

april 09





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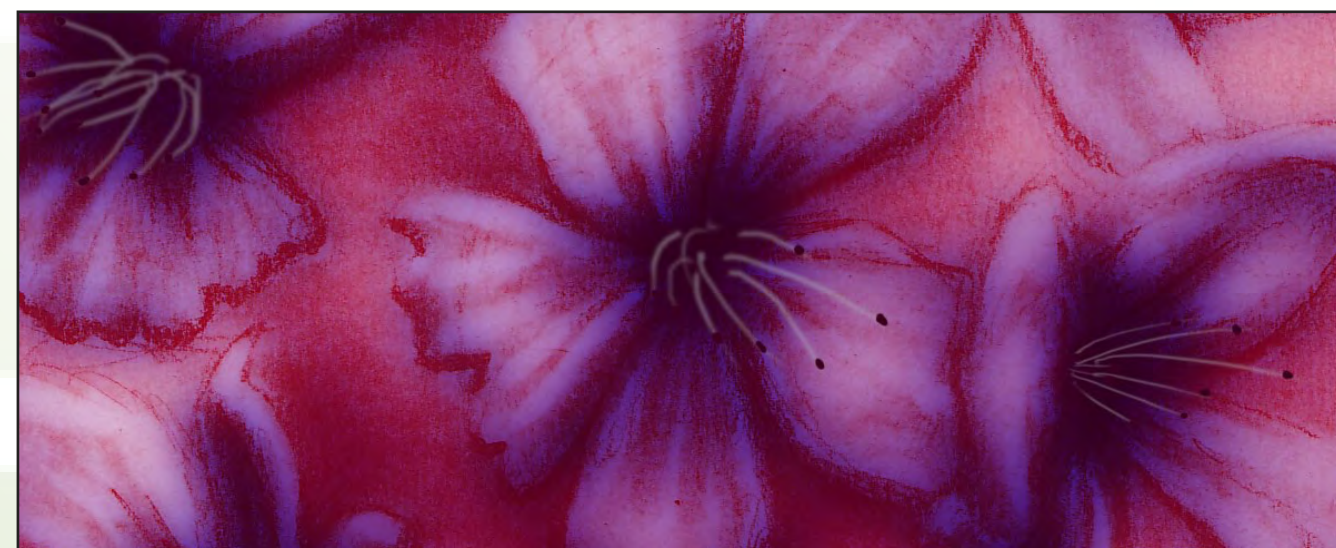
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## On the cover...



Cover art by Chip Boles

If I could spend Spring anywhere in the world, a top contender would be Japan. Sakura season highlights this time when Japan's natural beauty stands out past the paved waterways, concrete coastlines, and urban sprawl. A simple image seemed to get at

this for me this month. Hope y'all dig it.

Note: If any of you run across April's special Art Issue of *Japanzine*, take a look for my profile in there. I've got five images in it, plus a short interview. Thanks!

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All JETs in Hyogo are encouraged to send in articles, photos, musings, poetry, prose and any ideas to contribute or improve the *Hyogo Times* for the betterment of the Hyogo JET community.

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# From The Editor...

*"In like a lion and out like a lamb."*

At least that's how March is supposed to go! April/(Real) Spring is here! Yatta! Even though I am looking forward to the sakura-viewing and the warmer weather that accompanies this change, I am also extremely aware of how quickly time has passed!

After attending the Conference for Returning JETs in Yokohama last month, I've only just realized *how much* I have to do before leaving Japan!

In this regard, Tori Lowe, former JET and former Editor of the *Hyogo Times*, was good enough to give some advice to those of us who are leaving. Thanks for the reminders!

And if you would like to consider going the route of a "salaryman," look no further than former

JET George Sherriff of Nottingham in Tokyo, who wrote a second part to his feature, "Life After JET."

After the blandness that was February and beginning of March, everyone seems to need a little *Seoul*, so read up on what to do when there in Clay's article, if you haven't been already! I can't say I've been to the DMZ, but I can say I was out *bargaining* on prices with a shop owner at 3:30 in the morning in the Namdaemon markets!

If you are a second-year or older generation JET, and by now do not know what *hanami* is, utter and total shame on you! (Maybe, not the "utter and total" part, but all the same!) *Hanami*, in a word, is awesome. You sit under sakura trees (which are supposed to be blooming or else defeats the purpose of the "hana" part in "hana-

mi") and have a picnic and drink a lot.

Usually, the drink of choice is *sake* because many places will sell *sake* cups for a small price but the *sake* you receive at the event for the cup is free, as are the many refills!

Of course, you can always go with beer (the other "traditional" drink of Japan), and I can say that plenty of that was flowing at the St. Patrick's Day party held by the "Irish crew" in Himeji! If you don't know what I'm referring to (or can't remember because you drank too much), then just find the page with all the green, and you'll see what I'm talking about!

See you at *hanami* in Himeji! Don't forget — make some of those dips from Bob's recipes! They are perfect for picnics in general, but especially nice for *hanami*.



— Ann Chow

## Nishida

by Jack Jackson

I'd cry for you if I could but I can't, and I won't.  
I love you now more than I ever did before  
And saying goodbye breaks my heart.

I'll lie to myself and I'll lie to you just to make us feel better.  
Maybe we'll meet again, maybe we won't.  
Will you remember me? I hope so, but why?  
You remembering won't change anything...  
But the thought of you forgetting is heartbreaking.

I love you and never want to say goodbye.  
My mind knows I love others more and would  
Choose them over you and yet  
To think I'll never see you again makes me crumble.

The world is beautiful and so are you.  
However now I just want to curl up  
And cry, and cry, and cry.

Sometimes sorrow is just too much and then sometimes...  
I promise myself each time I'll change and  
Maybe I do but it is too little.

I know the world is beautiful but sometimes  
Things blind me to that beauty and  
Sometimes that beauty crushes me.

The world does not stop changing and it is  
Destroying me, and yet...I don't know.  
Why? And yet I know why.

It is a tragedy but it is beautiful.  
Actually it is beautiful, so very beautiful  
But it is tragic.

Perhaps in heaven we get the beauty without the tragedy...perhaps.

I know what I feel and it hurts.  
But would I change it?  
To feel happy do you need to feel sad? Is the pain worth the happiness?  
I don't know but I'll do, I'll do and I'll deserve what follows.

I thank you from the bottom of my heart and  
I hope I have made your life even a little better.  
I'm sorry I wasn't as good as I could have been,  
I'm really sorry.

Guide me please.



**Recipe of the Month:****By Robert  
Hollands**

# Dabbling with Dips

## Hummus, Tzatziki and Baba Ghannouj



For this month's recipes it's all about the dips. Combined with fresh sliced vegetables or some toasted pita or naan, these make for a great healthy snack.

The best part is that all three dips use many of the same ingredients; in around an hour I was able to make all three. Because they contain lemon juice,

they'll keep in the refrigerator for quite a while (though I dare say you'll be hard pressed not to eat the whole batch in one sitting!).

As always, when you read a recipe that requires use of a food processor or blender and you don't have one, you might be tempted to give up hope. It might help to think of such tools

as a quicker way to the results you'd get by using more "traditional" methods (I'm sure you can figure out how to mash stuff up using tools you already have in your kitchen).

Having said that, of course, go buy a food processor. They're not expensive — you can probably find one for 2,000-3,000 yen at a recycle shop.

### Hummus

**Ingredients:**

- 1 can (~500 g) chickpeas
- 1 tsp sesame paste
- 1 tsp lemon juice
- 1/2 tsp salt
- 1-2 cloves garlic
- cold water
- extra virgin olive oil and dry paprika, for serving

**Directions:**

- In a food processor, combine all ingredients except for the water, olive oil, and paprika
- Blend on high until it begins to form a paste.
- Add the cold water little by little and continue blending until the hummus reaches the desired consistency.
- Serve with toasted pita triangles. Before serving, drizzle a little olive oil and sprinkle some paprika on top.



### Tzatziki

**Ingredients:**

- 3 tbsp plain yoghurt
- 1 whole cucumber
- 1/2 tsp salt
- 1/2 tsp lemon juice
- 1/2 tsp extra virgin olive oil
- small bowl
- paper towels

**Directions:**

- Peel and mince the cucumber.
- In a small bowl, combine the cucumber and salt and stir, making sure that the salt is evenly distributed throughout. The salt will draw moisture from the cucumber.
- After a few minutes, drain any water that has accumulated at the bottom of the bowl and transfer the contents to a paper towel.
- Wrap the cucumber in the paper towel and press to remove as much moisture as possible.
- Add the cucumber and remaining ingredients into a bowl and mix well.
- Serve with gyros, souvlaki, shawarma, falafel, or any of your favorite Mediterranean or Middle Eastern food.



### Baba Ghannouj

**Ingredients:**

- 6 Japanese eggplants
- 1 tsp sesame paste
- 1 tsp lemon juice
- 1/2 tsp salt
- 1-2 cloves
- garlic
- extra virgin olive oil for brushing
- cold water

**Directions:**

- Preheat a convection oven to 190° C. If you don't have a convection oven, you can achieve similar results in a toaster oven and perhaps even in a microwave (though I've never tried the latter).
- Slice the eggplants in half lengthwise and brush the green part with olive oil.
- Place the coated eggplant halves in the oven and broil until the flesh begins to brown and turns soft.
- Remove the eggplant and, using a spoon, scoop out the flesh from the purple skin. You may discard the skin.
- In a food processor, combine all ingredients except for the water and blend until smooth. Slowly add water and continue blending until it reaches the desired consistency.



# WHEEL OF JEOPARDY!

Time for the H.T. Quiz: The "On Vacation" Edition! By Joy Feddes

**1 Are you hungry right now?**

- a) Oh Hungry? Oh Henry!
- b) Hungrier than a fiddler on a tin roof!
- c) No, I'm thirsty... for more cocktails.

**2 When you think of your childhood, you think:**

- a) You think there's no 'hood like childhood.
- b) Of the awesome toys you got to play with.
- c) Of napping. Sweet, sweet napping.

**3 Are you alone some tonight?**

- a) Nope, I busted out my blue suede shoes and danced up a storm!
- b) Yes, I want someone to love me tender.
- c) Who doesn't love Elvis?

**4 Would you like a pet monkey?**

- a) Yes, I'd call him Albert.
- b) Do you mean ANOTHER pet monkey? Yes!
- c) Can the monkey dance?

**5 What will you do with that jar of yennies you have when you leave Japan?**

- a) Leave them for my successor.
- b) Use them, all at once!
- c) Melt them and make a sculpture of you for your school as a going away present.

**6 Aloe vera is good for:**

- a) My yogurt!
- b) My back. Hello tropical vacation, hello massive sunburn.



c) I'm a little bit drunk... is the answer cocktails?

**7 A tropical vacation is nothing without:**

- a) Goating! Ha! Guess where I am? Phila-philippines.
- b) Cocktails. Nothing says good morning like a beer at 8 a.m. after some early morning snorkeling.
- c) You, and you too.

**8 Do you like pina colodas?**

- a) Yes, especially with the little umbrellas!
- b) Yes, but not the maraschino cherries that come with it. I can't quite believe they are fruit.
- c) By the dozen.

**What your answers mean:**

**Mostly As:** On my flight here, I met a man who told me about the sacredness of wombs. A disturbing conversation? Surprisingly only a little.

However, what is disturbing is that I won't be on vacation when you read this. Don't cry for me Mostly As, I've got another one in the works.

**Mostly Bs:** May I please play with your pet monkey? Or do you have a puppy? I saw a puppy yesterday and holy crap are puppies cute. Equally cute as kittens. Give me a call about the monkey though. And no, that is not a euphemism.

**Mostly Cs:** I know you weren't kidding about being a little drunk, so I'll keep this short. Have you ever thought about the word cocktail? Don't. It makes no sense. Just go drink a glass of water and then maybe another drink? Be smart, Mostly Cs. I think we are kindred spirits.

A Hyogo Times Ramentary Restaurant Review:

## World-famous Ippudo

By Andrew Tamashiro

Ippudo is a chain of ramen shops out of the Hakata area, with outposts in Tokyo and as far off as New York (I heard it's really expensive, though).

We had one near Waseda when I was a student, but the lines were always out the door, and we preferred Kokuran (RIP) anyway. It's one of the better chains in my experience, but I haven't been to one since my days as a study abroad student because there are so many other ramen joints I want to try.

This branch of Ippudo is located outside of Motomachi station in Kobe, about a 2 minute walk opposite Chinatown. Most Ippudo branches can be recognized on the outside by the wooden benches provided for the line of customers waiting to go in.

Ippudo only serves 2 "kinds" of ramen, which is blatantly clear on the menu. The *akamaru* and *shiromaru* versions, which are so called based on the color of the soups. There is a third item on the menu, but it is for a set meal, rather than a different "kind" of ramen and soup.



men and soup.

Ippudo also allows for the customer to customize their ramen as they see fit, with many toppings provided for the customer, including sauces, sesame seeds (to be ground up by the customer), and different types of pickled/spicy vegetables.

If you are feeling particularly hungry and have still have soup left, you may even request *kaedama*,

which is an extra serving of noodles, at the price of 150 yen. (You can do this more than once; it will just cost 150 yen eachtime.) They also serve an

atypical tea called rooibos, which is a "red" tea, traditionally from Africa. It has a slightly sweet taste to it.

Pictured here is the *Akamaru kasane aji* version of their ramen. It's one of their spicy versions, but doesn't approach the spice levels offered by *ramen-ya* that specialize in it. You can see the pork, green onions, bamboo, seaweed, and *mentaiko* (spicy cod roe) floating around in a bowl that I polished off in about 4 minutes :) I'm not sure what the black oil was made with, but it tasted of burnt garlic. I love garlic in my ramen. [Ed. Note: The black stuff is black sesame oil. I love goma in any form in my ramen.]

Somewhat disappointing, and not pictured, was the fried rice. Though well-seasoned and not too oily, there was no meat anywhere in the 500 yen dish. I expect more than rice and frozen veggie bits, no matter how well made the *yakimeshi* may be.







Friday the 13<sup>th</sup> of March saw what may go down in history as the biggest Paddy's Day bash Japan has ever seen (or the best craic at least!). Having let St. Patrick's Day 2008 slip by unnoticed by most, we Irish Hyogo JETs decided to throw a party for all our friends here

in Japan and let them know how things are done at home in Ireland.

No green beer, no corn beef and cabbage, and most definitely no U2. We decided to play to our strengths and just throw a big, honest-to-goodness drinking party. And boy, did we succeed!

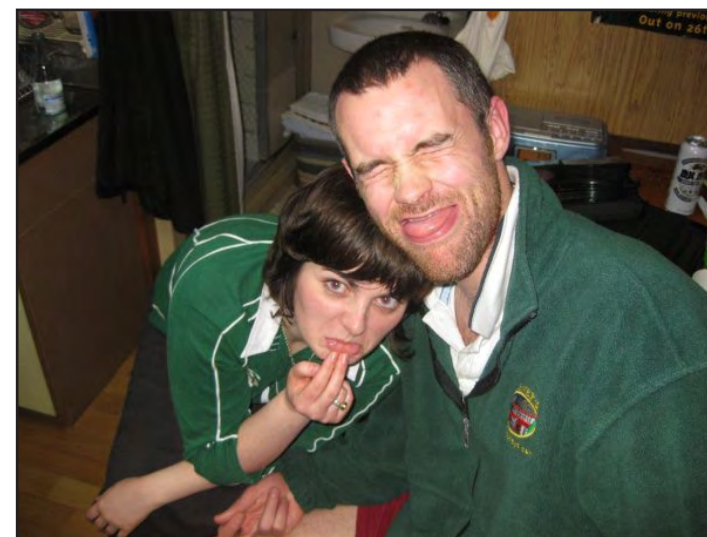
The venue was Hosanna, a British pub in Himeji, who for two glorious hours, took care of all our nomihoudai needs. Invitations were sent out early, the guest list chopped and changed, but by the time the big day dawned wet and wild (with an appropriateness that brought a tear to the eye) we had filled our quota of 55 guests.

People came from all over Hyogo and beyond, friends and strangers alike, and we gathered as many Irish people as we could to add to the authenticity. Dress code was,

of course, the obligatory green, and people really made a great effort. Those that didn't were glad to discover that it is not actually a tradition to pinch people who go sans green on St. Patrick's Day, much to the mystification of many of our American friends!

Hosanna kindly let us decorate the room how we wanted, and it is a credit to everyone who helped, both on the night and in the weeks beforehand, that the place closely resembled a remote part of the Amazonian rainforest by the time we had finished with it (minus the snakes, of course). We even had a life-size cut out of the great man himself, courtesy of the wonderful Mr. Chip Boles.

The music on the night was a mix of Irish contemporary and traditional,



but thanks to the merriment, it was relegated to a backseat role, as people got into the swing of things, and partook in the great Irish Paddy's Day tradition of "just having a laugh."

Once our two hours in Hosanna were up (and oh, how they flew!), the party moved on to the nearby Tiger Pub. We lost some people, gained some more, and amidst all the confusion and drinking, we managed to gather a gang and made for Aioi, where the party continued into the wee hours, and through to the next day and night. All in all, it was a fantastic time. We couldn't have asked for a better celebration of our most hallowed of saints.

Even though I can't imagine the night was what Patrick had envisaged as his legacy when he picked up that shamrock to preach to our heathen ancestors, I have no doubt he would've been proud of our dedication to the cause.

A big thanks from me, Caoimhe, Philip, and Paul to everyone who helped to organise the night (you all know who you are!), and to those who joined us and added so much to the atmosphere.

Finally, to those people who missed out this time, roll on Paddy's Day 2010! Go raibh míle míle maith agaibhse!





## Lesson Plan of the Month:

音の侍 *Samurai of Sound*

By Lester Somera

In practice, this game is just a quick phonics drill that usually helps to warm up classes that need to stretch their legs a bit. It combines listening practice with the enthusiasm most children have for running around and hitting things with sticks.

For elementary school, I used it to teach my students the most commonly-used short letter sounds in the alphabet and some basic phonics, so it took up several lessons. Depending on how skilled the students are, you can give them larger or smaller sets of letters — my amazing sixth grade class easily picked up all 26 over a period of two weeks, most of the others took three or four. All you need for this is a blackboard, a classroom with decent legroom at the front and four rolled-up posters.

If you are going to be using the lesson for elementary school, the vowels have the most difficult short sounds for Japanese kids to hear clearly (the E in fed and the I in fin), so don't overload them with vowel sounds and break each week down into sets of letters. At first, show them how phonemes connect in English ("A and B make 'ab,' B and A make 'ba'") and you can do that for several consonants and the letters A and E.

If you go up to G, you can make a bunch of three-letter words that they might



already know (BAD, BED, DAD, BAG, EGG, CAB...). Explain that if they can hear the sounds, they can guess at spelling. Continue with this in subsequent lessons, adding in new letters and new three-letter words while practicing the previous sets. Before the game, write down a list of words that only use the sounds that have been covered so far.

Split the class into four teams and give them 'swords' (just the rolled-up posters taped closed). I wrote the teams' letters on the tips to make it easier for me

to see who hit first. Line them up, and tell the challengers what sound in the word you're about to say they should listen for: the first sound, the middle sound, or the last sound. Then say the word (e.g.: "middle sound, BAG.).

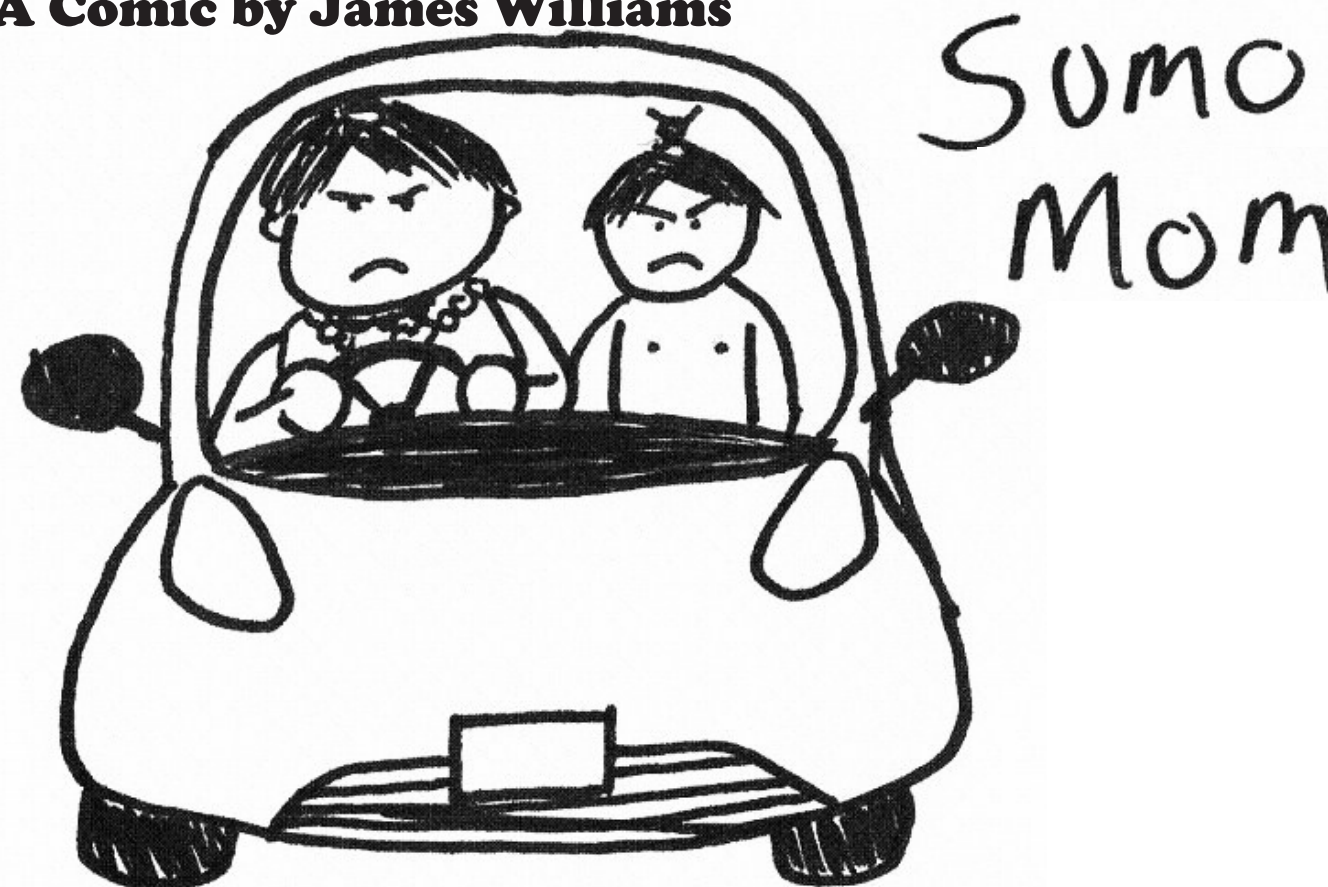
After you say

it, they all rush forward to the board and hit one letter. Whoever hits the letter that matches the sound first earns their team a point. The game should be moving as quickly as possible, so have a long list of words and note down which sounds the kids have trouble with. Of all the games I did with my older kids, this was the one that they were the most into, but it was also the game which caused the most violent confrontations. If people start swinging at each other, it's probably a good idea to dock points.

The kids were really enthusiastic once they learned that they could piece together letters to make words that they knew, which is nice, since elementary school English education is supposed to avoid teaching reading/writing skills altogether and just stress verbal communication and 'fun' at the expense of providing students with some sort of base for junior high. Try this at your elementary schools and see how it goes. I guarantee it'll be more worthwhile for them than learning the names of insects in English.



## A Comic by James Williams



# We Want Your Stories!

## ...and pictures, and opinions, and poems, and artwork, and essays, and....



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# The Best of the Block

By Brenda McKinney

Spring is definitely my favorite season in Japan (even though sometimes it seems hard to choose as each season has attractive aspects) and - lucky for us! - we were all placed in an amazing area to be in during this time. There's so much to see and do!

Kyoto is looking a little packed this month, but if you have ever been to the city during the hanami period, you can understand why. We also have the big HAJET Hanami Event at Himeji castle coming up and Salem over in Shiga, who runs the BEE (Bicycle for Everyone's Earth) program in Japan, has exciting news about a hanami-filled ride around the beautiful Biwako.

I hope to see you at some of these events and thank you – as always – for checking in!

## The Best of... HYOGO PREFECTURE

### Kobe Named UNESCO's newest "Design" City

Did you know that Kobe was a City of Design? In late 2008, Kobe joined the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization's (UNESCO) Creative Cities Network as a City of Design. UNESCO established the Creative Cities Network in 2004 to encourage cooperation and facilitate mutual exchange worldwide among "creative cities" committed to city revitalization through strengthening their cultural industries. Just another cool thing you can share about this temporary home after JET!

For more information on the program, check out: [http://portal.unesco.org/culture/en/ev.php-URL\\_ID=38176&URL\\_DO=DO\\_TOPIC&URL\\_SECTION=201.html](http://portal.unesco.org/culture/en/ev.php-URL_ID=38176&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html).

## The Best of... KYOTO PREFECTURE Spring Light Up at Nijo Castle

Finally, here is some proof to the rumor that ("some") Kyoto temples, shrines and taxis are cheaper or free if you are wearing your kimono!

From March 20<sup>th</sup> to April 12, Nijo Castle invites guests to view about 220 beautiful sakura trees and the castle garden in mysterious, illuminating light.

During this event, the outer citadel (which is normally closed to the public) will become the site of an ikebana flower arrangement exhibition and you can also catch a traditional Japanese musical performance.

Stands selling sweets and Japanese pickles will be set up by long-standing Kyoto shops, and tea ceremonies will be carried out near a small clear stream so that visitors may



enjoy the evening cherry blossoms with a traditional cup of macha green tea.

The event is open from 18:00 – 21:30 (last entry 21:00), with an extra 30 minutes on Fridays and Saturdays. Entrance is 400 yen (or FREE if you are wearing a KIMONO!) and the castle is located a short walk from the Nijojo-mae station on the Tozai Subway line. For further information on this event, please call 075-841-0096.

### Leaping Dance at Zuishin-in Temple

Every year from the end of March to the beginning of April, the red Japanese apricot trees at Zuishin-in Temple bloom with pink flowers that have long been associated with a spring leaping dance performance.

A poet named Ono Komachi, once known as one of the most beautiful women in the world, also lived here and the dance was supposedly established in order to bring humor to an episode where a man stalked her for 100 days.

However, the dancers also dance in a tender and playful way, inviting the audience to feel the warmth and



coming of spring. On March 29<sup>th</sup>, you can view the dance performance, plum gardens and treasure room at Zuishin-in Temple (a short walk from Ono Subway station) for 1,000 yen.

For details please call 075-571-0025 and don't forget to write about your experience for the Hyogo Times if you make it!

### Weeping Cherry Blossom Concert

This is the 21st annual Heian-jingu shrine Weeping Cherry Blossom Concert, established to celebrate the gorgeous weeping cherry trees in the shrine garden. These beautiful cherry blossoms are even mentioned in selected works of Japanese literature and will be lit up as the highlight of this event.

Live music will play as visitors enjoy the illuminated cherry blossom trees reflected in the garden pond. The concert will be held April 9-12<sup>th</sup> (18:15 – 21:00, rain or shine!) and tickets to the event are 2,000 yen each.

The shrine is a 3 minute walk from the city bus stop Kyoto Kaikan Bijutsukan-mae (look for the massive orange torii) and you can order tickets (or inquire about details) by calling the shrine at 075-241-6094.

### Spring Geisha Dance (Miyako Odori)

The geisha and maiko of Kyoto (or "geiko" as Gion geisha prefer to call themselves and incidentally means "a woman skilled in dancing and music") still carry out their traditional annual dances during the height of the cherry blossom season throughout the month of April.

The most popular of these dances are the Miyako Odori: "Cherry Blossom Dances" and "Dances of the Old Capital." Spectators flock from Japan and worldwide to attend the event, it would be worth your while to see this amazing event while you are living here! The dance performances will be held from April 1-30<sup>th</sup> at the Gion Kobu Kaburoenjo Theater (next to Gion corner).

Each performance runs for 60 minutes and the performance are held at 12:30, 14:00, 15:30 & 16:50. There are three ticket packages available and reservations are recommended (although tickets can be bought the day of the show). For more information or to book, please call 81-75-541-3391 or check out the event at [www.kyoto.travel/events/miyako\\_odori.html](http://www.kyoto.travel/events/miyako_odori.html).

miyako\_odori.html.

## And, finally, the Best of SHIGA PREFECTURE

### BEE Ride's Hanami Mini-Ride and Mini-Clean-Up in Beautiful North Biwa Country

On Saturday, April 11<sup>th</sup>, BEE (Bicycle for Everyone's Earth) Japan will host a fun ride around the northern part of Lake Biwa to raise awareness for upcoming Earth Day and to raise a little money for the BEE Japan 2009 Ride!

If you aren't much of a biker, don't worry! This is designed to be a relaxing and fun way to get out and enjoy nature, and show it some respect at the same time!

The ride will start at Yogo station at 10am and finish around 4-5pm and includes the cherry-lined roads along Biwa's shore near Makino, stopping for lunch, and riding along the hundreds of sakura surrounding Lake Yogo before dinner. BEE also asks that people pick up whatever gomi (litter) they see along the way to help contribute to Biwako's beauty.

The cost for the event is 1,000 yen/person, a donation to BEE Japan's 2009 Ride. If you need to rent a bike they are 500 yen and it's BYOBento, but there are places to eat along the way, many specializing in local fresh fish and veggies. Camping around Yogo is also an option (and Shiga AJET is in possession of several tents up for use!).

Please RSVP via the Shiga events page (at [esllwell.org](http://esllwell.org)) by April 6<sup>th</sup> or email [block6@ajet.net](mailto:block6@ajet.net) for further information. You can also learn more about BEE at [www.beejapan.org](http://www.beejapan.org).





# Getting to Know Some Random JETs

❖ **Name:** Rayna Price.  
 ❖ **Please call me:** Rayna.  
 ❖ **School and Location in Hyogo:** Oike JHS, Kobe Kita-ku.  
 ❖ **How we know you:** Er... you don't? Some of you might have met me in Shikoku. Rafting ahoy!  
 ❖ **Birthday:** August.  
 ❖ **Born and raised:** Darwin NT, Stanthorpe QLD, Yulara (Ayers Rock) NT, Adelaide SA.  
 ❖ **Family:** exists.  
 ❖ **University and Degree:** Flinders University, BA with majors in drama and screen studies, DipLang in Japanese.  
 ❖ **Other jobs you have had:** many, none interesting.  
 ❖ **Travels:** I had never been overseas until coming to Japan, but as you can see above, I've been around Australia a lot. I've since been to Singapore and Malaysia, and \*hopefully\* am going to India soon. Haven't yet travelled around Japan much, except for Nara. I've been to Nagano and Shikoku. Trip anyone?  
 ❖ **Hobbies:** READING, which I do far too much of. Craft in theory, but rarely in practice. Video games. Daydreaming. Reading blogs, listening to Savage Love, collecting amigurumi patterns I don't know how to use.  
 ❖ **Staying another year?** Fo sho.  
 ❖ **Favourites:**  
**Food:** Pizza.  
**Sports:** Belly dancing, but I haven't done it in forever. Today I watched my ichis play soccer. It was almost like it was me. I'm awesome.  
**Music:** Lots.  
**Shop:** Daiso!! Online: Etsy, Threadless.  
**TV Show:** *Arrested Development*.  
**Movie:** I never have a favourite movie. I rarely even have a Top 3.



But just for fun, and because I rew up on it, I'm gonna say *Terminator 2*. It never dates. Incidentally, neither do *Parenthood* or *Trainspotting*. If you wanna fight with me about whether *Parenthood* dates, find me on Facebook or something. Hairstyles don't count.  
 ❖ **Most Proud Achievement:** Don't feel as though I have any. Sad but true.  
 ❖ **Best life experience:** Rafting in Shikoku. Yeah, I haven't had an eventful life.  
 ❖ **Who would you like to meet?** Ewan McGregor.  
 ❖ **Why should we elect you President of the World?** Because I am tainted by neither experience nor qualifications, but I have read a lot of Terry Pratchett. These qualities, and a fondness for penguins, make me the perfect candidate for a nice cup of tea on the balcony. {Editor's note: this is, bar none, the best answer to this question we've ever had!}  
 ❖ **Best thing about Japan so far?** The euphoria I felt in the first few

months.

❖ **If it was my last day on earth I would:** make love to Ewan McGregor (no means yes, right?).

❖ **Interesting fact about me:** I once ran from somewhere in World 4 in Super Mario on the NES, little, with no sparte lives, and FINISHED THE GAME. I was taking over from my sister. I didn't take any shortcuts, or try to collect coins/lives/mushrooms, because I didn't think I would last very long, let alone finish. I was young, and oh!, the adrenaline as I raced through worlds 6 and 7 with no mistakes!! MISTAKES ARE DEATH. Maybe this is my "most proud achievement."

❖ **Bribery for students...YAY or NAY?** Heller yay!!

❖ **Funniest story involving a student:** I made each column write a different part of a sentence: subject, verb, object, place, time. Then I read out each row's sentence. I got gold. My favourite?

"Jou enjoyed Marimokkori on the toilet last Sunday."



❖ **Name:** Richard Adam Halls.

❖ **Please call me:** Adam.

❖ **School and Location in Hyogo:** As of next month, Iwaoka Chugakko in Iwaoka near Akashi.

❖ **How we know you:** I am the Librarian or the pleasant intellectual fellow at the Hub talking too loudly.

❖ **Birthday:** April 11th.

❖ **Location before JET:** Leeds in the U.K.

❖ **University and Degree:** Newcastle University, English Literature (I got a 1st!).

❖ **Other jobs you have had:** I used to work for Student Loans whilst I was still actually a student. People swore at me a lot.

❖ **Travels:** Not a vast amount. Being a European, I've been around a few countries there. France, Spain, the Netherlands, Italy and Ireland. I've been to America three times, but only to go to Disney World.

❖ **Hobbies:** Far, far too many. For starters, I run a blog at <http://mum-myboon.blogspot.com> all about my adventures in Japan. I am an avid comic reader and just general pop culture consumer. I love bad movies,

old school punk music and experimental books. I do a lot of gaming stuff, too. I play *Warhammer 40k* fairly regularly — I am currently in a *Dungeons & Dragons* campaign and I have a dangerous *Blood Bowl* team. Oddly enough, I'm not so into the video games.

❖ **Staying another year?** Yup.

❖ **Favorites:**

**Food:** Ramen is a magic food. I may not always want it, but if someone says "let's eat ramen," I can't refuse it.

**Sports:** Football, aka soccer.

**Music:** My all-time favourite band are the Mania Street Preachers, but I like a lot of punk and indie.

**Shop:** Traveling Man in Leeds. Best. Comic. Shop. Ever!

**TV Show:** Probably *Father Ted*, but maybe *QI*.

**Movie:** *Memento*, if I'm in an intelligent mood. *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* if I'm not.

❖ **Most proud achievement:** Getting my first at University.

❖ **Best life experience:** Naked Man Festival in Okayama. Drunk, nearly naked, 5,000 other men running around a town and screaming. What's not to love?

❖ **Motto to live by:** Try anything once. If you don't like it, you need never do it again. See above.

❖ **I remember when...** a farthing got you one way on the rotary trolley and a cup of coffee, consarn it! No, I', scary young. Fear my 22-year-old visage and think about what you have lost.

❖ **What are you drinking?** Beer. A nice one. From Britain.

❖ **Who would you like to meet?** Grant Morrison — genius comic book writer who thinks he once talked to 5th dimensional aliens.

❖ **Why should we elect you President of the World?** You shouldn't. I'm very disorganized. But I am honest.

❖ **Best thing about Japan so far?** All the awesomely humbling acts of kindness that you experience from co-workers.

❖ **If it was my last day on earth I would:** spend time with my wonderful girlfriend, sitting on a park bench feeding ducks.

❖ **Interesting fact about me:** When I was 13 years old, i.e. literally the day I turned 13, a boy broke my nose. The doctors fixed it by breaking it again and strapping a gigantic white plaster cast to my face to hold it in place. My birthday present? Tickets to see *Phantom of the Opera*.

❖ **My top tip for teaching:** review the previous lessons points using a game at the beginning of the current lesson. It's a good warm-up and a great way to check what is and isn't sinking in.

❖ **When the class is TOO QUIET** I... suddenly burst into song.

❖ **Bribery for students...YAY or NAY?** Yay. It encourages students that struggle with the lesson to participate if they can get a prize. Troublemakers will always be troublemakers and teacher's pets will always try, but the only way to get students who struggle to try is with some kind of motivation.

❖ **Funniest story involving a student:** Not a story per se, but I was once asked to mark compositions that my students had written over the winter vacation. Some of the highlights were:

"I will pleasure me in winter vacation."  
 "I will pleasure in winter vacation. I want come early."

"I will go to Okinawa so I can raid a banana."

"I exerted a cultural festival."



# Better Know a Ken: Gunma

by Erin Kessler

Part 15 in our ongoing 47-part series highlighting the lives of JETs living in other prefectures. Yes, we blatantly stole the idea from Stephen Colbert's 434-part *Better Know a District*. If you know someone living in another ken, have them send in their story and pics to [submit.hyogotimes@gmail.com](mailto:submit.hyogotimes@gmail.com).

Strong winds, strong women, mountains and cars — these are just a few of Gunma's claims to fame.

Fame, you say? I've never heard of Gunma! Indeed, most JETs had not even heard of its existence before being placed here (with the exception of a few, whom I shall refer to as "car enthusiasts"). That is why, in this "Better Know a Ken" feature, I will illuminate some of the outstanding features of Gunma for you.

If you look at a map of Honshu, Japan's biggest island, you will see that in the center there is a landlocked mass bordering Nagano to the east, Niigata to the south, Tochigi to the west and Saitama to the north. The shape of these borders evokes

the image of a crane in flight. Can you see it? Its outstretched wings and its beak pointing south-easterly?

Now, since this is Japan, we should consider the weather. It gets cold here in winter, and the strong winds can chill you to the bone. It's

also steaming hot in summer — one city, Isesaki, holds the record for highest temperature throughout Japan.

And as for the women, they are traditionally known to be strong and hard-working (whereas the men are lazy and spend their time gambling and playing pachinko).

Gunma is also considered to be the most centrally-located -ken in Japan, with the town of Shibukawa being the exact center and the self-proclaimed "belly button" of Japan. Every summer during the last weekend in July, a festival called the "Heso Matsuri" or "Belly Button Festival", is held in Shibukawa. The festival is a two-day affair, where people from all over Gunma come to dance in the streets, and shirtless men with faces painted on their bare stomachs parade through town. [Ed. note: Hyogo-ken also lays claim to having

the belly button of Japan in the form of Nishiwaki-shi, though I'm not sure they have a matsuri devoted to that. Let the fight for the title to be "Nihon no heso" begin!]

Mountains are abound in this humble prefecture. An active volcano, Mt. Asama, erupted this February 2, 2009. The ashes blew as far as Tokyo. There is also the mountain range of Myogi, so popular in autumn for viewing *kouyou*, the changing colors of autumn leaves.

Mt. Myogi, with its craggy peaks and steep inclines, is a challenge for the average hiker, but well worth the effort required. There are chains and ropes available for you to use if necessary. In addition, Mt. Haruna and Mt. Akagi can be seen on the horizon on a clear winter day. Gunma-jin are very proud of their mountains, and feel at a loss when they are in Tokyo or other big cities without them.

These mountains are also the setting for a famous *manga* about car-racing, made into a movie in 2005 called *Initial D*. The main character is Takumi, son of a tofu-shop owner who is able to perfect his racing skills driving through winding mountain passes in order to deliver the fragile tofu.

With all of these mountains and volcanic activity, there must be hot-springs flowing through the region, right? And indeed, Gunma isn't featured in many guidebooks, but it does



have one of the most famous *onsen* in Japan: Kusatsu.

This *onsen* town is known for its 100 per cent natural flowing hot springs where the highly acidic water is lauded for its purifying and curative powers. The hot springs flow through the center of town, culminating at the *Yubatake*, where the water runs through wooden gutters and sulfuric steam rises from the opaque, glowing green liquid below. Quite a romantic place to bring a date.

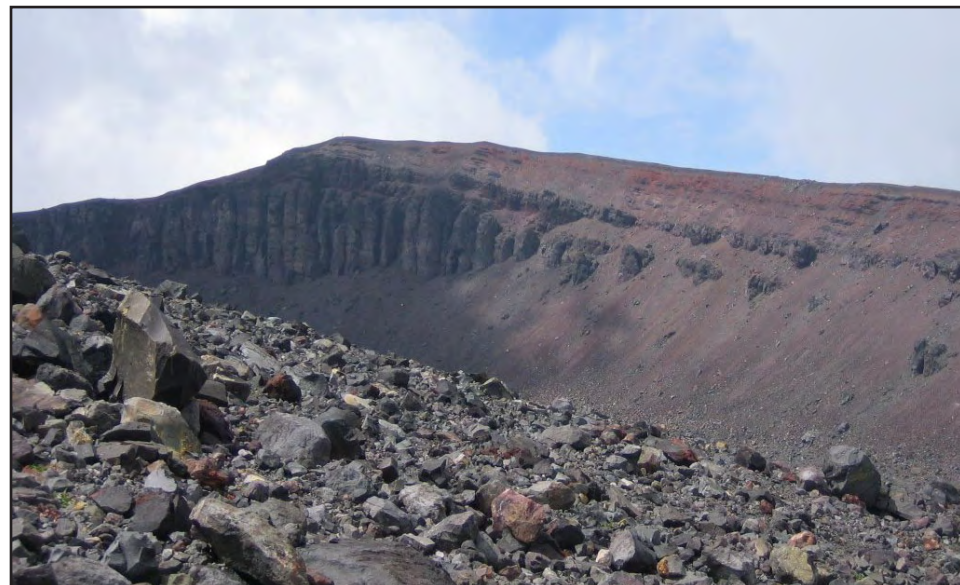
Now, what about the food? Gunma does have its *meibutsu*, or specialties — the two most popular ones being *konnyaku* and *yaki-manju*. *Konnyaku* is a clear, solid, jelly-like mass, which comes in many shapes and forms (cubed, rectangular, triangular, noodles, etc), made from a starchy plant known as Devil's Tongue. It is also tasteless, though you can add some taste by putting a little *miso* paste on it. It has a negligible amount of calories,

is high in fiber, and highly regarded as a healthy diet food.

*Yaki-manju* is a little more interesting. It is made with *manju* (round, steamed cake) placed on skewers, grilled, and doused with a sauce made from *miso*, sugar, soy sauce and salt. Every *yaki-manju* shop has its own secret recipe for this sauce, so the exact amounts of these ingredients are unknown to the general public.

This sweet and salty carbohydrate pride of Gunma is also a popular item sold during festivals. A tricky thing to eat as well, since the *manju* are usually too big to fit in your mouth, and the thick coating of sauce easily gets stuck on your face. No cause for embarrassment though — this is all part of the *yaki-manju* experience.

Gunma has long been a well-kept secret from the average tourist. Outdoor enthusiasts would love the landscape, opportunities for hiking, skiing and snowboarding, white-water rafting and bungee-jumping! Those who want to relax and take a break from their stressful lives have over 100 *onsen* to choose from. Here is a mere taste of Gunma — now come visit and explore to find out more!





# Travel **SOUTH KOREA**

## Go for the drama, stay for the food

By Clay Eaton

As long as you're in Japan, you've got no excuse to not make a quick trip to Korea. Not only is it one of the most dynamic countries in Asia (well, at least the Southern half is), but it's also home to one of the world's best cuisines and its cultural exports of dramas and teen idols grow more popular every year. Best of all, you can practically swim there!

(NOTE: Seoul is the capital of South Korea and nearly half of all South Koreans live nearby, so I'll be focusing on it in this article.)

Korea is a very popular tourist destination for the Japanese, so there are a number of ways to get there from here. There are direct flights from Kansai International Airport to Jeju Island, Pusan in the south, and to the various airports of Seoul. If you're going by air, I would suggest flying into Incheon International because for the past four years, it has been rated the best airport in the world!

Another adventurous way to get to



Korea is to take a hydrofoil from Fukuoka to Pusan (the JR Beetle service). The ride itself is only about three hours long. It is a good excuse to catch some sights in Kyushu and there's nothing quite like blasting across the Tsushima Strait in a jet boat. Make your reservations early though. Boat tickets can sell out fast and they're already fully booked for Golden Week. Once you dock in Pusan, you can hop on an express train to Seoul or anywhere else in the country.

Once you get to Korea, things can seem a little strange. It's probably the country most similar to Japan, but for those of us who live here that can distinguish the differences between the two, it stands out even more.

For one thing, English is much more widespread in Korea than it is here, and

many of the younger people you meet will have lived or at least studied in the English-speaking world. Coupled with the logical and easy-to-learn alphabet (I was literate in two hours!), this makes Korea much easier to navigate for a foreigner than Japan. North Americans can also take comfort in finding a Papa John's (pizza parlor) and Cold Stone (ice cream) shop around every corner.

Another important difference between Korea and Japan is the food. After the delicate tastes and textures of *わしよく*, Korean food is a spicy punch to the face that hurts so good. DO NOT MISS the original Yakiniku: Galbi (갈비). An authentic galbi restaurant will have you cutting up shanks of meat with a big pair of scissors, grilling to taste and then wrapping the meat in a lettuce leaf with various spicy pastes, kimchi, and of course, lots of garlic. Follow this up with some deceptively smooth Soju (never, ever drink Korean beer), and you have yourself a dinner to remember. {Design Editor's note — Galbi is one of the best

foods I've ever eaten. Trust Clay on this!}

Seoul is the second largest city in Asia after Tokyo, so there's something for everyone in this buzzing metropolis. For culture fiends, check out the palaces in the northern part of the city. The most impressive of these is Gyeongbok-gung (경복궁, 景福宮), former home of the Joseon Dynasty. Impressive and expansive, the grounds are also home to a number of museums and interestingly-dressed palace guards.

Like almost everything else in Korea, however, Gyeongbok-gung was at one point destroyed by the Japanese, so the whole complex definitely feels restored. For a more authentic feel, head west to the one palace that the Japanese spared: Changdeok-gung (창덕궁, 昌德宮). This smaller palace has a more intimate feel, and while you can only go through on a guided tour, you don't have to speak Korean to appreciate this island of serenity in the middle of Seoul.

If you're craving some of the international cuisine you have trouble finding here in Japan, head to Itaewon (이태원), Seoul's foreigner enclave. Located next to a massive US military base as it is, the predominant influence here is American, but that doesn't mean you can't find delicious Turkish or Southeast Asian food if you head off the main street. The burgers at Geckos are particularly excellent; it's across the street from Quiznos. This is also one of the best places for drinking and clubbing in Seoul, though this neighborhood has a bit of a sketchy reputation after dark, so keep your wits about you more than you would in Shinsaibashi.

For a more authentic Korean night life experience, head to Gangnam (강남), which is towards the south of the city. This area is a little more glamorous than Itaewon, though some clubs are known to charge more for foreigners.

Gangnam is also a great place to go shopping or to watch all the young rich Koreans show off the latest (\*ahem\* identical) fashion. This neighborhood



DO NOT MISS GALBI!!! Best meal ever!!!

is home to the COEX mall, where you can find everything from clothes and English-language books to raw fish. This mall is also home to two major tourist attractions; the Kimchi Field Museum can be found on level B2, and if you ever wanted to write a dissertation about kimchi, this is the only place you'll ever need to go.

Also in the bowels of the mall, you can find the studio where young men play out South Korea's unofficial national sport: Starcraft, the video game. Turn on the TV in Korea and you'll find not one but two channels of 24-hour Starcraft coverage, as legendary gamers compete for glory and corporate endorsement. If you're lucky, you'll catch a match, complete with a hoard of young women waiting outside the door for a chance to meet their favorite gamer. I assure you this is too weird for me to be making it up.

One last necessary stop in the Seoul area is the De-Militarized Zone (DMZ). Seoul is only about 50 kilometres from this buffer that separates North Korea and South. The place bristles with mines, tanks and lots and lots of men with guns, which makes for a pretty amazing tour!

The USO and various private companies offer day trips to the DMZ at

about ¥10,000 a pop. Orientation videos by the South Korean government find entertaining spins for the DMZ (a wildlife refuge par excellence!) while you explore tunnels that North Korean soldiers were digging under the minefields to Seoul's backyard.

The highlight of these tours is a visit to the Joint Security Area at Panmunjeom (판문점, 板門店). This is the area where North Korea and UN forces (namely South Korea and the US) are supposed to meet, but for the most part it has become a tourist destination. Here you can take some steps into North Korean-controlled territory (in a conference room), see the world's tallest flag (the result of the Cold War's greatest sausage-wagging contest), and you may even see a glowering North Korean soldier.

DO NOT mess around though: make a dash for the border and odds are both sides will shoot at you. While this may all sound a little intense, rest assured that as long as you play by the rules, the tour is very safe. When booking, make sure that your tour will take you to both the tunnels and Panmunjeom.

That's all we can fit in for now! As always, if you have other contributions about Korea, please send them in!



# Going Home...

## Recommendations from an Ex-JET

By **Tori Lowe**



I was reminded recently that recontracting time is coming up again, and I thought I'd finally get round to the article I was going to write about going home! I've been off the JET gravy train for almost seven months now, which honestly is a lot longer than I expected it to be when I would write this article.

For those at the end of their three years, I want to say that going home after such a long time was nowhere near as difficult as I thought it was going to be. We are warned over and over about terrible reverse culture shock, and while I did experience some particularly hard times when I first arrived back, I think the main cause was lack of preparation for actually being *home*.

### 1. Tie up all loose ends in Japan before you go. This takes time, so start early.

My main concern in the last six months of my time in Japan was wrapping up all the things I had planned to do, and preparing mentally for 'the end of an era' and the inevitability of someone taking over my job, apartment and work relationships. I had become really comfortable in my life in Japan and preparing for that upset to routine was my first and foremost concern! I guess, mentally and emotionally I was ready to go home. I think that has made things a lot easier in the long run.

### 2. Save at least two months worth of pay checks!

Financially, I wasn't prepared. Unlike many of my counterparts, I had saved "bugger all" and this put me in a bad situation when invited to event after welcome home event. It also put me in the dire situation of relying on the charity of family and friends. I just felt so ashamed of myself! I had worked and travelled and just generally had an awesome

carefree time in Japan, and I was going home and scabbing favours off people that had been just getting by for the last three years. Shame on me!

### 3. Take applying for jobs seriously.

Getting work was a lot harder than I anticipated. I had applied for quite a few jobs while I was still in Japan, and I always thought I would just get one of those. Oh the confidence! It didn't take long for those jobs to fall through (perhaps because I had been a bit slap-dash about the whole procedure) and after my third week of unemployment with no money and no hope of getting the dole (they wanted bank statements from Japan and I hadn't kept that kind of record), I started to panic.

### 4. Use your networks. All of them, no matter how unlikely some of them may seem.

I applied for about 30 different jobs in two weeks. I only ever heard from four of those. I ended up getting offered two of those jobs — a month after having applied, and neither of which I wanted to accept. This is where I give you the hot tip: networks. You've probably heard that a million times, and for good reason. The job I finally ended up taking was one I got through my best friend's mother, who was conveniently one of the directors at a technical school in Perth. Let people know you are coming home. Ask for your friends to suss out some temping work for you while you are getting yourself back on your feet.

### 5. Stay in close contact with other returning JETs.

Apart from being flat broke and feeling like a big fat failure in life, I am glad that I had a month or so of unemployment because it gave me time to re-adjust to the culture

here. At first, I kept on analysing [loudly] everything about Australia and Australian culture (haha!) as if I was some alien. That was extremely uncool and I'm glad I had it out of my system when I started a full time job. Of course, I still THINK it, but I can resist the urge to vocalise every cultural trait I pick up. It's awesome that you will be able to do this when you get home, but save your observations for other JET alumni — no one else really wants to hear it!

### 6. Keep looking for jobs even when you get home, just in case.

The first job I took, I got sick of pretty quickly. I was working in a small, busy office doing mainly data entry. It was repetitive, soul-destroying and my work mates spent all day, every day, whining about the bosses. It was great motivation to find a job I could get really excited about.

### 7. Consider every opportunity.

If you had asked me this time last year what I would be doing at this moment, I would have probably said "something to do with international stuff." Yeah, that's how clear it all was to me. With my degree in Asian Studies, a major in Japanese, and three years of teaching in Japan, I am now working at a small government-sponsored company as a co-ordinator of local government in Natural Resource Management. The official title on my pay slip is "Local Government Natural Resource Management Executive Support Officer." What the...?

My boss tells me that my resume was awful (likely the reason why I had no hits for jobs... get your resumes checked!!) but he had wanted to meet me because of my obvious interest in 'culture' (ahem... it also helped that another friend of my friend's mum had put in a good word). I had a four-hour interview, and was offered the job immedi-

ately afterwards.

### 8. KNOW that your experiences in Japan have made you just that little bit more awesome.

I LOVE my new job. It's something completely different to anything I have attempted before, and every day is a challenge. I am not using the 'hard skills,' such as Japanese language and umm....handy Google skills(?) that I picked up in Japan, but instead the 'soft skills' — such as flexibility, adaptability, organization and effective communication.

What I am trying to say is that time in Japan can prepare you for any job. Don't sell yourself short. Cast your 'job net' out wide. Even a year in Japan can pretty much tick off any selection criteria you might come across in [realistic] job applications (assuming you also have a degree). I didn't believe it while I was in Japan — because everyone I knew was doing it — but spending an extended time in Japan is a Big Deal. It took working in a crap job for one week to work this out; and only two months to move on to bigger and better things. That's another great thing about being home — not being locked into a dead-end job!

### 9. Realize every day that 'your life' is exactly that, and feel pretty chuffed about it.

So, if you are nervous about going home; don't be. It may take a bit of time when you get back to find a job, but you are in a great position to get a job you can love. Coming home has been as exciting as going to Japan in the first place. Getting a new place, making new friends, and spending quality time with family and old friends, culture shock, scary life assessment, discovering new places to eat and drink — it's all there, but in reverse. And if I ever get sick of life here, I know I have the confidence and know-how to move on again.





# The Big Sausage Festival

By Ann Chow

When I say “sausage,” I really mean “penis,” but to say you went to a “penis festival” makes people’s alarm bells go off. They think you’re *eroi*, or worse, スケベ.

On March 15 each year, there is a festival called the Hounen-sai (豊年祭) in Aichi-ken. “Hounen” translates to “fruitful” or “fertile,” so this festival is a fertility festival for both agricultural reasons as well as other kinds of regeneration. I tried saying, “fertility festival” to people but the word doesn’t seem to be in any Japanese person’s vocabulary. I end up reverting to the much more childish Japanese way of saying it, “*chin-chin*,” because it’s more clear to the listener. Then their eyes open wide, they ask if you mean “*pen-nis*,” and if you’re speaking to other women, they’ll giggle (as they do).

Daniel and I stayed overnight at Emerald’s place to get an early start on the next day, as we were using the Seishun 18 Kippu and had a 4 to 5 hour train ride to get there from Hyogo. We woke up at an ungodly hour for a Sunday morning, not so bright-eyed or bushy-tailed, but very much looking forward to the festival and getting some shut-eye on the train ride there. We caught up with Goran, managed to sleep the grogginess off, and after many train transfers, finally got there.

When we got out of the station, all things related to the phallus were already apparent. Not 50 feet from the station, there were several shops selling phallic-looking candy and other phallic-looking ob-



jects. We thought we could get candy omiyage later when leaving, but unfortunately, they were sold out by the time we left.

On our way to the main shrine, Tagata Jinja, there were many *yatai* stalls selling the usual *matsuri* food. Then we got to the shrine area, where the food started to look more interesting. By “interesting,” I mean think of sausages and bananas. There really isn’t much more you need to do to either

one to make them look like phalluses, but you’d be surprised at how much more you *can* do to make the likeness shine through.

Actually, I was slightly surprised they didn’t make either snack more realistic or grotesque

since I’d heard stories of sausages lined with a stream of mayonnaise! The giant sausages were pigs-in-a-blanket and the bananas were cut to have a

more realized tip. Possibly the best part about the bananas was not the shape, but the many flavors they came in — vanilla, strawberry, chocolate, and what may have either been blueberry or vanilla with blue food dye. The drawback was the price — 300 yen for what amounted to a sugar-frosted banana. It was probably the most I will ever pay for a banana in my life.

After feasting, we started to head for the start of the procession. Unfortunately, we got split up, but I managed to be left with the tallest person in the group (which came in handy later!), and it became the misadventures of Ann and Goran.

Goran and I walked towards the procession and realized that the crowds were so big, I couldn’t see anything. There were cameramen stationed at the bottom of the hill and they had ladders to help them scope out the view. I, fortunately, had Goran to help me in that department. We got the “crazy” idea that I should sit on top of his shoulders. People either moved far away from the new monstrosity or got a

newfound curiosity as to why this “Japanese girl” was with a gaijin twice her size.

Either way, what I saw while up there was unlike anything I’d seen before. A giant, carved, wooden object protruding from a regular *o-mikoshi* being paraded around gave me new meaning to the words, “morning wood.” I’ve shown photos to Japanese people and they seem to get squeamish, asking me why I would take photos of things that give them the willies, but, hey, it’s not my country that has an entire festival devoted to phalluses!

After the chants of “*wasshoi, wasshoi*” while dancing with the float, they slowly made their way to Tagata Jinja. The shrine is actually devoted to a female deity, which is why the phallus is brought to the shrine. The legend is that the daughter of a powerful warlord was married to a local prince, but since women were held in higher regard back then, the newly married woman didn’t have to leave her

household and the man would have to visit his wife. The festival is symbolic of this legend.

Thinking we could get back in time to see the float arrive at the shrine, we made our way to the neighboring one, Oagata Jinja, which was near the next train station — 20-30 minutes away on foot. We walked there thinking it would be closer than 30 minutes and as Goran asked for directions, this very *genki*, nice old man said to follow him.

Not only did he take us to the shrine and explained things, he told us that there was also going to be *mochi-nage* (mochi-throwing) and gave us bags to

said that with the giant wooden phallus floating down the street in public in mind.

After the *mochi-nage*, where Goran scored a bag full of soft mochi, the two of us went back to the other shrine, this time by train. We found the rest of our group and headed back home. Although this festival was all about the “sausage,” it really wasn’t that sexually charged. Our conversations on the train ride back had more salt than that! At the end of the night, I felt satisfied, which is the feeling all men should leave women with when they decide to come out and play. ☺





Life After JET:

# Landing in Tokyo

By George Sherriff

I remember waking up one sunny spring morning last year, in the ruins of a post hanami party, starting to question the wisdom of leaving the JET programme after one year.

While foraging for belongings left untouched during the rampage of a drunken Irish man, it dawned on me that life in August would be a shock to the system. How would a standard 9-to-5 job in England compare to the previous six months, or indeed the carnage witnessed the night before? Though life on JET and Uni were similar (little work and a lot of drinking) they were also very different. Ironically though, going back to England and finding a job would have proved a more difficult adjustment.

I therefore started to think about opportunities for future employment in Japan after the JET. I knew that JET represented one of the best teaching programmes in the world, and the thought of joining a money grabbing English teaching business had little appeal. However, the fact that my Japanese had progressed little beyond saying "I can't speak Japanese," meant opportunities were going to be limited.

In June I attended the JET careers fair in Tokyo. There were many reputable corporations represented, but when the first speaker started to talk in Japanese I soon lost hope. This is not to say that everyone was looking for Japanese speakers. There were other opportunities there, including events organizing positions and recruitment companies, employing for themselves, but also to help you find a job in Japan (although one woman told me I should go home!).

During the break I spoke to an ex-JET by the balcony. He said he now worked for a PR firm, but reflected nostalgically on his JET experience, as he bemoaned the long hours and short holidays of his current employment.

After the careers fair I visited Tokyo many times, going back and forth on night buses for various interviews. Some of them promising, many of them awful. 'Great opportunities' turning out to be positions in which you were given the corner of a small table in a small office to make cold calls, with no basic salary but a promise of 'great commission...'

Sorting out the clothes that were no

longer salvageable from the San-In beach party weekend, I came upon the business card that the former JET from the PR Company had given me, so I decided to email him. He gave me the details of his boss who was willing to give me an interview. So I used my now friendly contact at the bus company to book another ticket. Despite getting lost and turning up drenched in sweat, the interview went well and I finally found a great company that needed an English speaker.

I was offered the job, starting two weeks after JET finished. Moving to Tokyo inevitably proved more eventful than originally assumed. First of all, my accommodation was in a guesthouse. My large house in Himeji shrunk to a shoe-box with a rent more fitting for a castle. I shared a tiny kitchen and bathroom with a crazy woman from Brunei, whose chosen topics of conversation are far too obscene for the good readers of the *Hyogo Times*. In addition, her choice of food was somewhat suspect, as were her cooking methods, once falling asleep while her Tiger scrotum soup was boiling. The evacuation of the block and lingering smell provided one of the

many highlights.

Devin, a friend from Aioi, was offered a job with a business consultancy firm and had moved into the apartment above. Not too long after, we decided to look for a house. As JETs, we take the simplicity of being spoon-fed accommodation in Japan for granted, normally equipped with the basic necessities. Tokyo was different.

First off, I am sure you have all heard of key money, but most of us never have to worry about it. In Tokyo, key money is the norm. For those of you new to this term, key money is a two or three month rent down payment that is non-refundable, a gift to the landlord for the being so kind as to allow you to pay him to live in his house.

Aside from key money, additional costs included security deposits, agency fees, cleaning charges, re-contracting charges and the fact nowhere was furnished. The average initial cost we were presented with for just moving in was often in excess of \$7,000. Asking my colleagues at work about this situation, they simply nodded in solemn acceptance. Why no one questions this ridiculous system is beyond my simple comprehension! We did find one place willing to waive the fee, but upon realizing there was not Kanji for our names, we were informed of the racially conscious 'no gaijin policy.'

Craigslist.org provided our salvation. We found an American struggling to rent his house in Shibuya. After Devin ruthlessly bargained with him to achieve a remarkable reduction in rent, we moved in. Several months of profiteering from ex-Lehman Brothers employees and we were also fully furnished.

My new job was going very well, and served to illustrate that Japanese companies need foreign workers. The PR firm I work for is one of the largest in Japan, though out of the 230 employees there are just four foreigners. Within just a few months I was making presentations and pitching for new business, as well as working on some really interesting

accounts.

I had no previous PR experience, and am by no means proficient at what I do, but simply more confident using the English language with foreign clients than my Japanese colleagues. Over half of our clients are global corporations, leading me to question what my department did before having a native speaker. I truly believe this is the case in many Japanese companies; the problem is finding someone in a position of authority willing to act on this.

Aside from work, living in Tokyo is a surreal and expensive experience. I walk through the Shibuya crossing every day on my way to work, and rarely fail to see something strange! The nightlife is great, though it hurts your pocket as does most things. Two JETs visiting over winter left with hyperthermia due to attempts at keeping the extortionate heating bill down.

On the flipside, living next to Yoyogi Park provides a great opportunity to drink all day on the cheap! For those Mt. Fuji fans out there, seeing it on a clear day towering over Tokyo is a spectacular view. Despite never seeing nature from Monday to Friday, Tokyo's proximity to places such as Hakone provides getaways with unparalleled scenery, often missed in the concrete jungle of Honshu.

I have met many ex-JETs since being in Tokyo. A large percentage of them are odd, yet some have certainly



Devin moving house the cheap way... on the train!

profited well from their JET experience. Among others, the deputy chief of Bloomberg, a director of Ogilvy, the head of public affairs at the British embassy and a well known T.V. personality were all JETs.

The JET programme certainly has more international recognition than it's given credit for. Prince Charles recently came to Japan, and in the official press release the government praised relations between Japan and Britain, with Japan being the largest employer of British graduates through the JET Programme.

As far as my story is concerned, JET can certainly leave me in a great position in Japan, but it certainly helped taking a breather by the balcony at the right time...

*A special thanks to all the people in Hyogo who sponsored me for the marathon. Thanks to you I managed to raise over 440 pounds for Cancer Research*