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hyogo times

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.....Inside.....

The Temple of Winners Luck  
A Beginners Guide to Osechi Ryouri  
Snow Fun in Hyogo

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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: [hyogotimespublications@gmail.com](mailto:hyogotimespublications@gmail.com).

## Message from the Editor

### Happy New Year Hyogo!

I am writing to you from the past, in mid-December, far ahead of the New Year, hoping to leave my festive season free of editing work and full of food and fun. New Year has never been a big deal for me; parties are over-hyped, overpriced and impossible to get a taxi home from. As a waitress I would volunteer to work (for triple pay of course) and many years have seen me curled up by the fire watching Jools Holland's Hootenanny with my parents – I am middle aged at heart and love it. In Japan though, New Year is far more family-oriented, traditional and refined. Following last year, when I scaled a mountain to see in the New Year (albeit by ski lift and a little after sunrise), my resolution is to take this small piece of Japanese culture with me and, whenever logistically possible, climb a mountain on January 1st.

January can be a tough month with wallets considerably lighter post-holiday, cold weather confining you to the kotatsu and big decisions to be made at month's end. Still, it's also a beautiful month, there's snow to be enjoyed in the mountains, hot bowls of ramen and nabe to be guzzled and a few must-see festivals to be found. My personal favourite is the Wakakusa Yamayaki in Nara, commonly known as the Mountain-Burning festival. It is a pyromaniac's dream and well worth a trip to our near neighbour on January 25th, especially if you catch the firework display in which last year they made a deer's head in the sky – a deer's head!

For those of you lucky enough to have an office heater do curl up at school with this month's Hyogo Times. If you have no heater, my sincerest apologies for not providing you with burnable pages to warm you, but read on to distract yourself from your numb toes! The first issue of 2014 is packed full of articles, including old favourites and new writers and columns. In travel we have adorable bunnies or snowy mountains; in current affairs Sean is discussing Japan's secrecy law; there are updates from AJET events, our next Kannon stop, a flavoursome recipe in time for Chinese New Year, the triumphant return of Miso Green, a bumper edition of Where Are They Now? to help you with that impending decision, and so much more!

So forget your half-hearted resolutions, pour yourself a glass of something to make your warm and fuzzy and enjoy.

Char



Hello x 2!

## Message from the PR

### Hello Hyogo!

I hope you've all had some nice R&R during your winter holidays, and for those of you who have gone abroad – welcome back to the land of the rising sun! I'll be the first to say that winter is my least favourite season ["You call yourself a Canadian, Paige?" There, I said what you were all thinking!], but I'm really looking forward to all the winter activities and Japanese seasonal foods (read: nabe parties) this year.

As we settle in for the winter chills, snuggled under the 炬燵 (kotatsu; a table exuding the warmth of a hundred snuggling puppies), let me remind you of some of the exciting events happening in Hyogo. Hyogo AJET will be organizing an excursion to taste what is reputed to be the best sake in all of Japan! Luckily it's found in our very own prefecture, in the Nada area stretching from Kobe to Nishinomiya. Save the date of January 26th, more details to come on the FB page.

I should also mention that Hyogo is home to some amazing skiing and boarding resorts. Winter's a time to embrace your inner snow demon and shred those hills. Check out the resorts here, or just read this issue for more information! Whilst all the athletes tear up the fresh snow, we of more relaxing pursuits can sit back and soak in 露天風呂 (rotenburo; outdoor hot spring baths). What can be better than watching the snow fall while bathing in a pool of mineral rich, naturally heated water? My new year's resolution #1: make more time for rotenburo.

The winter can be a harsh season (especially compared to the weather that those south of the Equator are experiencing) but don't let it dampen your spirits. Please be wary of stage two of culture shock after a visit to your homeland, and don't be shy to use the JET Line: 03-5213-1729 (or the AJET Peer Support Group 050-5534-5566 after regular hours). The lines are manned by people who have been, or currently are, in the same situation as you.

The best way to combat the winter blues is to gather with your fellow Hyogoites and party! We're all on JET for only a limited time, so let's do our best to enjoy the rest of our time in Japan.

Paige



Chinese Chicken & Potato



### Ingredients

Serves: Two

Prep time: 10 minutes

Cooking time: 35 minutes

(For a one stove kitchen, it's faster if you have two.)

- 150g diced chicken thigh
- 3 potatoes, quartered
- half a head of broccoli
- handful of chopped spring onions
- thumb of ginger, thickly sliced
- olive oil for cooking
- 3 tps oyster sauce
- 2 tps soy sauce

This is the recipe I make when I'm missing home and want to inject some heritage back into me. It's a chicken dish with all the Chinese flavours you'd expect; ginger, soy, spring onions, but it's a bit unusual because some of the potato acts as a sauce, some as the main dish. Give it a try; I hope it was worth the steal.

This year Chinese New Year just about makes it onto January's calendar, sitting firmly on the 31st. To celebrate the famous zodiac race, you could immerse yourself in all things sweet and sour, salt and peppered or egged and fried but why not try something a little more authentic? This month's recipe has been stolen from the mitts of my mother; I personally pried it out of her Cantonese hands for your culinary pleasure.

### Step one

Place the potatoes in a pot. Pour in boiling water so that you leave about 1cm of the potato out of the water.

### Step two

Boil the potatoes for about 15 mins, so they're about 70% on their way to mashed potatoes. Take off the heat.

### Step three

In a frying pan, add a lug of oil. Fry the chicken and ginger together for about 5 mins, until the chicken is brown.

### Step four

Put the pot of potatoes back on a low heat and add the broccoli. Cook for 3 minutes with the lid on.

### Step five

Use a fork and lightly mash three to four potato quarters.

### Step six

Mix the chicken, ginger, oyster and soy sauces in with the potatoes.

### Step seven

Leave on a low heat with a lid on for 5 more mins or until the chicken and broccoli are cooked through.

### Step eight

Take off the heat and stir in the spring onions. Serve with rice.

Kung Hei Fat Choy!

Cherie Pham

# Snow fun in Hyogo

[Recycled and updated from Ski Hyogo, February 2013]

## Japan's skiing has been kept

a secret from the international market for years by the locals and Antipodeans in the know, and for good reason. The snow here is renowned for being particularly light and is eloquently named 'champagne powder'.

We are incredibly lucky being based in Hyogo in that a long weekend in Hokkaido (see Jetstar or Peach for flights) or up in Nagano (Willers' White Express bus ¥11,300 return from Osaka) is very manageable.

Even better though is that we can do day trips. Last January when I came back from an indulgent week in Nagano, I did a lot of research into where to ski more locally and was very pleased with the results.

Hyogo has fifteen of its very own snow oases. There is nothing better, nor more indulgent, than going for a casual weekend ski just because you can. The results of my research (reprinted below) took me on several fun ski days in our very own prefecture.

Although Hyogo may not be world famous for its pistes, it does have enough to entertain for a day or two, and snow is a very good excuse to head up to the beautiful north.

So whether you're a powder hound, piste bunny or total novice, it's time to drag yourself out from under the kotatsu, hop on a bus and hit the slopes local style. Hot sake is the new vin chaud, and you simply cannot beat onsen après-ski.

## Mount Rokko

Looking out over Kobe bay Mount Rokko is worth a visit at any time of year for the view alone, but come winter you can also enjoy playing in the snow. This small but conveniently located beginners' slope is the perfect place for newbies to find their snow legs, or if you are a bit more experienced then head to Rokko for a fun day of sledging and snow men.

Entry ¥2,000 (rentals extra)

Access Take the Hankyu to Rokko station then the funicular up the mountain.

## Hachi Kita/Kogen : web link two

30% Beginners  
40% Intermediate  
30% Advanced

Average snow depth in Feb 183cm  
Lifts 13

Hyogo's best known and most snow-sure mountain. Avoid the lower slopes which get choked up with learners, and the snow park which fills up early with posers decked out in the new season colours. Up the mountain you avoid the queues and benefit from a variety of slopes, semi off-piste and tree runs. Hachi offers two ski areas on the same pass, but the link run between Kita and Kogen is intermediate level so beginners should plan to stick to one side.

The Hachi Kita/Kogen area gets busy on weekends, so use the mid-term

exams and a day of nenkyu to go make some fresh tracks when everyone else has to work.

**After great success last year, on March 1st and 2nd Hyogo AJET will be returning to Hachikita and Hachikogen for another weekend of snow fun. For full details and how to book see the Facebook group.**

Full rental sets ¥5,000 – ¥6,000

Access Shinki Heart tour  
Return bus leaving from Namba, Osaka at 6.45am (other stops en route through Hyogo) to Hachi-kogen.

	Basic lift pass	Extended lift pass
Weekends	¥7,500	¥9,200
Weekdays	¥5,000	¥6,500
Specials*	¥4,500	¥5,900

\*specials: 14th, 15th, 20th Feb

## Four of Hyogo's hottest cold spots

### Sky Valley

Beginner 10%  
Intermediate 70%  
Advanced 20%  
Av snow depth Feb 185cm  
Lifts 5

Lift pass ¥3,500/day  
Skis/board+boots+skiwear ¥6,000/day  
Skis/board+boots ¥4,000/day

One of Hyogo's bigger mountains, Sky Valley has eight runs with the longest just over three kilometres. If you like to show off in the park,

Sky's has enough to keep you amused for the day with rails, boxes, kickers, a half-pipe and sometimes a quarter-pipe. There's something for every level at Sky Valley, and although it lacks proper pistes for the very advanced, if the snow's good then there's lots of potential to make tracks between the trees. Adorable woodland animals make the piste map easy to navigate, but be careful, the mascot may look deceptively friendly!

### Access

Shinki Bus tour  
Return transport from Sannomiya departing at 7:20am plus day lift pass from ¥5,000 to ¥6,800. See [website](#) for dates, prices and other pick-up points.

### Hyōnosen

Fancy testing the slopes of the tallest mountain in Hyogo? About 3 hours North West of Kobe lies the 1,509m Mount Hyōno. Best accessed by car (or a 50 minute bus from Yoka station), this small resort boasts a snow park and some excellent weekday discounts. Hang on to your lift pass for discounts at the onsen down the mountain too; the perfect way to relax those post mogul muscles.

## A beginner's guide to osechi ryori

### In amongst faux snow and strains

of l'mmmmmm dreammgggg of a whiteeeeeee Christmasssss you may have also seen in your department stores and supermarkets ornate square boxes filled with produce in every colour, begging to be bought at obscene prices. A far cry from roast turkey (northern hemisphere) or seafood (southern), this is *osechi ryori*, the Japanese "Christmas Lunch", is eaten with family on 1 January. Characterised by its colourful layers, morsels are packed into special *jubako* boxes, particular care being taken with the arrangement and colours. While all edible, most food is more symbolic than delicious, directed towards ensuring prosperity, good fortune, and health in the New Year.

Traditionally, in the first three days of the New Year it was not permissible to use a hearth or cook meals. To survive, families spent the last days of December cooking masses of food containing ample amounts of

sugar and vinegar, that would keep, unrefrigerated, for several days without spoiling. Now, similar to Christmas in the West, *osechi ryori* allows families to eat at home in the first days of the New Year when most stores are closed. The masses of food prepared also means that, for these days, tired housewives may have a break from their regular cooking duties.

If you are lucky enough to be spending *Oshogatsu* with a Japanese family this winter, here is a guide to what you may be eating.

#### Kazunoko

Tiny yellow herring roe, usually marinated in dashi, soy, and sake. When eaten, the roe has a bit of a crunch and is decidedly not delicious. The eggs are consumed as a wish for an abundant harvest and fertility.

#### Kuromame

Black soy beans, seasoned with sugar and soy for a soft and sweet taste. The word for bean, "mame", is similar to the word for "hard work and good health." Accordingly, eating kuromame is a foolproof, completely legitimate, and delicious way to ensure good health in 2014.

#### Gomame or Tazukuri

Small dried sardines, finished in a sauce of sugar, mirin, soy and sake. As the original use of these fish was as fertiliser for rice, the literal meaning of "tazukuri" is "rice paddy maker." The fish are symbolic of a rich harvest.



#### Datemaki

Looking a little like a castella sponge, this treat is similar to the ubiquitous tamago roll but made with fish or shrimp paste. Because of its resemblance to a scroll, eating datemaki expresses a wish for scholarship. Anyone studying for the Japanese proficiency test this year could do worse than try a few for luck.

#### Kurikinton

A saccharine mash up of sweet potatoes and chesnuts. "Kinton" means golden dumpling, and is symbolic of gold and silver treasures. This is the dish to eat if you want your finances to look better in 2014.

#### Kamaboko

Red (pink) and white fish cakes. The shape is said to represent the first sunrise of the year, and the colours are considered highly auspicious in Japanese culture.

#### Kohakunamasu

Red and white vinegar daikon and carrots. The colours represent mizuhiki, a twisted rice paper decorative cord that is used for special occasions.

#### Gobo

Burdock root seasoned with sesame. The roots of the vegetable grow deep into the ground resembling a crane, a symbol of a fruitful year. Gobo is eaten to wish for good health and an abundant harvest.

#### Prawn

With their long antennae and curved body, the prawns represent long life.

#### Sea bream

The fish is a symbol of auspicious fortune, and is eaten as a wish for many auspicious days.

#### Otoso

Spiced sake, drunk to defeat the evil spirits of the previous year. If you want to prevent illness in 2014, it is recommended you have a lot of this.

If you haven't yet latched onto a celebration, don't worry. These foods can be bought at supermarkets all across Japan, and it is easy to find something suitable for your appetite and budget. You can also try your hand at being a Japanese homemaker, with most (most!) osechi recipes fairly easy to recreate. More than anything, don't miss the chance to ensure your good fortune for the New Year and enjoy a unique aspect of Japanese culture at the same time.

*Kylie Pinder*

With thanks to Kawasaki Sensei for confirming the veracity of the information supplied.

## Just Ask Ava

Dear Ms Hart,

Winter in Japan is a joke. People here don't know how good they've got it. 50°F in December?! That's picnic weather for me. At my school, as soon as it did drop below 50, these old-school gas heaters were bust out (with mysterious kettles of water on top) and the grunts of "samui!" became shouts. On top of this and the carbon monoxide poisoning hazard, I've repeatedly been asked "Aren't you cold?" Seriously, how can a question of concern actually be a criticism? Where I'm from, men are men and there is no way I'm going to wear a sissy sweater like my colleagues do.

How do I deal with this 'unique' Japanese season without going insane or boiling alive?!

Yours,

Overheating in Ono

Dear Overheating

The use of passive aggressive questions is an art form as revered in Japan as Ikebana and Sado. Replying sarcastically as one might be won't do in one's native country, will only result in further concern for your health and a trip to the hospital to check your hypothalamus is functioning, or a bunny-in-headlights stare of confusion. Unfortunately for 'manly' men such as yourself, whose core temperature does run a little hotter, such questions are part and parcel of a true Japanese winter. Try to embrace them for the novelty of having colleagues converse with you; it certainly makes a change from the rally of "samui!" which usually constitute conversation for the winter months. Having said that, perhaps you are sick, your emotional reaction would certainly imply so. Have you considered a day's rest in case this paranoia simply stems from a mild case of "man flu"? I understand it can be quite incapacitating.

In terms of the heaters, I advise you not to complain too loudly, lest a herd of ALTs lynch you in envy. Instead, make use of the improvised kettle-cum-humidifier for instant ramen lunches.

Lastly this winter, appease the sensibilities of your colleagues by covering up ankle to wrist in at least two layers. However, invest not in HeatTech but in CoolTech, which will wick away the layer-induced beads of perspiration and give the Uniqlo clerks something to talk about when you are the sole purchaser of last summer's stock [now on super sale].\*

From the warmth of a real office,

Ava Hart

\*Ava Hart does not, and never would, be caught dead wearing mass produced garments such as this shop provides; she does, however, accept its necessity as a place to dress those over 5ft7.

Dear Ms Hart,

Later this month my Japanese boyfriend's mum is taking me to Kinosaki for a true onsen experience. Now, I love a gossip and wallow in hot water as much as the next person, but being naked with my man's mother? Too weird. I thought I'd get out of the trip when I told her I have a tattoo, but – I think wanting to seem cosmopolitan – she insisted that it wouldn't be a problem and that I can cover up with a hand towel to prevent offense to fellow bathers. The thing is, whilst I can get away with having a tat, I fear total embarrassment when she actually sees it. You see, I have a flame breathing dragon, starting at the base of my back and spreading its wings across my shoulders. It seemed like a good idea after a full moon party on my gap year, when I was obsessed with Stieg Larsson books, but it's hard enough to stay in favour with his very chic mother as it is.

I really like this guy and don't want a stupid decision I made when I was 18 to ruin what I've got now. What do you suggest to maintain my reputation with my boyfriend's family as a classy international?

With thanks,

Tattooed in Tamba

Dear Tit,

I have increasing numbers of tattoo related problems to solve but social attitudes are slowly changing to assist you. Considering the impending nudity with your "in-law", I suggest you tackle the issue head on and take control of the situation. For the inevitable gift you will take, instead of a box of boring local omiyage make it a Game of Thrones box set and explain you are a Targaryen by descent – purple contacts are also easy to source in Japan and will get you bonus points with any teenage siblings your beau may have. Alternatively take tickets to see the Desolation of Smaug, who could deny a dragon's cool factor after it has been voiced by man of the moment Benedict Cumberbatch?

A final piece of advice for the next time you are on holiday, my Targaryen Tamba: buckets of questionable cocktails are not suitable for someone of your lineage, nor do they make for good life decisions. From now on, class it up with a flaming cocktail worthy of your kin; two parts chartreuse to one part rum – a Flaming Dragon to match your ink.

Pitying and unblemished,

Ava Hart

Do you have a **burning question** or cultural conundrum? Well, the Hyogo Times is proud to introduce the scintillating and savvy Ava Hart, here to answer all your concerns in her new column **Just Ask Ava.**



## Osaka Sweets Marathon

### Having somehow managed to

get through the Kobe Marathon in November and remain smiling for most of it (no I'm not sure how that happened either), I had almost forgotten that I'd signed up to participate in the Osaka Sweets Marathon in December. When signing up, I think my reasoning went something along the lines of; 'Well I'll probably want to give up on running post-marathon training, so it will be a good incentive to keep going' then 'We're doing it as a group, so it's not like I'll be doing another full marathon.' But topping everything was 'SWEETS – I can get free cakes and sweets and general things of the tasty persuasion and justify it by running a bit? Hell yeah, where's the dotted line?'

Osaka is not alone in holding a Sweets Marathon. A quick look at the Sweets Marathon website reveals these sugar-loaded events take place all over Japan, from Hokkaido down to Fukuoka. The first event took place in Osaka in 2010, planned as a one-off. This year's December event was the

16th Sweets Marathon, with the 17th to take place in Tokyo in January, and the 18th in Fukuoka come March. There were over 6,000 participants running around Osaka Castle, happily shoving everything from egg tarts to green tea brownies in their faces. Blithely ignoring the pleas of the organisers who wanted runners to consume all their goodies at the 'Aid Station', I was not alone in grabbing handfuls of yum and running back to my teammates before chowing down.

The idea of a Sweets Marathon really is a fantastic one. You get to reward yourself and fuel your exercise as you go along. Not only that, but the range of sweets on offer is extensive enough that there was definitely a large part of me wishing I had been around the course a few more times. Teams of up to 10 people are permitted, which is exactly the 人数 we had. The course is a 2km loop with the 'Aid station' (read 'giant tables of sweets, cakes, jelly... oh, and some water at the end') just over halfway

through. The first runner covers the additional 0.2km, which, along with 21 circumnavigations of the loop, gives you your marathon distance. A few of our team members were initially hesitant to do two rounds (a few questioning their sanity on participating at all, but the draw of the sweets was strong...) but in the end that's how it was divvied up, with our glorious leader taking on the last stretch and running thrice\*. For the last little bit leading up to the finish line, the other nine of us joined in and we piled over the finish line en masse.

As a relay, it was a really social affair and a great way to catch up with people. The downtime when you aren't running provides ample time to natter about life in general along with what you're going to grab on your next circuit. However, it wasn't exactly a warm day and that did start to take its toll a little. Many other groups had tents along with their tarpaulins, something I would definitely consider in the future.

The temperature was perfect for the running part of the affair, but you spend a lot of time not running too, and that got chilly. The rather fetching hat/neck warmer given to everyone who took part was very appreciated, despite being bright pink. Having less time between runs would also probably have been a good plan – fewer giant temperature changes so in theory better for you on the 'not catching a cold' front.

For an event which is largely presented as non-serious, the time limit of four and a half hours seemed a bit strict to me. Okay, so you would expect it to be faster than a normal marathon, but you certainly can't dawdle if you want to spend any time appreciating the bits and pieces on offer. If people were actually keeping to the 'only eat at the Aid station' rule, I imagine far fewer teams would have finished within the time limit. I went charging round the course in order to get what I considered a reasonable selection of goodies. However, along with the rest of my team mates, I found upon

arrival at Sweets Town that my appetite was somewhat lacking. On top of that, the egg tart that I shoved down my gullet made me feel more than a little queasy. Taking a bag to nab a load of goodies is going a bit far, but I'm glad the odd bit of 持ち帰り (もちかえり) was let slide. No doubt the organisers also reasoned that while squashed cakes on the course may have been undesirable, people throwing up all over the place would have been worse. And it is a sweets marathon after all! What would be the point of having one if you couldn't actually eat the things without feeling awful? I swear that's why there were brownies – very easy to transport.

All in all, it was a fun, if slightly cold, day spent with great people doing something every-so-slightly silly. Everywhere you looked there were people dressed up; laughing with each other; debating the merits of different cakes; asking about where the baumkuchen was (right at the end of the table, just before

the water). Our team hadn't really trained for it at all (while no doubt an advantage, the short distance and fast pace meant the marathon training didn't even feel like it meant much!) but we finished promptly and received our (really very tasty) custard tarts to take home (they're wonderful, just not when you running!). It was a day full of people supporting each other, smiling at each other and eating cake together. What more could you want (except maybe more time)?

*Omogen Custance*



## Hiroshima Prefecture in a Day!

### On a beautiful Saturday morning

in November, I went with two of my close friends and boarded the Shinkansen heading for Hiroshima. We had quite an ambitious plan: visit Hiroshima Peace Park and Memorial Museum, roam around Miyajima and then finish off the day playing with bunnies on Okunoshima. I have to admit that we did not quite accomplish all this in one day,

but it is certainly possible. We even made a shared [Google Doc](#) outlining a schedule, if you would like to attempt it.

We started our journey by boarding the Shinkansen in Aioi, heading to Hiroshima station. Once we arrived, we took a taxi to the Peace Park, although we later learned that you

could take the streetcar straight there, it's about a 15 minute ride. I would highly recommend visiting the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum. It is sobering to see the effects of atomic warfare but it is very well curated and truly gives you a sense of what happened in the past and what is happening now in this resilient city. Midway through



the museum there is a small shop area where you can buy souvenirs. I picked up some postcards made of recycled paper cranes children leave at the memorial and a commemorative coin, which you can engrave for free with a name and the date of your visit to Hiroshima. If you mail the postcard at the museum, they will place a special stamp on it. After the museum, we explored the Peace Park that, among other monuments, features the A-bomb dome in the exact state it was after the attack.

Next we took a train to Miyajima and had a delicious lunch at one of the restaurants near the ferry entrance. While dining at the family-owned restaurant, we witnessed an energetic "Kanpai!" from a very cute little boy. We were on the island during low tide, so you could walk right under

the famous torii gate to take photos. You can also take the ropeway to the top of the island, where you can make momiji manju until mid-afternoon. This is where we fell off schedule. By the time we left Miyajima, returned to Hiroshima and caught the Shinkansen to Mihara, it was dusk. So we decided to grab a quick conbini dinner and found a hotel for the night in preparation for an early rise to visit Okunoshima (Bunny Island) on Sunday. This proved to be a great decision as the island had few tourists early in the morning and we had plenty of time to explore the beautiful island in gorgeous weather. Before you board the ferry for the island, make sure to buy lettuce from a grocery store so you can feed the bunnies!

It was truly a very interesting place to visit. Okunoshima was home to a poison gas plant back in WWII but

now only ruins remain in addition to a visitor's centre, small museum, hotel and of course the bunnies. Okunoshima was even secretly removed from maps and records during the years the plant ran until American forces decommissioned it after the war ended in 1945. The bunnies there now are not related to any test subjects there may have been when the gas plant was operating many years ago.

I guess we were overly ambitious in trying to visit all three sites in one day, but taking the time to make it a 1.5 day trip was so worth it. I even have plans to go back in the spring to Miyajima during high tide to see the gate as it floats. So, if you think you are up to the challenge, go and visit Hiroshima in a day (ish)!

*Jessica McSavage*



## Hyogo AJET Luminarie

**Hyogo AJET's December event** saw a very well wrapped-up group of ALTs gather at Motomachi to join the procession to the annual Kobe Luminarie. Inevitably with the crowds and multiple stops to take photos of the beautiful illuminations, the group separated as everyone

made their way leisurely through the spectacular tunnel of lights. The tempting food tents at the end, however, proved perfect to regroup and enjoy some steaming street food and longest fries ever seen. A chilly, but atmospheric evening

was enjoyed by all as we remembered the trials the region has overcome to be the place we love to live in today.

*Charlotte Griffiths*  
Photos by Kylie Pinder



# Homemade Kairo

## ...and other tips for winter

### There is a lot I could have written

about in the last three months, but I've been sick and busy. Those are easy things to say to an editor who is, albeit very kindly, urging contributors to write so that she doesn't have to put an entire magazine together on her own, but those aren't the primary reasons I've held off on writing. Rather, due to the sickness and busyness, I've slacked off on the principles I preach in this feature. I'd come home from work and want to do nothing but lie in bed, thus forfeiting my time not just for writing, but for the chores necessary to avoid unnecessary waste. It's embarrassing! But, oh well. January kicks off a new year, and while my resolutions will probably be the same as they were before, a year of missteps have led to discoveries I might not have otherwise made – or in this month's case, remembered – that I can now pass on to you!

I almost never use disposable *kairos* (warming packs). I only use them on graduation day in February, when I am forced to sit in a freezing, unheated gym in a nice suit and somehow NOT look like I am shivering to death (new JETs, take note!), and the sticky-backed disposable ones are long-lasting and inconspicuous. The rest of the time, though, I reach

for one of two things – the first is a hot beverage. My insulated mug makes for great drinking in the winter, but doesn't warm my hands. On the other hand, the hot steel cans from a convenience store warm your body inside and out, and the containers are recyclable, so not a huge sin in the world of disposables.

The other thing is a reusable *kairo*. They litter Tokyu Hands and such – many are battery or solar powered, but are full of plastic parts that will surely fail after a year or two and end up in a landfill. Another type, which I recently won at an *enkai*, is filled with a grain and stays hot for an hour or so after being microwaved, which is just enough for my typical commute, but I can also re-nuke it in the office before heading off to a classroom with insufficient heating. While this type of store-bought *kairo* is certainly friendlier to the environment, the synthetic fabric used to encase them is still a deterrent.

Fortunately, my mother made neck warmers when I was younger, and I remember loving to use them. They aren't terribly difficult to make, and can be sourced from things you probably already have in your apartment – no additional purchases necessary!

### Here's what you need

#### ○ A bunch of grains

Rice is the obvious choice, but if you like the particular smell of another grain, they'll also work, but probably with varying heat-holding power.

#### ○ A soft container

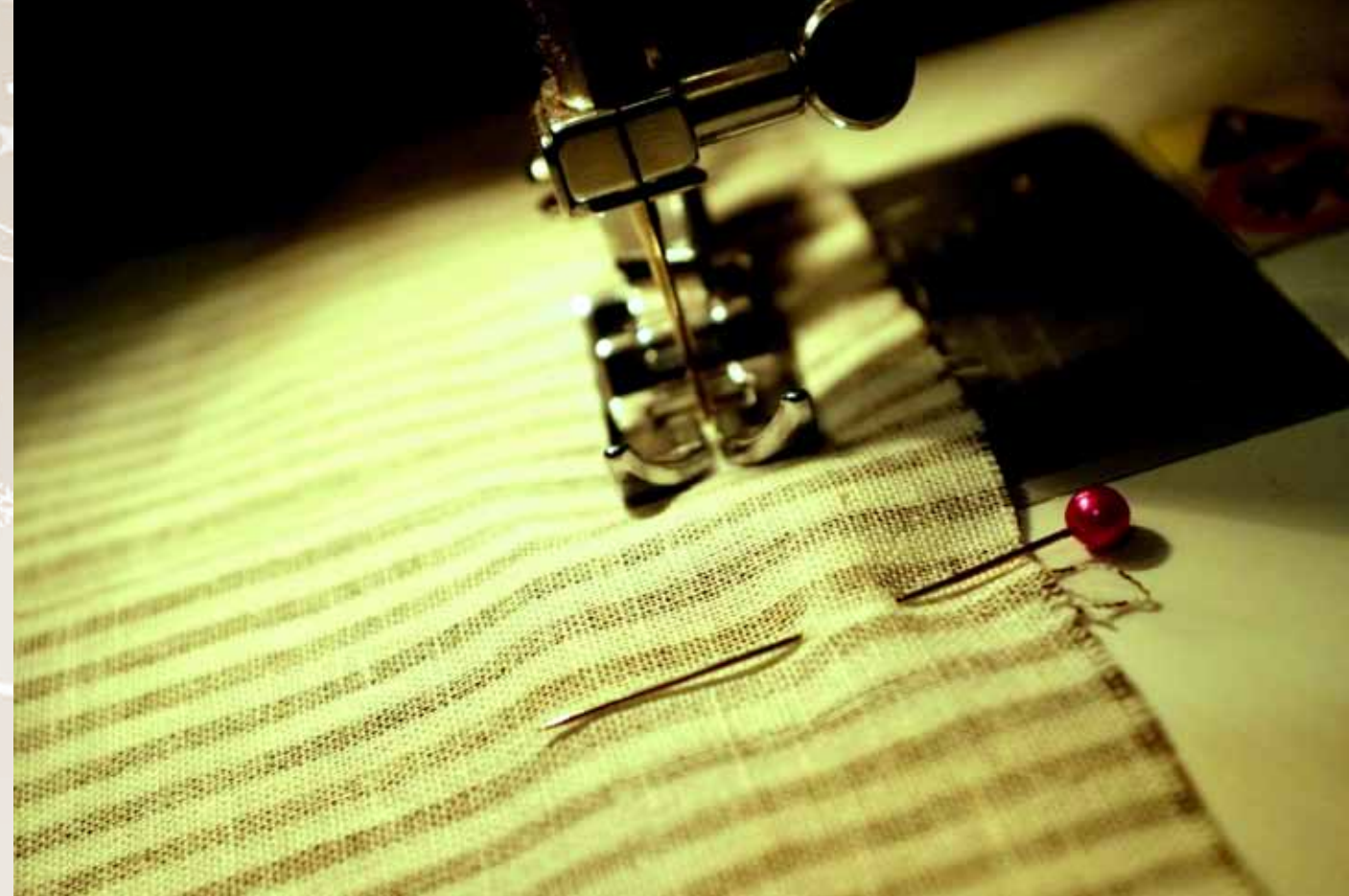
If you want to make one for your hands or as a pillow, you can use cotton fabric (nothing synthetic!; it could melt in the microwave) to sew a great *kairo* – even better if it comes from old clothing! For the no-sew method, use a long cotton sock.

#### ○ A way to close that container

You'll need the means to seal up your bag with either a needle and thread or sewing machine. Either way, it's not terribly difficult! However, if you go for the tube sock method, you can just tie a knot at the end to finish it off.

#### ○ Optional – dried herbs

I recommend tearing open a bag of your favorite soothing tea and throwing it in there so that it doesn't just smell like grains. It'll probably also give your *kairo* some aroma-therapeutic effects.



### Steps

1. Sew a container (or grab a sock).
2. Mix the grains and herbs together.
3. Put them in the container
4. Sew or tie it shut. That's it!

### How to use

Microwave it for 1 to 2 minutes, depending on its size, and use and reuse to your heart's content; it should stay good for about six months, depending on how often you use it. You don't want to get the grains wet for obvious reasons, but store-bought *kairos* recommend putting a cup with some water in

the microwave with your *kairo* to prevent any problems that might occur with overheating.

While I'm already on the subject of keeping warm, let me share some other tips for keeping warm in eco-friendlier ways.

>>>>



### Hot water bottle

Using multiple blankets is the obvious way to stay warm when sleeping in the winter, but if you prefer to sleep with fewer layers, consider investing in a 2-liter *yutanpo*, or hot water bottle. You've surely seen these everywhere by now, and they're wonderful! The larger sized ones stay warm through the night. You'll typically see plastic ones, but if you happen upon a metal one, go for that! Not only is it made of a more eco-friendly material, but you can heat the bottle directly over your stovetop flame. You never even need to remove the water from the bottle!

### Choose winter clothes wisely

When talking to my language tutor about my coat the other day, I told her that I try to go for wool as much as possible, and she responded by saying, "Wow, you really put thought into your clothes! I just try it on and buy it if it's cute." This is perhaps a common attitude, but clothing that does a poor job of insulating is what creates a need for things like kairo in the first place. There are plenty of technologically advanced synthetic fabrics out there which are engineered to be warm and breathable, but wool does as good a job, is natural, and is more likely to be found in fashionable forms. I've had a lot of luck at Muji, as well as at slightly more upscale international clothing stores, like Zara and the Gap.

### Weather-seal your apartment

The best way to keep bugs out in the summer is also the best for keeping your heat inside in the winter. Weather stripping is available at 100 yen shops and does a lot for preventing drafts. You might also consider bubble wrapping your windows to simulate double-paned glass, but I'm not entirely sure how well it works... I've tried it the last few years and I can't tell the difference. We'll see when the December electric bill comes in...

### Alternate heater types

If you must use a heater (and you surely will – who can get anything done under a blanket all day?), make sure you use the most efficient kind for your goal. If you just want to temporarily heat a freezing room up to a livable temperature, it's fine to use a forced-air heater, like your A/C or a ceramic fan heater. But if you'll be keeping the heat on for a while, go for a radiant heater, like oil-filled or infrared coil heaters. They take longer to heat a room, but the room stays warmer longer and over a larger area than with an air blower. Oil-filled heaters, like the one I have, are considered far safer than infrared heaters, but are more expensive. Trust me though, they are worth the investment.

### And a few more tips for warding off winter viruses

#### Neti pots

If you've never used one, they're nasal irrigators which originated in Ayurvedic medicine. Sterile, warm salt water poured into my sinuses gave me incredible relief during allergy attacks and colds, and allowed me to cut back on medications. It feels a little like drowning, but you get used to it quick. I got mine through [iherb.com](http://iherb.com), an international company with very cheap shipping to Japan. If you decide to order through them, typing "BGL550" will get you some money off of your first purchase, but be careful – it is a horribly addictive site for hippie-types.

#### Macrobiotics

In later Miso Greens, I may get into this topic more, but one of the cornerstones of the macrobiotic diet, which originated in Japan, is eating fermented food, like *miso* and *tsukemono*. Eating foods like

these that are full of probiotics will likely boost your immune system, but make sure never to microwave or overheat them! Add your miso paste a minute or two after the water has finished boiling to get the full benefit of the live microorganisms, and always go for fresh miso paste, not powdered.

### Make or buy reusable masks

I don't really buy into the surgical mask craze for preventing the spread of viruses, but if you do, consider reusable ones! Some appeal is lost for having to carry them home after being used, much like with cloth diapers or handkerchiefs, but when the alternative is throwing out tons of unnecessary waste, it's worth the slight added grossness. Plus, disposable masks don't have nearly as much character.

Stay warm and healthy this winter!

Ulu

[miso.green.ht@gmail.com](mailto:miso.green.ht@gmail.com)

## Increasing Closet Space for Skeletons: Japan's Secrecy Law

### If there is one thing the year

2013 demonstrated, it is that the adage, "Secrets don't make friends," is as true for government as it is for people. Edward Snowden's revelations of numerous National Security Agency programs, including those where the United States spied on its allies and collected enormous numbers of phone records, has heightened our fear that the government can know everything about us, while we are left knowing very little about it. As a result outrage has spurred demands to review the practices of security agencies, to increase the transparency of those agencies, and to strengthen protections for citizens. How these demands have taken shape in the past few months has varied by nation. In Japan however, it seems to have had the opposite effect.

The same week Angela Merkel sharply responded to allegations that the NSA had tapped her phone, Japan's Prime Minister, Shinzo Abe, introduced a new secrecy bill to the Diet. Although the bill allowed a number of ministries to label information as secret while only

vaguely defining what constitutes a secret, it called for harsher penalties for those who released state secrets (up to 10 years in prison), and included no oversight body. It quickly became law on December 6, 2013.

The public reaction? Not so hot. Thousands of protestors filled the streets surrounding the Diet before the law passed, and many in media and academia, including Nobel Prize winners, continue to attack what they believe is a threat to democracy. The law even had some opposition party members breaking with Japanese cultural norms (possibly after taking pointers from England's Prime Minister's Questions sessions) when they started yelling and accosting other members in an attempt to postpone a vote. As a result, polls taken after the bill passed show a considerable drop in Mr. Abe's approval rating.

Mr. Abe's government has responded to the criticism by arguing that the law is necessary for Japan's new U.S.-modeled National Security Council to function properly. More importantly, he suggests the new law benefits national security in that it dissuades "people and entities from helping foreign countries seeking to obtain such information" and increases the amount of intelligence other countries are willing to share. Although if it's any consolation (it's not), Mr. Abe now admits that perhaps more should have been done to educate the public and assuage their fears.

In a larger context this law can be seen as an extension of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's more nationalistic policies. Most are familiar with Article 9 of Japan's post World War II constitution, in which Japan renounces war and the means to conduct it. However, what is not consistently mentioned, although apparent given the historical context, is that Japan's constitution attempts to

keep power centered in the Diet, rather than in the hands of the Prime Minister and his Cabinet. Yet, throughout his time as Prime Minister, Mr. Abe and his political party, the Liberal Democratic Party, have pursued policies that both move away from the pacifist nature of Japan's constitution and offer the Prime Minister and his Cabinet room to operate independently of the Diet. An expansion in the role of Japan's Special Defense Force, an increase in the Prime Minister's functions, and the recent enactments of a National Security Council and this law support his policy aims. Mr. Abe sees all of the above as being critical to quickly confront crises, especially those that may occur due to the escalating tensions in East Asia, tensions that these moves ironically also heighten.

To be fair Mr. Abe is not the only one welcoming these changes. The United States government for a long time has pushed Japan to move into a direction where responsibility of the nation's

defense is shared. President Obama's White House has also welcomed the current law and it should come as no surprise that Japan's National Security Council's first direct hotlines will be with the United States and Britain. Given Mr. Snowden's leaks, the close relationship between the Japanese and American governments may just validate the public's concern for potential abuses by the government.

Returning to Mr. Snowden, it appears his actions then have had little effect on Mr. Abe's policy aims. The same cannot be said for the effect on the public; it has revived the argument worldwide that citizens have a right to know what their government is doing. At bare minimum the right to know what safeguards and policies will be put in place to protect their rights. As of now this law's vague definition of a secret and a lack of oversight only work to intensify the public's fear. It should go without saying that Japan has a history that supports such fears. If 2013 taught us the damage secrets can cause,

perhaps as a New Year's resolution for 2014, we, rather than our governments, can set the example and pursue a year of honesty and transparency.

*Sean Mulvihill*



Happy New Year Hyogo!

It's time to stop kidding yourselves and write off those generic, unattainable New Year's resolutions now. You might join the gym this January, but are you going to GO? Here are some realistic resolutions to consider: socialise with more Hyogo Jets, venture to our capital more often, get stuck into more literature... OK you got me, shameless plug, but don't just listen to me, here's the trustworthy Jessica McSavage from Kita-ku, Kobe for her take on the last Hyogo AJET Book Club.

#### On a Sunday afternoon in December,

I attended the second meeting of the Hyogo AJET Book Club. This time, we discussed J.K. Rowling's recent endeavour *The Cuckoo's Calling*, a mystery novel where a private detective attempts to discover whether a popular fashion model truly committed suicide or was murdered. Thirteen of us gathered at Macha Macha, a charming café in Motomachi. The most popular food items of a wholly

delicious menu proved to be margarita pizza and pancakes topped with a variety of treats like fresh raspberries and caramel drizzle, which we munched upon while discussing the book. Overall, the consensus was that it was an enjoyable read with a twist at the end no one quite expected. I thoroughly enjoyed my second book club experience. It's more than just reading and discussing a book, you never know

if a spontaneous game of book charades will break out or a group of people will decide to go ice skating afterwards. So come along to our next meeting on February 2nd for some great food, discussion, and spontaneous event planning with new friends!

Jessica McSavage

The margarita came straight from the pizza oven and into my stomach, even with a burnt mouth I can back Jessica up with an "oishikatta!" Food aside, let's announce the next book. Our editor Char (who gorged on the raspberry pancakes if you were wondering) won the vote for the third book...



Now all that's left to do is click 'going' on the Facebook event, source *A Tale for the Time Being*, enjoy it this January then meet us in Sannomiya on Sunday February 2nd to continue with those New Year's resolutions you've just made.

See you then!

Cherie Pham

#### *A Tale for the Time Being*

Ruth Ozeki \* Man Booker Shortlist 2013

In British Columbia, Ruth discovers the diary of 16-year-old Japanese student Nao. Possibly debris from the 2011 tsunami, Ruth's reading of the diary introduces us to a teenager's Tokyo. But the neon lights, love hotels, maid cafes and all the trappings of the capital we know, do not distract from the emotional tale of bullying, suicide and sadness and we, as Ruth the reader, are soon sucked into this maelstrom of a novel, desperate to discover what happens.

Reading this novel whilst in Japan is particularly poignant as we have a far better grasp of the cultural references

which to an outsider can only be understood on a superficial level. Furthermore, Nao's tales of Junior High School life can be painfully close to home as we think of our own students.

With an uncompromising depiction of issues deeply ingrained in Japanese culture, Ruth Ozeki's era flipping novel is a study in identity, communication, and the essence of time itself. She exposes a world in the throes of disaster, whilst creating characters worthy of salvation. Touching on war, computer science, global warming, Zen meditation and human nature, this book is a celebration of life in all its complexity.

It's already on my Kindle ready and waiting to be read. Now, the venue: hidden among vintage shops and boutiques is the delightfully named **Bo Tambourine Café**, a Tex Mex specialist in a quiet corner of Kobe that will serve as our next club hangout.

#### Hyogo AJET Book Club 3

Book ***A Tale for the Time Being***,  
Ruth Ozeki

Date Sunday February 2nd

Time 2pm-4pm

Meeting place Tits Park, Sannomiya,  
Kobe. Between JR  
& Hankyu Sannomiya

Venue Bo Tambourine Café  
神戸市中央区北長狭通3-3-7

All details on the Hyogo AJET  
Facebook page - click 'going'!

勝ちダルマ奉納棚

勝尾寺

## The Temple of Winner's Luck

### I've saved a special temple for

January – temple 23 of our 33,  
the temple dedicated to winning.

「すべては自分に勝つために」

"Everything you do is to win  
against yourself."

Now spelled 勝尾寺 (win, tail, temple),  
formerly 勝王寺 (win, monarch,  
temple), it is said that the characters

were changed when Emperor  
Seiwa regained his health after  
the offering of fervent prayers  
by the priest at Katsuo-ji.

Katsuo-ji is located north of Osaka,  
in the hills of Minou city, and it can  
be quite an excursion to get there.  
There is a helpful chart on the  
access webpage, and you'll notice

that most of the options end  
with "taxi ride." There is a bus from  
Senri-Chuo, but when I was pilgriming,  
it ran only thrice a day up the winding  
slopes of the mountains to deposit  
pilgrims at the magnificent gate.

Katsuo-ji had a modern, wealthy  
feel to it, well kept and not quite  
wild. This surprised me, since it felt



like I had just ventured deep into  
the heart of nowhere on that bus  
ride, and other such temples had  
a lonely or forgotten air to them.

Entrance to Katsuo-ji is ¥400, but  
the neatly gardened paths hint  
at the riches of the donations of  
all the winners who want to keep  
on winning. After you alight from  
your bus, you pass through the  
Niomon gate and over the bridge.  
Your usual suspects are in attendance;  
there's a large pond with a shrine  
to Benzaiten (that patron deity of  
all that flows), a Mizuko Kannon  
(patron of the water babies, those  
who were never born), a tall pagoda  
overlooking a pond, a vermillion  
Hondo, and a founder's hall. This  
founder's temple is different from  
others we have seen, however, since  
it takes the form of a mini pilgrimage;  
and not even of a mini Saigoku 33,  
but rather the Shikoku 88 temples  
are represented in the Daishi-do  
dedicated to Kobo Daishi.

You can ring the bell in the bell  
tower, and you can walk up to the  
Yakushido, the oldest building on  
the grounds, which stood even  
back when the temple was known  
as Miroku-ji (dedicated to the Buddha  
of the future). The Yakushi Nyorai, or  
medicine Buddha enshrined in the  
Yakushido was carved by the same



man, Kaijo, who dedicated the  
larger-than-life sandalwood carving  
of Kannon, here a Juichimen (eleven-  
faced) Kannon known as Myokan,  
or miracle-seeing Kannon.  
Sandalwood had to be imported  
from tropical climates, and so was  
very expensive, showing great  
respect and regard for the temple  
and Kannon.

The most striking thing to the  
average work-a-day pilgrim has  
got to be the Darumas. You know,  
those little (or not so little) dolls  
that always pop back up after you  
knock them down, onto which you  
paint one eye when you set a goal,  
and fill in the other when you achieve  
it? There is a large area for the  
dedication of "achievement Daruma"  
figures of various sizes, because it is  
customary to return and dedicate  
the figure with gratitude for a  
fulfilled wish or achieved goal as  
you let it go. But that's not the only  
place you'll find Daruma at Katsuo-ji.  
They are everywhere. It's like an  
Easter Egg hunt wherein the hider  
was not even trying.

Two other features of Katsuo-ji stand  
out in my mind: the Wisdom Walk,  
and the Pilgrim Path to (or, I suppose,  
from) Souji-ji, temple number 22.  
Across the street from the entrance  
gate, you can see the old pilgrim



path between temples, which leads  
through the woods and back down  
the mountainside into town where  
Souji-ji is located. Stone markers,  
called choseki, mark this path, and  
are the oldest of their kind in Japan.

The Wisdom Walk is a little spiral  
stone path. First you spiral in toward  
the wisdom stone, then you spiral  
out, then you sit on the bench and  
contemplate what you've done.

Naturally, Katsuo-ji is a popular  
New Year's destination. There is  
even a purification fire ceremony  
(saito goma) at the Sanbo Kojin-do  
(hall of Sanbo Kojin, a syncretic  
deity who protects the hearth and  
household from disaster). Sake from  
special barrels will be doled out  
before the ringing of the New Year  
bell. If you need to inject a little  
winning luck in your life, head into  
the hills and give Katsuo-ji a try.

Happy New Year!

*Lemon*

### Links

For more info about Daruma

Katsuo-ji main page  
(Japanese, but there is a somewhat  
limited English link also)

# Agricultural Reform: Tokyo's TPP Test

## Introduction

On December 10th it was announced that an accord on creating a new free trade zone in the Asia-Pacific, the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), had been postponed until next year. This announcement came as a disappointment for Japan watchers the world over, with many Japanese policy makers and external analysts considering TPP the most consequential element of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's strategy to revive the Japanese economy, dubbed "Abenomics". While TPP is the most public signal of the Abe government's intention to structurally reform the Japanese economy to better face global competition, the struggle to pass TPP is firmly rooted in a more domestic challenge: Japan's long-uncompetitive agriculture. In its promise to liberalize the Japanese farm industry, TPP has butted up against Japanese agriculture's confident history of disproportionate political power and unconfident political future amidst a demographic decline felt most acutely in agriculturally-dependent rural Japan.

## Pork Barrel and Rice Production

Since 1971 Japanese agriculture has been maintained, yet limited in growth, most actively by a policy known as gentan through which the government has paid farmers to reduce rice crops. While the gentan system was originally designed to protect the country's farmers from short-term fluctuations in price, the policy today keeps roughly

a third of Japan's paddy fields out of production costing vast sums each year in compensation to farmers for lost income. Japanese agriculture is further protected through the one of the world's highest tariffs: a 777.7% duty on imported polished rice.

Gentan has not only propped up Japanese agriculture, but also a system of implicit political patronage between the Japan Agriculture Cooperatives group (JA) and Japan's political parties, most traditionally the long-ruling Liberal Democratic Party. With almost 10 million members, JA is the country's fourth-biggest financial services provider, its largest political lobby and the supplier of nearly half of rice distributed across the country. JA has collected almost 12 million signatures for an anti-TPP petition and demanded that the government quit the trade talks if it cannot safeguard tariffs on rice as well as wheat, sugar, beef, pork and dairy products, placing an implicit threat over the heads of politicians pressured to keep pace with the Abe government's support of TPP.

## Liberal Democratic Party Liberalization

As the LDP has traditionally drawn much of its support from farmers and from JA, tackling gentan and other agricultural programs in any form had long been considered far too politically risky. This political impasse showed signs of changing, however, with the Japanese

government's November 26th announcement that it had approved a plan to halve the gentan subsidy from April 2014 and abolish it by March 31, 2019. This move will cut 161 billion yen in support for rice farmers' incomes while reducing import barriers. Additionally, the Diet passed a bill this month to reduce the amount of idle land and consolidate farms so that they can be leased to managers who will boost productivity. A separate bill passed by the Diet will introduce credit insurance, enabling farmers to borrow from banks and weakening JA's dominance in agricultural financing. The government estimates that proceeding with further TPP-required agricultural reforms may result in an initial decline of about 3 trillion yen in production from agriculture, forestry and fisheries, with rice accounting for about one third of that. However, the boost to the nation's exports, domestic consumption, and investment would ultimately mean a net 3.2 trillion yen gain in GDP and benefit the Japanese consumer via lower prices.

## Whither Agriculture - Wither Inaka?

While most economists contend that agricultural reform is a net win for Japan as a whole, anti-TPP sentiment remains active, particularly in rural Japan. This concern is particularly strong in light of Japan's demographic decline, with Japan's population expected to fall by more than 20% to less than 100

million people by 2050. This problem is felt most acutely in Japan's rural areas, and provides a poignant justification for the maintenance of Japan's current, inefficient agricultural system. It is frequently argued that agriculture represents a major avenue – if not the only avenue – for rebuilding the rural economy, with one recent Japan Times piece asserting that, "Steps should be taken to attract young people to agriculture and fisheries and add value to agricultural and fishery products through processing appealing to consumers and effective marketing."

This is certainly a positive goal, but its prescription falls short in its understanding of farming's role and limitations in rural Japan. Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries statistics show that there are 1.5 million family-operated farms, but they sell only an average of 500,000 yen's worth of agricultural products each year. With Japanese farms having an average agricultural income of only 0.5 million yen per year, Japanese farmers rely on an average income of 1.9 million yen from side jobs and, given the average age of 65.9 years old, an average pension revenue of 2.1 million yen. What these statistics describe is a system stretched beyond its limits, one unable to fully sustain its current participants. Even if the current system did receive an influx of new farmers, increased supply would only lead to decreased profits amidst a continued focus on domestic markets and a declining domestic demand.

## A Rising Sun Over Japanese Farms?

All of this is not to say that agriculture as an industry cannot sustain new farmers, or find new markets. To do so is possible. Ultimately, however, this outcome is dependent on the development of economies of scale that actually allow farmers to make a living from their labor – economies of scale encouraged by the market-driven incentivization of agricultural reform. As noted by Dr. Yutaka Harada of Waseda University and the Tokyo Foundation, "Many Japanese argue that crop production in Japan has a disadvantage compared to such countries as the United States, Canada, and Australia, where land is more abundant, but the important thing is not the area of arable land but the area of arable land per farmer. The area per farmer will increase if the number of farmers decreases." Rural areas can further boost their economies by focusing a more efficient agriculture industry toward the export of high quality, value-added Japanese rice, beef, and dairy products, which already have ready and profitable markets in neighboring countries such as China. Those that do will find government support – 30 billion yen in loans have been secured to help fund the production of value-added foodstuffs, with 30 billion more expected.

## Conclusion

Today Japan stands at a historical cross roads for its agriculture industry and, in turn, for its place in the global economy. The history of Japanese agriculture is often used to bolster its legitimacy by harkening back to a time of familial dedication (and higher prices). Looking back further, however, Japanese agriculture is shown not as a sacred constant but as an entity capable of evolution in the face of external pressures. Japan's small farm system derived from the efforts of a foreign occupation under General Douglas MacArthur to break down a monopolistic system of land ownership, to the net gain of society. Today, Japan faces a less forceful but potentially more international impetus to reform its agricultural system, to the net gain of society. It will not be the grind of an American occupation that pressures Japan to change, but rather the challenge of a large, and growing host of competitors. As Prime Minister Abe noted in a December 6th interview, "Agriculture is the most difficult sector to reform." While it remains to be seen how much farther politicians will move forward – and whether the people will keep up – Japan's passing of its TPP test sends a message that the sun is rising on the Japanese economy.

Taylor M. Wettach

## Where are they now?\*

With the recontracting deadline looming ahead, I had a very good long chat with three of my closest friends from JET who left the programme last summer and are settling into their new lives back home. I think their respective experiences are important to share because they cover the main three

situations those returning will face: further study, quickly finding a job, and looking for work for a few months.

On a personal note, I miss these three terribly, but am very proud of how they all stayed positive through the process of leaving Hyogo and finding their feet back in the States, I find

their success and attitude very reassuring for the decisions which lie ahead for all of us.

*Charlotte Griffiths*

*\*bumper edition!*



### *Paula Armstrong*

**Country of origin** USA/Germany  
**Dates in Hyogo** Aug 2011 – Aug 2013  
**Location in Hyogo** Nishinomiya

### *Elizabeth Luder*

**Country of origin** United States  
**Dates in Hyogo** Aug 2013 – Aug 2013  
**Location in Hyogo** Himeji

### *Jenny Nakamura*

**Country of origin** USA  
**Dates in Hyogo** Aug 2012 – Aug 2013  
**Location in Hyogo** Ono

### *Why did you apply for the JET programme?*

**Paula** I grew up moving around, so after four years of college in the United States I was feeling restless. The JET Program combined a lot of things I enjoyed – living in a new country, working with young people, learning a new language (or attempting to do so at least) – all in a reputable package.

**Liz** I applied for the JET Program because I was excited for the chance to live in Japan and as I'd had wonderful experiences mentoring students through Model U.N. I was curious to see what it would be like to teach. I also wanted to improve my Japanese.

**Jenny** Professionally, having been a teacher for a few years, I not only wanted to contribute what I had learned teaching in the US to the Japanese community, but to gain an enhanced global understanding of the Japanese education system and compare its high standards and rigor to American education.

Personally, I wanted to gain a better perception and appreciation of where I had come from. As a Japanese-American, I wanted to absorb and become immersed in the Japanese language and culture so that I could build better connections and relationships with not only my family, but also with the Japanese community as a whole.

### *How did you choose where to apply for in Japan?*

**Paula** I actually didn't list any preferences in terms of location. I feel really lucky to have been placed in Hyogo!

**Liz** I was hoping for a placement that would allow me to travel to many different parts of Japan. I think I really lucked out with my schools and my placement! I had actually lived in Nishinomiya before, for three years from 1999 to 2001 when my father served as the U.S. Consul General in Osaka, so I was thrilled to be back in Hyogo! I was happy to be placed in Himeji near old friends and family, but also removed enough that I could make JET a separate experience.

**Jenny** I have family who live in the Tokyo area, so I wanted to be close to them. [Also, who wouldn't want to live in Tokyo?!] However, after being placed in Hyogo, I had an unforgettable experience living in a small, rural town. The Ono community is very special.

### *Jenny, you came on JET with previous teaching experience, how did it compare?*

**Jenny** Both experiences were challenging at times, but extremely rewarding. I definitely feel as if I had a slight advantage coming into JET having teaching experience, however it was still quite an adjustment. The structure of the Japanese education system and how things are run in school and in the classroom is like no other in the teaching realm. The two things I wished I saw more of in the classroom were more technology access and usage, and a little more freedom and independence for the students to think & express their ideas.

### *What is your favourite memory of Hyogo/Japan?*

**Paula** There are too many favorite memories! My everyday interactions with students and the fun times I had traveling with friends are what I look back on most fondly. Also, climbing Mount Fuji and eating Kobe beef.

**Liz** We really packed a LOT into a year; it's hard to choose just one favorite memory! From Hyogo, off the top of my head, some of my favorites are my school's bunkasai, nights out with friends, skiing, the Himeji pottery festival. From all of Japan... trips to Sapporo, Hagi, Tokyo, Nagasaki, and Kurashiki!

**Jenny** One of my favorite memories in Hyogo was going to Ono's summer matsuri a week or two after arriving in Japan. It was the first time to experience seeing the whole community together. One of my favorite memories in Japan was going to Sapporo for the Yuki Matsuri. The experience of sledding, eating corn and butter ramen, and soaking in the onsen in the falling snow with some of my closest friends was absolutely perfect!

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

**Paula** Silly as it sounds, I hoped to gain some "resilience" in Japan; basically, I wanted to live on my own in a foreign country and deal with whatever challenges came my way. I also hoped to develop teaching skills and gain an understanding of Japanese society and culture. Despite some inevitable hiccups along the way, I think I was successful in meeting all of these goals.

**Liz** I joined JET hoping to improve my Japanese and gain work experience in an international work environment. Yes, I feel I've come away from JET with all of that and more!

### *Paula, you are currently at grad school, how did you find balancing the application process with work in Japan?*

**Paula** I found it difficult to work on applications (especially essays) after a full day at school, so I ended up

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doing most of them on weekends. Unfortunately that meant missing out on some social events. Still, all in all I'm happy with how things turned out, and it was a relief to know what I'd be doing after JET while I was still in Japan.

*Liz and Jenny, you were both applying for jobs whilst still in Japan, how did you find it?*

**Liz** I'm glad I started my job search early because it gave me lots of practice writing cover letters, editing writing samples, contacting references, etc. From that mindset it was easy to kick it up a notch when I returned home. My advice would be to identify what you want out of the next year/two years/five years and pursue those goals wholeheartedly.

I think it can be difficult to keep your energy up after a few months of looking for a job. At those times it's more important than ever to remain resilient.

**Jenny:** Putting the time in to apply for jobs can be tiring and somewhat frustrating, but the hours of researching really helps you become clear about what type of job you are looking for. While applying to jobs, I would recommend creating or updating

your LinkedIn profile. Many of my friends were contacted, and then later hired, through this professional network.

*Liz and Jenny, what did you do when you arrived back in the US still looking for work? How did you feel?*

**Liz** In the first couple months of applying, I felt very impatient with the application and interview processes. It really helped once I relaxed my attitude and put less pressure on myself. Writing this at the end of a long job search, I can say I'm starting a permanent position in January – success!! It feels so rewarding when your hours of applying and interviewing pay off. For me, I think it really helped to accept that finding a job I am excited about would take a while.

**Jenny** I spent most of my days searching for jobs and editing cover letters, which led to a lot of eyestrain and feeling a little defeated. However with patience and resilience, after one month I was offered a job!

*What are you doing now?*

**Paula** I'm in my first year of a master's program in law and diplomacy at the Fletcher School at Tufts Uni in Boston.

**Liz** I'm working short-term at the Washington D.C. JET Office processing applications to the 2014 Program. Working at the Embassy is a really valuable experience for me and I'm sure whatever follows will be too!

**Jenny** I am a Schools Manager for an education technology company called EverFi, which provides innovative, web-based resources that focus on teaching students critical life skills. I work directly with school districts and teachers in the implementation of the programs.

*Paula, how did you find it to go from teacher to student? Studying diplomacy, has your time spent living in Japan affected your attitude to the course?*

**Paula** I've found that I have a lot more empathy for teachers and try to complete my assignments in a way that will make it easier for them to evaluate my learning. My experience in Japan has given me another perspective from which to look at

global events and processes and has strengthened my resolve to work in the public or non-profit sector.

*Did you experience the dreaded reverse culture shock?*

**Paula** Yes! Initially, everything in America looked huge, and people seemed very, very direct and vocal about their opinions. I also bowed incessantly for about a month and still wave my hand in front of my face whenever anyone gives me a compliment.

**Liz** No, not much. My family moved a lot growing up so I knew what differences to expect coming back to the U.S. I think it probably helped to have a gradual transition back.

**Jenny** I didn't necessarily experience reverse culture shock, but I did spend about 20 minutes at a gas station, trying to remember how to pump gas for the first time in a year!

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

**Paula** My tolerance for being in awkward situations or situations where I don't know what's going on or what's going to happen next has increased \*tremendously\*. I'm also more sympathetic to immigrants

new to America, especially those struggling with English. In terms of practical skills, my public speaking ability has improved, which comes in handy for grad school presentations.

**Liz** It has helped me immensely... It was very interesting to come to Japan right after university because I imagine that first year out of school you grow in leaps & bounds whatever job you work at. To have experienced that first year on my own in Japan is something I will always treasure.

**Jenny** My experience living in Japan truly helped me discover a part of my own identity. I gained a better perception and appreciation of where I had come from and was able to develop a better relationship with my grandmother. Through this experience, I believe that I was able to encourage international understanding of different cultures not only within my high school, but also the Ono community, as well as promoting the importance of being proud of one's own values.

*What do you miss about Japan?*

**Paula** I miss teaching, I miss traveling, and most of all I miss all of the kind people I met in Japan.

**Liz** I miss the people! I think the relationships you form working on JET are very special.

**Jenny** It is an endless list. I probably miss my friends and my students the most. I miss how kind and thoughtful Japanese people are to others, the unbelievably reliable transportation and, of course, THE FOOD.

*Do you have any advice for A&Ts moving home?*

**Paula** Eat lots of your favorite Japanese food in Japan! It's just not the same overseas.

**Liz** I got some wonderful advice from a very dear friend when I moved back. She told me to make sure I invest time each week in something that I've always wanted to do, but never had the time to fit into my routine. Whether that's dance, language lessons, joining a sports team, painting, I think supplementing your job search with an activity you love keeps you grounded and motivated.

**Jenny** Absorb and experience as much as you can while you are in Japan. While transitioning back home, take all the time you need to relax and settle in.

The calendar for Hyogo Times is designed and maintained by Paige Ngo!

# JANUARY

Hyogo AJET event

Hanshin

Harima

Kobe

Tamba

Awaji

Tajima

Outside of Hyogo

Sunday

Monday

Tuesday

Wednesday

Thursday

Friday

Saturday

1

2

3

4

*New Year's holiday period*

2014

(prefectural JETs paid leave)

5

6

7

8

9

10

Toka Ebisu Matsuri  
(Nishinomiya Shrine)

11

Fire Matsuri (Shiga)

12

Toh-shiya (Archery Contest) in Kyoto

13

*Coming-of-Age Day*

14

Doyadoya (Osaka)



15

16

17

18

19

20

21

22

23

24

25

Wakakusa Yamayaki (Nara)

Kitano Tenman-gu Shrine Antique Market (Kyoto)

26

Sake Brewery Tour

*Australia Day*

27

28

29

30

31

First day of the Nagasaki Lantern Festival

*Chinese New Year's*

Nankinmachi Chinese New Year Festival (Kobe)



Osaka Castle 3D mapping super Illumination  
(December 14<sup>th</sup> – February 16<sup>th</sup>)

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Heated toilet seat,  
Balmey warmth in a cold sea,  
Very happy bum. anon