

The background of the entire page is a photograph of a laser maze. Several people are visible, some crouching and others standing, as they navigate through a complex web of bright green laser beams. The scene is dimly lit, with the primary light source being the lasers themselves, creating a vibrant green glow.

# ht

hyogo times

05.13

.....*Inside*.....

Tips for keeping busy during your downtime

Stairway to heaven

Takarazuka Revue(d)

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All JETs in Hyogo are encouraged to send in articles, musings, poetry, prose and any ideas to improve the Hyogo Times for the betterment of the Hyogo JET community. Submit by the 15th of each month to: [publications@hyogo.ajet.net](mailto:publications@hyogo.ajet.net)

## Message from the Editor

### They closed my Mister Donut!

With no warning at all, the 1st of April found a sign on the door thanking everyone for 2 years of custom and saying that my coffee providing study zone was no more. I was informed of the closure by a friend who came over for dinner on the 2nd and had to go to the ex-misudo in person to confirm on the 3rd – I was that certain my friend was mistaken. I know people who had been there on the 29th, 30th March & heard nothing of the impending doom of the establishment. Reading that little piece of paper, a part of my Sasayama soul died. It's sounds pathetic, especially as it's only been around for 2 years, but I was skipping when it opened. Free coffee refills right by Japanese class? It was so perfect for pre-lesson study sessions. And I got to eat doughnuts. I wasn't always a doughnut freak (and ice-cream: had a beetroot, apple and ginger one recently) but misudo opened my eyes (I don't understand the queues outside Krispy Kremes, they're too sweet as far as I'm concerned. And overpriced). Wondering which of my ex-students I would get to chat with... it's all gone!

But now, after a month of mourning, marvellous May is finally here. I've put away the kotatsu, ready to contemplate evenings spent basking in the setting sun. The frogs are back croaking their little hearts out, but I have yet to see any squished in the road; my laundry dries in less than a week. Happy times after my sudden loss. If it wasn't for the fact that I really like the food and colour scheme that Autumn brings, I would say we're in the middle of the best time of the year. It's not too hot, but the sun is shining. The rains haven't really started yet and students are getting used to their new positions in the hierarchy of the school. The mountains and fields have lost their grey tinge and are

gradually returning to vibrant green. I think about May and I smile. Definitely a good time of year.

Hopefully everyone is getting used to their new schedules and students right around now. I would like to say that I have, but that would be fibbing. Between first year orientation, 2nd years needing to finish the textbook from last year, and me disappearing off to Germany and the UK last week (my aunt's 60th birthday celebration – I surprised her; it was fantastic. I didn't even need to feel too guilty as orientation coincided with me being away – huzzah!) I haven't had a 'proper' week yet. That day will come, but Golden Week isn't exactly helping. I'm not really complaining about extra days off, it's just frustrating when I thought that school starting up again would give me back some of the routine that I've been hankering after.

"But what" I hear you cry "pray tell is in this month's HT?" Well, I'll tell you. If you've a longing to see ladies dressed up as men and relating great works of literature through the medium of song, check out the Takarazuka Revue review (you see what I did there?). It might be a little late for GW, but get some ideas for a short city break to Taipei. Or why not head out and up some of the mountains we're blessed with in Hyogo, perhaps following up with a celebratory Kobe beef dinner at Wakkoqu? All present and correct, plus other bits and pieces to boot.

Is it still hot beverage season, or have we moved on? Either way, have a read over a morning(or other) break and we'll be back next month!

Emi



## Message from the PR

### It's already May and, despite

making a brief comeback in Mid April, winter is definitely over!! Thank you to everyone who came to the Hyogo AJET Hanami event at Sumarakoen despite the weather that weekend. I had a great time sitting in the sun under the cherry blossoms, having a bevvie, sharing some food and looking at the ocean. I'd especially like to thank Pete for doing a wonderful job organizing. Unfortunately, we don't have any events organized for this month, but, the farewell party is coming up soon.

In the run up to the new school year, I went more than a month without regular classes. As I write this I've just taught my first two classes for the new school year. They didn't go so well. It definitely was a struggle – remembering what comes next and trying not to look at my lesson plan every three seconds, working with new teachers, trying to remember students' names, using classroom English and most importantly,

trying not to speak too fast. I hope everyone is settling back into the teaching (with any luck more easily than I appear to be).

This is my third May in Japan and I've always felt it's a funny time of year – the new school year has started but some of our friends are leaving in three short months. It's a topsy-turvy time of year. As you're reading this you're probably either thinking about your plans for the second half of Golden Week or just getting back from your holiday. Last year I went to Cambodia, Singapore and Malaysia during GW. Coming back was really difficult. I kept finding myself sitting at my desk, dreaming of Beng Mealea, mangoes, spicy food and late night Teh Tarik and tissue prata in Kuala Lumpur. This year I'm planning to go to Tottori for a weekend over Golden Week and really looking forward to venturing west.

For those of you who will be leaving us in the summer, there are some fantastic resources moderated by our P.A.s Ben and Liz. Please have a look at the Hyogo AJET Wiki for a handy checklist, visa advice, useful information on the pension refund and shipping stuff home. Finally, the **Hyogo Times** has a useful online classified section for getting rid of things you aren't taking home. You could also try using gaijinpot or the Kansai flea market magazine.

Have a great month!

*Ary*



*Jaipei\**



## Taipei: Monday - Friday

### It's a joy to live an easy two hour

flight away from Taiwan, a country boastful of its cheap eats and nights on the streets (in reference to its famous night markets of course). I spent a good working week in and around the capital and was left satisfied and saturated with holiday fun. There was nothing mundane, repetitive or routine about Taipei; everyday was different, a change from my usual "repeat after me" world of work.

### Monday

We landed in the early evening as Taipei was waking. The sun was setting and the stalls were setting up. Taiwan is fruitful in its night markets; it's easy to stumble into one whichever area you seem to be in. We dived straight into the mother of all of them and the biggest in town, Shilin Night Market. Networks of streets overfilled with food, overflowing with people, overjoyed with custom. We had plunged right into what Taipei was all about. The variety of food

ranged from jacket potatoes for the novice to whole squid bodies for the daring. The tangled smells of grilled chicken parts, fresh fruit and red bean filled desserts tied together surprisingly well. It was a great chance to taste all sorts of Taiwanese food in one, slightly overwhelming, street market.

Yes the food was tantalizing but there was a bit more to Shilin than food on sticks. Reams of brightly lit, girly accessory stores blared K-Pop and sold mainly shoes and phone cases, all as kawaii as ever. I've been to a fair few night markets and I have to say the sellers at Shilin were pretty tame. There was no hassling, haggling or harassing for a sale which left this tourist comfortable and happy to browse the stalls.

We clocked out from the bustle at the early hour of 10pm, instead of staying 'til 12 or 1am ingesting yet more grilled meats. The extra couple of hours spent sleeping paid off the next day.

### Tuesday

It doesn't count as a holiday unless you take a day trip (or two). Takoro Gorge is south-east of Taipei city and close to the semi-rural town of Hualien. If you look up this gorgeous gorge (couldn't resist that obvious alliteration) you may find bucket loads of (chotto) expensive tours and one which features a 30 minute plane ride. But in reality you can get there easily, affordably and without a pilot. We took the TRA (Taiwan Railway Administration) for two and half hours (NT\$800) and found ourselves in the inaka. It was a refreshing contrast to the busy happenings of the night before. The fresh air, sunshine and scenery were, unfortunately, all slightly ruined by the shed load of bus tours and bright yellow taxis; oh how tourism is an ugly necessity. We struck a good, yet slightly risky, deal with an English (Japanese, Chinese, Taiwanese...) speaking taxi driver. We hired this self-proclaimed linguist/driver for



NT\$600 each for the day (a bit less than the bus tour).

The gorge is an immense mass of rock with streams flowing through the white-washed crevasses. Hollowed caves work as throughways for cars and double as a playground for swallows. Most of our time was spent peering over bridges comprehending the depth of the drop then looking far into the distance, somehow still managing to have the gorge in sight. I felt like a speck in the world as I was panoramically surrounded by stone.

Takoro gorge is in one of Taiwan's eight national parks and it's definitely worth a visit. On a sunny Tuesday, we were lucky to miss the designated bus tour times and have the gorge almost to ourselves; well it felt like it at least.

### Wednesday

Another day trip planned (but this time much closer) was to the tea hills of Taiwan. Our 45 minute train ride was a steal at NT\$90 and took us to the old town of Ruifang. From the characteristic railway station we taxied to Jiaufen to begin a little trek up narrow, stall-lined streets to the peak of tea heaven. It was like Shilin, but condensed significantly and offering a more alluring variety of food. Every other stall was selling Oolong tea and between them were cute wooden trinkets stalls along with more unique souvenirs. When we reached the top, a tea house seemed to have appeared, unnoticed. Tea and terracotta filled the walls of this vast, warm establishment, naturally named Jioufen Teahouse. We were seated with our own pot of water, charmingly boiling on coals, as

we waited for our tea expert. The leaves were chosen and when the lady came, she went through the 'proper' way to make a brew. We relaxed with a fragile cup of Oolong and took turns mimicking the procedure we had been taught just moments before. We left with tea leaves in a handy gift bag and set off for our next stop. (NT\$100 per person for water, NT\$400 for tea leaves).

Shifen (are you getting confused yet?) is a quaint railway town famous for pretty much one thing – fire lanterns. You know those romantic paper lanterns that fly away into the sky. The latter half of the railway tracks were lined with fellow tourists releasing huge, colourful, personalized lanterns into the dimming sky. At NT\$100 a pop we were straight in, paint brushes in hand. We





\*continued

spent an unreasonable amount of time decorating all four sides of the lantern with typical things like "Taipei 2013" but the idea was to write wishes and send them off to be granted. We posed for an unfathomable amount of photos from all angles before we handed our beloved lantern to the atmosphere.

The train ride back to the city was spent half dozing and half discussing what to wear that night. As a chic Asian city, Taipei brags about its ability to keep people entertained into the early hours. We had to see what all the fuss was about. Plus, Wednesday night was ladies night!

Luxy was our main contender for the night; the portfolio of A-List celebrities that have performed there was enough to gain our custom. Strangely, the best part of the night may have been exiting the elevator into the club. It was like being in The Matrix/ Mission Impossible, green lasers everywhere, and when you've had a few cocktails you think you're Neo himself. The club was a big rowdy party, Thor and Captain American were prancing around pouring unnamed alcohol into passersby's mouths; the dance floor and stage were packed and at one point in the night a neon army of glowing dancers performed. It felt like Vegas. Bright lights, big city indeed.

## Thursday

What is your hangover food of choice? A Michelin star dumpling? It's not mine either but we were heading to Din Tai Fung, a dumpling restaurant that originated in Taipei and is now selectively open in countries across Asia and North America. It's in the basement of Taiwan's tallest building, Taipei 101, and has a ticketed seating system so you know it's worth it. People wait, staring at the screen, chanting their seat number in their heads, all for a tiny Asian delight, xiaolongbao. This dumpling is a steamed treat of half pork, half soup; a taste explosion in your mouth, a soup grenade if you will. The precision to which this dumpling is made earned its star. The fishbowl style kitchen encourages diners to watch the chefs prepare thousands of dumplings in a nothing-to-hide kind of way. Ten of these steamed goodies cost a modest NT\$120 so there is no excuse not to try Taiwan's most famous product.

After lunching on the national treasure we significantly lowered our standards by touring the themed cafes of Taipei. First stop, the newly opened Barbie Café. It's everything you would expect and blindingly more. Hot pink ferociously jumps off every wall and Barbie has been transformed into everything imaginable. It is an outrageous place, worth a looksie and a few

curious photos. Next stop, Hello Kitty Sweets. We were geared up with our Kitty Chan glasses on and a hunger for desserts. Much to our disappointment, the exterior was tired and dated while the interior was dirty and lacking fresh kawaii-ness. My Kitty Chan brain made me stay for cake and a coffee, which was a mistake. I'm not sure it was even worth the photos. The very cheesy cheesecake and the mediocre coffee set me back NT\$500.

To top off a touristy day we went to the top of Taipei 101 (NT\$450). At one point it was the world's tallest building, until Dubai decided to enter the fray of course. To get to the top of (what once was) the world's tallest building, we rode the world's fastest elevator, and between the 87th and 91st floors we were introduced to the world's biggest Tuned Mass Damper (TMD), a huge ball of mass made to reduce movement in high rises, the future of earthquake proofing.

I felt a sense of achievement after hitting so many 'World bests' in one place.

## Friday

TGIF is usually the first thing I think, text or read on a Friday morning, but that Friday I wished it wasn't Friday. Every day of the week threw something different at me, creating the best mix for a five day getaway.



I had only a few hours left on this city break and I knew how to best make use of the time; a last supper.

The other mouthwateringly famous, line-up outside for a table, type of food I had to try was Taiwanese beef noodle soup. A 10 minute taxi ride out of the city centre drove us, literally, into a crowd queuing outside a small, but full, noodle restaurant. The hearty noodle bowl came and food envy dissipated. The meaty concoction was incomparable. I was content with leaving now.

## Note

The place is heavily influenced by Japanese culture, unsurprising as their relationship is strong. Japanese is widely used in Taiwan, I would say more so than English. There were definitely a few times where my broken Japanese came to the rescue. The transport system is clean and efficient and the only real difference is the price, Taipei wins that round. The other very noticeable thing is the number of 7/11s around, sharing Japan's combini culture. I guess Taiwan felt like a home away from home (away from home?).

Cherie Pham

Tell me more..!

100NT\$ = 332円 (xe.com, as of 31.04.13)

Takoro Gorge

Hello Kitty Sweets

Luxy

Taipei 101

Din Tai Fung



## Tips for Keeping Busy in your Downtime

**I was inspired to write this** piece because a friend of mine is moving to Japan and the thought of living alone freaks her out. I assured her that distractions and forming routines once she's here are the best way to alleviate these kinds of anxiety. Even if it's not the case for you, whether it's at home or at the office, some JETs have a lot of time on their hands. Having free time is a luxury; don't waste it, maximize it!

### Educate yourself

There are a huge number of free online courses available these days. Take advantage and learn about anything that remotely interests you. If you're worried about sticking with a course, you could also consider something that provides certification at the end. The breadth of online certifications available should not be sniffed at. For these, just be careful that there aren't any requirements you have to fulfill in person.

### Explore new hobbies

Let's face it, hobbies are time consuming, but really enrich your life. Especially take advantage of hobbies you try that are unavailable in your home country. Don't take it too seriously at first either, and allow yourself to take on some hobbies casually as you discover what you really like.

### Become a YouTuber or Blogger

If this sounds crazy, think again! You're already braver than the majority of the people you know – you left your comfort zone and are living in a foreign country! Everything in your life is interesting because it's so different from theirs. Plus you'll thank yourself later for keeping a record of this exciting time in your life.

### Learn new skills

This may sound similar to exploring new hobbies, but it's not so involved. Like maybe cooking isn't something that enthralls you, but hey, since you're forced to cook for yourself at times, why not try out some recipes to add to your repertoire? It'll come in handy later in life too. Google 'skills everyone should know' and you'll find plenty to keep you occupied.

### Work out

So maybe you're not feeling anxious like my friend is, but if you are feeling any negativity, working out not only helps you look good but helps you feel good too! And if my tiny inaka town has a gym, yours does too. If the gym isn't your thing then find a new hobby that involves being active!

### Organize your files

I'm talking about digital files. I did this recently and it felt great. I deleted 286 gigabytes worth of files, organized my pictures, documents, lolcat pictures (don't judge), and everything else. About an hour a day for a week means that I can now easily find anything I want and not have to worry about space on my hard drive (also my future self will be happy).

### Read and watch all the things!

Now, don't argue that it's more difficult to acquire the things you want to read and watch being in Japan. All I'll say is if there's a will, there's a way (wink). Do it and finally join the conversation on some of the best movies, shows, documentaries, books that you've always wanted to join! It'll definitely take up loads of time and this can tie in to educating yourself as well!

### Plan your next activity

This one is my specialty. As JETs we have the time and money to really take advantage of living in Japan, the land of festivities. Every corner of Japan has a specialty, a history, a festival, something unique about it. Do the research and make plans to go! (Not to mention how accessible the rest of Asia is). It would be great vlog/blog content too.

### Give yourself a giggle

So a lot of what I've mentioned so far is productive in some way, but this one is simple. Make yourself laugh. Watch the funny videos you come across, click through the lolcat pictures (or whatever floats your boat), read humorous articles, whatever it is. No day is complete without laughter.

### Keep in touch

It's so easy for weeks to pass by before realizing we haven't spoken to our loved ones. The place you left behind is changing just as much as you are and in this day and age, there's absolutely no reason to throw your hands up in defeat that you've 'drifted apart' from it. Those people you left behind helped get you where you are today, so don't forget about them. Even a little bit goes a long way when keeping in touch.

I'm hoping this list gives you some new ideas or inspires you to incorporate some to your own routine. And of course, use your own discretion as to which you can attempt at school. Start as soon as possible! Remember, a year from now you'll be glad you started today.

*Jennifer Marcia*



## 春八つ橋 Haru Yatsushashi

Although the sakura have come and gone, spring is certainly in the air and all over Japan at the moment (my hayfever can attest to that) and so during a recent trip to Osaka I decided to pick up a box of the spring themed variety of yatsushashi (speciality mochi of Kyoto, see chapter 2). The box contained two separate and unique sakura flavoured variations alongside the more traditional cinnamon and matcha flavours.

### Sakura Mochi Juumi Yatsushashi

桜餅風味八つ橋  
cherry blossom yatsushashi

Now these guys are basically a yatsushashi themed take on 'sakura mochi', a popular spring time sweet. Pink in colour and containing a sweet red bean filling, sakura mochi come wrapped in an edible salted sakura leaf. Being quite a fan of said seasonal mochi offerings (they come with my highest recommendation) how were the yatsushashi going to stack up in comparison? Unfortunately I'm going to have to admit not particularly well.

Aesthetically they are quite attractive, the usual yatsushashi fair, less than opaque mochi with a pale pink sakura flavoured centre peeking through. The taste, however, was less than amazing. Although remaining faithful to the delicate texture that makes yatsushashi what it is, I really found the 'sakura' aspect to be much too subtle and entirely underwhelming. If anything the entire time I was eating them I felt like I was chewing a slightly sweetened pillow that by all rights should have been amazing! A nice yet insufficient addition was the inclusion of a couple of sakuradzuke 桜漬け (pickled cherry blossoms) which added a nice, salty contrast. Regardless, next spring I'll pass.

### Sakura Koshian

桜こしあん  
cherry blossom & sweet red bean paste

As opposed to the sakura centre of the version above, these ones instead had a sakura inspired mochi coating around a more or less kosher red bean filling. Once again though, I found the sakura to be too underwhelming, leaving them more or less indistinguishable from their cinnamon counterparts. They were rather pretty (again) from a purely aesthetic viewpoint, sporting an appealing pale pink colouring which was rather fitting for the season. At the end of the day however, I was far from impressed. I had thought it was pretty hard to screw up the winning formula that makes yatsushashi what it is, apparently I was mistaken. That aside, they are still perfectly edible, I just personally wouldn't be giving these ones in particular as an omiyage to anyone I really liked! All said and done, I still ate them all hungrily, but in the future I'll stick with the ever-reliable cinnamon variety.

Daniel (Jake) Jaccone

## チャーハン Chinese style fried rice

An easy & delicious dish that goes perfectly with gyozas!

### Ingredients

Serves 4

- 3 cups of rice (uncooked amount), cooked in the rice cooker
- 2 eggs
- 200g of sliced meat; beef, chicken or pork, even shrimp is ok
- 1 onion
- ¼ of a carrot
- 1 pack of mushrooms (I recommend shimeji; small mushrooms that are joined together at the base)
- ¼ cabbage
- ¼ bunch of spring onions
- salad oil
- salt and pepper
- soy sauce
- chicken soup powder granules (Youki brand with a red label, it's in the Chinese section of the supermarket)
- sesame oil

### Step one

Finely chop the carrot, onion and cabbage.

### Step two

Chop the mushrooms, meat and spring onion.

### Step three

Beat the eggs lightly and make an omelette using a little salad oil. Remove from the pan once cooked and slice thinly.

### Step four

Put the sliced meat in a heated frying pan with a little salad oil. Stir fry the meat, then add the vegetables. Cook for about five minutes.

### Step five

Add salt, pepper and chicken soup granules to taste.

### Step six

Add the sliced omelette to the meat and vegetables.

### Step seven

Add the cooked rice to the pan and stir fry for about eight minutes.

### Step eight

Lastly, add a little soy sauce and sesame oil to taste.

Lauren McRae





# Stairway to Heaven:

Or How I Learned to Stop Complaining and Love the 階段

## Oh the great outdoors!

As it finally starts to get to a reasonable temperature (for what – about 3 weeks?) I find my eyes drifting towards the mountains (I'm a country lass, for now at least) and my feet itching to bound upwards. I used to hate my parents for dragging me out walking when I was younger. I wanted to stay at home where I didn't have to haul myself up a load of hills, drink bad soup from a thermos and at the end of it all to discover the chocolate bar of the day was a penguin, not a snickers. The hills were definitely my main bugbear though. I was fine with sports, but walking up and down a load of hills for hours on end was on no level an appealing idea for an 8 year old girl.

How my older self laughs at that ridiculous child. Fuji: check; Rokko: check; Mitake (highest mountain in my fair town of Sasayama): double check (with more to come). I recently realized that I actively try to include some kind of hiking whenever I go

away on holiday because **it makes me happy**. The sense of achievement on reaching the 頂上(ちょうじょう; peak); the vistas laid out before you; the fully-justified trip to the onsen afterwards. It's all good fun. On top of that (and especially on holiday), you can stuff your face silly with tasty things because you just climbed a frickin' mountain. You can't quite say that about the hills and valleys of mid-Wales.

## The beautiful nature

As we have all been told a million times, Japan is great because we can 'enjoy the beautiful nature' and it's true – to an extent. Then you start to see all the concrete and go 'eh?' The rivers are concrete; half the mountains seem to be covered in concrete or being torn down to make concrete; the rice fields, whilst they can be beautiful as they sway in the sun, are most certainly not natural. The conglomeration that is the cities of southern Hyogo, merging

into Osaka with nary a breath of countryside between, is both terrifying and wondrous to behold. But the mountains are right there – waiting to take you away from it all, to get in touch with the true majesty of nature. So you strap on some appropriate footwear, take a deep breath and envision yourself scrambling to the edge of the sky.

Then you get to the bottom of your chosen mountain and find a giant flight of stairs. Doesn't exactly scream 'I'm in the wilderness!' does it...

I have been seriously put out and put off when faced with a huge set of steps going straight up the side of a mountain. It doesn't feel like you're in the great outdoors; it's like being on a stair machine at the gym with a bit more to look at. As much as anything, they're intimidating, whether you're going up or down. Going up and they're all just stretched out in front of you, taunting you with how far away the summit is; coming

down and the slightest stumble will have you bouncing down the mountain to inevitable death.

**Death I tell you!**

## A necessary evil

Now there are many reasons why trails require steps and I'm not going to discount that. Steps can make routes safer and play the very important role of preserving them. Without some kind of more rigid support, particularly steep trails become impossible. One look at the incline on most Japanese mountains and it becomes pretty clear that steps are a good idea if you want to get to the top. Take into account the traffic some of the more popular routes have to handle, and the preservation role steps play crystallizes their necessity.

Yet the giant single flight going up remains incredibly annoying. When hiking I don't like to take breaks until I reach a recognizable break point, often a switchback or viewing area. This is fine until your flight of stairs is right there, staring you in the face from the outset, and you're gasping for breath before you're a third of the way up. Give me a gentler gradient and a switchback sometimes, please! It would reduce the death factor on falling, and hide exactly how much further you have to

go before hitting the top, along with providing more realistic break targets (I accept that may just be me feeling not very fit as old Japanese ladies power past me, not a single a drop of sweat on their brows).

So I moan about the stairs, but most definitely not what they let you do. Rokko is covered in trails that NEED stairs because they need preserving because they're so popular because they are tremendous fun. Back in Wales we would go for a walk and see maybe 5 other people, if that, on any given day; there were correspondingly fewer concrete stairways in the middle of the forest. Head to Ashiyagawa Station and the start of the Ashiya-Arima Onsen hike on a weekend and you'll easily see more than 40 people as you decide what onigiri to buy from Lawsons.

## Head outside

Whether a stair fan or not, hiking up your local mountain (or one further afield) is a great way to do something active and for free (except for train fares/petrol money). The Ashiya-Arima Onsen hike is a good day out with the onsen at the end being a great bonus. If you want to try something less vertically challenging, shall we say, head over to northern Nishinomiya and explore the old JR Fukuchiyama line from Takedao to

Namaze (or the reverse). It's almost entirely flat and runs alongside the river. It's a beautiful area and the old train tunnels through the mountains provide plenty of opportunities to jump out at people (take a torch – the tunnels are pitch black at points). You may not get the views Rokko can provide, but it's still a lot of fun.

There is English information out there, try [here](#) for hikes in Kansai, and links to the rest of Japan. Routes are generally well-signed but in Japanese, so take notes of the kanji for important points on your hike (i.e. the name of the mountain you're going up).

P.S. The giant metal stairs up between the rocks is actually in Seoraksan National Park, Korea. Coming down that wasn't fun, not fun at all – I think I would have preferred to abseil (which some people were doing...).

## Omogen Custance



## Case studies, closet-cases and aliens!

### So, you might have met him on

the train, at the supermarket (no comment \*guilty look\*), at work (no comment, again), at the gym, walking home from the movies, at the movies, at your Soho hair salon, while shopping for that 'must have' scarf to match that 'needed to have' sweater you bought last year, at church (no comment, again), at a friend's BBQ, while partying with your girls, or just sitting at the park. But one thing was sure: he made the first move!

In the gay fraternity, all (or most...) gays are equipped with two things: impeccable oral presentation skills and a GAYDAR. Now, if you are asking what a GAYDAR is, you should be glad you found this article! A GAYDAR is a gay-guy's inner instinct that tells him if someone (he has come in contact with) is straight or gay (as we will know). This GAYDAR becomes more reliable over time and as one gets more 'seasoned'

in Gayville. Some GAYDARs are so good/reliable that it can pick out a guy on the "DL" out of a crowd of Muslims at prayer time at a Mosque! It can't be explained (or we just don't want to give away the secrets!). I trust my GAYDAR; I follow it and I don't think it has failed me – It's just that the guys are so deep in the closet and denial that even if you are offering an 'amnesty' to them to come out, they just get scared and deny deny deny deny!

Are we too hard on them? Do we expect too much from them? Come on! What exactly do they expect us to think when they were the ones who approached us with that charming, dashing smile, offered us a drink, invited themselves back to our apartments, arranged dinner for two, volunteered to go shopping with us at Victoria's Secret, helped to choose our mother's Christmas present, hung with us on our loneliest

night and sat with us while waiting for bad news. I might not know much about 'heterosexual male friendships', but I'm sure they don't involve all that (well, unless they are Indians... lolol... That's a whole new drama). So, should we have been blamed for thinking that they were gay? Shouldn't we have expressed our feelings? Were we wrong to have 'tried' something with all those signs pointing to 'green... go ahead'? Should the GAYDAR be responsible for these tragedies? Or maybe, just maybe it's a case of denial and **not** mistaken identity. Who knows?

Closet-case vs. Alien-among-us! Which is easier to deal with anyway? It's like choosing between a volcano or a nuclear bomb; a plaid flannel shirts or a paper bag; advance calculus or advance trigonometry! Come on!!! OK! So, because our GAYDARs are programmed to pick up the slightest of 'gay-rays', it will

automatically pick up a closet-case. And for the record (I don't know where I got this phrase from, but I need to return it...hmmmm), a 'closet-case' is a guy who is obviously gay (I'm telling you, we always know) but he is stuck so deep in the closet that he brain-washes himself to think that he is NOT and often times burdens himself with a girlfriend and in the worst case scenario, a marriage without a prenup' and ten kids (God only knows how he got them). These are the ones who constantly reach out for help, ergo come across our radar. But somehow even though they are reaching out for help, they insist that they are "OK" and "STRAIGHT" (as we know).

On the top side (pun INTENDED... lol), there are those few 'aliens' who, for some reason, should have been born gay (as we know), but I guess the memo got lost in the mail. So they have been condemned to live

a "STRAIGHT LIFE" (as we know). Then you might ask yourself, why do they constantly show up on the GAYDAR? Well, just say that although the memo was lost in the mail, you can always rely on those 'chatter-boxes' who will pass on useful information. Somewhere in those aliens' DNA, their souls cry out for the good old "GAY LIFE" (as we know). Ergo, they subconsciously find and make gay friends just to be around fabulousness, which is gay; they try to acquire taste in fashion and fine arts, as the gays do; and strangely, from time to time, pretend to get drunk and make-out (to say the least) with a guy they feel comfortable with. [No comment, AGAIN... damn!!!]

For that reason, every time you meet a guy and your GAYDAR goes off, deep down you might hope he is not another case study, not another closet-case,

not another alien. While the case-studies will make you pull your hair out; and the closet-cases take up all the space in the closet and may never come out, I guess the aliens aren't too bad, right? (At least the aliens know how to choose a good restaurant).

*Dwayne Cobourne*

Dear heart,  
Why him?



## Restaurant Review

### Wakkoqu

**Japan in spring is a veritable treasure trove for locals and visitors alike.** My family therefore decided that it would be the perfect time to visit for a good dose of culture and travel. However, as the years go by, the parents do tend to prefer a relaxing holiday and avoid city breaks. So this, coupled with my father's dodgy leg, made me rather nervous about what the heck they would do in the unrelenting urban sprawl I currently call home. In the weeks running up to their arrival I planned.

#### A lot.

The itinerary started in Okinawa. It was going to be the perfect place to ease them into Japan, eating sushi on the beach. Or at least it would have been had it not rained almost incessantly: strike one. From the islands we plunged into the modern melee of Tokyo where we were turned away from the Tsukiji tuna auction at 4am and then shivered together for a day at the Tokyo Sevens (reminding us very much of cold, damp Blighty): strike

two. Finally we returned to Kansai and I breathed a sigh of relief to be back on home turf; here I would not fail.

Returning in prime sakura season may not have been pre-arranged, but the fam gave me credit for it anyway. A significant improvement, but not the homerun I wanted. No, that came on my father's 60th Birthday when I knew I had to pull out all the stops. Fortunately Hyogo came to the rescue with its most famous product...

#### Kobe Beef.

I love steak. Sirloin, fillet, T-bone, rib-eye, rump... I love them all. To the horror of many I like my meat blue. In America I am refused this pleasure, in England waiters look baffled and in France they ask snootily if I know what I have asked for. This partiality stems from the birthday boy himself who charmingly jokes that when it comes to steak he wants the chef to (imagine a terrible Texan accent) "just cut off its horns and

wipe its ass". The whole family are carnivores, and so it was with high expectations that three gingers and a bearded bloke arrived at Wakkoqu. It may sound like the start of a bad joke, but it was the beginning of one of the best dining experiences of my life...

The Kitano restaurant came recommended by a friend and the bible (Lonely Planet) and has become the highlight of my Japanese culinary journey thus far. The restaurant itself has a simple charm; wood panelling and mood lighting create a relaxed but decadent atmosphere. Instead of a traditional table set up you are seated at a bar, whose surface is pristine steel, the stage for the night's performance. And what a performance it is. Once you have chosen which cut of beef to devour you can sit back, relax and enjoy the show.

It begins with the garlic; never say no to the garlic. Slivers of the flavoursome stuff are placed methodically on the heated surface

before being turned and turned and turned until they are crisp and a beautiful golden brown. By this point the aromas will have your mouth watering so it is the perfect time for an appetizer to appear; ours was smoked salmon on a bed of sliced radish. It was truly delicious and whet our appetite for more just as our chef began to shave fragments of fat from the slabs of marbled beef.

Post appetizer, a light soup and a salad with Kobe tomatoes precede the main event. As you nibble on the warm up dishes you can admire a true master at work. With understated ceremony your personal chef caresses the hunk of meat with his knife and spatula. Whilst the fat melts, he gently warms the main block through before cutting the slab as if it were butter. Each piece of meat is cooked to your preference, swiftly sliced and delivered to your plate as a perfect bite-sized morsel. There is a selection of condiments to choose from: the crisped garlic from earlier, Japanese rock salt, black pepper, mustard, soy sauce and special vinegar. As each steaming mouthful is delivered to your plate your chef will recommend a condiment (or combination) to accompany it, according to the texture of that particular soupçon. My personal

favourite was mixing salt and garlic, but mustard with soy was also a delicious new discovery. The Kobe steak experience is most definitely a far cry from the usual rushed Japanese dining.

And how was the meat itself? I suppose it would be a cop-out to say indescribable; but how to properly express the feeling of meat melting on your tongue? The delicate nuances of flavour as the beef becomes increasingly fatty... the desire to chew a mouthful for another blast of taste only to discover that it has already dissolved away... your taste buds seeming to sigh in ecstasy when the chef presents a new titbit for their delectation... Needless to say it was a very quiet meal, interspersed only with synchronized sighs of contentment reminiscent of the diner scene in **When Harry Met Sally** (fortunately the restaurant was empty).

Although the meat is the main event, the chef pays no little attention to its companions; vegetables, tofu and konnyaku all get the same loving treatment, and cooked in steak juices I have come to see konnyaku in a whole new light. Nothing goes to waste at Wakkoqu, and the smallest pieces of meat and fat are crisped up with garlic to make a delicious rice dish

and bean sprout mess to truly get your money's worth of all that succulent meat.

This exquisite meal is rounded off with a good strong coffee before you dance out the door, drunk on beef.

A midweek visit gave us the place to ourselves, and you can't get much better than having four trained Kobe steak chefs looking after you! The staff are incredibly welcoming and will humour poor Japanese, making you look very good to visitors from afar (before the next customers come in and it transpires the chef has worked in California).

So long as you are not a vegetarian you will delight in dinner at Wakkoqu; find any excuse you can to visit; a guest from back home, a birthday, even a birthday back home... or simply the fact that we live here and it would be darned rude not to try the local produce.

*Charlotte Griffiths*



# Takarazuka Revue(d)

## The (in)famous Takarazuka

**Revue** is something everyone should experience once in their Hyogo career. If, like me, your Japanese is limited to daily pleasantries, fear not, just choose a story you vaguely know the plot of. It might help (a bit).

Revue performers all train for the first two years of their seven year contracts at the highly competitive Takarazuka Music School. At the end of their first year of training, the students are split into otokoyaku (male roles) and musumeyaku (female roles). The otokoyaku actresses cut their hair short and speak in masculine Japanese whilst in the classroom.

On the 13th of April I went to see the all-singing, all-dancing, all-female production of Alexandre Dumas' The Count of Monte Cristo, and it was certainly something to write home about. The company has five performing troupes, each with its own style. Monte Cristo was performed by the Cosmos troupe who, as the youngest troupe (founded in 1998) are known for being experimental and less traditional than their more established sister groups.

Putting Dumas' 1,374 page epic on stage, and to music, is certainly no task for the faint hearted, but director Ishida Masaya definitely took the bull by the horns with this colourful show...

Set at the start of the 19th century it is a thrilling tale of revenge. Newly-married and promoted ship's captain Edmond Dantes is incarcerated in the isolated island prison, Château d'If, for a crime he never committed. Six years after his imprisonment, a fellow innocent breaks into Dantes' cell, sparking hope and giving Dantes the means both to escape and seek his revenge upon the trio who set him up.

The stage show is a very truncated version of the novel. Though it was never going to manage the character development and back story of the seven hour French TV adaptation, Le Compte de Monte Cristo, starring Gerard Depardieu, it gets the story across as much as the 2002 Hollywood version did. In an attempt to lessen the superficial plot development there is a four person Greek chorus; an 80s purple powersuit-wearing teacher and three irritatingly vocal 'students' clad in garish modern clothing. The contrast between

this commentary and the main show was incredibly jarring, both in terms of costume and performance style. It may have helped the Japanese speaking audience to keep up with the storyline, but I found the lack of style continuity irritating. Blurring the supposed 'reality' of the classroom study of the text with the main performance itself might have been an interesting approach, but the disjointed links and explanations the chorus provided seemed half thought-through and had (thankfully) almost disappeared by the second half of the story.

In an hour and a half of unmemorable songs but well-choreographed dances and excellent staging, Edmond's revenge was finished and the interval had arrived. I turned to my fellow theatre-goers in confusion "OK so they went for the Hollywood and not the book ending, but what on earth do they have left for the second act? I'm not sure I can sit through another rendition of "Edmond Dantes! Edmond Dantes! Edmond Dantes!"

Having downed a coffee I returned to the theatre with some trepidation, not looking forward to another hour of confusion and irritating 'comperes'. Interval over, a disco ball descended in front of the stage... confusion turned to panic, and then delight. The second act was actually a completely different show: Amour de 99.

As 2014 will be the 100th anniversary of Takarazuka's first show, Amour presented a selection of the Revue's most memorable numbers from the past 99 years. All drowsiness induced by the first performance was blown away by the phantasmagoria of the second. It was like a role reversed Las Vegas drag cabaret on acid. Never have I seen so many feathers, sequins and lamé outfits – we suddenly realized why the Grand Theatre is such a huge complex: to house all the costume changes!

The musical medley was effectively an extended curtain call, with the leads from Monte Cristo taking the main singing roles, whilst the huge ensemble cast (I'm guessing close to a hundred, often all on stage at once) wowed us with their perfectly synchronized moves and a range of dance styles.

The real show stopping number was Rio carnival themed; the stage filled with yellow-feather clad dancers, like baby Big Birds with pineapple head dresses and svelte legs, who high-kicked away as the leads paraded across the front of the stage wearing the biggest feather head dresses and fantails you can imagine. We thought this was the finale but no, the show went on with countless dance numbers including a delightful ballroom sequence which had us so wrapped up in its tale of romance that we forgot the dancer in a tux was a woman.

At the end of the hour we stumbled out of the dark theatre, blinking away the sequin flashes lingering in our eyes and feeling rather dazed but very ready to get our own dancing shoes on.

Takarazuka is an experience. You will be absorbed, entertained, and very, very confused.

## Tell me more..!

<http://kageki.hankyu.co.jp/english/>

## Tickets

¥3,500~1 ¥11,000

## Access

Takarazuka Station  
(Hankyu, JR)

*Charlotte Griffiths*



## 三室戸寺 Mimuroto-ji

Mimuroto-ji is known as the “Flower Temple,” so it’s a great place to visit during blooming season. Although the gardens managed to look nice even at the ending-edge of winter, my personal recommendation would be to visit during May or especially June, for the blooming of their spectacular ajisai (hydrangea) garden (containing ten-thousand flowers in hundreds of varieties and colors). They also have twenty-thousand azaleas, which bloom in May, and plenty of lotus flowers, which bloom later in the summer.

Mimuroto-ji is also an interesting site for those of the historical or literary inclination. The temple is located in Uji, a place featured in the Tale of Genji, and there is even a gravestone for the tragic figure from the tale, Ukifune! If you have an interest in the Tale of Genji, you probably want to give yourself plenty of extra time during your visit to explore other parts of Uji

once you’ve paid your respects at and explored the temple itself.

The main image of this temple is a sanju Kannon, that is a thousand-armed version, which was carved in the late 700s and is only viewable once every 33 years; there are no photographic images of the statue, either. There are several other statues within the temple that are considered National Important Cultural Properties, among them the Amida Buddha triad (Buddha in the middle, with Kannon on one side and Seishi on the other) which shows Kannon and Seishi kneeling instead of cross-legged. There is also an image of “Ukifune Kannon” holding a vase of infinite compassion.

In front of the main hall, you will find the “Wish-Granting Bull,” or 宝勝牛 (ほうしょううし). This is related to a legend about the temple in which a beloved bull

eventually brought a destitute couple to wealth and prosperity through a series of semi-magical events (read more about it [here](#).) If you reach into the bull’s mouth and roll the ball around, you will receive good luck. The bull is also a stand-in for the usual guardian lion-dogs (komainu) that you see at the gates of many temples.

Other features include a lovely temple bell which you are permitted to ring, a picturesque three-storied pagoda, and a treasure house. The treasure house is where you will find the images of the Amida triad, as well as some other very old and interesting carvings; it is open on the 17th of each month. There is also an Amida-do, dedicated to the Buddha of infinite light and his 48 vows to save all of humanity. A Juhachi Jinja is a shrine dedicated to the eighteen original gods brought to Japan from mainland via Korea during



the Muromachi era. As at many temples, there is also a Jizo grove for lost pregnancies.

To get to Mimuroto-ji, take the Keihan line to Mimuroto-ji Station, from which it is a 15 minute walk (or 3 minute cab ride). You can also go to the Keihan or JR Uji Station, from which you can catch a bus, and get off at the Mimuroto-ji bus stop. During the month of June, there will be a special “Ajisai” bus running from Uji Station. You can catch this bus in the rotary area just in front of each station (bus stop number 3 at Keihan Uji station, just right in front of the station for JR).

Enjoy your exploration of Uji, Mimuroto-ji, and its astonishing garden-filled grounds!

*Emily Lemmon*



*Tell me more..!*

For more information about upcoming events, check out the [Mimuroto-ji webpage](#). (Japanese)

And for more [general information](#) about history and features.

Also, don’t forget the [Kannon Pilgrimage map](#)!





*Ice cream post-climb methinks.*