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hyogo times

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

**Sumo:** the nuts, bolts and loincloths

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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

### Hallo!

March is a funny time in the JET schedule. We've said teary goodbyes to those graduating, but have yet to welcome a new batch of [hopefully] eager learners. Many of us may have a lot of extra time on our hands which can result in hours of Kanji study, applying for jobs back in the real world, or simply watching cute cat videos on Youtube. Winter is making a slow retreat north and one of the most celebrated seasons is on the horizon. I do, of course, mean *sakura* season and the resulting *hanami* festivities. Until the happy day when the blossoms come out pass the last few weeks of term away with a good book, a new project (notice my greeting? My NY resolution to study German **will** begin anew once I finish my marking... maybe) or get travel planning. If you haven't already, book something exciting in for Spring Vacation, Golden Week, or even summer! The yen is weak so why not spend it?!

In the meantime, have a browse of this month's Hyogo Times for inspiration and information. In view of the sumo tour arriving in Osaka in March, Claire is bringing us up to speed on the basics – essential to pass muster with the sumo aficionado you will sit next to (offering them a drink or snack will get you a free lesson on the day though). Paige is sharing her experience of,

and weeks of planning for, travelling in Vietnam. This month's Miso Green is the first part of an inspiring man's story of how he came to live an eco-friendly, sustainable lifestyle. We also have our regulars in Current Affairs, the Kannon Pilgrimage, Where Are They Now? and much more.

So sit back, embrace the calm of March before April's new school year rush, and enjoy.

Tschüss until next month [two words – look at me go!]

### Char

\*I am completely unqualified to give financial advice as I avoid looking at exchange rates at all costs [forgive the pun]. This is however an excellent excuse/justification to give to concerned parents or colleagues when they gasp, "you're going on holiday AGAIN?" Apparently expanding cultural horizons doesn't cut it anymore.

## Hey there, graphic designers!

The Hyogo Times team is looking for a talented graphic designer to volunteer their skills and help design and put together the monthly PDF. The ideal candidate would have a sharp eye for detail, as well as own and be sufficient in the Adobe Design Suite. If you are interested, please email [Karen](mailto:Karen) with a sample of your portfolio and/or why you are the one for the job!



## Message from the PR

It was in October of 2010 when I applied to join the JET Programme, full of excitement of the possibilities for the future. After filling in a handy online application form I discovered there were quite a few more hoops to jump through than had been apparent at first glance. Hoops jumped through and application pack (x4) sent off, I waited. I got an interview! I waited. And then, in March, disaster struck, truly heart wrenching disaster.

In this edition of the Hyogo Times I would like to take the time to look back and remember the event that occurred 3 years ago on March 11th 2011, the Great East Japan Earthquake (東日本大震災, Higashi Nihon Daishinsai). It struck at 14:46 JST in the earth and under the sea off the Eastern coast of Tohoku (東北) at a magnitude of 9.0 on the Richter scale. It shifted Honshu, the mainland of Japan, 2.4 meters to the east and moved the earth on its axis between 10 and 25cm. This violent shift in the sea bed displaced enough water to create a huge tsunami with waves up to 40 meters (133ft) high.

There were 15,884 confirmed dead, 6147 injured and 2,636 people missing.

Three years on and the cleanup of the area has progressed very well in the cities, but some towns are still in ruin, and are left to the older generations. The smaller towns get little money to help with restoration and many young adults have moved to the cities. Some areas are like blank canvases where once stood thriving communities. The populace and local administration often do not see eye to eye.

The southern part of the disaster areas has now eclipsed that of the north. Fukushima has gone down in infamy as one of the worst nuclear disasters in history. The passage of time dulls our memories and the distance between us and Fukushima gives us a certain disconnection. However, the story moves on and evolves. Reports of TEPCO and the Japanese government covering up the real situation of radioactive water leaking from the site (Asahi Shimbun) to Yakuza bringing in unskilled homeless people to help clean up Fukushima (Reuters), certainly do not give confidence to a still very dangerous situation.

As we are, however, only leaves on the wind in the greater scheme of things, all we can do is try to enjoy life as much as we can, help out where possible and always be prepared.

*Peter Hein-Hartmann*



Kicchiri Kitchen

## Spinach Ohitashi (Spinach steeped in dashi)

### Ingredients

**Prep time: 10 mins**

**Cook time: 2 mins**

**Makes 4 servings**

- One bunch of spinach
- 6g of dashi powder
- 1 tsp usukuchi soy sauce
- 1 tsp koikuchi soy sauce
- Salt
- **Optional**  
sprinkling of shredded katsuobushi (fish flakes) and grated yuzu peel.

My friend Sayaka kindly invited me to her home and taught me this quick and easy recipe, perfect for appetizers. Ohitashi means 'to soak in dashi stock'. Spinach ohitashi is a popular dish but you can make it with onions, asparagus and all sorts of veg. For now, let's stick to the classic.

### Step one

Wash spinach. Boil enough water to cover the spinach in a deep pan. Add salt.

a tsp of koikuchi soy sauce (the regular stuff) over the spinach. Squeeze again to tightly pack the spinach.

### Step two

Meanwhile in a bowl add 6g of dashi powder to ¼ cup of cold water. Put 1tsp of usukuchi (saltier) soy sauce into the mix and salt to taste.

### Step six

Cut the spinach into 1 inch blocks and place into the dashi mix.

### Step three

When the water boils, blanch the whole spinach stems for about a minute.

### Step seven

Leave to chill in the fridge for 10 minutes or as long as you like.

### Step four

Remove and rinse under a cold tap.

### Step eight

Stack the ohitashi up high in small bowls and serve. If you like you can top it with shredded katsuobushi and grated yuzu peel.

### Step five

Squeeze off excess water from spinach with hands and drizzle

Hai, douzo!

*Cherie Pham*





## Sumo: the nuts, bolts and loincloths

### Along with a lot of other ALTs sumo

wrestling is on my (very long) list of “things to see” while in Japan. Luckily, Hyogo is right next to Osaka, one of only four cities in the country to host Grand Tournament competitions. Tickets went on sale February 2nd and a good friend was kind enough to organize a small group trip. While I’m looking forward to watching the competition, I’ll be the first to admit

that I know next to nothing about the art of sumo wrestling!

I could just show up at the match with no background knowledge, Google translate and Wikipedia pre-loaded on my phone. But I’m a firm believer in independent research and preparation. So, with Term 3 exams approaching and

class-time shrinking, I will learn as much about sumo as my limited internet and free time will allow. If you’re interested in joining the fun, read on for a brief and abridged beginner’s guide to sumo.

To begin, sumo wrestling dates back to ancient Japanese traditions and festival celebrations. The sport

developed from Shinto practices originally performed to entertain the gods. Shinto symbolism and rituals are still very present in sumo wrestling, but we’ll delve into those particulars in just a few paragraphs.

There are several theories and legends centered on the creation of sumo wrestling and the specifics

of the first sumo match. The most popular include the tale of Takemikazuchi and Takeminakata, both deities, who grappled with each other on the Izumo shore about 2,500 years ago. Takemikazuchi was triumphant, winning control of the Japanese archipelago (and later establishing the ancestral lineage of the current imperial family).

Another story involves two mortals fighting at the request of Emperor Suinin. The winner, Nomi no Sukune, is sometimes referred to as the father of sumo.

Presently, the [Japan Sumo Association](#) manages professional sumo wrestling throughout the country. Six tournaments

are held each year: three in Tokyo at Kokugikan in January, May, and September; one in Osaka, in March; one in Aichi, in July; and one in Fukuoka, in November. These competitions, part of the year-long Grand Tournament, last for about two weeks with dozens of matches occurring throughout the day.

Sumo wrestlers, called rikishi or sumotori live and train in heyas (stables) and are coached by an oyakata (stablmaster). The training and lifestyle of sumo wrestlers is strictly regimented and monitored by rules and regulations. Of course, with regulations comes bureaucracy, and with bureaucracy comes controversy and scandal (read up on the 2011 “fixing” scandal). Finally, like most organizations in Japan, sumo wrestlers are organized in an intricate and highly honored ranking system.

At each competition, the wrestlers’ wins are tallied to determine individual placement in the hierarchical ranking. Wrestlers move up or down through six divisions according to their total wins and losses. From lowest to highest the divisions are: jonokuchi, jonidan, sandanme, makushita, juryo, and makkuuchi. Wrestlers in the two highest divisions receive titles, depending on their records. These three titles (lowest to highest) are: komusubi, sekiwake, and ozeki.

Finally, the grand champion of the tournament receives the title of Yokozuna. This honor is not rewarded based on number of wins alone: there is actually a group of people within the governing body of sumo wrestling responsible for judging top wrestlers and bestowing the title of Yokozuna when appropriate. Therefore, it is possible for multiple wrestlers (or no wrestlers at all) to hold the title during the current tournament period.

According to custom, Yokuzuna compete at the end of the day, so if you’re planning to attend a match in Osaka, be sure to stay until the late afternoon matches. Currently, two competitors hold the title of Yokozuna: Harumafuji and Hakuho. Yokuzuna are easily identifiable by the traditional zuna, a braided rope with dangling shide (folded, zigzagging paper strips), which is worn during the opening ceremony of Yokozuna matches. If the zuna garment sounds familiar that’s because you’ve probably seen dozens of shimenawa (braided rice straw ropes) decorating Shinto temples.

### Shinto Symbolism

Shinto symbols and references are present in multiple aspects of sumo matches. Physically, the center focus of a sumo match is the ring itself, the dohyo. This circular space is an elevated, clay stage covered in sand and bordered by straw bales.



Suspended above the ring is the yakata, a replica of the roof of a traditional Shinto shrine. The yakata shelters the ring, as if creating a sacred sanctuary. The four hanging tassels represent the four seasons while the purple bunting brings to mind slowly drifting clouds.

Inside the dohyo stands the gyoji, a referee clad in Shinto priest attire. His role is to pray over the dohyo and assess the outcome of the match. The gyoji also conducts the major opening ceremonies, most notably the first ceremony, the dohyo-iri. Before the day’s matches begin, the wrestlers from the top two divisions are announced individually as they walk to the dohyo, circle the ring, and participate in a group clapping ritual. During this event, wrestlers wear a colorful apron called keishi-mawashi. Yokozuna have a unique sort of opening

ceremony prior to their matches and are not present in the dohyo-iri.

### Match time

First, the two competitors enter the ring on opposite sides. Each faces the audience to perform a stomping ritual, meant to drive away evil spirits. Then, competitors receive a ladleful of chikara-mizu (power water) from another wrestler (but not one who lost his previous match). The water is a symbol of purification. The wrestlers step to the center, facing each other, and clap their hands before spreading their palms wide. This display shows that neither competitor is carrying a weapon.

Finally, the wrestlers return to their corners and throw a handful of salt into the air to purify the ring. After these rituals, competitors face each other in the center of

the ring at the shikiri-sen (starting line). They settle in a crouched position, staring into the eyes of their opponent. The match begins when each competitor places their fists on the ground just before rising to meet their opponent. In upper divisions, competitors may retreat to their corners several times before initiating contact.

The actual length of contact is usually less than thirty seconds. Preparation for the initial charge does not exceed four minutes. Occasionally, the gyoji may determine that a water break is needed and the wrestlers will pause in the middle of their combat and retire to their corners before re-entering the ring in the exact same position.

A match ends when the first wrestler touches the ground with any surface other than the bottom of his feet or when the first wrestler is forced out of the ring. The gyoji will announce the winner, based on his close-up observations. Any of the five shimpan (judges) seated around the ring may dispute the gyoji’s decision. Reversals, rematches, and ties are possible in sumo, but uncommon.

### Side note

As you may have guessed, sumo is a male-dominated sport. Osaka’s former female governor, Fusae Ohta,

was repeatedly denied access to stand in the ring while presenting the Governor’s Prize. Female wrestlers are not recognized by the association but leagues and competitions do exist. Foreigners, however, are welcome in the sumo world. Bulgarian-born Kotoōshū Katsunori was recently granted citizenship to become a sumo elder.

**Now go show off your new found sumo skills!**

**Website:** [Sumo](#). Book [here](#)

**Dates:** March 9 – 23, 2014

**Location:** Osaka Prefectural Gymnasium Body Maker Coliseum (closest station, Namba)

**Cost:** Ring-side seats: ¥14,300

[Expect to sit on the floor!]

2nd floor chair seats: ¥3,000 ~ ¥9,500.

General admission: ¥2,000.

*Claire Bronchuk*

Photos courtesy of Lukass Jursins

### Sources

[Sumo Talk](#)

[Japan Guide](#)

[New York Times](#)



## Vietnam

### A quick guide for the smart traveler

#### Looking for your next beach

vacation? Vietnam consistently ranks as one of the top destinations, offering a cultural smorgasbord complete with a distinct cuisine sure to please any foodie's palette. And it's all possible at a budget backpacker's rate of less than ¥2,500/day.

I'll try not to bore you with the typical itinerary you can find on the thousands of travel websites, and just give you some off the beaten track tips and the how-to's of keeping under budget.

#### The North for a more cultural experience

Sapa and Bac Ha (3 days, 4 nights)\*  
Hanoi (4 days, 4 nights)  
Halong Bay (day trip)  
Ninh Binh (day trip)

#### The South for a party and beach vacation

Hue (day trip)  
Hoi An (5 days, 6 nights) \*\*  
Nha Trang (skipped)  
Ho Chi Minh City (5 days, 5 nights)  
Mekong Delta (2 days, 1 night)

#### The North

Don't go to Sapa or Bac Ha if you aren't ready for the overnight train (approximately 9 hours) there and back. Depending on your budget and luck, you may end up in the middle bunk sandwiched between a crying baby and its mother and a snorlax you're afraid might be over the bunk's weight limit. On the hard-sleepers, there are six bunks in a room, and as the name suggests, beds are less padded. With three bunks on each side instead of the two found in soft sleeper compartments, less vertical room is afforded. The lowest bunk is the roomiest and often the most expensive, but worth the extra hundred yen or two to be able to sit fully up right. There is also the option of sleeper buses. I've been advised to get a bottom chair off to the side and near the back of the bus by a few who have used them.

It's highly recommended to go up to Sapa during the summer months when the cool temperatures allow

you to escape the heat of the city and to view the vibrant green rice terraces. Since I went during the winter break, I only stayed one night before heading to Bac Ha, best known for the Bac Ha market (occurring every Sunday). It's the most accessible market of its kind to which many of the Vietnamese minority groups travel great distances on foot to reach. I would recommend going to the live animal market where you can climb a set of stairs to view the oxen trades. Beat the rush of tourists by arriving around 7am. Since I prioritized the market, I didn't take the daily bus from Sapa (typically arriving at 9 am), but rather stayed in Bac Ha in order to stroll into the market early. Accommodation in Bac Ha is sparse, but you can find dinner, bed and breakfast for ¥1,500. Those on a tighter budget can negotiate for the meals to be removed; they offered to take off 500 ¥ for me. Another Sunday market, 12km north of Bac Ha, is the Lung Phin market. Lung Phin is definitely worth it if you want the off the beaten track experience.



Woman and her child sitting on a mekong delta park bench

When I went, I was literally the only tourist in the market, and everyone was a lot more welcoming about getting photographed. This market is frequented by three different native tribes, so you will be able to see a more diverse selection of traditional garments.

Hanoi is the capital of Vietnam and its second largest city. The chances are your hostel or hotel will be situated in the Old Quarter, but if it isn't, you should make time to visit. It is where Hanoi becomes most alive, and has the most interesting street food. The French Quarter on the other hand, is quite bare of anything interesting, so I think it can be skipped.

Pho is a soupy noodle meal that originated from Hanoi. It is one of the cheapest and most delicious meals you will ever eat in your life. Make the most of your time in Vietnam and eat an ample amount of it. More expensive, but equally necessary for a complete life, is egg coffee. Please do not leave Hanoi without trying this heavenly



Restaurant in Hanoi



Restaurant in Hanoi



Man selling toys near the entrance of the Ben Thanh market



Young girls shopping at the Lung Phin market



Partly restored gate on Hue's old imperial grounds (unfiltered)

beverage, or else I feel you will be deprived of tasting the best drink you'll have ever tasted. I still dream about it at night. Egg coffee is quite dense and sweet, so it is best enjoyed a while after a meal.

Hanoi Kids is a volunteer program that gets university students to tour you around. They only ask that you pay for your student's expenses on the day, such as museum admission and any food you eat together. You can customize the tour as much as you want, so you're capable of setting the tour's price tag. They can take you to any of the big attractions, and will even show you where they serve the original egg coffee.

Halong Bay is the top scenic destination of Vietnam. This is where to take your postcard-perfect photographs. You can do Halong Bay for under ¥4,000 if you don't care to stay overnight on a boat. However, this means you won't be able to go as far out, and might miss out on some of the spectacular views. If you are willing to make your own arrangements to and from Hanoi to the port, go to the counter (our saleswoman had very good English) and hire a private boat. We were able to get a three person crew boat for six passengers for under ¥2,000 each. Make sure to ask to see the boat before you sign the papers. This is how we were able to get a boat with a top deck at the bow of the ship. You may get the

option of kayaking and stopping at some caves. You don't need swim trunks to kayak, but you will need pocket change for the cave's admission fee. Another plus to having a private boat is you aren't squashed into single file line and ushered along at a snail's pace in the caves. If you aren't going on an all-inclusive boat, make sure to buy snacks and liquor in the city before. This also applies to trips in Ninh Binh and the Mekong Delta, as the boat crew will no doubt try pushing their merchandise onto you at three or four times market price.

## The South

Hue is en route from Hanoi to Hoi An. I recommend planning your train journey so that you visit it on the way, instead of backtracking from Hoi An. Hue was previously the imperial capital of Vietnam, so it has the cultural beauty of Nara but without the deer or greenery. It was our group's humble opinion that the place was a bit lacking. It does, however, have many local dishes and a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Hue opens and shuts at regular business hours, so don't visit it for the night life.

Hoi An is treasured for its relaxed atmosphere and hip eateries. Maybe my expectations were too high, but the town didn't really resonate with me. My experience could have been soured by the unpreparedness of our "homestay" for our arrival (claiming we were a day too early), a shopkeeper letting the air out of our bike tires, our bikes being outright stolen, ¥12,000 being extorted from us for each lost bike, or the worst

tailoring ordeal I've had to suffer through (don't go to Phuong Nam Tailors unless you want to fight for adjustments). Lessons learned: homestay in Hoi An means a normal hotel where no one speaks working English, don't let your bikes out of sight, and only get items copied at tailors. The extent of a tailor's skills is apparent through their model items; don't expect tailors to create great pieces they don't have a sewing pattern for.

Hoi An has evolved to become very touristy, with only tailors, souvenir and knick-knack shops lining the street, and bright lanterns to overload your visual system. In the town's center, you will see more tourists than natives. I recommend Hoi An for those wanting an escape from 'real' Vietnam (often necessary during a long backpacking trip), to meet other travelers at a bar, or to enjoy an English breakfast.

Ho Chi Minh City, commonly referred to as Saigon, is the hub of Vietnam. Here you will find the

biggest and latest-opening bars and clubs. Most of the cultural sites and beaches are located a side trip away, so make sure to leave plenty of room in your itinerary for them. The Cu Chi Tunnels (recommended) will take a full day, especially if you plan to travel inexpensively on the local buses. To cut down on commuting and taxi rides back from bars, book accommodation in district 1. This area has plenty of very nice restaurants, and bars as well as the Ben Thanh Market. You can spend a whole day in the Ben Thanh Market, browsing through all the stalls packed tight with everything you can think of and eating safe (in terms of food poisoning) local cuisine at the eateries located at the market's center. As it is all indoors, it is great on an overcast day.

Try to pick clear, sunny days for visiting the Mekong Delta. There are a few places to explore the Mekong Delta, but the most





Woman walking with her goods on a bike in Hanoi



Warning to those who get squeamish easily (at the wet market)



"The Banh Mi Queen" in Hoi An



Turnip boat of the floating market in Can Tho's Mekong Delta

recommended is in Can Tho city. We got two boats for five people at approximately ¥1,500 each person. This included a trip to two river markets and a rice noodle making factory. We chose to go in two separate boats (smaller boats can go through smaller canals), and without a guide (¥500 less each and no droning speeches). Don't forget to bring small change, because your boat drivers will expect a tip.

### Very, very useful general tips

- Never sit down for a meal until you know the price. Written prices are always better than quoted prices so ask to see a menu if possible. Beware of places without any prices listed.
- Always buy your own tickets for transportation if you have time. If you go through your hostel or hotel, they will always add a hidden service charge (despite a lot of tickets having the actual value written on them).

- Take the local buses, they are dirt cheap (¥25~30 per ride). Avoid them if you are claustrophobic or get motion sickness easily, but take them for a very unique experience (a Spanish couple on my bus got hand fed by one of the locals that loaded the cargo onto the bus). These buses also run from airports and will save you over ¥1,500 each way. Just make sure to check the schedule ahead of time, since some buses don't run in the evening.

- The practice of keeping guests' passport is standard in Vietnam so don't be shocked when they ask. The best security is to make sure they have good reviews online.
- Bargaining in the north will take more effort on the customer's side than in the south. Walking away will rarely incite the call backs you expect, and remember, walking away is your last power move, going back means the ball is in their court.
- Personalize your trip by looking up the local events occurring in your destination cities. I used

the mobile app [Tripoko](#) which is completely functional offline.

- Eat [BanhMi](#) often.

### Paige Ngo

\* overnight trains counted as a night in destination location.

\*\* Hue and Hoi An lie close to the middle of Vietnam, so it's possible and quite recommended you visit them even if you are sticking to the north.



## The Hyogo AJET Book Club

Last month we had our biggest book club yet, over 20 people took over the ever-so welcoming Bo Tambourine Café in Kobe to share their many opinions on Ruth Ozeki's *A Tale for the Time Being*. The novel runs two stories side by side, Ruth an author who reads the diary of Nao, a Japanese junior high school student. It delves into Buddhist spiritualism entangled with real issues of the environment, bullying and suicide in Japan. Serious topics expressed through the thoughts of a teenager, this book set us up for a great discussion.

Jason Maclellan, second year JET from Inagawa-cho, reviewed the book gathering.

Our third Book Club meeting at the Bo Tambourine Cafe in Kobe was a great way to spend an unusually warm February afternoon. The cafe had an enjoyably cosy atmosphere for our meeting, other customers were turned away because of the 20+ book enthusiasts occupying all the tables. When our conversations managed to turn toward the book there were many different opinions on the story itself and the issues it raised. Did you enjoy Ruth or Nao's story more? What did you think of the pacing of the book? Do you think the author tried to tackle too many

topics at one time? Many of us had differing ideas on these questions, but one of the things that most of us agreed on was that, as teachers in Japan, reading Nao's story had a much more powerful impact than it may have had reading it in our home countries. Some of us have noticed our own students become more withdrawn at times, only to learn later they are having trouble at home. We can also identify with the aspects of Japanese culture in the book that we've all come to be familiar with in our own lives. As always, February's meeting of

the Book Club was packed with engaging conversations all shared over some nice cups of coffee. A big thanks to Cherie for organizing a great day once again!

*Thanks Jason and everyone who came! As always, after a few rounds of chair swapping and discussions the next book was chosen by the members that day. The book suggestion came from Dustin Henrich, a second year Osaka JET from Ikeda-shi. (Yes, we even let in other prefectures!)*



### Ender's Game 1 by Orson Scott Card

*The Ender's Game takes places in the future where human-kind's battle against an alien race has been raging for hundreds of years. In order to win, the government breeds genius children to become super soldiers. One child in particular, Andrew Ender Wiggin, shows potential to be the leader human kind needs in order to win.*

*I chose this book because the movie trailers caught my attention. Before I go see the movie, I want to read the book. I've heard lots of good things about it!*

Ender's Game is the first sci-fi classic to take the stage, and the film is out in cinemas in Japan now so there's potential for a double discussion.

All book clubbers are encouraged to suggest books so we have a range of genres to keep things interesting. We've had some great suggestions in the past which, although not chosen, weren't forgotten about. Introducing the Hyogo AJET Book Club's bookshelf. Join us here on GoodReads to browse book suggestions and let us know what you think about them.

As the final term of the school year winds down and your classes start to deplete, why not dabble in a little

science fiction and schedule a film date too.

All details about the book club are on the Hyogo AJET website and Facebook page (click 'going!').

See you next term!

*Cherie Pham*

**Hyogo AJET Book Club 4**  
Ender's Game 1 by Orson Scott Card  
Date: Sunday April 20th  
Time: 2pm-4pm  
Meeting place: Kobe, TBC.



## Mt. Kabuto Hike

This article is brought to you through a partnership between the Heart of Japan blog, a project by the Hyogo International Association, and the Hyogo Times.

### If you're looking for a day-trip

hike in the Hanshin Area, around the cities of Osaka, Kobe, Nishinomiya, or Amagasaki, I recommend heading out to Mt. Kabuto (possibly named for its helmet-like shape). At just over 300 meters (or about 1,000 feet), the mountain makes for an easy climb, and also features a temple with beautiful views of Nishinomiya City and Osaka further east. Also nearby is Kabutoyama Forest Park, which has free admittance and some great viewpoints of Mt. Kabuto, the surrounding city, and Nishinomiya Harbor.

There are a quite a few train stations nearby Mt. Kabuto, including Koyoen, Nigawa, and Kotoen. For my hiking course, I started from Koyoen Station, walked through a maze-like residential district (bringing a map or a capable smartphone is must), climbed up to Kannoji Temple, continued on to the peak of Mt. Kabuto, hiked east

to Kabutoyama Forest Park and its 6-kilometer trail, then further east toward Nigawa Station and its local branch of a famous bakery/sandwich store called Pannelle (パンネル). You could easily take the opposite route (starting at Nigawa Station and ending at Koyoen), but I preferred to finish the hike with a nice pastry as a reward.

Getting off at Koyoen Station, I walked north up the hills through winding neighborhood streets for about two kilometers. After passing through the center of the residential district, there is an abundance of Japanese signs reading “神呪寺”: Kannoji Temple. Also, being Japan, there is a profusion of vending machines selling hot and cold drinks and, just in case you forgot, energy bars for intrepid hikers. Life. Saver.

The way up to Kannoji Temple seems like it's designed to get worshippers and travelers pumped as they approach the temple because it features concessive gates that offer tantalizing views of the main complex. The temple was originally built over 1,000 years ago, though has since then had many parts rebuilt and replaced. The temple grounds have a fantastic panoramic view of the surrounding area, often reaching far off into the distance past Osaka. I highly recommend hiking on a clear day to fully enjoy the view.

Next up, I took the path from the temple directly up to the summit of Mt. Kabuto. Having expected views as spectacular as those from the temple, the summit was a bit disappointing, but the path upward still has some views to make the extra exercise worth it. Plus, hiking

the insignificant extra distance allows you to say that you truly climbed Mt. Kabuto. Street cred.

Descending east toward Kabutoyama Forest Park, I entered the six kilometer light climbing trail. On the way, I stopped off at the park's viewing area where there are some picnic tables, vending-machine full of sports drinks, and the park's “Statue of Love” which is pretty cool. The park also features exercise zones to do some outdoor workouts if hiking isn't enough. There are also plenty of rest-areas and bathrooms.

As frequent signage indicates, wild mountain boars are dangerous and I saw an elderly man reading on bench, utterly terrified of the possibility of their appearance (see photo). Main rules concerning mountain boars: a) Don't feed them b) Try to leave the scene calmly and quickly if one appears.

Kabutoyama Forest Park has all kinds of surprises like pristine ponds, giant decorative clocks and winter-blooming flowers. I took my time on the trail to enjoy them, and hope you do too. To return home, I took the east exit, and again wandered through the maze of neighborhoods, this time bound for Nigawa Station and the way home. I stopped on the way, however, to pick up a pastry at Pannelle (Open 7:00am-7:00pm except on Sundays and two Mondays per month). The store is a popular bakery chain located all over the local area offering everything from your standard bread loaves (cut thick, in Japanese-style) to black sesame chicken sandwiches, croissants and sweet-potato danishes. I choose a walnut-flavored pastry filled with sweet bean-paste (くるみあんぱん).

Pannelle products aren't like your standard convenience store bakery fare. They are fresh, cheap, and delicious, with many products running out as the day goes on. My walnut sweet-bean pastry was fresh and chewy on the inside, and slightly firmer on the outside. Success. After reaching Nigawa Station, hunger satisfied, I was done for the day and ready to board the train home for bed.

*Joshua Kaplin*

### Editor's Tip

If you don't fancy tiring your legs, catch the number 7 bus from Nishinomiya Hanshin (also stops at JR) and be whisked straight to the temple and/or forest park. The park is particularly beautiful during momiji season.



## Just Ask Ava

### Dear Ava

Being green is really getting to me. At school I always do double-sided printing, bring my soup in a thermos and never use PET bottles, but at home, despite serious effort, I cannot get the recycling here. My pred left me a massive poster with all the sorting info and collection dates, although it's so yellow it might be from his pred six years ago... Anyway, I take the plastic off the bottles, wash the cans, hang my cartons to dry on the washing line, **everything**. Honestly, I'm so freaked out by the cockroach danger that I'm a bit OCD about it all. But **still** the grandma on the corner seems to find something wrong and drops my trash bags back at my door in secret overnight almost every time, which means I miss the collection every other week. I've totally stopped trying to recycle glass, and all my wine bottles by the back door started an awkward conversation when a JTE came by; did I mention I live within sight of school? Not such a good thing.

I've tried stealth recycling at midnight, but the lady has ears like a bat because the trash is still returned, even though she won't admit to doing it!

In summer the fridge was full of banana peel by trash day and I took plastic bags of trash to throw away at school so my house didn't stink of warm garbage for an extra week!

Winter's tough, I eat more so there's more packaging to ditch, but it's so cold I go to the supermarket less so can't safely get rid of the plastic boxes. At least the trash only smells when I put it by the gas heater – and then I really know the house is full.

I know it's not eco-friendly to complain about recycling, but I don't think I can cope much longer. The thought of spring and all the fruit flies coming back brings me out in a cold sweat. Please help.

Shamed in Shiso



### Dear Shamed,

I cannot say I have ever suffered from the same issue; my cosmopolitan lifestyle comes complete with maid service, and 'trash' and 'garbage' do not feature in my vocabulary. However, I can empathise with the odour issue, my sentiments are similar on the rare occasion I enter a subterranean transport system. It sounds to me like you're making every reasonable effort to comply with local practice – heavy drinking included in the inaka. As such, I suggest two solutions to deal with your pesky snoop. First, the friendly approach: get crafty with your recyclables. No, not for yourself, you are not a five year-old. Channel all your creative powers into a delightful hand-made, eco-friendly [and therefore necessarily ugly] gift for your meddlesome neighbour. Perhaps a necklace of ring-pulls or a headband adorned with plastic egg nests - if Instagram is to be believed, cat-ear headwear is frightfully à la mode [do please note the adverb].

Option two from my dear friend Candida Sole: the threat. Nothing so crass as a face-à-face showdown, this is all about subtlety. For the next collection date, ensure your receptacles are filled with explicit evidence of your close yakuza connections. Nothing incriminating of course, but just enough to make it quite clear who she's dealing with; the added bonus being, of course, that she can't inform on you without admitting to her dustbin delving, and if she braves it then she's the one to look the fool. Unless of course your underworld ties are true, in which case option one's art and crafts make for a fantastic cover.

Scented and serene,

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.**





## Building “Brandt” Bridges: Prime Minister Abe and Promoting Peace

On December 7, 1970 in Warsaw,

Poland, West Germany’s Prime Minister Willy Brandt laid a wreath and fell to his knees at a monument commemorating the lives lost during the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. His gesture, appearing to be both spontaneous and genuine, came to symbolize the acknowledgement of past wrongs. Brandt’s act, although unpopular with many domestic groups at the time, received a largely positive international reaction and became one of the many steps toward reconciliation with Eastern Europe<sup>1</sup>.

However, Germany’s steps in atoning for their past atrocities have been the exception rather than the rule. Numerous countries with a history of bloody foreign and civil wars or genocidal acts often fail to come to terms with the past. In the case of Japan and its actions before and during World War II there are two main camps of thought. On the one hand, it is argued that Japan has taken the necessary steps in recognizing and correcting former injustices and that it is unfairly compared to Germany both in past violence and current acknowledgements. On the other, it is suggested that the Japanese have not gone far enough in admitting their faults and compensating those who suffered under their abuse.

Admittedly, I lean toward the belief that the Japanese government can do more. In fact, I believe the current government has to do more if they are committed to deescalating current tensions and promoting peace in the region. Of course, many Japanese statesmen since World War II’s end have admitted to the suffering caused by Japan and either expressed their regret or apologized for their country’s wrongdoings. Most well-known is the resolution passed by the House of Representatives in the Diet under Socialist Prime Minister Tomiichi Murayama in 1995. It stated;

"On the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the end of World War II, this House offers its sincere condolences to those who fell in action and victims of wars and similar actions all over the world.

"Solemnly reflecting upon many instances of colonial rule and acts of aggression in the modern history of the world, and recognizing that Japan carried out those acts in the past, inflicting pain and suffering upon the peoples of other countries, especially in Asia, the Members of this House express a sense of deep remorse."<sup>2</sup>

Yet even though Mr. Abe’s Cabinet states they hold the same stance as previous Cabinets on the issue, their commitment to such statements and beliefs is questionable. For starters, Mr. Abe explicitly shared a desire to revise aspects of previous statements in years past. More recently, his Cabinet’s attempts to change textbooks to downplay Japanese military actions and his visit to Yasukuni Shrine portray a government concerned more with ramping up nationalism than righting past wrongs. Mr. Abe says that “Japan must never wage a war again” and their forces should only be used to promote peace<sup>3</sup>. However, if he fails to recognize his country’s aggressions and atrocities for what they were in the past, what are the odds that he will recognize those in the future?

Understandably it is unfair and impractical to place the burden of Asia’s peace on Japan’s shoulders and to derive such peace from a complete acceptance of wrongdoing by Mr. Abe. Other countries, specifically China and South Korea, must also do their part in avoiding a misconstrued history that further fans the flames of hatred. Yet it often takes a bigger person to rise above petty posturing and finger pointing (such as those currently plaguing the region) and admit their faults. Rather than a visit to both Yasukuni and Chinreisha,

as Mr. Abe did last year, a visit only to Chinreisha, a “remembrance memorial to pray for the souls of all the people regardless of nationalities who lost their lives in the war,” would do more for peace<sup>4</sup>. Going even further he could once and for all denounce the use of “comfort women” during the War and offer direct compensation to the victims. The very popular Mr. Abe has a number of opportunities to set aside his nationalistic tendencies and surprise everyone.

Acknowledging my own country’s history, I recognize there are extreme difficulties to overcome. It was not until 1988 that American lawmakers and President Ronald Regan signed legislation that compensated and formally apologized to more than 100,000 Americans of Japanese descent; the victims of forced internment during World War II<sup>5</sup>. Furthermore, the American government has yet to formally apologize for the use of atomic bombs against Japan during the War. Yet regardless of the difficulty, future peace needs humility as shown by Willy Brandt, a humility that allows us to stare straight into the horrors of our past and say to the world, “I’m sorry.”

Sean Mulvihill

<sup>1</sup> Lanoszka, Alexander. “Prime Minister Abe, You’re No Willy Brandt.” *The National Interest*, 13 Feb. 2014. Web. 19 Feb. 2014.

<sup>2</sup> MOFA. “Prime Minister’s Address to the Diet: ‘Resolution to Renew the Determination for Peace on the Basis of Lessons Learned from History.’” 9 June 1995. Web. 16 Feb. 2014.

<sup>3</sup> Abe, Shinzo. “Pledge for everlasting peace.” *Speeches and Statements by the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet*, 26 Dec. 2013. Web. 17 Feb. 2014.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Qureshi, Bilal. “From Wrong To Right: A U.S. Apology For Japanese Internment.” *NPR: All Things Considered*. 9 Aug. 2013. Web. 19 Feb. 2014.

### Further readings and opinions

- [Japan should follow Germany](#)
- [Japan's History Problem](#)
- [Prime Minister Abe, you're no Willy Brandt](#)





## AGEJ Sake Tour

Thanks to everyone who came and made the two sake tasting days a success. For those who didn't come, here's a rundown of what went on January 25th and 26th. Feel free to use this itinerary to go on your own!

Follow us virtually on this map!

We met at Mikage station at 11:30am, and walked the few steps it took to get to はなや (restaurant specializing in creative Japanese dishes). The place was cozy, nestled in one of the side streets. After shedding our shoes and being seated, we got busy ordering from the four lunch options. It was an easy bill to split, as meals were priced at either ¥1,000 or ¥1,500 (comes with a side of miso soup and pickles). I ordered the tempura donburi set and each morsel was definitely worth each yen. The house specialty of Awaji stone grilled chicken also looked amazing; grilling is done on a personal hot black stone. There's nothing like a pseudo mini cookout to incite some lively conversation.

Despite being a little late to the reservation, our patient waitress thanked us for our patronage with "service" (complimentary) dessert. It was tofu (I think?), but tasty. I am completely serious when I say that that was the best Japanese dining experience I've had in Japan. Many of us left with their meishi in hand.

Bellies full, we traversed across the railroad tracks to the Hakutsuru brewery ("Japan's number one selling brand!") With videos dating back to at least the 80's at every display, we learnt the ins and outs of sake brewing and why Hakutsuru's sake stands above the rest. This brewery-museum has two floors filled with life-size displays. At the finish line there stood the much anticipated sake tasting room. There were even cake samples in the shop. Some of us took to dressing up in the brewery's outfits and posing with massive bottles of sake. Since we were already in the area, we decided to drop by another brewery, the Kiku-Masamune

brewery ("Top brand Karakuchi in Japan"). We watched a ten minute film in a mini theatre reporting on the special Kimoto method of creating a sake with a "dry, yet rich taste". We ended the day with a quick browse around the shop and more sampling.

I'd like to give special thanks to Ryan Hertel for running the Saturday portion of the event. I had a great time meeting new people and catching up with others, thanks again for attending!

*Paige Ngo*  
Photos by Daniel McLaughlin





## Ginzo, Koji, and Dirt Savotem's Story, Part One

When my boyfriend, Chris, first arrived in Japan, he didn't have a job in hand. He found one rather quickly; within about 6 weeks, but there were still a few months between his hiring and start dates, so he decided to sign up for WWOOF Japan and work on someone's farm for a few weeks, as Chris doesn't keep his sanity for long if he can't put his hands in dirt. He was drawn to contact Savotem Fujiwara (藤原仙人掌) and spend some time working for his family. In a very short time, they grew remarkably close. We have since visited each other's homes several times, and Chris recently quit his job to help

Savo renovate his family's new home in Daisen-cho, Tottori, until we go home for good at the end of my JET contract this year. Saboten, the word for cactus, isn't his legal name, but it's certainly his real name. The kanji of the word, which literally mean "the palm of the mountain hermit," are certainly befitting to him. He's gone by Savotem for years and I don't even know what his legal name is. He prefers to stylize it with a 'v' and an 'm' as opposed to the standard Romanized spelling. "Savotem" certainly looks more Roman, anyway.

The following is part one of my translation of a speech Savo gave at one of his art exhibitions. He has of course told variations of this story, of how he came to live a self-sufficient life, to his friends before, but only recently has he refined it to share publicly. It's filtered through my voice a bit – I translated and edited it so that it flows a little better in print – but the story itself is his and I haven't embellished it in the slightest. If you prefer to hear it from him and have half an hour to spare, I'll post a link to a subtitled YouTube video in the comments as soon as I finish it.

### My name is Savotem Fujiwara.

I live in Tanto-cho in Toyooka with my wife and two children, and we live with the aim of being completely self-sufficient. We typically get our food from fields on our 0.37-acre plot. Throughout the year, we grow 50 varieties of vegetables. In the winter though, the snow is waist-high in the fields, so I take a break from working outside, and work on making seasonings. From the koji I cultivate every week, I make miso, shoyu, mirin, vinegar, pickles, doburoku (a kind of unrefined sake), and more. I also draw and carve.

There's no gas supply at our house. When I first moved in, there was propane, but knowing I was planning to live sustainably, I returned the gadgets to the gas company. Instead, we heat our water for cooking and bathing with firewood. There's no TV, either. I have a young daughter, but she doesn't mind. She seems content to help us work the fields, gather the vegetables, cook miso soup and serve it to us. Occasionally, we'll find an unpeeled mikan in our soup, but I think it's good for her to grow up surrounded by nature. Our

livelihood depends on these kinds of routines.

I was born in Tokyo and raised in rural Kyoto. I was a badly-behaved kid. In junior high, I smoked and I had terrible grades. But I was also captain of the table tennis club... that was the one thing I loved. Studying was too challenging for me, so I spent most of my time playing, which frustrated my parents and teachers, so they were hard on me. I was very hard on myself too, for being such a bad student. Low self-esteem plagued my entire adolescence.

In the summers during junior high there were no club meetings. I couldn't do the one thing I enjoyed doing, so I decided to take a trip. It was pretty incredible of my parents to let me, such a bratty kid, go off on my own, but I had relatives in Sapporo they could send me to. I emptied my savings and bought a Seishun-18 ticket, and travelled all the way from Kyoto to Sapporo on local trains, stopping off at youth hostels at the end of each day's leg. After one night with my relatives,

I went off on my own to explore Hokkaido. This was in the 1980s in the latter part of the railway boom, so the youth hostels were bustling with lodgers. These clearly well-seasoned travelers were shocked to see a young kid traveling alone, and praised my bravery. It was one of the happiest times of my life up to that point.

But of course, eventually I had to go back to school, where that terrible feeling of ineptitude came creeping back. The experience in Hokkaido stuck with me though, and from high school on, I traveled every chance I had, hitchhiking to avoid train fares and sleeping outside so I didn't have to pay for lodging. I went abroad to countries where people live self-sufficiently, like Nepal and India, and when I came back to Japan at about age 24, I decided to try the camping life for a while. For a year and a half, I lived with no electricity, gas or plumbing on Ishigaki Island, just west of Okinawa.





One day, about a year into my time on Ishigaki, I woke up one morning unable to move. My body was like a rock. If I tried to move even a little, pain shot through my body. "What is this? Why is this happening," I thought to myself. I was writhing around in my tent unable to get out of it when finally, people living nearby came to my aid. Seeing my condition, they suggested that I try traditional medicine and adjusting my diet instead of going to the hospital. I started a treatment regimen with my uncle, who is an acupressurist, and when I felt better, I returned to camping life. Eventually I came back to Kyoto to work at the part time job that allowed me to earn money for my travels, but soon I was in severe pain again and couldn't even do that. When I was so worried that I finally did go to a hospital, all of my test results were inconclusive, so I was diagnosed with lumbar pain. But the thing was – it wasn't just my back. Be it my back or ankles

or whatever, some part of my body was always hurting, and not in a normal way. Up until this started happening, my health was so good that if I wanted to climb a mountain, I could throw a loaded backpack on and go, but now the pain practically prevented me from living.

When I was 26, I took a turn for the worse. I was emaciated – much thinner than I am now, listless, and when I started finding blood in the toilet, I knew something was really wrong. I went to a doctor of traditional medicine who had a great reputation, and he performed an Q-Ring test on me. Shockingly, the test showed that I had pancreatic cancer. Seeing my initial sadness, the doctor scolded me, saying, "You're going to die if you keep this up!" As the days went on, I went to the library and read up on pancreatic cancer to find out just what kind of disease it was. For two years, I was sure I could die at any

moment. I continued treatments with that doctor – fasting, thermotherapy, cleansing diets. My life was far from normal.

You write the kanji for "cancer" like this: 癌. Within the radical for illness, there are three mouths over a mountain, so some people used to say, "If you eat mountains of food and bad-mouth a lot, you end up with cancer." I thought, "Oh, that's what must have done it." When I was traveling with very little money, I'd sometimes eat what I found lying around outside, which included a lot of instant meals and junk food.

During my treatments, there were many days when I thought, "If my pancreas starts to hurt, there's a chance that I could die tomorrow. If that happens, I should do what I want to do today." The things I had always wanted to do suddenly became my priority, but I was still poor

and in no condition to travel, so I turned to drawing. The only things I could really draw were jizo (boddhisatva statues), and I drew tons of them – jizo that seemed to convey, "It's okay, everything will go well, everything will be great." Drawing became very therapeutic.

Later, I thought about the three mouths in the kanji for cancer again. I had been eating much better than before, so I wondered why I wasn't improving. Then I had the realization that the mouths, in my case, must have represented stress. The stress I had put on myself growing up for not being a model student had to be what had damaged my body. But by doing what I wanted, by drawing, and not bothering to interact with unpleasant people who I quite literally didn't have time for, I finally came to love myself. It didn't matter that I wasn't a model student in my youth. If people made fun of me,

I could just laugh it off. The three mouths of the cancer turned into smiles. But I still bore this illness, regardless of my new attitude.

Look out next month for part two of Savo's story! Also, something to think about: if you think of anything you'd like to ask Savo, leave it in the comments! I'm going up to visit them soon and if I gather enough to ask, perhaps I can also do an interview for a future Miso Green. Or you can always email me with your questions.

*Uluwehi Mills*  
miso.green.ht@gmail.com



## Kimii-dera 紀三井

### Our travels are taking us further

and further afield, this time down the coast to Wakayama-ken! Kimii-dera is temple number two on our pilgrim quest.

The only temple farther south on our list than Kimii-dera is temple number one, Seiganto-ji, deep in Wakayama. Getting to Kimii-dera takes some doing, but in cherry blossom season it's well worth it. The temple is famous for its glorious cherry blossoms, the blooming of which heralds the official start of spring for the entire Kansai region. The seeds for these old trees were said to have been given to the temple's founder by the Dragon King who lives under the sea. Kimii-dera's name, meaning "Three Sacred Springs," comes from the three found on the grounds, the Well of Purity, the Well of Healing, and the Well of Good Fortune.

Kimii-dera overlooks the Bay of Poetry, Wakanoura, and you only have to climb 231 steps to get up there. The staircase itself is called the Slope of Karmic Bonding, and has its own story. Once, a pious young man was carrying his elderly parent up to the temple when his sandal broke. A young woman who was working in the area at the base of the stairs saw this and brought him a replacement sandal. From this first meeting, the couple fell in love and got married, and both were led to a life of prosperity when the young man, in the employ of his father in law, made the whole family wealthy. The moral of the story is, if you climb the steps with an open and generous heart, you too can be united to your own happiness and prosperity.

Along the way up this precarious staircase, you will encounter paths to the sacred springs that give the temple its name; these are nice built-in breaks from the climb. The first is the Well of Purity, once used and renowned for its delicious water and said to be blessed by Kannon. Further out from the steps is the Well of Good Fortune, seen through a window after its restoration, and further still is the Willow spring, also called the Well of Healing, so named for the soothing powers of the properties of the willow (often used in medicine), said to flow from Kannon's grace as well.

Once up the stairs, you can turn right to visit the newly built mausoleum (Shinbutsuden) which has an 11-meter figure of Thousand-armed (Senju) Kannon, officially consecrated in 2008. For a small fee, you can visit the upper

floors of the new building as well, which offer excellent views over the Bay of Poetry. Going right from the stairs will lead you toward the Hondo and a few other interesting pieces of Kimii-dera's landscape.

The Rokkaku-do (six-sided hall) near the top of the stairs is the mini pilgrimage, meaning that the images from all 33 temples are enshrined inside. Next to the Rokkaku-do you'll see a stone monument shaped like a postcard. This is the Maigo no Tegami memorial, because Kimii-dera conducts a yearly "Lost Mail Memorial Service," this year on April 1st, for those letters which the Japan Post is unable to deliver. In Japan, undeliverable letters are known as lost-children letters (Maigo no Tegami). The memorial is for those who sent them, and those who never received them; I find this a touching way to handle

letters that will not or cannot be sent (like letters to the departed).

The Hondo itself is a National Important Cultural Property. It houses an Eleven-face Kannon (Juichimen Kannon), and this secret image is shown every 50 years. This image is thought to be especially good for those seeking healing and prevention of physical illness.

Other temple features include the Tahoto, a special style of pagoda behind the Hondo (also with nice views of the Bay), and an 800-year old camphor tree. There is also the bell tower and Mizuko shrine you will by now be used to seeing. Finally, although all of our temples will be beautiful in sakura season, special attention is paid during mid-March to the blossoms of the 1200 trees at Kimii-dera, because they will officially start off Kansai's

blooming season. Keep your eyes on the sakura forecasts and make a trip down to Wakayama to be part of Kimii-dera's magnificent sights!

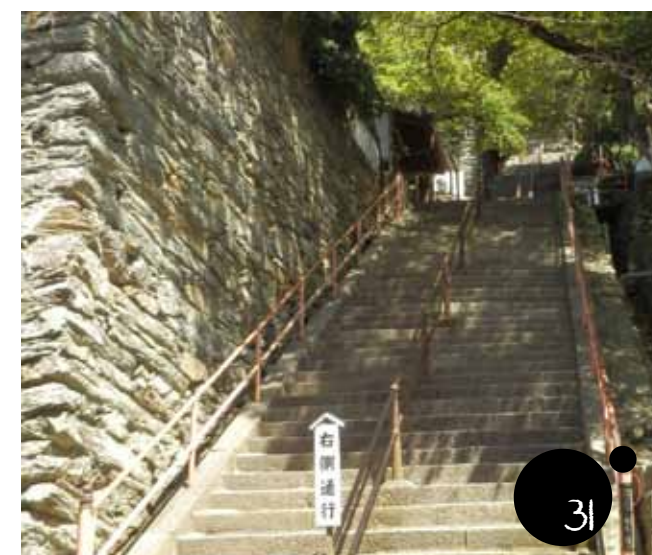
To get to Kimiidera, take a train to Wakayama Station (there are JR and non-JR options for this). From there, take the Kinokuni Line and alight at Kimiidera station. The temple is about a 10-15 minute walk from the station (the train ride will take about an hour and a half from Osaka station).

Happy trails!

*Lemmon*



30 • hyogo times • march 2014





## Adventures await!

### Did you love scavenger hunts as a kid?

Were you a champion at hide-and-seek? Why not join Geocaching, a growing worldwide phenomenon ascribing to those interests.

So, what is geocaching you may ask? It is a worldwide scavenger hunt made for the modern adventure-loving person! Using a GPS enabled device, players may search for, find, or hide 'caches' almost any place imaginable on earth. Caches may be as small as a bolt magnet designed to blend in when perfectly placed on a street pole, for example, or large plastic containers hidden under fallen logs in the forest. Once found, you sign the logbook (often just a strip of paper) with your username and the date found and then log the find online. Caches are not always physical; some are virtual, requiring a visit to a location and taking a picture, or unknown, meaning that the player must solve a puzzle at the location of the coordinates to reveal a final location or information they must communicate to the cache owner in order to log their find. Others are event caches, meaning that geocachers get together at

a location for an event and must register with the event owner to secure their log.

Since all caches are hidden by geocachers, you can often find some pretty neat places known to the local geocachers that may not be on your favourite travel site. I have geocached in Canada, Japan, and South Korea and have some pretty spectacular photos from places I have visited. Often, geocaches are hidden in locations with high muggle traffic (geocachers affectionately refer to non-geocachers as muggles). This has occasionally led to interesting looks from passers-by as I duck my hands underneath a bench or phone booth in search of a small magnetic cache. I love when this happens because it can sometimes lead to a conversation where I get to share my adventures with a new friend.

Besides finding caches, players can also send out Travel Bugs, key chains with a trackable code, to travel the world. Players can specify a certain goal for the Travel Bug and watch as fellow geocachers take it from



My friend's first ever geocache find, it's a recycled mint container!



cache to cache and player to player to achieve its goal. I found a Travel Bug in Canada that wanted to travel the world, so I brought it with me and dropped it in a cache in Kobe's Meriken Park. It has since travelled to Tokyo and will hopefully reach another country soon!

a geocaching adventure, so send me an [email](mailto:jem383@geocaching.com) or look me up on [geocaching.com](http://geocaching.com) as jem383!

*Jessica McSavage*

Geocaching is a low cost and high reward activity; there is a free app and full version app offered by Groundspeak, owner of [geocaching.com](http://geocaching.com) available for smartphones. Membership on the website is 100% free, although premium memberships may be purchased at a low annual cost for extra perks. [Geocaching.com](http://Geocaching.com) has amazing video tutorials and resources for geocachers of all levels and posts regularly on Facebook, Instagram and the geocaching blog.

So, if you ever find yourself with a free day and need an excuse to get out of the house, want to rediscover a frequently visited spot, or are just looking for some adventure at a new site, why not give geocaching a try! I am always available to go on



## Pecha Kucha A solution to the presentation pandemic

### We've all been there; falling

asleep as a lecturer drones on, yawning as a fascinating life story is told as a monotonous 40 minute speech with fully four slides, texting instead of concentrating when a speaker waxes lyrical about his pet project using more acronyms than exist in the United Nations... Poor presentation skills seem to be pandemic. Technology has the potential to make public speaking visual, dynamic and powerful, but so often it is used ineffectively, even detrimentally.

Take a look at Time magazine's [Top 10 Greatest Speeches](#), all of which are examples of speechmakers who moved and motivated with words alone, none of this new-found animated photographic pie-chart malarkey. It is very easy to spend hours deliberating over how best to animate a PowerPoint presentation; an almost productive

procrastination from thinking about what actually to say. But can you imagine Winston Churchill dithering between a fade and a bounce?

Today, we may have the option to illustrate our ideas, but should we? How can we ensure visuals aid rather than detract from our ideas?

### The answer: Pecha Kucha.

One of the myriad Japanese onomatopoeic phrases, pecha kucha translates best as 'chit chat', but this is no casual natter. Pecha Kucha events are all about being clear, concise and captivating.

Invented in Tokyo in 2003 by Dutch architects Astrid Klein and Klein Dytham of [Klein Dytham](#) to prevent their contemporaries from prattling on, Pecha Kucha gives a very simple but rigid structure

to oral presentations. A speaker has 20 images of 20 seconds each (changing automatically) to deliver their address. With just six minutes and forty seconds to play with, delivery must be slick and well-rehearsed.

The concept started small, with the first Pecha Kucha Night in Tokyo staged for young designers to present their projects and network. It has since taken off globally – with events organized in over 700 cities. In Kansai we are spoilt for choice with events in Kyoto, Osaka, Nara and our very own Nishinomiya. On Saturday 22nd February I attended my first Pecha Kucha Night in Osaka, where the organisers were celebrating their fourth event and their first year on the Pecha Kucha scene.

The event was held at [Trois Dix](#), a macrobiotic and organic restaurant in Shinmachi, near Shinsaibashi station. We were treated to ten presentations on diverse topics, with about half in English and half in Japanese (some including subtitles). Highlights came in the form of an education in whisky, which included generous samples of a Glenmorangie and homemade chocolates to bring out the citrus notes, and an incredibly enthusiastic café owner who wants to Japan to dance, dance, dance – and not just in matsuri [visit Hiro Nakanishi in Nara at [Café Wakakusa](#)]. What was particularly impressive was how the balanced 20x20 format and passionate speakers facilitated communication even for those listening to a foreign language. Only one presentation, which had huge visual potential, did not take advantage of the slides, which was a shame for non-Japanese speakers.

At a Pecha Kucha Night mingling is just as important as the presentations themselves, and at Trois Dix this was made clear by the two "Beer Break!" intervals, both of which were used to make new friends and followed by the official post presentation networking hour. With a largely bilingual gathering it was an excellent opportunity

to meet other globally minded people in the region.

The Pecha Kucha format has huge potential to deliver a strong message, entertain your audience, or simply introduce people to your hobby. It encourages the speaker to think about how they use visual aids to facilitate communication. I think this is particularly important in Japan where PowerPoint slides can often simply be a text version of the speech itself. On the [Pecha Kucha website](#) you can find many presentations in over 20 languages. As a demonstration of how to use slides effectively, and thanks in particular to their length, these slideshows have the potential to be great teaching resources, or simply a way for you to learn something new.

### Pecha Kucha Kansai

Coming up this month is an event in Kyoto on 16th March, and next month the established Nishinomiya branch will celebrate its [20th event](#) on 8th April.\* I highly recommend attending one to meet new people and discover new things, and if you find that you aren't interested in a topic, don't worry, by the time you're back from the bar the next presenter will be speaking.

Pecha Kucha, freeing us from boring presentations.

### Tell me more!

For more information and to get involved visit [www.pechakucha.org](http://www.pechakucha.org).

### Charlotte Griffiths

\*Prices vary between events; the night in Osaka was ¥1,500 including two drinks. Check event details before attending.



## Where are they now?

This month the Hyogo Times spoke to Brandon Kramer, a native of Virginia, US who has remained in Japan after spending 2006 – 2011 in Sasayama on JET.

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

I hoped to see things from a different perspective, try something new, learn a language, and travel. I think I was pretty successful.

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

Immediately after JET I started working at a private high school in Kobe, at the recommendation of my principal. At the same time I started the Master's program for a M.S. Ed. TESOL at Temple University Japan. I finished the Master's after 2 years, and am finishing up at my high school job now, after seven and a half years in Japan.

### *Staying in Japan, is there anything besides family and friends that you still miss about the US?*

Of course I miss my family and friends, but I would miss them even if I went back to the US after finishing. I probably wouldn't want to live in the area I grew up, and my friends from high school and university have since spread out all over the country, so I realize that

going home wouldn't really bring back the same friend network I once had. My network of friends is tighter and more centrally located here in Kansai. Otherwise, besides friends and family there isn't much else I particularly miss about life in America that I can't find here.

### *Why did you choose to stay in Japan?*

Related to the previous answer, I wasn't very interested in going back and I had a good group of friends here. I also like teaching in Japan and the lifestyle that comes with it.

### *What are you doing now?*

I am now an ALT at a private high school in Kobe, a job not much different than JET. I will be moving to Osaka and teaching at Momoyama Gakuin University from April, thanks to the Master's degree I finished last year.

### *Has studying a Masters affected your teaching and/or job opportunities?*

Absolutely. Almost every university position requires a Master's degree, and many high schools do as well, especially as they go up in rank.

### *What is it like to teach in Japan outside the rigid structure of the JET programme?*

JET wasn't really very rigid for me, although maybe I just had a great school. There were always chances at my school to try new class ideas, take on new projects, and grow as a teacher. If anything I'm more limited at my current school, but I knew that when I signed up. Outside of the ALT role, the main difference is that you take care of the small details of life on your own, where JET pretty much does everything for you. The support network is also much looser, and the friends I make now tend to be people who have been here longer as well, which puts a different perspective on things.

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

I appreciate that I am constantly living in a mixture of two (or more) worlds, as I talk to and relate to people back home and then move forward with my life here. While it's not so much of a problem anymore, the differences in culture have also taught me to think on



my feet and improvise solutions more effectively, I think.

### *What is your favourite memory of your time in Japan so far?*

I have a ton of great memories with a lot of great people. In particular, Aki Matsuri every year carrying shrines in Sasayama is a blast (still going, 7 years in a row), running around mostly naked at hadaka matsuri out in Okayama was absolutely crazy, hanami in front of Himeji castle with the 100 yen sake cups they serve was dangerously fun, and cycling solo across Kyushu was one of the best spontaneous trips I've ever made.

### *Do you have any advice for ALTs looking to continue working in Japan post-JET?*

I can only speak about teaching jobs... but am I allowed to recommend that they quit in April? Otherwise the next best option is to somehow find a small teaching job at a company or school and hang on until the next hiring season comes around. While it's not impossible to find work in September (I did), it is much easier to make something happen if you go with the rhythm of the work cycle here. Otherwise get involved with JALT, get certifications, and learn Japanese if you want to boost your chances of getting hired.



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

# MARCH

Hyogo AJET event

Hanshin

Harima

Kobe

Tamba

Awaji

Tajima

Outside of Hyogo

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
						AJET Hyogo Ski/Snowboard Trip
2 Kansai Style Exhibition – Lost in Interpretation	3 Urasa Hadaka Oshiai Matsuri (Minami- Uonuma, Niigata)	4 5 6 7 Seishun 18 Kippu Valid (Mar 1 <sup>st</sup> – April 10 <sup>th</sup> )				8 Ice-skating (Port Island)
9	10 Hounensai (Inuyama, Aichi)	11	12	13 KasugaSai (Kasuga Shrine, Nara)	14 White Day	15 Izushi Hatsu-uma Taisha (Toyooka)
Sumo Tournament in Osaka (Mar 9 <sup>th</sup> – 23 <sup>rd</sup> )				Hygashiyama Hanatoro (Kyoto) Mar 14 <sup>th</sup> -23 <sup>rd</sup>		
16	17 St. Patrick's Day	18	19	20	21 Spring Equinox	22
Izushi Hatsu-uma Taisha (Toyooka) (Mar 15 <sup>th</sup> – 17 <sup>th</sup> )	En-Nen-Sai (Kyoto)	Hygashiyama Hanatoro (Kyoto) Mar 14 <sup>th</sup> -23 <sup>rd</sup>				Start of the Setouchi Shimanowa 2014
23	24	25	26	Sakura season starts (Forecasted)		29 Antique Grand Fair (Kyoto) Mar 28 <sup>th</sup> – 30 <sup>th</sup>
	Kitano Odori by Kamishichiken (Kyoto) Mar 25 <sup>th</sup> – Apr 7 <sup>th</sup>					
30	Mitsuyama Taisai (Himeji) Mar 31 <sup>st</sup> – Apr 7 <sup>th</sup>					



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Time to  
sit.  
back  
&  
relax.