

hyogo times

April, 2008



Contents

Messages

4.....	From the Editor
5.....	From the PR

Every Month

6.....	Love and Relationships: 25 Ways to Leave your Lover
7.....	Keitei Pictures of the Month
8.....	Recipe of the Month: Cookin' up Curry
9.....	Stealth Gaijin: Life as an Asian JET
18-19.....	Better Know a Ken: Akita
20-21.....	Travel Japan: Scenic Sendai
22-23.....	Getting to Know Some Random JETs
28.....	Kansai Concerts: June/July
29.....	Wheel of Jeopardy!

Features

7.....	Book Review: <i>Once There Was War</i> by John Steinbeck
10-11.....	Discovering Love Hotels
12.....	First Day: A peek inside the life of an elementary school JET
13.....	Hosts: Pimpin'Ain't Easy
14-15.....	Special Feature: Punk in Drublic
16.....	Eight Hours of Biking? Yes Please!
17.....	Touring Toyota
24-25.....	Special Feature: Bullying in Your School
26-27.....	Bathing in Kyushu
28-29.....	Bangkok: Paradise on Earth... for Shoppers

On the cover...

A man peeks through a sea of umbrellas on the vendor-lined road to the Buddhist Sensoji Shrine in the Asakusa district of Tokyo (cover).

Tourists pass by one of the famed *chochin* lanterns mounted in Sensoji's imposing *Kaminarimon*, or "Thunder Gate" (left).



Photos by Jeff Morrice

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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:

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Visit us online at:

<http://hyogoajet.net>

From The Editor...

Hello again! Hope you're all well and enjoying the onset of summer. I, for one, am already spending as much time as I can at the beach and am already working on my tan. Though being Irish my tan does have a distinctly "freckled tomato" look to it.

This month the *Hyogo Times* has its usual range of quality articles from getting buried in sand in Kyushu to just getting down in a love hotel. However I'd like to draw your attention to two articles of a more serious nature — Dave Highnoon's article about drinking and Jeff Morrice's article on bullying.

These articles are ones which everybody should read and think about. Both articles sent shivers down my spine as I read them as I thought about how these issues could affect my wonderful friends and my lovely students.

Dave's article speaks for itself but I would like to add a little something to Jeff's topic. The article shows just how terrible the effects of bullying can be, especially in Japan, and without question it is happening at each of our schools.

You may think that being an ALT and not being able to understand the language means that we can't do much to prevent bullying. However in reality we may be in a more powerful position than many other teachers. As ALT's most of us are easily among the coolest and most popular teachers at our school. Nearly everything we do is cool; from the way we dress, to the way we talk, to what clothes we wear. With minimal effort we can make picking on a certain kid very uncool. A tiny effort on your part could change that student's life forever. It might not work every time but if it does it could be the most valuable thing you'll ever do in Japan. Apathy in this matter could have dreadful consequences.



My monthly lecture done, I'll leave you in peace to go and enjoy the sunshine before the energy-sapping humidity kicks in. I'm off to water my garden so I can show my town that the gaijin can actually do something productive. It may not be much but it is certainly the best gaijin-owned garden for 50 kilometres and I am going to keep it that way

{Editor's note: Kevin lives 51 kilometres from Jeff, and that's the only reason he can get away with that claim. Watermelon and blueberries own over nine square metres of grass any day, Irish!}

Hope you enjoy the articles and remember to keep sending those submissions in! Happy reading!

— Kevin

And From The PR...

Welcome to May, Hyogo-ites, and welcome back to school/work for another exciting, busy year!

Spring has well and truly settled in, and brought with it sakura, warm days, ninja rain and plenty of good times. I hope you all managed to make use of the wonderful, sunny weekends recently to pick up some sake and a bento and get yourselves involved in some serious hanami under the trees.

I think you'll agree that the sakura this year has been very shiny indeed! It's definitely the best I've ever seen.

Spring must have known how bloody awful winter was and rocked out in grand style to make up for it. A bit of a trade off, freezing our asses off for three months in return for two weeks of superb hanami, but I'd say it was definitely worth it!

One thing I especially loved about this year's season was the cultural insights that it brought. Previously, wandering through the trees as a tourist, I remember going "Ahh, yes, nice flowers. Oh look, that man is so drunk he's wearing only his underwear and his friends are showering him with cold water." This year, I sat back on the precision placed HAJET tarp together with a wonderful group of both foreign and Japanese people, relaxing, reflecting and discussing the sakura and our lives in Japan. And maybe playing a bit of impromptu sumo too!

Seriously though, this year I've learnt a lot about the reasons why Japanese people love sakura so much. To everyone I talked to, it's so much more than just a flower. It represents birth, rebirth and all things new. It blooms at the start of the new financial and school year, beckoning companies, students and workers alike to the new challenges, responsibilities and opportunities of a fantastic new year.

Also, sakura really is one of the most amazing flowers on the planet. Flawless and intricate in full bloom, it then



falls at the height of its beauty, stunning crowds of adoring fans and giving rise to that stereotypical "love in the falling sakura" scene. It caps off its position by flowering for a short, yet perfect, amount of time. Any shorter and it'd be ridiculous, any longer and it'd lose its "Let's go get drunk under that short-lived flower!" effect. And that wouldn't be any fun at all!

Speaking of fun, I can feel the beautiful, long, hot days of summer just around the corner. The sun is already burning up there in the sky, so break out the shorts and thongs, dust off the Barbie (no, not the doll!) and get ready to head to the beaches. I know it's going to be a good one.

Finally, keep an eye out for sizzling summer events, both AJET and otherwise. It's going to be an action packed summer, with two very notable events already announced — the massive San-In Beach Party and Tajima Ultimate Frisbee Tournament, both in July. Hit up Facebook for the details. They're set to be fun-tastic, so get yourself involved!

Until then, take care, stay safe and get stuck into bringing the word of English. Peace out, Hyogo-ites! See you all on the beaches...

— Daniel

Love and Relationships:

25 Ways to Leave your Lover

By MacKenzie Roebuck-Walsh

Nine months into the current JET cycle do you find yourself wearing Japan goggles? They work like beer goggles, but require nothing more than sheer desperation to give a rosy glow to the girl next door or add four inches to the young P.E. teacher.

Nine months is a long time to go with minimal physical attention and many of us make decisions we'd never deem possible in the western world.

Unfortunately, while a first date may be bliss, a second a trip to the moon (or at least an astro-themed love hotel), by the third you may find yourself saying "Why am I dating someone I'm not attracted to mentally or physically and how do I get rid of them?"

Thankfully, Paul Simon had the very same question and discovered there are indeed fifty ways to leave a lover. So when you need to say good-bye give some of these a whirl or create some new ones yourself.

Paul Simon's Top 5

These lyrics must have taken him hours to create:

1. Slip out the back, Jack.
2. Make a new plan, Stan.
3. You don't need to be coy, Roy.
4. Hop on the bus, Gus.
5. Drop off the key, Lee.

Japan's Top 5

1. The Hep Five Ferris Wheel near Umeda is known throughout Japan as the 'break-up' wheel. Even a mention of a ride should be enough to send them running.
2. Go to a Korean restaurant and order kimchi and kimchi only. Not into Korean? Then try an Italian joint instead — "Waiter! Raw garlic por favore?"



3. Mmmm... did you order sashimi with scales for breakfast in bed?
4. Leave a Post-it that says "We're over" — make sure to have your JTE translate it for them!
5. Take them to the Ninja village and have them taken care of.

My Top 10

1. Tell them you love President Bush.
2. Take them to the monkey village and hide a banana down their pants (could be tricky but not if you get in one last quickie).
3. Tell them you'll meet them in Korea. Go to Mongolia.
4. Find Jesus: Now there is only room for one person for you to worship in your life!
5. Suddenly remember the doctor said that burning wasn't normal...

6. Pick up a bottle of Britney Spears' newest scent... *Desperation*.
7. Tell them you are Ginger from American Airlines and must catch an early flight.
8. Email them a picture of the most expensive engagement ring you can find with a note that says "nothing

- less." (Had a sorority sister do this and it worked like a charm!)
9. Tell them your dad is THE Godfather. (You may need to include a box-set of the series to really get your point across.)
10. Marry a Buddhist a monk - who needs English conversation when they are tantric!

Realistic Top 5

1. Send them a c-mail featuring the waving bye-bye hand.
2. Tell them that you are just not that into them.
3. Give them to your nearest JET friend — one man's trash is another's treasure!
4. Don't call back.
5. It's been real, it's been fun but it hasn't been real fun. Peace.

In all seriousness though, break-ups can be tough and very much like doing crunches: the older we get the harder they get! Take a deep breath and do a little dating but don't plunge into any relationships without the age old test — "would I date you at home?"

An Exclusive Hyogo Times Book Review:

This time we review a real book!

By Maeve O'Connell
Once There Was a War
— John Steinbeck

When America entered the Second World War, John Steinbeck — at the grand age of 41 — was too old to volunteer for the Armed Forces. Instead, he chose to travel to Europe to live among the troops, and report back on the daily lives of the average soldiers via dispatches to the *New York Herald Tribune*. This book is a collection of his dispatches.

The book is comprised of two introductions, followed by the dispatches themselves. The first introduction is mostly a commentary on Steinbeck's life and his motivation for the book. The second is by Steinbeck himself and was included in the original publication.

nal publication.

I'm generally not a big fan of introductions, but these two are definitely worth a read, particularly Steinbeck's and what he has to say about censorship and the War Effort. The actual dispatches are split into three sections — *England, Africa and Italy*, with each individual dispatch being about a page or so long.

The first thing that crossed my mind when I started this book was whether or not it would be a bit tedious — it is, after all, 300 pages of newspaper articles. I think the fact it wasn't is due to the quality of Steinbeck's writing (even if he himself was somewhat critical of it). He captures the idea of the everyday man at war excellently. You get a really good sense of the boredom and super-

stitions of the troops, and of the rumours and distrust the bad chain of communication led to.

A few passages were particularly impressive - such as the description of a journey on a converted cruise ship transporting troops, and the passage written about Bob Hope. I also really enjoyed a collection of dispatches at the end of the book describing the capture of a German radar station on an island off the Italian coast. In fact, it was such a great story that I began to wonder if Steinbeck had taken a few liberties with the facts!

All in all it is a really good read. Obviously it is historically informative, but at times it is also both exciting and genuinely moving. Even for those with only a moderate interest in the war, it's a book I'd recommend.

Keitei Pictures of the Month

You love keiteis, I love keiteis, we all love keiteis! That's what inspired this new monthly feature — the Keitei Pictures of the Month! Send in your best shots to submit.hyogotimes@gmail.com along with your name and a brief description to share your best keitei shots! Hey — you can send them direct from your phone! Totemo sugoi!



Is this an advice sign or a warning sign?

Photo by Melissa Blackmon



Anne didn't specify, but I'm giving 10-to-1 odds that this pic was taken at Donkiote!

Photo by Anne Chow



Sunset over the river-side festival.

Photos by Brenda McKinney

Cookin' up Curry

Palak Paneer and Chana Masala

By Jojo Jackson

No time for idle chit chat this month. I've got two Indian curries in the mix. I can't promise authenticity but this is how I do them and they are mmm...good.



Chana Masala

Ingredients:

- 1 onion (thinly sliced)
- 2 cloves garlic (crushed)
- 2 teaspoons cumin seeds (crushed)
- 2 teaspoons mustard seeds
- 2 teaspoons garam masala
- 2 small dried chilies
- 2 thumbs of ginger (roughly chopped)
- 1 tablespoon of tomato paste
- 1 tin of chickpeas
- A punnet of cherry tomatoes
- Some salt and freshly ground black pepper

To prepare:

- Sauté the onion and garlic for 10 min.
- Add spices, chili and ginger and fry until the seeds begin to pop.
- Add the tomatoes, tomato paste and chick peas, and cook for 15-20 mins on low heat.
- Add cherry tomatoes and cook till soft.
- Season to taste, and don't be afraid to add quite a bit of salt, because salt + tomatoes = yummy!

Serve the curries on basmati rice (if you can find it) cooked in the whey. I cook my rice in the microwave (gasp) since I only have two gas rings and no rice cooker. Cover the rice with water (or whey in this case) so that the liquid layer above the rice is about 1/2 an inch deep. Microwave on high for around 12-17 minutes (the length of time depends on quantity and the ability of your microwave — ours is a bit of a dinosaur!)

Palak Paneer For the sauce:

Ingredients:

- 1 onion (diced)
- 2 teaspoons coriander seeds (crushed in a mortar and pestle)
- 1 teaspoon mustard seeds
- A thumb-sized piece of ginger (finely chopped)
- 1 small dried chili
- A bunch of spinach (roughly chopped)
- 3-4 tablespoons cream (to loosen sauce)
- Salt and pepper to taste

To prepare:

- Sauté the onion in olive oil, butter or ghee (clarified butter, and works best because you can heat it to high temperature without burning).
- After 10 minutes, add coriander and mustard. Frying releases their flavour. Fry until the seeds pop.
- Add ginger and chili and cook for another minute.
- Add the spinach and let it wilt.
- Add the cream and purée the sauce. If you don't have a blender, just chop all ingredients finely before you start.

For the paneer:

Ingredients:

- 1 litre of milk
- 300 ml of unsweetened yoghurt
- I've also used the juice of one lemon, which works well too.

To prepare:

- Bring the milk to a boil in a heavy bottomed pan and as it reaches the boiling point, add the yoghurt.
- Leave it on the heat until the curds separate from the whey (when

the mixture starts to get a greenish tinge).

- Strain the curds through a clean tea towel into a bowl (Don't discard the whey! Cook the rice in it — the whey gives it a lovely nutty flavour).
- Press the curds until they form a solid ball.
- Add the paneer to the spinach sauce. Season, taste, reheat and voila!



Stealth Gaijin

Life as an ASIAN JET

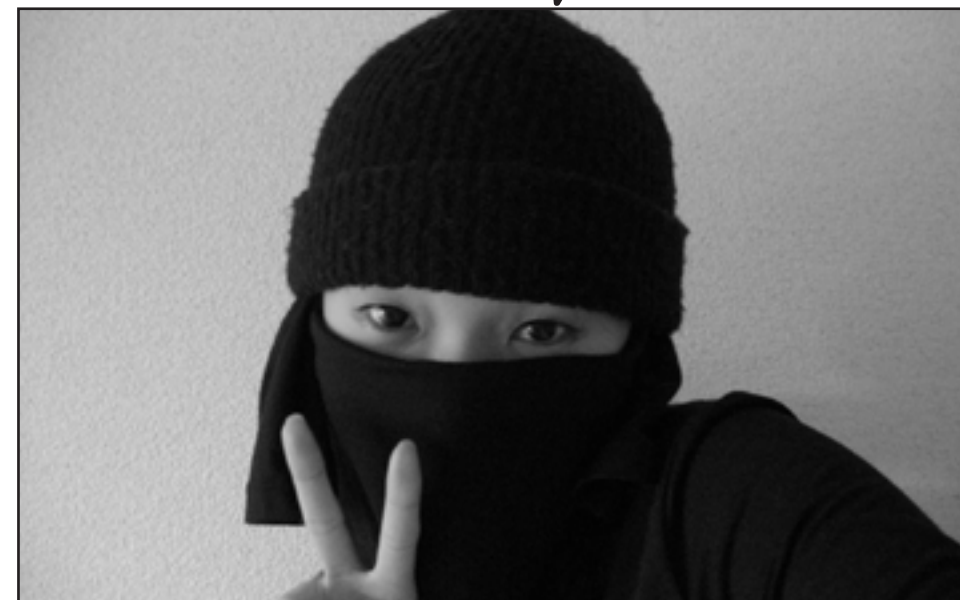
Last month, Paul O'Shea touched upon a topic that I probably would not have written about until later in the year. This month I could have told more of the often mindless (and sometimes hilarious) trials and tribulations I have gone through during my time here. But I won't. Instead, I have dared to broach the subject of inter-Asian racism. Actually, I did not, Father O'Shea did. So much for being daring.

Being American first and foremost, you would think I wouldn't encounter racism except the odd "Oh, it's a gaijin" look. The only problem with that idea is that my facial features betray me as otherwise. Therefore, the assumption is I am from an Asian country and not the western world.

I'll admit that when I came here, I thought I would encounter specific racism a bit more than I would back home, where there are people from all walks of life and of every imaginable ethnic mix. With the history between China and Japan during WWII and before that, I didn't relish the idea of being caught in the middle, albeit generations later. I still hear stories of my grandparents and great-grandparents during the war, so believe me I know about the fragile social politics between Asians. Also, Japan isn't known for being truly accepting of foreigners, so I felt I had two strikes against me — one, being a *gaijin* (and not looking like one), and two, being of the "wrong" Asian background.

Trying to explain my background to my colleagues takes a little more work than I think it should. Trying to explain it to my students... well, I've given up, and with good reason — as it turns out, I wasn't completely wrong about the racism.

At my first junior high school, when I was doing my self-introduction to the



Stealth Gaijin — both kawaii and universally hated by racists.

students, I included in my presentation that I am *chuugoku kei amerika jin* because I was trying to stop people from asking where my parents are from. I was asked in every class I had at the elementary schools (I go to 4 *shougakkous*, with roughly 20 classes per school) so I thought I'd nip that in the bud.

After telling them, some of the kids were really interested that I look like them, but I speak fluent English; other kids decided I was just weird because I'm Asian but didn't speak a lot of Japanese. I even had two kids tell me I was pretty in Mandarin Chinese and they still can't string that sentence together in English!

I thought, "Alright, it's great that I can tell them I'm Chinese-American and not get racial slurs thrown at me! Yatta!" However about two months into the job, one of the students in one class got up for the umpteenth time, so I told him to sit down ("please" and everything). He did sit down, but not before he said "Fuck you," and then added "Ugh, Chinese people," while rolling his eyes. I, rightly, smacked him on the back of the head for both comments.

After that incident (one of the milder ones), I decided to not tell the students at my second junior high school my ethnicity. I have been better off for it, but I think it's rather unfortunate that is what it took to stave off racism because it means they are left ignorant. Some of my students have cleverly asked me how many languages I speak, thus narrowing down what ethnicity I am. Others take guesses by speaking to me in Chinese, Korean and Vietnamese. Still, I will maintain I am *amerika jin*. I don't need another kid asking if I live in Chinatown (Oh, the clichés!).

Most of the teachers who ask are, I think, genuinely interested in me and if they are racist against Chinese people or those of Chinese descent, then they hide it quite well. I think maybe my one extremely, extremely, superficial gripe is when they "downgrade" me from *kirei* to *kawaii* once they find out I'm not *nissei* or *sansei* (second or third generation Japanese, respectively). It's happened a few times but I could just be reading too much into it. Besides, *kawaii* is preferable to *kowai*, even if the former is over-used.

Discovering Love Hotels

By Laura Starnes

So, sex — pretty much everyone is doing it these days, even if you aren't. But do you know where? Ah, that mysterious euphemism, the "love hotel." Love hotels don't have any history that I know of, so just assume they were all created overnight by a well-meaning love fairy who wanted to create safe havens for young couples to copulate in sound-proofed peace.

And there the fairytale ends because they also enable cheating husbands to continue their affairs with the office lady and provide hangouts for high school teens to get up to no-good. But I shall continue with some useful advice, not least because love hotels are a great place to stay when you want a bit of luxury but can't afford a five-star hotel.

How to Do it

Walking north from Tit Park in Kobe (in Osaka, head to Umeda, Namba, Ikutamateramachi, or Sakuranomiya) you will soon find yourself in the realm of Love. There'll be garish signs on the roofs for places such as Chapel Christmas (Umeda) and Honjin (Sannomiya).

If you're coming for the night, you should arrive after 10pm and check for signs in green (rooms available) and red (full) on the sign outside. Now look at the price for an overnight stay.

You'll pay extra on top of that for a Friday or Saturday, or the night before a national holiday.

Depending on the poshness (vs. skankiness) of the hotel it'll be 5,000 to 15,000 yen (and upwards) a night. Try

going during the week for better value.

A "rest" stay will be the price for an hour and "Service Time" (fixed price) is available during the day for those Tantric fans.

Now for the scary part — actually plucking up the guts to walk through those dark doors and enter the land of sin. Try not to enter at the same time as others (if you do, avoid all eye contact). Head for

the large panel on the wall that shows illuminated pictures of the available rooms and look for a room you like.

So now you've made your choice. You're ready to press the button. Depending on the age and style of the hotel, one of two things will happen. If



Ho, ho, ho indeed! Come on, what else could I write?

dirty place) and then pay the two hands that poke out somewhat threateningly at your nether regions.

The first set of people will have to use a machine in the entrance of their room or else be locked in. Don't worry until it starts talking at you, then just feed in money and press the button until it stops.

Once you're in, you're in. Amuse yourselves with Japanese porn (available on all TVs — even those in the toilet). Grab the hotel information brochure and search for anything that says *muryou* next to it, because that means FREE. Get breakfast, rent cos-play costumes, borrow a foot massager, a hair curler, the latest DVDs or, if you're a really great date, some Xbox games! Those who picked Skank Hotel should not forget to check the free condoms (usually two — never enough) for pin holes.

Inside most rooms you can also

expect a karaoke machine, a big bed, a mini-bar, a sex-toy vending machine and tea-making equipment. Drop into a combini beforehand for stamina drinks or hard liquor — whatever your date needs that night.

There's so much to do, make sure you don't forget to make the love-fairy happy!

Next morning, wake up glowing (that's if you didn't spend all night playing video games, but seriously would those people ever make it to a love hotel in the first place?) and open the door singing with glee! Don't forget to check you've got everything (it can be embarrassing to have to go back) and rejoin the streets feeling very pleased with yourselves. Yatta!

FAQ:

Are gaijin couples ok? Yes but it would be helpful if one of you spoke a little Japanese just in case.

Are boy-boy, girl-girl couples ok? Two girls: yes. Two girls and one boy: yes. Two boys: no. Two boys and



one girl: no. Not fair, is it?

Can you drive there? Yes, park in the basement garage and if you like, use the hotel's logo board to cover up your licence plate (so the wife doesn't catch you).

Are there "themed" rooms? Yep, you can find such themes as the Hello Kitty S&M room featuring a Kitty plush doll wearing a ball gag, blind fold and barbed wire garters (Hotel Adonis, Ikutamateramachi). Then there is Chapel Christmas (Doyama-cho, Higashi-Umeda) where it's always stocking-season. Want a merry-go-round in your room? Try Room 402 in the Hotel Public Jam

(near Uehonmachi station, Osaka). Space fetishism more your thing? In the UFO Room in Hotel Loire (a 15 minute walk from Kire-Uruiwari station, Tanimachi subway line) you can play with fake knobs and watch Star Wars. However don't expect theme rooms as the norm, especially in Kobe.

How did you get all this information, oh Love Goddess Laura? Well I'd be lying if I said I'd experienced every one of these hot hotels and so here are a few links if you require more information: {www.public-jam.com} and {www.quirkyjapan.or.tv/hotels.html}.

Thank you and goodnight.

First Day

A peek inside the life of an elementary school JET

By Camaron Voyles

When I first started my job as an elementary school teacher, I was unaware that one of my schools would be offering me the incredible adrenaline rush that comes with never knowing what classes one is going to teach until sometimes minutes before the start of class. Their attitude led to an exciting first day of teaching, in the same way that being slowly eaten alive by bears is exciting.

I went to school that first morning slightly anxious but reasonably certain I wouldn't have to do any real teaching as I had just spent the last week at my other school giving self-introductions. I walked into the staff room and sat at my desk calmly enjoying my morning glass of green tea. After about 15 minutes, the homeroom teacher in charge of English approached me and said, "We have an assembly in the gym right now."

"Okay!" I replied, pleased to have been told.

"And you have to give a speech," he added as we walked towards the gym.

Oh. I made a friendly, light-hearted joke about maybe being told about these things in advance next time, and made a u-turn back to the staff room. While disappointing to an extent, this latest development didn't really faze me. I had come prepared!

After my week of self-introductions, I had learned to carry a speech with me in both English and Japanese. I retrieved it from the staff room and read it to the school. It was well received and I returned to the staff room after the assembly feeling rather pleased with myself. I had deftly handled what could have been a disaster.

My pleasure was tragically short lived. The same homeroom teacher sidled up to me as soon as we got back into the staff room. "So, first hour you will teach the first graders about colours," he said in a ca-



sual, off-hand manner.

He clearly hadn't taken my joke about giving me advanced warning to heart but this wasn't the time to punch him in the mouth. No, this was the time to frantically search for materials. I pawed through the mess my predecessor had left in his desk for anything that might help me teach colours while the teacher droned on about Good Morning songs and "What's Missing?" games.

Having pulled something that looked like colour flash cards from the desk, I turned to him. "Um," I said, "when does first period start?" It would be close, but if I had at least 15 minutes or so to work out a plan and calm myself, I would probably be okay.

He consulted his watch. "First period started five minutes ago, so you'd better hurry." The teacher slapped me on the back and laughed confidently as I gathered up my materials and walked to the first grade classroom, feeling like a death row inmate on the day of his execution.

I was supposed to start the class with some cretin song known as the Good Morning Song, which I had never before, but I popped in the CD and looked at the book which had the lyrics for the song. The kids had apparently never heard

it either, as they stared blankly while I mumbled the lyrics along with the peppy female voice on the CD.

Feeling this song was failing tremendously, I looked desperately for a way to "spice it up" and found the accompanying dance for the song. This dance was illustrated by helpful diagrams that were so easy to understand that, amazingly, having never even practiced this dance before, I was soon jerking and flailing like some sort of epileptic fish out of water, only with less grace.

After the song, my face burning with humiliation, I moved on to the actual teaching of colours. This went well (I even managed to figure out what the "What's Missing?" game was!) except for one minor detail — all of the children already knew the names of the colours in English. I thought I could trick them with "light green" and "light blue," but they even knew those! The class therefore had an air of utter futility to it and, when the bell finally rang, I felt thoroughly defeated. Then I had to do it all again second period.

I am pleased to say that, since that first day, things have markedly improved, in the sense that I now usually know the games the teacher is suggesting as I frantically search for materials.

Hosts: Pimpin' Ain't Easy

By
Tuwhakaroa Biddle

The other day I came across a 2006 award winning documentary titled *The Great Happiness Space: Tale of an Osaka Love Thief* (but I won't tell you how or where I found it because the FBI might be reading this). Anyways, the focus of the documentary is the No. 1 host café in Osaka, a bar called Rakkyo Café in Minami, and the featured host is Issei. Issei is Osaka's #1 selling host and he is also the owner of Rakkyo. At the time of filming he was only 22, had 20 staff and was himself making anywhere from \$40,000-\$50,000 US a month.

I had never really given a second thought to host cafés but after reading a synopsis of *The Great Happiness Space* I felt it was definitely worth a watch. My preconception of host cafés was that they were nothing more than a place for handsome pretty boys men, to get rich quick off rich girls who want to have fun.

From a business perspective it's genius; as a lifestyle, straight-up pimpin' (bling-blingin' and all the rest); and as a job, an easy one that is pretty much party time all the time. I found all this to be true to some extent but while watching this you soon learn that every silver lining has a cloud.

Interviews with both the hosts and the customers give you some insight

into the mentality of both sides. You feel sorry for the customers, many of which seem delusional as they wish to marry or, at the very least, want to be the actual girlfriend of their unattainable host. You also wonder throughout how the women obtain so much money that they can easily spend upwards of \$1,000 each night, three nights a week.

As for the hosts you might at first be indifferent towards them, maybe a little envious, but when they are portrayed as money hungry whores you can't help but dislike them.

Any idea that being a host is easy money and a fun life is soon shattered when you learn just how far they go for their job. You realize that their life isn't all that great as night-after-night they lie to the same people, spew continuously to remain sober and emotionally wreck themselves as they struggle with the ethics of selling themselves to customers or forcing customers to buy bottle af-



ter bottle of champagne that costs anywhere from \$250-\$5,000 US a pop!

As the documentary progresses and you hear more from the hosts and their clients it becomes quite depressing. Your impressions and feelings towards them begin to change, and in the end you can't help but pity them all as you realize that the host-client relationship is nothing more than mutual parasitism: the hosts gain financially at the cost of their clients whereas the customers gain emotionally at the cost of the hosts. It might not seem to be a good match but for better or worse they believe they need each other.

Although the true nature of this profession and its customers can only be truly understood through experience, this documentary is as close as any of us will ever get. It's difficult to convey the complexities of the host world in words but I recommend you watch this and experience it for yourself. It really is an interesting eye opener.

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Punk in Drublic

Public drunkenness has more dire consequences than you may think

By Dave Highnoon

I am writing this article because it is important that somebody speaks up about the dangers of getting madly drunk in public in Japan like so many JETs do.

I have been in Japan for over a year now and like many of you, I enjoy having a good time with friends and occasionally drinking more than I should.

Recently, there have been some terrible incidents involving JETs because of alcohol. There was the ALT in Miyagi-ken who got so drunk that she accidentally fell on the train tracks, and was run over by a train. Luckily she survived; however, she lost her right leg. Then in January, a few days after the mid-year seminar in Kobe, a first-year Wakayama ALT had too much to drink and passed out in a ditch with the temperature below 5 degrees...he never woke up. Imagine his parents when they heard that their son who had been



in Japan for less than 6 months had died in a ditch because of alcohol. Now imagine the friends that he was with, finding out that somebody they were partying with had died. When I heard these stories, I felt sadness and anger. The anger comes from the fact that the people around these two did not take care of their friends. However, I've come to realize that this is not home, and the friends that we make here are not necessarily the same as the friends back home.

I will tell you a story that I did not hear second-hand, but actually experienced it myself. Last spring I met Darren, a private school teacher from England.

Darren worked for an English language school that has branches all over Japan. He was in his late 30's and had been living in Japan for the last 6 years. A few years ago he married a lovely Japanese lady and had two beautiful children. After going out with this guy and getting drunk together many times, we developed a great friendship. However that friendship came to an end one night just before the Hanami. We went to a *nomihodai* and got madly drunk as usual, laughing most of the night telling each other stories about life back home. After we left the bar, I decided to catch the last train home, but he said he would ride his bike because he lived



close by. Around 11pm we said goodbye at the station, I got on my train and he rode off.

That month was my birthday and we had plans to party together but I couldn't get a hold of him after that night of *nomihodai*. After numerous calls and emails, I decided to stop trying to get a hold of him, thinking that he was probably very busy or had lost his phone. My birthday came and past without any word from him. Naturally I became worried about the guy, but I assumed that he was fine because he had lived here for so long. 25 days later, early in the morning, my phone rang. I saw on the phone that it was him. I was excited to talk to him. The first thing I said to him was: "What the heck man! WHERE HAVE YOU BEEN?" His reply almost brought me to tears.

He told me that for the last 24 days he was in jail. The police would not tell him why he was there, or what he was charged

with. He was not allowed to make any phone calls except to the British embassy who told him they couldn't do anything for him. He the police. In the end, he was charged with trespassing a private property. His wife had to pay 300,000 yen bail and the court ordered him to pay 500,000 yen to the bar which turned out to be run by the Yakuza. He lost his job because he was unable to phone the company, and his wife's parents told her to divorce him.

The last time I spoke to him, he told me that his wife was going to stick by him and that he has quit drinking. In just one night and by one mistake, Darren's life changed so dramatically that he lost almost everything he had in Japan. By sharing this story with you, I hope you become fully aware of the real terrible things which can happen in a country as safe as Japan.

When you get so drunk that you don't know what you are doing it can lead to unimagined consequences. Please have fun in Japan but drink responsibly. We need to be respectful at all times to this beautiful country that we are so lucky to be living in.

spent 23 hours a day in a cell that he could touch side to side without even stretching.

I was so shocked by his words that I couldn't stop saying "You must be kidding me." He doesn't remember much of what happened that night except that he was invited into a snack bar by a girl standing out front of a building. After having a drink there, he wanted to leave but was handed an outrageous bill with little money left in his pocket. After an argument, the bar staff called



Eight hours of biking? Yes, please!

By Wendy Boone

I had been here for three months and was still wary about Awaji island, my job, the language barrier, and all the challenges that come from being a gaijin in Japan. What I needed was an experience to open my eyes to all beauty that Japan claims to have (and this does not include pachinko parlors, karaoke, or dim-lit ramen shops next to train stations!) I had heard about how gorgeous Japan was long before I got here, but in between trips to big cities and rides on the rocky Kobe Dentetsu train line I had failed to see that.

That's when I remembered an excursion suggested by my predecessor — the Shimanami-Kaido bike route, which goes from Shikoku to Honshu via six small islands. I'm an outdoorsy girl and spent the past few years in university biking from class to home to work to parties, so a bike trip sounded good to me. Plus I never imagined that when I was old and decrepit I would be able to tell my grandchildren, "Yeah, I biked between two of the main islands of Japan back in the good ol' days".

It was an opportunity I couldn't



resist. So I gathered some interested friends and early one Saturday morning in November, right when the need for scarves and hoodies appeared, we set out westward from Hyogo.

The trail goes between Onomichi on Honshu and Imabari on Shikoku. We decided to go to Imabari on Saturday and stay the night, then bike for the whole day on Sunday, ending in Onomichi in time to catch the train back to Hyogo.



Imabari isn't exactly the most exciting town one can visit on Shikoku, so we traveled onward to Matsuyama for an afternoon at the famous Dogo Onsen before returning to spend the night in Imbari. We stayed at the friendly Komecho Ryokan and then set out for eight hours of biking early Sunday.

The trip was more amazing than I could even attempt to put into words. The views from the bridges between the islands are absolutely breathtaking and no picture could ever do them justice. We didn't rush the trip, occasionally stopping for a "rerax" time and some photo opportunities. At the



end of the day — when we were enjoying our konbini beer waiting for the train home — we were exhausted, but full of laughter. Our crotches hurt like hell the next day due to wedging bike seats, but it was well worth it.

I totally recommend this trip for any adventurous people out there who don't mind a little bit of exercise and a lot of Japanese beauty. The trail is pretty easy to follow and the few times we wandered off the route some kind Japanese people helped us back along the way. The trip was definitely in the "Top 5 Great Things I did in Japan" list!

The website for the route is {www.sunrise-itoyama.jp/english.html} and if you have any other questions please feel free to email me at {wkboone@gmail.com}.



Touring Toyota



By Daniel Carter

It was a warm spring day in March when 25 genki JETs braved planes, trains and other nefarious means of transport to descend upon the lovely, laid-back city of Nagoya. Thanks to Toyota and {www.jetsetjapan.com}, a grand tour of Toyota's Aichi-ken facilities had been organised for interested JETs all over Japan, and we were the lucky ones! Our itinerary included the Toyota Techno Museum, Toyota Factory and Toyota Headquarters building. We were fully pumped, and ready for a sneak peak.

We kicked things off at the rather impressive Techno Museum in central Nagoya, where we learnt that Toyota actually started out as a cotton weaving company. Cotton to cars? How bizarre! The museum also showcased the history and technology of the automobile division of Toyota.

The highlight of this section was without a doubt the iUnit, Toyota's insanely cool one person "car of the future." You can sit in it like a normal car and take on some bike toting obaachans at the dangerous speed of about 5 km/h, or you can lower it into 'road mode' and get down and dirty at around 50 km/h. Needless to say, we all wanted a test drive! Unfortunately, despite our combined gaijin charm, we were denied — zannen yo!

After a lunch with our super genki tour guides, we were herded onto a maxi taxi party bus to the Toyota factory in Toyota-shi, just outside Nagoya. Here we got to wander through the factory and spy down on "human workers," as our tour guide liked to call them. These "human workers" had jobs that were kinda repetitive, and I saw one guy almost dancing as he did final quality assurance on his cars. Needless to say, I think we all felt renewed appreciation for

our not-so repetitive jobs.

From there it was on to the best part of the factory tour — checking out the massive industrial robots in the car body factory. These were enormous and their arms flew around like crazy with welding guns sending sparks flying everywhere. As someone pointed out, it seriously looked like something out of *The Matrix*. Not to mention that some of us, having just gotten into *Sarah Connor: The Terminator Chronicles*, felt just a little uneasy...

Our final stop was the Toyota Headquarters building, where we had the chance to check out Toyota's latest technology. After a bit of trumpet blowing by Toyota's latest robot we were proudly escorted through the Hybrid Synergy Drive (HSD) and Fuel Cell showcases.

This was one of the main things I had come to see, and I was pretty impressed with the technology. After working out some initial problems (like the Prius completely shutting down at high speeds... errr, glad you fixed that one,

guys!), Toyota seems to have really come through with HSD. They also do seem to be at least semi-seriously about tackling general environmental issues. Amongst other things, they clean and recycle the water used in their factories, recycle "spit metal" from the welding process and use some biodegradable plastics. They are also developing fuel cell technology for cars, a power source which emits only water.

After a quick spin through a product showroom and photos in the 12,000,000 yen Lexus convertible, we finished up the tour with a Q&A session with some Toyota executives. They were surprisingly open and direct with their responses, and there were some really good questions and answers.

Overall it was a great day and I think we all achieved what we had travelled so far to do. Toyota's history, factory and technology were unusual and interesting, and their environmental efforts are heartening. If you get the chance to take a Toyota tour, I highly recommend it.



Better Know a Ken: Akita

By Edel Donlon

Part 5 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.

So let us start from the very beginning — where is Akita-ken?

Akita is located in the Tohoku region. It is bordered by Aomori, Iwate and Yamagata.

Go look at that Lonely Planet Japan guide that I know everybody has copy of somewhere and it basically tells you there is nothing to do here and that you should just travel on past.

So I am now going to put you all straight and explain about all the great things that Akita has to offer.

Akita has four very distinct seasons {*Editor's note: four distinct seasons? In Japan? Honto?*} and with each different season comes different things to see and do in Akita.

Winter:

We are lucky enough to have some of the best ski resorts in Japan. They open around Christmas time and close the



end of March. One of the best is Tazawako Ski Area. This is located on the Komachi Shinkansen line and the views of the lake below are breath taking.

Winter is also spent festival hopping around the ken. We have festivals that involve hitting each other with large bamboo poles, frightening little children by dressing up as Namahage (Japanese style bogeymen).

My personal favourite "Naked Man Festival" where all the local men climb up a mountain in the snow to a shrine — wearing only a loin cloth — in order to pray for a good rice harvest.

Spring:

With spring comes

the cherry blossom season and you haven't seen cherry blossoms unless you have been to Kakunodate. The sign as you enter the town says "Cherry



Blossom Tunnel" and that is exactly what it is. As we are further north we don't get cherry blossoms until around Golden Week so that would to a perfect time to visit!

an array of candle-lit lanterns hung on a huge bamboo frame between 12 and 18 metres high. The performers in the festival then carry these frames down Kanto Street on their hands,



Summer:

When I think summer in Akita, all I think about is the beautiful beaches and the Kanto festival.

The Kanto festival is held on the first week of August on Kanto Street (surprisingly!) in Akita city.

This is an amazing and spectacular festival and over 1.3 million people come to watch it.

A Kanto is

shoulders, backs and even their foreheads accompanied by musicians and dancers. It is truly a wonderful sight to behold.

Autumn:

The changing of the leaves and the preparation for winter snow occupies most of autumn but for anybody wishing to visit during autumn I'd advise visiting the Oga Peninsula.

There you can find some amazing onsen's, an excellent aquarium and fantastic views of the rugged coastline.

Final Comments:

We are also proud to have the highest consumption of sake in Japan and the most delicious rice (I guess every ken says that!).

Akita is very accessible from most of Japan and we have two airports and the Komachi Shinkansen line just to make visiting even easier.

So if you are looking for a trip away from the tourist attractions of the south and want to experience life in Akita contact me and I am sure that we can find some futon space for you!



Travel Japan

Sight-seeing and shopping in scenic Sendai

By Jeff Weese

Sendai, the capital city of Miyagi Prefecture and the self proclaimed "City of Trees," is different from any other city in Japan. Stepping out of JR Sendai station onto the tree-lined boulevards gives off a sense of... well, not Japan. Don't worry, there are still enough karaoke joints, izakayas, and Doutor Coffee Shops to make you feel at home, but there is something else about Sendai that just makes it different.

While Sendai accommodations may seem expensive at first, cheap deals can be found on {www.jalan.net} for as low as 3,000 yen per person, per night. After you've checked into your hotel, check out the surplus of nomihoudai specials at one of the many bars on Kokubuncho-dori. For as far as the eye can see, neon lights will beckon you to 90-minute 1,500 yen all-you-can-drink specials. That's right kids, three drinks and you've already made it worth your while.

There is a special little café called Peter Pan just off Kokubuncho-dori that has wall-to-wall vinyl for your viewing and listening pleasure. It is hard to spot



as it is on the third floor, but you should be able to see the sign — a record sitting in a cup of coffee — from street level.

During the day, Sendai has enough covered shopping streets to keep you busy for hours, and they are far better than the ones in Kobe or Himeji. Some of the streets are even tree-lined with benches where you can stop to give your wandering feet a break.

If it is your stomach that needs attention, pop into a gyutan (cow tongue) restaurant. Sure, you can order gyutan anywhere in Japan, but Sendai is the place of origin. It is usually served with barley rice, ox tail soup and pickles.

If you really want to grab the tongue, visit Tasuke restaurant where in 1948 Masta Sano Keishiro conceived the concept of eating cow

tongue. To this day it is still considered one of the best places in Japan to try this Sendai specialty.

After lunch, take a stroll to Osaki Hachimangu just outside of the city. Built in 1607, this shrine is a good example of the plush architectural style that characterizes the Momoyama Period. It is free to wander around and the colours and style are different to anything we have here in Hyogo.

If you head all the way to Sendai, you can't skip Matsushima, which is only 30 minutes from Sendai on the Senseki Line. Matsushima is considered a part of the scenic trio in Japan along with Miyajima (Hiroshima-ken) and Amanohashidate (Kyoto-fu). Matsushima is dotted with over 260 islands ranging in size and shape but almost all are topped with lush green trees. The islands are best seen by taking a scenic boat cruise through Matsushima Bay at dusk. Some of the cruises start at just over 1,000 yen for a one-hour cruise. Really, words or photos will not do this area justice — you will just have to check it out for yourself.



If you have an extra day in the Sendai area and are not sure what to do, take a bus or train over to Yamagata (one-hour journey). From there you can catch a bus up to Zao in just 40 minutes. No matter what season you visit Zao, it is going to be beautiful. I can only speak for the fall, but famous slopes in the winter, beautiful cherry blossoms in the

spring, and fantastic hiking in the summer all seem like good enough reasons to visit this little town nestled in the towering mountain peaks. If you have the time, hike up to Okama Crater Lake. While its color changes throughout the day according to sun-ray movements, the postcards in town all boast a radiant chemical blue color.

Regardless of what outdoor activity brought you to Zao, a relaxing soak in a huge outdoor onsen will top any day. While there are many onsens to choose from, Dairoteburo is probably one of the best. Don't let the strong sulphur smell put you off from dipping into the inviting milky blue water, because it is truly gorgeous.

Getting There

From the Osaka/Kobe area there are 14 daily flights to Sendai with either ANA or JAL. The prices vary widely, but you can find deals for as low as 11,000 yen each way if you

book in advance! If it is a scenic ride you desire, the Shinkansen is also an option. You will have to transfer at least once in Tokyo and the journey will take five or six hours of your time and about 20,000 yen out of your wallet, but hey, who doesn't love a good Shinkansen ride!

Sendai may not be at the top of everyone's list of places to go in Japan, but I think it deserves a gander. It makes a great base to explore the Tohoku region and also gives you a chance to explore a different kind of Japanese city. Happy travels



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Getting to know some random JETs

❖ **Name:** Kenji Victór Kaneko.
 ❖ **Please call me:** Kenji, Kenj, Baby Boy.
 ❖ **School and Location in Hyogo:** Wadayama (aka The Wad). Three elementary schools — Yanase, Okura, and Youdo.
 ❖ **How we know you:** You probably don't but I'm sure I've run into many people in cities all over Japan at the weekends.
 ❖ **Birthday:** September 17th, 1985.
 ❖ **Born and raised:** U.S.A.
 ❖ **Family:** Japanese pops and Spanish mom. Now both are American. Two older brothers (28 & 26).
 ❖ **University and Degree:** Tufts University in Medford/Boston, MA. Degree in sociology.
 ❖ **Other jobs you have had:** Everything. Ranging from janitorial work to telemarketing to retail work (which I can't stand) to marketing work.
 ❖ **Travels:** Japan (10 times or so) to visit family, Spain (family), Mexico & Canada (although I'm not sure if those really count), Dominican Republic.
 ❖ **Shumi wa nan desuka:** Playing and watching sports, especially American football. Reading sociology related books, particularly about race and the multiracial experience.
 ❖ **Favorites:**
Food: CANNED TUNA FISH. Tuna fish in pasta. Tuna fish in a tortilla wrap. Tuna fish on pizza. Tuna fish with hot dogs.
Sports: Anything really but favorites are American football, weight training/fitness and basketball. Also do some snowboarding and want to get back into the skateboarding game.
Music: R&B, Hip-Hop, Neo-soul

and Soulja Boy in the clubs...crank dat baabyyy.

Shop: Underground street-wear brands, necklaces, Nike Dunks (Hi & Lo), Nike Air Force Ones, premium Japanese denim, cardigans, blazers.

TV Show: NFL Network, Real World, and currently Making the Band 4.

Movie: *Karate Kid*. "You got a problem with that?" "No Sensei."

❖ **Most Proud Achievement:** Being finally able to converse with my Japanese grandparents and graduating from Tufts University.

❖ **Best life experience:** Meeting my ex-girlfriend/girlfriend and our adventures together.

❖ **Motto to live by:** No official mottos but "*Just do what I want, when I want*"...and this: "*We would look hot as a couple cuz you shaped so beautifully and you almost cute as me.*" – Cassidy (Rapper).

❖ **I remember when...** I was four years old and life was the s***.

❖ **What are you drinking?** Disaronno, Disaronno, Disaronno. Even Disaronno with tuna fish.

❖ **Best thing about JET so far?** Being able to work more on my Japanese.

❖ **Why should we elect you President of the World?** Because the world would be a more fun place.



❖ **My biography will be called:** *What'cha Know Bout Kenji? The Life and Memoirs of The Kaneko Kenji.*

❖ **My top tip for teaching:** For elementary schools just be nuts and play and run with the kids.

❖ **When the class is TOO QUIET** I...It doesn't happen in my classes. Elementary school baabby!

❖ **Bribery for students...YAY or NAY?** Hell yeh. My kids feen for that Kaneko-sensei money or stickers.

❖ **Funniest story involving a student:** Every Friday, my favorite student, an ichi-nensei, runs up to me, lifts up my shirt, and looks at my boxers. Then he proceeds to yell the fact that he saw my boxers and what color they are.

❖ **Name:** Mark Pasadilla.

❖ **Please call me:** Mark.

❖ **School and Location in Hyogo:** Yanase JHS, Awaga Elementary School, Santo-cho, Asago-shi.

❖ **How we know you:** I don't think you do.

❖ **Birthday:** March 1.

❖ **Born and raised:** Born in Rota, Spain. Raised all over (Navy brat!), but mainly Monterey, California.

❖ **Family:** Father is a retired U.S. naval officer turned weekend golfer and part-time masseur. Mother is financial analyst for U.S. government.

❖ **University and Degree:** University of California, Santa Barbara – B.A. Art Studio.

❖ **Other jobs you have had:** A variety of desk jobs (which I do NOT favour), worked at a shoe store in high school, QA Core Tester with Leap Frog (educational media games company), QA with Electronic Arts (the mega video game corporation responsible for the *Madden* series).

❖ **Travels:** Well, my dad was in the U.S. Navy, so I traveled a bit when I was younger. I was born in Spain and have lived in Florida, Texas, Japan (a different, non-JET experience), and finally California, where I call home. I've been to the Philippines, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Mexico, Italy, Germany, France, Denmark, Portugal, Switzerland, Austria, Netherlands and Belgium.

❖ **Shumi wa nan desuka:** Playing basketball (A LOT), exercising, singing, taking pictures of random things, reading, getting lost, making fun of you because you made fun of me, traveling and letting my mind transfer energy onto paper.

❖ **Favorites:**

Food: Filipino, Japanese, Thai, Mexican.

Sports: Basketball, football (American), snowboarding, running, tennis.

Music: Hip-hop, R&B, Neo-Soul, Jazz, Rock, Disney.

Shop: In America... Target! In Japan... 100 yen shop!

TV Show: Too many to list. So I'll

take it back some years and rock *MacGyver*.

Movie: Far too many to list. *Top Gun*, *Goonies*, *Back to the Future*, *Ferris Bueeler's Day Off*, *Greenstreet Hooligans*, *The Usual Suspects*, *The Godfather Trilogy*, *Donnie Brasco*, *City of God*, *Snatch*...

❖ **Most Proud Achievement:** Getting out of bed every morning when I don't want to.

❖ **Best life experience:** Touring Europe by van with my family when I was six years old. And learning to tie my shoes.

❖ **Motto to live by:** "*Pray as if everything depended on God. But act as if everything depended on you.*" – Grandpa Magno.

❖ **I remember when...** this random older Japanese man decided to try and talk to me and a friend inside our local JUSCO, and then remarked that I reminded him of a famous African-American actor. I'm Filipino.

❖ **What are you drinking?** OJ... best juice ever.

❖ **Best thing about JET so far?** Conversing with my JHS students and being "it" for eight hours every Friday at my elementary school and not giving any mercy by running full speed and tagging everyone... even during their other classes when I burst into their classroom and run in circles around their desks while their teacher stares in bewilderment as I maneuver ever so skillfully between chairs and tables, tag someone and run back out....



❖ **Why should we elect you King of the World?** So I can tell you what to do.

❖ **My biography will be called:** *Through These Eyes*.

❖ **Funniest story involving a student?** I was teaching my fourth-year elementary students illness vocabulary, and when I felt they were comfortable with the words, I tested them with flash cards. I held up, "sore throat" and one kid's hand shot up. I called on him, and he proceeded to do the confused Japanese tilt of the head to one side, and then finally let out, "Deep throat?" Yeah...I don't know either.

❖ **My top tip for teaching:** Don't be afraid to get laughed at. Laugh at yourself harder than them. Then make them dance like ballerinas in the front of the classroom to a hip-hop track.

❖ **When the class is TOO QUIET** I... walk up and down the aisles while dancing some kind of step to a hip-hop beat in my head

❖ **Bribery for students...YAY or NAY?** Yay... giving pistachios out from home is the greatest gift. Not that I did that, but I just thought it would be randomly cool. And funny.

Bullying in Your School

As teachers, JETs are surrounded by student personalities of all kinds. The bully is one we should all keep an eye out for.

By Jeff Morrice

I was bullied in high school, as I imagine many of you reading this might, in some form or other, have been. I remember being tormented by a former best-friend named Kyle who would take every opportunity to make fun of me in some way — my clothing, my hairstyle, my acne or even the people I chose to hang out with. The worst part was I just couldn't understand why.

While Kyle made my life mostly intolerable for a few years, in the grand scheme of things he was only a minor irritant. I survived, just as you readers survived, and I think that today I'm a fairly well-adjusted man. But not everyone can cope with torment so well, nor is the degree of bullying always the same.

When I started researching this article, a disturbing trend began to present itself. Bullying in schools is obviously a problem world-wide, with occasionally frightening results, such as school shootings. These shootings are pushed to the media's fore-front in North America, but in Japan bullying and school pressures have a more depressing result that people don't really like to talk about on TV — suicide.

In 2006, 220 senior high school, 81 junior high school and 15 elementary school students took their own lives. Yes, you read correctly — 15 elementary kids. Of those 316 suicides, 91 left a note that made mention of trouble at school, and Japanese police determined that a total of 240 of those student deaths were connected to school difficulties.

In a recent survey of over 15,000

Japanese parents, teachers and students, 72 per cent of those polled acknowledged that bullying was a problem in the school system, while a further 29 per cent said it was the biggest problem facing Japan's schools today.

Furthermore, a second poll of 15,000 elementary school students found that eight per cent claimed to be bullied on a weekly basis. Putting that in perspective, in your average class of 40 children, four of those are being harassed weekly, with that harassment possibly continuing throughout all of their school lives.

Bullying takes on multiple forms. In Japan, bullying, or *ijime*, can seem as "innocent" as calling names, or escalate into racial discrimination, violence, sexual assault and extortion — yet no form of bullying is truly innocent or harmless. And in a country where 96 per cent of high school students have mobile telephones, text messaging and the Internet have also become new venues for harassment, with threats being posted anonymously to message boards frequented by students.

The 1995 case of Kiyoteru Okochi, a 13-year-old junior high school student, was the first widely-reported *ijime*-related death, garnering media attention nearly worldwide. Bullied daily, Okochi revealed the sad truth of his life in a suicide note — he had been humiliated, harassed physically and



mentally, his bike broken by his attackers repeatedly, and been forced to give these same tormentors money every day (amounting to nearly \$10,000 US) before Okochi put things to a stop by hanging himself.

Thirteen-year-old Okochi certainly wasn't the first Japanese student to have killed himself due to bullying and sadly he definitely wasn't the last either.

During a five-month span in mid-2006, one student killed themselves each month in a dramatic fashion that caught not only this nation's, but the world's attention. One junior high student found hanging in his school's bathroom; a sixth-grade elementary girl threw herself from a building — each death was sadder than the next, and each was connected back to episodes of harassment at school. But this was



just the beginning.

Things came to a head in November of 2006. The Education Minister received an anonymous letter from a boy who was being tormented by bullies. The boy said he couldn't take it any more, and that if the government didn't do something immediately, he would kill himself on the weekend.

The Ministry of Education held an emergency press conference, pleading for the boy to be rational and not take his life. This well-meaning act, an attempt to save a young boy's life, kick-started a grisly trend — following this first anonymous boy's example, the Ministry was flooded with letters and emails from schoolchildren who claimed they would kill themselves if the bullying didn't stop.

Whether they were copycats, hoaxers or dead honest, each threat had to be taken seriously. A bullying hotline set up that weekend received nearly 3,000 calls in its first week of operation, but as a solution it wasn't enough. The situation boiled over almost immediately.

The body of a student was found each day that week, each having committed suicide.

A 17-year old girl jumped off a building, landing in her school playground. She barely survived the fall, but died later in hospital.

Another girl, only 12, jumped from an apartment building in Osaka. She'd been bullied at school because she was "too small."

A 14-year old boy left school after telling his teachers that a bully was demanding \$200 US from him. He went home and hanged himself in his shed. Another boy hanged himself in Nara, and the next day another 17-year old girl jumped from the roof of her school.

Five children. Five days. All suicides as a result of bullying.

Adding to the problem, a school principal hanged himself from a tree after he had been unable to curb the bullying in his school. It had been discovered he had not reported a case of student extortion in his school.

There were more letters, and more suicides, in the days and months that followed. Today the Ministry of Education has an extensive anti-bullying campaign to promote awareness and understanding, but it can't stop everything.

I have experienced bullying first-hand only once in my school. I came around the corner and right there in the hall was a group of older kids holding an *ichi-nensei* by the. The biggest boy had a paper cup that they had filled with Stinkbugs and was holding it up to the little guy's nose. They were all laughing at him.

This was during my second or third

week on the JET Programme, and I had absolutely no idea what to do. I just walked past them and went to my classroom. I felt horrible about it later, simply awful. Even right now I feel terrible.

We've all been that kid, and we all know how it feels. I would have loved for someone to have stepped in and made my bully stop back when I was 15, but it never happens. Why is that?

CLAIR's official advice to JET participants is to speak to your supervisor if you're interested in *ijime*. Here's my advice, gleaned from the knowledge banks of {www.stopbullyingnow.org}.

Speak to your supervisor

Yeah, it is lame as the official stance, but you really should find out the rules of the school on this stuff.

Immediately stop the bullying

If you see bullying taking place, stop it. Get in between the attacker and attackee. Don't lay blame, don't make judgement, don't even react — just stop the act itself and let the school disciplinarian sort the rest out.

Tell the teacher

The teachers aren't mind readers, and are busy enough as it is. If you see repeated bullying taking place then tell the homeroom teacher.

In my experience, the teachers and staff at your school probably take bullying very seriously, but they can't do anything if they don't know it's happening. My school doesn't tolerate *ijime* in any form, as I've seen, but they don't catch everything.

Also, be careful dealing with it yourself. The bullied child should be dealt with delicately — they have been humiliated and don't need to be questioned about that in front of others.

Don't ignore it

It doesn't go away if you turn a blind eye, and bullying can have disastrous end results. It's obviously not implicitly our jobs as JET participants to deal with this sort of thing, nor are many of us even qualified to do so, but I made the mistake of walking away once, and I won't do it again.



Bathing in Kyushu

By Erin Greer

When your JTE asks you if you want to accompany her on a free weekend to Kyushu, you simply can't refuse.

So the first weekend in March, I flew to Fukuoka/Hakata (it used to be two separate cities but has been merged into one) with her and her American friend to enjoy all the food and leisure that Kyushu has to offer.

After a day of shopping and eating Hakata's famed ramen, gyoza, and mizu-taki, we headed to Oita-ken on a popular tourist train called the Yufuin no Mori. We spent a couple of

peaceful hours in Yufuin — a small picturesque town with a beautiful lake and scenic mountain view — before heading to the newly built Kokonoe "Yume" Otsurihashi. This is a 777 metre long footbridge through a valley surrounded by waterfalls and colorful mountainous terrain, and is quite beautiful.

After the footbridge it was on to the famous hot spring town of Beppu. Beppu is famous for two types of hot springs: one is onsen for bathing, and the other is *jigoku* (the hells) for viewing. The many hells (Oven Hell, Blood

Pool Hell, and Devil's Mountain Hell etc) are more of a cheesy tourist attraction than anything else, so if your time is limited in Beppu focus your attention on visiting the eight areas of onsen.

Our hotel (Ryokan Kannawaen) was in the Kannawa onsen area and had an onsen that was rated one of the Top 25 in all of Japan. Having never been to an onsen before (I know... shocking!), I was excited for the opportunity to bathe in such a famous one. The first time was a bit awkward as it was late in the day and the onsen was closed to the public so only me, my JTE, and her friend were there.

After I got over the whole "Whoa... I'm naked with my JTE" feeling, I was able to relax and enjoy the onsen's soothing light-blue color (apparently due to the unique pH of the water) and the feel of the naturally heated water mixed with the cool mountain air.

Staying at the ryokan was a very pleasant experience. After our first bath, we enjoyed a huge *kaiseki* dinner (it took us over two hours to get through all the courses!) and then we had the onsen to ourselves again before we went to bed. At night, when the steam is rising off the surface of the water and it is so peaceful and calm, it's easy to have one of those "Wow, so *this* is Japan" moments.

In the morning, we took another dip in the deserted onsen before it opened to the public. It was a perfect and refreshing way to start the day.

After that we headed to the shores of Beppu Bay to enjoy one of Beppu's sand onsens. First you are given a loose cloth robe to change into, and then you lie down in the sand outside with a wooden block for a pillow, and the women working there bury you in sand that has been heated by hot spring water.

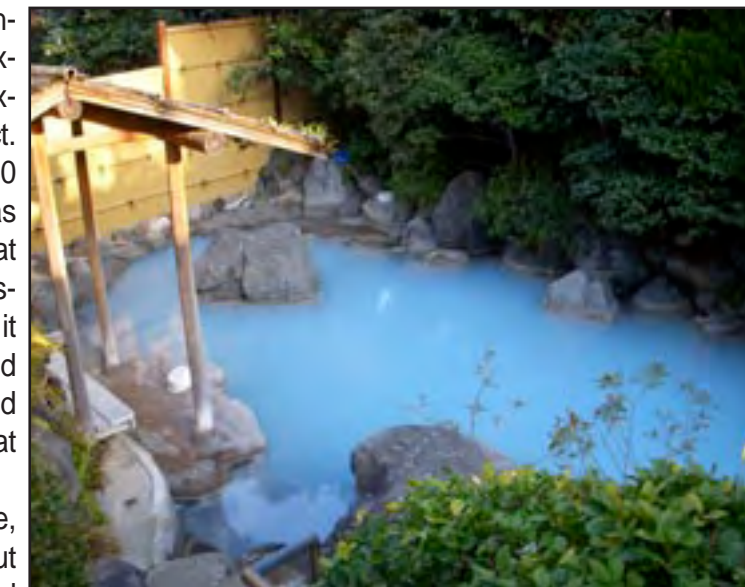
This onsen is unique not only in the fact that you are buried in sand, but also because it is open for viewing, so people that are waiting for their turn can come and watch you. After they bury you and make you a sand pillow (much more comfortable than a wooden block pillow!) you lie there relaxing for 15 minutes until they tell you to get up.

The sand felt warm, heavy, and very restricting, but the warmth of the

sand was soothing and the texture had an exfoliating effect. After about 10 minutes, I was dripping in sweat but my JTE reassured me that it was healthy and said she wished she'd sweat more.

Of course, after getting out of the sand and seeing me she goes, "WOW! You really are sweating a lot," followed by awkward laughter (what can I say? I'm a BSG!). Following our "dip" in the sand onsen, we showered once to get the sand off and then again to actually clean ourselves before taking a quick dip in the warm bath to complete our excursion.

Overall, Beppu is a nice town, with steam from hot springs rising from vents everywhere you look. I'm glad I finally got over my fear of public nakedness and visited an onsen. But after a relaxing and pampered weekend in one of the best onsen areas in Japan I can still say that I hate showering on those teeny wooden stools!



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Kansai Concerts

June Listings

2ND

BMO Musicfest '08 feat. Soulja Boy, Bobby Valentino, Hurrican Chris and Fabo.
8,500 - 10,000 yen, doors @ 6 p.m.
Club Quattro, Osaka

6TH

Fuji Rock Pre-event feat. Dextpistols, Bryan Burton-Lewis, Newdeal and Juse
2,500 yen, begins @ 11 p.m.
Club Karma, Osaka

July Listings

9TH

The Click Five
5,800 yen, doors @ 6 p.m.
Club Quattro, Osaka

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

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Wheel of Jeopardy!

Time for the H.T. Quiz: Recycled picture edition! By Joy Feddes

1. O-hanami, o-han-ami:

- a) Oh how I love the sake... I mean blossoms.
- b) And... it's over.
- c) Little known fact: o-hanami stems from the ancient tradition of drinking.

2. Your new ichi-nen-seis:

- a) Are so kawaii it hurts.
- b) Are your old roku-nen-seis, with less attitude.
- c) Are about half as groomed as your san-nen-seis. They'll learn, they'll learn.

3. I'm so excited:

- a) A new *Grey's Anatomy*, after waiting so long! Stupid writer's strike.
- b) And I just can't hide it! I know, I know, I know I want you, I want you!
- c) You just promised me you'd bake me a cake!

4. New teachers at school:

- a) And one's a total fox. Score!
- b) Finally I'm not the newest kid in town.
- c) Crap, the teacher who did my CLAIR tests for me is gone.

5. Your favourite Japan-themed song is:

- a) *I think I'm Turning Japanese*.
- b) *Mr. Roboto*.
- c) *My Lovely Horse*.

6. Your dream bento contains:

- a) A big fat steak.
- b) Sashimi, sashimi, sashimi!
- c) Pocky.



7. I saw you last week:

- a) You were taking pictures of someone else's child.
- b) You were stealing someone else's child.
- c) You were baking me a pie. Where is it?

8. What did the fish say when it ran into the concrete wall?

- a) Nothing, fish can't talk, obvi (I can't believe I've put "obvi" in this quiz twice now!).
- b) "Dam!" Man I love puns!
- c) "Shit!-sureishimasu!"

What your answers mean:

Mostly As: Drink some fine 300 yen wine, eat some Camembert with rice crackers and fondly remember the events of the day and this extravagant life you lead in Japan. Try not to notice

that your apartment is the size of a shoebox and infested with stink-bugs.

Mostly Bs: If you were Indiana Jones, people would be Jones-ing for you in a serious way. How could they not? Your brilliant smile and love of puns is a crowd pleaser. Go please some crowds Mostly Bs, go please some crowds.

Mostly Cs: I can MostlyC clearly now, the rain has gone, no glasses or contact lenses anymore! Are you considering laser surgery? I'm not. I have perfect vision. However, if you do get laser surgery, I hope that you also get laser vision. That'd be wicked awesome (not just regular awesome).

Bangkok: Paradise on Earth ...for shoppers!!!

— Submitted Anonymously

Thailand is notorious for its affordability, especially with regard to locally produced goods. The underlying reason for this is a combination of Thailand's recent leap into wide-scale export manufacturing and its low minimum wage (about one-seventh of Japan's). Additionally, most of the markets that you will encounter are almost perfectly competitive, having a large number of sellers offering almost identical products. In any case, on the ground, this translates to excellent value for just about anyone earning a wage in the developed world.

Despite higher purchasing power, thrifty post-college student ethic will dictate that one learns to haggle quickly and mercilessly (unless you want to be that fool often parted from his money). A used phrase book is practically worth its weight in bhat (the Thai currency) for anybody intending to buy anything in Thailand. The exercises in charm and wit that surround shopping can be quite endearing for the first couple days...until you know the price of everything and JUST WANT TO MAKE A DAMN PURCHASE!!!

On that note, it is important to smile and be polite when dealing with vendors. Firstly, this will usually get you a better price. Secondly, the people you



are dealing with are simply vendors trying to get the best price for their goods — it's nothing personal. This is not to say that you will not on occasion be called cheap (if I ever see that ***ing taxi driver again...) or receive scowls for refusing to buy overpriced goods. Be the bigger person and just walk away with a smile and a *khapkhun khru* (thank you) or *mai ow* (no thanks). Remember the guy two stalls down is selling exactly the same thing.

In just about every tourist district, you will find clusters of vendors ranging

from humble stalls to massive arcades selling every manner of manufactured good from ornate "silk" pillow cases to "authentic" name-brand clothing. As a general rule, the going rate for an item is really about half to three-quarters the price that you are first quoted. However there are exceptions as some vendors are more honest than others. These enclaves can seem like a bargain hunter's dream until you realize that no Thai shop in these areas, meaning no matter how refined your sweet-talk is after days on Khoa San Road, you will still end up paying too much.

Enter the Grand Market. The Grand Market, Chatuchack Market or Jatujak Weekend Market is a place where just about everything short of state secrets is up for barter. Held every weekend in northeast Bangkok, it is said to be the world's largest bazaar-style market, hosting some 10,000 stalls and about 200,000 daily visitors. Everything sold by your local tourist vendors can be found here at much lower prices, though it is still necessary to barter tooth and nail in order to have more money for beer.



Falling precariously between your average street vendor and the weekend market is the behemoth MBK, or Mahboonkrong shopping centre, about fifteen minutes by taxi from Khao San Road. For those a little intimidated by the laissez-faire atmosphere of the sidewalks, this plaza offers a slightly more ordered chaos. Make no mistake about it, prices here are still negotiable, but prices are usually very reasonable, taking into account higher overheads. There are export shops here that specialize in selling clothes manufactured in Thailand for the purpose of export and they are a great value if you don't mind that the brand names are often removed or missing.

In the vicinity of MBK, there are more high-end shopping centres available to you, such as Siam Centre, Siam Discovery, Central World Plaza and many others. However, most of the stores that you will find here are the same as you would find in most of the developed world's malls, at basically the same prices. They aren't worth the trip.



Aside from manufactured goods, there are plenty of other consumables available to the average traveler in Thailand. Roughly one-half of India's fast growing population now resides in Thailand and support themselves through lucrative express tailor shops that can be found roughly ten metres from anywhere you are standing in Thailand. If you do your research and have your bargaining skills sharpened you can have the pleasure of packing three suits into your already overloaded travel pack for the price of one store-bought suit back home.

The only other force of nature able

to compete with these express tailors is the Thai massage parlors, which occur about every nine metres from anywhere you are standing in Thailand. Ancient massage, or Nuat phaen boran in Thai, dates back about 2,500 years and is locally acclaimed for its therapeutic and medical properties. The technique basically consists of a series of stretches coupled with deep massage which uses the massuer's body weight to supply the pressure. I cannot emphasize what excellent value these places are. For the cost of a meal in Japan, you can have your body pummeled into submission by a five-foot, hundred-pound strikingly beautiful (or sometimes not) Thai woman. Unfortunately there are no Thai massage parlors in the greater Kansai area... if there were I would be eating a lot less.

Short of electronics and midget ponies, Thailand is hard to beat for leisurely shopping. The biggest problem that you will encounter is finding space to take it all back with you!



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