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hyogo times

08.13

a "Welcome  
to Japan!"  
special  
edition!

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

Banished to the Inaka

A beginner's guide to Cool Biz

Top ten must have apps for Android phone users

## Contents

3

Message  
from the  
Editor

4

Message  
from the  
PR

5

FEATURE:  
Banished  
to the inaka



16

KICCHIRI KITCHEN  
SPECIAL: Your  
Japanese kitchen

18

FEATURE:  
5 things: advice  
from a unicorn



10

FEATURE:  
A beginner's  
guide to Cool Biz

12

Hyogo AJET  
Book Club

14

Kannon:  
Tsubosaka-dera  
& Oka-dera

20

FEATURE:  
Top ten apps

23

Hyogo  
AJET Committee

26

WATN?:  
Simon Shone

28

Miso Green:  
Lasting impress-  
yons

30

What's on Japan:  
August

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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).\*

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## Message from the Editor

Greetings all!

**Welcome to the August issue of the Hyogo Times.**

Of course August means that we must say goodbye to those retiring from the Hyogo JET community. It is a bittersweet time, but isn't any period of change? Two of my closest friends are returning home this summer, so as a last hurrah we are currently travelling in Indonesia, a final celebration of what has been an amazing twelve months. I am sure there will be many (possibly inebriated) tears shed before the trip is out.

And so I find myself finishing this, my first editor's letter, on a beach in Bali. The sand is sparkling, the waves rolling in, surfers stand proud on their boards, beautiful people bask in the sun, the air smells faintly of sunscreen and incense and somewhere a beach bar is throbbing with an infectious house beat... jealous yet? You should be. Indonesia is beautiful in its chaos, perfect for an adventure, and the complete opposite of Japan's orderly society. It's the first time I have left Japan this year and my serious wanderlust has finally been appeased (12 months is the longest stretch I have ever stayed in one country). It feels rather strange and incredibly noisy away from Nihon, but it does make me grateful for the luxuries of Japanese living: the quiet, the clean and the efficiency.

However, this month's edition is dedicated to our new Hyogo ALTs. Having been here for a year myself I can assure you that you have just started the most exciting adventure of your lives thus far. This prefecture and country have more than you can imagine on offer to keep you busy in the weeks/months/years ahead.

Admittedly August is a tricky time in Japan; the heat is oppressive and the workload often mind-numbingly light, but the wonderful silver lining is that it's also the season of festivals, fireworks and frivolity, so get out there and explore! The ultimate August trip is of course Mount Fuji. An impressive way to start your career in Japan; scaling the tallest mountain in the country will earn you massive kudos points with colleagues, and teach you why Japan's called The Land of the Rising Sun.

And for those hours you're twiddling your thumbs at your desk, what do we have for you at the Hyogo Times? Well, it's a special feature packed issue; Kylie's educating us in the illustrious history of Coolbiz; Adam is welcoming the new inaka residents with some sage advice; Paige has hot tips on what Apps to download for all you new Japanese smart-phone users and the Hyogo AJET committee are saying their 'konnichiwas', plus much more!

As ever, submissions, comments and greetings welcome by the 15th of the month, send to [publications@hyogo.ajet.net](mailto:publications@hyogo.ajet.net)

Now, my cocktail-in-a-coconut is calling, so I best be off. I look forward to meeting you all at the Welcome Party.

Selamat tinggal!

*Char*



## Message from the PR

### Hello fellow JET members!

For newcomers this is the start of your JET experience and you have all been placed in one of the best places in Japan (not just my opinion).

First of all, let me introduce who we are. Hyogo AJET is the representative committee for all JETs living in the prefecture. We are similar to National AJET, but we work on a prefectural level. We assist the Hyogo Board of Education (BOE) with the major seminars and conferences. We also provide support, organise events and keep JETs informed of local issues. All municipal and prefectural JETs fall under the same AJET banner.

As always, Hyogo AJET, will be holding a welcome party for the new incoming JETs! This year, due to some changes at the Sogo Beer Garden, we will be holding it at the Sannomiya Terminal Heineken Beer Garden on Saturday the 31st of August. You can RSVP on the event page on the Hyogo AJET Facebook group. This is a good opportunity to catch up with old friends and meet the new faces!

August is here and it's not very hard to find something to do on the weekends! There are many festivals and events during the summer period. One major event that I would recommend everyone to go to is the 'Port of Kobe Fireworks Festival'. This is held on Saturday, 3rd of August. If you would like to see what else is happening in Hyogo feel free to browse this [website](#).

That's all from me. I hope to see you all at the welcome party!

*Matt Lim*



*Banished to the Onaka!\**



## Banished to the Inaka!

### I live in a remote patch of

Japanese countryside called Taka-cho. I'll forgive you if you've never heard of it. Even the BOE has trouble remembering we exist out here, not even bothering to replace my predecessor's name with mine in the prefectural English Dept. directory after two whole years! The town, to put it very mildly, is smaller than my hometown. Before I even arrived here, the news of my placement was already making waves at my future school. "A New Yorker?!" they thought. "This guy is going to lose his mind out here in the middle of the inaka! How is he going to cope?!" I know for a fact this is what they thought because they were unafraid to tell me so once it became apparent that I hadn't lost my mind after my first few days here. "Phhh," I responded. "This place is great! It's spacious, there are gorgeous mountains everywhere, friendly townsfolk, amazing food... I'll never get tired of it!"

By the very first Saturday out here, I was so crazed with boredom that I biked to the nearest train station for over an hour in the prime of hellish Japanese summer, sweaty and miserable, just to get to a place that I could potentially allow myself to call "somewhere." Because the inaka, in case you didn't know, is "nowhere." In fact, the Japanese term "inaka" actually means "land of crushing loneliness that will eat your soul." It's true, look it up.

In all seriousness now, I love my placement. I love the school. The kids are wonderful. My coworkers are awesome. I love the town. It's as cute as a Japanese bug's ear, and believe me, that's... mortifying, actually, terrible choice of simile there, but what I'm trying to say is it's a lovely place. It's just a boring place. If you have been designated as an inaka dweller, your city-placed counterparts will have nothing on you in terms of reasons to complain, and usually their complaints will go a lot like this: "Damn it all! There's

only seven karaoke places to choose from in this part of town!" Or: "I hate my life! My local mall only has three floors!" Or: "Woe is me! I have to travel ten minutes by subway to get anywhere fun!" Are you crying yet? I am.

There are plenty of people who will dive headfirst into the Hyogo inaka, pre-packaged with the indomitable Japanese "ganbatte" spirit before they even boarded the plane, and really will never grow weary of the country life. There are a lot of you who have been placed in areas you think of as "inaka" but really have no idea how good you've got it (rule of thumb: if there is a McDonald's in your town, you do not live in the inaka). Then there's those of you who, like me, hail from lands of many, many more than one McDonald's, who will have no idea what to expect and don't know how they should feel about the whole placement-in-the-middle-of-nowhere thing. After 2 years of living out in the sticks, here's the best advice and solace I can dispense to you:

Embrace the fact that you will be a living curiosity. This at least applies to those of you who are visibly Western (i.e. of non-Asian descent). Generally speaking, people in the Japanese inaka tend to be very kind, but foreigners out here tend to attract attention, for better or worse. Staring is fairly common, especially when you first arrive. This makes some people feel celebrated; others like they're an animal in a free-range zoo. In either case, making a good impression on the townsfolk shouldn't be hard to do. You can blow people's minds out here by merely uttering a mispronounced "konnichiwa." You are invested with a certain measure of power here, not only in influencing your students, but the entire community, in regard to how they see the world beyond Japan, because you may literally embody the only contact many of them will ever have with it. Positive gestures will go a very long way, and the worst that is likely to happen is that you will be blasted

in the face with friendly rapid-fire Japanese by an eager local who is assuming that your ability to say anything in Japanese must mean that you're fluent.

Don't get a car if you can bike to your school or to the nearest train station. Needing to own a car in the inaka is, in my opinion, the single worst thing about it, especially if you are an American, South African, or Jamaican because you will be amongst the unlucky souls who will need to do hard time on the driving course at Akashi Driver's Licensing Center next year if you choose to recontract. True, a car will provide heat in the winter and A/C in the summer while travelling, but mostly it will function as a financial black hole with wheels. I could seriously write an entire article on this topic alone, but to name only a few things that will tax your patience and your wallet: super narrow single-lane roads with deep rice paddies on either side (no railings); unbelievably low

speed limits (40 km/hr on average); a complete absence of free parking (¥500/day is as good as you are likely to find); overly cautious drivers that actually end up being more hazardous than safe; shakken (bi-yearly inspection), which is essentially legal robbery (inspections start at roughly ¥60,000 and are often even more expensive); and, let's not forget, the absolute-zero alcohol tolerance policy (meaning if you're found to have had so much as a single sip, you are going down hard – license revocation, social excommunication, getting fired from your school, and jail time are all potential consequences – plus, anyone else in the car at the time will be going down with you for not preventing your "bad decision").

There is a new Costco in Kobe, and it is the prefectural capital of Western foodstuffs. Unfortunately, if you're making the assumption that all the Costcos in the world carry all the same products and



...continued

brands, it turns out that that's actually not true. But fear not, for despite its comparatively watered-down selection of Western brands, you'll find a lot of stuff that you won't find anywhere else out here. And rest assured: the vendors selling hot dogs and pizza have indeed remained intact, as has the bakery, which even cranks out holiday specialties like pumpkin pie – a genuine rarity in Japan. Since its opening last year, making the trip to Costco has quickly become the equivalent of a Mecca pilgrimage for comfort food-starved ALTs. Regarding its location in the north-western corner of Kobe-shi; a very long way out from the nearest train station – it stands as one of the few advantages to car ownership here. The car-less (and friends-with-cars-less) amongst us will assuredly have a harder time getting there, though there is alternatively another location in Amagasaki, which is better connected to public transportation, to which many an Osaka JET has brought along a rolling suitcase to more easily transport their haul.

If nothing else, learn to read katakana. During the summer, you're going to do a lot of desk warming. Maybe I should say desk cooling since you're going to be monsooning sweat all over it every day. And in the inaka, there's not exactly an endless variety of things to do in your free time, so unless you like pachinko and chain-smoking, why not do something useful and study Japanese? If you're new to the language, katakana is where to start. Not only is it an essential part of the written language, but knowing katakana alone will function as a kind of extremely useful cheat-mode in many circumstances, since a great deal of terms written in katakana are derived directly from English. Granted, some of these words are a bit mangled in pronunciation (resulting in the infamous "katakana English" that will plague your classrooms in the future) like コーヒー ("kouhii"; coffee) and テレビ ("terebi"; television), but once you're used to the accent, you will automatically be endowed with the ability to recognize a fairly long list of Japanese vocabulary words simply because you speak English. This is one of the few instances of mercy the Japanese language will present over the course of your studies, so take advantage of it as early as possible.

Japan Railways is trying to troll you, but you can get around it. Never mind the inexplicable two-tickets-per-one-way-trip requirement on the shinkansen. Never mind the fact that they have dumped out-of-service trains throughout the inaka to tease the locals. You may well depend on one of JR's billion and fifteen stations – which are indeed everywhere in Japan, except perhaps for where you live – as the nearest emergency exit that can get you on the way to the closest major city. Lots of times, these emergency exits will be little more than unmanned shacks set up next to train tracks. Don't worry about the lack of ticket machines – the trains that frequent these stations usually have little slip dispensers by the doors that mark your point of origin; just bring the slip to the staff at the counter of your destination station to settle your fare. That said, since many of you will be living pretty far from more populous places, you may have to travel a long way on a JR train to get to that destination, after having already embarked on an epic quest to get to the nearest JR station. Because of the distance, you may have to make one or more transfer trains en route. A little-known secret that even

the most inaka-softened veteran ALTs don't usually know: on long journeys, it will often cost less to purchase individual tickets – one for each trip between transfer stations – than it would to purchase a single ticket for the whole trip. Granted, this would require enough time to exit each transfer station, purchase a new ticket, and then reenter, but if you've got a few minutes between trains, this is the way to go. Use [this extremely handy site](#) to check train times!

Perhaps some of you are thinking your placement in the countryside is something of a raw deal. Admittedly, I still do envy my friends in the cities, but it should be noted just how much they envy me. We inaka dwellers, in contrast to our urban counterparts, are given the opportunity to acquire a far more comprehensive experience and a much wider perspective in our time in Japan. The urban experience in this country is, frankly, largely the same wherever you go, just with varying degrees of population/structural density and shifting preferences for udon vs. soba, soy sauce broth vs. light broth, this type of okonomiyaki vs. that one, etc. Furthermore, urban life happens to be the well-beaten

path of Japan, and if you are placed in the cities, you will be living out a well-beaten lifestyle. There isn't much urban ground that countless other foreigners have not already trodden. The inaka, however, is ripe with chances for discovery. The immense spirit of community out here is something that you will not find anywhere else, and involving yourself in that community will grant you the privilege of seeing a side of Japan that most foreigners never get the chance to encounter. I have done many incredible things out here that I would have never been able to do had I been given the city placement I originally requested. I have performed on guitar in a bamboo forest shrine for a village festival. I have been introduced to a new class of students, not by way of the classroom but by tackling the region's highest mountain together with them on a teamwork hike. I have had incomparably sensational tempura using vegetables that were picked less than a minute before being eaten. I have struck an enormous bell at a temple on New Year's Eve and heard the ring echo through the valley. I have been invited over for dinner and drinks at great curved-roofed Japanese homes, fitted with marvelous Japanese gardens,

kept by the warmest of Japanese families. These are the kinds of experiences that await you here. To be sure, the inaka may not have as much on offer as the city, but no city in Japan offers anything that can truly replicate the inaka's charm.

*Adam Nelson*



# A Beginner's Guide to Cool Biz

## It is August.

And once again, it is time to accept your part as that sweaty, melting gaijin, collapsing into the air conditioning on a train, as your fellow, perfectly groomed, Japanese passengers desperately try not to sit next to you. It's time to acknowledge that feeling of inadequacy as you see an army of Japanese salarymen and women all immaculate and fresh-looking, in the same short sleeved white shirt, sans tie, sans jacket. So where is the sweat? What happened to the suit? What do they tie around their forehead post enkai?

Welcome to Japanese summer. Welcome to Cool Biz.

Cool Biz, started in 2005 by Hyogo's own Yuriko Koike, is an initiative requiring air conditioners in government ministries and agencies be set at 28 degrees Celsius, and workers to wear short sleeved shirts and casual wear

without a tie or jacket. This state-sanctioned rejection of formality and tradition seemed at first sacrilegious and the concept took a while to catch on, but in its first year alone the energy savings from Cool Biz were estimated to be equivalent to the volume of CO<sup>2</sup> emitted by one million households in one month. In the subsequent year, this increased to 2.5 million. From these beginnings, Cool Biz is now embraced all over Japan and a source of great national pride.

Post Tohoku earthquake and in the wake of the Fukushima Daiichi disaster & resulting energy shortages, the Japanese government launched (the somewhat punchier) 'Super Cool Biz'. In addition to previous measures, and so as to reduce the stress on the strained electricity grid, employees were encouraged to adjust their working hours to the morning and evening, and to make use of their annual leave to holiday.

The Super Cool Biz campaign for 2013 kicked off on 3 June. This year, workers at ministries and agencies are encouraged to dress lightly in polo shirts, sneakers, and Aloha shirts, although unlike in previous years, employees may no longer wear t-shirts, jeans or sandals. Private companies are also encouraged to take part. You may have experienced Super Cool Biz firsthand, with school air conditioning used sparingly and only after a certain date and when above a certain temperature.

Here are some commonsense tips to surviving Super Cool Biz and Japanese summer.

## ① Fight with fashion

It seems counterintuitive to put on more clothing, but this is indeed the Japanese way; it would be rare to see a Japanese person without an undershirt of some kind in summer.

Uniqlo and its subsidiary company, GU (as well as nearly every other clothes manufacturer), sell shirts and singlets to be worn under clothing which are designed to absorb perspiration and minimise odour. Whether the shirts do as claimed or have only a placebo effect is for you to decide. For more professional types, dressing for Cool Biz does not mean dressing down; fortunately Japan is the place to buy light weight, non-lined suits.

If you're more comfortable relying on time-tested, low-tech clothing stick to the basic rules of summer dressing and choose loose fitting, natural fabrics (particularly cotton and linen) in light colours.

## ② Hydrate your guts out

Regardless of your activity level it is important to stay hydrated to lower your body temperature and replace fluid lost by sweating. Keep in mind that soft drinks, juices, coffee, or alcohol, while thirst quenching, contain ingredients which dehydrate, and as such water remains the best option. With a vending machine on every corner there really is no excuse.

## ③ Consider modern gadgetry

If you are one of the chosen few with air conditioning, remember to use it with a thought to the environment and your electricity bill. Operate your unit with all windows closed, curtains drawn and with doors closed to non-essential rooms. Shade the western side of your apartment if possible, and be aware of the natural and electrical light you are introducing into the environment. Run your air conditioner at 23 degrees Celsius for optimal efficiency, or, if you want to embrace the Super Cool Biz ethos, at 28 degrees Celsius.

If you are one of the majority without, a pedestal fan is essential to surviving the hot nights of summer. But pay attention to natural ventilation; if you are fortunate to have an apartment with windows and doors opening to either the North and the South or the West and East you will have excellent cross ventilation that will keep things wonderfully cool for free.

## ④ Consider traditional gadgetry

You don't need a lot of money to take cool with you as there are several life saving devices you can pick up for free or next to nothing. Along with tissues, Japanese companies take advantage of summer to hand out enormous hand fans (uchiwa), covered with advertising, with which you can create your own mini-breeze from the stagnant air. Do as the Japanese do and carry a small face towel with you at all times (a mecca kawaii pattern is optional) to blot away sweat on your face and neck. And for those who don't want a glistening complexion, there are many pocket blotting papers around, designed to remove sweat and oil but not makeup.

These tips, together with frequent trips to beer gardens and shaved ice dessert shops, will hopefully ensure your survival, happiness and sanity over the next few months. And above all else, don't wish these days away! For as much as summer is unbearable in Japan, winter is worse. Let's Cool Biz!

Kylie Pinder

## Introducing the brand new Hyogo AJET Book Club!

### For all you new comers finding

your feet in your freshly-woven tatami homes, this club will be a great way to casually slip into the JET community. Not to mention, it will give you something to do at school in the long summer before the students arrive. And the same goes to all you re-contracting JETs.

The Book Club will be a casual affair, so don't worry if you're not a big reader. It took me ten months to read Dorian Gray, and I'm running this show!

So, to business!

Whether you've just arrived into the sweltering sauna that is Japan's summer, set off on your jollies or been courageously ploughing through the daily "atsui" ritual, we are all bound to this country for at least another year and in need of a summer read.

Each new book title will be released here and on the Hyogo AJET Facebook group. The discussion date will be around two months after at some trendy café in the capital of our ken, Kobe. Please feel free to suggest books on the Facebook event so we can put it to a poll to decide the next book.

Now all you need to do is join the Book Club event on the Hyogo AJET Facebook group.

Without further ado the first book for the HAJET Book Club will be...

*Before I Go to Sleep*  
by S.J. Watson

**Memories define us.**

**So what if you lost yours every time you went to sleep?**

**Your name, your identity, your past, even the people you love - all forgotten overnight.**

**And the one person you trust may only be telling you half the story.**

**Welcome to Christine's life.\***

\*From the back cover



The debut novel, written by British NHS worker Watson, is a mystery thriller following a woman named Chrissie who develops amnesia from what she believes was a car crash. Left with just a 24 hour memory, she writes a daily journal to teach herself about her past.

Published in 2011, this Sunday Times and New York Times bestseller is so sought after it has already been poached by Ridley Scott's production company and made into a film starring Nicole Kidman and Colin Firth. Due for release in 2014, it could be the Book Club's first film outing!

### *What did the critics say?*

"The summer's single most suspenseful plot belongs to *Before I Go to Sleep*... Mr. Watson had written this as pure page-turner."  
**New York Times**

"Memories – real, false, and a bit of both – are at the heart of Watson's haunting, twisted debut... Watson handles what could have turned into a cheap narrative gimmick brilliantly, building to a chillingly unexpected climax."  
**Publishers Weekly (starred review)**

"An intriguingly fresh look at the amnesia-focused psychological thriller... A captivating and highly suspenseful read, populated with believable characters who lead the reader through a taut, well-constructed plot."

**Library Journal**

Download or order the paperback – there are various ways of getting a copy of the books but the easiest way I find is Amazon.

The first Book Club meeting will be Sunday October 6th. The exact location is yet to be decided, check the Facebook event closer to the time.

Enjoy the read!

*Cherie Pham*



# 壺阪寺 岡寺 Tsubosaka-dera (6) & Oka-dera (7)

## This month we explore temples

six and seven on our thirty-three route, journeying a bit off the beaten path and into the wilds of Nara prefecture. Both of these temples are less accessible than the ones previously featured, but they are both worth a visit if you have the wherewithal to make the trek.

First up in numerical order is Tsubosaka-dera, or “Jar Hillside Temple.” This temple is associated with healing miracles related to sight and the eyes. For this reason, the principal image of Kannon is actually on display every day, because it is meant to be seen, in connection with its reputation for curing eye diseases. On my travels I did not have the opportunity to actually glimpse many of the Kannon images enshrined at the various temples I visited, so this was a treat indeed. The main image is of Juichimen Senju Kannon (eleven-heads and a thousand arms), carved from a kasha tree in the Muromachi era (1333 – 1573) to the original image carved in the 9th century, which had been destroyed by fire.

Before you get to the Hondo (which is actually the small octagonal building at the back of what looks like the main hall) though, where this image is located, it will be clear

to you that this temple is not like many other temples you have been to in Japan. You will see that around the temple grounds there are many modern stone images carved in the ancient Indian style. This is related to the temple’s ongoing active engagement in social welfare programs in India, including hospices for Hansen’s disease sufferers and for the blind.

As I walked through the grounds, I could smell the scent of lavender flowers baking beneath the August sun, not realizing until later that it was probably part of the scented flower garden created for the use of blind visitors. Indeed as you approach the temple, you will see to the left a building called the Jibōen (Loving Mother’s Garden), a facility for the sight impaired elderly built in 1962 under the direction of Shoken Tokiwa, the late former abbot of the temple. Since then the temple has built a further five large facilities throughout Japan for the sight-impaired elderly; the temple continues under the guidance of his son, the present abbot.

The India connection is also apparent in the Jataka Wall, a long relief carving made of Indian marble that tells stories from the

life of the Shakyamuni Buddha. The Jogando is a mausoleum which also displays many Buddhist motifs of both Japanese and Indian style; the outer walls are covered in replications of the Phoenix Tile, the original of which is fired clay tile excavated from the temple grounds with a relief image of a phoenix on display inside the Hondo/Raido. Dating from the Hakuho era (late 7th Century), it is the oldest Buddhist artifact in Japan. Towering above on the hilltop is the Great Kannon, sculpted in India and shipped in pieces to Japan, she weighs 1,500 tons. These are but a few examples of the India connection you will see at Tsubosaka-dera.

Entrance to Tsubosaka-dera is ¥600; be sure to taste the free samples of eye-healing tea in the shop near the front! As mentioned, getting to Tsubosaka-dera is tricky (I actually visited Okadera first because the schedule worked out better for me that way) compared to some temples we’ve seen, but it can be done! Take the Kintetsu line from Osaka (40 min) or Kyoto (70 min) to Tsubosakayama (壺阪山) station (watch it, you’ll have to change trains once at Yoshino station). From there, take a bus (watch it, they only run like five times

a day – schedule is [here](#)) or a taxi up the mountain to the temple. For driving directions, check out the temple’s webpage at the end of the article.

Getting to Oka-dera, temple 7, is a similar picnic. Take the Kintetsu line to Kashiwara Jingu Mae (橿原神宮前駅), not Okadera station! Then from the east exit (東口), get the Nara Kotsu bus to Oka-dera (similar caveats apply, schedule [here](#)). Make sure you note the return bus times on the bus placard when you get off the bus at the Oka-dera bus stop, from which it’s about a ten minute walk uphill. You can also, of course, taxi it up.

Oka-dera is located on the eastern mountains overlooking Asuka, the ancient first capital of Japan and an area rich in archaeology. The Nyoirin (wish-fulfilling) Kannon image found in the Hondo is the largest clay image in Japan, and is said to have been made by Kobo Daishi with clay from India, China, and Japan. The image does date to the Nara period (710 – 794), with the head and hands being original (the rest of the body is not in as good a shape). The image has survived many disasters, and having survived through the centuries of earthquakes, fires and typhoons, it is venerated

as a protector from disaster. Oka-dera is visited especially by people seeking amulets for protection from disaster in the yakuyoke years of vulnerability (for men these ages are 25, 42, and 61, and for women the vulnerable years are 19, 33, and 37). The principal image at Okadera, like that of Tsubosaka-dera, is open to the public every day.

The formal name of Oka-dera is Ryūgaiji 龍蓋寺, or “Dragon Lid Temple,” referring to the legend that the wandering ascetic shaman-priest Gien Sōjō subdued a dragon here and placed him in the pond in 663. On the temple grounds, you can see the pond where the dragon is held. There is a large stone lid that gives the temple its name (Dragon Lid) that lies below the surface of the water under the memorial stone in the middle of the pond. It is said that when there is drought in the region, the lid is shaken so that the Thunder Dragon will awaken and make rain.

There are paths winding all around the precinct of this mountainside temple, and they make for a pleasant stroll through the shade, as well as lead to an overlook providing a nice view of Asuka below. The okunoin is especially interesting here as it

is in a small cave! Every temple has an okunoin, usually deep in the mountains away from the bustle of the main temple; it is the most sacred place in the temple grounds, the source of the spiritual energy of the temple. This is the only Okunoin on the pilgrimage that is a natural feature of the landscape. The cave is called Mirokudō – the temple of the Buddha of the Future. The cave also esoterically symbolizes the womb. More information about the other features of Oka-dera can be found [here](#)!

Learn why Tsubosaka-dera is called “Jar-Hillside Temple” and the story behind the puppet play that made it such a popular destination for the sight-impaired [here](#).

Tsubosaka-dera’s [official site](#) (Japanese)

Oka-dera’s [official site](#) (Japanese)

[My adventures](#) visiting Oka-dera and Tsubosaka-dera last August.

Happy travels!  
Don’t forget your [map](#)!

*Lemmon*







## Getting to Know Your Japanese Kitchen

### Around this time last year I tumbled

into my new Japanese home, took my shoes off, and walked past the toilet, shower, and kitchen into my bedroom/living area in a matter of footsteps. I'm 5'2" and I am not exaggerating when I tell you that in the unit of strides my flat is 10 by 4 so you can imagine the box I live in. The kitchen is just one stride by half a stride. I'm not telling you this to get your sympathy, but to show you that size does not matter...

I've been around my fair share of kitchens in the past year so I think I can cover most of what you'll be dealing with. I'm going to invite you into my home and share the delights of how to cook in a compact capsule and then delve into Char's high-rise apartment for those lucky enough to have a dance-floor-sized kitchen.

So if you're a keen (novice) cook like myself and want to take full advantage of your new kitchen, whatever size, shape or added extras then let's get cooking!

### Rice Cooker

My rice cooker is a simple model and cashed in at around ¥4,000 (though the crème de la crème of rice cookers go for as much as ¥100,000!) so I have merely the basic functions:

- ① メニュー, Menu/炊飯 (すいはん, suihan) Cook: Press this button to choose the appropriate setting for whichever type of rice you want to cook from options 2-4 below. Press and relax, your rice will cook itself!
- ② 白米 (はくまい), Hakumai (White rice.)
- ③ 早炊き (はやだき), Hayadaki (Fast Cooking.)
- ④ おかゆ, Okayu (Rice porridge). My Chinese heritage allows me to fully appreciate this watery, porridgy goodness as a remedy for all sicknesses, but if you don't want a wet bowl of mush, stay away from this button.
- ⑤ 予約 (よやく), Yoyaku (Reservation.) This clever thing let's you cook rice at a later time, in 1 hour increments.

- ⑥ 保温/取り消 (ほおん/しとりけし), Hoon/Torikeshii (Keep Your Rice Warm/Cancel)

Your sophisticated model may have these extras on the menu:

- 無洗米 (むせんまい), Musenmai (Pre-washed Rice)
- 玄米 (げんまい), Genmai (Brown Rice)

### Easy instructions for perfect rice

- ① Use a rice cup and measure out your rice. I usually use ½ a cup per person.
- ① Wash the rice under cold water
- ③ Put rice in the rice cooker bowl and fill with water to the appropriate line. (1 cup = line 1, 2 cups = line 2...) If you're making rice porridge there is a separate scale.
- ④ Shut the lid, press your preferred menu setting and wait 30 to 40 minutes.

- ⑤ Once ready (Mine shows a "0" on the screen, yours might ping or beep), use the rice spatula and dish out your fluffy Japanese rice.

It may seem like a bit of a wait, but the rice comes out perfect every time, and it gives you plenty of time to cook the main part of your meal. You can also use the reservation function if you're a really efficient chef!

### Toaster oven

Ok this is quite self explanatory but I want to stress how useful this tiny grill is. The guidelines my toaster oven gives are for もち, a Japanese pounded, rice flour cake that can be grilled and eaten, usually around the New Year; ピザ, readymade pizza for those lazy days and グラタン, or gratin, a creamy rice mixture topped with lots of cheese and breadcrumbs. I make my toast (トースト) in mine in the morning and when I'm feeling homesick I roast potatoes or even make cottage pie. It really is a little wonder.

### Nabe pot

Get a nabe pot! Nabe is a kind of hot pot you fill with soup and gather your friends round to cook their own meats and veggies on a stove. But it's not JUST the perfect sociable supper; I use it to make stews, soups, chilli – allsorts! It will keep you alive during those blistering winters and serve you well all year round.

### Japanese stove

Whilst I do miss a proper oven for baking and roasting, the Japanese stove is a worthy replacement. Not only can you steam, simmer and sauté on the hob (and most importantly heat your Baked Beans for that little taste of home) but a good Japanese stove also includes a small grill. This narrow grill is ideal for cooking fish or vegetables and is a great healthy alternative to frying.

Almost all Japanese kitchens will come with the above equipment and if not, then invest early so you

can make the most of your cooking time in Japan. If you're lucky enough to have had a particularly keen cook as a predecessor, you may even inherit a combination microwave oven, the greatest kitchen luxury you'll find in Japan. Admittedly you may have to scale down your cookie batch in order to fit it in, and you certainly shouldn't be over confident and try and cook a roast for 14 people (guilty), but this whiz of a machine will make you popular for miles around for your ability to bake and roast in the winter months.

So now you are properly acquainted with your kitchen, prepare for next month, our first official cookery class of the new JET calendar, when we will be rustling up a delicious Japanese sashimi rice bowl (kaisendon, 海鮮丼!)

*Cherie Pham*



## 5 Things: advice from a unicorn

### It goes without saying that the best

things about Japan will always be the people that you meet and relationships that you forge; The friendly lady who sells bread at one of your schools, the volunteers running Japanese language classes, the other ALTs in town and random people you 'inherit' from predecessors. And that's before you even start to think about anything truly work related.

So I'm not going to talk about that, but about some of the other little things that can make your time in the Land of the Rising Sun that little bit more magical. They aren't strictly Japan related, but have made my five years in Japan, a smilier place.

### ① An Oven

Innocuous as it may sound, one of my happiest purchases in Japan was my oven. Before heading to these fair shores, it hadn't crossed my mind that an oven wouldn't be present and correct in the kitchen upon my arrival. Stepping into my kitchen for the first time and noting this lack, my initial thought was 'how am I going to cook for myself?!?' Of course it's not actually that hard, and I soon realized that most of the food I cooked was on the gas hobs that were in the kitchen, but I still wanted the option to bake/roast things.

So I took a deep breath, handed over a wodge of cash and bought my Japanese oven.

Doubling as a microwave (useful) and grill (useless) too, just having it in the house made me happier. When the mood took me I had the smell of freshly baked bread wafting through my house; baked veggies in giant quantities became a regular feature of meals and I was able to produce cakes, meringues, biscuits (the list goes on) to share with teachers and friends.

I love my oven and if it wouldn't explode upon being plugged in to a British electrical circuit I would never, ever part from it.

### ② Yuzu

If I see this little citrus fruit's name attached to pretty much anything I'll seriously consider buying it. The smell of it is heavenly and the taste rapture-inducing. From moisturizer to yuzu-wasabi, I have never failed to love anything it touches. I'll always choose yuzu-ponzu over any other; the yuzu-hachimitsu (yuzu-honey) chu-hai at Torikizoku the yuzu sorbet at the supermarket. I've used yuzu juice to make fruit pies that bit more amazing, and the aforementioned yuzu-wasabi takes tuna mayonnaise to a whole new level. Try it, and fall in love.

### ③ Mister Donut (Point Card)

When I first arrived in Japan I got a lot of point cards as that just seemed like a 'thing'. A word of warning – most are absolutely rubbish and you have to spend an extortionate amount of money to get anything from them.

Now I'm a bit of a fan of Mister Donut to say the least. The doughnuts aren't overly sweet, the custard in the custard one is delicious and honey dipped old fashioned are one of my guilty pleasures in life. The chain also has free refills on coffee making it a brilliant location for Japanese study in my humble opinion – you get a coffee, a donut or three and you're set for an afternoon. They also have ¥100 doughnut sales with alarming regularity (it was certainly the case for a while, and possibly still is, that they had a sale every fortnight. EVERY FORTNIGHT).

Now let's return to the point card point. At ミスド, you get 3 points for every ¥100 you spend. It can therefore be terribly efficient to get doughnuts when they're on sale. Over and above that, you can actually get some nice things with the points. For 50 you can get a free doughnut (a bit meh, though not nothing) and for 150 you get into cup territory. They're well designed, ceramic cups with silicone sleeves so you don't burn yourself holding

5

them. Volunteer your card when going with friends and not only is that really very achievable, but you both get tasty things to eat. A win all round really (apart from maybe for the waistline).

**Update:** Apparently the Mister Donut people really do hate me. Having closed my closest 店, they are now discontinuing the point card. Anyone with a card, you have until September 30th to collect/use points. I stand by 'yey delicious doughnuts and free coffee refills' as a reason for misdo being wonderful, but the card going is undoubtedly a bit of a bummer.

### ④ Soft Cream Flavours

I'm not sure this would have been a thing if it wasn't for my town, Sasayama, having the best ソフトクリーム on the planet; kuromame (black bean). If you visit (and you should), you must try it, and if possible, go to 特産館さやま (Tokusankan Sasayama) which is the best in town. Sasayama also has chestnut ソフト which is good, but not as good.

Now that little plug is over, what about the other flavours you can find? There



are some that tend to be in most tourist locations; there will always be green tea, often black sesame (my preference in these situations), and the more standard strawberry, chocolate, vanilla. A little further afield perhaps, but in Asakusa, Tokyo, there's a stand that has flavours like sweet potato, sakura and wasabi. It seems that the more tourists there are, the greater the range becomes.

Yet, like Sasayama, you also get more region-centric flavours. This means I've sampled wine, miso and even soba ice cream. Whenever you're out and about and see a ソフトクリーム sign, go and have a peek at what's on offer. It might be awful (miso – bleargh) or wonderful.

### ⑤ Gatsby Ice Wipes

Japan is HOT in the summer. It is sticky, and as one friend recently put it, before too long you just start repeating 'I'm a swamp creature. Fear my swamp ass' over and over again. It's all fine and dandy when you're in the a/c, but as soon as you want to move anywhere, give a lesson or, god forbid, cycle somewhere with a rucksack on, things go rapidly downhill.



Enter the Gatsby wipes.

Now something similar may be available back home, but until encountering a Japanese summer I didn't have a need for them so I don't know. They're wet towels, handily on sale in most convenience and drug stores, which have the added charm of menthol. Menthol has cooling properties and boy do Gatsby wipes make good use of that fact. The initial wipe isn't that cooling (but gets rid of those pesky beads of sweat peppering your brow) but then it hits and it's wonderful. Stand near a fan and you will be cold.

I took them to Singapore with me on a trip with my brother, and he now requests them in care packages (which I swear I'm meant to get living abroad rather than the other way around...).

Keep them away from sensitive areas though. Male friends inform me that drunken dares to wipe the nether regions result in a serious degree of discomfort for not an insignificant amount of time. You have been warned.

*Omogen Custance*



# Top ten must have applications for Android phone users (with some iPhone suggestions)

## Okay, you've finally got your

residence card, so at last you can get your phone. Now to put that baby to use! Here are the top ten applications I think you need for your stay in Japan. They are in no particular order, but grouped into functional categories.

I own an Android smart phone, and all the apps described here can be found in the Google Play store (for FREE!). Although I do suggest some iPhone compatible applications, I make no guarantees.

## Social

### LINE

(iPhone compatible)

Stickers! Fill those awkward silences with fun stickers (like emoticons, but not only for emotions) appropriate for virtually any occasion. LINE is the go-to way to chat with your friends, in Japan. You can even use it to make free calls.

**Pro tip:** LINE can auto-add people in your contact list, and people with your phone number can add you easily. If you want to keep your students at bay, change your LINE settings under "Friends".

### WhatsApp

(iPhone compatible)

Remember those Budweiser commercials where everyone starts saying "Whatssuuuuppp?!!" Well this app has nothing to do with that; it's a great app to keep in touch with your friends back home by texting for free. Set up group messages to organize meet ups in Hyogo.

**Pro tip:** Make sure to include the country code of the phone numbers of your friends back home when you are writing them in your phone address book. Otherwise, Whatsapp won't add them to your Whatsapp contact list.

### Snapchat

(iPhone compatible)

Your friends will no longer mind when you send that umpteenth photo of your beloved Nyan-chan when you use Snapchat. This app allows you to draw and write on photographs/videos and send them to multiple contacts to be viewed for a set number of seconds. They won't automatically be saved to the recipient's phone, although beware of screenshot capabilities.

**Pro tip:** Android's camera is silent on Snapchat, so your Asian addiction to photographing your meals will go unheeded using Snapchat.

## Travel

### Japan Trains

Train navigation is a cinch with Japan Trains. Type in your departure and arrival stations, when you want leave or arrive by, and all those crazy transfers are clearly laid out for you. Truly an invaluable app, it'll save you both time and money, not to mention prevent you from getting lost. Be wary of line transfers, you might need to take them at a jog or at least a very brisk walk.

**Pro tips:** Transferring lines? Click your menu button in the results menu and get the stations mapped out in Google maps for you. It's a lot easier to make those tight transfers when you have a map to look at – trust me! It's also great just to view what direction you're traveling.

You can also go into settings and change it to search for local trains only, useful if you use a Seishun 18 Kippu (a great holiday discount ticket), or to avoid the expensive Shinkansen fare.

### Alternative for iPhone users:

Hyperdia

The iPhone users I know don't bother with the app which you have to pay for, and simply use the [website](#).

## Productivity

### Google Calendar

(iPhone compatible)

Not only can you use Google Calendar to organize all your activities by hour, day, or month, but you can also share calendars with other people. As such Hyogo AJET has created a calendar available to all Hyogo JETs and Hyogo Times readers so you can keep up to date with both AJET and other local events in the Kansai region. Sync it across your phones, tablets, and computers so that you'll always know where to be and when. You can even make a group calendar, so that you can "accidentally" be where your "friends" are...

**Pro tip:** The Hyogo AJET Calendar From a Gmail account, go into the "calendars" section. In the left panel, click the dropdown menu on "Other calendars", followed by "Add by URL". Now copy and paste: <http://tinyurl.com/kfldmab>.

Alternatively you can view the calendar [online](#).

### Wunderlist

(iPhone compatible)

Lists are for the organized. Wunderlist is for the sedulous. Make lists with ease, and stop carrying small scraps of paper in your pocket.

**My top list:** Weekend travel packing list: toothbrush, phone, phone charger, money, sunglasses, friend.

## Japanese Study

### JED

(Japanese English Dictionary)

(Offline capabilities)

JED is the most comprehensive Japanese-English / English-Japanese dictionary I've come across. You can search in romaji, kana, and even kanji. You can also search by parts of speech. Clicking on an entry for a verb provides a list of conjugations.

**Pro tip:** I no longer bother looking up kanji by radicals, and use the google translate app instead (see below).

### Alternative for iPhone users:

Midori

(\$7.99 on the US Apple App Store)



## ...continued

**Google translate**

(iPhone compatible)

What's the gossip in the teachers' lounge? What did that public announcement say? How did your student address you in this week's love letter (probably 恋人)? What application can I use to translate what people say and look up Japanese? One answer: Google translate. It has both a "voice" and a "draw" search. Ask someone to repeat what they said in Japanese to give you a sense of what they said. Write what you see in the draw function to discover meaning behind those mysterious words. It is very forgiving of incorrect stroke order so don't stress out about it and it has regular text searches as well, if you need that.

**Pro tip:** In using the "voice" function, ask the speaker to say only one sentence at a time.

**AnkiDroid**

Spaced repetition software is all the rage, and this application makes it happen. This is an application version of <http://ankisrs.net/>. Spaced repetition, for those who don't know, is the presentation of flashcards at time increments that match the difficulty of the word. For example, if you say that you find the card you are learning is difficult to recall, the program may present the card once a day, rather than once every five days if you said it was easy. This system is supposed to greatly reduce your study time and increase the information that can be studied. There is a database of openly sourced flashcard decks that can be downloaded. AnkiDroid can be used to study anything that uses flashcards.

Recommended decks: romaji to kana (for beginners), Core 2,000 and 6,000 Vocabulary and Sentences (for intermediate – advanced) and Japanese Onomatopoeia (for fun).

**Entertainment****Tuneln Radio**

(iPhone compatible)

Learn Japanese, or listen to a familiar accent by tuning in to your favourite radio stations. You don't need 32GB on your phone when you can stream music from anywhere around the

world! Look for local stations to pick up some kansai-ben (the kansai dialect). You can even access a variety of podcasts.

**Not so pro tip:** I listen to BBC Radio 1 England and NHK Radio 1!

**JpMapPuzzle**

(iPhone compatible)

**"The best games are the educational ones."**  
someone's teacher

You'll be able to learn the name and location of all forty-seven prefectures in no time when you download this app. Race against your friends to drag the prefectures into the correct location in Japan.

**Pro tip:** Move the window to give you access to the greatest number of prefectures and skip prefectures that aren't in that area. You can go back to them after.

**P.S.** My best time on expert mode is 1'25"98.

*Paige Ngo*

## Hyogo AJET Committee 2013-14

**Like National AJET, Hyogo AJET**

is here to help you make the most of your time in Japan as a JET. Hyogo AJET organizes local events and activities to celebrate and share the best of Hyogo within our little community. But it's not only fun and games; Hyogo AJET is also a great source of information on living and teaching in Japan. And perhaps most importantly, there is the **Hyogo Times** itself; the magazine for Hyogo JETs to share their experiences and talents with the rest of the community. [Shameless plug: [email](#) us to get involved!]

HAJET events in the pipeline this year include white water rafting in Shikoku, partying in downtown Osaka, a sake factory tour, camping and much, much more. Make sure you're a member of the '[Hyogo AJET](#)' Facebook group for all the latest events and information.

Of course our very first event is at the end of this month: **The Welcome Party**. Hyogo AJET's biggest event of the year is in Kobe on Saturday 31st August at the [Sannomiya Terminal Heineken Beer Garden](#). So put it in your calendars now and come meet the rest of the rabble!

*New this year from HAJET*

**HAJET Book Club** for people who like to read and natter about books, probably over coffee and lots of cake. See the ad on [page 12](#) for details about the first book and meeting.

An easy-to-use **Dropbox file** where we can share teaching materials across the prefecture. Keep an eye on Facebook for details on how to access the file, and then please add your own lesson plans!

Now, without further ado, we introduce the charming faces of the 2013/14 HAJET Committee!

*1. Arjan Julsi***Year:** 4th ("WOW, I'm a 4th year now!")**Location:** Akashi (but teaches in Takasago)**School type:** SHS

**Most likely to be found:** "When I'm not at school you can find me trying to find somewhere new to eat, some music to check out, or a new running path/trail."

**Top Japan tips:** Be flexible and appreciative. If you decide to study Japanese, don't neglect the Kanji. Go to Kyushu at least once.

**Favourite places:** That area in Kobe between Motomachi and Sannomiya, north of the station, Eki Mae (駅前) Sushi, Fukuoka, Huckleberry Records, the Iya Valley on Shikoku and Ame-mura/Horie/Minami Senba in Osaka.

*2. Peter HeinHartmann***Year:** 3rd**Location:** West Kobe/Akashi**School type:** SHS

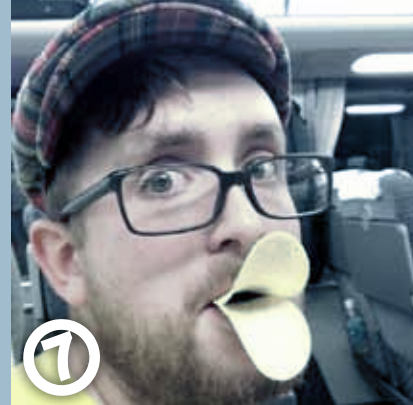
**Most likely to be found:** enjoying the company of good friends or cycling around Kobe and Akashi.

**Top Kobe tip:** A little known bar in China Town (Motomachi) called Bar Puerto. ¥500 cocktails, no menu – they will just make whatever you want, and they make 'em strong!

*3. Patricia Jordan***Year:** 3rd**Location:** Asago City in Tajima, Northern Hyogo**School type:** ES and JHS

**Most likely to be found:** Playing taiko, singing, or traveling for the weekend





...continued

**Top Japan tip:** Go to Sapporo in the summer for a couple of weeks either to study Japanese or just escape from the heat. You won't regret it!

**Favorite place in Hyogo:** Kinosaki Onsen

#### 4. Matt Lim

**Year:** 3rd

**School type:** SHS

**Most likely to be found:** travelling by train

**Top Japan tip:** "Explore Japan whenever you get the chance!"

#### 5. Whitney Litzy

**Year:** 3rd

**Location:** Kami-cho (Tajima)

**School type:** JHS and Elementary

**Most likely to be found:** with a coffee in hand

**Favourite place in Japan:**

Anywhere with a clear view of Mt. Daisen

**Top Japan tip:** "Write down the things your students say before you forget them"

#### 6. Charlotte Griffiths

**Year:** 2nd

**Location:** Nishinomiya

**School type:** SHS

**Most likely to be found:** pestering you to write for the Hyogo Times / hunting for mature cheese

**Favourite places so far:**

Sapporo, partly for the Yuki Matsuri ice-sculpture festival, but mainly for the crab, lamb, cheese, butter

ramen and beer and Nagano for skiing on 'champagne powder'.

#### 7. Ryan Hertel

**Year:** 2nd

**Location:** Minamiawaji, Awaji

**School type:** JHS

**Most likely to be found:** Staring blankly at the grocery store fish section / In the city, shouting.

**Top Japan tip:** Carry a sweat towel in the summer, you won't regret it [wash your towel before winter or you will regret it]

**Favourite places so far:** "Yuwaku onsen village, just outside Kanazawa, Ishikawa. It was my first Otaku voyage hot spring experience. I highly recommend it. I've also given an obscene pile of yen to Murphy's Irish Pub in Osaka..."

#### 8. Paige Ngo

**Year:** 2nd

**Location:** Amagasaki

**School type:** SHS

**Most likely to be found:** trawling [www.flypeach.com](http://www.flypeach.com) for the next bargain adventure

**Top tip:** try apple and custard taiyaki – delicious!

#### 9. Cherie Pham

**Year:** 2nd

**Location:** Kawanishi (on the outskirts of Osaka)

**School type:** SHS

**Most likely to be found:** taking photos of food

**Favourite trip in Japan:** "Biking the Shimani Kaido; over 70km from Onomichi, Hiroshima to Imabari on Shikoku. The achy legs and sore bum were well worth

the stunning views over the 7 bridges.

#### 10. Kylie Pinder

**Year:** 2nd

**Location:** Kobe Suzurandai

**School type:** SHS

**Most likely to be found:** stuck in Tumblr scroll downs trying to find amusing gifs for class (weekdays), or skulking through Motomachi spending too much money on vintage clothes (weekends).

**Favourite place so far:** Ainokura in winter; a tiny village of traditional gassho-zukuri houses locked away from the touristy hordes by masses of winter snow.

#### 11. Anastasia Windeler

**Year:** 2nd

**Location:** Kami-cho (Tajima area)

**School type:** Two JHS and Three Elementary

**Most likely to be found:** Practicing Ultimate Frisbee or checking out the random eateries in Tajima.

**Top Japan tips:** Be open to the chaos. Living in Japan can be quite an adjustment but the JET community and local community are amazing and you will find more than you can imagine by just getting out there and going with the flow.

**Favorite places:** Kyoto. There are a lot of wonderful historical sites, great architecture, good shopping locations, and great people. Tajima also has really great views; it makes the hour drive to work really pleasant.

*Charlotte Griffiths*



## Where are they now?

A new regular feature, Where are they now? interviews Hyogo JET alumni to find out what they are up to post JET.

Our first interviewee is the charming Simon Shone of New Zealand origin who spent two years based in Itami from August 2010 to 2012 and is now living in London.

### What did you do immediately after leaving JET?

**Simon:** I went back to NZ for one month to see family and friends before embarking on a two month trip of the UK and USA. Whiskey tours, seeing NZ/JET friends who had also finished their contracts at the same time or during my two year tenure, volunteering in the US Elections... I covered a lot of ground! It was a knacker but amazing experience. Then back to NZ for the summer, to work, and sort out the next move in 2013.

### Did you experience reverse culture shock?

**S:** Fair to say that I did. Everyone is warned, and to some degree even expects it, but it is very subjective. I had made some very good friends during my two years, not to mention

how Japan gets 'under ones skin'... Going from a decent salary to unemployment (thank you airport arrival card!!) was a bit of a funny, albeit it semi-serious, welcome to the real world. I was fortunate enough in that my parents had moved house and city whilst I was in Japan, so my 'home' environment was different to when I last visited NZ. Also, I had already made some decent travel plans (booked the flights at least) so I had that to look forward to and organise.

I could imagine that the last thing anyone should do upon their arrival is... not much. I guess it depends how long you've been away, the degree of contact you've had with friends and family since you've been in Japan, and also whether you still have friends who are remaining in Nihon.

From forgetting what my own currency was worth whilst in the supermarket, to the homesickness pangs that stirred when I realised that back in Japan the new term had started, whilst here I was in a decidedly 'un-Japanese' environment.

### What are you doing now?

**S:** I currently live in London, where I have applied to join the British Army. I have just completed a TEFL

course, and work as a Teaching Assistant at a primary School, focusing on a couple of Autistic spectrum students. Throw in some part-time bar work at a busy station sports bar, and you have me! I'm enjoying London, and the neighbour-esque quality of Europe. Most of my friends from high school live here too, so it's rather jolly. For those that know me, don't get me started on the football: brilliant.

### How has the experience of living in Japan helped you?

**S:** Work experience, multi-cultural networks, travel, friends... I actually have friends all over the world. It's phenomenal. Japan was out of my comfort zone. The experience of having to learn the language, adjust to customs and subtle/obvious clashes of work ethic and social etiquette helped me in my working capacity, giving me new transferable skills which could be applied in almost any/every setting.

### What did you hope to gain from doing JET? Did you?

**S:** JET/Japan was my solution to 'I've graduated and now I want to do something totally different'. It proved to be a superb solution.

For me JET was an opportunity to leave home (NZ), live and work overseas, and do something which was outside my comfort zone, so to speak. I really just wanted to do and experience something different. It's a testament to the programme that I still keep in touch and have visited Japan and my friends from JET since I left the programme.

### What do you miss about Japan?

**S:** Thanks to Facebook I'll likely always get pangs of 'homesickness'... photos of enkais, beer gardens (oh! The beer gardens!), food and the like.

I enjoyed the cultural differences. They were at times frustrating, but it is all very much part of the charm. I found it helped me to appreciate my own 'home' in a different way. I am lucky enough to have many good friends and some extended family who will always give me a reason to visit Japan again. There was also a great sense of camaraderie between English teachers; sharing classroom stories after a week of lessons was always bound to draw a laugh.

I do particularly miss the food. Nothing quite like a freshly made sushi or okonomiyaki, or the takoyaki cart outside my station selling freshly made dumplings to late-returning commuters!

### What is your favourite memory of Hyogo?

**S:** There are so many... whilst not strictly 'Hyogo', reaching the summit of Mt Fuji was definitely a highlight. Watching the Hanshin Tigers play was always a brilliant evening; the atmosphere, hilarity, costumes and pure entertainment. And karaoke nights that nearly always turned into mornings. Taking my parents into school to visit students and teachers was also quite a highlight.

### Do you have any advice for alt's moving home?

**S:** Make the most of your new and (hopefully) international social network of friends. Make the effort to keep in contact and when feasible, travel to see them. I made it a point to do that, and I can't tell you how valuable it was to me to see some of my close JET friends, whom I'd seen not more than 2 months

previously at a local izakaya in Japan, now in their home towns and communities. It was like seeing a new, wonderful side of them and their families.

If you find that you're pining for Japan after returning home, then plan a trip back...

And another thing: Onesies... You are never too cool.





## Lasting Impress-yens

The August issue is a great time to address the new arrivals to the JET program. Welcome! You have likely just settled into your apartment, perhaps with inherited items from your predecessor, but likely without much. It's also likely that you don't have a lot of money on hand, considering that you just moved a significant distance from your homeland. For many of you in this situation, you are looking to fill the voids in your apartment as soon as possible, and are surrounded by charming, colorful, convenient and cheap ¥100 stores.

On the surface, ¥100 shops and 3-coin shops seem like a godsend. When compared to dollar stores elsewhere, they are better organized, cleaner and contain a breadth of useful, cute and kitschy products. You can indeed get your hands on many essential tools for daily life by shopping at The Daiso and Seria. However, I am actually writing this month to try and convince you to avoid them.

The first and most obvious reason is that most of what you might purchase at a ¥100 store is, well, cheap! The likelihood of an item that you buy at one of these places lasting through your JET tenure is extremely low. While this is not an economically big deal, if you are environmentally conscious like me (and what would motivate you to read Miso Green if you weren't?), the idea of these items' ultimate fate is a scary one. Spend a couple of extra yennies to break the cycle of replacing cheap with cheap.

Then, there is the plastic. Stores like these pride themselves on their overseas plastic factories (look at [The Daiso's homepage!](#) They have literally the largest plastics factory in the world). Items at ¥100 shops are often far over-packaged in plastic wrapping and casing as a result. Most of this packaging is labeled recyclable (bearing in mind that plastic is not infinitely recyclable, but typically takes one more form

before its final landfill resting place), but, and this is my other key point, the products themselves are not. The majority of products in ¥100 shops are plastic, including items you might not suspect, like those made of fabric and silicone, all of which will end up in landfills when they fail. And consumable ¥100 items are typically sold in smaller containers, which mean more unnecessary plastic packaging.

Furthermore, ¥100 shops are a slippery shopping slope. While I try to avoid them, I occasionally go for items I can't easily find, or can be found elsewhere but with unnecessarily high markups, such as office supplies. But, while I am there, I often think to myself, "Well, I could also use one of these, and it's only a hundred yen, and I feel like I could use a snack, and OH! I've been needing this for a while..." and suddenly I've spent three bills on essentially nothing.

But most of all, the primary reason you're better off finding your survival goods outside of the discount shops is that you have viable eco-friendly alternatives. Recycle shops in Japan are phenomenal. They blow other countries' charity shops out of the water, because they're not really charity shops. Recycle shops pay relatively little for things that people bring in, and sell them at respectable, competitive prices, and they only take items that are fully functional and of a certain degree of quality. Think of the unique omiyage you'd be able to find in second-hand stores!

They also often carry some of the miniscule items we find ourselves at ¥100 shops trying to buy, such as light bulbs and batteries. These get sold to recycle shops when people move, and despite being similarly priced, they are usually of better quality than their ¥100 shop counterparts. The best recycle shops are often off the beaten

path, so check in with your coworkers about their favorites in the area.

Although you have just arrived, and need some stuff, and are probably broke, try to shop with the future in mind. Get things that will last until your successor arrives, and break the vicious cycle of buying cheap things and replacing them with new cheap things. But more important, use this opportunity to make your apartment feel like a home. This, I find, is essential for overcoming culture shock and confirming a sense of identity as you find your place in your community. By relying on ¥100 shops, JET apartments often have the feel of college dormitories; places that emphasize our impermanence in this country and have the ability to magnify homesickness when it hits. Recycle shop items come from homes, and wouldn't be there in the first place if they were considered

expendable. Allow me to show you what I mean. Throughout the article are comparative photos of a typical ¥100 shop item next to a slightly more expensive recycle shop item. Ask yourself: which feels homier? Which has more character? Which looks like it would last longer? Which would I be prouder to own?

Happy thrift shopping!

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# What's on Japan?

<b>A</b>	<b>m</b>	<b>T</b>	<b>W</b>	<b>T</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>S</b>
					<b>1</b> The 2013 Setouchi Triennale International Art Festival Until Sept 1st	<b>2</b> Nebuta Festival Aomori Until Aug 6th
						<b>3</b> Kanto Festival Akita Until Aug 6th
<b>4</b>	<b>5</b> Group B Orientation Tokyo Until Aug 7th	<b>6</b> Hanagasa Yamagata Aug 5th until Aug 7th	<b>7</b> Tanabata Sendai Aug 6th until Aug 8th	<b>8</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>11</b> Hi-no-Kuni-Matsuri Kumamoto Until Aug 13th	<b>12</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>14</b> Setsubun Mantoro Nara Until Aug 15th	<b>15</b> Hyogo Prefectural Orientation Aug 14th until Aug 16th	<b>16</b> Yamaga Toro Matsuri Kumamoto Aug 15th and 16th	<b>17</b>
<b>18</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>22</b> Group C Orientation Tokyo Until Aug 23rd	<b>23</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>25</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>31</b> Hyogo AJET Welcome Party!





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*...and now for your Hyogo experience to begin!*