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**A**s we march forward toward hanami and the end of the school year, let us not forget to be grateful for the advantages life in Japan offers us (see what I did there?).

So far, every March I've spent in Japan has included at least one weekend full of cosplay and nerdiness at some sort of convention or other. My first year, I went to Anime Japan, while last year I went to the Nipponbashi Street Festa. If you're interested in the latter, do join the [HAJET group](#) that will be going! Sadly, I'm otherwise engaged during this year's, so you'll have to have all the fun for me. (Also, the friend I went with was

recently featured in the [Huffington Post](#).) Back in the States, I loved going to conventions when I could. Their atmospheres were giant clouds of geeky fun. Perhaps because of this, I've found most Japanese conventions to be a bit of a let-down. The cosplay rules are stifling in that you are not allowed to arrive in costume and must pay to get changed in tarp tents on concrete. Freaking out the unsuspecting Seattleites was part of the joy of going to Sakura Con in droves. Also absent are game panels of the non-video persuasion. Of everything I've attended here, though, the Street Festa is by far the most enjoyable (perhaps because you can roam at least some streets costume-clad).

This month, we have a variety of articles, and I've found at least several to be highly entertaining. Under review are [pizza](#) from two different sources, the [Rurouni Kenshin](#) Takarazuka Revue, [Slade House](#) at the most recent book club meeting, and the city of [Kagoshima](#). Inside are also musings on [money](#), a recipe for [milk stew](#), advice for maximizing your enjoyment of the imminent [hanami](#) season, a short story about [unrequited love](#), and our alumni of the month, [Gina Panozzo](#).

That other guy might have better conventions, or a car with a great build and paint job, but everywhere/thing/one has their strengths and weaknesses. Focusing on what you love and learning how to overcome your flaws can help you lead a fulfilling life. Go get 'em, tiger.

*Brittany Teodorski*

Photo courtesy of Ryan Hertel.



**H**ello Spring!

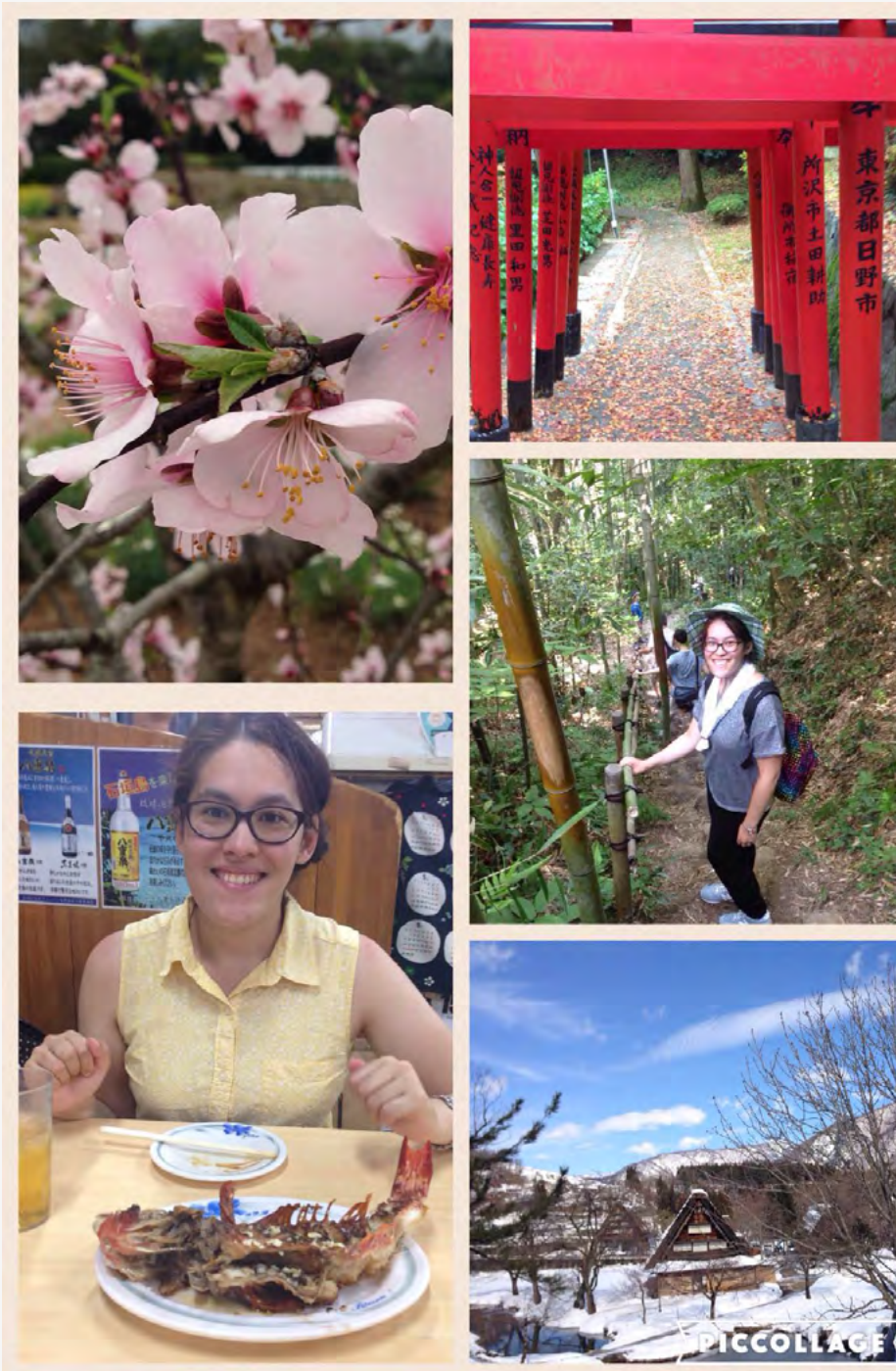
The end of winter is in sight and spring is just around the corner. This means that the end of the school year is here! If you're planning to go away during the spring holidays, have a blast and recharge your batteries for the new school year. If you aren't going away, plan your work days well so that you're not bored at school doing nothing. It's a good time to catch up on your reading, learn a new skill, plan your next trip, study a bit of Japanese or talk to students outside of class time.

If you haven't gone and explored Japan yet, now is a good time to grab a friend (or go by yourself) and tour around Japan. Japan has so many different places to visit with exciting things you can do at each place. With less than six months to go until my time in Japan is up, I'm trying to plan my final trips. I'm hoping that I'll be able to visit all of the prefectures in west Honshu by August. However, one of the prefectures I want to visit is Yamaguchi and I still don't know what I can do there... If anyone has any suggestions or recommendations, please let me know! Japan is such a gorgeous country to travel around with its history, beautiful scenery, delicious food (FOOOOD!... drool...) and unique culture. Make the most of living in Japan and go and explore this great country we're living in!

Now is plum (梅, ume) blossom season which looks very similar to the famous cherry blossom. It's one of the first blossoms to bloom and signals

the start of spring. Go and check it out– they should be blooming until mid-March. A famous location in the Kansai region is Kitano Tenmangu Shrine in Kyoto. Plus, later this month the cherry blossoms will be out in full swing. During this time, make the most of the short time that they're in bloom by having a hanami party with your friends– remember to bring some sakuramochi to share!

*Aiko Lignon*



**M**arch is here and that means spring; which means sakura are around the corner! While we savor our last moments of kotatsu comfiness, we can also enjoy our last rounds of nabe and warm winter favorites. Milk stew is a delectable creation I discovered while having kyushoku 給食 (school lunch) at a local preschool and let's be honest, the cold sadness of junior high kyushoku can't hold a candle to the warm, yummy meals lovingly prepared by the preschool and elementary lunch ladies. So it's time to delve into the world of school lunch and see what tasty morsels we can unearth and add to our cooking repertoire.

**Servings: 2-3**

#### Ingredients:

- A drizzle of Oil
- 200g Chicken Thigh Fillet, cut into 2cm pieces
- 1/2 Onion, sliced into 2.5cm/1 inch squares
- 2 Potatoes, peeled and sliced into 2.5cm/1 inch cubes
- 2 Carrots
- 1 Broccoli, cut into small florets
- 1 tsp Chicken Stock Powder or 1 Chicken Bouillon Cube
- 1 1/2 cups Water
- 1/4 cup Flour
- 1 1/2 Tbsps Butter
- 2 cups Milk
- +/- 20g Grated Cheese (optional)



#### Instructions:

1. Drizzle a bit of **oil** in a large saucepan and let it heat up. Toss in **onions** and saute until softened.
2. On high heat, add **chicken** and stir until browned.
3. Add **potatoes, chicken stock powder/bouillon cube** and **water**. Bring to a boil and simmer.

**Variation:** Add an extra tsp of **chicken stock powder/bouillon cube** and an extra cup of

**water** for a more soupy consistency, good for dipping bread and adding rice.

4. In the meantime, peel and slice the **carrots** into triangular chunks. Add to saucepan and simmer. There should be just enough liquid to cook everything, not an excess (unless you're cooking the soupier variation).
5. In a separate pan prepare the **roux**:
  - a. Melt **butter** over low heat in a medium saucepan.
  - b. Add 1/4 cup of **milk** and the **flour**. Whisk until smooth, over low heat. Add the rest of the **milk** gradually, while whisking.
  - c. Continue stirring, increasing the heat until the mixture thickens and bubbles.
  - d. Add **cheese** if desired.
6. Check that the **potatoes** in the simmering pot are cooked thoroughly.
7. Add the **milk roux** to the stew.
8. Add **broccoli**, and bring to a gentle boil once more.
9. Taste and season with **salt and pepper**.
10. Serve with bread or a bowl of rice <3 Enjoy!

Base Recipe Courtesy of <http://www.littlejapanmama.com/>

**Personal notes:** After making this recipe for the first time, I think personally, I'd make a soupier version with the vegetables cut smaller next time. Waiting for the potatoes to cook takes a while, so I'd recommend cutting them even smaller than what the recipe calls for. However, if you like chunky, hearty stew, the original recipe is excellent. Just be prepared to be more patient.

So there you have it! School lunch that's actually quite delicious.

Have a good March ;)

*\*mandy\**



**F**inally the winter months have begun to thaw and the first hints of spring are in the air, what bliss. For Japan, it means that the peak of the seasonal calendar is soon at hand. That's right: It's cherry blossom season and that means hanami parties. Between mid-March and early May, sakura trees bloom throughout Japan, covering the country in a canopy of pretty pink blossoms and making everything feel like the opening credits of an anime in the process. They remain, without a doubt, one of the quintessential experiences on offer here in Japan and definitely an item on any traveler's bucket list.



So how exactly does one cherry blossom? The hanami or blossom viewing party (花見, literally "flower viewing") has been around nearly as long as Japanese culture itself, with the practice first being mentioned by the Nara royals back in the early 700s. The premise is simple: simply gather a group of friends, find a nice patch of ground then sit on it and look at the flowers while you eat and drink to your heart's content while listening to music and catching up on the latest gossip. All in all pretty straight forward, but this then brings us to the tricky bit: hanami hits in a BIG way in Japan, for the week or so that the blossoms last and competition is fierce.



Staking out the perfect hanami spot is by no means a task for the faint-hearted. Once the perfect balance of branches to balmy sky has been scouted and the tarps are down, it's time to viciously guard your patch from interlopers until the rest of your gang arrive. Leave no tarp left unattended, lest it be coveted by roaming pensioners and always move in packs. Additionally, be sure to come well stocked with snacks and drinks as local combinis can be a long walk and often running low on popular purchases. There are of course the typical festival style stall foods on offer but they tend to be pricey and limited in variety.

Now finally the all-important question: where

to have your hanami? Throughout Hyogo, there is a veritable cornucopia of options so why not venture to multiple locations if you can? The average local park will no doubt suffice as sakura trees are essentially everywhere. However, for a truly spectacular experience, any of the following locations are more than likely to meet your criteria.

- Takeda castle
- Pretty much anywhere on the main strip of Kinosaki
- Akashi Park
- Hokura and Gokoku shrines
- Sumamura Park
- Ako Misaki
- Suwayama Park
- Kannoji Temple
- Shukugawa Park
- Literally any temple in Arima
- And of course Himeji Castle



For those of you who are interested, there will be a formal Block 6 Osaka Castle Hanami and HAJET will be posting a Hanami event page with various locations that will be visited on particular days concluding with a large group event at Himeji Castle. Due to the fickle nature of the blossoms themselves the dates have yet to be decided and tentatively sit at somewhere between the end of March and the start of April. So grab your tarps and beers and join us in the gardens for a floral event you won't soon forget.



*Rachle Beaman*



**I**f you're anything like me (34 years old, six feet two inches, 96kg, orange birthmark above right eyelid) and you live in Japan and have a postbox, at least one hand, a functioning eye and a smattering of curiosity, then you've probably received in the past, and subsequently read, one of the myriad of high quality glossy foldout menus that advertise Japan's defining contribution to international cuisine— the "complicated pizza."

Boasting flavour combinations that would make a horse blush (if the horse were in fact not horse but human, and maybe specifically a human with a deep sense of lingering unease when faced with unfamiliar combinations of food that humans eat), the Japanese pizza aesthetic has rampaged, like a giant hotdog filled Godzilla across the country, leaving a trail of crisscross patterned mayonnaise and sweetcorn bits in its wake.

Boasting culinary delights such as the Mochi-Mentaiko pizza— What's that you say? Marinated cod-egg sacks and tasteless white goo that look like those little cubes you put in your toilet cistern that make the water go blue. At the same time? And with mayonnaise? And slivers of dried seaweed? And only ¥ 3,100 for a large? —PIZZA LA is the chief exponent of Japan's determination to remove any last remaining traces of authenticity, taste, heritage and value from one of the world's most popular foodstuffs.

Exploring their website is like entering a reverse Narnia, with friendly lions replaced with sausage-

rimmed bacon pizzas, and heartwarming journeys of self-discovery in fantastical wonderlands with corn cream soup. As an added bonus, you can actually choose between having tomato sauce or mayonnaise as the base for you pizza, thus being able to bypass entirely one of the main ingredients of the actual dish. Add to that the utterly bizarre monikers they have adopted for their proto-Frankenstein creations, "busters' quarter," anyone? And you have a culinary disaster that could make even the most apathetical thoroughbreds weep.



And I'm sure you'll agree, there's truly nothing more rewarding than turning on the lava lamp, giving the shag carpet the once over, then inviting a potential suitor over to your abode and springing a 12 inch cheese-rimmed busters' quarter on them while they're not looking. If, however, the idea of snow crab meat pizza with a liquid cheese rim doesn't so much float your boat as capsize it with a giant undercooked hotdog shaped iceberg, then perhaps you're more suited to a pizza restaurant where the cod eggs

have been replaced with basil, the mayonnaise with marinara sauce and the pizzas cooked in a wood firing oven rather than in the bowels of Beelzebub himself.



Situated in the town of Gunge in the heart of Sasayama, "Pizza Gunge" is the brainchild of local Shiro, who took over the restaurant when it was serving Indian food and decided to use the wood firing oven to make pizzas. His marinara sauce is truly amazing: sweet and orange with a nice thick consistency rather than the deep red, watery, tart flavoured stuff you get elsewhere, and he keeps his pizza toppings pretty simple, using cheeses made in Sasayama and imported olive oil and tomatoes from Italy. I first met Shiro about two years ago when I started going out to Sasayama to volunteer at a local pottery studio and almost always pay a visit when I'm out there. The surroundings are pretty innocuous, just off a main road next to some rice fields, but if you're in the area and want to eat pizzas that A: don't have pre moulded bases in the shape of little cups that subsequently have liquid cheese poured in, B: don't want to spend over ¥ 3,000 to eat said cups C: are not mad, then it's well worth a visit.

As an added bonus, Shiro makes bread which is equally as good, and if you want some for free with your pizza just say: "I read Scott's article" and he'll give you a small loaf when you make an order. If you don't want the bread but are a big fan of quizzical looks and awkward silences simply stare blankly ahead and say: "Horses don't like complicated pizzas," scratch your nose with your left hand three times, your right ear with you left elbow once, then make a hasty retreat, arms flailing by your sides like miniature windmills.

Gunge pizza, 852, Gunge, Sasayama, Hyogo, 669-2341.

To get there, take the JR line from Sanda to Sasayamaguchi station. Take the west exit to get to the bus terminal and get on a bus headed for downtown. Get off at Nishi-Machi.



*Scott Patterson*



Since I came to Japan, I've had people back home ask me "How are you finding it?" and I reply "Amazing! I'm earning the most money I have in my life." This is meant to be a slight bit of tongue-in-cheek bathos but there is some truth to it— part of the reason I like Japan is I have disposable income. After all, money makes the world go round.

So what do you do when the world stops turning? Due to reasons I won't go into— they'd be tedious and honestly I'm not security savvy enough to be entirely certain that someone couldn't use them to break into my account— I found myself without money for a few weeks.

Well, no, that's an exaggeration— I couldn't take any money out of my account. I had the cash that was already in my wallet (not nearly as much as I'd like) and what I could borrow from my friends (much, much more than I'd like— I play by Polonius rules when it comes to loans). This was enough to go to work and live until I got my mojo back, as it were, but it did make me feel very vulnerable.

There were certain obstacles to me reclaiming my economic pride: for one thing, banks and government offices are only open during school hours. This, I humbly submit, is bullshit. We hear about Japanese workers being bent, Cratchett-like, over their desks long into the night and the resulting effect on the national psyche and family dynamics and rikki tikki tavi and yet we can't get the services we require at any time other than when we ourselves are working? Whatever. A

judicious application of nenkyuu resolved this— and who wouldn't want to spend their precious free time sitting in the lime green paradise of sunny SMBC?

Another hurdle to overcome was the maddening, herculean swarm of bureaucracy constantly attempting to separate me from my money like Dorothy from her misbegotten shoes. Whenever I thought I'd filled in the last form or submitted the final report or cleared the last hoop, a new one sprung up like a challenger in Smash Bros. At one point, it turned out that my hanko had been upside down, at another it seemed that my hanko had failed to be upside down, because apparently that's what was necessary for that form. I kid you not. It was exhausting and exasperating and degrading and more than once I thought that they were just adding in extra jigs to dance because I was a foreigner. Certainly, I heard "gaijin" being murmured more than once.

But, of course, the bigger problem was that I simply don't speak Japanese. I couldn't describe my problem. I couldn't communicate what I already knew and how they could remedy my situation. More than once after I had tried to explain that my card wasn't working a teller pointed me to the ATM (which were often in the very same room), thinking my problem was that I had some kind of machinological myopia and I was, in fact, unable to see any machine more complex than a pencil sharpener.

I would finally manage, mainly through pantomime, to communicate that I had already tried this and they would furrow their brow and take my card and do various bankimonious things and then return, hand back my card, and splurge some Japanese at me. This, you will be shocked to learn, was not really progress.

I should say that of course I don't blame them here— I am the one who moved to a country of

which I emphatically do not speak the language. I should not and do not expect its denizens to kowtow to my ignorance. But I still felt very alone, holding my impotent card and being kindly ushered out of the bank, because, as far as they were concerned, they'd done all they could.

As you might have guessed from the past tense, I've now resolved this issue and am gladly spendthrift all over the shop, but it's left a sour taste in my mouth. The language barrier was always going to be a problem, but the casually obstructive opening hours and deliberately obstructive paper-pushing made me question how established my life in Japan is. I had thought myself king of an admittedly small castle, but now I realised that that castle was made of cards and the table its built on has a wobbly leg and that I can't ask anyone to prop it up because I don't speak the same language as them.

For a few days, I got very, very angry at the whole situation and it made me just want to up and leave (don't know how I planned to do this with no money— pedalo, maybe?), because I felt like The Man was against me. Now, The Man is back on my side, he's signing my payslips even, and everything's dandy, but I've learnt to not take things for granted. Especially not money. Let it know how much it means to you. Stroke it. Sing to it. Let it sleep in your bed every once in a while, while you take the floor. After all, you never know when it might up and leave you.

Rory Kelly





**@**n January the 31st (or 31th, as many of my students would have it), the Hyogo Book Club met to discuss David Mitchell's *Slade House*. It was published on October 27th, 2015, mere days after the 12th book club meeting (for which we read Natsuo Kirino's *Real World*) and of some significance to the novella's plot.



Set in the same universe as Mitchell's best-selling novel *The Bone Clocks* (though perhaps all of his books are in the [same universe](#)), the aforementioned novella is an eerie tale of twins prepared to do anything to stay together, including the abduction of those who wander onto their residence. I hadn't read *The Bone Clocks* until after finishing *Slade House*, and I think I'd recommend the same to those who've read neither. *Slade House* is bite-sized (perfect for a lazy afternoon at school for the ambitious and voracious reader) and I found the last chapter leaving me wanting more information on one of the characters introduced. *The Bone Clocks* happily filled that yearning and was an altogether heartier and more satisfying morsel than its dainty companion.

Fortunately for all of us (especially those of us leaving this summer), Book Club is not like Hotel California or Slade House: we can come and go as we please. Last-minute cancellers beware: should a future meeting have too many people and we find ourselves in an unaccommodating restaurant, you're first on the chopping block. Those who met at Tits Park were privy to the skull-and-crossbones drawings added to the members list. Following this merry jig, we sauntered over to Cafe Ovest.



Once there, we settled into our seats before wrecking the place with a half-considered notion of putting our tables together. This resulted in a T table, which was pretty overwhelming when everyone was talking at once. Also overwhelming was the presence of 15 foreigners who, at best, had a chaotic ordering system (or lack thereof). Despite this, the waiters managed awkward neutral expressions and brought out everything eventually (even the drinks!). The food itself was pretty middling, with oily pasta and what I'm told was a moist strawberry cake. Other than desserts, though, there are few vegetarian or vegan options for those of you who swing that way.



Those of the club who finished *Slade House* had generally favorable things to say about it, and it received an average of 3.9 stars out of 5. The tone is creepy and draws you into itself, while the characters are interesting, though at least one was incredibly dislikable. The two criticisms most of us had were the overarching predictability of the plot and the clumsy world building in the fourth chapter. Other than that, it is enjoyable (and won't take away too much of your time).

On April 17th, we'll be [meeting](#) at an undisclosed location to discuss *Burial Rites* by Hannah Kent. Get in on this murder tale.



*Set against Iceland's stark landscape, Hannah Kent brings to vivid life the story of Agnes, who, charged with the brutal murder of her former master, is sent to an isolated farm to await execution.*

*Horried at the prospect of housing a convicted murderer, the family at first avoids Agnes. Only Tóti, a priest Agnes has mysteriously chosen to be her spiritual guardian, seeks to understand her. But as Agnes's death looms, the farmer's wife and their daughters learn there is another side to the sensational story they've heard.*

*Riveting and rich with lyricism, BURIAL RITES evokes a dramatic existence in a distant time and place, and asks the question: How can one woman hope to endure when her life depends upon the stories told by others?*

(from [Amazon](#))

*Brittany Teodorski*





As many fellow nerds may know, the Snow Troupe of the all-female theater troupe of Hyogo has been performing a musical version of the manga Rurouni Kenshin. The aforementioned is the story about a samurai with a bloody past, wandering during the first several years of the Meiji Era to atone for his many slaughters. It has been adapted many times over in several forms, and most have been well-received. Based on my own opinion, the play should be as well.



Photo courtesy of Mandy Wong.

Those who have read the manga would probably have the most enjoyment (and the fewest “spoilers,” if there is such a thing for something a story completed over 15 years ago). Watchers of the anime up through episode 28 or so will be familiar with all of the major characters (excepting the added one; we’ll get to him in due time), but some of Kenshin’s backstory will be novel. I can’t say much about how it compares to the live action films or OVAs, having never

watched them.

Within the play, backstory doesn’t remain much of a mystery. Kenshin is first introduced in his heyday as Hitokiri Battousai (or, in English translations, Battousai the Manslayer). Megumi is similarly initially shown concocting the “spider



Photo courtesy of Takarazuka Revue.

opium” that figures heavily into the play’s plot, as well as Saitou’s role (besides swaggering around looking tough). Most character information is doled out upfront. Gone is the shifting perspective audiences may have from first experiencing the manga or anime, learning more as the series pushes on.

There were also several flashbacks employed, almost exclusively concerning Hitokiri Battousai and Sozaburo Kano, the added character. These were done spectacularly, especially with Kano’s reintroduction as a Francophilic business man, to show the audience what the characters were remembering, considering, or struggling with. The flashback characters were in the spotlight while the rest of the stage was dimmed, which was visually very appealing.

While I didn’t appreciate the (arguably) primary

reason Kano was added into the story, I felt his past with Kenshin was done effectively. His *raison d’être* (again, arguably) was to provide romantic tension between Kenshin and Kaoru, the main female character. After drugging both, he begins to start groping Kaoru, and after Kenshin’s interruption, creeps on him as well. This change, along with others, also took away a lot of Kaoru’s bite, making her much less of a badass than her manga and anime counterparts. Sadly (judging from my enormous sample size of two), boring and meek female characters seems to be a staple of the Takarazuka Revue.

Happily, many of the best staples of Rurouni Kenshin made it into the stage production. Seina Sagiri’s 「おろ」s were flawless. Sanosuke’s absurdly-sized sword makes a brief appearance. Yahiko’s actress was hilarious to watch in the background, and her voice was perfect. I’m offended on her behalf that her photo wasn’t used in any of the promotional materials (or in the lobby). The gang visits 赤べこ for some beef nabe, complete with one of the more ridiculous song and dances I’ve seen. The prize for most ridiculous, however, goes to Takeda’s gatling gun song. It gave just the right mix of insanity and hilarity to the character, allowing Kano to serve as the primary antagonist.

In general, the music was very revue-esque. The pit was on-point the entire time, and their timing for sound effects during the fight scenes was



incredible. I particularly enjoyed the bassoon and amped violin. The sweet, sweet synthesizer was also fun. As always, the performance concluded with a revue section, full of a number of absurd costumes. You can really tell who is top-billed based on how many feathers they’re wearing. Since Rurouni Kenshin occupied a large part of the second half, this was shortened, which I won’t really lose any sleep over.



Photo courtesy of Takarazuka Revue.

Should you want to see the play, you have a couple options. If you have 年休 and no classes, there are still advanced tickets being sold on the [foreigners’ website](#). At the time of writing, shows are available at 11 AM on the 3rd, 8th, and 10th, at 3 PM on the 10th, and at 1 PM on the 11th. Otherwise, you can go to the theater early in the morning to try to buy last-minute (usually those for standing at the back) tickets. There should be around 40 or so for each performance. This should work both for the rest of its run in Takarazuka and when it moves to Tokyo from April 1st until May 8th. It could be a fun Golden Week trip! For those unable to make it, [here’s](#) a video from the Takarazuka website.

*Brittany Teodorski*



A bay city with a nearby volcano, Kagoshima is a beautiful and rather unique Japanese city. The volcano, Sakurajima, is still active and thus erupts rather frequently. 1914 was perhaps its largest recorded eruption and covered the city in ash, including a torii on the volcano's island. Its remarkable landscapes make Kagoshima City a destination well worth visiting.

#### Getting There and Around



Skymark is probably your best bet if you want to leave Friday evening. Their flight departs at 17:30 from Kobe Airport compared to Peach's 19:00 departure from KIX. The extra hour it takes to get to KIX negates most of the hour-and-a-half time difference between the two, and it's significantly more expensive to get to and from KIX than Kobe Airport. Skymark also has a 19:30 return flight Sunday night, which I found very convenient.

Once in Kagoshima, there are ferries and flat fare trams that can get you to most of the interesting places around the city. Definitely get the 1- or 2-day Welcome Cute pass for unlimited rides on

these forms of transportation, as well as a couple discounts on attractions. These include the Magma Onsen on Sakurajima and the Fairy Tale Museum. Passes can be purchased near Kagoshima Chou Station, Tenmonkan, and the ferry terminals between Kagoshima and Sakurajima.

#### Where to Stay

Green Guesthouse is fairly conveniently located about a ten minute walk from Tenmonkan, Kagoshima's liveliest neighborhood. You have to ask to use the lockers, but then you get to pick your own combination. The staff and the price were both nice.



#### What to Do

Kagoshima's most iconic landmark is easily Sakurajima. When I visited, it hadn't erupted for several months. This worried the residents. Three weeks later, mere hours after my second year students left following the conclusion of their class trip, lava spewed forth and was joined by lightning, leading to some very spectacular views. When not blowing its top off, there are many things to do on

the island.

For a rather packed, though very doable schedule, first take the bus out to Kurokami, a torii gate that's been buried in ash. Keep in mind that the driver will probably think you're confused and yell at you that it's the wrong bus. You have to transfer once to get out there, and there's not a whole lot else, but it is interesting and there's an entertaining sign nearby. After your return trip, board the local (correct) sightseeing bus. It stops at several viewpoints from which you can observe Sakurajima and Kagoshima. The slight pressure of taking good enough pictures in the (sometimes extremely short) allotted time makes it seem like a game, which I took great joy in. Back near the ferry terminal, venture out to the Magma Onsen and soak to your heart's content. The magma heated bath was too much for my fragile skin, however, so beware.

A manageable walk and hike from the city hall tram stop (even for me and my bum knee) is Shiroyama. If you trust your luck and old Japanese ladies enough, you may be offered a ride up by one parked by the side of the road. We are cautious folk, so we awkwardly just kept walking toward our unexpected incline. From the top, you can look out over the city with the volcano offering an attractive backdrop, on one condition: if the weather is relatively clear and sunny. A Japanese woman (potentially the same as your ride-offerer) may approach you and teach you about some of the city's history, gift you with origami and "Kagoshima's famous food" (but only pictured on a bag of ash), and try to take you home

with her for tea.

I didn't get the chance to visit any of them, but Kagoshima is home to more than its fair share of museums. You can get slight discounts at several of these with the Welcome Cute pass. The Kagoshima City Museum of Art is highly regarded on the interwebz, though I was personally more intrigued by the "Marchen" [Fairy Tale Museum](#). This is especially true now that they have a special cat exhibition until July.



#### Last Minute Points

- Kagoshima is famous for its しゃぶしゃぶ, but we instead opted to eat at the pizzeria, L'Oro di Napoli, with a wood-fire oven imported from Italy. Their business cards are ingenious and we were surprised we'd never seen any similar to it before.
- On Tenmonkan, there is a vending machine of crepes. Avoid them if you dislike whipped cream.
- Senganen was on my list and is heralded as a must-see. Don't make my same mistake of running out of time.

Go, drink, be merry. One weekend might not be enough time to see everything you want, but it is rather economical. I, myself, would love to get back out there once again.

*Brittany Teodorski*



Hello fellow JETs, this is Gina reporting to you for duty. I'm a JET Alumnus who was stationed on beautiful Okinawa from 2012-2015. Some of you may believe I sold my soul for my awesome placement, but it was actually third on my list! Being based in Okinawa, I had an experience completely different from mainland JETs. Everything was different down to the native *Uchinaguchi* (Okinawa's indigenous language) and dark pink cherry blossoms that bloomed in January. These experiences make my memories really happy, especially ones pertaining to learning *sanshin* (the Okinawan snake skin banjo) and going to Orion Beer and *Eisa* Festivals. As I write, I can still smell the 500 yen draft Orion in my cup, hear the *Eisa* calls, and feel the beating *taiko* drums. The echo of *Shimanchu no Takara* by Begin is alive in my memory as I recall laughing, eating *yakisoba*, and waiting for fireworks with my friends. I can remember wearing my beautiful purple *yukata*, my hair styled with a traditional handmade glass piece from Kyoto and a flower comb. I loved the festivals and the Japanese were so kind as they whispered, "*bijin*" (beautiful woman). When they see a beautiful foreigner in their traditional wear, I can't tell you how many people will compliment, try to talk to you, and go out of their way to be nice to you. Appreciating and showing appreciation for your host country's culture will get you far.

Bragging rights for Okinawa definitely pertain to the awesome beaches on the outer islands and the main island. From my apartment, during the spring and autumn months I would leave

the windows open and smell the salty sea breeze bringing fresh air into my apartment. After living on Okinawa, all oceans of the world will be ruined for you after experiencing clear sapphire and emerald waters. I especially loved watching the sunsets from the beach and witnessing the sun set the ocean on fire with orange and red. Those are images I can never forget.



The most valuable lessons we take away from our time in Japan is discovering who we are. We may pick up a new hobby, learn Japanese, or marry a local. I was fresh out of college when I went to Japan and had never been abroad to Asia. It was my first time in the Land of the Rising Sun and a dream come true. Ever since I was 12 years old, I dreamed about living and experiencing



Japan. When I finally caught my dream, I lived it happily and without many worries. In your early twenties, you're just determining who you are. You start to realize you don't know much about the world and discover what your host country thinks about the world you

left. I learned I can take a lot more than I thought I could—when all my close friends left, I learned to enjoy my alone time, deal with some blatant racism, and push myself to be a better person despite the odds.

While on JET, don't be a potato, sit at your computer desk and Facebook all day. I had a lot of free time and I know many JETs who do. Use that time to be productive. Study Japanese, start a blog, read an interesting book, or join a club at your school. Being overseas is a chance to start fresh. You're no longer the person you were and you actually have the ability to craft yourself into the person you want to be. It's a miraculous thing because you can make Japanese and expat friends to further that goal.

The best thing you can do while living in Japan is explore the country. You're there and traveling within the country is pretty cheap. There're low cost airlines like Peach, Vanilla, and Jetstar that have great rates. Believe it or not, but ANA also has some great bargains sometimes. While I lived in Japan, I traveled to many of the outer islands

of Okinawa including Aka, Geruma, Miyako, Ishigaki, Tokashiki and Zamami. On mainland, I was able to visit Fukuoka, Kyoto, Nara, Osaka, Sapporo, and Tokyo. My only regret while living in Japan was not making it to Aomori prefecture for the giant paper lantern festival every summer or visiting Himeji Castle, the poster site for Japan.

At the end of my three years, I chose to move on to another country and seek a new adventure there. I now live in Korea, in a small city just outside Seoul. I teach English at a high level middle school to a bunch of rowdy kids and it's pretty great. I'm still traveling, adventuring and discovering Asia. If you'd like to contact me or learn more about Japan and Korea check out my [blog](#) and [YouTube channel](#).

Gina Panozzo





**I** love you.”

Colin didn’t blink or put down his cup; he took a sip of tea and continued staring at his computer screen. I got the distinct feeling this had happened to him before.

He clicked on something and I saw his eyes start to move as he read. He was infuriatingly calm. It was kind of hot.

I wasn’t sure whether to repeat myself. I knew what he was doing, but I didn’t want to play into his hands by falling for it. I let the long seconds tick by (I remember he had some kind of annoying, very loud clock— I’m tempted to say it was one of those creepy Felix the Cat ones with the eyes, but that doesn’t seem like his style).

Colin continued reading as though I wasn’t there. Even if I hadn’t just admitted that I loved him, I would have considered this kind of rude.

“Colin?” I tried again.

“Yeah?” He turned to look at me as though I’d just entered the room.

“Did you hear what I said?” I knew he had and he knew I knew and I knew he knew I knew and he knew ad nauseum. But what could I do? He had all the power.

He nodded and turned back to his computer screen. I don’t think I’ve ever hated anyone

quite as much as I did in that moment. I wasn’t expecting him to reciprocate (well, part of me was— the part that unironically likes Twilight; the part I don’t talk about) but I was hoping to at least fluster him a bit. But I knew, in that moment, that he’d already guessed long before this conversation. I must have given myself away at some point: I guess I wasn’t as good an actor as I thought.

We’d met in the theatre. I don’t remember the exact first meeting: in theatrical endeavour, you tend to meet people in big groups, either as the cast of a show you’re in or else at some tedious networking event. I wasn’t immediately attracted to him but then I didn’t actually know I was gay when I met him (I think these days he might tell people that he was the one who “unlocked my closet,” so to speak: he fucking wishes). We probably shook hands (like I said, I don’t remember the actual first meeting) and made small talk. I probably thought he was a pretentious a-hole, which is a very common opinion when one first meets Colin, and he probably thought I was a stuck-up, whiny shit because I was.

Anyway, the first conversation I remember actually having with him is when we were both sat in theatre. This must have been after I met Duncan, because I know that I was feeling extremely uncertain about my sexuality at that point. I was watching a dress rehearsal for something— I think I was meant to be helping with the set, the keywords being “meant to”— when Colin entered and, against habit, sat down next to me. I don’t remember if I actually squirmed or not— I know I was uncomfortable around other

men at that point, but I like to think that I hid it well. But then, I also liked to think that I hid my feelings for Colin well and we’ve all seen how that turned out.

So he sat down next to me— I remember now that it was his show, or at least he’d written it, which meant that he was probably actually there in the hopes that I would offer observations on the script like “It’s brilliant” and “I wouldn’t change a word.” Given that I was a stuck-up, whiny shit, I doubt I obliged.

The show had a military theme, I think, so we somehow got onto the topic of “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell.” Looking back, I think Colin might have guessed what I was going through at the time and deliberately picked this subject to provoke me. No, I’m vilifying him; he wasn’t a cruel man. We got on to the topic, that’s all that I can say for sure.

“Oh yeah, I’m not allowed to go to war,” Colin said.

He didn’t realise (I hope) how much this off-hand comment sent my world crashing down around my ears. If someone like Colin could be gay, then someone like me could be gay (I do realise now, of course, that anyone can be gay but at the time I was going through some stuff). We were cut from the same cloth, he and I. Well, I think so. I think he thinks he’s better than me. Fuck him.

I believe I excused myself from watching the rest of the play (I’m tempted here to say that it was dreadful anyway, because I’m still bitter, but that wouldn’t be fair— it was entirely unmemorable) and walked outside where I continued the

conversation in my imagination. I believe it went something like this:

**COLIN:**

Oh yeah, I’m not allowed to go to war.

**ME:**

Why’s that?

**COLIN:**

Because of my huge, throbbing erection for you.

Dialogue was never my strong suit. I tried to put him out of my mind, but that just made me think about Duncan and, well, I’m not writing about that so we’ll skip ahead some.

The next time I met Colin alone I was out and very, very proud. Like, too proud. I don’t want to start a whole thing but there’s being comfortable with your sexual identity and then there’s being obnoxious about it and I sadly fell into the latter category.

I don’t doubt that Colin had heard about my transformation, which is one of the many reasons I find his behaviour in this section of the story frankly odd. He was a couple of years older (at the time, he seemed impossibly worldly) and presumably had gone through a similar phase himself and maybe he just wanted to make himself feel smug by looking back at how he used to be.

Anyway, I was walking through the streets at night— I didn’t drink at the time, so I have no idea what I was doing (probably moping in some way.) But I ran into Colin and he wasn’t doing anything and I wasn’t doing anything, so I invited him back to mine for tea and— here’s the weird part—



he accepted. To this day, I don't know what he was expecting to get out of this, except a terrible cup of tea. I mean, I know he liked attention (he was in the theatre, after all) but even at my best I don't think he and I got along, and at that time I think I was genuinely insufferable to even my closest friends.

I probably regaled to him my entire sexual saga (and not the good kind of sexual saga, either) and I no doubt name-dropped Duncan as the cause of it all (Duncan, if you're reading this, I'm so, so sorry— you didn't deserve to be blamed for that version of me). He then casually mentioned that he'd never found Duncan attractive and I suddenly saw him in a whole new light. This casual dismissal of the object of my obsession cast him as some kind of arbiter in my mind of what was and wasn't worth pursuing. After all, he'd been out longer than I had, so he surely had better taste than me. So now, in my mind, he wielded power. And that made him sexy.

I should note that all of this was happening while we were sitting next to each other on an incredibly tiny sofa. I didn't have any furniture at my place back then, apart from this one incredibly uncomfortable and boxy sofa that had come with the place. I think I thought this made me seem minimalist and unmaterialistic and a bunch of other aspirational adjectives. God, I was sickening.

Anyway, Colin left, unaware— or so I thought— of the passion he had ignited inside of me.

So that moment led to me sitting awkwardly in his flat (“awkwardly”: at least he had more than one piece of furniture, jackass). Over the next

few months, I conspired to meet him as often as possible. The word “conspired” suggests some kind of malicious plot on my part— I didn't stalk him or anything, I just made sure we'd talk to each other as much as possible. For example, I wouldn't leave a party I knew he was going to attend (thank you, Facebook) until he got there and, when he did, I'd make sure we talked for at least a little bit, just the two of us. Now that I think about it, this is probably how he realised I was crushing on him.

After one such party it was about one in the morning and the host politely kicked us out. Someone said they weren't ready to go to bed yet and people began discussing about what to do next and where we could go. I wasn't interested, I'd gotten what I came for (guess who), until Colin's house was thrown into the mix as a possible suggestion. Suddenly, I was game. So we all started to head towards his flat but it was a bit of a walk and, as we travelled, more and more people lost their vim and headed out (I remember that they mostly departed in couples, because I was incredibly aware of things like that at the time) until it was just me and Colin, walking in near-silence.

If I could only travel back in time once, I would head back to that moment, wait in some alley and then drag myself in when we passed. I would slap myself a couple of times and snatch the ridiculous hat I wore off the top of my head before yelling “Go home, you idiot” as I faded into nothingness from having altered the time stream.

Everyone else had left. It was just me.

I think I actually took his not suggesting I call it a

night too as some kind of suggestion of affection, as opposed to the worst mix of politeness and bewilderment. I can see it all in my head now— the way he inserted the key in the door, how we climbed the stairs which, like all such staircases in big cities, were full of rubbish bags. We stood outside his door and I commented on his doormat which humorously read “Oh, not you again!”

I think I actually said “lol.”

Out loud.

In my head, I am screaming at myself to just go to bed, but I can't alter events and I've already started this story so I might as well finish it. We went into his flat and he offered me a drink and I just asked for water, thanks, because I wanted to seem unfussy and oh God, get out of there, you moron, please. He got me water and I asked him— not for the first time that evening, I assure you— if he had seen Pan's Labyrinth. He said no, having failed to watch it in the half-hour since last I inquired and I implored him to because “It's so good— it doesn't even matter that it's in Spanish.” (Kill me now.)

Anyway, after that, the conversation died down and I still didn't go home and Colin booted up his computer— maybe he was gonna show me something cool or maybe he just didn't want having me there to interrupt his plans for the evening and the glass in my hand began to tremble. The feelings inside of me began to bubble over and fill up my mouth— I had to say something or I would choke on them. I can still picture him now, bathed in the light of the Windows start-up screen, and I still feel an incredible pull towards him. So I told him.

And that's where we started this story. His non-reaction. I left shortly after— he didn't ask me to, I just developed some modicum of self-awareness. I imagine I spent the rest of the evening complaining on Facebook to my friend in America that it was so unfair and that he was an asshole.

He wasn't. And it wasn't unfair. I see that now. He wasn't rude, he wasn't malicious, he never told anyone what I did. He didn't even kick me out; he just let the natural awkwardness of what I'd done carry me out of his flat like a bin bag on a river. He remained very cordial throughout the rest of our acquaintanceship. I did not.

Once, I remember, he was up for a part in a show in which I had some middling amount of influence and I blocked him getting in, saying I'd worked with him before and he was “impossible.” I'm sorry, Colin, I really am. I said before that I'm still bitter and, yes, there's a small part of me that will always hate you but it honestly is just a tiny fraction of my psyche and I know it's unreasonable. If we ever meet again, I promise I will show you all the courteousness that you did me (long overdue) and I will completely understand if you throw a drink in my face.

You taught me a lot about the world, Colin, though I can't imagine you meant to: how to casually drop into conversation that I'm gay, how to rig a Fresnel at four in the morning and, most importantly, when to just go home.

*Rory Kelly*



Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
	1 Mechanical Puppets Ex.	2 Mechanical Puppets Ex.	3	4	5	6
	Mt Rokko & Mt. Maya Winter Attractions					
	Kaiyodo Dinosaur Exhibition					
	Takarazuka Rurouni Kenshin					
	Todaiji Shunie (Nara)					
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
Symposium (register by 3/3)					Tamba Happiness Market	D-Prep (register by 3/10)
	Takarazuka Rurouni Kenshin					Omiachiman Sagicho Matsuri (Shiga)
	Todaiji Shunie (Nara)					
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
Takarazuka Rurouni Kenshin						DenDen Matsuri 2016
Todaiji Shunie (Nara)				Hatsuuma Festival		
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
						Kansai Highland Games
					Sakura Festival	
28	29	30	31	All month:	Ningyo Dolls Exhibition	
					Cat Exhibition (ends 3/27)	
					Harima Arts and Crafts Exhibition (starts 3/4)	
Sakura Festival						



