

Hyogo Times

December 2008



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On the cover...



Cover art by Chip Boles

For ALTs, December in Japan means cold. Whether huddled before a kerosene heater or under your kotatsu, this is the season for seeing your breath in your apartment (or my kinda gross favorite: seeing steam rise from the toilet as you use it...).

In this spirit, I considered an image with a class being conducted in a frozen wasteland, students in their

uniforms (girls still insanely in skirts!), with polar bears and penguins in attendance for pronunciation practice.

However, I simply couldn't face it. Ladies and gentlemen, I just had to go to my Happy Place. And this Happy Place is what I drew. Maybe you'd like to spend the winter there, too. Plenty of room in the pink castle...

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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...

Brrr... and hello to everyone! Welcome to another chilly December where the Christmas decorations have been up since November 1 but you wonder why the heck there are so many *blue*-colored lights representing Christmas. Are they *trying* to make us feel S.A.D.? (Seasonal Affective Disorder, for those of you who don't know.)

Hopefully, everyone's doing okay on that front by going out and socializing a bit, even if you wake up earlier than the sun does! There was the Himeji Thanksgiving event at the end of last month at Blue Plate, which I sorely missed but hope you made it to. And also from this year's Thanksgiving in Kobe, some of the Kobe JETs decided to have a Thanksgiving erotic story competition night ("A what?" you say?) and a Mr. Dustin North won the competition. Reader beware. It might get (your) juices flowing.

Other things to get you feeling hot, not the least of which, is a recipe from Bob for spicy mapo tofu that doesn't involve a pre-mixed package of mapo as well as an article on how to impress members of the opposite (or same) sex! Just in time for lovey-dovey Christmas in Japan!

That's only the beginning! This month, you probably won't miss any chances to see Christmas lights strung up here, there — everywhere — along with the cute, yet insufferable couples, but there are some good displays to check out. The biggest one is probably the annual Luminarie in Kobe, which commemorates the victims of the 1995 Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake. It isn't really up for Christmas but since it is around *for* the time of Christmas, you should check it out.

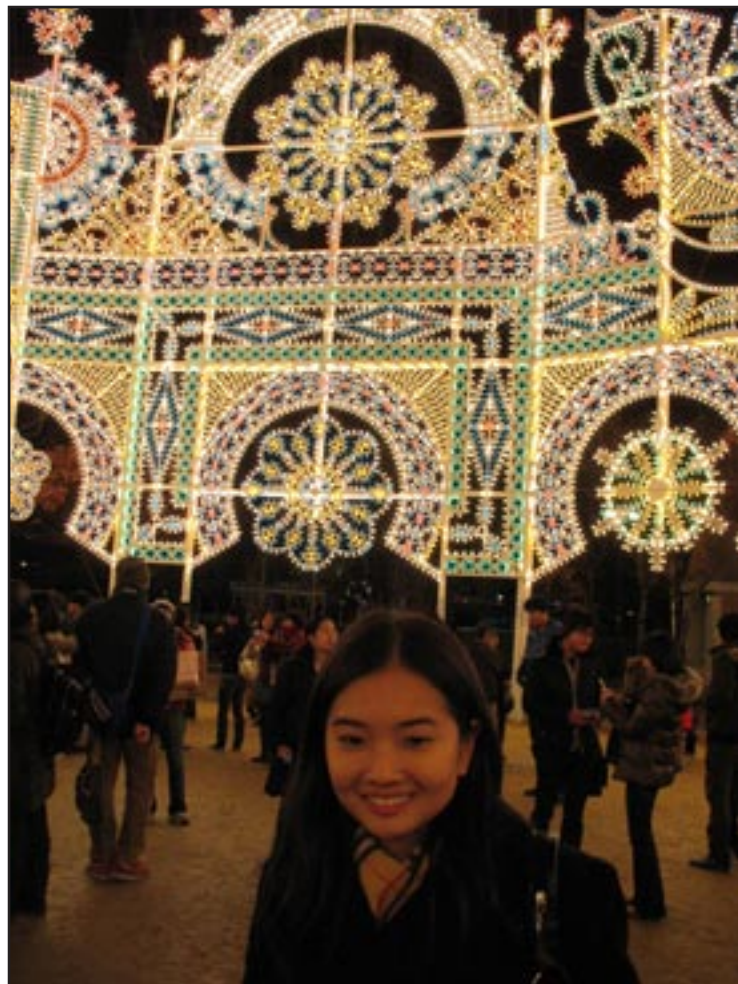
There's also the German Christmas market in Osaka at the Umeda Sky Building. It's one of my personal favorites because it really seems tra-

ditional if you ignore all the Japanese people around you! Only kidding. Sort of. It's the ONE place I've found candy canes in this country even if it's at 200 yen a pop! (I haven't been to Costco to check, so if you see them there, let me know!)

I'm sure some of you will be returning home for the holidays so let me just say happy packing and have a safe trip! For those of you *not* going

home but are headed elsewhere for the break, take care not to get into too much trouble (like, say the current situation in Thailand). But if you're "stuck" in good ol' Nippon for the winter festivities, don't hesitate to go to your local KFC and get some Xmas dinner! Only kidding. No, I really am. Please don't go to KFC for dinner. Unless you want to, that is.

If you are staying here for the holidays but need ideas on what to do, take a look at Brenda's Best of the Block for Xmas/New Year's, which is a bit Kyoto-centric this month but still worth checking out. I did *hatsumode* last year and you won't believe the amount of people who make their shrine visits at 4 a.m. on New Year's Day! And if you are itching to go somewhere a bit further (up north maybe?), you should take Jeff



Weese's advice on heading to Nagano for some cheap but good, clean, snow-filled fun!

On that note, I'd like to say a big THANK YOU to Jeff for writing the travel reviews for the Hyogo Times for nearly three years. It's not difficult to write something short for a publication once a month but it's very easy to forget or be lazy about it (which I'm sure the previous editors agree with), so thank you Jeff! I hope you do well with your new project! Our new travel writer will be Clay Eaton, currently in Kasai.

That's it for now. As we say in New York, Happy Chrismakwanukkah! Have a great holiday doing whatever you're doing, and I hope you have a merry, wonderful New Year! See you in '09!

— Ann Chow

And From The PR...

Hello again all for another shiny month of JET mayhem! It seems that winter has hit us like a shovel in the face, so I hope you're all chilling out (haw haw) and, jokes aside, taking care to stay as warm as you can. There are plenty of bugs and colds floating around so rug up and stay under that kotatsu... as if you could ever get out :D

This edition of the Hyogo Times sees us on the ever-shortening slope down to some chilly weather and, inevitably, Christmas. Which is a rather unique experience given that we're all in Japan, a country that (in theory) doesn't celebrate the holiday. Still, the Christmas lights will be up and there will be trees in the department stores, and anyone looking for some romantic (or other) times should be sure to head down to Sannomiya to check out the famous Luminarie. Christmas in Japan also has a decent chance of

being a white one, which is always a nice touch for those of us from the southern (and even some parts of the northern) hemisphere. The snow has other advantages too, including plenty of chances to ski, snowboard, do *yuki-gassen* or Mr. President, and heaps of other fun activities.

Finally, as this is the last edition of this year, I thought I'd take the opportunity to reflect back over some of the more interesting experiences Japan has offered in the past 12 months. It's a country where everyone can find something interesting to do, but I think it really rewards people who are willing to step out of their comfort zone... at least a little, anyway. Examples that spring (heh ... unintentional pun WIN!) to mind are onsens (communal nude bathing!), Hadaka Matsuri (communal, mostly-nude, running through freezing cold water and generally fighting other mostly-nude men), various crazy local festivals (communal nudi

... err, I mean things like post-new year festivals where people risk their eyebrows to throw New Year decorations on enormous 6-metre-tall bonfires and then dodge blocks of *mochi* thrown by priests!) and all of those tiny little restaurants and bars (they're there in your town, no matter how small it is!) with no windows that could be anything from a fantastic little ramen shop to a Yakuza-run snack bar.

What I'm saying is that there is so much opportunity in Japan to get out there and find new and amazing things behind every door and around every street corner. Go and experience that local festival, walk into that little local bar you've always been too afraid to enter, and plan a trip to somewhere totally off the map. You'll find things you never thought possible, have experiences you'll never forget, and no doubt be enormously satisfied when your time on JET finally comes to an end. And if you haven't managed to really get out there yet, don't worry! Take my advice — it's worth doing, and there's plenty of time left in the New Year for all kinds of adventures.

And with that, I wish everyone who celebrates it a very happy and safe Christmas, and to everyone, a wonderful and exciting New Year. See you in 2009 ... peace!

— Daniel Carter



Recipe of the Month:

Pock-marked Old Woman!

By Robert
Hollands

If you're like me, December finds you with a schedule packed with Christmas parties and *bonenkai* — basically, excuses to drink yourselves silly and practice English with teachers who usually ignore you in the staffroom.

But if you're lucky, you'll also try expensive and unique dishes you'd never have the opportunity to try otherwise. (My last year's *bonenkai* was at a restaurant specializing in tongue.)

Of course, there are some downsides to the end-of-year festivities: first, these parties can get pricey, especially if you have multiple schools. Second, eating out frequently means you're spending less time in your own kitchen (for shame!), which also means fewer leftovers to take to school the next day.

Don't worry; help is on the way — in the form of a popular Szechwan (Sichuan) dish known as mapo tofu.



This dish, a staple in seemingly every Chinese restaurant in Japan, has an interesting history. The dish's name comes from a word that translates roughly as "pock-marked old woman." Legend has it that a poor old widow in Chengdu created this recipe to feed some travelers who happened by, using a few simple ingredients from her scant pantry.

Whether she was pock-marked or not is the subject of (admittedly, not heated) debate, but supposedly word of this bold new culinary creation spread through the province and beyond, and soon people were coming from all over the kingdom to have a taste.

Fast forward to 1952, when a middle-aged man from Szechwan Province named Chen Kenmin immigrated to Japan with the dream of starting up a restaurant there. His restaurant *Shisen Hanten*, in addition to being a successful business, was ultimately responsible for introducing Szechwan cuisine — including this month's recipe — to the Japanese.

Chen became known as the "Father of Szechwan Cooking" in Japan, but he was also the father of another famous chef, Chen Kenichi — better known as "Iron Chef Chinese" on the popular Japa-

nese TV cooking show *Ryouri no Tetsujin*. The Iron Chef regularly prepared mapo tofu on the program, which only served to increase the dish's already broad appeal.

I chose this month's recipe because not only is it extremely easy to prepare, but it keeps well and tastes just as good the next day. Like many other Szechwan dishes, mapo tofu relies heavily on fermented black bean paste and red chili paste, two ingredients you probably don't already have but no discerning foodie's kitchen should be without.

You can get a lot of mileage out of just one jar of each, depending on how spicy you like your food. Also, even if you're not normally a fan of tofu, I think you'll find the silky smooth texture and subtle taste of the bean curd perfectly complements the firm

Mapo Tofu

Ingredients:

- water for boiling tofu
- 1 block soft tofu, cut into 1 cm cubes
- 100g ground beef or pork
- 2 handfuls of chopped negi (the thickest kind)
- 50-75 mL water or any kind of broth
- 2-3 Tbsp oil for stir-frying
- 2 Tbsp rice wine
- 2 Tbsp soy sauce (use light or *shiroi* soy sauce for a less salty flavour)
- 1 Tbsp Chinese red chili paste
- 1 Tbsp chinese black bean paste
- 1 Tbsp cornstarch paste (mix equal parts cornstarch and cold water).

Directions:

- Bring water to a rolling boil in a wok or pot. Boil tofu cubes for 3 minutes. Drain in a colander and set tofu aside.
- Heat oil in a wok or pan. Stir-fry green onions (negi) and meat until the meat begins to brown.
- Add the black bean paste and continue stirring until the meat has completely browned.
- Add the tofu, rice wine, soy sauce and red chili paste, stirring carefully to avoid breaking the tofu.
- Add the water or broth and boil the whole thing for about 3 minutes, or until you start to see pools of red oil from the chili paste forming on top.
- Remove from heat, and let cool for about 5 minutes. Add the cornstarch paste and stir in to thicken.
- Serve atop steamed white rice.

meat and savory sauce. It's a tofu dish for people who hate tofu.

One quick note on cornstarch: cornstarch is commonly used to thicken Asian dishes. However, unlike flour or other starches, cornstarch will break down at high temperatures. For full thickening power, allow the dish to cool for about 10 minutes before adding the cornstarch paste.



WHEEL OF JEOPARDY!

Time for the H.T. Quiz: Broken Macbook edition! By Joy Feddes

1. The X in Xmas indicates:

- a) Kiss! Xmas is a dating holiday in Japan.
- b) It's re-reclaiming of a pagan holiday.
- c) It's old-school slang for Christ — gotcha!

2. Holiday plans?

- a) I've got a couple of hot dates lined up with my kotatsu.
- b) Brushing up on my Eigo skills in the motherland.
- c) Drunk on a beach, please!

3. All I want for Christmas:

- a) Is youuuuuuuuu, baby!
- b) Peace on earth, natch!
- c) A computer that promises never to die on you or lose its memory

4. How often do you update your Facebook status?

- a) Daily, I like to keep people informed.
- b) Never, I like to keep things mysterious.
- c) I scorn Facebook.

5. Hahaha, like you're not on Facebook!

- a) My requirement for a social life requires me to have Facebook.
- b) ... Sorry, my heart stopped for a moment while considering someone wasn't on Facebook.
- c) I get off on resisting social trends.

6. Your most meaningful relationship in Japan:

- a) is with your JTE. You really bond over the teaching English experience.
- b) is with a source of heat.
- c) is with your computer. (Oh Vincente de Macbook! Why did you



leave me? Why?).

7. Have you backed up all your files upon hearing about my loss yet?

- a) Just after I update my Facebook status.
- b) Frig Joy, not everything is about you!
- c) Yes, I have. Thank you for teaching me such an important lesson.

8. Your favourite holiday tradition:

- a) Drinking eggnog. I know I shouldn't, but I can't help but love it!
- b) is it wrong for me to say the gifts? I mean, giving them, of course.
- c) Who sings "Love Me Tender" and makes Christmas toys?

What your answers mean:

Mostly As: I'm not sure if we are friends Mostly As. You seem to be fickle, but I know you have good taste in Christmas beverages (Did you get a Starbucks Gingerbread Latte while

they existed? Delish!) Hope your holidays are sweeter than a class full of 6-year-olds who shout out your name with glee when they see you!

Mostly Bs: What will you get for Christmas (or Hanukkah?). I hope it will be students that learn with sheer delight, a heated apartment and a Japanese baby to call your own. If you get none of those things, it must suck to be you. Although, wait a minute. I have none of those things, and I can assure you, it usually doesn't suck to be me, so there is hope for you yet! Just back up your files and you will be ok.

Mostly Cs: The answer is, of course, Santa's little Elvis. I met Elvis on the train platform the other day. He does live, disguised as a high school Japanese boy. Very clever Elvis, very clever. For Christmas, let's hope Santa puts Facebook in your stocking because you know you want it, and I want you to have it.

A Hyogo Times Restaurant Review:

I Ate Eight —Hakkaku Ramen

By Andrew Tamashiro

Hakkaku Ramen

251-9 Ueharada, Hanada
Himeji City
兵庫県姫路市花田町上原田 2
5 1 - 9

On my recent trek down to Himeji Port to get my re-entry permit, I stopped by Hakkaku (Octagon) Ramen, a self-proclaimed "umai" (delicious) ramen-ya just a few minutes drive from the River City Shopping Complex. The flapping banners and huge sign got my attention, as did the fairly packed parking lot. It's always nice to see a bunch of middle-aged guys in a ramen joint, because I associate that with a no-nonsense attitude and good value.

I ordered the Hakkaku Teishoku A, which consisted of ramen, yakimeshi (fried rice) and gyoza. Of the four levels of broth thickness (assari, hankote, kotteri, kote kote), I went with the slightly light hankote since I knew I had an hour drive ahead of me and it wouldn't do to fall asleep on the Bantan Expressway. The shoyu broth smelled and tasted faintly of chicken. It was topped with bean sprouts, green onions, chashu, and nori.



I enjoyed the noodles, but felt the entire bowl lacked any real depth. The soup was a bit too light, even with small bits of fat floating about, and the chashu was tough despite being fatty.

Though the ramen wasn't as good as quite a number of other places, I felt like the fried rice was some of the best I've had in a while. The red pickled ginger was crunchy and pungently refreshing when bitten into, and the rice had large chunks of pork and egg. It lacked the overbearing oil

taste that often accompanies hastily prepared yakimeshi.

The gyoza were above average, very crispy and offered a pleasant textural departure from the rice and ramen.

They have a lunch menu full of 700 yen set meals, like ramen and a chashu bowl, or ramen, rice and karaage, or ramen, gyoza and rice. There's also an ongoing promotion of gyoza on days ending in 8 (the 8th, 18th, and 28th): 88 yen for an order of gyoza. I'm assuming this is because of the use of the kanji for 8 in the name Hakkaku. For whatever reason, it's a ridiculous deal for 6 gyoza, and I can't help but wonder how popular the place is on those days.

I also can't help but wonder if, by straying from my typical affection for thicker soup, I may have given Hakkaku the short end of the reviewing stick. However, judging by the rather ordinary combination of toppings (even though the nori was good), I feel like changing just the soup wouldn't have done much.

I would almost certainly return for a gyoza discount day, and would order the fried rice again. Unfortunately, without a solid ramen, I'd rather try something new if I'm driving an hour south from the countryside of Tajima.



Lesson Plan of the Month:

Alphabend - Forcing Contortion

By Lester Somera**Forcing Contortion
(5th/6th grade level)**

This lesson is designed to reinforce the alphabet and teach kids the difference between the particle "a," as in 'a donkey,' and the particle "an," as in 'an elephant.' (Yes, I'm still in that election mindset. Deal.)

It is incredibly annoying to hear one of my teachers omit a particle and say "This is copier," or whatever, but I learned recently that there is no articulated difference in Japanese between vowels and consonants, since the kana alphabets consist almost entirely of [consonant + vowel] syllables, with the exception of "n/nn."

Most kids learn how to use romaji early, but they won't learn the English alphabet until the fifth grade or so, which means that they don't learn how to make individual consonant sounds for years and it screws them over later when they talk entirely in katakana English. You'll see this fact for yourself if you do this lesson, and then you will weep for the state of English education in this country.

In any case!

You'll need to make some flash cards for this lesson. Write the alphabet on 26 cards. You probably have flash cards for other lessons laying about somewhere — gather up about 30. They don't need to be related in any way, they just need to vary between words that start with vowels and words that don't (arm, bear, egg, hospital, etc.). Write A and AN on the board.

For the first half, split the class into two groups, then line them up. The first two people in each line come up to the front, turn around, and face the back of the room. They are not allowed to look at the blackboard.

Place two letter cards on the board. The first person in each line will be the Answerer; the second person will be the Object and cannot move his or her body. The



third and fourth persons are Shapers, and get to move the Object to resemble the letter. The Answerer has to guess which letter their teammate is being contorted into.

Once successful, everyone moves up a spot in the line and the Answerer goes to the back. Try to pair the letters in terms of levels of difficulty, because kids will complain if they get G and the other team gets Y or something like that. Every time a letter appears, put it on the board under either A or AN. The best way to do this, population permitting, is to make it into a guys-versus-girls deal, because younger kids are all about the cooties and get embarrassed when asked to touch a member of the opposite sex.

The second half of the lesson uses your other flash cards. After explaining that the letters in each column use either

A or AN (vowels are 'boin' and consonants are 'shiin'), test them on the concept by writing various words.

Have everyone stand up and show them the flash cards. Whenever you show them a card that starts with a consonant, they have to put their hands on their head. If the card starts with a vowel, they have to put their hands on their hips. On the first run-through, flip each card after you say what's on it so that they can see the letter it starts with. After that, they have to rely on their hearing. If they screw up, they have to sit down.

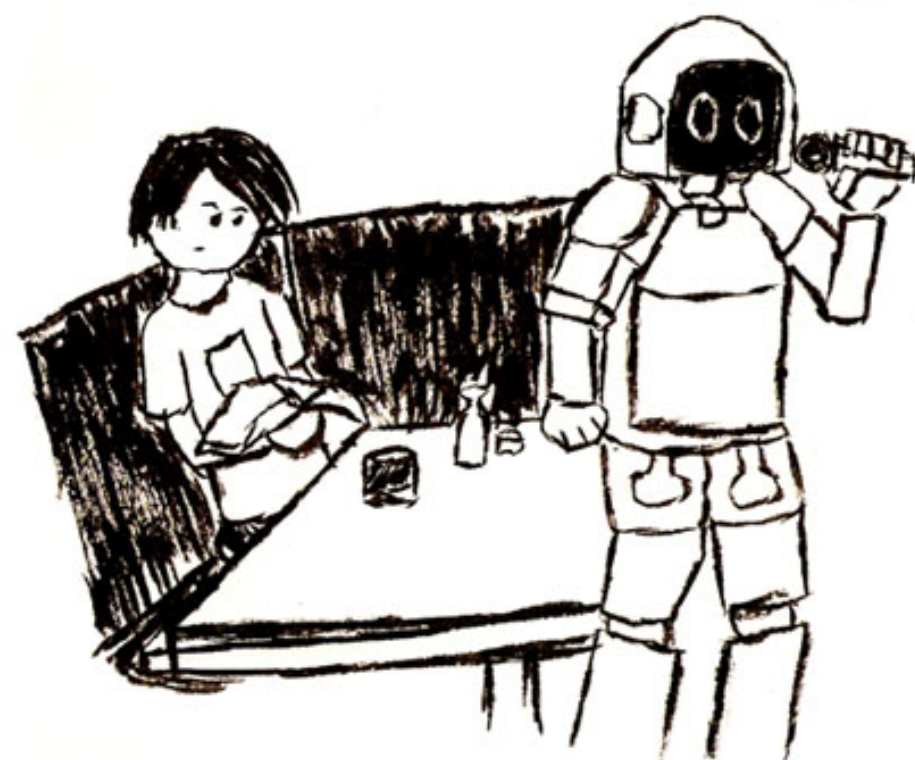
This has worked very well in even my grumpy morning classes, but the first half of the lesson takes a lot of time to explain to a JTE and will also probably require that you diagram it, so plan accordingly for time constraints.

**A Comic by James Williams**

I'M KILROY

KILROY

KILROY



Karaoke with Asimo

A Hyogo Times Exclusive Short Story:

The Feast

By Dustin North

In the distance, harsh magenta painted the horizon as the sun slowly sank on what was sure to be the last night of his life. Tufts of clouds, white and reflecting strange blue hues painted the sky like wildflowers in the fields Trevor remembered from his home far away. So clearly he could recall his beautiful fields and streams. It was paradise, where a man could be free, where a man could be wild. The women were wild as well, he recalled with a faint warmth rising deep beneath his glossy plumage. Life had been cruel since then.

There had been a rainstorm in April. His young wife Celeste had been enraptured with the storm, and had drowned while forgetting to close her beautiful beak while staring at the sky. All through the spring and summer months Trevor had mourned her. He was a torn and tormented turkey. He eschewed his own kind as they reminded him too much of what he had lost, who he had been. He wandered endlessly, constantly seeking danger, seeking some sort of revenge. He would pick fights with small woodland

creatures, but he knew, deep down, that accosting field mice would never bring back his beautiful Celeste.

After months of anger, the emotions slowly seeped into a hollow loneliness. One fateful day in early October he heard the distant and welcome sound of gobbling. He stalked the sound to the edge of Highway 72, where he beheld a turkeys' paradise, or so he thought at the time. "Farmer Tucker's Family Turkey Roundup" was the redemption he was looking for; he was sure of it. Acre upon acre of turkey homes filled with a seemingly endless supply of grain, but even more intriguing were the inhabitants themselves. Never had he seen such beautiful specimens of turkey flesh, each one of them a curvy, albino fantasy. Talk about breasts...

As the twilight deepened, Helen shimmered beneath her radiant, white feathers. Too much time had passed. Tonight, they would follow all of the others to the chopping block. How had she wasted so much time guarding what she didn't want to guard? Her virtue sat inside her like an

icy stone. An egg she could never lay. Would she go to her grave a virgin, untrained in the ways of love, her turkey maidenhead intact? Weeks ago, when Thanksgiving seemed a forever away, the others had teased her so.

All of her life Helen's beauty had been a curse to her. She was constantly followed by polite, but arrogant, young cocks, sure that they could have their way with her as if she were some common hen. She never understood the allure, the desire that they felt. Helen had never seen the face of love until she had seen... him. His cockscomb blood-red and his waddle the same blue as Farmer Tucker's best plaid work shirt. He was so dark, so wild, so dangerous. Trevor had come to the farm and quickly made a name for himself by bullying the other cocks. How quickly her sisters had been willing to lay aside their chastity to be with this brooding stranger. He had turned all of them away though, one by one. He enjoyed their company, but never the spoils that could so easily have been his. His eyes were dark, haunted. How she had wanted to heal him. It seemed absurd, even yesterday when dozens of other turkeys still roamed the pen, but not tonight. Tonight was different entirely. Helen and Trevor were the only turkeys left in the world, or so it seemed. She would sacrifice herself to save his soul if she must.

As darkness spilled across the farm, floodlights flared to life, illuminating Trevor as stalked up and down the pen angrily like the caged beast that he was. How absurd that it would end like this? Dinner for a family of strangers, and for what? He hadn't brought Celeste back, nor banished her memory from his mind. Trevor was drawn from his reverie by a light cooing sound, soft and unexpected. Something glimmered in the corner of his eye and urged him to cease his tormented pacing. He was shocked to

realize that standing merely feet away was the porcelain beauty, Helen. Trevor had thought himself alone in the pen, the last of his kind, alone in his sorrow. This vision of loveliness tugged at his fierce heart. He saw something compelling in the beauty's eyes, and he thought it might be redemption.

Helen continued to coo, gobbling softly as the wild turkey stared back at her enraptured. She swayed her graceful white neck this way and that, the way a proud mare might.

Sensing some primal clue, Trevor began his low coo as well. Slowly, ever so slowly, he raised his wings and inhaled her scent. She smelled of grain, sunshine, and something more. His mighty turkey chest swelled slowly and his feathers began to rise as his continued to inhale. Wild and uninhibited colors sparkled from his glossy, dark plumage beneath the unforgiving flood lights as he began to circle the snowy creature.

Helen followed the beast with her eyes alone. She continued to face forward, slowly swaying from side to side. Her own plumage expanded as well, looking like some majestic white angel beneath the too-bright lights. Though she seemed composed, Helen was terrified. Was this right? Was this the answer to her chaste life? Could she save herself and this dark stranger as well? As Trevor began his third rotation around her, she

felt a fire kindling deep in her turkey breast. His proximity was beginning to make her shake, feeling almost boneless. Tensing as she sensed his advance from behind, Helen cooed softly again into the cool night air.

Slowly advancing and retreating, his feathers whispered softly against her plumage once, and then once

more. How had this dazzling creature seduced him so? Always before she had seemed so cold, so formal... as chilly as her snowy exterior. But tonight, tonight was different. Her white feathers glowed like a too-hot fire. He could feel heat radiating off of her. His need was real, growing, and hard - a wishboner like none he had ever felt before. He began his final advance.

Helen cooed louder as she felt him swoop in upon her. He was a predator, but they were both prey to this burning lust. Her glassy black eyes rolled heavenward and her thighs began to feel incredibly moist as she felt his proud turkey cock pushing with velvety force against her fowl mystery meat. It took but a moment, a sharp, painful, pleasurable, unimaginable moment for him to pierce her maidenly defenses. White meat and dark meat mingled upon the platter of ecstasy. She gobbled uncontrollably before regaining control, and coaxing the rogue deeper inside herself. She gasped as she realized how deep she wished he was buried within her feathered treasure, deeper than any chicken or duck within a turducken. She bucked against his insa-

tiable lust, and her own.

Trevor's eyes also rolled skyward. He was cooing and gobbling in rhythm to their frantic bucking. He felt a molten hot pressure building in his turkey baster as he mercilessly stuffed his lover. His firm turkey balls felt as if they were melting like mini-marshmallows upon burning yams.

All too soon the moment of divine ecstasy was upon them both. Shriill gobbles cutting through the night air like comets were prelude to their climax... and redemption. Helen felt she might swoon as he tenderized her into frenzied orgasm. Her juices flowed freely, marinating her lover. Trevor's breath halted as he began to spread his gravy deep within her. They both shuddered there a moment in perfect union before collapsing to the cooling earth, still connected by turkey cock and mystery meat. Tremors ran through their bodies as they exalted in the aftermath of their passion. They lay together until Farmer Tucker pulled them apart, hauling Helen to her inevitable end. She would be the most succulent and tender turkey he ever tasted. As the night deepened, Trevor was left alone again.



The Best of the Block

By Brenda McKinney

Hello again and happy packing for all of you jetting off for the holidays this winter season (score on the 19 days of vacation for 6 days of *nenkyu*, Hyogo-ken!). Even if you're *not* heading for sunnier pastures this winter break, living in Japan gives you the unique opportunity to experience *Hatsumode*, the traditional first visit to a temple or shrine on New Year's Day, with the rest of the country – possibly even in historic Kyoto!

And for those of you wondering about the outcome of the National AJET December Opinion Exchange with CLAIR and the ministries, it was a success! This year's reports (on Team-Teaching, JET Alumni, Community Involvement, Handover Procedures & Pre-Departure Study Materials) offered some great suggestions and prompted some really great discussions, the product of which you will hopefully see in the upcoming year.

So without further ado, here's to a rocking season of *kotatsu* (heated coffee tables), kerosene stoves, and newfound expertise in layering clothing for work. Let's make the most of it and happy holidays!

What's Happening Around Hyogo Prefecture

Kobe Luminaire

This is the event-of-all-events for Kobe residents and one of the reasons Kobe is known as the "romantic city" throughout Japan. As the city website puts it, "dreamlike sculptures of light

stand out against the night sky. It's a memorial event for the lives lost in the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake." It's been rumored that this will be the last year you'll be able to check out this free event (a 5-minute walk from JR Motomachi or San-nomiya Stations – follow the crowds towards the water!), so add it to your itinerary (December 4th – 15th)! Also, from personal experience, make sure you make it through by 10pm, because they aren't kidding when they say the music and lights *will* go off at that time!

If You're Hanging Around Shiga Prefecture

Live Jazz in Kampokan

Get to know both the JET and Japlf you're looking for a good jazz scene, join some folks from Shiga at this "lavish" museum in Gokasho Town on Sunday November 30th from 2-5pm. Gokasho Town is said to be very pretty and is historically famous as the one-time home of the Omi Merchants, so it might be worth a day trip just to see the town. The cost of the jazz event is □500 in advance / □800 at the door and more information can be found at www.kampokan.com (tel: 074-848-4141). For further (Shiga) contact details on this event, please email block6@ajet.net.

Childrens Multicultural Square

On Sunday, December 7, from 10:30 – 15:30, there will be a children's event at Piazza Omi

hosted by the Shiga Intercultural Association for Globalization (SIA) and they are looking for ALTS to volunteer to help with the event. Shiga JET is involved and this event includes games, music and there will be a chance to try on kimonos and folk costumes from around the world for free (great for taking holiday card pictures!). If you like working with kids and this sounds interesting to you, you can sign up through the SIA at 077-526-0931 or email block6@ajet.net for Shiga AJET contact info.

Shiga Ultimate Frisbee

Is the Taj Ulimite tournie just a little too far away for your liking and you can't make it to Himeji for the next Hyogo practice? Why not make some new friends and maybe learn some Ultimate tricks from the Shiga Ultimate Frisbee team at their tournie, held this month on Saturday, December 20th (starting at 10am) and Sunday, December 21st at Yasu Park. Ultimate is fantastic exercise and great fun, so check out the post from the "Flying Disc Association" on Shiga's ESLwell page (or email block6@ajet.net) for directions/more info. Other teams also welcome to join the cup!

For more information on Shiga-ken events, please see their online forum (which also includes announcements & stuff for sale) at <http://shigajets.eslwell.com>**

Over in Kyoto Prefecture

New Year's Eve in Kyoto

Have you ever been to a temple and noticed a large, metal bell hanging in the corner? Well, *o-shogatsu* (New Year's) – a family holiday in Japan and the most important holiday of the year – is the one day when literally every temple in Kyoto will ring that cool, huge bell (*joya no kane*) 108 times. Why? Because there are 108 humanly desires and the bell-ringing can sweep them away.

I've been told most temples stay open all night for New Year's and give away free sake, so why not try out a new kind of all-nighter and celebrate this holiday the Japanese way in Kyoto? Temple-hopping is where it's at! If you're

going to be in the country and don't already have New Year's plans, I'd consider this a must-see.

I don't think transportation will be going all night, so hopefully the temple guide on this page will help you plan out where you want to go.

Pumpkin Memorial Service at Yata-dera

Like free food? Why not head over to the *Kabocha* (pumpkin) Memorial Service at Yata-dera on Tuesday, December 23rd? I can't promise that this will be like a regular memorial service in Japan (a pumpkin is set in front of the main hall and people can ward off illness by touching it), but the pumpkin service starts at 10:00am and

free cooked pumpkin is limited to the first 1,000 people. To get to Yata Temple, take the Tozai Line to Shiyakusho-mae.

Kakure Nenbutsu Buddhist Sutra Chanting

When Kyoto was struck by a serious plague in 951, the Buddhist monk Kuya started a dancing and sutra-chanting ritual to stop it.

Come watch monks at the Rokuhara Mitsu-ji perform this historical tradition (now an "intangible important folk cultural property"), called the *nenbutsu odori* dance. The dance will start around 16:00 on Saturday, December 13th and will take place each day until Tuesday, December 30th.

Temple Guide

Rakuchu (Central Area of Kyoto)

Myoren-ji Temple (Tel: 075-451-3527; Kyoto City Bus, Horikawa Teranouchi Stop)
Ho-on-in Temple (Tel: 075-414-1550; Kyoto City Bus, Horikawa Kamidachiuri Stop)
Seigan-ji Temple (Tel: 075-221-0958; Kyoto City Bus, Kawaramachi Sanjo Stop)
Mibu-dera Temple (Tel: 075-841-3381; Kyoto City Bus, Mibudera-michi Stop)

Rakuhoku (Northern Area)

Jorenge-in Temple (Tel: 075-744-2408; Kyoto Bus, Ohara Stop)
Shorin-in Temple (Tel: 075-744-2409; Kyoto Bus, Ohara Stop)
Enryaku-ji Temple Eastern Pagoda (Tel: 077-578-0001; Keihan Bus, Enryakuji Bus Center Stop / 1,000 yen; with amulet)

Rakunan (Southern Area)

Zuiko-ji Temple (Tel: 075-641-1704; JR Inari Sta.)

Rakusai (Western Area)

Daikaku-ji Temple (Tel: 075-871-0071; Kyoto Bus, Daikakuji Stop)
Nison-in Temple (Tel: 075-861-0687; Kyoto City Bus, Saga Shakado-mae Stop)
Jojakko-ji Temple (Tel: 075-861-0435; Kyoto City Bus, Saga Shogakko-mae Stop)
Inku-ji Temple (Tel: 075-872-4625; Kyoto City Bus, Yamagoe Stop)

Rakuto (Eastern Area)

Konkai Komyo-ji Temple (Tel: 075-771-2204; Kyoto City Bus, Okazakimichi Stop)
Shinnyo-do Temple (Tel: 075-771-0915; Kyoto City Bus, Shinnyodo-mae Stop)
Hyakumanben Chion-ji (Tel: 075-781-9171; Kyoto City Bus, Hyakumanben Stop)
Eikan-do Temple (Tel: 075-761-0007; Kyoto City Bus, Nanzenji Eikando-mae Stop)
Shoren-in Temple (Tel: 075-561-2345; Kyoto City Bus, Jingu-michi Stop)
Choraku-ji Temple (Tel: 075-561-0589; Kyoto City Bus, Gion Stop)
Kennin-ji Temple (Tel: 075-561-0190; Kyoto City Bus, Higashiyama Yasui Stop)
Tofuku-ji Temple (Tel: 075-561-0087; JR Tofukuji Sta.)
Bishamon-do Temple (Tel: 075-581-0328; JR Yamashina Sta.)

Getting to Know Some Random JETs



- ❖ **Name:** Suzie Winterton.
- ❖ **Please call me:** Suzie.
- ❖ **School and Location in Hyogo:** Okawachi Junior High School, 4 elementaries. Kamikawa-cho.
- ❖ **How we know you:** you probably don't.
- ❖ **Birthday:** 3 December.
- ❖ **Born and raised:** Mandurah, Western Australia.
- ❖ **Family:** I have them, yes.
- ❖ **University and Degree:** Curtin University. I've forgotten what my degree was called, so it probably wasn't that impressive.
- ❖ **Other jobs you have had:** secretary, filing clerk, waitress, grape-picker.
- ❖ **Travels:** England, Ireland,

France, Portugal, America, New Zealand, Malaysia.

❖ **Hobbies:** manga, books, cooking.

❖ **Staying another year?** Probably not.

❖ **Favorites:**

Food: chocolate, cheese.

Sports: uh, next question!

Music: rock, punk, anything catchy that isn't in high C.

Shop: bookstores?

TV Show: *The Big Bang Theory*.

Movie: *Second-hand Lions*.

❖ **Most Proud Achievement:** getting into JET.

❖ **Best life experience:** Uh, coming here, probably.

❖ **Motto to live by:** *Shit happens.*

❖ **I remember when...** I climbed to the top of Mt. Fuji and the first thing I thought was, "Right. Done it. Hah. Can I go home now?"

❖ **What are you drinking?** Now? Tea.

❖ **Who would you like to meet?** Terry Pratchett.

❖ **Why should we elect you President of the World?** Because I really don't want the job

❖ **Best thing about Japan so**

far? The kids.

❖ **If it was my last day on earth I would:** fly home and make everyone in the family get plastered on the basis that if a passing spaceship picks us up it will cushion the shock, and if not — well, it can't hurt.

❖ **Interesting fact about me:** As long as I can keep making wry comments I'm fine.

❖ **My top tip for teaching:** always remember that the most attitude-laden nine-year-old has a Spongebob pencil case.

❖ **When the class is TOO QUIET I...** would shed tears of joy. Seriously, I've never had that "problem."

❖ **Bribery for students...YAY or NAY?** Hell YAY!

❖ **Funniest story involving a student:** Um, okay, this is the only one I remember right now. Maeda-sensei and I have a kid called Yuuki in one of the 2-nensei classes who says that he can't concentrate when he sits down. It's a claim he's been making since about May this year.

When Maeda-sensei first noticed she said, in English, "Mr. Yuuki, what are you doing? Sit down!"

Whereupon Mr. Yuuki replied in Japanese, "I don't get it." Maeda-sensei rolled her eyes and Yuuki leant forward and down to ask the boy in front of him what she'd said. Shouta turned around, held Yuuki's eyes and said in Japanese, "She said 'Yuuki, what the hell ya doin'?! Hurry up an' sit down, moron!'"

❖ **Name:** Andrew Tamashiro.

❖ **Please call me:** Andrew is fine. I'm not one of these people with some random name by which I'd rather go by.

❖ **School and Location in Hyogo:** Asago in Tajima, Youdo, Ookura and Yanase elementary schools, plus Yanase kindergarten.

❖ **How we know you:** I write the ramen reviews that no one reads and used to have a bit of an afro.

❖ **Birthday:** June 14.

❖ **Born and raised:** LA side of the LA/OC border, home of suburbs and tons of white and Asian kids.

❖ **Family:** Older brother, younger sis and the retired parentals.

❖ **University and Degree:** University of Southern California, business/marketing.

❖ **Other jobs you have had:** Office bitch, door-to-door credit card sales, accounting.

❖ **Travels:** Other than the States, Italy, Netherlands, Mexico and this is my fourth time to Japan.

❖ **Hobbies:** Taiko drumming, basketball, food culture and drinking, dancing and singing all at once.

❖ **Staying another year?** Yeah, probably.

❖ **Favorites:**

Food: Mom's mac 'n cheese, Italian, Mexican, Japanese.

Sports: Basketball, though recently I've rediscovered the love of dodgeball and ultimate frisbee.

Music: From Tribe Called Quest to Johnny Cash to B'z.

Shop: 100 yen shops, and our town revolves around Jusco so... that.

TV Show: *Bakushou Red Carpet*, *Curb Your Enthusiasm*, *Married with Children*.

Movie: *Team America*, *Orgazmo*.

❖ **Most Proud Achievement:** Hmmm... building a house in Mexico?

❖ **Best life experience:** Tie between studying abroad in college and working sales (I learned a lot

about myself).

❖ **Motto to live by:** *Don't be a jerk.*

❖ **I remember when...** the Power Glove looked cool and I wore shoes with different coloured laces like Punky Brewster.

❖ **What are you drinking?** Free coffee from school... mmm free...

❖ **Who would you like to meet?** My grandparents.

❖ **Why should we elect you President of the World?** You shouldn't unless you want to hear *Under the Sea* sung every morning in school classrooms.

❖ **Best thing about Japan so far?** Free veggies from vice-principal and the weirdness of the countryside.

❖ **If it was my last day on earth I would:** drink a Guinness and eat a steak.

❖ **Interesting fact about me:** I take pictures of my food and upload it to the internet... maybe that's not so much interesting as just weird.

❖ **My top tip for teaching:** Be loud. I'm loud as hell. My friend who works across the street claims she hears me in my third-floor classroom.

❖ **When the class is TOO QUIET I...** get them on their feet. I work at elementary, so this doesn't happen too often, but it does depending on the homeroom teacher.

❖ **Bribery for students...YAY or NAY?** Hell yes. Stickers are the best thing since thickly sliced shokupan.

❖ **Funniest story involving a student:** Maybe the time one student called me "Kintamashiro-sensei." Kintama means testicles.



Better Know a Ken: Yamaguchi

Story and photos
by Miyoko Conley

Part 13 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.

When I first arrived in Japan, my prefectural advisor told our group that we were very lucky, because in Yamaguchi-ken the food was delicious and the people were nice, though it was a little *inaka* (country). Having been in Yamaguchi-ken for a few months now, I can say that is most definitely true.

I live in Hofu, which is near the capital city of Yamaguchi. The way I describe my city is "convenient" because I am near four shopping centers, but then again, I also live across the street from a rice field. Yamaguchi-ken is an interesting blend of contemporary and traditional Japan, with beautiful mountains and not-so-beautiful industry.

Located in the very southwest of Honshu in the Chugoku region, Yamaguchi has been called the



"Kyoto of the West." This is because during the Muromachi Period, the ruling Ouchi Clan mimicked the city planning of Kyoto, and a rich culture blossomed.

The next major ruling clan was the Mori Clan, who ruled during the Sengoku period. After a major defeat by the Tokugawa Shogunate (who started the Edo Period), the Mori were forced to give up all their land except in Hagi.

It was in Hagi City where they built a castle, which you can visit today at historical "Castle Town,"

a place that has old-fashioned streets and houses from the Edo period. The Mori Clan also sought to strengthen their economic and



educational systems, producing people who played an important role in the Meiji Restoration. Historically, many famous politicians have come from Yamaguchi. Fun- nily enough, it is the smallest prefectural capital in Japan.

If you Google-search Yamaguchi-ken, one of the first things you will read is that it is famous for its *fugu* (blowfish). People who live here pronounce it "fuku," which is the same as the character for fortune and wealth or good luck. Specifically, the port city of Shimonoseki is known for its *fugu*.

There are also many sites to visit in Yamaguchi-ken. In Hofu, there is the Hofu Tenmangu Shrine, which is one of the three major Tenmangu Shrines in Japan and is also the oldest. It was built in 905 A.D. for Lord Sugawara Michizane, who has been deified as the "god of study." Many students from all over Ja-



pan come to the shrine to pray for good scores on their exams.

If you come to Hofu on the fourth Saturday in November, you can witness the Hofu Naked Man Festival, boasted as one of the liveliest festivals in Japan.

Hop over to Yamaguchi City and you can walk along Park Road to see the five-story pagoda at Rurikoji Temple, or go northwest to the largest karst plateau in all of Japan, Akiyoshidai.

Another popular spot is the Kintaikyo Bridge, a five-arched wooden bridge over the Nishiki River in Iwakuni. There are also many onsens in Yamaguchi-ken, including

Yuda Onsen. The train station is marked by a giant statue of a white fox because during the Muromachi period, it is said that a white fox bathed its wounds in the hot springs there. And if you ever get tired of Japan, you can catch a ferry to South Korea or China from Shimonoseki.

Each city in Yamaguchi has its own unique sites to see, but there are too many to list here. Just come on down and see it for yourself. However, I would recommend visiting Yamaguchi-ken when the weather is nice, as many of the sites are natural or are shrines.

Though I have not been in the prefecture that long, I have thoroughly enjoyed my time here, as some of the people here are the nicest I have ever met.

I'll leave you with a few words of Santoka, the famous haiku poet who was born in Hofu and known for his free style:

*The color of sunset is very beautiful
I have just spent modestly my
times of today.*

For me, this exemplifies the easy-going way life seems to amble along in Yamaguchi-ken.



Travel Japan

Overnight Bus Nagano Ski Weekends

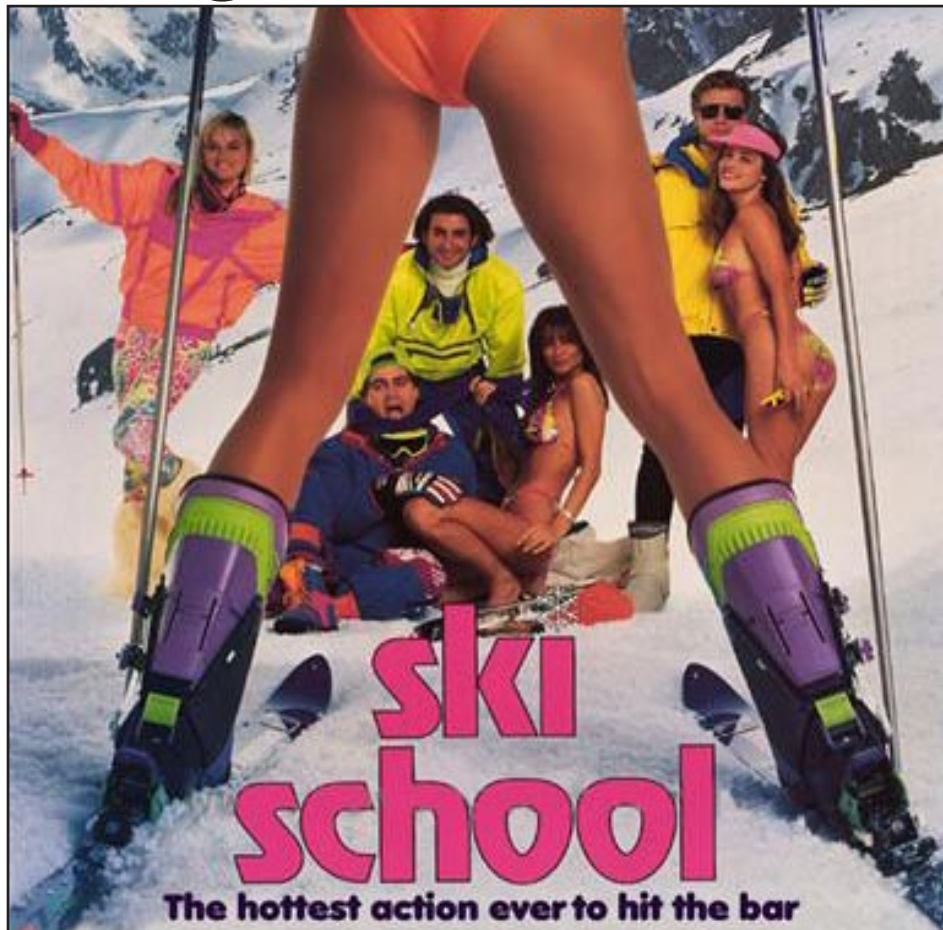
By Jeff Weese

Strapped for cash AND *nenkyu*? I think that might be the consensus of ALTs around this time of year as everyone returns from exotic holidays abroad or wholesome holidays back home. But don't let that be the reason for sitting on your tatami mats for the rest of the winter!

There are plenty of amazing weekend winter packages to Nagano that do not require any *nenkyu* (maybe a half-day for Taj people) or many of your yennies!

You can spend anywhere between 15,000 and 35,000 yen for all-inclusive weekend packages, but what your package is inclusive of determines what end of the price spectrum you will be paying. All packages will include bus transportation and lodging as a basic, but adding on lift tickets, meals and rentals really do not kick up the price that much more.

So starting with the bus, most of them leave from Osaka's Banpaku Koen (Hakuba buses are available from Himeji/Sannomiya) on Friday evening. This should leave you plenty of time to run home after work and grab your stuff. You'll also want to be wearing something comfortable, not for sexy time with the bus



Best *Ski School* quote? "It's not how far you go, it's how go you far."

driver, but because you will want to make up for the extreme discomfort of the seats! They are definitely not made for the Western-built body!

Off you go by about 10:30 pm, due to arrive at your destination usually between 5:30 a.m. and 8 a.m., depending on where you are going. The bus will stop every two hours or so to let you off to unload

your bladder and fill up on decent rest area food. The stops are welcomed the first two times but by the third and fourth stops occurring at 3 a.m. you are thinking to yourself, "I don't need to pee and I don't need anymore yakisoba!"

Back to the ski trip, when you arrive at the break of dawn (literally), you should grab a coffee to wake

To my loyal travel review readers:

I have truly enjoyed writing the travel review for the Hyogo Times for the last three years. I know that many of you have explored places I have recommended and I hope that many more of you have the chance to continue exploring. As my life heads in new directions, I am stepping away from writing the travel review but I hope that someone with enthusiasm for travel wants to take the reins. Thank you all for reading and enjoy where your travels take you.

— Jeff Weese



Not that there's anything wrong with that.

you up, chuck your stuff at the lodge and head to the lifts for the first run of the early morning! All day Saturday you can ski or ride your heart out through the trees, in the bowls, in search of the untouched fluffy white, or on the green cruisers.

Back at your accommodation, they will prepare a full-on meal of local specialties for dinner and breakfast (usually included in the price), so be sure to ask your *ryokan* par-

ents what time dinner is served.

After dinner, if you can stay awake, spend a few minutes wandering through the ski village, as there are usually pretty interesting onsens, *omiyage* shops and tucked-away bars. Sunday is more of the same on the mountain and you should push it hard this day so you'll be passed out for the bus ride home.

There will surely be an onsen or bath in town or at the *ryokan* that

you will need to partake in to feel as fresh as possible for work the next day. With *omiyage* bought and paid for, soon enough it will be time to board the same luxury liner back to Hyogo Prefecture. Squeeze yourself into your spacious seat and hopefully sleep all the way back home to arrive between 5:30 and 7:30 a.m. Monday morning! Perfect timing to limp back to school, achy muscles and all, to sneak into the *shokuin-shitsu* just in time for the morning meeting! An afternoon nap in the library or English office will probably be necessary, but it will all have been worth it!

Some of these packages you can build yourself and some come as a bundle already, but usually you can score transport, *ryokan*, meals at the *ryokan*, lift pass and rentals for between 20,000 and 25,000yen! Awesome price for an entire weekend of fun!

The top three ranked areas in Nagano are Hakuba, Nozawa Onsen, and Shiga Kogen. The ski and snowboard pamphlets on display outside travel agencies are a little difficult to sort out, so I recommend stopping in and having a chat with a lovely agent about your next exciting weekend holiday!

Discount Snowboards

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Love and Relationships:

Christmas Loving

By *Lub and Lub*

So I woke up the other morning... and it was freezing! ☹ It's times like that I wish it was the weekend and I could spend the whole day in bed with someone I cared about.

Out on the streets of Japan I've noticed a massive increase in couples everywhere, looking all gooey-eyed and happy. While I walk along, freezing cold, trying to avoid these people who seem to have no concept of others trying to walk past, they crawl along at snail's pace. It makes me sick! (ahh, how my inner green-eyed monster surfaces at Christmas time...)

In Japan, Christmas is purely a time for couples (and KFC). We are here for cultural exchange (blah blah), but it doesn't mean you have to become completely Japanese and conform to everything. It's an exchange! You may be in Japan, but don't forget your own Christmas values.

In my home country, it is all about seeing my family and spending the days in a nice warm house, opening Santa's presents with many drunken relatives. There is no reason why you can't try to recreate this with your new friends in Japan. Organise your own Christmas Day, have people to sleep over, buy little presents for each other, and if you're lucky enough to have an oven, attempt to cook a traditional meal (if not, then improvise!).

I find if you educate Japanese people about how our Christmas Day and their New Year's Day are very similar, they



Design editor's XXXmas loving suggestion — Hotel Christmas love hotel in Osaka.

will understand and sympathise with you. They may realise how special Christmas is to you, and you might even get an invite to their home.

During the winter months, it is very easy to feel alone and depressed. This is normal. You are exposed to less sunlight and will spend more nights at home alone (sleeping under your *ko-tatsu*). Be proactive now before you become too down or frozen.

Get excited about making plans for Xmas, stock up on those little pocket heaters and soup, and stick bubble wrap on your windows.

If all your friends are going home for Christmas, and you are worried about being alone, then I suggest going and exploring Japan, or if you have the money, go abroad. It's a great time to take a little *nenkyu* but get loads of time off!

Now for those of you needing

to buy presents for loved ones (or yourself ☺), nothing says, "I love (ラブラブ) you" more than making something with your own hands. It means you actually got off your bum and planned ahead, and shows you were really thinking of them (*kawaii* ne!). However if you're useless like me here are some easy ideas:

COOK

(or attempt to)

Both guys and gals love someone cooking them a lovely meal. It doesn't have to be complicated — try to find out what their favourite food is, or just do a simple mac and cheese. Buy a nice bottle of wine, some candles, something yummy for dessert... you know the rest. Buy some cheap deco-

rations from the 100yen shop (re-use next year!). It will be nice to have your own little Christmas Day... Santa hat is optional, but preferred.

BAKE (or attempt to)

Japan has loads of those cute little gift bags and ties — baking is a thoughtful gift that looks pretty. If you don't have an oven, attempt a trial and error recipe with your toaster oven!

Use your hobby

Draw or paint a picture, knit a scarf, write a poem or story, do a collage of a load of photos (steal from facebook), collect quotes that remind you of them, or design your own lovey dovey Christmas card. (Note: if your hobby is a sport, making them come and

watch you is NOT a fun present!)

Buy a white mug from the 100yen shop and paint it yourself.

Plan a fantastic day out

Surprise them by not telling them where you're going. Make sure you dress VERY warmly! (Hint for anyone wanting to take me out! I want a winter picnic on the mountain and to go to USJ!).

If you are a bit skint (ie. broke), make coupons (IOU= Wash the dishes, go shopping with you, massage, cuddle, kiss, etc.) or make a winter survival pack with hot chocolate powder, heat packs, chapstick, etc.

I hope you all have a loved-up Christmas with your family, friends or any loved ones! xxx



It's said that it takes all kinds of people — I don't want to meet the folks that need *this* to get turned on!

I Love My Inaka Town

By Kenroy Taylor

Hi, I am Kenroy Denzil Taylor, a hyperactive ALT at Yumesaki High School in Yumesaki-cho, Himeji-shi. At first, I saw myself as Tarzan in my own jungle. I saw a strange and boring town surrounded by mountains, rice fields, and people who only speak Japanese. I complained, envied the city JETs, and the closest JETs to me are in Fukushima, a thirty-minute bike ride away.

As the weeks passed, I began to take a closer look and what really unfolded before my eyes was my very own paradise in the bush. The vast land of rice fields is actually a spectacular view as I ride my bicycle around the big town. Farming is the livelihood of most of the people, so sunshine or rain you can see people in their fields.



The Yumesaki River is the nucleus of the town. I often go hiking up the river. On one of my hiking trips upstream, I met a lady and she said something in Japanese but all I could make out was "National Geographic." I had my camera and my pants rolled-up like one of those explorers on the National Geographic

channel. She showed me some strange-looking fish and a beautiful flock of birds nesting in a nearby tree.

There is a spot in the river which is very deep and the fish are as big as my arm. Seriously, I am afraid to swim in that spot because I can't see the bottom and I might have watched too many horror flicks, but I don't know what is down there and I don't want to be the curious imbecile in the movie who gets killed first!

I really want to learn Japanese so I can talk to the people in my community. Everyone wants to teach something and they are so friendly. Some people even helped me sort out my garbage, as I had everything mixed up at first.

Yumesaki is famous for the many onsens because it is in the Shiota area. In fact, Yumeno Hotel



and Onsen are about five minutes from my house. If anyone ever needs to just thaw out during the winter, just catch the number 51 bus at Himeji bus station in the Sanyo Building and get off at Yumeno bus stop just a few blocks from Lawson's convenient store.

I think I have been blessed to be working at Yumesaki High school. I love my school. There is never a day that I don't laugh. My JETs are genuinely friendly and easy to work with. The truth is we do not always agree, but usually our final consensus puts the students first. Each lesson is like an act. Even though it is the same lesson, the audience is different so the act is modified.

One of my JETs and I do a monthly one-point lesson for the local cable television. It is aired on Sundays. So far we have done August

through December. So I am on TV and the good thing about this type of community outreach is that people actually use the one-point phrases when they see me. In fact, a lady came by my school in early November wanting me to teach her English. The little free time I had is now gone but it is for a great cause so I do not mind.

I remembered the kocho-sensei saying "Ken, I have found a Japanese girl for you; she is one of your fans." My JETs teased me so much over the next few days saying I should ask her out. So now I meet with her at my school and after each meeting everyone looks at me with the, "How was it?" look on their faces.

(My deepest fear is that I might actually ask her out. She is very beautiful and her English is coming along great but then again my school knows too much already. Also, I do not think that my kocho-sensei's words were to be taken literally. What do you think?)

So I won't complain. Even though there are no trains to my town and the last bus to Himeji-shi is at 7 p.m. Yumesaki is very cold because of the many mountains but I am actually having a great time. I am Jamaican so I have never experienced such freezing weather and I heard that the worst is yet to come, but with enough *gaman*, I will survive.

