

A man in a blue jumpsuit and white helmet with goggles is leading a brown horse on a red track. The horse is wearing a blue protective hood. The man is holding a blue rope attached to the horse's harness. The background is a solid red color.

ht

hyogo times

06.13

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

A day at the races

Climbing Fuji

Osaka: A night on the tiles

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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

Message
from the Editor

Hello, hello!

June and warmth are finally here to stay!
My temporary staffroom overlooks a tree-lined
mini-lake rather than the baseball pitch as the
previous one did, and I seem to spend half my time
watching the leaves flutter in the breeze. I'm British,
so forgive me for the weather talk, but the end of May
was glorious; hot, but with cooling breezes, night
time and shady spots remaining cool. Essentially,
it's perfect British summer weather and I love it.
Of course the rains will come and humidity head
through the roof, but I can't help but smile for
the moment at least.

The end of May also, of course, meant the real
start of the end for us leaving JET in the summer –
the 2013 contingent (hello if anyone's reading!) are
finding out their placements. As soon as I started
seeing posts on the Hyogo AJET Facebook page
it all became that more immediate. I've attempted
to start a manual to relate some of the ins and outs
of life of my school. 5,500 words later, I think I'm in
overkill territory and I'm not even done yet. That said,
there might be something in it somewhere that's
going to be useful. At the very least writing it kept
me entertained during the midterm exams.

I have a horrible feeling that these last few months
are going to fly by in a haze of busy-ness. My cunning
plan to slowly but steadily improve the cleanliness of
my house (so I have less to do **just** before I move out)
has rather fallen by the wayside. I keep noting things



I could do, and then deciding
that I'd just be doing them again before too long.
I managed to pack away the kotatsu blanket, heat-tech
and jumpers in a vacuum bag though, so that made
me feel like I'd done something. Now if I could just get
off my arse long enough to sand and varnish the table...

But hey, enough talk of moving and cleaning.
It's **Hyogo Times**, err, time. This month we have the
return of Miso Green, a trip to the top of Japan and
time spent appreciating the fleet footed inhabitants
of the Hanshin racecourse. We also have another
delicious treat being whipped up in the Kicchiri kitchen
and some suggestions for a night on the tiles in, shock
horror – Osaka! It's at times like this that I wish my
computer had a glare-free screen so I could toddle
off outside, sit down in the sun, and peruse.

Enjoy!

Qmi

P.S.

The joys of getting everything together before the
PDF is due out. Can you tell that I wrote this before
May 28th...

Hello x 2!



Message from the PR

Hi all!

I hope that everyone is delighted about the weather warming up, I'm certainly happy that I can comfortably leave the windows open and cycle around in a t-shirt. No doubt by next month we'll all be complaining about lack of air-conditioning and sweating in places we didn't know we had glands. As a result of the clement (if slightly drizzly) weather, there are loads of really exciting things going on this month, so I hope you can all get involved!

Firstly, there is a Hyogo AJET trip to the races planned for June 23rd. I went on the same day last year and had an amazing time. It is one of the biggest races of the year, so everybody is on tenterhooks and the resulting atmosphere is fantastic! It probably also helps that despite being an absolute gambling novice and only making ¥100 bets all day, I managed to win enough to buy myself dinner-happy days. Meeting time and place TBC (check the **Hyogo AJET facebook** page)

but if you turn up to the Hanshin Racecourse (two minutes from Hankyu Nigawa station) during the day, I'm sure you will find us there, having a flutter and possibly sunbathing with a gin and tonic.

There are also lots of live music events happening round and about this month. One that has been particularly recommended is **PARK IT!** which is a completely free music festival at Osaka Nanko Sankaku Park on June 9th. If you're particularly interested in soulful music, or would just like to spend a day in the sunshine enjoying some free music, this "irregular party for irregular people" sounds like it might be for you!

Finally, this month I am particularly excited about cycling the Shimanami Kaido, a road that connects Honshu and Shikoku, via six small islands in the Seto Inland Sea. According to everyone's pictures and stories it's a really beautiful journey, and only 60km, so doable for even the

un-fittest of cyclists. A perfect way for me to spend a June weekend as far as I am concerned, provided that the rainy season doesn't live up to its name!

Whatever you do, enjoy June!

Over and out.

Anna ♡

Saigoku
Kannon
Pilgrimage

Photo from Sacred Japan

六波羅蜜寺
&
六角堂*



六波羅蜜寺 & 六角堂 Rokuharamitsu-ji and Rokkakudo Crossroads, Centerpoints and Sixes, a Tale of Two Kyoto City Temples

Rokuharamitsu-ji and Rokkakudo

are temples 17 and 18 of the 33-temple path, and both are located in the city of Kyoto, one of them at its very center. We'll explore both in one article, since it's easy to visit them on the same day.

First up is **Rokuharamitsu-ji**, the name of which references the six realms of existence (hell, hungry ghosts, animals, titans, humans, and gods) through which souls roam before they achieve enlightenment and liberation. It was built at a crossroad once called the "Crossroad of the Six Realms," considered an entrance to the underworld, near the Toribe cemetery entrance where those too poor to afford proper burial were unceremoniously dumped.

In its heyday during the early 12th century, the temple stretched from the river up to the mountainside. However, after the whole district was burned in the late 1100's (only the main hall, Hondo, surviving), the rebuilt Rokuharamitsu-ji became and remained a neighborhood temple. It suffered somewhat under the Meiji Restoration, but was finally fully renovated in 1969.

Rokuharamitsu-ji is said to have been built by the legendary wandering holy man & monk, Kuya Shoin. Kuya moved among the common people, chanting and dancing, and generally putting Buddhism a bit more within their reach. He came to be called "The Marketplace Saint." He traveled about doing good works, wearing shabby clothes and living a simple life.

During a time of plague in Kyoto, he is said to have carved an image of Kannon, which he pulled from place to place with him on a little cart, giving out medicine and a special tea purported to heal the sick (oyubukicha, which is still traditionally drunk on the third day of the New Year for good luck and disaster prevention). Once the plague had dissipated, he was given permission to build a temple to continue praying for the dead.

The main Kannon image at this temple is a Juichimen (eleven-headed) Kannon, shown once every 33 years. It is said to be the original carving made by Kuya, and was not seen between the time of his carving it and its first showing in 1507; the most recent viewing was in

2003. This Kannon image is known for having the power to cure illnesses and is also known as Enmusubi Kannon, the Kannon who helps people find a marriage partner.

The Hondo of Rokuharamitsu-ji is the oldest building in central Kyoto, and inside you can buy a special kind of oracle that uses an old Chinese system of birth times. Admission to the temple and main hall is free, but it is ¥600 to visit the museum. Inside you'll find several important cultural properties of Japan, including a 13th century portrait of Taira no Kiyomori. There is also a compelling image of Nenbutsu Kuya, carved by Kosho in 1207, which shows six tiny Buddhas coming out of Kuya's mouth, the artist's representation of Kuya's famous chanting. The museum is small, but they do have an English information page along with the usual Japanese. Outside, there is also a satisfying water section to the right of the Hondo, where as a purification ritual you can fling water with ladles over statues of Mizuko Jizo and Benten as well as Kannon.

To get to Rokuharamitsu-ji, take a bus to either Kiyomizu-dori (and walk west) or Gojosaka (and walk northeast). Or you can take the Keihan main line to Kiyomizu Gojo and head north then east on foot.

Getting to **Rokkakudo** is even easier as it's literally in the center of the city. From the bus stop Karasuma-Sanjo, it's just a two-minute walk, from Karasuma-Oike, 4 minutes, and from Shijo-Karasuma, 5 minutes. Just find Rokkakudo on one of the tourist-friendly maps posted on the corners of these busy intersections.

The compact grounds of the temple include a stone marker that indicated the "belly button" of the city of Kyoto; as close as it is to the bustling Karasuma-dori area, the temple itself has the calm and peaceful atmosphere you might expect from one of our pilgrimage locations. Adjacent to the temple is a large glass building dedicated to the art of ikebana, which began here more than 400 years ago; the abbot of Rokkakudo is also the president of the international Ikenobo Ikebana Society. The temple is surrounded on other sides by city

buildings, one of which contains a Starbucks with large windows, if you want to get out of the heat or the rain while contemplating the temple.

The main hall of Rokkakudo is a six-sided building whence comes its name. The main Kannon image enshrined here is a small Nyoirin (wish-granting) Kannon. It is just 5.5cm tall, and is never put on display; it is made of gold and was the devotional image of Prince Shotoku. There is a larger statue of another Kannon image elsewhere on the grounds, up behind the sixteen Arhats (disciples of Buddha); the statues of the Arhats (sixteen being one for every compass point) stand along a small running waterway. Water is an important presence at Rokkakudo, and is built carefully into the grounds, in an almost ikebana-like way, and you will see water around the Founder's Hall, with swans drifting to and fro.

Keep your eye out for the Rokkakudo willow, known as an **enmusubi yanagi**, or the willow tree which brings people together; those looking for a partner tie prayers onto this tree. The bellybutton

of Kyoto is in front of the Hondo, and is said to be a foundation stone from an earlier iteration of the temple building; it's the small circular part in the center of the six-sided stone that is the bellybutton. You will also see the monument to the art of ikebana, first started as an act of Buddhist devotion. There is a charming-looking one-word Jizo statue, which refers both to his power to grant your wish if it is made with one word, and also to his power to save a person by uttering one word. If you have a chance on your way into or out of the temple grounds, you can see the temple bell which is now located across the street due to later construction and changes in the dynamic city.

As always, you can use the map [here](#) (especially if you have a google-enabled phone) to find your way to the temples. More information about all the temples is available [here](#), and the Rokkakudo webpage is [here](#).

Happy travels!

Emily Lemmon

All you need is Love

Next time you're in the capital;

don't bother queuing for the Sky Tree to get the view. Head to the 53rd floor of the Roppongi Hills Mori Tower at sunset for a spectacular 360° view of the city (and the Sky Tree itself for that matter), then enjoy a decadent dinner with the best seats in the city at the Mado Lounge before perusing the latest exhibition at the Mori Art Museum.

All You Need is Love: From Chagall to Kusana and Hatsune Miku, which opened on the 26th of April, runs till the 1st of September. The Mori Art Museum's 10th Anniversary Exhibition, which includes around 200 works varying from celebrated pieces of art history to new commissions, explores love in its myriad forms.

A primal desire, for humans love is the ultimate emotion and inspiration; dynamic, powerful, infinitely incomprehensible and sought for by all. Wandering through the artistic interpretations of love's complexities at the MAM is a journey into both the most public, and the most personal, manifestations of love.

Divided into five sections, the exhibition first asks the impossible question: What is love? Before

delving into romantic love, love in loss, familial love and love of mankind.

The first section; **What is love?** examines the language and symbols we associate with love. The pieces begin to dissect the iconography we see every day. Of these, **Sacred Heart**, the exhibition's poster piece, is a standout. Jeff Koons' 3.5m stainless steel sculpture, reminiscent of an oversized valentine's chocolate, highlights how our consumerist culture portrays love. Damien Hirst, meanwhile, connects love and death in his untitled piece which features real butterflies. Whilst the big name artists have an obvious draw, don't forget to look out for the exhibit hidden away behind a curtain where you will be 'possessed by love', and the incredible voice-activated robot which recites poetry (Japanese) according to the pitch of the speaker's voice.

Part two; **A couple in love** focuses on romance and passion, and how they have evolved over time. It features well known pieces such as Auguste Rodin's sculpture of a tragic couple in **The Kiss**, and Marc Chagall's **Above the Town, Vitebsk**, depicting the artist himself floating through the air embracing

his wife. An over-18s room throws light on historic representations of passion in Japan, with several graphic printing blocks portraying **kagama** (young male prostitutes often dressed as girls) copulating with obscenely well-endowed gentlemen. Of a rather different tone was Gohar Dashti's poignant series **Today's Life and War**; photos of a newlywed couple doggedly going about their everyday life in the midst of a fictionalized battlefield show how war diffuses into all aspects of modern society.

From romance we move swiftly and painfully to **Love in Losing**. The most memorable piece here was from French artist Sophie Calle, who persuaded dozens of women to share their interpretations of a painful break up e-mail. The variety and emotional charge of the renderings in the installation (from a parrot to a ballet dancer) were overwhelming. In the same section, another room is dedicated to a rather different reaction to loss; in his video installation, Iraqi born, Finland based artist Adel Abidin suggests 52 ways to keep a woman's love and therefore avoid the pain of heartbreak. The advice ranges from the sweet to the laughable and the potentially offensive.

Family and Love explores the most innate of loves, familial love. We experience the artists' respective portrayals of the complex relationships of the most intimate community. From David Hockney's simple and nostalgic, **My Parents**, to Japanese artist Asada Masahi's amusing photographic tableaux showing his family acting out different scenarios, from the ramen shop to power rangers, this section is diverse and personal. Now, you might think it incongruous to find a photographic study of a Japanese sex doll amidst the many displays of familial affection, but Laurie Simmons' **The Love Doll** demonstrates the changing mechanics of family. The chronological series re-appropriates the overtly sexual nature of the doll, rendering her one of the family by cataloguing the developing relationship between doll and artist. The voyeuristic portraits of the doll in de-sexualised situations in the family home have a feeling of undisturbed innocence which is both disturbing and touching.

Finally, **Love Beyond** is a collection which looks at how technological advancements change our conceptions of love, as well as love on a global scale. Visually dramatic, Kusama Yayoi's **Love is**

Calling is a psychedelic sculpture room from Japan's most famous contemporary artist, dominated by her signature polka dot pattern. Appropriately placed in the exhibition is the last piece, **Final Home**, by Tsumura Kosuke. In light of recent disasters in Japan, the self-titled 'philosophical fashion' designer fills his survival jackets (which are made almost entirely of pockets to be filled with insulation/padding/useful items in case of emergency) with a variety of symbolic materials. Appropriately the jacket 'filled with love' is stuffed with flyers for the exhibition itself.

As you leave the gallery, the overwhelming feeling is that love, in all its complexities, is to be found everywhere; it transcends all disappointment and conflict to unite us as a species.

The anniversary exhibition brings together an incredibly eclectic selection of pieces from across the world. Despite all the different works being under the umbrella theme of love, combining them into one body of work does result in some rather sharp shifts in tone. But the gentle jarring of the exhibition's continuity makes it feel all the more like love itself;

bewildering and thought provoking, a little mad, and utterly mesmerizing.

Charlotte Griffiths

The Mori Art Museum, Roppongi Hills

26th April – 1st September

Opening hours

10:00 – 22:00 (Tue: 10:00 – 17:00)

Ticket Prices

Adult: ¥1,500

University/High school student: ¥1,000

Child (4 years to Junior high school student): ¥500

* All tickets include access to Tokyo City View observation deck

The Personal Hygiene Quandary

After a necessary hiatus last

month, Miso Green is back! I had in fact written an article for the May issue; that I ultimately hated, about ¥100 shops. That article is still quite immature and will probably appear in another form in the coming months. Instead, I'd like to talk about something very personal – the way I smell.

I don't know about you, but I am extremely sensitive about scents. During my budding maturity in high school, I fell in love with a certain brand of perfume, saved up, and bought the biggest bottle I could find. Halfway through the bottle I was disgusted by not just that scent but by most pungent fragrances. Even the scent of the brand-name laundry detergent that I loved as a child and treated as a sign of economic comfort has become intolerable. As you can guess, shopping for personal hygiene products has become a nightmare.

My perfect deodorant debuted in 2006. Unlike most antiperspirants/deodorants on the market in America, it did not contain aluminum-based ingredients (which, though not proven, are thought to be linked to Alzheimer's. That's enough to freak any hippie girl out) and somehow used cotton as an absorbent. Equally important was the fact that its

fragrance was imperceptible. For whatever reason, American ladies' deodorant manufacturers generally make their most basic scent "powder fresh", a smell like disgusting fake baby powder. This deodorant didn't, though... it just smelled like... cleanliness.

It was discontinued in 2009, and without a thought, I bought a 6-pack on eBay so that I wouldn't have to suffer through a year without it. In that year, it was brought back into stores, probably because enough consumers complained about its absence, and I could return to my normal routine without worry. I picked up two bars before coming to Japan, thinking that I'd be home to visit in enough time to restock.

Of course, I forgot about it during my first visit home, and after I had picked the last clumps out of the bottom of my last container, an expatriate friend of mine told me of his plans to visit home, and I enlisted him to pick me up a couple of bars. He looked everywhere – drugstores, sporting goods stores, megamarts – it was gone. For good. He gave me updates after every store he checked, and apologized for his failure upon his return to Japan, as did I for his wasted efforts.

I checked online and found that people are now making serious profits on this stuff. \$15 per bar is not sustainable, so with little other alternative, I resorted to checking locally for a new brand. After scouring every drugstore in my town, I managed to find 2 liquid deodorants. They were heavy on the perfume, but my only options. At first test, I seemed to tolerate one that was citrus scented. Upon putting it on my skin, however, I found the scent overpowering, and by noon I was desperately trying to wash my skin so that I could make it through the rest of my day without being nauseous. Upon getting home, I dumped the bottle & contemplated my options. I certainly didn't want to smell like a stereotypical hippie at work, but I also didn't want to buy and toss tons of packaging while experimenting with new products I was almost guaranteed to hate.

I decided to attempt to make deodorant myself. Then I would be bound to like the way it smells, and if I didn't, I could guiltlessly try again. I found a recipe that I could create from what was already in my pantry, and, as it turned out, it is the most effective deodorant I have ever used.



I was then determined to make and replace as many household products as I could. I am, slowly but surely, taking ownership of the way I smell, and never again will I need to worry that something will be unavailable when I move to another country. Some of these products are more successful than others, but they are definitely worth trying.

Many homemade household products use essential oils as ingredients. They are an expensive initial investment, but a tiny bottle goes a long way. Just don't use any ¥100 shop oils, as they are bound to contain impurities and could be harmful if used on your body. Instead, I praise the quality of Hyogo's own [Kodera Herb Garden](#) essential oils. The farm's owner takes sustainability very seriously, and the oils are guaranteed to be of the highest quality. Kodera essential oils are sold in [Kyoto](#), [Osaka](#), [Himeji](#), [at the farm in Kodera](#), as well as [online](#) (I also highly recommend their [dandelion coffee](#)).

Here are some recipes for personal care. Don't be intimidated by the high price tags of the ingredients; they are extremely versatile and can replace many other household products. Links are provided for products that are difficult to find in grocery stores or drugstores.

Deodorant

- ¼c coconut oil
- ¼c arrowroot powder (葛粉 kuzuko. Cornstarch also works)
- ¼c baking soda (重曹 juusoo)
- 10 drops tea tree oil

Heat the coconut oil on your stovetop just until it melts, then combine with all other ingredients.

When used as a solvent for deodorant, coconut oil serves two functions: it blocks the production of bacteria and soothes skin. Coconut oil is solid at room temperature, but any higher & it liquefies, so store your deodorant in a watertight container, or in an old deodorant container kept in the fridge.

Shaving Cream

- 1 bar soap (any will do)
- ⅛c rosewater
- ⅛c liquid castile soap
- 1½ tsp olive oil or coconut oil

Melt the bar of soap in a double boiler (or a metal bowl over a small pot of boiling water). Add remaining ingredients.

The end result of this shaving cream will be semi-hard, and will require a shaving cream brush for application, but it will also be the best shaving cream you will ever use.

Toothpaste

- 1 tbsp baking soda
- 3 tbsp coconut oil,
- 1 - 2 tsp xylitol granulated sweetener
- 10 drops (or more) peppermint oil

Mix all ingredients. Adjust to taste.

To be honest, this really wasn't for me. Commercial toothpaste's burning-

...continued

clean sensation and froth is difficult to replicate at home. However, if you can live without the mouthfeel, this recipe is actually quite effective at cleaning teeth.

Clarifying rinse

- 4c water
- 1c apple cider vinegar (りんご酢 ringosu) **or** 1/2 tsp citric acid (クエン酸 kuensan)

Mix and pour over hair.

Apple cider vinegar is very good for you, especially if you drink it, but the smell on your body through a day can be off-putting. Citric acid has the same detangling and buildup-removing effect on hair without the smell.

Hair gel

- 1/2c water
- 1 tsp agar powder (寒天粉 kantenko)
- 5 drops essential oil of your choice

Dissolve agar in boiling water, and continue boiling until there is 1/4 cup of liquid. Remove from heat, add essential oils, refrigerate.

I can't tell you how pleased I was when I discovered this recipe. Hair products for curly girls are impossible

to find in Japan.

And yet, with agar in every supermarket's dessert section, they're not! This gel works well for defining curls but not for hold. Use oil (preferably coconut, olive or grapeseed) to smooth flyaways

Bug repellent

- 2 tbsp olive oil
- 10 - 25 drops of any combination of these essential oils: **peppermint, lemon, lemongrass, lavender, Koder's Mushi-Yoke blend**

Combine all ingredients.

Never use essential oil directly on the skin. Always thin it out with another agent first.

This repellent is meant for skin, but for the house version, use 1 cup of water instead of the olive oil. Spray on screens and concrete, but avoid tatami, hardwood and wall paint. It's pretty effective if used about once a week.

Face powder

- corn or arrowroot starch
- optional: cocoa powder, alcohol

Combine ingredients and store in an old powder container. If you don't

have one, Muji does. If you prefer a pressed powder, add rubbing alcohol or vodka to the mix and let it dry thoroughly before using.

I only recently started using skin makeup after feeling conscious about my age. I asked around and was recommended Bare Mineral's Skin Veil many times, but when I read the ingredient list, I realized that my friends have been paying upwards of ¥3,000 for corn starch. Upon experimenting with cornstarch alone, I was very happy with the translucent results, but for people with darker skin, adding a little cocoa powder may help with matching skin tone.

I urge you to try these recipes out. If nothing else, try making your own deodorant. You'll thank me when the humidity rises.

Uluwehi Mills

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Snake Update

Well we're not quite halfway

through the year and the little blighters (and some not so little) are starting to venture forth in the warm. Is it an added incentive to try for morning runs when they'll hopefully be asleep? Yep.

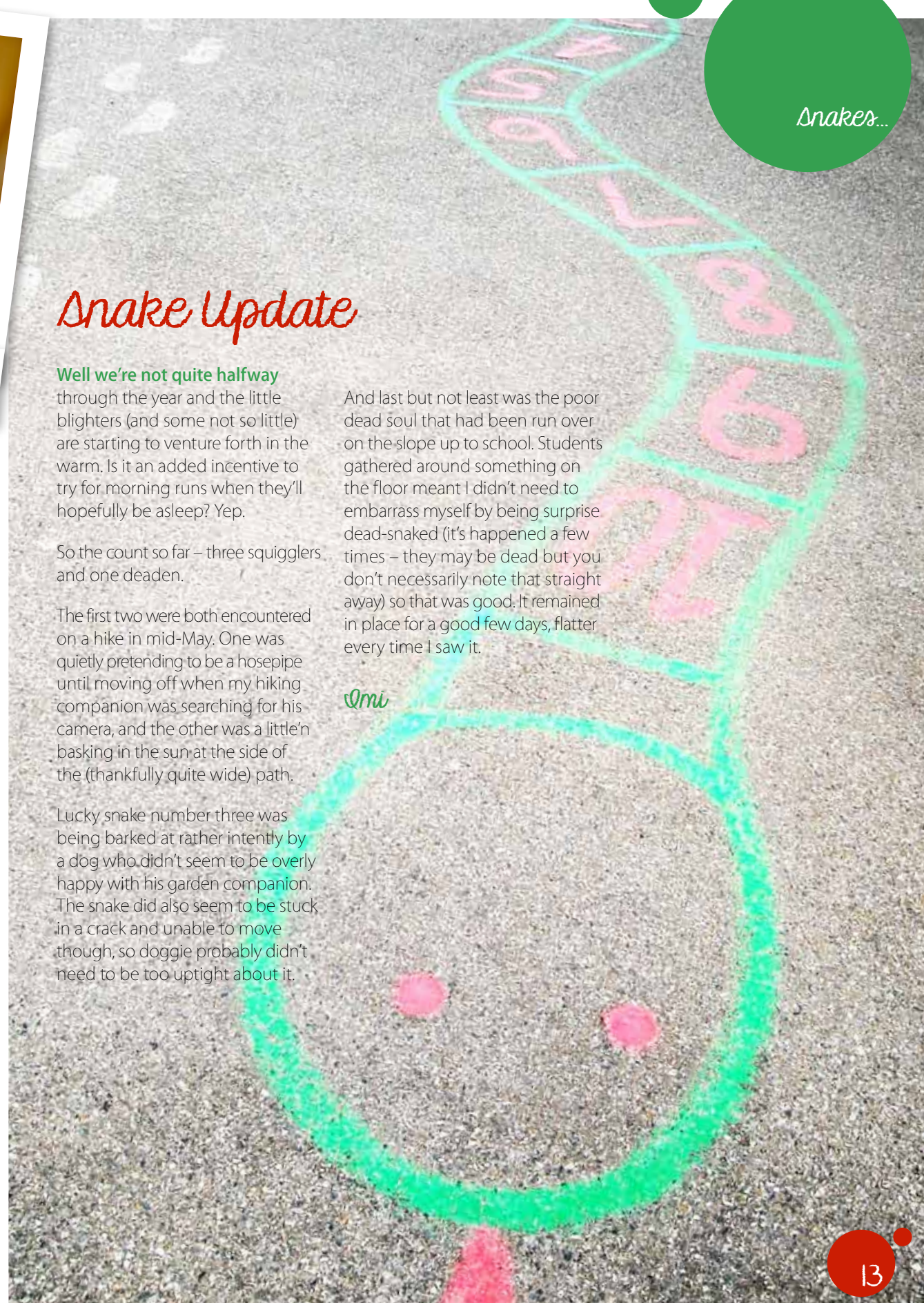
So the count so far – three squiggles and one deaden.

The first two were both encountered on a hike in mid-May. One was quietly pretending to be a hosepipe until moving off when my hiking companion was searching for his camera, and the other was a little'n basking in the sun at the side of the (thankfully quite wide) path.

Lucky snake number three was being barked at rather intently by a dog who didn't seem to be overly happy with his garden companion. The snake did also seem to be stuck in a crack and unable to move though, so doggie probably didn't need to be too uptight about it.

And last but not least was the poor dead soul that had been run over on the slope up to school. Students gathered around something on the floor meant I didn't need to embarrass myself by being surprise dead-snaked (it's happened a few times – they may be dead but you don't necessarily note that straight away) so that was good. It remained in place for a good few days, flatter every time I saw it.

Imi



a Day at the Races

As the weather begins to heat

up, and the last vestiges of the cold season that once was wither away, we begin to find ourselves outside more, enjoying the sun and exploring the places that our winter selves only dreamed of in a huddled mess under a blazing kotatsu. The seemingly late arriving spring, with its unkind mix of warm and cold days, brings runny noses and unforgiving coughs that have begun to run the throat dry. But the dry times too will soon pass as rainy season looms near. Yet fear not, for the warm days of June are the perfect time to visit a Japanese institution steeped in history. What better way to spend a warm weekend than in the sun with beer in hand and a pocket full of money?

Horse racing in Japan began in 1862 in Yokohama, and has since blossomed into big part of Japanese life. There are ten racecourses in Japan, Hanshin Racecourse being one of the "big four" which also includes Kyoto, Tokyo, and Nakayama. Hanshin racecourse is located in

Takarazuka and was once the site of the Kawanishi Aircraft Company, which manufactured warplanes during World War II. In 1949 the factory closed and the Hanshin racecourse was built. Since then it has been refurbished multiple times, most recently in 2006. The racecourse has a capacity of 139,977, with seating for 12,603, and features a grass and dirt course.

The admission price is only ¥200 (¥2,000 for a 'luxury seat' with personal TV and a comfortable chair) and it is a great way to spend a day when you don't feel like spending too much money and are looking for an exciting time. But one cannot go to a racecourse without betting! There is something invigorating, exhilarating, and undeniably amazing about punching the ticket for the horse you like. It suddenly becomes your best friend for that one minute it's gliding across the track, majestically taking long fluid strides, glistening in the sun. Everything around you

becomes quiet and it's just you and the horse.

But winning is another story and it is not as simple as it seems. When you walk around the park you see old men with their newspapers studying each horse intently, assessing the weather conditions, and considering any other factors that could affect the outcome of the race. These men are professionals at what they do and they take it very seriously. I tend to take a much more bohemian approach and choose the horse with the coolest name, or the horse that looked the toughest in the pre-race parade. I highly recommend taking a newspaper detailing all the races that day. It will tell you everything you want to know about the race, the horses that are running, and also provides "expert predictions."

The Hanshin Racecourse is open the first four weekends in June culminating with a large and

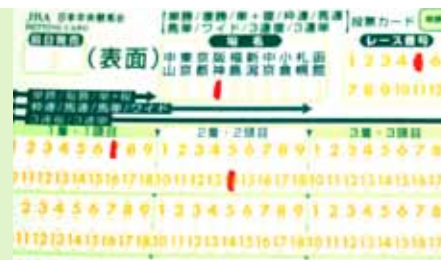
important race on June 23rd called the Takarazuka Kinen. This is the last race until September. Each race day there are over ten races, starting in the morning and ending in the early evening. Doors open around nine although the big races are not until the afternoon. After each race there is about a 30-minute break for people to make bets, use the bathroom, or to buy drinks or lunch. There are restaurants everywhere in the stadium and you can also bring your own lunch and alcohol. This being Japan, there is ample space for picnics inside the actual stadium itself. This is also a good time to make your way to the parade ring of the stadium where they have what looks like a miniature racecourse with a huge TV and scoreboard hanging over it. This shows race results and live races from other parts of Japan. Crowds form as the soon-to-race horses walk around the ring, allowing people to decide which horse they fancy the most.

From this vantage point one can really appreciate the strength and beauty of these fabulous animals.

Whether you are looking for a crazy day in the sun, or a relaxing time with the family, the Hanshin Racecourse can satisfy anyone's needs. It's perfect for those that want to see slice of life in Japan that is different from the norm. It is a great day out.

There is no English at the Hanshin raceway so it is recommended to familiarize yourself with the betting card and types of bets before going. [This is a great website](#) to do so. Hanshin Racecourse is 30 minutes from Osaka and 25 minutes from Sannomiya on the Hankyu Kobe Line (in both cases transferring at Nishinomiya-Kitaguchi Station.) Then, take the Hankyu Imazu Line and get off at Nigawa Station.

Jon Burroughs



草団子 *Ninja Kusa Dango*

I picked up this box on a recent trip to the Iga Ueno Ninja Festival (伊賀上野 NINJAフェスタ) a five week event that is run by the city of Iga 伊賀市 in Mie prefecture 三重県 from April 1st to May 6th each year. When a couple of friends suggested hiring a car and driving down for the weekend I was more than excited, and keen to get my ninja on! To anyone that has not been, the trip comes with my highest recommendation!

Anyhow on to the review: As a foreword, this mochi doesn't actually have anything to do with ninja. In fact, rather than mochi, today's review is about kusa dango 草団子 (grass dango). Dango, whilst being almost identical to mochi, is a separate type of wagashi. Generally speaking the difference is that mochi is made by pounding glutinous rice into a dough whereas dango is made by adding water to mochiko 餅粉 (glutinous rice flour) and boiling or grilling the resulting dough.

So why the ninja packaging? I suspect it results from an archaic reading of the kanji, 草, which could once be read to mean 'ninja'. It's essentially a pun!

Unlike any mochi 餅 or dango 団子 that I have featured thus far, as opposed to the usual mochi outer layer filled with a sweet centre (usually azuki あずき) this kusa dango lies on a bed of anko 餡子 (sweetened red bean paste). Instead of just popping them in your mouth, a small spoon is provided to scoop the dango up with a little anko on the side.

Last summer, I became somewhat addicted to kakigori (shaved ice) and decided to get myself a machine to make it at home. Using the kusa dango, I thought I'd try out the very traditional ujikintoki kakigori flavor which is typically topped with sweetened red bean paste, dango, and often capped with condensed milk. It was a great way to consume these little treats.

If you see these guys floating around pick up a box and try making your own!

Daniel (Jako) Jaccone



ギョーザ * Gyoza

Ingredients

- 200g minced pork (豚ひき肉; butahikiniku)
- 400g cabbage
- 1 bunch Chinese chives (にら; nira)
- 1 leek
- 2 packets of dumpling wrappers (餃子の皮; gyoza no kawa)
- 1 tbsp sesame oil
- 1 tbsp salad oil
- 1 tsp minced garlic
- 1 tsp grated ginger
- ½ tsp sugar
- 1 tbsp soy sauce
- salt and pepper
- extra salad oil
- ponzu sauce (soy sauce with citrus)
- chili oil (ラー油; ra-yu)

Step one

Finely dice the cabbage, leek and Chinese chives

Step two

Add a little salt, pepper, sesame oil and salad oil to the meat and mix with your hands until it becomes a little sticky

Step three

Add the garlic, ginger, sugar, soy sauce, salt, pepper and a little salad oil to the mince meat and then add the vegetables. Mix well

Step four

Take a gyoza wrapper and place a small spoonful of the meat/vegetable mixture in the centre, fold in half and pinch the edges together, making pleat like folds

Step five

Put about one tablespoon of salad oil in a heated frying pan. Place the gyoza in the pan and cook one side until brown. Turn over and brown the other side

Step six

To make the dipping sauce, put ponzu in a small dish and add chili oil to taste

Step seven

Serve with fried rice and the dipping sauce

Lauren McRae

Climbing Fuji

Fujisan: That eponymous symbol of Japan. A perfectly shaped cone, almost artfully topped with snow, towering over Shizuoka and Yamanashi; visible in all its glory from Tokyo when the haze abates. Since ages past it has held a special place in the Japanese psyche, a sacred mountain often depicted in artwork and literature. It's no wonder that it's almost certain to become a UNESCO World Heritage site later this month.

Every year, thousands of people climb to the summit in the summer months of July and August. Climbing overnight and arriving at the top in time to watch the sunrise is touted as **the** way to tackle this most active of Japanese experiences. I've seen the pictures and it looks magical, and I don't doubt it can be a truly memorable experience.

Mine was rather different.

I completely understand the appeal of climbing Mt. Fuji. Experiencing the ~est of something in any country will always be an attractive proposition. As the highest mountain in Japan, and not only that, but also readily

accessible and climb-able with relatively little kit, it doesn't seem like a bad thing to try and tackle. With a uni friend living in Kanto and another one coming to visit, Fuji seemed a perfect place for us to meet-up. A few other friends joined the party, and on a weekend in early July a few years ago, the five of us rendezvoused at Shin-Fuji station. We knew we could take a bus from there to the 5th station and start out climb. The skies were clear and our spirits were high.

Up we go

Things didn't get off to the best of starts. Before we'd reached the 6th station, one of my friends (who is by no means unfit) found himself throwing up at the side of the path. Thinking that it might be altitude related, we took a break. Things not improving too much, three of us headed on, with promises made to meet at the top (hopefully) or after we'd come down again the following morning (if necessary).

Our ascent had started under the stars, but soon the clouds started

to set in. It got colder and damper, visibility dropping to meters at best. It was also about this time that two of our torches gave out, leaving the three of us largely scrambling in the dark. On the moronic side for not being better prepared? Definitely.

Things got worse as it got windier and ¥100 ponchos proved to not be quite as useful for keeping warm as we'd hoped. Shoes were giving out and being held together with duct tape (we brought that at least ><). Even with better shoes the surface you're walking on is basically gravel and not in the least bit pleasant to traverse.

We were not in a happy place. Not at all. We tried stopping and sheltering from the wind when it got too biting, but such locations were few and far between. There are huts dotted along the trails where (more plan-conscious) people can book some floor space and sleep. After a few hours rest, they head to the summit for the sunrise. Having decided beforehand that accommodation would be a waste of money, we hadn't done this. No,



we went into a few, got chunked out of them all, and continued our fight with the elements.

As the organizer of the trip I felt awful for having put my friends through this. I tried my best to keep spirits up but it wasn't easy. Constant checking of times and knowing how long it should take between each station was all that kept us going. I don't think that the timings ended up being accurate in our case. Time just seemed to stretch as we forced our tired bodies onwards. We were determined to see this mountain conquered though, and we kept going. The lure of the sunrise from above the clouds pulled us on and up.

Sunrise

I can barely remember arriving at the top. We hadn't left the clouds and so everything remained damp and misty. People were trying to shelter in the temple at the top, the small shokudo type establishment that was offering ramen and hot drinks, and in the wind shadows of said buildings if they could. We went inside for some of the time, but as more people arrived and it became progressively more packed, we headed back out and huddled together for warmth by one of the buildings.

By this time, our hopes of seeing the sunrise, as you may have surmised, had been dashed. We hadn't come through the clouds as we'd been hoping, and

despite the wind, they were not dispersing. 'Sunrise' was a lightening of the grey around us. Not spectacular, not breathtaking, just really, really depressing.

And down again

Things didn't even improve on the way down. We hadn't managed to meet up with our friends and weren't even sure if they would have made it to the top. Intending to go down the 'fun' Gotemba trail, we gave up on that idea when the wind refused to let us get to the trailhead. Instead we went down the way we'd come up. I'd heard about queues of people on the mountain and had thought it was an exaggeration. Apparently not. It felt like it took nearly as long to get down as it had taken to go up...

But when we finally arrived back at the 5th station, it was to find our abandoned companions waiting for us. They'd made it up to the top, apparently having passed us at some point (probably when we were briefly hiding inside somewhere). They'd also managed to take the Gotemba trail down, and enjoyed it thoroughly.

We had planned to go to Yokohama together for the day, but that was completely out of the question by this point. All I wanted was a bed, and my other Kansai friend was of the same mindset. So with muscles aching and eyes barely able to stay open, we went our separate ways.

I'm pretty certain I slept the entire way back.

An Experience ... That's for sure.

Now we weren't that well prepared, and no doubt the climb would have been better if we had been. That said, the gravel would still have been there. The clouds, the wind, the rain, the crowds would still have been there. Better equipment wouldn't have made the sunrise more than a creeping lightening of the fog. We would probably have been warmer, maybe a little drier (and therefore happier), but we wouldn't have had the Fuji experience that I, and I would assume most people, crave. I grimace when someone tells me about their Fuji plans. I don't want to, but I can't help myself. I know people who have had the perfect Fuji trip – I know it does happen! But I cannot in good conscience say that I don't regret doing it. As one of my teachers said to me before I ventured forth, "Fuji is a fantastic mountain to look at, but others are much, much better to climb."

For those of you NOT put off by this, there's plenty of information out there on how to do the climb properly. I'm not going to give any links because I don't want to encourage you.

So there.

Omogen Custance

Osaka: A night on the tiles

I have a confession to make:

I am a traitor to the supremacy of Hyogo-ken. I've been cheating on our Asian home with the next door neighbour. Yes, I am having a torrid affair with Osaka. Kobe's nice and all, but Osaka just sizzles with energy and adventure; it's the bad boy every twenty-something fools around with before settling down with comfortable, cultural Kobe. So if you're missing that special someone to pass the long nights of summer with, let temptress Osaka steal you away for a night to remember, or perhaps not!

Where to begin?

You can find food to suit any palate in downtown Osaka, but my personal favourite to start the night off is **Café Absinthe** in Shinsaibashi. It serves up delicious Mediterranean-fusion cuisine to complement its impressive cocktail menu, including the green fairy herself for those who dare. Linger after dinner to enjoy some mellowing shisha (including the intriguing alternatives of wine or liquor instead of water). Have a chat with manager Dmitri who has the lowdown on the hotspots of the night. If you're lucky you might even get an invite to club Red where, on occasion, Dmitri himself moonlights as a funky-house DJ till the early hours.

Appetite sated, you're ready to dive into the myriad of bars littering the streets of Shinsaibashi and Namba.

For large parties, try **Balabushka** where there's plenty of seating and free pool and darts for those with a competitive spirit. If you prefer your games more digital, then ALT-haunt **Space Station** is your place. This cosy bar is crammed with so many different gaming units you're bound to rediscover a game you loved age 12 (or now, we won't judge).

By now it's around 11pm, the night is young and you're itching for something a bit more local. Well, allow me to guide you to the **Misono Building**; a labyrinth of liquor dispensing themed bars. This place alone would make the most surreal and lethal pub-golf destination. An Alice-down-the-rabbit-hole kinda place, you will discover something new on each visit; **Bar Nob** is recommended for its friendly bar man who hand carves your ice cubes and remembers your song selection from the last visit. If you stumble into the rock and heavy metal bar, watch your head on the treacherously low-hanging light fittings on the dance floor!

For one last tippie before getting your dancing shoes on, head to

Cinquecento, a big favourite with locals and visitors alike. Appropriately named, everything on the menu is ¥500 and working your way through the extensive and creative martini menu will give you a stinking headache, empty wallet and a fantastic night with a lot of new friends.

Boogie wonderland

You may be concerned that the infamous post-midnight dance ban will hinder your revelries, especially in Osaka, whose Mayor is said to be militant in his support of the ban. But fear not friends; downtown has either escaped his notice, or there are some shady deals going on. Whichever the reason, embrace the freedom to get your groove on at one of Osaka's ubiquitous dancing dens...

Of course the best nights end somewhere new, exciting and previously unheard of, but for a failsafe party try one of these:

Club Pure: your go-to for nomihodae on weekends (Ladies ¥2,500, gents ¥3,000 if memory serves). The name is most definitely ironic, but everyone's up for a good time at Pure. On Saturdays the DJ plays mostly Top-40 music, each track for

a maximum of 20 seconds. Be warned, those over 5ft8 will develop a neck-crack or a big lump on the head in the bathrooms.

Club Azure: a black hole which will suck you in and spit you out with hazy memories and sore feet. The music is a mix of RnB and hip-hop, break-dancers frequently pulling shapes in the midst of the rest of the dancing crowd who, naturally, are all facing the DJ. The dance floor has a bar at each end and a walkway around it so you can walk in circles all night, losing your original friends but making many more along the way. Having its lockers on ground level means less smoke will invade your overnight bag when you descend into the bowels of the club itself. The main draw is the price; at just ¥500 entry (with a free drink) for foreign nationals, Azure is the go-to for a cheap night.

Red: although fairly small, the aforementioned Red attracts a good crowd on Saturdays and the vibe is classier than a lot of Shinsaibashi establishments. Local hipsters rub well-clad shoulders with foreign students in-the-know.

Onzieme: more upmarket, Onzieme has music nights varying from hip-hop to techno and everything

in between. There are often special guest international DJs, check their website for more details.

Rumour has it there is also an all night club by name of **Heaven**. My attempts to find this mysterious all-night party have failed thus far, overcome by tiredness. But what to do between club close/feet giving up and the train home? True, there are always the tables in McDonald's or Royal Host, but I prefer somewhere with decidedly less fluorescent lighting and chip fat: the Capsule Hotel Asahi Plaza.

For sleeping beauties

The capsule hotel is a symbol of modern Japan – a line I use on my parents to justify my capsule stays as cultural experiences. It's true though, the capsule experience is very different to a hotel or hostel. So on your next night in Osaka, check in and finish your night in style at the **Asahi Plaza**. (Be sure to grab yourself a stamp card; for every third visit you get a free drink or snack, and your twelfth stay is free!) Of course you can crawl straight into your space-age sleeping quarters, but why end the night so soon? Before sleep, not only can you luxuriate in the onsen-style bathroom, discussing

the night with your pals as you wash the smoke from your hair, but also frolic in your matching PJs in the powder room where all your ablution needs are met. They even provide pre-toothpasted toothbrushes! Finishing the night at the Asahi Plaza might just be my favourite part of going out in Osaka (I promise they aren't paying me), and in comparison to a capsule I visited in Tokyo, this one is really very, very good. So go, just to tick it off that entry on your Japan bucket list and get the requisite photo in your capsule!

With thanks to my research assistants who graciously donated their livers (and occasionally dignity) in the name of this article.

Charlotte Griffiths





Enjoy natural air flow while you still can