then prepare for some street fashion snapshot requests, while you're taking a stroll in Shibuya. Simple denim or leather biker jackets are absolutely mandatory for chilly spring evenings.



Perfect Normcore Ensembles



Stylish, Edgy Leather Pants

**TRY THIS...**

You never thought this day would come, did you? Silky scarves with bold designs, high-waist flares, light flower pattern dresses and long tassel cardigans. Everything that will give your hippie parents a nostalgia trip. If that's not exactly tickling your fancy, you could try something more elegant. Outfits inspired by the male wardrobe will fit well into the spring mood. Clothing stores are overflowing with collar shirts in all colours and lengths, as well as pleated trousers and tuxedo-like jackets. Sounds like your daily working attire? Try experimenting with colours or adding a funky detail like a baseball cap or round sunglasses for a more casual look.

**SPRING SHOES**

The most-loved shoe trends in 2014 are still enjoying popularity this spring. So don't put aside those heavy black boots with buckles—you'll need them. As the days get warmer, you might want to slip into something more suitable for a walk in the park. Nike or New Balance might help you there! Slip-on sneakers will be a good alternative to sports shoes, if you're not exactly a fan of the latter. They are lightweight, comfortable, and you don't need to tie them—perfect!

**ACCESSORIZE, ACCESSORIZE!**

Fashionistas know that skilful accessorizing can turn any outfit into a runway-ready coordinate. The world of fashion unanimously agreed, a simple flap bag will rule the streets this season.

Large bags are so last season! This spring, compact clutches or tube-shaped purses are essential. Leather, fur or chain straps? The choice is yours! If you're into hippie fashion, try tassel bags in earth tones and comfortable backpacks for larger luggage. For jewellery, go big or go home! Rather minimalist in design, but chunky and eye-catching bracelets and rings will make your simple spring OOTD stand out in the crowd.

**FINALLY...**

For the newest trends, you can find some inspiration on prêt-à-porter runways this season. Mom's high-waisted denim, boyfriend's jacket, dandy shirts and hippie motifs. Yup, mishmash is all you'll see on the streets this season. However, no matter what style you're into, those cherry blossom Starbucks cups are the main accessory this hanami season. Keep it simple, but stylish. Normcore trends have just caught on, and I have a feeling it won't leave us anytime soon!

*Stasia Cholewa is an eikaiwa teacher in Tokyo. She's not exactly a fan of rigid dress codes. So, on her days off you can meet her on the streets of Shibuya or Shinjuku, sporting a fashionable outfit completed without breaking the bank. Cute café hunter, traveller, volunteer, event reviewer and blogger. Visit her blog, [shichijyuuni.com](http://shichijyuuni.com) to check out her countless adventures!*



Buckle Up!



Chic and Sleek



Bohemian Flair



Essential Leather Biker Jacket



Chunky and Funky

# AMA

## PEARL DIVING MERMAIDS OF JAPAN

MICHAEL DOWNEY (TOKYO)

**ONE OF THE LESSER-KNOWN** but fascinating parts of Japanese culture is that of the Ama pearl divers. *Ama* (海女) literally means “woman of the sea” and is recorded as early as 750 AD in the oldest Japanese anthology of poetry, the *Man'yōshū*. These women specialised in freediving some 30 feet down into cold water wearing merely a loincloth. Utilising special techniques to hold their breath for up to two minutes at a time, they would work for up to four hours a day in order to gather abalone, seaweed and other shellfish.

### PURSUIT OF THE PEARL

The most profitable pursuit, however, was diving for pearls. Traditionally for Ama,

Island, near Toba city. This business was the main reason foreign observers associate Ama with pearl diving, even today. The “traditional” white attire we often see Ama divers wearing was also created by Mikimoto. He observed how surprised the foreign visiting tourists were when seeing the Ama diving naked wearing only their traditional loincloth ([Source](#)).

The role of the Mikimoto Ama was to collect oysters so that the pearl-producing nucleus may be inserted. Once this process was completed, the Ama then carefully returned the oysters to the seabed. This required each diver to hold her breath for around two minutes at a time in freezing

cold waters. Upon surfacing, the Ama opened their mouths slightly and exhaled slowly, making a whistling sound known as *isobue*.

### AMA TODAY

Although the tradition is still maintained across many parts of Japan, the skinny-dipping practices of old have largely been lost. Since the Meiji Era, divers have worn goggles for clarity and, in 1964, rubbery, black wetsuits were introduced.

Ama are mostly female, purportedly because their thicker layer of fat than their male counterparts helps them endure the cold water. Another reason is the self-supporting nature of the

profession, allowing women to live independently and foster strong communities. Most surprisingly however, is the old age in which these women are able to keep diving. Nowadays most Ama are elderly women (some even surpassing 90) who have practiced the art for many years.

With lack of young women to succeed their elders and modernisation of Japan's fisheries however, this ancient practice is dwindling; numbers have dropped to just 1/8th of what they once were. In 1956, there were 17,611 Ama in Japan, but as of 2010 only 2,174 remained. Of those, nearly half work in Mie prefecture.

### OLD VS. NEW

As technology progressed, Ama communities were faced with decisions—adopt new equipment or retain traditions? New fishing methods could easily enable

greater hauls and reduce work, but at the same time, increase the risk of overfishing and damage the delicate ecosystems that supported life for these coastal towns. Rules were introduced to prevent this.

On Hegura island in Wajima city, rules state that abalone under 10 cm must be returned to the sea, with a punishment of two days without work if caught breaking them. Despite their efforts however, numbers of abalone and other shellfish have been declining, in part due to overfishing, but also the rising sea temperatures that affects the growth of seaweed the shellfish eat.

Although the scantily clad, romanticised image of the profession is a thing of the past, there's still a rich history and culture that needs to be conveyed to younger generations. The tourism industry at Mikimoto Pearl is a great start to help

preserve the memory, but the age-old fishing traditions held by small coastal villages are definitely in need of special attention to make sure their heritage isn't forgotten completely.

*Michael is fluent in Japanese and has spent about half his life involved with the language and culture. An ex-JET who worked as a CIR in Aichi, he now manages digital sales and marketing for a large overseas organisation in Tokyo. An avid adventurer, Michael often ventures out to explore and photograph *haikyo*' (ruins), writing up thrilling tales of his discoveries on his website *'Gakuranman'*. He also teaches advanced Japanese on his website *'Gakuu'*.*

**AMA ARE MOSTLY FEMALE, PURPORTEDLY BECAUSE THEIR THICKER LAYER OF FAT THAN THEIR MALE COUNTERPARTS HELPS THEM ENDURE THE COLD WATER. ANOTHER REASON IS THE SELF-SUPPORTING NATURE OF THE PROFESSION, ALLOWING WOMEN TO LIVE INDEPENDENTLY AND FOSTER STRONG COMMUNITIES.**

finding a pearl inside an oyster was akin to receiving a large bonus while they went about their ancestral practice of collecting shellfish. That changed when Kokichi Mikimoto, founder of Mikimoto Pearl, began his enterprise.

Mikimoto used Ama divers to look after his cultivated pearls on Mikimoto Pearl



Modern Day Ama



Ama in the 1960s



Ama in the 1960s  
Photos - Fosco Maraini

**READ THE FULL ARTICLE ON MICHAEL'S WEBSITE OR WATCH THIS MINI-DOCUMENTARY INCLUDING INTERVIEWS WITH CURRENT AMA.**

## JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT AND YOSHITOMO NARA MAY

as well be from different planets. Basquiat: a minority who lived on New York City's streets. Nara: a Japanese national living in, arguably, the world's safest country. Basquiat dedicated his entire career towards advocating for minorities and seeking recognition for his work. Nara, meanwhile, has been championed by fine arts communities worldwide. We may not need rocket science to connect these two artists, but let's start by looking to their separate worlds to draw links through their aesthetics.

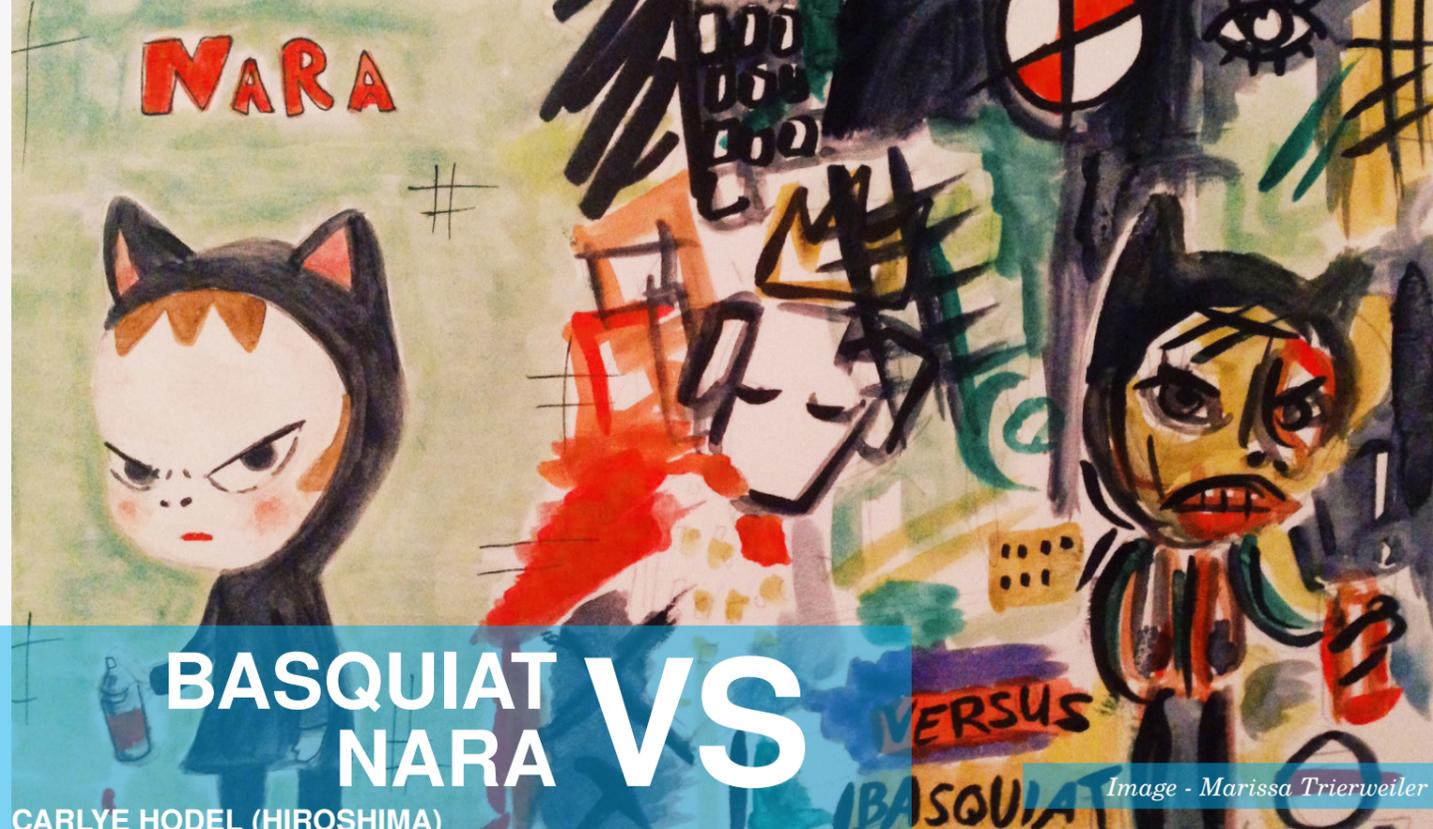
### WORLDS APART

Nara (born 1959) and Basquiat (1960-1988) couldn't have had more polarizing upbringings. Basquiat was born in Brooklyn, the son of immigrant parents. A young black man in a prejudiced America, Basquiat was a perpetual outsider. At 15, he ran away from home to hustle on the streets of New York City. In NYC, Basquiat



faced discrimination and exclusion from the fine arts communities, ultimately morphing his perception of self, race, and acceptance.

Across the globe in rural Hirosaki, Aomori Prefecture,



CARLYE HODEL (HIROSHIMA)

Nara was exposed to little outside his immediate surroundings. Japan is one of the world's most homogenous societies—the polar opposite of New York City. This sense of security and birthright acceptance, which Basquiat longed for, Nara rejected in favor of expressing his independence.

### STAND OUT OR FIT IN

While Nara searched for ways to stand out, all Basquiat wanted was to fit in. For Basquiat, the 1970's street art movement became an outlet for his frustrations.

Under the pseudonym SAMO©, meaning “Same Old Shit,” Basquiat expressed his malaise held for the bureaucratic art world, by juxtaposing graffiti with corporate art world terms and positioning them as epitaphs, graffitiing phrases like “SAMO©...4 Mass Media MINDWASH.” Basquiat showed Manhattanites that he and the street community were not to be excluded, making SAMO© ever present on the sides of upper class buildings.

In the countryside, Nara devoured Japanese anime and manga, but still hungered for self-expression. But, with a US airbase nearby, Nara tuned into their radio program, “The Far East Network”, where he heard the combative punk anthems of The Ramones and The Stooges. Punk became the soundtrack of his youth, allowing for a subversive escape from the land of

kawaii and homogeneity. The punk movement confirmed the value of Nara's deepest emotions and thoughts, which before had been suppressed.

### AESTHETIC

Basquiat is best known for his paintings, Acque Pericolose (1981), Notary (1983) and La Colomba. (1983) In Per Capita (1981), we can see Basquiat's neoexpressionist trademarks: untamed brushwork, bright colors, violent lines, text, and symbolic imagery. Powerful and independent, his work embodies the American spirit. Basquiat's work was real, textually accosting, and full of grit.

While Basquiat's work is extreme, Nara's is deceptively simple. The Fountain of Life (2001/2013), Doggy Radio (2011), and Cosmic Girls (2008) have garnered worldwide recognition. His work features children with inflated balloon like heads, large sullen eyes, and small

button noses. Each appears innocent with their calm demeanor and pastel hues. Their innocent child like quality is a reflection of the commonly held Japanese attraction to all that is camp and cute.

### APPEARANCES MAY BE DECEIVING

In Basquiat's Per Capita, we can see his pairing of graffiti text with symbolic imagery. A dichotomy is drawn between the central heroic black figure and the text in the upper left field. The text explicitly states the inequity of monetary distribution among several US states. Through the symbolism associated with this pairing, Basquiat makes a socio-political commentary on the unjust role/value afforded to minorities in America. His work reflected questions about his own position as a minority; unable to break through limitations established by predominantly white leaders of the fine arts world.



While the sweet appearances of Nara's childlike figures do mirror Japanese culture, they are authentic and unique because they contain something unsettling. The children typically appear with punk-esque text, in Damn

It ALL (2012), the explicit title is scrawled next to the portrait of a child. In Nice to See you Again (1996), a girl is pictured brandishing a knife. By pairing these innocent characters with implements of violence, Nara creates his dichotomy commenting on the dark thoughts that lie hidden beneath the outer appearances of the Japanese public dialogue; underlying issues that aren't so kawaii to discuss.

### SELF & SOCIETY

Basquiat's work expressed his frustrations at being labeled by the art community as a “black artist” rather than an “artist.” His goal was to traverse these segregated grounds by declaring his identity not singular, but instead part of the larger American narrative. Nara's art calls into question the true nature of the individual, while also pointing a finger in revolt at Japanese group mentality. While Basquiat wished to be accepted as part of the majority, Nara looked to promote individuality. However, they both led the viewer to question their own perception of identity versus what society has constructed them to be.

*Carlye, a 3rd-year ALT, spends her weekends getting jiggy at local Hiroshima haunt Mac Bar or grubbing at Lopez okonomiyaki restaurant. If not prone to random dancing, email [carlye.hodel@gmail.com](mailto:carlye.hodel@gmail.com)!*

# THIS MONTH IN... LIFESTYLE



**NICK POWERS-MAHER**

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

This month, I'm riding on a baking kick that involves baking a thing at least half a dozen times in one week, then spending a week blogging about it. I made up a list of pastry goals for the next four months and pinned it to my wall for inspiration. I'll also be prowling my local greengrocers and supermarkets waiting for the summer fruits. A Southern by birth and by spirit, I'm itching to make some berry tarts and peach sweets to show off at my local *hanami* parties.



**TOM LEGGE**

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

This month I've been organising my trip to Turkey and Italy next month. Hotwire.com has saved the day once again with some really good Secret Hotels in both Rome and Venice. I'm doing a bit of domestic travel this month, taking the shinkansen down to Fukuoka for some drinking and eating with two friends and a nude life-drawing model



**SIMON GRIFFIN**

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

Spring is here! It's time for the viewing of sakura, the enjoying of end of year (and start of year) enkai, and maybe to start considering putting away your kotatsu. The end of April is also the start of Golden Week, and this year I'm off to Vietnam and Taiwan. Wherever you're going, and whatever you're doing, be safe and have a great time!

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Animal Islands



**P.37**

Sakura! Roses!



**P.38**

Travel Mistakes



**P.40**

Japanese Farming



**P.42**

Hyuganatsu Season!



# JAPAN'S ANIMAL ISLANDS

ELLEN FREEMAN (MIYAZAKI)

We've all heard that Japan's human population is declining—and that means for some of the country's tinier islands, the animal kingdom has taken over! Like the feline-ruled island of Aoshima in Ehime that recently went viral in Western media, these creature-filled corners of the nation have become popular tourist destinations for animal lovers, whether they're monkey maniacs or cat crazy. From Hokkaido to Okinawa, we've rounded up the best places to go on your own personal safari, Japan-style. No zoos or aquariums necessary: these are islands where you can encounter our furry, feathered, and finned friends (or beasts) in the wild. Let's safari!



## OKUNOSHIMA, HIROSHIMA Rabbits

No one's entirely sure whether the feral rabbit population on tiny Okunoshima is descendent of a group of bunnies left by schoolchildren in the 70s, or freed test subjects from the island's former poison gas factory. Whatever the case, when the island was converted from a WWII battery to a resort park, the rabbits bred like, well, rabbits. Today, sightseers are practically overrun with cuteness by the tame—but hungry—bunnies, which seek nibbles and affection from visitors. In fact, there are so many long-ears underfoot that cars are not allowed on the island.

### GET THERE

1 hour by car or 1.5 hours by train from Hiroshima to Tadanoumi Port, followed by a 15 minute ferry.

## MIYAJIMA, HIROSHIMA Deer

Sightseers come to Miyajima to see the floating shrine at Itsukushima, one of the fabled Three Views of Japan (see [last month's article](#) on another). But animal worshippers will be delighted by the laidback deer who are known to photo bomb tourists' shots of the famous torii gate. The *shika* number over 500, and are believed to be messengers from Shinto gods. They have supposedly been inhabiting the island for at least 6,000 years. Today, visitors can see the sacred deer lazing on the beach and wandering the quaint village's backstreets in search of snacks.

### GET THERE

30 minutes by car or 1 hour by train from Hiroshima to Miyajimaguchi Port, followed by a 10 minute ferry.



## KOUJIMA AND CAPE TOI, MIYAZAKI Japanese Macaque Monkeys, Horses

This spot on the Nichinan-Kaigan coast in southern Miyazaki is a two-for-one. Hire a local boatman to take you across to see the colony of wild Japanese macaques on Koujima, a field laboratory of Kyoto University's Primate Research Institute. If you're lucky, you'll see them doing the primate version of dipping sushi in soy sauce, they're famous for washing their food in the salty seawater before digging in. Those who still have enough energy for horseplay after monkeying around can make the 30-minute drive south to Cape Toi, where bands of wild horses roam against the background of stunning cliffside views.

### GET THERE

1 hour 45 minutes by car from Miyazaki City (driving recommended), or 2 hours on the JR Nichinan line to Aburatsu, then 50 minutes by route bus to Koujima and Cape Toi.

## AMAKUSA, KUMAMOTO Dolphins

If you've seen *The Cove*, you know that not everywhere in Japan is a dolphin paradise. But one place where you can observe happy bottle-nosed dolphins leaping alongside your boat is in the blue waters off of the 120+ islands of the Amakusa archipelago. The wild dolphin habitat spans the northwestern coast of the prefecture, where you can hop on one of many guided tours that claim a 98% chance of seeing Flipper all year round.

### GET THERE

2.5 hours by car from Kumamoto city (driving recommended).

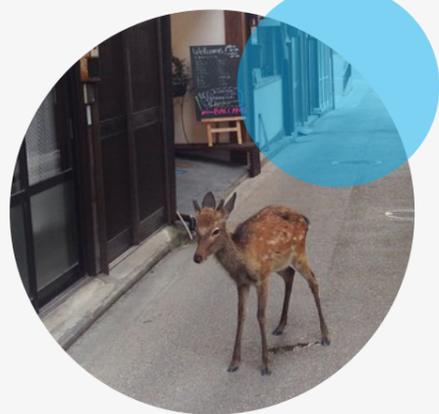
## TASHIROJIMA, MIYAGI Cats

Tokyo's cat cafes have nothing on Miyagi's "Cat Island", where kitties outnumber humans 4 to 1. Feline fans from all over Japan visit Tashirojima (off the coast of Ishinomaki), to cuddle with the island's several hundred semi-feral cats. Originally imported by the island's silkworm farmers to control pests, then pampered by local fisherman who believed that they brought good luck, these kitties are now honored with a cat-sized shrine in the center of the island—and have even inspired a manga-themed campground decorated with kitty artwork by some of Japan's top manga artists.

### GET THERE

1 hour 20 minute drive from Sendai to the Ajishima Line ferry terminal, followed by a 1 hour ferry. Alternatively, 2 hours by train from Sendai to Ishinomaki, then a 30-minute walk or a 10-minute taxi ride to the ferry.

Photos - Ellen Freeman, Estuko Miyamoto, Rick Synder, Simone Armer, Sinead Owens



### OKINAWA Whales

Live out your Free Willy fantasies from late December-early April, when wild humpback whales gather to breed in the warm waters off the shore of Okinawa. Excursions embark daily from the main island and further-flung Zamami, guaranteeing to get you up close and personal with the majestic creatures that show off their Y-shaped tails and, for a lucky 18% of tourists, perform impressive barrel leaps.

#### GET THERE

A number of companies offer tours setting out from Naha, the northern part of the island (near Churaumi Aquarium), and Zamami Island, which can be reached from Naha by speed-boat (50 minutes) or ferry (2 hours).

*Ellen Freeman enjoys the inaka life with her husband in gorge-ous Takachiho, Miyazaki (but occasionally misses the cat she left behind in her hometown of Portland, Oregon). Her writing has been published on Refinery29, The Fashion Spot, Racked, and the Matador Network. She overshares on [Instagram](#) @ellenlouisefreeman.*

### WAKKANAI, HOKKAIDO Swans

Every year from late April to May, hundreds of birdwatchers flock to Japan's northern island of Hokkaido for Lake Onuma's swan festival. These marshes near Wakkanai are the warm-weather stop over for tundra swans on their migration from Siberia, and you can spot them again on their return flight around October. The Lake Obuma Bird House has a log cabin nature observatory that gives out free binoculars to help you get a closer look at this moving sight.

#### GET THERE

5-6 hours by train or 1 hour flight from Sapporo.

COMMENTS

# SAKURA! ROSES!

SIMON GRIFFIN

Photos - Simon Griffin

COMMENTS

FOR MOST OF US, APRIL means cherry blossoms! Enjoy some sakura ice cream, with some sakura mochi, drinking sakura tea, and of course not forgetting to look at the sakura. It's wonderful! No spring would be complete with a stroll under some blossoms while contemplating the metaphor for our transiency of existence that each falling petal represents. However for those of us who have been in Japan a little longer and maybe are looking for something different this year, why not consider switching out the cherry blossoms for roses?

Located just a 15-minute walk south from Osaka's Umeda Station, Nakanoshima is flanked by the Tosabori and Dojima rivers and offers a strange juxtaposition of peace

and tranquility surrounded by the hustle and bustle of one of Japan's busiest cities. The island houses The Museum of Oriental Ceramics, The Osaka Nakanoshima Prefectural Library, and The Osaka Central Public Hall—the latter being a beautiful example of classic Western architecture. However the highlight for most visitors is the free park and rose garden that fills the eastern end.

Just to be clear, I'm no expert on roses, I know nothing about the difference between an 'Ace of Spades' and an 'Anne Frank', but even I, in my rosy ignorance, can appreciate the sea of colour of over four thousand roses that comes into full bloom each spring. There's

something oddly satisfying about being able to capture both the Osaka skyline and banks of flowers in a single photo, a sight not possible in most of the city. The roses are all labeled, and arranged by their year of creation, creating a colourful time tunnel back over hundreds of years. Even in the off-season, the gardens remain beautiful and are a popular spot for family picnics and joggers wishing to dodge traffic.

So, this spring, if you find you simply cannot stomach one more scoop of sakura ice cream, spare a thought for the forgotten flowers, head to Osaka, and go hunting for the rose between two skyscrapers.

#### MORE INFORMATION

The island is free to enter, and open year-round. Ideal rose viewing season is late April through May. The park is easily reached on foot walking from Osaka/Umeda Station, or just minutes from Yodoyabashi, Oebashi, Naniwabashi or Kitahama stations.



Multicolored Rose



A Busy Summer's Day



Flowers Back by Skyscrapers

# 5 TRAVEL-PLANNING MISTAKES TO AVOID

SAMANTHA FERRARI (TOTTORI)

## 1 DECIDING ON A WHIM TO PLAN A TRIP WITH THAT SLIGHTLY ANNOYING PERSON YOU JUST MET

Not choosing your travel companions wisely is the single biggest mistake you can make while planning your vacation. Someone's boorish habits, only slightly irritating in moderation, become excruciating when you spend an extended period of time with them travelling.

I recently made this mistake. While he didn't ruin my travels in Southeast Asia, he certainly made the trip less enjoyable. He chewed with his mouth open and never said "please" to the servers at restaurants. He scoffed at the local food and almost exclusively ate McDonald's. He ignored his exotic surroundings and the rest of the group, constantly absorbed in the Wi-Fi on his iPhone.

Choose the company you keep wisely, especially when travelling. When in doubt, go alone—travelling by yourself is actually awesome.

## 2 THINKING, "IT'S HOT. I CAN TOTALLY GET AWAY WITH ONLY PACKING SHORT-SHORTS, TANK-TOPS, AND BIKINIS."

There's nothing like showing up to see the Reclining Buddha in Bangkok or Angkor Wat in Siem Reap and being told you must have your knees, shoulders, and cleavage covered to be admitted. It's hot as hell, so you dressed like you're about to go rollerblading around Malibu. You can either wear a hideous green robe that's probably not the cleanest, or buy a whole new outfit from the street vendors.

The way a tourist dresses says a lot about her knowledge of the local area. Before you go to a foreign country, do some research and see what is expected. The more appropriately you dress, the more the locals will respect you. In Ghana, a girl in my field school just didn't understand that her shorts were inappropriately short for conservative West Africa. The women scowled at her and the men literally called her out on the street: "Child, your shorts are too short!"

Maybe you think it's sexist and outdated. Fine. Your opinion doesn't matter. You are a guest.

## 3 INPUTTING YOUR CREDIT CARD INFO RIGHT AWAY AFTER FINDING AN AMAZING DEAL FOR A FLIGHT AND AN AMAZING HOTEL

It's fine to have favorite accommodation booking websites, but relying on only one booking site's review is a gamble. You should always cross-reference the reviews on any establishment with other booking sites: an eighty-percent rating on one might only be a sixty-percent on another.

When booking flights, take your time and don't jump on a deal just because at first glance it's inexpensive. Consider the hassle factor. How many connecting flights are there? How much extra is checked baggage? Are meals included?

Do a quick web search of the discount airline you are considering buying from. In this economy, you never know what businesses might go under. (SkyMark just did)

## 4 NOT BOTHERING WITH VACCINES OR TRAVEL INSURANCE

A friend of mine got a mosquito bite in South Africa that turned into a nasty infection. She hadn't bothered to buy insurance for the trip before we left home. It took some convincing to get her to go to the doctor because she had to pay for it out of pocket, but when her leg turned a putrid green, she conceded. The doctor told her she could have lost her leg if she had waited any longer for antibiotics.

Money should never prevent you from seeking medical attention in an emergency. Travel insurance guarantees that no matter what happens to you (within reason), you're covered. Some insurance plans even cover stuff outside the medical-realm, like lost luggage.

Vaccines are an investment. Once you've had them, they're good for a few years. Some countries have strict vaccination requirements for entry. Know the requirements or they'll send you straight back home.

## 5 BRINGING YOUR LAPTOP WITH YOU ON THE TRIP.

A common complaint I hear among fellow backpackers is "my pack is just so heavy." I ask then what the heck is in there. "My laptop," they'll say. "It's pretty heavy."

You really don't need your laptop. Bringing it with you is a rookie mistake. Almost every hostel/hotel in the world now has a computer connected to the Internet. If not, there's bound to be an Internet café somewhere. Why do you need your laptop anyway? Don't be that guy who's always on the Internet during your vacation—you're missing out on the glorious new place around you! At some point you'll have to leave that laptop in your hostel. Whenever you're not with it, there's a chance it will be stolen.

Do this instead: bring your smartphone with you, leave it on "airplane mode" and use it like the mini-computer/camera that it is. Even in developing countries, more and more restaurants, shops, and hostels have Wi-Fi. Smartphones are a heck of a lot lighter than laptops.

*Sam hails from Calgary, the cowboy capital of the Great White North. Her interests include foreign horror films, skiing, and sunbathing on beaches. When she's not teaching English or cycling around Japan's inaka, she's exploring as many far away lands as possible.*

*Photo - Samantha Ferrari*

# JAPANESE FARMING CHANGES AHEAD

CATRINA CAIRA (HOKKAIDO), TRANSLATION BY HIROMI CHIBA

## JAPANESE AGRICULTURE

is about to face a major change in the face of the proposed Japan-China free trade agreement. Unlike agriculture in other industrialized countries, most of the farming is still done by small local farmers, not big companies with heavy automation.

China relies on nitrogen fertilizers, and suffers from poor agricultural policies and pollution problems (1). Their use of chemicals has caused such problems as metal cadmium and arsenic in foods and even exploding watermelons in 2011 (2). In comparison, Japan has enacted food safety and reliability ordinances, supporting environmentally friendly agriculture and insuring trustworthy foods (3).

In the wake of a rash of food safety scandals, many Chinese took to buying imported food, leading to mislabeling of products (4). However, the Chinese government did put agricultural reforms into its “number one document,” which came out last January (5). Only time will

tell if the measures they have and are continuing to implement are effective.

The Japanese products, though more expensive, are of much higher quality. The industry hopes to capitalize on this quality when the market expands to include Chinese competition. The next big challenge is market expansion into other countries.

Japan and China both focus on small farming practices rather than the big business practices used elsewhere. This is largely because the food prices in Japan are high enough to support small farms, whereas in other countries the farms must industrialize to survive. This allows Japan to produce high quality organic foods when most other industrial countries’ agriculture is moving to chemical fertilizers, pesticides, and genetically modified breeds to remain profitable. We can only hope the choice to go with expensive, quality products

will pan out in the future, and the need for such products in other countries will make up for the losses in business caused by the influx of cheap products from other countries to Japan.

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- (2) Newcomb, Tim. “Growth Chemical Leads to Exploding Watermelons in China.” *Time*, 17 May 2011. Web. 11 Feb. 2015.
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- (4) Watts, Jonathan. “Exploding watermelons put spotlight on Chinese farming practices.” *The Guardian*, 17 May 2011. Web. 11 Feb. 2015.
- (5) Stanway, David. “Food security, rural environment top China’s policy agenda in 2014.” *Reuters*, 19 Jan. 2014. Web. 11 Feb. 2015.

**JAPAN AND CHINA BOTH FOCUS ON SMALL FARMING PRACTICES RATHER THAN THE BIG BUSINESS PRACTICES USED ELSEWHERE. THIS IS LARGELY BECAUSE THE FOOD PRICES IN JAPAN ARE HIGH ENOUGH TO SUPPORT SMALL FARMS, WHEREAS IN OTHER COUNTRIES THE FARMS MUST INDUSTRIALIZE TO SURVIVE.**



## INTERVIEW!

*I asked a local farmer and agricultural instructor, Tetsuya Aoki of Aoki Farm in Higashikawa, Hokkaido, to discuss the agricultural industry.*

**What do you think makes Japanese farming so great?**

Japan is very skilled at improving crop yields for agricultural products. Japanese farmers and researchers have spent a lot of time developing improved breeds and better cultivation techniques, leading to new labour-saving technologies and high fertility in the crops.

**How do you think the industry in Japan is different from other countries?**

Japan has Japan Agriculture co-operatives (JA), which deal not only with the crops but all aspects of the industry. By having the same group manage production, collection, sales, species development, and technologies research, we can solve problems holistically, and it allows for faster and more efficient spreading of information.

**What are some of the current challenges in the farming industry in your opinion?**

The proposed free trade agreement with China (TPP), plus other international agreements and changes to import regulations for agricultural products from other countries will bring many cheap products to the market. This is the biggest challenge we’re facing now.

**How is the farming industry approaching these issues?**

The farming industry will put greater emphasis on the safety and health qualities of food and taste. This allows them to sell their high quality food for higher prices, so they can compete not in quantity but in the quality of the goods they have. They are also working to promote trusting relationships with customers.

**How do you think the proposed free trade agreement with China will affect the Japanese farming industry?**

There is currently a big difference between agriculture in China and Japan. Japanese farmers can take advantage of this to sell the better quality Japanese products to the 100 million people who make up the wealthiest class in China.

*Catrina is a second-year ALT in the amazing town of Higashikawa, home to 8,000 people, and 8 JETs. She has a degree in anthropology and a Masters in art conservation, specializing in objects. She traces her family history back 900 years to Cairo, Egypt, via Italy. But more importantly, her favorite fruit are figs and she loves unagi.*

# HYUGANATSU SEASON!

LARISSA MILO-DALE (MIYAZAKI)

## IF YOU'VE EVER VISITED

southern Kyushu, but especially if you've visited Miyazaki, you'll no doubt have seen the vibrantly yellow *omiyage* boxes on display at the train and bus stations. Miyazaki has a few claims to fame when it comes to food, including apple mangoes and charcoal-grilled chicken, but its shining star is, without question, the *hyuganatsu*. Mangoes are incredibly expensive and the chicken takes a special hand to get just right, but *hyuganatsu* are readily available at any grocery store or in your neighbor's garden.

The fruit's name comes from Hyuga (日向国), the historic name of Miyazaki, and *natsu* (夏), meaning summer. The first seedling was discovered by chance in 1820 by the Yasutaro family in their garden in Miyazaki

City. The fruits that this tree produced were much too acidic to be marketed, but the golden fruit's promise spurred further breeding with similar wild trees. That first seedling grew into a tree that would be designated a natural monument in 1935, but sadly, was heavily damaged by a typhoon in 1949 and, after years of recovery efforts, perished in the autumn of 1959. By the early 1970s, however, grafting and pollination tests were proving successful and, gradually, the beloved fruit we now know came to be.

Today's *hyuganatsu* have retained their original sourness with an added, modest sweetness. Their fresh aroma is reminiscent of grapefruits and lemons and the fruit itself is believed to be a mutation of *yuzu*, or a hybrid between *yuzu* and pomelo.

What sets *hyuganatsu* apart is that unlike other citrus—most notably the grapefruit—the white flesh under the peel (mesocarp) can be eaten as is! It is fluffy in texture and not at all bitter.

*Hyuganatsu* season in Miyazaki begins at the end of January—when you'll start to see the fruits filling out their carefully attached protective paper bags—peaks in March, and tails off in April. The various products that are made from the fruit go on sale from April to December.

*Larissa is a 2nd-year ALT in Miyazaki, which is Japan's taste of the Caribbean: the capital of surf, reggae, and mangoes. You can check out her tweets about sustainability, music, and the good life in Kyushu on Twitter @larashka.*

## HOW TO EAT FRESH HYUGANATSU

Peel off the yellow rind to expose the fluffy and edible, white mesocarp.

Slice the fruit, leaving lots of fluffy white skin on top. Enjoy it on its own, with some sugar lightly sprinkled on top if you have a sweeter tooth, or lightly dip your fruit into soy sauce as though it were sashimi!



## OTHER WAYS TO ENJOY HYUGANATSU

- Squeeze out the juice! Drink it alone or part of a juice blend.
- Cocktails or fruit wine
- Salad dressings and other sauces
- Sorbet, pudding, jelly or other desserts
- Both the fruit and its peeled skin can be added to salads
- Add small pieces to your gyoza for a citrus kick
- Make marmalade using the rind

Peel the skin, cut the flesh into blocks and add them to boiling water to remove any trace of sour flavor. If you like, add some sugar or maple syrup to the water to further enhance their sweetness! Then, dehydrate the fruit pieces, as you would persimmon or mango. Finally, coat them in melted chocolate, let the chocolate re-harden, and remember to pace yourself as you enjoy these tasty treats!

## HOW TO CHOOSE THE PERFECT HYUGANATSU:

Avoid scratches and discolored parts on the surface.

Choose shiny and bright yellow fruits.

When you hold the fruit in your hand, it should feel heavily packed and firm with juice.

While the fruit can be kept in the fridge for up to a month to maintain freshness, it's always best to eat them as soon as possible.

# THIS MONTH IN... COMMUNITY

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Biking the Inland Sea



P.50

The Shimani Kaido



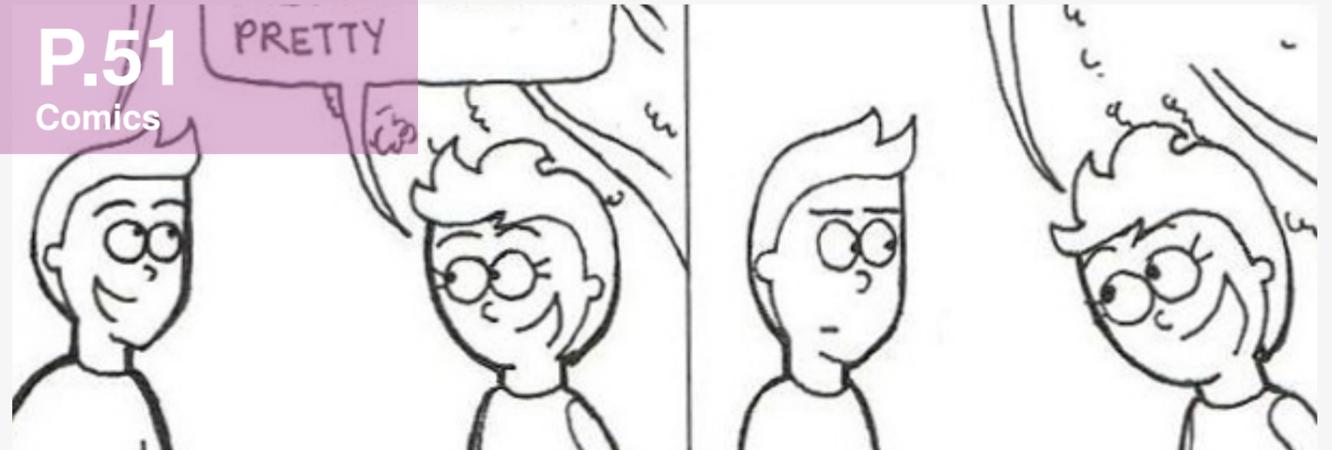
**HIROSHI FUKUSHIMA**

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

Goodbye winter, welcome spring. The Sakuras are about to bloom and so is the schedule of sports events. With the numerous sports starting their new season now is the time to pack the kotatsu and get out and cheer for your local team. Why not give try a new sport and join the new first years at training at their school sport club. It's the attitude and effort you put in that counts. The cities which will host the 2019 Rugby World Cup were announced recently. Is your prefecture hosting the cup? Mine is! This is the next big sport event before the big one, the Olympics!

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Comics



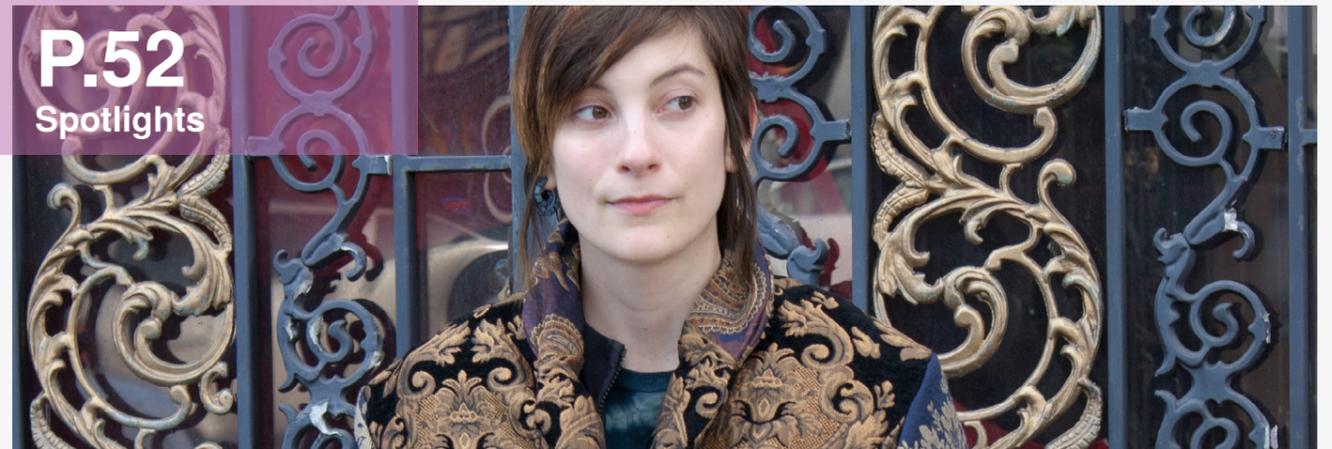
**NATHAN BERNE**

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

Let's cleanse the brain! My own spring cleaning means a trip somewhere nice – usually out of the country for Golden Week! Last year, I hit up Laos and Cambodia (almost lost my taste for travel, admit those foul, drunken tourists), but it's always nice to start with sakura! My incredible gf talked me into a well-worth-it trip down to Kochi last April, and this year we'll visit Kyushu to find her family's ancient hometown. Hence the flip-side of sakura symbols (after you tire of mono no aware): don't forget your roots, but keep chasing the next big dragon.

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Spotlights



# BIKING THE INLAND SEA!

## ... AND GETTING THE MOST OUT OF YOUR OWN CHARITY CYCLE EVENT

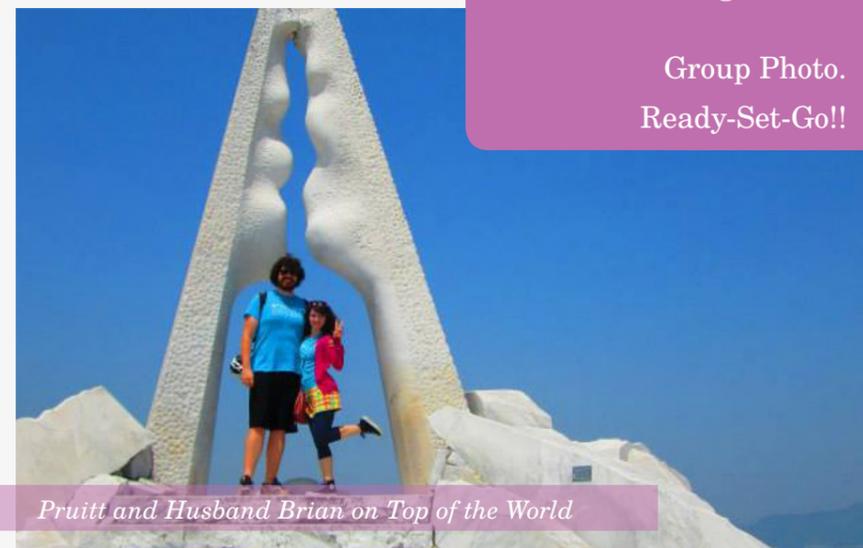
JESSICA PRUITT (OKAYAMA)

**TREKKING THE SETO INLAND SEA** by bike, this AJET charity ride crosses seven bridges across six islands, and sets a great standard for modeling your own local charity ride. Read on for Jessica Pruitt's first-hand breakdown of the event, and check out the [2015 AJET event page](#).

### GEAR-UP

Hope you like heights! Just follow the sky-blue lined road...

Completed on May 1st 1999, the [Shimanami Kaido bridge system](#) spans the network of small islands between the larger Honshu and Shikoku, treating visitors to astounding views, snacks, and exercise for the daring. Heading South from



Pruitt and Husband Brian on Top of the World

Onomichi (Hiroshima), route highlights include amazing bridge-side ocean views, recurrent ice cream shops (a MUST!), a unique modern Buddhist temple, and an incredible final 4 kilometer bridge to complete the route into Imabari (Ehime).

Now a popular 60 kilometer trek for hikers, bikers, roadtrippers, and pilgrims

alike, this journey across the Seto Sea has grown so popular that the Japanese government has actually repainted the road and cycling routes to better show the way.

For AJET's part, the Shimanami Kaido Charity Cycle event was born from a love for cycling, a desire to bring cyclists together, and a goal to support local and

### THE EVENT AS PLANNED

- Rent Bikes as a Group.
- Pass out Shirts and Contact Cards.
- Safety Speech.
- Announce Hotel Assignments.
- Group Photo.
- Ready-Set-Go!!

### THE EVENT AS EXECUTED

- 1 Rent bikes individually (upon arrival[s]).
- 2 Riders depart at their leisure – with or without contact cards!
- 3 Safety Speech ... while some folks are leaving...
- 4 Announce hotel assignments... to whoever's left...
- 5 Partial-Group Photo.
- 6 Ready-Set... Catch-up!!

international charities. From my time participating in the event (since 2013), we've supported [PEPY Cambodia](#) and [Tohoku Artist Caravan](#). Our 2014 run saw a total of 52 participants coming together to raise over \$1,000, while the 2015 ride is [right around the corner!](#)

Undercarriage B...



ROUTE MAP:  
SIX ISLANDS TO  
SHIKOKU!

CHECK  
OUT THE  
GOOGLE  
MAP [HERE](#)

GREEN HILL HOTEL ONOMICHI  
BIKE RENTAL DEPOT  
ONOMICHI FERRY

HASSAKU-YA DAIFUKU  
THE DINOSAUR

BIKE DROP-OFF

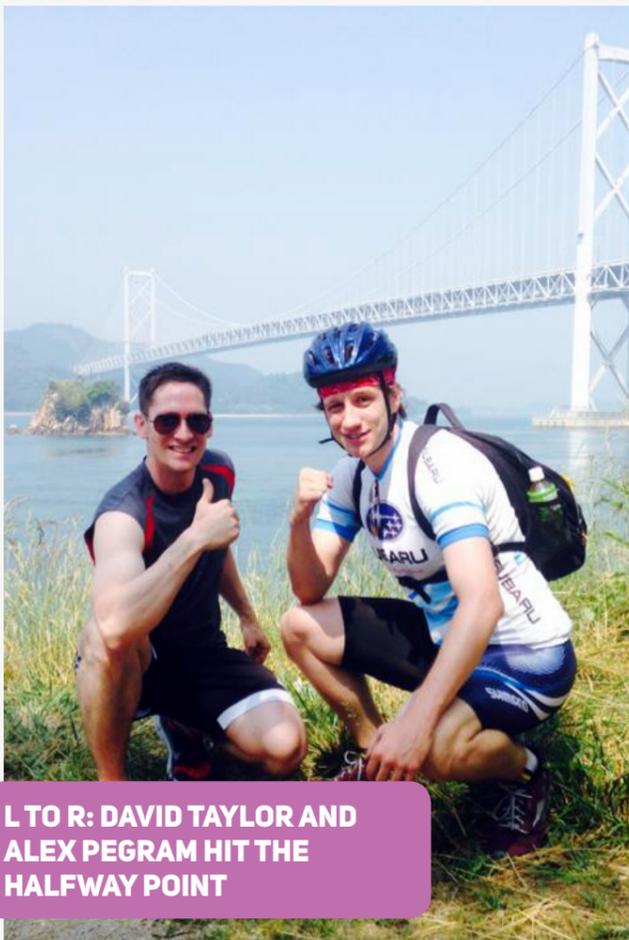
DOLCE GELATO  
KŌSAN-JI

TATARA ONSEN  
TATARA REST STOP

HAKATA REST STOP

DANCE YOUR PANTS OFF  
YOSHIMI REST STOP

HOTEL SHICHIFUKU  
HOTEL SHOUFUKU  
IMABARI STATION BIKE DROP-OFF  
KIYOMASA ONSEN



L TO R: DAVID TAYLOR AND ALEX PEGRAM HIT THE HALFWAY POINT



ALEIA YOUNGSHIN HAN CROSSING A 4KM BRIDGE



THE 2014 CYCLING GROUP PRE-DEPARTURE AT ONOMICHI, HIROSHIMA

Photos - Jessica Pruitt, Lee Hanae, David Taylor

### NUTS, BOLTS, AND GEARS: THE CYCLING CHECK LIST

- **Website:** Find an official Route Site, or build your own (see AJET's 2015 event page [here](#), and route map [here](#). Be sure that each rider is aware and able to access official information for their ride.
- **Secure Transport:** In addition to finding local repair shops, apprise riders of emergency buses, escape routes, and pertinent public transport timetables.
- **Appraise Hotels:** Some venues allow bike drop-off, catered dinner, and group discounts. Find what you need!
- **Compare Calendars:** With a date set, check for weather conditions, construction or bridge closures, or if you'll be riding concurrently with other groups. Consider co-organizing!
- **Suggest Stops:** The Shimanami Kaido route hosts some amazing viewpoints and ice cream shops, and noting these for your riders helps with pacing and morale. Good for what ails you...

### POTHoles AND SPEED-BUMPS

In planning your own event, check first for an official website for the route itself (sometimes a locally or nationally supported resource), and note any payments or check-points along the way. Beyond basic route and hazard info, research transport options to rent-a-cycle shops, as well as return routes (some riders do a round trip; others change their minds midway through). Be sure to locate drop-off terminals for bikes, scout hotels, and compile a list of local food and rest stops along the way (don't forget sightseeing!).

For added ease, designate an event folder (we used [Google Drive](#) in 2014) and provide a track sheet to each RSVP respondent, [as we did in 2015](#). As interest grows,

search for cyclist blogs to get those crucial insiders' tips, and find and post pics of any key landmarks and route directives. Don't forget to include a price break-down, a suggested route timeline, and a set place to reassemble everyone upon arrival (our group required two separate hotels).

Also, note that some hotels offer arranged dinner and breakfast, but please reivew allergies and dietary restrictions with the staff. Be mindful of the hotel's timeline, too!

### SETTING YOUR PACE-LINE

When the day arrives and you're assembling at your launch point, provide everyone with a contact card with phone numbers for taxis (in each area that you'll be crossing) and URLs to Google pins of bike repair shops, rest

areas, and bus stops. (Protip: URL shorteners are great for this.). If possible, and with a nod toward ride safety, consider dispatching someone as a "Ride Leader" early on, and save a few riders as your "Rear Guard," to account for any issues along the way. Each of these should carry a first aid kit, and should check in throughout the ride.

As a pacing concern, be advised that the paperwork at a rent-a-cycle company takes some time, and some participants are...well, *really genki* to start riding. If the weather is nice, no one wants to wait around after they're through the rental line, so keep your information dispensation quick and concise, snap that group photo ASAP, and send everyone off at their own pace (another good reason to designate a Ride Leader).

Overall, your ride, your route, and your rider management are entirely up to you! The work is always well worth it, as these events bring participants out into and across communities, and add that extra special cross-prefecture interaction for everyone; just be aware of the pitfalls and the extra opportunities to give back!

Safe cycling!

*Jessica Pruitt is a former 3-year JET and a long-time AJET officer. Bound for Tokyo this spring with her husband, she'll be greatly missed at the annual Okayama Halloween party, where she has consistently thrilled the crowd as everything from the Queen of Hearts to Eevee the Pokemon.*

# SHIMMYING DOWN THE SHIMANAMI KAIDO

DAVID TAYLOR (OKAYAMA)

**SPEAKING PURELY AS A** participant, the Shimanami Kaido bike ride is a blast!! At 75km from full start to finish (including pre and post-bridge riding), the exceptionally scenic route lets you hop from beautiful seaside views to breathtaking bridges. The citrus fruit and gelato along the way are just unforgettable, but the best part of all is the chance to engage with the people you'll meet along the way.

**THE LOCALS AND CYCLE COMPATRIOTS REALLY WERE GREAT, AS THIS IS TRULY THE KIND OF EVENT THAT ALLOWS JETS TO BE OUT ON DISPLAY AS THE FRIENDLY AND ENERGETIC BUNCH THAT WE ARE.**

## A ROAD WARRIOR'S RIDE

When I rode in 2014, I was glad for the well-paved bike path, while the speedier veterans liked the challenge of trying to finish the full route in under 3-hours (doable, but you'll miss the views!). Either way, it was a surprisingly friendly ride, as we scarce passed anyone without a "Konichiwa!" or an encouraging "Ganbatte!" The rest stops proved great opportunities to chat up the

locals over fish burgers and okonomiyaki (plus more tasty citrus and gelato, of course), and we met new friends aplenty including cycling clubs, pilgrims of the temple circuit, migrant workers, and families out for a leisurely ride.

As such a popular route, the road was busy but never crowded; drivers knew to watch for us, so the cycling felt consistently safe while that big, beautiful blue line painted down the road side guided our way. We didn't even worry about getting lost, since signposts tracked the distance elapsed and marked the turns ahead, leaving us free to focus on the beautiful stuff going on all around. The locals and cycle compatriots really were great, as this is truly the kind of event that allows JETs to be out on display as the friendly and energetic bunch that we are.

## VICIOUS CYCLE?

As far as difficulty, though the route did feature some challenging hills throughout, all were doable at our own pace; it's an easy-going ride for the greenhorns. Our own ride saw 30-degree Celsius weather with clear blue skies, but despite that heat, all the sunscreen, water, and

Pocari Sweat (my best friend) saw me through! Be advised: you'll definitely want to come prepared, as past riders have had to plow through rain and snow (including a hailstorm along the uncovered final 4km bridge in 2011!).

Regardless, as long as you're not that pitiful soul riding the 7 bridges with a hangover, just fuel up on high-energy foods (and gelato), and enjoy the view! The Shimanami Kaido ranks among the most positive and thrilling experiences that I've had in Japan!

*David Taylor spent a year as an ES JET in Okayama, and counts the Shimanami Kaido, the Naked Man Festival, and a wild tournament of Beer Pong among his many accomplishments. Now a teacher in Alberta, Canada, he's still found time to revisit Japan, while his future plans include continuing as an educator to today's youth, and as an ambassador of cross-cultural understanding.*

Photo - David Taylor

Thanking the Temple Spirits

COMMENTS

# COMICS

COMMENTS



Manka

## MARIKA'S COMICS

Marika participated in JET from August 2013 - 2014 in Akita Prefecture. Her comic hobby started there and now she is back in New Zealand, working at an International English school in Japanese student services. She enjoys drawing comics in her free time.

[Website](#) • [Twitter](#)

## SPOTLIGHT NOMINATION?

Know someone in the community doing something neat or noteworthy? Nominate them for next month's Spotlight at [connect.editor@ajet.net](mailto:connect.editor@ajet.net)!

## SPOTLIGHTS



JACK CHAMPION (OKAYAMA)

Jack Champion arrived in rural Japan last summer from Wiltshire, England, and quickly sought out any available clubs around his new home in Okayama. Having studied aikido at university, this new JHS JET was eager to try a new martial art, and was intrigued when a kind individual at the Board of Education handed him a handwritten note with a date, time, and bus stop, along with the word: kendo.

Thus, only one awkward week after arrival, Jack almost instantly progressed to a near full-time kendo club member's schedule, and now trains twice each week (and at home on his roof-top!). He competed in his first tournament in March, and now looks forward to testing for his first *kyu* this year, with the ultimate aim of *dan* grade.

As an added bonus, Jack now trains with masters from all around town, including teachers and kids of all ages (rather, the students now teach him!). Despite the challenge, the warm welcome of his new community has proven exceptionally inspiring, as Jack has practiced with the local high school, and now regularly trains with elementary students. All he had to do was ask! He might try kyudo at the high school soon...



MATTHEW DURRANT

Originally hailing from Norwich in England, Matt Durrant has just completed his first novel-- *Yoshida: Death of a Salaryman*.

While he was studying Japanese, Matt spent a year at Tokyo University of Foreign Studies. On his commute to the campus, he found himself wondering about the individual lives and personalities of the many salarymen he shared the train with. Inspired by playing a [visual novel by Christine Love](#), he decided to write about a salaryman who commits suicide and enters a strange world. In writing for a Western audience, he was conscious about not contributing to stereotypes and misconceptions around suicide in Japan, and this shows in the final product. He aims to show that, even though an outsider might see salarymen as a uniform mass, they all have hopes and dreams.

Matt uses his deep knowledge of the country's current issues and real-life events to create a plausible near-future version of Japan. Reading *Yoshida: Death of a Salaryman* is a very gripping experience which doesn't let up until the final page. It's perfect for those long Golden Week journeys. [Click here to get your Kindle copy.](#)

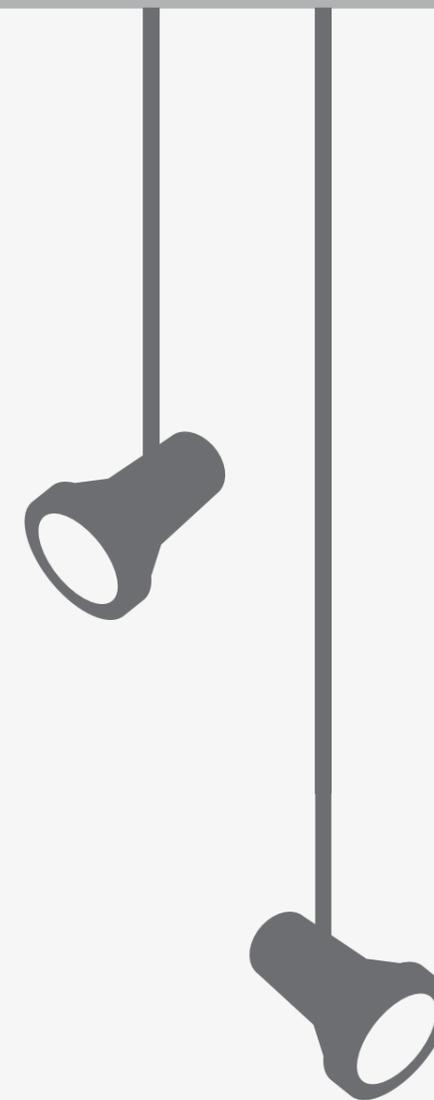


STERLING DIESEL (NAGASAKI)

Meet Sterling! Raised in Okinawa, the United Kingdom and the United States, she now lives in Nagasaki.

Since she was very young, she has always been creative and artistic, from drawing and painting, to even designing her own clothes. When she was 15, she made an entire outfit from scratch with her mother, from the wig to her shoes! These days, she enjoys making jewellery and clothing that she can wear and showcase. "I love working on projects that let me express myself as an individual", she says. "It's a great feeling when you can inspire someone". Her own inspiration comes from fashion designers, Alexander McQueen and Range Murata.

Her essential jewellery making supplies are, copper and silver wire, clear neon tubing, feathers, watch pieces, acrylic paint, sequins, seashells, and practically any trinket leftover in a box of antiques. She lives by these mottos, "Don't Panic", "Follow your situation" and "Never log off!" You can contact her at [pankodx@gmail.com](mailto:pankodx@gmail.com).



# CONTRIBUTING TO CONNECT

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

Contact Head Editor Steven Thompson at [connect.editor@ajet.net](mailto:connect.editor@ajet.net) with your submissions, comments, and questions.

## ARTICLES

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

## SPOTLIGHT

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

## COMMENTS

Let us know what you think. Click the comment button at the end of any article, or interact with us on Facebook, Twitter, and [issuu.com](http://issuu.com).

## PHOTOS

All of Connect's photos are provided by the community, from the cover to the articles and everything in between. If you're an aspiring photographer and want your work published, send it to us at [connect.editor@ajet.net](mailto:connect.editor@ajet.net).

## HAIKU

Each month Connect will feature haiku from our readers. Haiku are simple, clean, and can be about anything you like! If you're an aspiring wordsmith with the soul of Basho, send all of your haiku along with your name and prefecture to [contest@ajet.net](mailto:contest@ajet.net).

## COMICS

You asked for it, and now Connect features comics. Whether you're a desk doodler or a published artist, we want to see your panels and strips about life in Japan.



## CONNECT WITH US

Interested in contributing to Connect? Want to stay up-to-date on interview opportunities, photo requests, and Connect announcements? Sign up to be a contributor at the [Connect Contributors Circle](#) online to receive updates from us, pitch your ideas, and discuss with the Connect staff and community.

You can also Like us on [Facebook](#), follow us on [Twitter](#), and interact with the magazine via CLIP at [ISSUU](#).