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OCTOBER 2008

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On the cover...



Cover art by Chip Boles

Halloween is only the best night of the whole year, and I was excited to have an excuse to draw lots of monsters. Japan has a whole mess of its own weird mythical creatures, and putting them into an awkward social situation with the monsters I grew up with sounded like a lot of fun. I'm not sure, but maybe they are showing up for a party in the same place, something like that. You may know the Western monsters, but here's a quick rundown of the Japanese Yokai that you can wikipedia at your leisure: —

— [Rokurokubi](#) (long-necked woman),
— [Oni](#) (kind of a general horned demon, usually red or blue)
— Kappa: (a kind of turtle-ish water monster with a plate-like depression in its head)
— [Kitsune](#): (the Japanese word for fox, often seen as magical creatures indicated by growing more than one extra tail).
— And my favorite, the [Karakasa](#): an umbrella-monster-thing. A type of [Tsukugami](#) which is an object that has reached its 100th year of existence and developed a spirit. Also happens with old sandals, apparently.

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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...

Greetings everyone!

October is upon us, and amazingly enough, we're experiencing some awesome weather! No more sticking to your clothes the minute you step out the door! That really shouldn't be something to "celebrate," but it is.

Time to check out the fall foliage and the many autumn festivals that are coming our way! As I type this, there's a pre-Autumn Festival passing by my apartment building. "Yoyasa! Yoyasa!" If you haven't been to a festival yet in Japan, there are plenty to check out, including the Nada Kenka Matsuri on October 14th and 15th in Himeji (Shirahama-no-miya Station on the Sanyo train line).

To an American like me, October is probably known only for one thing – the day at the end of it, Halloween! And with that in mind, Robert, our resident cook has created some delicious recipes with the all-important-for-Halloween food: the pumpkin!

I don't usually like pumpkin but his recipes were too good to not even try out. And if you really need incentive to get your hands dirty, have you ever tried explaining what ravioli is to the Japanese? Just bring in some of this ravioli and they'll wonder why they have never heard of it before because it is so good.

This month's edition includes articles by our regulars, Joy and Brenda, another *Ramentary* by first-year Andrew, and a travel article by not-so-first-year Jeff Weese that will take you to Europe in Japan. Sort of. (Can IKEA count as Sweden? Well, I don't know, but who doesn't like

IKEA?)

If you looking to travel to Europe (maybe because you were inspired by Jeff's travels to IKEA) or wherever else, within the next few months, I suggest you start looking for tickets now if you haven't already started. And if you need help to look, that's exactly what we have for you! Recommendations from our travel expert, Jeff.

I think that's all from me for now. If you're looking for a ghoulish-time to be had for Halloween, there are plenty of parties to check out in Osaka and Kobe on October 25th and 26th and you can also join your fellow JETs in the celebrations in Himeji on Halloween night or the annual Tajima party in Yabu on November 1st.

Until next time! Muahaha....!



And From The PR...



Recipe of the Month:**Pumpkin Puree, Ravioli and Soup, oh my!****By Robert Hollands**

Let's talk about pumpkins. Most people don't even think about these vegetables (or botanically-speaking, fruits) until Halloween, when it's time to go out, find the biggest one, take it home, carve it up, stick a candle in it, and put it out on the front porch, only to wake up the next morning to find it unceremoniously strewn across the front driveway in pieces. If they think of pumpkin as a type of food at all, they usually think of pumpkin pie or some other sweet dish whose primary ingredient - usually some unholy abomination of processed, canned pumpkin puree - bears little resemblance to anything that actually appears in nature. The purpose of this month's article is to show you how truly versatile pumpkin is, not just as the backbone of many holiday sweets, but various savory dishes that you can enjoy any time pumpkin's in season.

I've given you three different recipes to choose from. All of them can be made from a basic pumpkin puree (directions below), and if you find one big enough, you can make all three from the same pumpkin. A little goes a long way.

Pumpkin Puree

Cut a hole in the pumpkin's top, around the stem. Use a spoon to remove the seeds and stringy flesh attached to the seeds. Cut the pumpkin into rough chunks, and slice the orange flesh away from the rind (you can throw away or compost the rind).

**Ingredients****Pumpkin Puree:**

- 1 medium pumpkin
- 1 medium onion
- 100 ml vegetable or chicken stock
- 1 tbsp butter
- salt and pepper, to taste

Croquettes:

- 1 package panki bread crumbs
- all-purpose flour, for dusting
- 1-2 eggs, beaten
- canola or vegetable oil, for deep-frying
- salt and pepper, to taste

Ravioli:

- 100 ml vegetable or chicken stock
- 1 package of wonton wrappers (30 count)
- grated mozzarella, to taste
- salt and pepper, to taste

Soup:

- 300 ml vegetable or chicken stock
- 150 ml heavy cream
- salt and pepper, to taste

will ensure the ravioli remains closed when cooking. Fold the wrapper over evenly into a half-moon shape and seal by pressing on the wrapper's edges with the tines of a fork.

In a separate pot, bring some water to a rolling boil. Boil the finished ravioli for 1-2 minutes, at most. DO NOT OVERCOOK. When finished, drain the cooked ravioli in a colander and rinse with cold water. Serve immediately.

Soup**(can also be ravioli sauce)**

This will be fairly difficult to achieve without a food processor or blender. Katie and I found one at a recycle shop for about 2000 yen. If you don't have one (how do you live?) you can still give this recipe a shot, just as long as you don't mind chunky soup!

Gradually add the extra 300 ml stock to the puree and continue to cook over medium heat, stirring continuously until you've achieved an even consistency (sound familiar?). Then, empty contents into a food processor or blender, and puree until smooth. Transfer this *back* into the pan and continue to cook over medium heat, gradually adding the heavy cream until your soup has turned a nice, golden yellow. Add salt and pepper to taste and serve immediately.



Now you're ready make a puree which will form the base of all the recipes that follow. Place the pumpkin chunks in a microwave-safe bowl, add a little vegetable or chicken stock, cover with plastic wrap and, using the high heat setting, cook it for about 15 minutes or until the flesh is soft enough to mash with a fork. Slowly add more stock while continuing to mash the pumpkin in the bowl. The goal is to achieve a puree that's thick enough to be shaped without falling apart, so be careful not to add too much stock.

Next, mince the onion and sauté in butter over medium heat until translucent. Then, spoon the pumpkin puree into the onions and mix. From here, you can choose any of the below.

Croquettes

Fashion paste into palm-sized balls with your hands and then flatten into discs about 2 cm thick (use the supermarket croquettes as a reference). After that, it's a three-step process: evenly coat in flour, dip into the beaten eggs, and then evenly coat in bread crumbs. Deep-fry in oil until golden brown on all sides, turning them over if necessary to avoid burning. After cooking, set aside on a paper towel to drain and cool.



A Hyogo Times Restaurant Review:

Pigging Out at Ton Chin Kan

By Andrew Tamashiro

I figured if the spot had a picture of a pig on the sign, they must have confidence in their *tonkotsu* (pork bone) broth.

I always like seeing manual labourers, truckers, and other blue collar guys in a ramen joint because that usually means it's hearty, tasty and reasonably priced. Ton Chin Kan sounds like a Chinese place, but they specialize in the version of ramen broth that I seem to favour: fatty, thick and addictive.

In a nice air-conditioned, all-wood restaurant (seems to be a lot of those here in the countryside), a simple menu with typical ramen choices: *shio*, *miso*, *shoyu*, along with the signature *tonkotsu*, and side items like *gyoza*, *karaage*, *donburi*, and fried rice.

They were also advertising what looked like squid fries: long thin strips of squid lightly fried and served alongside your ramen for about 300 yen. I didn't get them this time, but wouldn't be surprised if I tried them on the next trip.

There are four or five book-



cases full of manga volumes, magazines and other serials, but that doesn't mean you spend a lot of time waiting. The staff keeps the food coming and it's worth the sub-1,000 yen prices. The lunch menu features a number of combos, often at a 300-400 yen discount over their already reasonable prices. Water pitchers, garlic powder, ginger and sesame seeds are available at each table, enabling folks to spruce up what's already a fine, albeit somewhat sparsely garnished, bowl of noodles.

The actual soup is actually

lighter than it looks both in initial flavour and in the post-meal food coma stage. Dressed only with *negi* and a few pieces of *chashu*, the "ton chin kan" ramen leans on its soup to keep folks coming back. It's thick with a perfectly palpable porkiness, with the crunch of the fresh *negi* and texture of the deliciously soft, fat-laden meat contrasting with a firm chewiness of a well-cooked noodle.

A piece of advice for ramen fans: if you've never ordered your ramen with hard noodles (*kata-men*), you don't know what you're missing. It's the ramen version of al dente, and some stores (like the chain 一風堂 Ippudo) have multiple levels of hardness to choose from.

I've seen Ton Chin Kan Ramen in other places, so I'm convinced they're a chain of sorts. This particular branch is located on Route 9 in Yabu in South Tajima, and the address is 1711-1 Ueno. (養父市上野1711-1)

They're closed Mondays, and are open the rest of the time from 11 a.m.-3 p.m. and 5 p.m.-11 p.m.

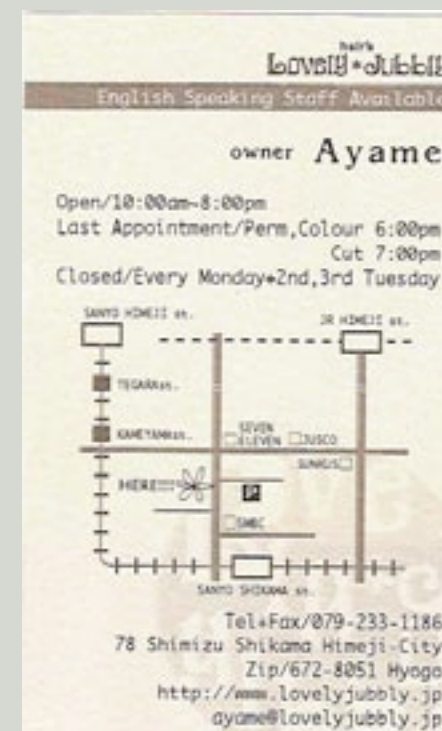


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THE PLACE TO GO FOR HAIR...

Just 5 minutes from Himeji on the Sanyo line at Shikama Station! Lovely Jubbly is where it's at for perfect style, Western products and extraordinary service... all in English! What could make this a more enticing deal?

How about a 20% discount on all services!*

*products not included



Attending a Japanese Wake

By Joy Feddes

A few weeks ago, I attended a Japanese wake. It felt distinctly Japanese, at least when compared to the very Christian funerals I have attended. My understanding of Japanese is still pretty minimal, and the words I do know are not particularly funeral-related, so some of this is speculation on my part and some of it is from the internet.

I went to my junior high school on Monday and was told that the father of the vice-principal had died, and all of the teachers were attending the wake, which was the next day. One of my JTEs came up to me and told me about it, and told me I could get a ride to the funeral home with some of the teachers. I was told to wear a black suit if I had one.

The next day, at a different school, I asked my super-friendly supervisor about giving money, which I knew about from reading the JET handbook. She told me I should give 3,000 yen. She also gave me the appropriate envelope to put it in and showed me where to put my name. She wrote the name of my junior high, and on the back of the envelope, I put the amount.

Once at the funeral home, I followed the teachers in. We signed our names in the register, entered the home and greeted the family with a bow. Then we went to a side table and gave our money envelopes. Each person who gave an envelope was given a gift bag in return, and we took our seats midway into the hall. At the front of the hall were the casket and a huge floral arrangement with a large picture of the deceased in the middle.

The dress code for the funeral was all-black; for women, a black



dress with black tights or a black shirt and black pants, and for men, a black suit with a black tie. There were two exceptions to this rule — two of the female family members were wearing kimonos (one green and one orange) with black obi.

Once the service had started, a priest came to the front and began to read a sutra. He read this sutra for a solid 45 minutes while people went up and offered incense on small burners in front of the floral display.

First, the family members offered incense. Then, the visitors took turns in offering incense, and then bowed at the family, who bowed back. Everyone was ushered about by the hall staff and it was all very orderly.

Once back in our seats, everyone held their *juzu*, which is a Buddhist type of rosary, between their hands until all of the guests went up, put incense on the burner, and bowed at the family.

Once the guests were done and the priest finished his sutra, my vice principal (I assume to be the highest in the hierarchy of the family) said a few words, thanking the visitors. I

think there was also a bit of a eulogy; his words led to some teary eyes around me.

Then the service was over and the family went outside the hall. Everyone left, bowing once more as they went outside, and we also received a box of cookies from the grandchildren.

Back at home, I investigated my gift bag. I received a box of green tea powder, an envelope with the details of the deceased on it and a cardboard box with two half-orbs of sugar, one in clear plastic and one in pink plastic.

I haven't been able to figure out what the sugar is for. I think it's an offering for a shrine, as it certainly doesn't look like it's intended to crack open and stir into your coffee, but can't find any writing to confirm or deny my thoughts.

The all-black, no exceptions, attire, the chanting of the sutras, and the bowing were very different from Western funerals, but still led to the overall feeling of sadness and mourning. I was thankful for being included with the teachers in attending the wake to give my condolences to my vice principal and his family.

WHEEL OF JEOPARDY!

Time for the H.T. Quiz: Gearin' up for Fall edition! By Joy Feddes

1. How was your September?

- a) You mean how was my Sports Festival month? It was fine. I haven't taught a class yet.
- b) You mean how was my speech practice month? It was ridiculous.
- c) Fine-thank-you-and-you!!!

2. Yesterday for lunch you had:

- a) Lukewarm soup, a whole fish, a giant bowl of rice and cold, boiled cabbage. Yum!
- b) Potatoes.
- c) Beer.

3. How recognizable is your katakana name?

- a) Meh, close enough.
- b) It's like the second cousin to my name.
- c) I don't even know katakana me. We aren't even distantly related.

4. If you had a million yen:

- a) You'd be able to buy a lot of sweet IKEA furniture.
- b) You'd have less than a million dollars. So you wouldn't be able to buy my love.
- c) You do (or you will). You're on JET.

5. A chesterfield is:

- a) A chi-ye-su-ta-fi-ru-do? Wakari-masen.
- b) It's old-school for couch.
- c) A field of chests? A chest made of fields?

6. You hate to admit it, but your favourite comeback is:

- a) That's what she said.



- b) Mom jokes.

- c) Britney — she rocked the MVAs!!!

7. Have you heard the new New Kids on the Block song?

- a) Yes! Awesome!
- b) Yes! Tragic!
- c) Yes! Wait, what?

8. October to you means:

- a) Leaf viewing!
- b) Slutty Halloween costumes!
- c) The invasion of the stink bugs!

What your answers mean:

Mostly As: Yea, school lunch is terrible, I know. Don't worry, you aren't suffering alone, but try to eat a big breakfast and sneak the bits you don't eat off your plate. Or don't sneak. You're foreign and your sense of taste isn't as refined? Remember not to keep your hopes up, so they don't get dashed. Also, you look nice today!

Mostly Bs: Are you Canadian? Are you loving the "u" in favourite but not in mom? Our country is having an election this October, so I hope you voted. You didn't, did you? Dang apathy! I hope you are maintaining your inner Canadian by regular doses of maple syrup and laughing at Quebec. If you're not Canadian, I hope you still love the "u" in favourite, even if you want to put it in mom. Haha... mom joke!

Mostly Cs: How is your Japanese going? Mine left, and I've been looking for it to no avail. Don't worry, you're such a great teacher of English, you won't even need Japanese! Rock it out eigo-no-kyoshi! Before you know it, you'll be back in the motherland using phrases only you know, and you'll feel like an outsider once again. It's tragic, but you're just not cool enough to make "sumimasen" the cool new way of saying "excuse me."



By Jeff Weese

Are you looking for a Swedish adventure? No need to go to Sweden, because Sweden has come to us! The ever-famous Swedish shopping adventures of IKEA have graced our presence in the central city of Kobe on Port Island.

Ok, so no, this is not a travel review on an actual Swedish adventure, but going to Kobe to visit IKEA comes pretty close, and it IS a trip in itself! The newest IKEA in Japan opened its doors in Kobe less than six months ago and it is still one of the hottest weekend destinations for Japanese and foreigners alike in the Kansai region.

As you walk through the front doors, it feels like clearing immigration (not in a bad way) on a Swedish border with warm welcomes of Hej (Hello in Swedish) written on the walls. You can even smell the warm Swedish meatballs, sliced roast beef, and lin-

gonberries that Ida is cooking upstairs. But wait, you have to work up an appetite first before splurging on such special treats. Head up the escalator to start your journey through the show rooms!

You can wander through the models of perfectly assembled show rooms, imagining your

Japanese apartment in its place, and if you get lost in the maze of other settings IKEA has flawlessly set up, you can always retreat to the lounge showroom to test the plushness of the sofas! Better yet, if you are feeling a bit sleepy, take a snooze in one of the bedroom models! A lot of this fine Swedish furniture is quite affordable and very functional (as IKEA furniture is back home as well).

Now that you have wandered through IKEA's marketing plotted maze, you have surely earned a Swedish treat! The restaurant is at the end of the showrooms and is ready to serve up a hearty portion of Swedish meatballs with a side of lingonberries and creamy potatoes, a delicious slice of roast beef with golden fried potatoes, or even a smoked salmon and cream cheese bagel!

Whatever meal you choose, you can be sure it will be affordable! You can easily enjoy a full meal even with delicious bonuses such as a salad, soup or bread



Travel Sweden



(real bread, none of this Japanese crap they like to call bread), all for about 1,000 yen! A steal for such a delicious feast! After enjoying your traditional Swedish meal in the lounge-like restaurant, it's time to go shopping!

As you head downstairs, grab a shopping cart. Even the strongest-willed person will need one! Everything is laid out in front of you and with tantalizing price tags, who could resist that 199 yen cheese grater, 299 yen clock, or 399 yen rug? Remember that you are on holiday in Sweden, so don't count your yenies... splurge!

There is so much to choose from, and if you are concerned about how you are going to lug everything home, don't be! IKEA has an excellent shipping service that will help you

get things from the store to your door in no time (Cost depends on how much you are shipping and how far you live from the store, obviously).

As the holiday draws to a close, you should reward yourself and round off your Swedish adventure with a hot dog and ice cream (didn't know either of those were Swedish!) from the café and maybe pick up a few other Swedish treats from the food

shop! They have delicious Swedish cheese, melt-in-your-mouth Swedish chocolate, and even the juicy Swedish meatballs in frozen form to enjoy at home!

As you board the free shuttle bus to Sannomiya, and of course back to Japan, and wave goodbye to Sweden in a big blue building, just remember that in the future, a trip to Sweden is never more than a free bus ride away from Sannomiya!



The Best of the Block

By Brenda McKinney

Summer is officially over and fall, one of the most beautiful seasons in Japan, is upon us. Take advantage of the mild weather (trust me, it can be short-lived) and check out the fall colors while getting to know more about everything our area has to offer!

What's Happening Around Hyogo Prefecture

Rokkosan Country House Ropes Course

Get in touch with your inner Tarzan at the ropes course in Kobe. The 40-point field athletics course at the top of Mount Rokko is also a great place from which to view the city of Kobe. To get to the course, take the Rokko cable car and change to the Rokko-Arima Ropeway to reach Rokko Sancho (peak) Country Station. The course is closed Thursdays and on rainy days.

Chagall at the Hyogo Prefectural Museum of Art

Quench your artistic thirst

with "A Poet of Colors," a temporary exhibit presenting over 150 oil paintings and prints by Marc Chagall. This event, held at the Prefectural Art Museum in Kobe through October 15th, includes special works from the State Tretyakov Gallery in Moscow, the Chagall family collection in Paris and Chagall's murals for the Jewish Theatre. You can find hours, price information and a map on the museum website: www.artm.pref.hyogo.jp/exhibition/index.html.

If You're Hanging Around Shiga Prefecture

Azuchi Tour Castle and Temples of the Sasaki-Rokkaku Clan

Join the Shiga JETs on their annual trip to the castle ruins and temples of Azuchi this October 18th. Azuchi is mostly famous for Azuchi Castle, but Kannonji Castle is counted among Japan's Five Greatest Mountain Castles. This year's theme will be the temples and castles of the Sasaki-Rokkaku. The group will be meeting at Azuchi Station around 9:30am to rent bikes (about 500 yen). Please



check Shiga's page on www.ESLwell.net or email block6@ajet.net for more information.

Shiga's Halloween Party
Come to Shiga for the best Halloween party in Kansai on Saturday, November 1st. The party will be held at Freestyle Bar BLUE (5 minutes from Moriyama Station) from 7 p.m.-12 a.m. and anyone and everyone is welcome. Entrance is 1,500 yen (incl. one drink), the Shiga JETs are DJing the event and there will be a costume contest (with prizes)... so start thinking about your costumes now!

The Beauty of Lake Biwa

New to Japan? Checked out Lake Biwa yet? If you're into camping, Biwa is a great place for weekend cycle trips and camping (there are two main sites). If you're interested in checking out Japan's largest lake, email block6@ajet.net for information on where to get tents or for "local" (JETs') advice on routes and sites to visit.

Over in Kyoto Prefecture

Cosmo Flower Park Opening

Come see the Flower Park Cosmos Park, which will be celebrating its opening in the Arashiyama and Takao Parkway through the end of October. More than 3,000 colorful cosmos (those pretty pink and purple flowers) will be in bloom in this large park — completely free of charge. For directions or further information, contact the Arashiyama Takao

Parkway at (075) 871-1221.

Also Close by... Osaka: Universal Studios "Wonder Halloween"

Come check out the all-decked-out USJ before November 3rd for a special Halloween Character parade and limited-time studio pass which allows you to enter from 3pm at a discounted rate.

NARA: Disaster Prevention Seminar

Would you know what to do in the event of an earthquake in your community? How about if a fire broke out in or near your home? Come to the NIFS Disaster Prevention Seminar to experience what a real earthquake feels

like in the simulation room, and receive all sorts of advice from experts about what to do in emergency situations. All attendants will also receive a free gift (hand-powered flashlight radio).

The event will be held on Oc-

tober 5th (2 p.m.-4 p.m.), at the Nara Bousai Center, in south Nara City. A group will be meeting outside the Kintetsu Nara Station at 1:20 to take a bus, so contact Abel (NIFS CIR) at silvabel@ezweb.ne.jp if you are interested.



Mount Rokko



Getting to Know Some Random JETs

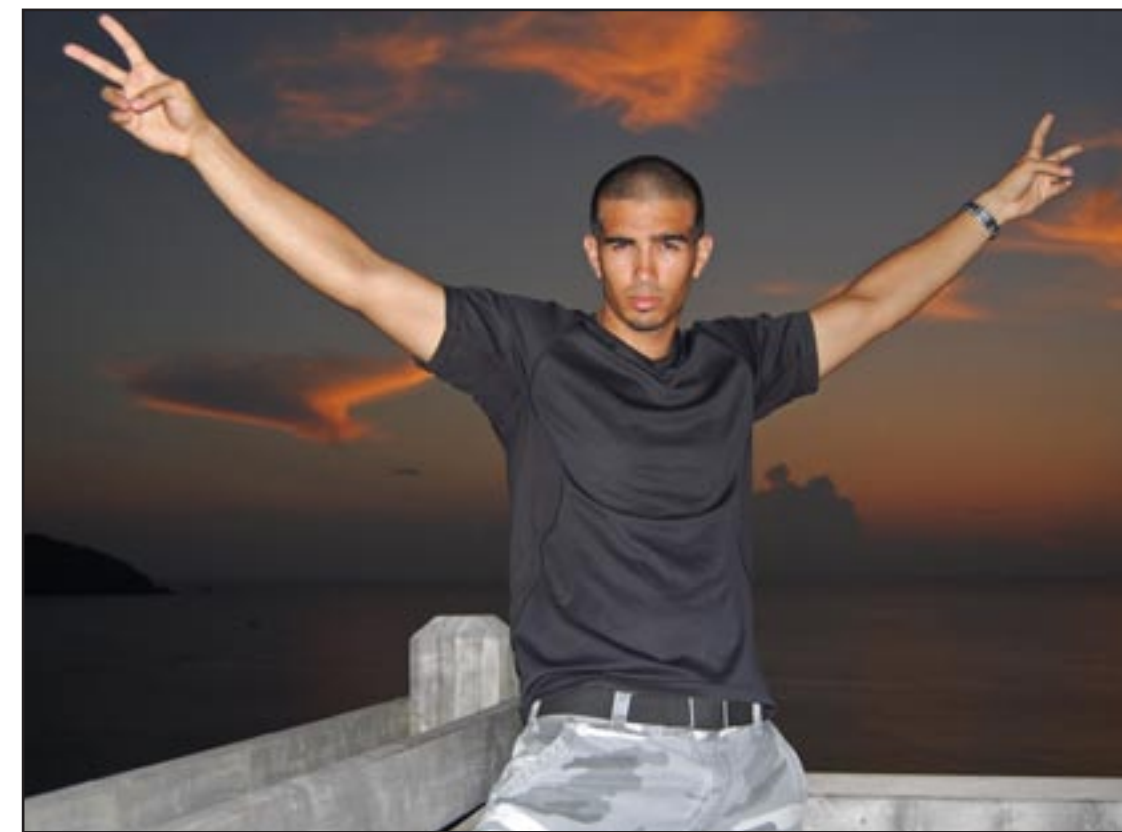
- ❖ **Name:** Leanne Moreira.
- ❖ **Please call me:** Leanne, Le.
- ❖ **School and Location in Hyogo:** Amagasaki Oda.
- ❖ **How we know you:** You probably don't.
- ❖ **Birthday:** July 20.
- ❖ **Born and raised:** Toronto, Ontario, Canada.
- ❖ **Family:** parents, older brother, one dog, one cat.
- ❖ **University and Degree:** Wilfrid Laurier University, biology.
- ❖ **Other jobs you have had:** cashier, file clerk.
- ❖ **Travels:** willing to go just about anywhere.
- ❖ **Hobbies:** Soccer, volleyball, Ultimate Frisbee, skiing, cooking.
- ❖ **Staying another year?** Uhh... yea.
- ❖ **Favorites:**
 - Food:** I don't discriminate.
 - Sports:** Hat tricks = Chu hai's.
 - Music:** Anything the Jamaican is listening to.
 - Shop:** Anywhere in Thailand.
 - TV Show:** *Grey's Anatomy, House.*
 - Movie:** *Wanted...* best movie ever.
- ❖ **Most Proud Achievement:** Not killing this asshole on the right page.
- ❖ **Best life experience:** Surviving dive training.
- ❖ **Motto to live by:** *Life is kind of like milk... you got to drink it before it gets sour and mouldy.*
- ❖ **I remember when...** I beat up this guy in the stairwell...
- ❖ **What are you drinking?** Orange juice.
- ❖ **Who would you like to meet?** A Jamaican that isn't too full of himself to eat.
- ❖ **Why should we elect you Presi-**

- dent of the World?** Cause I'd make bacon and pancakes mandatory breakfast :)
- ❖ **Best thing about JET so far?** Alcohol in vending machines.
- ❖ **If it was my last day on earth I would:** probably make a huge breakfast for all my friends, then run naked through the streets.
- ❖ **My top tip for teaching:** Don't take everything so seriously.
- ❖ **When the class is TOO QUIET** I... start to mime my lesson, just to



- make sure the students understand.
- ❖ **Bribery for students...YAY or NAY?** YAY!!!
- ❖ **Funniest story involving a student?** Talking to a group of male third-year students:
Student 1: *Why don't you study Japanese?*
Me: *Because I want you to speak English with me.*
Group: *Ohhhh....*
Student 2: (In English) *Are you S or M?*

- ❖ **Name:** Luke Leyow Nihon.
- ❖ **Please call me:** whenever you're going to the beach, or dancing, or dancing at the beach...
- ❖ **School and Location in Hyogo:** Ashiya WHAT! Amagasaki represent. Nishinomizzle in the Hizzle foshizzle.
- ❖ **How we know you:** I'm the guy that stalks you on Facebook...
- ❖ **Birthday:** Let's just say it rounds up to thirty and leave it at that, shall we...
- ❖ **Born and raised:** Big up all my ALTs from the West Indies.
- ❖ **Family:** Corleone... HOW YOU DOIN???



- ❖ **University and Degree:** B.Sc. Life, Street Side University.
- ❖ **Other jobs you have had:** They used to trust me with people's money lol... worked in banking for two years when I graduated, but I've pretty much done it all... bussing tables, bartending, selling life insurance, lab tech, video rental clerk, selling shoes, library attendant, pension management, math teach, securities trading, computer repair... Indian Chief :)
- ❖ **Travels:** I was too busy working I guess... but as of late, I've been following an Indian bird to some pretty cool places.
- ❖ **Hobbies:** Dancing. Being intoxicated. Women. Dancing with women who are intoxicated.
- ❖ **Staying another year?** Only if they bring the contract to the enkai again this year... crafty JTEs...
- ❖ **Favorites:**
 - Food:** Anything the woman on the other page is cooking...
 - Sports:** Capoeirista Lachino.
 - Music:** I like both kinds: Reggae and Dancehall.
 - Shop:** Whichever Thai stall Le is dragging me off to next.

- TV Show:** *The Colbert Report...* "Nation, and this brings me to tonight's word: Gaijin."
- Movie:** *Good Will Hunting, GATTA-CA, Great Expectations, Gladiator.*
- ❖ **Most Proud Achievement:** Escaping Jamaica's gravity to crash-land onto this strange wonderful planet.
- ❖ **Best life experience:** Travel-partner-left-side-six-pack-Guniess-notes-windows-down-country-roads-sunny-skies-map-ocean-tunes-laughter-shades-reflection-wind-hair-left-hand-right-knee-full-tank-engine-purr-balance-clutch-second-clutch-third-clutch-fourth-clutch-fifth-smile-happiness.
- ❖ **Motto to live by:** *When life gives you lemons... beat that motherfucker down and squeeze lemon juice in his eyes.*
- ❖ **I remember when...** I got beat down in a stairwell...
- ❖ **What are you drinking?** Probably some girly cocktail like a butterscotch martini... or Guinness... Yeah, I'm strange like that.
- ❖ **Who would you like to meet?** My graduate entry requirements... and women who don't talk so much... but who like dancing intoxicated :)

- ❖ **Why should we elect you President of the World?** Because I would give you all loads of uncompetitive government contracts, kickbacks and tax breaks (Luke Leyow for Block 6 Rep 2009).
- ❖ **Best thing about JET so far?** Watching locals run from elevators in fear of a suicide attack when I haven't shaved for a week and GAIJIN SMASHIN!!! Sumimasen, wakarimansen! Sumimasen, wakarimansen!
- ❖ **If it was my last day on earth I would:** have brunch with my family... then go solidify my legacy... a few times...
- ❖ **Interesting fact about me:** I'm motivated by fear of poverty and desolation. TERRORADE! Is it in you?
- ❖ **My top tip for teaching:** Don't be the loser teachers you suffered through in high school... you remember them: seldom prepared, less often interesting and never inspiring.
- ❖ **When the class is TOO QUIET** I... am probably late again... "Sorry Kyoto-sensei... yes I got a flat... again... yes... since yesterday..."
- ❖ **Bribery for students...YAY or NAY?** So I read a JET memo the other day about being liable for anything in print...

Better Know a Ken: Aomori

By Michael Larson

Part 10 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.

The Basics

Here you are, the great north. The northernmost prefecture on Honshu, home to sprawling cities, charming villages, vast seas and towering mountains — this is Aomori-ken.

Known for apples, Tsugaru shamisen, snowy winters and good snowboarding, Aomori is a beautiful place to visit.

Hachinohe Station in Aomori is the last stop on the Tohoku Shinkansen, Japan's longest bullet train line, which connects Tokyo to northern Japan. Additionally, the Seikan tunnel, the longest and deepest rail tunnel in the world, connects Hokkaido and Aomori-ken.

Ferries to Hokkaido also run from Oma, one of the northernmost towns in Honshu, located on the tip of the Shimokita Peninsula (though these ferries are scheduled to go out of ser-



vice in 2009).

Aomori's cities contain all of the attractions of urban Japan and the conveniences and quirks of metropolitan life in the Far East. However, one of the best ways to see the prefecture and take advantage of what the ken has to offer is to get outdoors. With hectares of wide-open space, Aomori is a haven for all sorts of sports and outdoor activities.

Whether it be some of the best snowboarding in the country (Mt. Hakkoda), the surf culture along the Pacific Coast and the Shimokita Peninsula, amazing

hiking during the summers, horseback riding, or just going for a drive, Aomori is an outdoor adventurer's paradise. So grab your REI backpack and black North Face jacket, and head north. Aomori awaits you.

Regions and Cities TSUGARU

The birthplace of novelist Dazai Osamu, Tsugaru composes most of the eastern half of Aomori Prefecture, including the cities of Aomori, Hirosaki, and Goshogawara.

For Japanese speakers, the local dialect, Tsugaru-ben, proves to be a challenge as many standard Japanese words are shortened into their core syllables.

But whether you are new to Japan or an old-hand ex-pat, Tsugaru offers a variety of sights, a wealth of natural



beauty, and a warm, friendly culture that will have you drinking sake late into the night.

Hirosaki City

Famous for Hirosaki-jo, a 17th century Japanese castle first constructed in 1611, Hirosaki City is a something of a tourist destination and the second largest city in the Tsugaru region.

With over 2,000 cherry blossoms in the castle grounds alone (and being one of the most famous areas for cherry blossoms in all of Japan), Hirosaki is perhaps best visited during the spring.

Hirosaki is especially nice during Golden Week, when the blossoms can be enjoyed during outdoor picnics with traditional Japanese springtime fare.

Aomori City

Like most Japanese cities, Aomori's metropolitan areas are host to a boisterous nightlife, which thrives in bars, izakayas and karaoke parlors.

The commercial center of the prefecture, Aomori City is also host to many of the prefecture's cultural treasures including Sannai Maruyama,



which boasts the oldest Jomon ruins in all of Honshu.

Aomori is famous across Japan for its Nebuta Festival (paper Japanese floats), held in the beginning of August.

NAMBU

Comprising the western half of Aomori Prefecture, the Nambu region is endowed with natural wonders, including Mt. Hakkoda, Lake Towada and the Oirase Valley, which together make up Towada Hachimantai National Park. The biggest cities in the region are Hachinohe and Misawa, which plays host to an American Air Force base.

Hachinohe

Another of the prefecture's major population centers, Hachinohe is Aomori's second largest city. Hach, as the local gaijin call it, is home to the Kabushima Shrine, a religious monument that also serves as a habitat for over 40,000 seagulls.



SHIMOKITA

Shimokita, the peninsula in the northwestern part of the ken, is somewhat isolated from the rest of the prefecture, but well worth the drive or train ride from Aomori City.

Undeniably, the most interesting attraction in the region is Osorezan. Referred to as the "Gates of Hell" as well as the "Mountain of Dread," this trip into the mountain will assault your nose with the odour of sulfur.

For those who can take the smell, the ghostly atmosphere of Osorezan's temple grounds will surely be worth the drive (and for those looking for a soak, the temple grounds include an onsen that is open to visitors).

For the more conventional, Yagen is a free outdoor onsen located in the same mountain range as Osorezan, though visitors should be warned that the sexes aren't separated in this bath.

If you're looking for a good meal, the tuna in Oma is some of the most expensive in the world. It'll lighten your wallet to eat this fare, caught by fisherman in one-man boats, using a single lines and hook. And if you're looking to get a drink, Mutsu, Shimokita's largest city, supports a variety of bars and nightlife options.

Travel Japan

How to Get Where We Want to Go

By Jeff Weese

Winter vacation is right around the corner, so getting started on your travel plans NOW is going to save you money and a splitting headache! Winter vacation is a perfect time to get out and explore all that Asia has to offer OR go back home to escape Japan for a little while and refresh yourself with Westernization and normality.

The quest begins with deciding how to go about purchasing the most expensive but most necessary part of travel outside of Japan: airfare! It can be difficult to find a deal when you are buying tickets right after the Japanese family of three who was willing to drop 300,000 yen each on a three-day package to Los Angeles just to go to Disneyland for a day!

Don't get too discouraged though because there are many options out there. Picking up an English newspaper such as the *Daily Yomiuri* and glancing at the half-page ads from No1 Travel and HIT Travel gets your heart racing a little when your eyes freeze on the 15,000 yen fare to Seoul, Korea. DON'T assume that is what you will actually pay from these guys.

Those fares are usually for a random day in the middle of a week when essentially no one can travel, on a flight connecting through Kazakhstan, AND THEN they add all their taxes — Return-on-a-Sunday tax, fuel tax, airport tax, leave-on-a-weekday tax, extra-low fare tax, or "I'm having a shitty day today so I'm gonna tax you" tax!

You name it, they'll tax it! While these prices are deceiving, it IS a

good place to start looking. Next, hop on the computer and send out an email to ALL of them. It can't hurt to compare prices! Below you will find the web addresses for the some of the well-known travel agents catering to foreigners in Japan:

No1 Travel (Kansai): <http://www.no1-travel.com/kix/no1air/index.htm>

HITTravel: <http://www.hittravel.co.jp/index.php?lang=ENG>

IACE Travel: <http://www.iace.co.jp/english/>

AirNet Travel: <http://www.airnetjapan.com/index2.php>

World Express Travel: <http://www.wexp.co.jp/e-index.htm>

No1 Travel dominates the market and while their prices can be reasonable, price discrimination and unprofessional service are some of the things you may come across. If you are looking to go on a holiday with a Japanese friend or significant other, you may receive a different fare than them. They mark some of their fares for Japanese only or Gaijin only! I think in most countries this is illegal, but of course, this is Japan!

If you do choose No1 Travel to



Haven't seen it? What?!? For shame....

assist you in your travel plans, steer clear of Noreen, the manager at the Kobe branch. Her customer service has been consistently unprofessional with unreturned phone calls and emails, then lying about them, as well as mistaking inquiries as reservation requests, but never telling you that she has booked it! There have not been as many complaints about the Osaka branch except for their pushy sales tactics saying, "There is only one seat left so you MUST book and pay today!"

HIT Travel and AirNet Travel are worth submitting inquiries to, but their websites are sometimes difficult to navigate and rarely do the

web searches produce anything but a message to call the company for a quote.

I have heard great things about IACE Travel including low prices and good customer service, but have yet to experience it for myself.

World Express Travel, on the other hand, I have had plenty of experience with and can recommend them with the highest regard. They are a small outfit based just across the street from JR Sannomiya station. Their response time for inquiries or general questions regarding your reservation is very timely and their customer service is very personable.

I have dealt the most with Mr. Fujiwara who will work his hardest to accommodate your reservation request until the day before departure if necessary! When you are searching for quotes, I highly recommend you talk to one of the friendly faces at World Express!

Finally, there are the web-based travel services from America such as

www.orbitz.com, www.travelocity.com, and www.expedia.com that occasionally have lower fares, but sometimes there are hurdles to jump, such as the ticketing issue. Sometimes they require you to take paper tickets, which must be sent to an address in America, but if the price is low enough, it may be worth it!

Want to do something a little different? Japan being an island makes ferry travel possible as well. There are international ferry services between Japan's major port cities and China, Taiwan, Korea, and Russia.

From Osaka/Kobe, the routes to China and Taiwan (via Okinawa) are the most logical,

while the ferries to Korea can easily be caught from Fukuoka (Hakata) or Shimonoseki. Ferries in the direction of Russia usually depart from Hokkaido or the Japan Sea Coast of the Tohoku Region. You can find more information about international ferries at, <http://www.seejapan.co.uk/transport/sea/international.html>.

Wherever your travels take you for the holidays, good luck booking your flights and have a great trip!



"Between two pillows? THOSE AREN'T PILLOWS!" - classic!

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