



Hyogo Times
June 2008

TRAVEL JAPAN

Jeff Weese
takes us around
our own Hyogo

TANUKI TESTES

Clayton Houck
uncovers the
mystery behind the myth

JUDGING JET

Politics with
Paul takes a
closer look at
the Programme

*GODZILLA! RUN!

(to a bookstore for his new tell-all memoir)
EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW!

RELATIONSHIPS

GO-BETWEENS

TEACHING

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On the cover...

This month, Chip Boles contributed a very special cover for the Hyogo Times.

He explains:

"In an English class at my school, a textbook had some dialogues about 'Who do you think is stronger — Godzilla or King Kong?'"

"In that book, Godzilla won every time. I started thinking about what great symbols of Japan and America (respectively) they are. The cover kinda came out of that."



Cover art by Chip Boles

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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.

Submit by the 15th of each month to:
submit.hyogotimes@gmail.com

Visit us online at:
<http://hyogoajet.net>

From The Editor...

Hey and welcome to the June issue of the Hyogo Times!

June takes us into "rainy season" and hopefully this issue will give you something to read while the rain is pounding on the windows. Lots of Japanese complain about the rainy season but I personally think it is a great thing — it sure as hell beats the four rainy seasons we have in Ireland!

This edition of the Hyogo Times is an especially practical one. We have instructions on how to look after your futons and tatami mats from Jeff, tips on what to do at a wedding (yes we are ALL freaked out by the fact our friends are getting married! What the hell are they doing?), as well as the usual tasty recipe from Jojo and the great travel advice from Jeff Weese.

I've already followed some of Jeff's suggestions (Okayama International Villas are gorgeous!) and I will certainly be following some of the suggestions from this Hyogo-centred one. I'm also tempted to follow some of the suggestions Tori makes in her article (a Sonic the Hedgehog hairstyle would look good on me...wouldn't it?)

I'd also like to recommend Paul's article where he takes an in-depth look at the JET Programme and gives some comments on how it could be improved. You may not agree with all (or any) of what he says but it is still a beneficial article to read and think about. Nobody would be so bold as to claim the JET Programme is perfect but it does have many good points. The good in JET needs to be expanded on and the bad limited to ensure its continued success. As JET's we have a much closer knowledge of the Programme than anybody else.



If we don't let other people know our opinions — what is good about the Programme, what is bad — then the JET Programme is doomed to stagnation. And just as stagnant water should be thrown away, a JET Programme which cannot change with the passing of time should also suffer the same fate.

Anyway if you have any comments that you would like to make on Paul's article (or any other article) please put your comments into writing and email them to me. The Hyogo Times team loves hearing from you in every form — letters, articles, poetry, photos, drawings — you name it, we love it! Ok so that is all from me for now except to wish you all a happy June and a very sunny rainy season!

Happy reading!

—Kevin

And From The PR... JEFF!

Daniel Carter, our PR, has been very busy lately! Yes, it is! So busy, in fact, that he couldn't quite get us an editorial this month, or PRtorial, or whatever the hell the 300-400 words that usually appear in this space are called.

In Dan's stead, here's a sampling of what's kept our fearless representative so very, very busy, along with my jackass commentary! Prease to enjoy!

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/hyogo-jets/message/3764>

A friendly reminder to check your email inboxes! I often forget too!

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/hyogo-jets/message/3763>

A friendly welcome to the new JETs that will be joining us in August! n00bs!!!

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/hyogo-jets/message/3760>

A friendly re-post about the Toyota seminar applications, as the first links didn't work!

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/hyogo-jets/message/3753>

A friendly mention that you can apply for Toyota seminars! Not sure why, but yay for Toyota advertisements!

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/hyogo-jets/message/3752>

Some friendly tips on where to get Aussie wine! Canadian wine is better!

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/hyogo-jets/message/3748>

A friendly shout out to Ann Chow and her website find — read books for free without being a pirate! Arrr....

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/hyogo-jets/message/3735>

A friendly notice about a new JET special interest group making sure we're not insane... or insanierr....

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/hyogo-jets/message/3734>

A friendly plea to help make AJET better! Help them help themselves! They need it! Yes, they do!

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/hyogo-jets/message/3733>



A friendly note about Himeji tourism! "So there's this castle..."

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/hyogo-jets/message/3732>

A friendly note about Himeji's Yatai Festival! Yatta for yatai!!!!

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/hyogo-jets/message/3731>

A friendly note about the Aioi Peron Matsuri! I had a friend named Casey Peron, wonder if this is related...

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/hyogo-jets/message/3730>

A friendly notice about Hyogo tourism! "So there's this castle..."

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/hyogo-jets/message/3729>

A friendly free advertisement for Toyota's Nagoya facility tours! Three Toyota posts in less than two weeks!

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/hyogo-jets/message/3728>

A friendly reminder about the AJET haiku and photo competitions!

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/hyogo-jets/message/3727>

A friendly reminder of a book sale... in Shizuoka-ken? Five kens away? Useful!

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/hyogo-jets/message/3726>

A friendly reminder about the 2008 AJET awards! Oooh! I hope I win one!

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/hyogo-jets/message/3725>

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/hyogo-jets/message/3721>

A friendly post about a Firefox plug-in that makes nihongo more palatable! Who are these assholes who keep setting foxes on fire, and then "plugging" them? Is that a sex act?

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/hyogo-jets/message/3720>

A friendly shout-out to some Tajima rock bands! They do rock, as does the Taj! I should know!

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/hyogo-jets/message/3719>

A friendly reminder to add more AJET junk mail in your physical mail slot. I like to use my newsletters as rolling papers for cigarettes. Mmm.. inky!

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/hyogo-jets/message/3718>

A friendly plea for "funky" people for Taj Ultimate! Hmm... am I funky enough?

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/hyogo-jets/message/3717>

A friendly free advertisement for an advertisement website! That's a lot of advertising!

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/hyogo-jets/message/3716>

A friendly free advertisement for a travel company! I love having ads spammed to my inbox!

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/hyogo-jets/message/3709>

A friendly announcement telling us all the HAJET library is still alive and running, now in wiki form! Wiki-ed! Ha ha ha! I kill me!

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/hyogo-jets/message/3683>

A friendly list of "Bling-Bling" (huh?) events at bars that are gaijin-friendly need gaijin money and free advertising!

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/hyogo-jets/message/3682>

A friendly reminder that the AJET peer support group still exists! Yay!

Nothin' but love Dan!

— Jeff

Goin to the chapel to see someone else get married

Love and Relationships:

By MacKenzie Roebuck-Walsh

The Japanese obsession with the western wedding, which you can witness even in the inaka (my town of 60,000 sports several chapels including one that looks like a church straight out of Mexico!) assures brides-to-be that June is their month. This is because according to popular Japanese knowledge, blushing brides run amuck in June all across the western world.

However this June bride idea is not just a stereotype Japan picked-up in a little ditty. In fact, according to census information, it is the most popular month to wed. Things like fresh flowers, sunshine and summer vacations all seem to combine to pack June full of eternal vows and wedding parties.

If you are like me and have several weddings to attend in the not-so-distant future, here are a few tips for the big day that will have Granny giving you a sip of the fine champagne and your friends remembering you fondly as that

ideal guest who danced with the flower girl and Grandpa.

Married Couples

On the special day it is your job to bolster marriage. Sure, just this morning you had a first-rate row over who was going to stay sober enough to drive home. But on the big day, put all that time-tested love aside and tell the couple what bliss being wed truly is.

Thinking on all the positives might even turn your flames of rage into a fire of passion. So throw out the car keys and rent a room — attempting to out-do the newlyweds next door could fan those flames into a five alarm fire!

Dating Couples

Men: Your honey-bunny is more than likely freaking out at the sight of two of her nearest and dearest heading down the aisle. The pressure is now on for her. This doesn't mean she wants a ring tomorrow, but she does need that little kiss of assurance or hand squeeze during the vows to know that, if not tomorrow, thae may-be by Christmas... of 2012.

For extra brownie points don't forget to buy the groom a drink and twirl the bride around the floor!

Women: For years men have been told that the wedding day is the beginning of the end. Do a little preparatory shopping at Donkihote and wow your date with a sexy bride costume — a little reminder that a big rock is just his ticket to a wilder ride.

To score big with the newlyweds make sure your dress is understated — it is the bride's day in the sun. Also bring along a few tissues to dole out when the tears of joy start!

Single

Single and ready to mingle? Take a page from the movie Wedding Crashers — don't get down and blue about being fabulously alone while all your friends scamper down the aisle. With todays divorce rates still pushing 50 per cent it just means you're being extra cautious and enjoying the fun while you're at it!

Dance, dance, dance and if another hot singleton approaches don't be afraid to say "Baby, I'll give you my room key" and wink when the classics are played after Grandpa has gone to bed!

The Whole Shebang

Everyone should brush-up their dancing skills. Take a ballroom class or learn a classic wedding dance. Many people dread weddings because they "can't dance." Everyone can dance... some just need a little practice. So get out there and shake your thang!



Those American weddings in the deep southern states are always such a classy affair!

Kansai Concerts

July Listings

25,26,27

Fuji Rock Festival — feat. Gogol Bordello (!!!) and roughly 100 other performers
3-day ticket: 39,800 yen, 1-day ticket: 16,800 yen. Parking/camping pass: 3,000 yen/day each. Pre-book now, regular sales begin June 7.
See {www.smash-uk.com/frf08/} for massive full band lineup and details.

23RD

Good 4 Nothing
2,300 yen, doors @ 6:30 p.m.
Club Drop, Osaka

30TH

Jason Mraz
6,000 yen, doors @ 6 p.m.
Namba Hatch, Osaka

Bar Trinity

Sundays - Guinness ¥600
Special Discount for
AJET Members

WhyNot Japan
International Party June. 13
¥3000 (2500 WhyNot Members)
All You Can Drink

June 7 - Urban Palyground
(Electro & Breaks)
June 20 - PJ3 & The Groove Kings
(Live Funk & Soul)
June 21 - Flava 2 w/MC Isonoman
(Underground Hiphop)



TEL: 078. 333. 1286

SUN-THURS: 19:00-2:00 FRI/SAT: 19:00-5:00

Servin' up Soup

Summer Veggie Soup with lentils, pesto and parmesan

By Jojo Jackson

My inspiration for this recipe came as I was biking to school past garden after garden bursting with new summer vegetables. I know that this plenitude of fresh veggies doesn't necessarily translate to cheaper and more variety of produce in shops (since everything is deemed to be imported) but nonetheless it got my taste buds going!

The summer weather also inspired me to make use of the roof-top garden above our flat, and I consequently invested in some dirt, pots and herb seeds. Now everything is growing really well so if you have a sunny windowsill and see some potted herbs for sale (I've seen basil plants for 90 yen!), you should definitely buy them. There's nothing like fresh herbs to add flavour and interest to a meal.

Keeping that in mind, making your own stock adds loads to this simple recipe. To make stock, fill a saucepan with any raw veggies you have in the fridge — I usually roughly cut up a carrot, a stick of celery (leaves and all), an onion and throw in a big handful of herbs from the 'garden' (rosemary, sage, thyme and oregano are my favourites). If you eat meat you can also add uncooked chicken bones to the mix. Cover the lot with cold water and simmer for about 45 minutes or until you think all the goodness has come out of the veggies and into the water. Strain the liquid and reserve.

Any veggies work in this soup but these are some of the really good ones: carrot, green beans, snow peas, courgette, red cabbage, yellow or red capsicum, peas.



Summer Veggie Soup

Ingredients:

- 1.5 litres stock
- 1 onion, diced
- 1 clove of garlic, minced
- Vegetables of your choice
- 1 cup of lentils
- 2 tbsp pesto
- Some freshly grated parmesan
- Salt and pepper
- Some fresh basil

To prepare:

- Cook the lentils in 1 litre of boiling water until soft.
- Gently fry the onion and garlic in some olive oil in a sauce pan.
- Add the stock and bring up to a simmer.
- Add veggies (add the ones that take the longest to cook first).
- Add cooked lentils.
- Season to taste.

To serve:

- Ladle soup into bowls, making sure that each one has equal quantities of veggies, lentils and stock.
- Dollop a spoonful of pesto into each bowl
- Sprinkle a handful of parmesan and some freshly chopped basil.
- Grind a bit of black pepper into each bowl for good measure.
- Serve with crusty bread and olive oil for dipping.



Stealth Gaijin

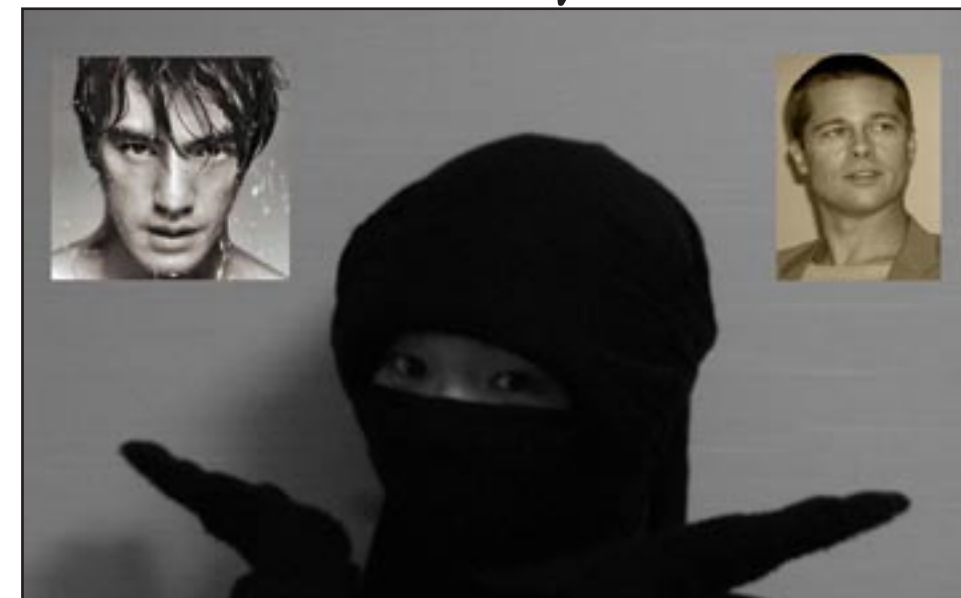
Life as an ASIAN JET

Last month I went a bit on the heavier side of social politics so I'm going to keep it a little lighter this time. I am not MacKenzie (the *Hyogo Times* Love and Relationships guru) nor am I a professional psychiatrist/therapist and consequently I am undoubtedly, *super-unqualified* to talk about this topic... but I'm going to do it anyway.

Romance in Japan for a member of the Stealth Gaijin can be *chotto* difficult. It's a situation which is not easy to navigate due to the intricacies of looking like "*one of them*," compounded by the problem of speaking *chotto dake nihongo*. Of course, the circumstances that make it a problem depend on who you talk to, who you date, and how you see it, but some special problems do exist.

Back home, I remember my female Asian friends at high school clamoring for the next picture of the hot male Cantonese pop singers or the up-and-coming J-pop stars. While we may make fun of the pretty J-boys at the schools we teach at now, those pretty boys were loved by my friends back then. Some of my friends liked them so much they even started learning Japanese from anime or manga just so they might be able to one day snag a pretty J-boy themselves.

Some of these friends are envious of me because I will certainly run into pretty J-boys on the street every now and then. They imagine that I will head off into the sunset and live happily ever after with one of them. What my friends forget is that there is a language barrier, and even if there wasn't one, there are plenty of cultural differences to make up for it. There are definitely gaijin in Japan who are here for the sole purpose of finding a Japanese/Asian partner, but I didn't come here just to look



Stealth Gaijin — disappointingly *not* servile Japanese mates hungry for Gaijin love.

for a pretty J-boy, even if it might speed up the "learning Japanese" part!

Being approached or hit on in Japan is a strange experience for me because of my Stealthiness. In a Japanese man's eyes, I am "unnatural" because I can't speak "my own" language. But it is still "*sugoi*!" that English flies out of my mouth faster than the shinkansen trains. However, the coolness of English aside, most Japanese men do not know what to say once they find out why I speak English.

Then there's that other part of the spectrum: dating a fellow gaijin. When a stealth gaijin dates a gaijin-looking gaijin, observers presume the stealth gaijin is Japanese (because there just aren't any other Asian ethnicities in Japan. There just aren't!). Consequently the attention, and sometimes ire, drawn from the Japanese and from fellow gaijin can be quite uncomfortable.

In addition, my conversations with unknown gaijin men who are trying to flirt with me often tend to go like this:
Him: *Hello./Konnichiwa./Konbanwa.*
Me: *Hello.*
Him: [*insert icebreaker in Japanese*]

Me: *Uhm, okay. (Sometimes I understand. Other times, not so much.)*

Him: [*insert stuff in Japanese*]

Me: *I don't know what you're saying. My Japanese isn't that great...*

Him: *Am I saying it wrong? But wow! You speak really good English! [proceeds to jouzu my eigo.]*

Me: *Thanks...but I'm not Japanese.*

Him: *Oh, but you look it?*

Me: *Yeah...but I'm not. I'm from the U.S...*

This is almost rhetorical, but do guys ever listen? I mean, I'm telling you I don't understand you in a language that we both speak! Anyway, the interest slowly, but surely, dissolves once I tell him I am a gaijin from the US of A, hiding in the Land of the Rising Sun, and thus am not Japanese. Now that I think about it, I wonder if this fading of interest should be considered racism or preference...

In any case, I may have had a few bumps in the road as far as romance in Japan goes, but I can't say I'm not having fun. Certain moments definitely provide me with material for a comedy routine should I ever need it!

GODZILLA

By Chip Boles and Clay Eaton

In an exclusive interview, Godzilla, the big man of Japanese cinema himself, sat down with the Hyogo Times to talk about his career, nuclear protests and the "feud" with a certain giant primate.

HT: First, thanks so much for meeting with us. I know a lot of our readers are huge fans.

GZ: No, thank you.

HT: So, I bet you get this all the time, but you look taller on screen.

GZ: (Laughing) Yeah, I get that a lot. The camera adds 10 pounds, a few hundred feet, all that.



SPEAKS

HT: But you're looking great.

GZ: Thanks. I try to stay in shape. I've been working with Kong's trainer, this guy outta LA.

HT: That brings up a big point of controversy about you, right off the bat. Many people say that you are in a vicious feud with King Kong.

GZ: Yeah, I'd like to clear that up — there is no feud. That all comes out of the "giant-monster-thing," which, by the way, I don't agree with that term. But anyway, everybody thinks



we should be fighting, so that's what they sell.

In reality, I've worked with him a few times and he's a prince, and a real professional. I'm happy as hell over his success with the Pete Jackson re-release and all. He sure had a better time of it than I did. For the record, I never approved of Matthew Broderick...

HT: But getting back to your relationship with Kong...

GZ: Yeah, no, we've worked together and it was great. We're friends. I

mean, there aren't that many of us big guys out there, and it takes one to know one. You know?

HT: I'd like to talk about your career. You are widely recognized, not just as a prolific performer with a career span-

ning decades, but as a symbol of Japan. Your early work differed greatly from the later stuff. Can you tell us about that?

GZ: Sure. Yeah, I've been working a long time, and it all started out as anti-nuclear protest. Real powerful, art-film stuff. Japan had just been through the hardest part in its history, and (the director, Ishirō) Honda wanted to address the difficult, complex feelings that Japanese were having after WWII.

In that first movie, *Gojira*, there's a sound you hear even before the credits come up — of "me" walking. Huge, booming steps. Did you know that sound is made from recordings of American bombs being dropped on Japan? It's true. Honda wasn't pulling any punches.

There's a hospital scene right after the big attack. The hospital is filled with victims with burns and much worse, too. He even showed kids just staring at their dead parents, and doctors finding radiation in the victims of the "monster" attack. God, that really got to me. Most movie-goers in Japan at the time had seen this in real life. I believed in the film 100 per cent — still do. Like I said; it was brave, powerful, real film-making.

HT: But they never did this kind of thing again in any other Godzilla movie. Why not?

GZ: Well, it didn't fit the feeling of the time, did it? Japan was trying to get past the war, find a new identity in industrial success, all that. Images of the war were out. But entertainment was in.

HT: How did you feel about this new direction?

GZ: Ummm... I can't say it was my favorite, but you gotta eat — you know? When I started, I never expected to be in another movie. But the audience was there, so we went ahead. And all those crazy guys I "fought?" Jeez. We had a great time.

HT: Some say you started the whole Kaiju genre — translates as something like "mysterious beast" movies where it's basically guys fighting with each other on model train sets. Do you agree?

GZ: Sure, I guess that's where a lot of it started. The movies we were making at the time were really just escapist and fun.

HT: They weren't totally devoid of

content. Once you fought a smog monster, an incarnation of pollution. In another, you fight against a monster created by Americans to stifle Japan's economic development (*Ed. note: this was in the '80s*). In *Son of Godzilla* you fight against elementary and junior high school bullies, at least metaphorically. That definitely had a message.

GZ: Sure, I guess, but it wasn't exactly eco-terrorism. It was fun, but it was fluff, like *Captain Planet* or something. (Laughing) Earth, Wind, Water, Fire, Heart!

HT: Do you still feel like "a symbol of Japan?"

GZ: Sure, well, I've had a big part in pop-culture here, and pop-culture always reflects the rest of the culture. I guess you could say that I've

reflected Japan at different times in its history. The same thing is true for Kong, but with the U.S. — he's this big, hairy gaijin. (Laughter)

But seriously, in his story, he's someone who's brought to America against his will. His story touches on perceptions of other cultures, slavery, America's desire to capitalize on nature — all kinds of things. He certainly reflects America of a certain era.

HT: What do you see for the future?

GZ: Well, the movie-making has always had lulls. We just had the 50th anniversary of the original movie — God, I feel old — and it went really well. Lots of folks had never even seen the original. But who knows? I don't think being involved in a culture's idea of itself can just stop. As Japan changes, so will I.

HT: Thanks again for talking with us.

GZ: My pleasure.



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HT: Thanks again for talking with us.

GZ: My pleasure.

The Laws of JET

By Suzie Winterton

Author's Note: These are not plagiarised from Murphy's/Sod's Law in any way, shape or form.

- Any word translated as "holiday" will, in 90 per cent of all cases, not mean "obligation-free time away from teachers and students."
- There will never be a well-meaning Japanese person who speaks English around when you need them.
- You will never see your students outside of school until you are in a situation in where you really do not want to see them.
- When you have finally learnt enough Japanese to talk to your students, they will start speaking English.
- The more time you have, the less work you'll do.
- Anything the students remember will in no way be related to what they need to know to pass the exam.
- The students will only pay attention when you screw up.
- You will learn more from your students than they will from you.
- Any good weather will be succeeded by bad weather that lasts for twice as long. Probably with bugs.
- Any insect that isn't poisonous will arrive in hordes.
- Individuality is fine, just do it in big groups.
- Dignity does not apply to gaijin.
- Vitally important information about any event of consequence will be written in obscure kanji.
- No Japanese map will be to scale. Ever.
- Non-paid leave does not hap-



pen, even as a preventative against insanity.

- Exciting things will happen in your area the day you are not there.
- The simpler a problem is the more people it will take to solve it.
- Any Japanese word said with complete confidence in front of a large amount of people will be wrong.
- As soon as you master any kind of system, it will be changed.
- The smartest kid in class will be a loudmouthed brat.
- Make friends with kids. They are the only people rude enough

to tell you when you f**k up (and to tell you that kanji is overrated).

- If asked to guess a Japanese woman's age: Pick a number anywhere between eighteen and thirty. Even if you get it wrong they'll be happy.
- There is a Go Home Early Club at every JHS and Senior High, however unofficial.
- No gaijin will ever interpret phrases like "you don't have to bring anything, really" correctly.
- The gym will always be the coldest place within school grounds. This includes the sports field.

Elementary School Brutality

A peek inside the life of an elementary school JET

By Camaron Voyles

Do you remember playing the game "Red Rover" in your elementary schools as a child? Of course you do! It was a game where important life lessons were learned, fun was had by all, and no one got hurt. That's how I remember it, and that's how and why I made my worst decision as an elementary school ALT.

I went home to America over Christmas, and on my first day back in class, haggard, unshaven, and wanting nothing more than to crawl under my desk and take a nap, I was greeted by a third grade homeroom teacher who appeared from nowhere and cheerfully asked "What is the English lesson today?"

This was something of a dilemma as I, of course, had spent the entire vacation playing *Halo 3* with my friends rather than use the time to plan lessons ahead. With nothing planned, I suggested the first cheap alternative to a real lesson that came to my mind: "Um... how about we play a traditional American elementary school game?" My frantic mind landed on Red Rover, on the merit that it was the only elementary school game that I could remember at the moment.

And so it began. Red Rover is a game in which two opposing teams of children hold hands to form two chains. One team then calls the name of a person on the other team, who charges at the opponent's line and tries to break through. If he succeeds, he triumphantly returns to his own line. If he fails, he is absorbed into his opponents' chain.

During the explanation to the students, I mentioned that this game could be a bit dangerous, so they should be careful, although I followed this by laughing confidently to reassure the homeroom teacher, who was glaring my way with increasingly wide, fearful eyes.



His fears (and the doubt I was starting to feel) proved well-founded when the first boy whose name was called sprinted to the other line, took a hard clothesline to the throat, and dropped like a sack of grain.

I don't know about you, but I certainly don't remember ANYONE attacking the throat in my games of Red Rover. After checking to make sure he was all right (he was...just), I instructed the children to keep their arms well below throat level and began to lament the fact I would almost certainly be out of a job by the time the day was over.

Miraculously, after the initial throat attack, everything went smoothly. This was mainly due to the fact that the kids, realizing that what happened to the first kid looked really painful, moved forward reluctantly upon hearing their names called, bounced lightly off the arms of their opponents and allowed themselves to be captured. I was content with this.

This continued until the class was very nearly over and I thought I would be spared the guilt of any more injuries. Then one of the teams called the name of undoubtedly the smallest girl in the class and I started to get that Bad Feel-

This girl was obviously not like the others, those wimps who were content to just go through the motions and be taken prisoner. No, she had been *waiting* for this. I saw a gleam in her eyes that told me she was going to go all out and she just might break through!

Except she decided to run right at the link in the chain created by the two largest boys in the class. My stomach and jaw both dropped as she sprinted with reckless glee at the boys, who were swinging their arms back and forth, and she was almost to them when *oh balls they just hit her in the MOUTH!* She dropped to the floor, hands immediately rising to cover her mouth. I rushed over to her, watching with horror as her eyes first slowly widened with shock and then slowly filled with tears.

I eventually got her to lower her hands and, expecting to see the end of my teaching career represented by her mangled mouth, looked with immense relief upon no apparent injury. She stopped crying after a moment, the bell mercifully rung, and I learned a valuable lesson: I swear I will never let my students play Red Rover again.

King of the Hill might be fun, though.

You Don't Know Sumo

By Catherine Reid

It is thought that sumo was first performed in Japan in 453 A.D. by Chinese wrestlers at the funeral of a Japanese Emperor. The earliest forms of sumo have been documented as far back as the eighth century, where there were few rules and the unarmed wrestlers often fought to the death. These original sumo wrestlers are thought to have been samurai. Back then there was a strong association with Shinto religious ceremonies, many of which are still performed today.

The Ring

In the sixteenth century, the use of the dohyo (ring) was first introduced for tournaments. The dohyo is made from a mixture of clay and sand and is 34 to 60 centimetres high with a diameter of 4.55 metres. It is bounded by tawara (rice-straw bales) which are partially buried in the dohyo.

Around the outside of the ring there is a fine layer of lightly brushed sand to determine whether a wrestler has touched the outside of the ring. In the centre there are shikiri-sen (two white lines) which the wrestlers stand behind before making their charge at each other.

The Wrestlers

Wrestlers (referred to as rishiki) wear only a mawashi (silk loin cloth) during a fight. It is about nine metres long and 60 cms wide. The mawashi is folded in six parts and wrapped around the waist four to seven times, depending on the size of the rishiki.

The combatants' hairstyles, fashionable in the Edo Period (1603-1867), resemble a ginko leaf but also act as a form of head protection if a



rishiki falls during a fight.

The Ranks

There are only about 800 rishiki (from trainees to professional) in Japan. There are six divisions in sumo, with the wrestlers in the highest two divisions being the only salaried wrestlers (Sekitori). The highest division (Maku-uchi) and the second highest (Juryo) comprise of only 42 and 28 wrestlers respectively. The wrestlers in the four lower divisions are paid only a subsistence allowance and must do chores at their training stable to pay their way.

Sumo has a very strict hierarchy which is based purely on sporting merit. The Yokozuna (grand champion) is the highest ranked rishiki. Once promoted to yokozuna, he must either maintain his high performance standards or retire. A yokozuna is never demoted. There have been only 69 yokozuna in the 300 years since the position was introduced into sumo.

There are two active yokozuna today — Hakuho and Asashoryu, both of whom are Mongolian.

Tournaments

Sumo tournaments are held six times a year in Japan, with each tournament lasting for 15 days. Prior to competing each day, the rishiki partake in the dohyo iri (ring entering) ceremony wearing a kesho-mawashi (a silk apron with elaborately embroidered patterns costing approximately \$4,000 US).

Rituals are performed to attract the gods' attention by clapping the hands together then holding the arms out with the palms up to prove the wrestler has no concealed weapons. Leg lifts and a heavy stomp on the dohyo drives out any evil spirits.

The Battle

Before the fight begins the fighters must again perform certain rituals including leg stomps, clapping, rinsing out the mouth, wiping the body with a paper towel and throwing salt into the ring to purify it. Once the rituals have been performed, each rishiki takes his position behind the shikiri-sen and charges his opponent.

Fights are usually brief. The loser

is the first to touch the ground with any part of his body, apart from the feet, or the first to touch the ground outside the ring. Once the fight is complete, the rishiki return to their side and bow to each other before the gyoji (referee) points his gunbai (war fan) towards the winner. The tournament winner is the rishiki who wins the most bouts over the 15 days.

Life as a Sumo

Life for a sumo wrestler is highly controlled and disciplined. The Sumo Association determines the behaviour of wrestlers, even going so far as banning wrestlers from driving after one was seriously injured in a car accident.

When youngsters enter sumo they must grow their hair long for the chonmage (topknot). They must wear a chonmage and traditional Japanese clothing whenever they are in public.

Junior wrestlers live in communal dormitories within their training stable. Sekitori have either their own room or apartment (if they are married).

In the training stables, the juniors

wake up at 5 a.m. for their training sessions, followed by chores such as cooking and cleaning. The sekitori rise later and train after the juniors. The wrestlers don't eat breakfast but have a large lunch. A "sumo meal" generally consists of a simmering stew of various types of fish, meat, veggies and rice

all washed down with beer. This is followed by an afternoon nap, a routine to ensure weight gain. In the afternoon the junior wrestlers attend school classes or do chores. The sekitori are free to relax, reply to fan mail, etc. In the evenings they go out and socialise with their sponsors, but the juniors must stay at the training stable or attend a social event as the man-servant of a sekitori.

Due to their lifestyle, sumo wrestlers have a lower life expectancy. Post



retirement, they tend to develop diabetes, have high blood pressure and suffer from heart attacks. Their excessive alcohol intake can lead to liver problems. They develop arthritis and joint related problems from the stress placed on their joints by their heavy frames. Making a career as a sumo wrestler is certainly challenging. There is fame and fortune there, but only if you work very hard and make countless sacrifices to succeed.

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Politics with Paul

JUDGING THE JET PROGRAMME

By Paul O'Shea

Ahh...the JET Programme. The butt of many jokes, the financial ruin of the Hyogo Board of Education, and of course the reason we all enjoy a high standard of living despite spending most of our time on Facebook.

The idea of JET is a noble one — to internationalise an insulated country via the nationwide teaching of English by English-speaking graduates from around the world. However, to anyone who has first-hand knowledge of the JET Programme, it is clear that it is a bloated and inefficient monster with productivity levels that would make the venerable Homer J. Simpson gasp.

This is a harsh statement but it is true. I am a JET and I benefit greatly from the JET Programme, in terms of salary, holidays, workload, time to pursue other interests, etc. However, if I were a Japanese taxpayer, I would want either sweeping reforms or to end the JET Programme, and I would probably harbour a great deal of resentment for all JETs everywhere. Here's why:

Qualifications

Firstly, the JET Programme puts people who are not teachers into teaching positions. Do you remember when you first arrived, and were asked to make your own lesson plan for the first time? Do you remember wondering, "What's a lesson plan? How do I make one? What's going on?" Well there's no reason you should know how to make one, unless you're a teacher. An arts or science degree doesn't qualify you as a teacher. But yet, the JET Programme puts you into a teaching position!

Teaching English effectively without some sort of qualification



Seminars. Japanese tax dollars well spent.

(or several years experience) is extremely difficult. What's the difference between "I ate," and "I had eaten?" Or between "advice" and "advise?"

And it goes way beyond grammar — the ability to give clear instructions (in English, not Japanese!) or the knowledge of how long you should talk for are both vitally important. A trained ESL (or EFL) teacher should be able to walk into a classroom full of low-level students and teach them English, through English, (assuming the students can use a dictionary for the odd tricky word) without even needing a lesson plan.

You have probably heard that the JET Programme is only one-third teaching. This is true. But it is still one-third teaching. It is almost impossible to get a half-decent job teaching English in Western Europe without at least the basic month CELTA qualification. Why should Japan, with the world's second largest economy, not deserve the same standards as France, Spain or Germany? Why not make it a requirement for applicants?

There are plenty of qualified teachers in the world, and for those

who don't have a qualification but really want to go on JET; it takes one month, just one, to get a basic qualification. I don't see that stopping anyone who is serious about coming to Japan, but I do see it allowing JETs to do a far better job in their schools. By making a basic qualification in ESL/EFL a requirement, the quality of English teaching by JETs would increase considerably.

There are more benefits of having qualified JETs. Knowing that they are in fact qualified teachers, schools receiving JETs would be far more likely to assign them greater responsibility and a greater role in school life. This could include solo teaching, teaching classes other than Oral Communication, greater flexibility with lesson planning, syllabus construction, etc...

Of course, this may not happen, or it may only happen to a limited degree, but the point is that an ESL requirement would increase the productivity of the JET (the school and students benefit) and the JET would get more out of her job. Everyone is a winner.



A smart gaijin is a happy gaijin

What about the other 66 per cent of JET — internationalisation and becoming an ambassador for Japan? Well, let's take the latter first.

ESID — Every Situation is Different. This is the mantra which results in some readers not recognising anything I have written thus far — JETs who love their job, their school, their teachers and their students, and who are loved in return.

However, we all know JETs who are unhappy here in Japan. Some have already broken contract, others are not re-contracting. Most of the people who are unhappy on the JET Programme are unhappy because of their school situation. After a bad experience in their schools, they leave Japan with a bad taste in their mouth, and a bad impression of Japanese people, and are extremely unlikely to become goodwill ambassadors for Japan. How to remedy this?

Well, for step one, see above. Remember that if all JETs are qualified, the school's opinion of us goes up, along with the JET's job satisfaction. However, some schools are just tough. The question is why do schools where the level of English is particularly low need an ALT? I don't want to de-

prive students, possibly from poorer backgrounds, of the international experience having an ALT can bring, but a cursory cost-benefit analysis will tell you that there are other things three million yen per year can buy which are a lot more beneficial to such students than an ALT.

Furthermore, why can't such schools have an ALT just visit once a week? I teach once a week in such a school, but it also has a full-time ALT whose job it is to teach English to future rice-farmers — every single day. I won't say any more than that.

Takin English to the people

The final goal of the JET Programme is internationalisation, which is indeed very admirable. The extent to which JETs participate in community events depends very much on the individual JET and the local community in ques-

tion, and is not something which I have the time or the knowledge to go into here. Suffice to say that the level of internationalisation achieved by JETs varies widely.

The JET Programme is dying. Budget cuts and

private ALT's are killing it. It doesn't have to be this way — a few simple changes could make an enormous difference. However, unfortunately, it is unlikely that this will happen. Instead, the few teachers in the staffroom who never smile at you and who privately think you are a waste of space and money, will continue to do so. And you will continue to think that they are miserable old farts. And it's not your fault or their fault, but the fault of the system.

JET THAT JUST WANTS TO STUDY

I am a bit late on this issue, but I want to clear something up, and mount my high horse while I do so. Our contract is printed in the JET General Information Handbook along with an explanation of each clause. I refer you to Page 71.

"Application of this clause [Article 15]...is intended for one-time, unavoidable 'special needs'. It is not a loophole for regular time off away from the office (to take Japanese language classes or to visit sick friends and relatives, for example)"

Therefore, Article 15 cannot be used for study leave. We have so much free time both during and after school to study Japanese. I spoke none when I came here, but I study in school and take evening classes (almost an hour each-way to Kobe every week) and am generally happy with my progress.

We are not students, we are ALTs. Our job has three components, none of which require the Japanese language. I know an ALT who is finishing his second year, speaks no Japanese, is loved by his students and has had a great time here.

The way this affair panned out reflects a lack of professionalism (and basic research) and reflects poorly on the JET community as a whole... as if we didn't have a bad enough reputation already.

The JET 2006 General Information Handbook reads: "Any other time the supervisor deems there is a special need, for the period of time the supervisor deems necessary." (p. 69-70)

It goes on to explain that this time off is for essentials such as alien registration cards, adding: "It is not a loophole for regular time off away from the office to take Japanese language classes or to visit sick friends and relatives, for example."



Better Know a Ken: Nagasaki

By Shane Leavy

Part 6 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.

Located on the island of Kyushu and home to over 1.5 million inhabitants, Nagasaki will always be remembered for the events of August 9, 1945, when it became the second victim of the destructive power of the atomic bomb.

Nagasaki has recovered well from that horrendous event, and today the city is a thriving metropolis with a relatively decent night-life for a city of just under 500,000. It has a number of unique festivals, often reflecting the strong connections the prefecture has with China.



The Chinese Lantern Festival in Nagasaki draws hundreds of thousands to the city.

The Kunchi festival in October, for example, includes a Dragon Dance, originally performed by Chinese residents of the



city. Families celebrating the O-Bon festival also tend to go a little bit overboard in Nagasaki — head to the graveyards spluttering with fireworks and you'll see for yourself.

The volcanic Mount Unzen tends to dominate the Nagasaki skyline and, unfortunately, often the news too. In 1792 the collapse of one of its domes created a tsunami that killed 15,000 people, and in 1991 an eruption killed 43 people.

High on the slopes of Mount Unzen is Unzen town itself, an eerie place to visit as the main street is surrounded by clouds of steam stinking of sulphur from the volcanic vents around it.

The nuclear attack dominates much of Nagasaki's history and image and it was only after living in the prefecture for a while that I began to realize that Nagasaki's contribution to Japanese history goes far beyond just this. Actually, as the sole port open to the outside world in the Edo Period (17th to 19th century), it has always been a place of vital importance to Japan.

The Chinese were always allowed to come and trade, and consequently there is still a cool Chinatown in the city of Nagasaki. In recent years local festivals for the Chinese New Year have blown up into a huge celebration and cities

Catholic Portuguese) proved a little too successful at getting converts.

In Nagasaki, Christianity was eventually outlawed entirely and practitioners very brutally persecuted. Some were crucified in Nagasaki city while others were boiled alive in the volcanic steam vents on Mount Unzen, the slopes of which I live on today.

The region around the mountain is highly volcanic and the surrounding area riddled with onsens. On the far side of the mountain is Shimabara, where locals drink odd-tasting mineral water from public springs claiming it helps you live longer.

My own town's volcanism attracts a fair few tourists for its onsens too. It has also recently been getting into the news by virtue of its name — Obama.

The tourist centre here recently ran an "election" in which tourists could vote for "Obama" or "Hirari." Since the town is also known for its champon (a kind of seafood noodle soup) some local wit decided to print signs reading: "CHANGE we can believe in/OBAMA CHAMPION."

Ah yes, sometimes Japanese humour gets it just right!



The five-storied Shimbara Castle in Nagasaki prefecture

are packed for the Chinese Lantern Festival. It is interesting to see hundreds of thousands of Japanese people celebrating Chinese culture considering the tensions between the two countries.

Not everyone was as trusted as the Chinese in Nagasaki, though. The Dutch, for example, were al-

lowed to trade, but only so long as they kept their corrupting Western influence safely quarantined on the island of Dejima. They were even made to tread on fumie — sacred images of Jesus or Mary — in order to prove they weren't Catholics, a remnant of the suspicion which arose after their predecessors (the



Mount Unzen



Travel Japan

Keepin' it real local in our home Hyogo-ken

By Jeff Weese

Just because Golden Week depleted your travel funds doesn't mean there are no adventures for you! If you were a jet setter in the month of May and are concerned about your bank account's bottom line, then take it easy for the month of June and do some exploring in your own backyard!

Hyogo Prefecture is home to numerous attractions and cultural gems from the infamous Takarazuka Revue to the Hokudan Earthquake Memorial Park and Kinosaki Marine World (Japan's version of Sea World) all just waiting to be explored.

While I might be your trusty travel editor, in no way am I as good of a source as the JETs who actually live in the areas I'm about to recommend. Feel free to base your travel plans on my recommendations, but look up the local JETs and pick their brain for the specifics!

Mention Takarazuka to anyone in Japan and the first response you will get will be about the Takarazuka Revue. The Takarazuka Revue is a unique performance with an all female cast who are graduates of the highly competitive Takarazuka Music School. These women play both male and female



Himeji Castle is a world heritage site, and also the most beautiful castle in Japan.

roles and they invite you to come and be amazed! Performances are almost daily and ticket range from 3,500 yen nosebleed seats to 10,000 yen front row seats. Tickets can be reserved by calling 0570-00-5100.

If the Takarazuka Revue doesn't interest you, Takarazuka also has the Osamu Tezuka Manga Museum which is home to world-famous Astroboy. Osamu Tezuka is the creator of Astroboy and lived in Takarazuka from age 5 to 24. The museum follows Tezuka's theme of "Love of nature and preciousness of life," is open every day except Wednesday and only costs 500 yen!

You can check out more information at {www.city.takarazuka.hyogo.jp/tezuka}.

The north of Hyogo is also home to many different exciting attractions such as the Kinosaki Ma-

rine World which gives visitors a chance to be entertained by dolphins, sea lions and many other interesting aquatic animals. It is only 2,200 yen to enter and can be accessed by a 10-minute bus journey from Kinosaki Station. Before leaving the well-known resort town of Kinosaki, be sure to dip into one of several onsens that can (reportedly) relieve anything from dry skin to serious illnesses!

Still north, but not on the coast like Kinosaki, is the Tajima's largest city — Toyo-oka. From Toyo-oka, you can visit the Hyogo Prefectural Homeland for the Oriental White Stork, which is a special protected species of Japan. The Oriental White Stork population in Japan has decreased drastically and this enclosure is an information haven on the intriguing bird. The museum is closed on Mondays and admission is free.

There is more to Toyo-oka than just Oriental White Storks. In Toyo-oka you will also find the Japan Mongolia Folk Museum. At this museum you can experience one of the largest displays on Mongolian culture and lifestyle in Japan. While a trip to Mongolia probably

wouldn't have fit this month's budget, I'm sure 510 yen for admission does. Just don't show up on a Wednesday or you will be facing closed doors.

Back down south in the Harima area are several interesting cities to explore including the cultural treasure of Himeji, home to the famous Himeji Castle, which is only a few minutes walk from the central gates of JR Himeji Station. Admission will set you back 600 yen, so with the rest of the money you saved you can take a bus journey out to Mt. Shosha to see the setting of *The Last Samurai*. How you decide to get to the mountain and how you ascend means costs will vary, but to enter the temple area itself is only 300 yen.

Off the mainland of Hyogo sits the island of Awaji, which can be accessed by either the Takko Ferry or via the longest suspension bridge in the world — the Akashi Kaikyo Bridge.

On Awaji you won't be short of things to do! There is the Hokudan Earthquake Memorial Park, where the true epicenter of 1995's Great Hanshin



The Akashi Kaikyo Bridge, which connects Awaji, is the longest suspension bridge in the world.

Earthquake was. Here you can see the actual fault that caused the earth to shift and an original house that was stuck on the fault during the time of the quake. It costs 500 yen to get in but watch out for Wednesdays when it is closed.

Onokoro, also known as Awaji World Park, is a day of fun when you can wander around six different areas of the park including Miniature World, where small-scale versions of the Leaning Tower of Pisa and Buckingham Palace can be seen. Only a 20-minute bus ride from Sumoto Bus Terminal and 1,200 yen to enter — it is an easy day

on Awaji.

This list is only the beginning of things to see and do in this prefecture! Outlet malls in Sanda, wandering the streets of Kitano in Kobe, a drive-thru safari at Himeji Central Park, whirlpools in Naruto on southern Awaji, the Akashi Municipal Planetarium where views of the bridge can be seen... it goes on and on!

These places are close and cheap and best of all, they give you a little insight into the prefecture you live in. Don't let money be the reason why you don't get out this month! Explore Hyogo!



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Getting to Know Some Random JETs

❖ **Name:** MacKenzie Caroline Roebuck-Walsh.

❖ **Please call me:** Maki-chan

❖ **School and Location in Hyogo:** Sannan JHS, Tamba-shi.

❖ **How we know you:** Relationship Guru, *Hyogo Times*.

❖ **Birthday:** January 2nd.

❖ **Born and raised:** Born in Waxahachi, Texas (directly south of Dallas) and raised in Deadwood, South Dakota.

❖ **Family:** My parents and I are a mutual admiration society.

❖ **University and Degree:** Drake University, BA in international business and public relations.

❖ **Other jobs you have had:** Waitress, travel agent, front desk clerk, minority co-ordinator for Iowa Democratic Party, master stapler for Caterpillar, online magazine editor.

❖ **Travels:** Is my life-long hobby! I'm hoping to see the entire world by the time I'm 50 so I have 50 years to do it all again!

❖ **Hobbies:** Reading, ballet, travel and baking cakes in my rice maker.

❖ **Staying another year?** Nope.

❖ **Favorites:**

Food: Spaghetti, sushi, whatever is on my plate.

Sports: Tennis, skiing biking and swimming.

Music: Best if seen live.

Shop: Small (large) hat addiction.

TV Show: *The Wonder Years*.

Movie: Recent: *Juno*. All-time: *Pretty Woman*.

❖ **Most Proud Achievement:** Meeting my goals every day and exceeding the expectations of those who love me.

❖ **Best life experience:** For me the best life experience is the little things that happen each day to make you who you are: smiling at strangers, hugging friends, talking to parents,



taking a moment to let the sunshine wash over you, enjoying a glass of wine or a pint of Guinness...

❖ **Motto to live by:** "Get out of the shade and into the heat; off your ass and onto your feet!" Grandpa Roebuck.

❖ **I remember when...** America had a booming economy, treated other nations as friends, not enemies, and the Democrats were in control.

❖ **What are you drinking?** Red wine or hot tea after eight cups of water (amazing bladder control).

❖ **Best thing about JET so far?** Onsens and chu-hi.

❖ **Who would you like to meet?** The Dali Lama.

❖ **Why should we elect you President of the World?** I'll settle for the U.S. (but wait, don't we rule the world?! {Ed.'s Note: Not at all, dear}). Why? Because I am honest and look good in red, white and blue.

❖ **If it was my last day on earth I would:** Get all my family and friends together for a huge meal and intellectual discussion. Then have a water-balloon fight!

❖ **Interesting fact about me:** If given the choice between a bath and a shower, I will always choose the bath! However, I recognize this is not the most environmentally friendly option so I try to use the bath water to water my house plants whenever possible!

❖ **My top tip for teaching:** Smile.

❖ **When the class is TOO QUIET I...** make them line dance.

❖ **Bribery for students...YAY or NAY?** Yay! My fourth-grade teacher gave us bubblegum and I can still remember every word she said!

❖ **Funniest story involving a student:** Are you Ms. Green? (for some reason this question always gets all the ichi-nensei to roar with laughter!)

❖ **Name:** Robert Hollands.

❖ **Please call me:** Bob.

❖ **School and Location in Hyogo:** Amagasaki Prefectural High School, Amagasaki City.

❖ **How we know you:** I'm the guy who never comes out for anything.

❖ **Birthday:** Dec. 3, 1982.

❖ **Born and raised:** All over the U.S. I spent most of my time in Richmond, Virginia.

❖ **Family:** A half-sister and half-brother.

❖ **University and Degree:** University of Virginia, BA in English and Spanish.

❖ **Other jobs you have had:** I taught eighth grade Spanish for a year and then worked for a bit in DC doing various office-y things.

❖ **Travels:** A while back I did western Europe (France, Italy, Switzerland and Austria). More recently I've been to Malaysia, Singapore and Korea (thanks Japan!).

❖ **Hobbies:** Cooking, playing guitar, goofing off.

❖ **Favorites:**

Food: Thai red curry.

Sports: Anything you can do by yourself: hiking, skiing, etc.

Music: I have a real soft spot for New Wave and assorted '80s pop.

Shop: UNIQLO! Not the fanciest store around and you won't win any Japanese fashion contests (how could you, really), but the clothes are cheap and well-made.

TV Show: *Arrested Development*.

Movie: *Groundhog Day*.

❖ **Most Proud Achievement:** When I won the "Draw the West Virginia State Seal" competition in the fourth grade. All you had to do was literally copy the state seal, but I copied the best in the state, dammit!

❖ **Best life experience:** My time so far on the JET Programme, because it taught me to give thanks for each day because my rent will never be this cheap again as long as I live {Ed.'s Note: Amen brother!}.

❖ **Motto to live by:** "He sends one of

yours to the hospital; you send one of his to the morgue. That's the Chicago way."

❖ **I remember when...** I really wanted a pair of LA Lights sneakers. What a strange and terrible time..

❖ **What are you drinking?** Aquarius or Pocari Sweat. I was pleasantly surprised that everything in Japan is greipufurutsu flavour — the best flavour ever.

❖ **Who would you like to meet?** Anthony Bourdain.

❖ **Best thing about JET so far?** That even in the biggest cities, you never have to travel more than an hour or two to find real, unspoiled nature.

❖ **Why should we elect you President of the World?** I don't think I'd like to be

president — too much time in the public eye. I'd much rather be the shadowy puppet-master behind the scenes, living in an undisclosed location.

❖ **If it was my last day on earth I would:** probably not put on pants. I mean, what's the point?

❖ **Interesting fact about me:** Although I'm an American, I don't own a single firearm. This is one of the many things about me that never fails to disappoint my students.

❖ **My top tip for teaching:** Never make any assump-

tions about what these kids will or will not understand. Today I had to review how to count in English...

❖ **When the class is TOO QUIET I...** become a super gaijin monkey, dancing around until I get a reaction. Failing that, I find open mockery works well too.

❖ **Bribery for students...YAY or NAY?** I've never done it, mostly because I'm too lazy to think of a good bribe. I do, however, try to cram at least one silly thing into each lesson to loosen them up.

❖ **Funniest story involving a student?** A male student once asked me about my "big, long destroyer." Which was odd, because I hadn't yet taught them how to play Battleships...



In Search of Tanuki Testes

By Clayton Houck

Guarding the entrance to many Japanese bars are statues of an interesting creature called the tanuki, or raccoon-dog in English. With an unpaid bill in their right hand, sake in their left hand, and a large scrotum below, these statues depict the tanuki at its most mischievous and jolly. These traits are (according to Japanese folklore) aided by the special powers garnered by the tanuki's exceptionally large testicles.

Although the magic of testicles are apparent to many, the reasons for the tanuki statues and their large male anatomy are not entirely obvious. However, a further understanding of the statues can be found by examining the tanuki in nature, Japanese culture, and Japanese history.

In nature, the tanuki hardly looks like its statue depiction. Where the tanuki statues seem bewildered and excitable, actual tanuki possess a passive or even slightly nervous state. Tanuki are rarely aggressive and are one of the few species of canine that are not usually very territorial. Furthermore, the statues gen-



erally show the tanuki as an obese animal with a wide neck, protruding belly, and fat male pectorals. In reality, however, the tanuki is a small and straggly dog species that most closely resembles a fox or a raccoon.

There is, however, one area where the statues do justice to the tanuki — the large testes. When selecting mates, the female tanuki has a preference for large male pack-

ages. The male offspring then inherit the genetic make up for large testes and the female offspring inherit their mother's sexual selection preferences (preference for the bigger bulge). The evolution of larger testes is only inhibited by the energetic costs and risk factors of large testes.

The evolution of the large testes can also be traced to the theory of sperm competition. As testicular size



The tanuki's influence extends beyond children's songs to many different parts of Japanese life. For instance, Japanese rooms are measured based on the number of tatami mats that can be placed within the room. A room the size of eight tatami mats is called a tanuki room. Why? Because it is rumored that a tanuki's scrotum can be stretched to cover eight tatami mats!

Even Japanese ramen shops are no



is found to correlate with sperm production, large testicles can be beneficial for males that mate frequently with different partners. An increase in sperm per ejaculation increases a male's chance of fertilization and paternity. Thus, a male tanuki with large testicles can produce more sperm and hence increase his chances of fathering offspring.

Although the processes of sexual selection and sperm competition can explain the evolution of the tanuki's testicles, it does not explain the Japanese's fascination with tanuki and their testicles. And the Japanese do love them! To see just how much look no further than the popular Japanese children's song that goes:

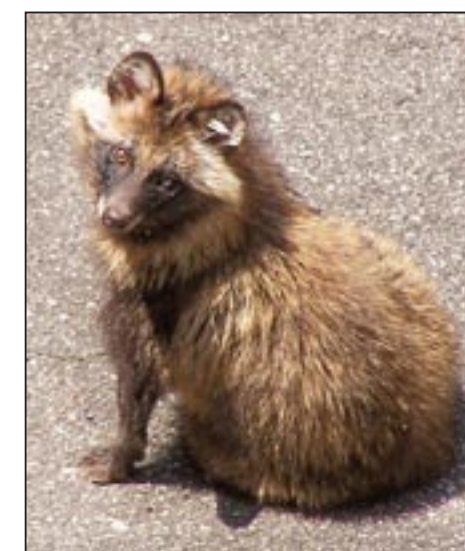
*"Tan Tan Tanuki no kintama wa,
Kaze mo nai no ni,
Bura bura"*

Roughly translated into English as "Tan-tan-tanuki testicles, there isn't even any wind but they still go swing-swing-swing."

escape from the tanuki presence. Within them you can often find the offer of tanuki soba. This consists of soba noodles topped with *tenkasu* (deep fried tempura butter). The dish has the illusionary presence of tempura without any meat or vegetable fried in it and is named after the tanuki because of the tanuki's reputed ability to shape-shift.

Similarly, there are plenty of references to the tanuki in popular Japanese culture. In the Super Mario Bros. 3 video game for the Nintendo, the main character (Mario) could gain special powers upon gaining a tanuki suit or a leaf. With reference to both the stone tanuki statues of Japan as well as the mythological shape-shifting trickery of the tanuki, the tanuki suit allowed Mario to turn into a stone state that made him invisible to enemies.

The magic of Mario's leaf, on the other hand, comes from an ancient tanuki myth with Buddhist origins.



Legend states that before a tanuki transforms, it places leaves from the lotus plant (a plant held sacred in Buddhism) on its head. The leaves, combined with chants from the tanuki, provide the necessary magic for transformation. In Super Mario Bros. 3 the leaves fall from above and when Mario jumps head first into the leaves, he gains special abilities such as a tanuki tail and the ability to fly.

Looking around Japan it is obvious to me that the tanuki has been interwoven into modern Japanese culture. Therefore I say that to understand the tanuki, with its enjoyable oddities and taboo aspects, is to understand Japan!



The Back Roads of China

By Catherine Reid

There were cobblestone roads, mud-filled potholes, snow-capped mountains, terraced rice fields, gum trees (minus the koalas), a marijuana plantation or two, plough-pulling beasts, soccer-playing monks, rap-dancing competitions, roast dog and gourmet-style insects. Altogether there was just a whole load of adventure!

Where, you ask. Yunnan Province, South-West China... by bicycle! Every day was different as I watched life in the Chinese countryside come alive before my very eyes. All the incredible sights made bearable the uncomfortable bike saddle that was glued to my rear end day after day.

Foreign cyclists, especially those dressed in brightly coloured Lycra and wearing sunglasses and helmets, are rare in rural China. So is the understanding that a bike can be ridden for enjoyment and not just for transportation. Young and old, men and women, would glance at us as we pedalled past their fields or through their towns. Once the image of "strange foreigners" registered, the brief glance would be followed by a few quick words to anyone in their vicinity and they would all band



together to bear witness to the event until we became a dot on the horizon.

The locals also showed plenty of interest at each rest stop as they would line up to take our photos whilst we took theirs. A trip past a school was an experience as hundreds of school kids swamped us as we approached. They were delighted to see us, although I must admit their teachers did not seem too impressed as their students ran from the school yard and onto the road to greet us!

The highest ride on the trip rose to 3,300 metres above sea level. It

was a climb that certainly gave the bike's granny gear a great workout. Due to the lower oxygen levels at that altitude there were many mandatory photo opportunities to be taken advantage of (i.e. many recovery sessions disguised as photo



stops). Children from local minority groups dressed in mismatched and oversized clothes watched with their mothers from the roadside. These kids loved being photographed and enjoyed seeing themselves on digital camera screens, a new concept for them.

As we slowly made our way up the mountain there were the numerous forms of transportation spluttering and chugging past us up the mountain. There were trucks with exhaust fumes that left us gasping for oxygen and motorbikes so loud that I'm sure they could be heard in Shanghai. At the summit of our route, the snow-capped Jade Dragon Snow Mountain rose majestically behind us to a towering height of 5,600m and rewarded us with some spectacular views.

The 35km ride downhill was an



exhilarating experience, however the cobblestone road made the ride extremely hard on the legs, arms, shoulders and hands as vibrations shuddered through my body all the way down. The gravel edges of the road made it very difficult to maintain control as I flew around sharp corners which gave way to steep cliffs. One small lapse in concentration could have easily left me returning home in a body bag.

With this in mind, I stopped at several places during the descent to take in the amazing landscape of terraced rice fields cut into the mountain sides. The people there had been tending their fields well before I

had arisen and would remain there hours after I had passed them by. They harvest and de-husk rice just as their ancestors have done for hundreds of years and plough their fields with the assistance of oxen, a technique which has been used for centuries in China. Their housing is basic, mud-brick style with an array of animals living in close quarters. Riding near houses often means chickens will be running across the road in front of you, giving a much greater understanding to the expression 'playing chicken' with traffic.

As I cycled into Dali at the completion of my journey, I was sad to be finishing my tour but also glad that



I had so many wonderful memories to hold onto forever. Rural China is still living in the past, but who knows for how long. The rapid progression of China into a capitalistic society will no doubt filter through to the rural regions in time. I am glad I have had the opportunity to experience the old rural China before it is lost forever.

Top 10 things leavers want to do — but probably shouldn't — before they go home

By Tori Lowe

10. Give that hot student your forwarding address. By the time they get there, you won't be their teacher anymore...and they will be legal!

9. Photocopy your ass cheeks and pop the copies into the Teaching Manuals you will leave behind for your successor. That will teach them for trying to be better than you!

8. Scour the Big Gomi rubbish piles. See what pieces of useless furniture you can take back to your apartment and charge your successor for.

7. Get your hair cut in a distinctly "Japanese style." Women: 'El-

vira Mistress of the Dark' was a sex bomb of her time—why WOULDN'T you get the same hairstyle? Men: Sonic the Hedgehog's hair is, like his computer game, a timeless classic.

6. Women: wear that boob-top you have rejected as inappropriate for school for the last year. You know your tits look great in it! Men: you know that shirt with "Looking for Japanese Girlfriend" written on it in Japanese IS hilarious. Wear it.

5. Go to the train station. Set up your boom box. Dance like everyone is deliberately ignoring you.

4. Change all the toilet slippers that you have soiled at your

school for something floral and pretty. It will give your successor extra motivation for perfecting their aim in the squat toilet.

3. Grab one of the old ladies with the 90 degree back and see if they really can straighten up.

2. Trying to get rid of second hand clothes? I read on the net you can sell used underwear for about US\$29 a pair... if you can convince your students to pop them on for a day first.

1. Organize your own farewell party. Have it at your place; serve cheap beer and 100 yen snacks. As the guests are leaving, charge them 10,000yen.

Each.



Taking Care of Tatami

By Jeff Morrice

This past winter you may have been cursing the Japanese and their lack of insulation, but you should remember that the Japanese house is designed to be a living, breathing organism.

The space beneath your abode allows air to circulate, and nearly everything indoors is designed with a purpose — your tatami regulates humidity and temperature, your paper shoji screens limit direct sunlight, and even your wooden fusuma (sliding doors) help to absorb and release moisture.

But as the seasons change and we head into the rainy season with the humidity steadily climbing, we need to make sure that our living houses are still in good shape. So here are some handy tips to get your house prepared for the summer humidity.

Futon Care

It's recommended to air out your futons at least once a month, but once a week is better to keep them in top shape. Do it on hot, sunny days when there's no chance of rain and remember to bring them in before sunset, otherwise they'll absorb the evening moisture and be damp again in no time.

It's also a good idea to beat your futons with a paddle to shake the dust out — less dust means less chance of mites and bedbugs setting up shop.

Beyond that, futons can also be washed in double-sized washing machines or at laundromats, or taken in for dry-cleaning. However if you do wash your futon, remember that it will take a long time to dry — probably a day or two in the sun — so have a spare futon to sleep on that night.

Lastly, take some time each morning to fold and put away your futons. Leaving them in the same spot on the tatami is a good way to grow yourself a new colony of spores. So unless you

are a biology major doing a thesis on tatami mould, get those futons folded up every day!

Tatami Care

Believe it or not, tatami can be aired out as well. Tatami absorbs a lot of moisture naturally, which is a good thing as it regulates the moisture in your house, but the mats do need to be dried out every so often.

Unlike carpet, tatami mats are not a permanent installation and lift out of the floors relatively

easily, meaning they can be taken outside on a hot day for air and sun. This should kill any mildew, bugs or mould colonies that you've been harbouring.

Some people air out their tatami every three months, some once a year, and some every seven years — it depends on humidity and laziness. Doing this once a year should be good enough for Hyogo and most other areas in Japan, but it doesn't hurt to do it more often. It's best to do this on a hot, cloudless day when there is no chance of rain. If it rains on your tatami, you'll be buying new mats, and they aren't cheap.

Most tatami mats are also double-sided, and can be flipped (though with the lifespan of tatami usually averaging 14-15 years, rotating the mats is a rare task!). General tatami care should be followed before you air them out or flip them — wipe with a very slightly damp cloth to get rid of stains or spills, vacuum the mats with the grain and never walk on the mats with your shoes on.

Another way to fight futon and tata-



So soft....

mi humidity is with shikketori packets, which are like those little 'DO NOT EAT' silica packs you find in new purchases. The shikketori pellets absorb moisture until they turn into a gel, and should then be replaced. They are great for closets, dresser drawers and clothing containers and the slim ones can also be placed under tatami mats and between tatami and futons. You can also get bucket-sized ones that are good for both closets and small rooms.

If you do happen to get mites in your mats there are sprays to take care of them. These aerosol cans come with special nozzles that plug into your tatami so you just have to spray away and rid yourself of the pests.

Finally, if you consider yourself as rich as your students think you are, go out and get a dehumidifier. These can run upwards of 100,000 yen, but they're unrivalled for keeping your house moisture-free. Also, hanging laundry in a room with a dehumidifier dries your soggy clothes in no time flat!

Wheel of Jeopardy!

Time for the H.T. Quiz: Spice up your life edition! By Joy Feddes

1. You overuse the phrase:

- a) Ok, so now...
- b) Daijobu desu.
- c) Eeeeh???

2. How's your grammar?:

- a) Swim, swam, swum-ming.
- b) Grammar is my bitch.
- c) I amn't telling you.

3. April showers brought:

- a) Bugs.
- b) Puddles.
- c) I think in Japan it's June showers...

4. Japan's motto is:

- a) It came from the sea, that's why we eat it.
- b) What's the motto with you?
- c) We won't tell, so you're gonna have to ask.

5. Last night for dinner you ate:

- a) The world's most expensive salad. That's right — a yellow pepper, an avocado AND strawberries..
- b) Curry a la Jojo — *oishi desu yo!*
- c) Cup noodle.

6. Was Golden Week Golden?:

- a) Only gold plated. It rained a bit.
- b) 24 karat. Sunshine and beach... perfect!
- c) Lies! It wasn't a week at all!

7. How often do you talk to your loved ones back home?

- a) Daily. The cord is still attached.
- b) Never. My life in Japan is too



glamorous to find the time... and the whole time zone thing.

8. Facebook chat:

- a) Creepy! Yikes!
- b) Oh Facebook, you are my true love now.
- c) Eeehhh?

What your answers mean:

Mostly As: Do your students know anything about you? Mine knew my last name the other week and I was both impressed and a wee bit frightened. They still can't tell the difference between I like, I want and Oh well, can't win them all. But you can! Feel lucky Mostly As, go to a pachinko parlour and share your winnings with me!

Mostly Bs: Get involved in Japanese culture this month. June is the time for learning how to embrace the warm sweaty hug that will be July and August (and part of September too, let's face it). The more involved you are in the culture, the more you'll love Japan. Also, get involved in taiko or kendo, and get super buff for bathing suit season.

Mostly Cs: Do what your mama said. Who cares what they say because rules are for breaking. Who made them anyway? You gotta show what you feel, don't hide. Don't care how you look; it's just how you feel! You've gotta make it real. Its time to free what's in your soul. You gotta get it right this time, come on freak and lose control! That wisdom was from the Spice Girls, are you ashamed for agreeing with it? Don't be, we all know they didn't write their own music.

Top 10 Things I'll Miss about Japan

By Philippa Cahill

1 DRIVING

A lot of the time it is kinda insane, what with farmers stopping suddenly on a really dodgy corner, or Obasans indicating at the last possible second, but I cannot deny, it's damn entertaining. In Melbourne, my hometown, it's all about highways, freeways, and one-ways. Here, pretty much anything goes, and I get a thank-you bow to boot — from the driver!

4 LONG SHOWERS

Melbourne is in a drought, has been for YEARS, so the fact that I don't have to limit my showers to three minutes AND I can indulge in a bath, is a luxury to me!

7 BEING ABLE TO TALK IN PUBLIC WITH LINGO PEOPLE DON'T UNDERSTAND

There's nothing finer than using a bit of "Australia-ben" on the train, at the shops...anywhere! For example: "Cop a geez at the old codger. He's got a bloody mondo zit on his mug." Equally as entertaining is using unnecessarily conservative language: "One can't help but be aware of the seemingly gargantuan growth protruding from the gentleman opposite's cranium?" Both methods are equally as safe to use in front of the random stranger who, trust me, may understand English!

2 KYUSHOKU

There's plenty of dishes I'll be glad to never eat again, (especially the pregnant fish, ewww!) but for the most part, it's pretty cool being able to sample a variety of Japanese dishes. When asked back home "Did you try [insert Japanese delicacy here]?" I can now say "Yeah, probably!"

5 GOOD PUBLIC TRANSPORT

I love the fact that every single time, the driver WILL stop at the precise spot indicated on the platform, and the people WILL form two orderly lines. The station melodies simply warm my heart, and don't even get me started on my love affair with the shinkansen!

8 LITTLE JAPANESE BOYS

Okay, I know this sounds seedy, but hear me out. I'm not the clucky type, but under the age of five, Japanese kids are sooo freaking cute. I'm considering buying an extra suitcase to smuggle one back home!

9 WEARING JEANS TUCKED INTO GUMBOOTS IN MY LOCAL a.COOP

Enough said!

10 OBACHANS RIDING MOTORCYCLES

I couldn't believe this when I saw it for the first time. There I was, idling up alongside to see if it was a cute Japanese guy, when I score a not-so-toothy grin from a 90-year-old woman.

3 TV SHOWS

Where to begin with their terebi bangumi's? A personal favourite of mine was *A-Cuppu desuka?*, set in a café where a group of men competed to find out if the female customers cup size was in fact an A-cup. If they inquired and were incorrect, a swift slap to the face was delivered followed by a defiant exit of the woman in question. GENIUS!

6 BEING A CELEBRITY

You know what I mean, having eyes (and bodies) follow you around the supermarket, people stopping you in the street, elementary school students chanting your name upon arrival. For one year of my life, I've been able to gain an insight into what life's like for a B-grade celebrity.