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## On the cover...



Cover art by Chip Boles

**Robot Love.** So many people see Valentines as a requirement, a socially mandated call for a show of affection. This year, I hope that HT readers can get past that in their own lives.

Look around us — we are in Japan, a culture that is probably very different than the one in which we grew up. Here, we don't have to do the

same old thing. Here, we're stepping outside of our social mandates (and into others, but anyhow...), so maybe this time and place is a chance for us to get past our default settings and show a special person in your life something spontaneous...

Something unprogrammed. (insert your favorite 80's love-song guitar solo here)

# Hyogo Times Staff

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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...

Hello minasan! I hope your winter vacation went well and that none of you caught that nasty cold floating around the Kobe Mid-Year Conference. (I wonder who started it.)

My holidays were great, spent with family and friends, eating some meccha delicious food. However, less than a month into the New Year (and, literally, on the second day of Chinese New Year), I just found out that the JETs in my town and I are being unceremoniously dropped by our contracting organization after our current contracts are up in July. They decided they were cutting the JET Programme from the city due to budget cuts. Quite frankly, I really wasn't in the mood to write anything for this editorial because it's eating up so much of my time, but I did write a little something to express my anger and frustrations.

However, since this problem only affects me (for now) and my main goal is just make people aware that this

could happen to them, my job to talk about that has been done. Just keep reading through the issue and you'll find my letter to the BoE.

This month, we have some exciting things going on! First of all, there's the annual *Yuki Matsuri* taking place in Sapporo, Hokkaido that our new travel writer, Clay Eaton, has written about from his trip last year.

The second thing up is Singles' Awareness Day... I mean, Valentine's Day! Kym Farrant, our "Love and Relationships" writer since November, aka Lub and Lub, shares my sentiment for this most saccharine of days, but if saccharine is what you want, she's got some tips on how to actually get some romance in along with the tooth-decaying sugar! And if you're up for it, Chip Boles' Himeji Valentine's Day Prom seems to promise a lot of fun on Singles' Valentine's Day, so come out and play! As a friend once said, "Valentine's Day is my favorite day in the year because all the unhappy people

stay home." You wouldn't want to be that person, right?

I should also mention that our cover artist, Chip, has won an award for his "Himeji-Joe vs. Ultra Takoyaki" piece (the cover of November's HT issue) and had his work published in the *Kansai Scene* as well as *The Wall Street Journal Asia*! Congratulations Chip! I hope you don't leave the *Hyogo Times* too soon for greener pastures!

And finally, there's the *Saidaiji Hadaka Matsuri* (Naked Man Festival) in Okayama that some of our fellow JETs participated in last year (and didn't escape unscathed). It's an exciting event to see, even if watching flat bottoms wrapped in cloth running around a temple isn't your idea of fun. It's pure madness and totally Japanese, which means you should go (participation is not mandatory)!

As a matter of fact, our *Better know a Ken* section this month was written by the editor of the Okayama JET publication, who participated last year. From the sounds of it, he fared better than Kevin, the HT editor last year (who was also in the same pile of naked bodies at the bottom of the stairs)! For more info, read Brenda's Best of the Block and Adam Manfredi's Okayama feature!

One more thing before I let you glaze over from reading this long note — this month, we have included an article from Michael Grudzinski who is from Toyama-ken. We are working with the Toyama AJET Newsletter from now on so expect more features from them in the future!

Alright, enough of me talking and more of you reading! Happy New Year (a little late) and Happy Chinese New Year (also a little late)!!!

— Ann Chow



# Meet Your Prefectural Assistant

**Name:** Chris Pearce  
**Nationality:** USA  
**Born:** Phoenix, Arizona  
**Raised:** Here and there in the Portland metro area, Oregon  
**JET Year:** Fourth-year CIR/PA  
**Office:** Hyogo International Association, Chuo-ku, Kobe  
**Employer:** Hyogo Prefecture, International Relations Division  
**Yashiro Experiences:** 3 (I was a late alternate and missed my first Yashiro)  
**Martial Status:** Married for three years in March to Izumi, a Japanese woman born and raised in Bolivia.  
**Distinguishing Characteristics:** I'm the male PA, I have a strange sense of humor, and I'm more or less bald.



## Past:

Few years of experience as a software programmer after high school, BA in Japanese, living in Japan for a total of almost six years now

## Present:

Being a prefectural assistant is only a minor part of my job since I'm normally at the Hyogo International Association. I'm far removed from the seat of power at the prefectural office where the International Relations Division and Hyogo BoE are based. Most of the time, I'm just like any other employee in my office, in charge of projects and doing occasional translations.

My PA work is broadly split into two categories: everyday and once-a-year work. Everyday work for me is checking the PA mail account, answering questions as best as I can, and managing the Hyogo JETs mailing list. I get a few phone calls each year, but most phone calls go to the prefectural office.

The once-a-year work is the most interesting. It starts with picking up the new JETs in Tokyo. With two PAs we switch off between Tokyo Orientation A, B, and C. But last year, I was able to go to all of the Tokyo Orientations because Hannah (the other PA) was new. I thought it was great to be able to see

everyone coming to Hyogo, if only for a few minutes. After Tokyo A and B is the Yashiro Orientation. Last year, this changed from all new Hyogo JETs to just the new Hyogo BoE JETs. Money was the big reason the orientation was cut. I spent two days and a night there giving a few lectures. No more Japanese classes!

All the new local BoE JETs now have an orientation in Kobe for a half day. I also lecture there about life and problems. Unfortunately though, neither I nor Hannah have any experience as an ALT, and since we also don't work for the BoE, we don't really have any idea what working as an ALT is like.

But we're lucky in Hyogo that there are so many experienced JETs that the new JETs can look to for advice. This really sets Hyogo apart from the other prefectures that have much smaller JET populations. Then, finally, we get called out to the ALT Mid-Year Conference to help a little at the end. Not so helpful this year, but hopefully my few minutes on stage was at least interesting.

## Future:

I've re-contracted for my 5th year. Izumi wants a baby this year. After JET, I'm planning on living in Kobe and working as a freelance translator.

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

# Fettuccine Alfredo with Blackened Chicken

I won't waste a lot of words this month with a cute introduction because this dish needs none. Barring the allergic or the lactose-intolerant, I'm not sure I know a single person who has not tried *fettuccine alfredo* at some point in their lives, and out of those people I'd safely wager that all of them love it.

To be fair, it's a hard dish to dislike — butter, cream and Parmesan cheese combined to make a rich, velvety sauce which is then ladled over a plate of perfectly cooked pasta.

Yet, despite its popularity, I'm the only one I know of (besides Mom) who bothers to make it from scratch. I see jars of Alfredo sauce on the shelves at the local supermarket and I cringe, in the same way I do when I see a packet of pre-sliced onion. There's simply no excuse to waste your life eating bland, preservative-laden nonsense when you could actually whip up something incredible in just five minutes.

The blackened chicken is the



only part of this recipe that's remotely complicated, and that's due only to the diversity of the spices involved. At a bare minimum, you should have paprika (the thing actually responsible for the "blackening"), cayenne or chili powder for kick, and salt. I doubt you'll have much trouble finding the rest at

any well-stocked supermarket.

As a final note, please bear in mind that the chicken is not essential to your enjoyment of the pasta, but it does provide a potent counterpoint of color, flavor and texture to the relatively low-key ambience of the cream sauce. Enjoy!

## Alfredo Sauce

**Ingredients:**

- 1 cup heavy cream
- 1 cup grated Parmesan cheese (use fresh! Only resort to the green can when absolutely necessary, such as when taking pictures for your monthly food article and you're too lazy to bike to Costco to buy actual Parmesan)
- 2-3 Tbsp butter
- 2-3 cloves of garlic, minced
- salt and pepper, to taste

**Directions:**

- Melt the butter in a saucepan.
- Add the minced garlic and sauté over low heat until the garlic starts to release its aroma.
- Slowly add the cream, stirring it



into the melted butter.

- Cook for five minutes on low heat to bring sauce to temperature. Be careful never to allow the sauce to boil, and stir continuously to prevent the cream and butter from separating.
- Gradually add the Parmesan to the sauce, stirring it in until it melts completely. The addition of the cheese will thicken the sauce and will bind the cream and butter together.

- There should be enough seasoning in the blackened chicken to forego adding any additional salt or pepper to the sauce, but if you feel compelled to do so, please keep in mind Bob's No. 1 Rule of Seasoning Food: Do it on the heat, not on your plate. Nothing will overpower a dish quite like the taste of raw salt and pepper; cook it first.

## Blackened Chicken

**Ingredients:**

- 300 g chicken, cubed or cut into strips
- 1 Tbsp sweet paprika
- 1 tsp salt
- 1 tsp granulated garlic
- 1 tsp onion powder
- 1 tsp cayenne pepper
- 1 1/2 tsp ground black pepper
- 1/2 tsp dried oregano
- 1/2 tsp dried thyme

**Directions:**

- Mix all spices and herbs together in a bowl to create the blackening mix.
- Slice the chicken into strips or cubes and sprinkle liberally on all sides with the blackening mix.
- Heat cooking oil in a pan and fry the chicken on one side until the spices turn dark brown or black in color.
- Turn the pieces over and do the same for the other side.
- Serve atop Fettuccine Alfredo. Make sure the chicken is cooked through before serving.



## Persimmon Jam

**By Suzie Winterton**

*(Or, What to Do With All the Persimmons Someone Landed You With Because They Didn't Know Either.)*

**Ingredients:**

- 3 cups persimmon pulp
- 2 cups white sugar
- 1 Tbsp fresh lemon juice
- 1/2 Tsp lemon zest

**Directions:**

- Combine pulp and sugar in a medium saucepan.
- Cook over low heat, stirring constantly, until thickened and opaque (about 15 minutes, DON'T boil).
- Remove from heat, stir in lemon juice and zest.
- Pour into sterilised jars.

**Note:**

- One Japanese persimmon will yield 1 cup of pulp.
- This recipe yields 3 cups of jam.
- A good method of checking if your jam will set is to put a plate in the freezer when you first put the jam on. When you think it's ready, drop half a teaspoon or so of the mixture onto the frozen plate and nudge it with a spoon. If it wrinkles or lifts up, the jam will set. If not, then it needs more time.

# WHEEL OF JEOPARDY!

Time for the H.T. Quiz: Back from Break Edition! By Joy Feddes

**1 How much do you pray for snow days?**

- a) Whole heartedly, to all gods for good measure.
- b) It's more like wishful thinking.
- c) More than I like puns, and I really like puns.

**2 How were your holi-days?**

- a) Awesome possum.
- b) Full of central heating goodness.
- c) Delicious. I gained five pounds!

**3 Kobe mid-year seminar, eh?**

- a) I learned so much, it's a very valuable use of my time.
- b) My school actually forgot. How could they? It's so exciting!
- c) I missed the "romantic time in the K-car" moments of last year.

**4 Do you play ski?**

- a) Yes, and snowboard play too.
- b) You mean, "Do you ski?"
- c) No, I play warm and dry, thank you.

**5 Have you purikura'd yet?**

- a) As if! That's for crazy Japanese girls and couples. I am neither.
- b) My wallpaper is made of purikura stickers.
- c) No, but I will - promise!

**6 Obligatory re-contracting question:**

- a) Stop asking! I don't know!
- b) I give myself one more year to find a Japanese wifey...
- c) It's been swell Japan, but time for me to peace out.

**7 Your V-Day motto is:**

- a) "I spent 90% of my money on



women and drink. The rest I wasted." — George Best.

b) "Love is like an hourglass, with the heart filling up as the brain empties." — Jules Renard.

c) "Animals are such agreeable friends — they ask no questions, they pass no criticisms." — George Eliot.

**8 What gets you through the cold, lonely nights?**

a) Fumes from the kerosene stove — they make everything happy and rosy and lovely... and then I wake up drooling...

b) Boozy McAlcohol always shows up to make things bearable.

c) Thoughts of my hot Latin lover.

**What your answers mean:**

**Mostly As:** What what! Have you noticed that there are some awesome dated expressions in this quiz? Obvi! I know you noticed, because you are my inspiration to go back into the past for things we all know are wrong. I saw you with your rat-tail! Rat tails are like head-

to-toe neon, leggings as pants, and frosted tips — they had their place and we're all trying to forget it. Remember to be choosy when feeling nostalgic, Mostly As. No one likes a rat tail.

**Mostly Bs:** When teaching my students the phrase "Can you \_\_\_?" One student said, "Yes we can!" which is to say, Obama, you are a legend! Don't F up the hopes and dreams of many by not being a superhero. Which is to say, are Mostly Bs from the USA? Can you explain to me why the state Rhode Island is not an island? I think it explains a lot about your country...

**Mostly Cs:** I went home for Christmas and enjoyed the love of two cats and two dogs. I did not enjoy their constant shedding (minus one dog that is a goldendoodle and does not shed). Sometimes I think I want a pet to keep me warm and company, and then I realize I have you! You're awesome mostly Cs! High fives!

A Hyogo Times Ramentary Restaurant Review:

## Winter Eating in Ginza

By Andrew Tamashiro

Hakata's Ichiran Ramen  
Ginza Sushidokoro Marui  
銀座寿司処まる伊

An 11-day travel/food binge around Japan escorting two college buddies from the United States led to a much lighter wallet, tighter jeans and some fantastic memories. Obviously, the food is as big a story as spending New Year's Eve at Fushimi Inari Shrine or getting my buddies into their first public bath.

Tokyo is as diverse a culinary city as you will find in Japan, with international influences catering to one of the most dense and food-oriented populations in the world. Tokyo borrows not only from other countries, but from different regions of Japan. Like many ramen chains, Hakata's Ichiran operates outposts in Tokyo.

We were taken here by a friend I made during study abroad, a guy living in Ginza who claims Fukuoka as his home prefecture and enjoys his ramen as much as I do. Needless to say, I trust his opinion.

The typical ramen experience is not what you'll find at Ichiran. Twenty counter seats, each separated by walls, isolates each customer from other patrons. The workers are rarely seen, only heard, as they deliver your order from an elevated platform through a bamboo screen, revealing only their voice and the lower part



of a t-shirt. A private water dispenser, personal call button, and a single but customizable dish (from choosing the richness of the broth, to the type of *negi*, to the level of spiciness) set this chain apart from others. The basic ramen is rich without being heavy, lightly spiced, and tinged with garlic. Bamboo shoots, welsh onion, and *chashu* pork are included as well. It's far too easy to breeze through a single order of noodles and move to a second, or to polish off the broth without thinking twice. Unfortunately, the closest Ichiran a Hyogo-ite will find is in Osaka.

The same friend took us to a fantastic sushi joint in the east part of Ginza. Befitting the area, it was simultaneously stylish and relaxing, with a staff and appearance that exuded a cool confidence. We opted for the *omakase* ("leave it to you") course, an option that currently enjoys popularity in the US as well.

Out came a wood block with 40 pieces of sushi (10 each), with shrimp, salmon, tuna, and my favorite *unagi* (freshwater eel) among them.

My first bite was succulent, but delicate to the point of feeling as though

the fish were melting on my tongue. A slight touch of soy sauce brought out the deeper flavors, and each piece was finished far too quickly. The *tamagoyaki* (grilled egg) contained bits of veggies and shrimp as well, and was a pleasant surprise for a piece I regularly ignore.

Seconds were ordered (thirds for some) and each subsequent sushi accompanying our beer brought a deeper feeling of contentment. Often, a compromise must be made between quality and price when sushi is involved. Chains like Sushiro and Kappa offer a cheap and easily available option. While few among us can afford regular consumption of *otono* at a Michelin-level establishment. Prices weren't prohibitive, with each of us leaving with that euphoric feeling one gets after having had just enough to eat and drink and only about 3500 yen lighter in the pocket.

Eating one's way through Japan is an expensive venture, particularly if you are like me and want to eat the famous things where they're great: *okonomiyaki* in Hiroshima (better than Kansai-style, in my opinion), *takoyaki* in Osaka, Genghis Kahn in Hokkaido, *udon* in Shikoku, and of course, the varying ramen styles from Kagoshima to Asahikawa. That said, I can't think of two hobbies I'd rather combine than travel and food.



## Lesson Plan of the Month:

**Zombie Revenge!**

By Lester Somera

**Bomb Squad (or, Zombie Revenge)**(Elementary 3<sup>rd</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup> grade level (maybe JHS 1?))

For this activity I drew inspiration from the *bakudan* (bomb) game, where kids in a circle have to recite vocabulary in order to pass the 'bomb' to the next person in the circle, and this continues until a countdown timer goes off.

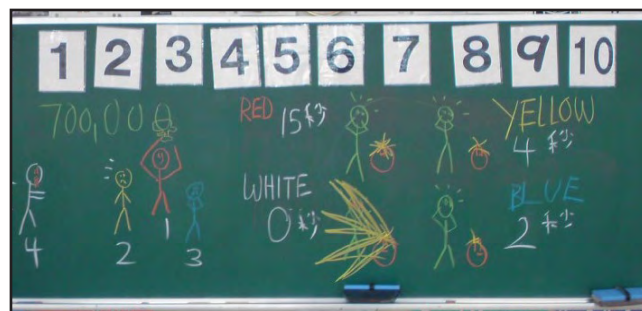
After playing *bakudan* once or twice to do counting games, I came up with this for the subsequent classes because I noticed that there wasn't any dramatic tension unless there were actual consequences when someone got stuck with the bomb, and what's more dramatic than the threat of all-consuming and fiery doom? This game is best for learning sequences (numbers and letters) but can probably be adapted for vocabulary practice.

You'll need a giant die to serve as the bomb. A lot of times these are lying around in playrooms or you could make one out of cardboard. Split the class into groups. Any group with fewer people than the others will have an unfair advantage, so place your teachers on teams if necessary.

Have them form so that they

all make a giant alternating circle (Group A, B, C, A, B, C...) and draw a person on the blackboard for each group, then draw explosives next to them. Write "12秒 (seconds)" next to each person. This is each group's bomb counter.

Explain that the die is going to go around the circle after you say the first letter/number, and the bomb-holder has to shout the next part of the sequence before they're allowed to pass it to their neighbor.



Meanwhile, your stopwatch will be running. When the countdown ends, whoever is left holding the die has to roll it. Their throw will be deducted from their group's bomb counter (e.g. a 5 will reduce their bomb counter from 12 to 7) and then you will reset the stopwatch and go again, continuing from the person who rolled the die. Once a team's bomb detonates, they become zombies. If the count-

down finishes with a zombie holding the die, then they can pass it to either of their neighbors, and THAT person has to make a roll. The game continues until one team is left or until class time is over. It helps if you manipulate the results a little bit so that the die stops in each group's section the first time around, just to prolong the activity. Prod recalcitrant kids with answers (or not) as necessary.

This game is extremely complicated the first time around, and it's hard to explain unless your JTE can translate, so do some test runs to make sure that all of them understand. You wouldn't think this would be a huge deal, but for some reason, actually having a physical representation of their group's status really gets them into it.

I've been doing this with my younger ones to help them memorize the order, but there are ways you can make this more difficult for older students, like adding a cue to count backwards instead of forwards at certain points.

Have fun with it — I really enjoyed seeing two-thirds of the class chanting "SIX, SIX, SIX, SIX!" while the other third stared in terror at their hapless dice-roller.

**A Comic by James Williams**

So what if he's  
Yakuza? How tough  
can a bunch of fags  
who can't get into  
public baths be?



As it turns out, the Japanese mafia  
subsidizes English lessons now.

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# This could happen to any JET

**By Ann Chow**

I wrote the following in an email to the Hyogo prefectural assistants about my situation in terms of re-contracting. Apparently, it's not the first time that something like this has happened to unsuspecting JETs placed in local contracting organizations (meaning mostly JHS and ES JETs).

I **\*am\*** making a big deal out of

this because it probably will not be the last time this happens and something **\*obviously\*** needs to be done. This shouldn't happen to other JETs and I want to make that known in every which way I can.

We were told by our local BoE (not prefectural) that **we** should sign that **we** don't want to re-contract even though we were given papers by the BoE stating **they** will not re-contract

us due to budget cuts. This is probably supposed to make things easier for them because then they don't have to explain themselves to CLAIR or the Hyogo BoE. I'm not signing it.

This is something I think every JET needs to know about. Spread the word if you can — not that I, in particular, got shafted, but that this really **can** happen suddenly to any JET.

Douzo yoroshiku onegaishimasu.

Like many others, I have also "dreaded" making the re-contracting decision. It's only two small boxes on paper but only a pen mark pretty much decides what you will do for the next year of your life. I'm a second-year JET and staying a third year didn't seem appealing to me because of what I've been through the past year and a half. I fretted over this decision as long as everyone else, but I was told today (January 27th) that the city I live in will no longer re-hire or hire through the JET Program[me] anymore. My go-between wants us (me and the other JETs in this town) to sign that we do not want to re-contract by February 6th, when our papers are due. (Yes, we got to think about our decision for a slightly longer period of time, not that it matters now.)

I wasn't given a choice AT ALL. It wasn't because of anything I did that they're not re-hiring me, but the city is no longer using JET because of "budget cuts." They are, however, going to hire people from a different company. I was completely blindsided. If I had really, really wanted to re-contract, I wouldn't be able to stay with JET because the time period

to request a change of city was in November/December. Coincidentally, my go-between heard in November that we might be "let go" at the end of our contract, but he didn't say a single word to us. We've met 3 times in meetings over the past 3 months. I live 10 minutes from my Board of Education. My current workplace is 2 minutes from the Board of Ed. I am an email or a phone call away. He might not speak any English but that does not excuse him from not telling us this could happen, and he chose to do so only at the very last minute.

After all the crap I've been through, I really thought I would get a little more respect from the BoE since they keep track of us. And I guess by keep track, I mean they ask us questions about our life and our life at school, but by no means do they do anything to protect us or inform us about the important stuff.

At my first school, where I worked at for 3 months and was still in the "shiny and new" phase, I encountered things seen in movies set in the south side of Chicago or in the ghettos of New York (and hell, I **\*AM\*** from New York City and NEVER did I expect this

to happen to me, in JAPAN of all places!). Kids threw things at me because they didn't like Chinese people - chalk, pencil erasers, paper balls, etc., and they tried to bully me because I'm short and smaller than most of them. (The New Yorker in me didn't take that crap.)

They thought it was okay to hit me on the head and things like that, but those were the least of my problems. One kid waved a razor blade at me because he thought it was funny (until I said I'd take it away from him). Another kid spit at me because he hated school and teachers. Every other day, you could see (cigarette) smoke coming out of the student bathrooms. I broke up fist fights, and if you've seen me, you know I'm not the kind of person who should be breaking up fights!

At my second school, the students fought pretty much every day (especially in the summer) and barely a week went by when the fire alarm didn't go off or the kid with skin problems didn't try to put water into the fire alarm light node. We had a smoke bomb thrown into our shokuinshitsu and I got flipped the bird at least once every two weeks. One kid

had behavioral/mental problems and hit a lot of the teachers when he was mad. I was "lucky" - I only got shoved into a desk a couple of times by him and then I shoved back, which he didn't expect.

One teacher said no to this kid snapping her bra strap and she got a shiner for it and was out of school for two weeks. Another teacher got kicked in the leg by him and left the school abruptly before her contract ended. Another teacher left under mysterious circumstances due to this kid being so violent all the time. In May of last year, there was this MASSIVE fight which involved almost the entire school and it took 16 teachers to break this thing up. The principal didn't even bat an eye nor did he bother to call the police. (That's been changed now.) These were the environments I worked in and it went be-

yond the call of duty for an ALT.

I just changed schools again at the beginning of this month so everything I know about Japanese schools has been what I've been through for the past 18 months. It hasn't been pretty and it hasn't been easy but I did want my experience here on JET to be semi-decent (not even looking at "decent," just "semi-"). I've had some great students along with the horrible ones. I really tried to make it better for myself. I even started an ESS club in a school where I was almost sure only delinquents attended. But the thing that will make me bitter about JET is that I may have had a choice to stay if I was told in a timely manner. I'm not ill-prepared, by any means, to leave Japan but the choice wasn't mine to make and through no fault of my own. I've done everything, and definitely

more, than is or should be needed of an ALT and this is how we are treated.

The go-between is supposed to be our link to the BoE and CLAIR and he didn't do his job. When he found out it MIGHT happen, he should've told us but we weren't told. It's only been about 5 hours since I've been told but I'm over the fact that I can't re-contract. I'm just pissed off as hell that the chance to do so was taken from me.

This can happen to anyone who isn't under Hyogo BoE jurisdiction and I thought someone in the higher stratosphere of this "business" should know.

Sorry this was so long. Thanks for reading. It really upsets me that this happened when it could've been avoided.

Regards,  
Ann Chow

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# The Best of the Block

By Brenda McKinney

Hello and Happy New Year to all of you! Whether you stayed in Japan, went home for the winter break or got your adventure on in some exotic foreign country, hopefully you are still feeling refreshed after the winter break (and not too cold now that the coldest days are upon us!).

Since coming back from break, the National AJET council has been getting back into our regular routines and have been excitingly planning for the upcoming national surveys, May opinion exchange with CLAIR and the Ministries, Career and Information Fair at the Returner's Conference in Yokohama, as well as all of the spring events planned by local AJET chapters all over Japan. You will be getting information on the surveys in the next few weeks (which I hope you will help us with!!), but in the meantime, check out our AJET Facebook page to see some of the other events.

Also, I don't know if you will agree, but sometimes I feel that JET and my life in Japan is like one big party (or

"happy Japan-land camp" as one other JET called it). But like any good party, it's got to end... and life-as-it-is will also change.

I have really enjoyed getting more involved in AJET over the past year and would like to encourage all of you staying next year to consider running for the upcoming Block elections. It's a great opportunity to do something new, get another perspective on the program and work with really motivated and fun people from all over Japan. Platforms are due in March, but feel free to email me anytime ([block6@ajet.net](mailto:block6@ajet.net)) with questions!

Thanks for checking in and here is your February installment of the BEST of the BLOCK.

## The Best of... SHIGA PREFECTURE Biwako Full Marathon

Explore Lake Biwa on foot while participating (or cheering people



on while checking out the largest lake in Japan!) at the Lake Biwa Full Marathon. The marathon will be held on March 1, but registration will close in early February.

For more information, please visit the race website at

[http://www.lakebiwa-marathon.com/pdf/Race\\_Info\\_2009\\_e.pdf](http://www.lakebiwa-marathon.com/pdf/Race_Info_2009_e.pdf).

## Hikone Castle

And while you are in Shiga, also stop in Hikone to see the famous Hikone Castle. Today, the castle is a National Treasure because it's one of the rare castles from the feudal era that wasn't torn down or destroyed and then rebuilt in modern times as a tourist attraction.

## The Best of... KYOTO PREFECTURE Setsubun at Yoshida Shrine

From February 2-4, shrines and temples hold rites to exorcise demons, an event marking the start of Spring according to the lunar calendar. On this day, every family takes dried beans called "mamemaki" and throws them at someone dressed as a demon, yelling, "Out with the demon, in with good fortune!" to drive away the ogre.

People also eat "futomaki" sushi while facing a direction that has been decided as auspicious for that particular year. It is customary to eat one more bean than your age.

The Setsubun festival at Yoshida-jinja Shrine is supposed to be especially lively, with a fire festival ceremony beginning at 11pm (a 7 meter tall fire is lit, burning whatever offerings worshipers have brought).



## Baika-Sai at Kitano-Tenmangu Shrine

On February 25, *geisha* and *maiko* (apprentice geisha) will host "Nodate" (an outdoor tea ceremony) beneath the plum blossoms. Visitors at the shrine can look on as they commemorate Sugawara Michizane on the anniversary of his death. Sugawara Michizane was a well-known scholar, politician, and plum-blossom aficionado of the Heian-era who is celebrated as the god of study in the shrine on the anniversary of his death.

Advance tickets to the festival are available and highly recommended as Baika-sai usually attracts crowds of thousands.

## And, finally, the Best of HYOGO PREFECTURE Kaibara Evil Warding-Off Ceremony Festival in Tamba

Also in the spirit of Setsubun, go to the Hachiman Shrine in Kaibara-cho (Tamba) to see the oldest evil warding-off festival in Japan! If you live in the area, more than 100,000 people are said to visit this festival annually to see the solemn performance of the ritual at midnight.

The festival will be held on February 17 & 18 and is a 10-minute walk from Kaibara sta. on JR Fukuchiyama line. The Kaibara-cho Tourist Information Desk at 0795-72-0544 for further details

## Setsubun Ceremony on Mt. Shosha (Himeji)

To celebrate Setsubun, Shosyazan Engyoji Temple on Mt. Shosha (yes, that place where The Last Samurai was filmed...) will be holding a prayer ceremony (13:00) and a bean-scattering ceremony (14:00). The temple is open from 8:30 to 17:30 and entrance is ¥300. There is also a Special Fee for the event: ¥1,000 will cover an entrance fee, admission for Jikido, and round-trip on the microbus.

For more information or to confirm times, please visit <http://www.shosha.or.jp> or call 0792-66-3327.

For those of you that enjoy crab, you are in for a real treat. February 22 marks the 18th Toyooka Tsuiyamako (Tuiyama Port) Crab Festival. Between 8:30 a.m. and 2:00 p.m., a variety of events will be held at the festival, including drum performances, auctions, rice-cake making (with "free distribution to visitors"), crab games and — of course — the presentation of various crab dishes!

To get to Kojima Pier, take the Zentan bus for Hiyoriyama from Kinokuni Onsen Sta. on JR San-in Line and get off at Minato-Kanko-Annishomae or Kojima. Please call 0796-22-8111 with questions.

## SASAYAMA MARATHON

The 29th annual Sasayama ABC Marathon will be held in Sasayama on March 1. The full marathon begins and ends at the Sasayama Castle ruins and about 10,000 athletes participate in this event each year. While this is a timed race, the course — which runs through the beautiful mountainous villages of the area — is surprisingly flat if you are interested in trying your first long race.

For further information information, including about registration, please call 079-552-5960.

## Also, don't forget about the Okayama NAKED MAN FESTIVAL!

Every year on the third Saturday of February, the town of Saidaiji in Okayama



ma Prefecture hosts one of the most popular and famous Hadaka Matsuri (naked festivals) in Japan. Thousands of men, dressed only in fundoshi, similar to the "diapers" worn in sumo, brave the winter cold to participate in a tradition hundreds of years old.

The participants, of which there were 9000 in 2007, run around the temple grounds, periodically passing through purifying water. As midnight nears and steam rises from the now quite warmed-up throngs of "naked men," more than ten thousand spectators wait for the lights to go out and shingi, lucky sticks, to be dropped into the crowd. For several intense minutes, the men struggle for the shingi, attempting to be one of the lucky few to make it off the temple grounds intact and holding the prize.

Okayama AJET is organizing a trip. To get further information or to book, please email [nakedman2009@gmail.com](mailto:nakedman2009@gmail.com).

# Getting to Know Some Random JETs

- ❖ **Name:** Cheryl Young.
- ❖ **Please call me:** Cherie.
- ❖ **School and Location in Hyogo:** Tatsumi and Mihara JHS in Minami Awaji City, Awaji Island.
- ❖ **How we know you:** randomly.
- ❖ **Birthday:** August 2.
- ❖ **Location before JET:** Berkeley, California, USA.
- ❖ **University and Degree:** University of California at San Diego, urban studies and planning.
- ❖ **Other jobs you have had:** I've had many, but one of my favourite pre-JET jobs has to be working for Gap Inc. International - Japan in their distribution and planning department. I was the gal who decided which accessories and how many of 'em each Gap store in Japan should have.
- ❖ **Travels:** I've been to a few countries, but I can't wait to see more of the world! I'm hoping to see some of Southeast Asia this year!
- ❖ **Hobbies:** watching movies, traveling, having adventures, finding cuteness wherever I go...
- ❖ **Staying another year?** Yes!
- ❖ **Favorites:**  
**Food:** Sandwiches, and pretty much anything with cheese in/on it.  
**Sports:** Taekwondo.  
**City in Japan:** So far?  
**Shop:** Kiddy Land in Harajuku.  
**TV Show:** *Lost*, *Sex and the City*.  
**Movie:** *50 First Dates*.
- ❖ **Best life experience:** <3
- ❖ **Motto to live by:** "Twenty years from now you will be more disappointed by the things that you didn't do than by the ones that you did do. So throw off the bowlines.

Sail away from the safe harbor. Catch the trade winds in your sails. Explore. Dream. Discover."

❖ **I remember when...** scrunchies were cool.

❖ **What are you drinking?** CC Lemon, because everyone is sick!

❖ **Who would you like to meet?** Helen Keller.

❖ **Why should we elect you**

**President of the World?** You really shouldn't.

❖ **Best thing about Japan so far?** There are so many things that I love about Japan! I guess if I had to narrow it down, it would be a toss-up between the people and all of the beautiful places to see.

❖ **If it was my last day on earth I would:** spend it hanging out with my better half, Mori-chan.

❖ **Interesting fact about me:** I love Hello Kitty! Last November, I fulfilled a long-time dream of experiencing Sanrio Puroland... the ultimate Kitty-chan fan destination!

❖ **My top tip for teaching:** genuinely care about the students!

❖ **When the class is TOO QUI-**



**ET I...** start to make faces at the class.

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

❖ **Funniest story involving a student:** JTE jokingly asked if anyone knew Pablo Picasso's full name (in *New Crown* 3, there is a picture of him on Page 56). One student raised his hand and without hesitation blurted out:

"Pablo Diego José Francisco de Paula Juan Nepomuceno María de los Remedios Cipriano de la Santísima Trinidad Mártir Patricio Clito Ruiz y Picasso," from memory. The rest of the class erupted into a chorus of "Ehhh!?!?"

I swear that student is actually an android in disguise.

- ❖ **Name:** Raishel Ganges.
- ❖ **Please call me:** Rai (レイ).
- ❖ **School and Location in Hyogo:** Ono Higashi Shogakko, Ono.
- ❖ **How we know you:** I am a first-year ALT.
- ❖ **Birthday:** August 11, 1986.
- ❖ **Born and raised:** Philadelphia, PA.
- ❖ **Family:** Mother and Japanese host family (Okaasan, Otousan, 2x Oneesan).
- ❖ **University and Degree:** BA from Franklin and Marshall College.
- ❖ **Other jobs you have had:** Campus information desk worker, secretary.
- ❖ **Travels:** Barbados, Thailand, Japan.
- ❖ **Hobbies:** Reading, writing, socializing.
- ❖ **Staying another year?** Yes.

- ❖ **Favorites:**  
**Food:** Thai food.  
**Sports:** Basketball.  
**Music:** Hip-hop/R&B, pop, oldies, soundtracks, soft rock, Top 40.  
**Shop:** United Colors of Benetton.  
**TV Show:** *Charmed*, *Terminator: Sarah Connor Chronicles*, *Grey's Anatomy*, *Heroes*.  
**Movie:** *Gattaca*, *Matrix* (before the superpowers), *Pursuit of Happyness*.
- ❖ **Most Proud Achievement:** Being the first in my family to graduate college.
- ❖ **Best life experience:** Studying abroad in Japan Spring 2007 and living in my own apartment.
- ❖ **Motto to live by:** *Just do it*, but my favourite quote is by Margaret Mead: *Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed,*

*it is the only thing that ever has.*

❖ **I remember when...** I used to dance on my bed to Britney Spears' *Baby One More Time* and then go on to sing *Barbie Girl* by Aqua.

❖ **What are you drinking?** Southern Comfort with lots of lime juice on the rocks.

❖ **Who would you like to meet?** Alive: Barack Obama; Dead: Niccolò Machiavelli.

❖ **Why should we elect you President of the World?** Surely you would elect me president because I am brilliant, empathetic and funny. Also, no

one can defeat my Japanese child army that I have beguiled with my English. lol.

❖ **Best thing about Japan so far?** The amazing people that you randomly meet who end up changing your life and/or becoming your best friend.

❖ **If it was my last day on earth I would:** broadcast a world-wide goodbye speech (since I plan on being that important) then spend the rest of the day with people I love.

❖ **Interesting fact about me:** I am really good at Japanese tongue twisters.

❖ **My top tip for teaching:** Make the lesson interactive.

❖ **When the class is TOO QUIET I...** walk around the class like a sleuth and then call on someone I know will know the answer. That injects confidence and fun back into the room, sparking participation again.

❖ **Bribery for students...YAY or NAY?** Nay; exciting them with English is more effective and cheaper.

❖ **Funniest story involving a student:** One day when I was returning home from school, four policemen stopped me to check if my bike was stolen. As they were checking the records, one policeman decided to stir up a conversation with me. After he congratulated me on the success of Obama, he asked where I worked. Just as I was about to answer, a second-grader of mine walked up and declared, "She is my teacher." The policeman asked the boy to say something in English. The boy said "Apple." Then the policeman said "Oh アップル." Correcting him, the boy said, "No, apple. Katakana is not English." I do not know if this is funny, but it was the most rewarding moment of my time here thus far. My second-grader used perfect English in a real world situation without prompts.



# Better Know a Ken: Okayama

Story and photos  
by Adam Manfredi

Part 14 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 found out I was being placed in Okayama prefecture, I asked my judo instructor back home, who is Japanese, what he knew about the place. He thought about it for a moment and then said, "They have really good peaches," and was silent.

It's true our peaches are pretty good, that is if you want to spend 600 yen for one. For that price back home, I can get a flat of peaches that are just as good, if not better, but I don't go around telling the locals this as they take a lot pride in their fruit.

This moves right into the second thing Okayama is famous for: Momotaro. When I am traveling around Japan, and I tell a random Japanese person who has accosted me for whatever reason that I am from Okayama, the first thing they think of, and often the only thing they can



think of about Okayama, is Momotaro.

Momotaro, or Peach Boy as us English speakers often call him, is the local hero of Okayama. I can't say I've ever really looked into his story much, but I think he was born from a peach and killed some demon in a cave in Kagawa Prefecture, or the like. You know how these Japanese folk stories go. A statue of him and his animal friends – a dog, a bird, and a monkey – can be found at the east entrance of Okayama Station next to the Peach Fountain, the local Okayama City meeting point.

This brings me to my next point. Okayama's two largest cities: Okayama City and Kura-

shiki. Although Okayama City is the Capital of the Prefecture, Kurashiki is probably more famous within Japan due to its *bikan* area, a historic area with well-preserved wooden warehouses called *kura*, a number of excellent museums, and arts and crafts shops.

The *bikan* area is walk-able from the Kurashiki train station. The rest



of the city is pretty unremarkable, but with a population of a little over 400,000, it does have decent enough shopping and the like.

Okayama city is known for its two main attractions, Okayama castle - a modern reconstruction - and Korakuen Garden. Korakuen is often listed as one of the top three gardens in Japan and is worth a visit if you are in the city.

With a population of almost 700,000, Okayama is slated to become Japan's newest designated city this year. It's located on the Shinkansen line about halfway between Hiroshima and Osaka. It also acts as the transfer point south to the Seto-Ohashi Bridge to Shikoku and north to Shimane and Tottori Prefectures and is pretty convenient for getting around Japan.

Like all prefectures in Japan, Okayama has its share of festivals. One of the more note-worthy ones is the Saidaiji Hadaka Matsuri, or Naked Man Festival. The festival takes place every year on the third Sunday of February in the town of Saidaiji, Okayama Prefecture.

I took part in the festival last year. After getting well-drunk on sake on



the bus to the festival, I was herded into waiting tents where we stripped naked and paid a Japanese man to wrap us in a *fundoshi*, kind of like the loin cloths worn in sumo.

It was nearing midnight, and I, properly attired for the cold winter

night, left the tent and along with thousands of other men, ran through the streets of the town and into the local shrine where we passed through pools of ice cold water and had more water poured on us to cleanse our bodies.

Everyone then crowded to get onto the main building of the shrine where

at midnight a few large wooden sticks called *shiki* were thrown down for us to fight for. The man, or group of men, that brought it safely out of the temple would be rewarded with a large sum of cash, though with thousands of other men vying for it, this turns quickly into a rather big mess. I really wasn't worrying to much about getting near that thing as I was having a hard enough time just not getting crushed, falling down stairs, or choked by the local yakuza who thought it was funny to put the gaijin in a headlock.

I managed to get out with only minor cuts and bruises gained when I end up at the bottom of a large pile of men after falling down a half flight of stairs. Another JET next to me was not so lucky and broke his collar bone after falling into the same pile. I helped him to the tent and found his waiting wife to escort him to the hospital. Yeah, it's definitely something I am glad I did, but this year I will be watching from the warm(ish) stands!



# Travel Japan

## Sapporo — Snow Sculptures and More

By Clay Eaton

It's February in Japan and the biggest event this month is the Sapporo Snow Festival up in Hokkaido! Many of you are already heading up North to enjoy the hundreds of sculptures of snow and ice, and those of you who aren't should definitely keep it in mind for next year. When you get there, look for free drinks at the ice karaoke bars and lots of corn on the cob.

The sculptures are easy to find and really don't take more than a day to see. So, here are some other things to see and do in Japan's fifth biggest city when you need a break from the snow Pikachus.

To start, you should check out the local product that's made Sapporo a household name around the world: beer. Sapporo ranks itself among the world's "Three Beer Capitals;" the other two being Munich and Milwaukee. Though they clearly made that distinction up, the city is home to the country's first brewery and its parent company also makes Ebisu.

The Sapporo Beer Museum is only a short busride away from downtown and is as fun as it sounds. Here you can learn all about Japan's beer his-



tory and why Sapporo beer is the best of all the lagers. Unfortunately, there is no free beer on the tour. This should be illegal.

But right in the next building you can find the Sapporo Beer Garden, which serves not only nomihoudai beer but also all-you-can-eat Jingsukan. That's Japanese for Genghis Khan, which apparently stands for endless grilled mutton. This particular combo is the best mistake I have ever made, and can be found all around the city if you don't make it out to the brewery. Prepare for a big nap afterwards.

On a final beer note, keep an eye out for "Sapporo Classic." It's only sold in Hokkaido, and in my opinion is far superior to the premium beers we get down here.

While you're pigging out on beer and mutton, save some space for Sapporo's other specialty: ramen. Sapporo is famous for its distinctive Miso Ramen, which is delicious and filling after a day of walking through the snow and ice sculptures.

The most famous ramen district is Suskino, the center of Sapporo's night-life, which can be

found at the southern end of the snow festival. Off to the side of the ice sculptures in this area is the *Ganso Sapporo Ramen Yokocho* — a long steamy alleyway filled with tiny ramen shops. You can also check out the Sapporo Ramen Republic, a ramen "theme park" located in the Sapporo ESTA building across from the train station.

Aside from delicious food and drink, there are also plenty of other sites around to keep you busy. Just walking



around you'll notice that Sapporo feels different from the average Japanese city: the roads are wide, there are sidewalks, and the whole place is a sensical grid instead of a beguiling labyrinth.

This is because Sapporo is one of Japan's only cities to have developed after the Meiji Restoration, at a time when the government was concerned more with making modern metropolises than confusing invaders. Much of the city was actually planned out by Americans and Europeans, and the historic buildings have a pretty Western feel. The old Government Office Building,

the Clock Tower and Hokkaido University are all great places to soak in Japan's unique brand of 19th century modernism. Think lots of brick.

For something even more modern, check out Sapporo's TV Tower. It's much cooler than Tokyo Tower, which was only built for radio (OK, so Tokyo Tower is more than twice as tall). The tower is not hard to find: it's at the east end of the snow sculptures and is very tall and red.

While it is just a lookout tower like every other Japanese city has, it's still got a great view of Sapporo and the snow festival below, and you

can get some pretty great postcards up top. For the nominally adventurous, you can take the stairs down from the observation deck, and you'll even get a free cup of warm milk for your efforts! You're not required to drink it.

Finally, don't rule out a day trip outside of Sapporo if you've got the time around the snow festival and various winter sports. I highly suggest a trip to the Asahiyama Zoo, in Asahikawa. While it's a bit of a train

ride out there, this is the biggest zoo in Japan, and the furthest north(!). T

he zoo was recently remodeled and has some fantastically interactive enclosures which have you up close and personal with seals, penguins and polar bears. Also, if you time your trip right, you can watch the zoo's world-famous Penguin March, in which the keepers take the resident Emperor Penguins for a walk around the zoo. Definitely something to write home about — just be prepared for ridiculous crowds.

Best of luck to those heading up to the Snow Festival this year, and those of you who aren't, rest assured this stuff will be waiting for you when you do get up there. If anyone has other suggestions for things to see or do in and around Sapporo, please let us all know! Also, you can find a map of all the places mentioned above [HERE](#).



## Discount Snowboards

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## Love and Relationships:

## Valentine's Day

By Kym Farrant

I guess because this is the February issue, I should talk about Valentine's Day even though I don't really feel like talking about this sweetest most sickening of days. Having said that, I am the author of the "Love and Relationships" column so I feel obliged to dispense some Japanese Valentine facts for any 1<sup>st</sup> year JETs out there (or 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> year JETs who have spent the last one or two Valentine's Days camped out under their kotatus. Bloody hell it's cold!). In Japan, there are two days of "ラブ" (not including Christmas).

Valentine's Day (Feb 14<sup>th</sup>)

A day where girls give handmade cookies or chocolates to the guy they like (or to male work colleagues, which is known as *giri-choko*, obligation chocolate). Girls will spend hours making handmade cookies, chocolates, and cakes in hopes of sending that special guy into a sugar-induced craze just so that he might actually ask them out on a date.

(Editor's note: Just make sure you don't do what I did last year. I went to the Shiroi Koibito Chocolate Factory in Sapporo during my trip to

the Yuki Matsuri and got omiyage for all the teachers in my staff room. I completely forgot I was returning to school on V-day. I gave everyone omiyage but some of the male staff were very surprised and tried to talk to me for various reasons for the rest of the week. Talk about uncomfortable/awkward! At least I got to explain to them that in the US/West, V-day is really what they call, "White Day" and they were shocked. ☺ )

White Day (March 14<sup>th</sup>)

A day where guys who received a "chocolate of love" or a "chocolate of courtesy", in return, give marshmallows, cookies, white choc, etc., to the girl.

On this day, all the poor suckers who received a "Luv Chocolate" or a "Courtesy Chocolate" have to give marshmallows, cookies, white chocolate, etc., to the girl who gave him the little brown balls of chocolate her blood and sweat. There is a phrase that I feel I should mention as it is important on White Day and it is *sanbai gaeshi*, "thrice the return". This means that guys have to give back three times as much as they received on Valentine's Day! Take note ladies! You know how the BOE is always going

on about "Cultural Exchange"? Well, I think that this is one that I'll be taking back home with me!

This year, Valentine's Day and White Day are on the weekend, so make sure you book any restaurants in advance. (The couples will be out in full force...) Alternatively try:

## Akashi Kaikyo Bridge

Take the JR train to Maiko station, and walk 3mins to the bridge. You can go up underneath the bridge, and it has some great views (it's enclosed, so you won't completely freeze) and has a nice little café. It's best on a clear night, when you can watch the sunset next to Awaji, and then see all the lights on the bridge light up.

## Hiking

Get away from the crowds, and spend some quality time together. Go hike a mountain ☺ I suggest the old JR Fukuchiyama line. It is an easy 6km hike and it's unique in that you follow the old train line and go through many old train tunnels. Take a torch/flashlight because some of these tunnels are long and very dark, and check the weather conditions before you go.

However, FEBRUARY IS COLD, so stay at home under your kotatsu and get cozy. Candle lit dinner and a movie. What more could a girl want?

## Tips to make your Valentine's Day a Success

Wander around the classrooms at lunchtime on the run up to V-Day and you're bound to be given many chocos. Set up a V-day post box for students to secretly send cards to each other (and you). Finally, make yourself look pretty and get out of the house! There will be lots of other singles feeling sorry for themselves at this time of year, so go catch one!

Love ya xxx



## And now for something completely different

The strange thoughts in my mind this month (AKA Kym over-analyses everything)

I guess the one thing that has really got to me recently is re-contracting!! This year's decision has been a real struggle for me, but I've found it really interesting listening to other people's reasons/motivations for staying or going.

It surprises me how many people base their decision on their love life, even if they don't 100% admit it. Whether it is due to a loved one they have found here in Japan or the ones they have back home, or vice-versa – a lack of love, love plays a huge role in many people's choice. Maybe not everyone will agree with this reason as their primary one, but your love life does have a big impact on your happiness, so it will greatly colour your perception of your time here in Japan.

I've always sworn to never let my love life influence my life or travel decisions, but does this mean I just end up being lonely? I try to be logical and do what's best for me, hoping I find someone along the way, but I feel, particularly for single girls in Japan, your strength can be tested. One year of being single and having fun with your friends is fine, but after three years, you might start to question what's wrong with you (or "What's wrong with all these guys?! Hello!") "Why don't guys want to be with me?" and your short answer will be, "You're in Japan." (See November article for this topic).

I feel like Japan can warp people's perspectives sometimes. (It certainly does with mine. I'm permanently wearing my rose-tinted glasses!) It seems some people remain with a partner in Japan much longer than if they were living in their home countries. I mean this in terms of compatibility, "the one"-type thing. In your home country, you would probably hold slightly different expecta-

tions and allowances in your relationship. Some people have made more drastic life-changing decisions after only knowing their partner for a relatively short period of time (and only in Japan). On the other hand, many couples who started on JET with me have since broken up here or after returning home. I guess that's life, but I also feel like Japan has a strange influence on things (or is it just me?).

This winter, I traveled to Thailand and Cambodia, and apart from being shocked by the amount of public affection between people (I've been in Japan too long!), it was also a kind of wake up call. What do I really want in life? Have I altered my standards in Japan just so I'm not lonely? Am I rushing/wishing/dreaming my life away, just because everyone else is moving so fast? Do I stay in Japan because of a guy?

A friend of mine has been dating a Japanese girl for about a year now. They have already discussed the possibility of marriage. I knew this guy back in England, so I practically fell over when he told me this. I'm not saying that it's a bad thing; I just feel after only a year of knowing her, and being only 24 years old, where did that more carefree, chilled out guy go? My friend is, however, being realistic. They know that if they do decide to marry, one of them will eventually have to commit to the other's country. This is a massive commitment! So first, they are both going to try to live and work in Australia (neutral ground) and see how they get along in a different environment. I wish



them both the best of luck.

This couple is not alone. I know of many other people considering big changes in their life. Does everyone rush because our time in Japan is limited or are we just at that stage in life called, dare I say it, "growing up?"

If you find yourself making these kinds of decisions or are in these situations, double check that you're thinking straight and being realistic and not living in the "Happy Japan Bubble". [NOTE: For me, Japan creates a "Kawaii Bubble" in which I live and I forget all notions of the outside world]. Ask yourself: If I was back in (insert home country here) would I be dating this person? Would they stand up to what I want in a partner back home? Is he Mr. Right? Or just Mr. Right Now?

Anyway, enough of pouring my thoughts out. I will now retreat back into my "Kawaii Bubble." Maybe I'll go shopping – oh, look, BOOTS!



# New Years Eve... AWAJI STYLE!



By Kate Emory

## Top Ten Tips on celebrating New Year's: Awaji-style!

1. Go shopping for food mid-day on the 31st. This is to ensure the prime crazy time to enter any Japanese shopping center. People will be everywhere, and food will be stacked 10 high, and so cheap that you will wish every day was New Year's Eve.
2. Have a BBQ on the beach. (Come on, we're Awaji! What else do you expect!)
3. Ignore the rain, and seek shelter in the alcove of the women's washroom.
4. Don't ignore the hail. Get off the beach and into someone's house. Preferably nearby and preferably someone you know.
5. Mix western with Japanese: hamburgers, sausages, salad, sushi, soba and mochi. This will make sure all cultures and people are represented and no one feels left out. Then feast like there is no tomorrow!
6. Near midnight go to the temple, and since no one you know has a proper watch, use a keitai to do the countdown. You may have to countdown several times this way, but one of them is sure to be on the button!
7. After the temple, go back to the beach! The hail has stopped anyway! Along the way, open that champagne that you bought. Now's a great time to begin the party.
8. Go swimming...yeah...not the brightest idea, but hey! It was fun! (but freezing!)
9. Go to your local hang out or bar and spread the joy of the New Year. Teach everyone you know the phrase "Happy New Year!" and say it as loud as you can. No...louder. LOUDER!
10. Go home and wake up on New Year's Day to konbini food and a movie marathon.

**And that is how the average Awaji-ite rings in the New Year!**

## Toyama Exchange:

# Kanazawa's *The Cottage*

By Michael Grudunski

The Cottage  
金沢市 (Kanazawa)  
香林坊 (Kourinbou) 2-12-10  
せせらぎ道り Sesaragidouri)  
Ph: 076.262.3277  
Open: Sunday~Tuesday;  
& Thursday~Saturday:  
12:00~2:30 p.m.  
6:00~10:00 p.m.  
(Closed every first and third  
Tuesday of the month)

Kanazawa is rightly known and celebrated for its many cultural wonders: Kenrokuen; the Museum of 21st Century Art; and the temples of Teramachi, to name a few. The city is also an urban refuge for those who crave "big city" nightlife and restaurants. Near the shopping and partying glory of Katamachi lies the quiet street of Sesaragidouri (located on the interactive map) lined with a host of hip joints in which to dine; get a cof-

fee; or even relish some premium chocolate.

One such restaurant is *The Cottage*, one of the most chill and comfy places I have yet to find in this country. Offering tastes of both Britain and Ireland, the Cottage sets itself apart from the competition with handmade meals and some of the friendliest owners you'll meet this side of the Japanese alps.

The Cottage is run by Tony and Momo, a delightful married couple who met years ago at a Halloween party in Ireland. Tony is from the United Kingdom, and Momo is originally from Ishikawa-ken. The story of their meeting is a funny and fascinating one which, if you're lucky, they'll share with you as Van Morrison spins on the turntable.

I recently sat down at their bar and sought respite from the cold, driving sleet with a marvelous glass of mulled wine (780円). Suffused with spices, citrus, and cloves, it'll warm your bones on a brutal winter's day.

The food is also top-notch, pos-

sessing the quality that can only come with handmade care. All of the pasta is made on the premises, and so the vegetarian lasagna (1,380円) is well worth your yen.

I also recommend the handmade curry and rice: it's not the usual カレー you find in Japan. Complete with potatoes, carrots, and other morsels of sheer goodness, it'll fill you up and make you question the need for dessert. But press on! For after dinner is the joy of a traditional Irish coffee (880円). You can enjoy your drink either perusing a copy of *The Official England Cricket Manual* (which is one of several periodicals at the bar), or discussing the finer points of Dexter Gordon with Tony.

If you seek some high-quality comfort food in a casual, friendly environment, look no further. The Cottage is the perfect compliment to a day in the gardens or at the museum. It will sate you. It will relax you. And it will make you feel right at home, even if home is nowhere near the British isles.

