



5.15



.....inside.....

**Block 6 Kinosaki Car Rally**  
**The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank**  
**Travel: Naha**

# ht

## May Features

- 5 **The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank**
- 7 **Block 6 Kinosaki Car Rally**

- 2 **Hello! Message from the Editor**
- 3 **Hello! Message from the PR**
- 4 **Kicchiri Kitchen: Blanched Broccoli**
- 9 **Travel: Naha**
- 11 **Book Club: Cloud Atlas**
- 13 **Fistful of Fun: 5 Books for May**
- 15 **The Refuge: The Durants X**
- 17 **Prefecture Spotlight: Okayama**
- 19 **Calendar**

## Hyogo Times Staff

**Editor:** Sean Mulvihill  
**Online:** Dana Warren  
**Designer:** Erika Horwege  
**PR:** Erika Horwege  
**Cover:** Erika Horwege  
**Backpage:** Erika Horwege

**Contributors:** Rachel "Rackle" Beaman, Nicole Finch, Erika Horwege, Larisa Kile, Sean Mulvihill, Brittany Teodorski, Helen Yuan

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:

# hello!

After adjusting to new teachers, new students, and perhaps even new schools this past April, Golden Week came as a welcomed reward. Although a much busier time of year for the hotspots in Japan hopefully you found worthwhile activities to spend your four days off. This month's **Naha review** from Brittany couldn't have been better timed for my own Okinawa trip. While there, I was able to visit Shuri Castle, Okinawa's Peace Memorial, Seifa-Utaki, and Tokashiki Island to spend a relaxing day on the beach. Oddly enough, I also found myself at a concert where at the age of 26 I was one of the oldest people there - that is besides the parents sitting in the corner supporting their children on stage. That hardly mattered, however, due to the week's consumption of delicious taco rice and Okinawa's Orion beer.

Back at school, May should be a time when you begin to feel a lot more settled and comfortable in your position, especially for those April arrivals just joining us. In fact, comfortable is a perfect adjective to describe May. Surprisingly, the first term is often the easiest for the ALTs. Golden Week comes a few weeks after classes get started, then midterms begin a few weeks after that, often followed by a culture or sports festival, then finals starting in early June, and before you know it,

you're off on summer vacation. Again, it's a comfortable balance between work and play. More importantly, the weather is not unbearable or suffocatingly hot this month and as we get into the groove of teaching and lesson planning, we might seamlessly insert ourselves into other areas of the school. With the nice weather take the time to watch different club activities and find out when games, practice or regular ones, are being held. The beginning of May is a big time for tournaments for most sports and many third grade students will have their last games. If you're responsible for ESS, find activities you can do outside. Recently, I played Duck, Duck, Goose with my students and taught them how to throw and catch an American football. It doesn't take a lot of planning and the students get really into it.

As always, if you need something to do during your spare time, look through this month's issue of Hyogo Times. Rackle shares here experience participating in A-JET Block 6's first **Kinosaki Car Rally**, I delve into the new **Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank**, Larisa revisits her time at the last **HAJET Book Club**, and Nicole Finch gives us a taste of life inside **Okayama Prefecture**. Also find this month's **recommended books** and attractions, a **new recipe** from Helen, and the newest chapter of **The Durants**. Enjoy the comfort while it lasts, soon we'll be blanketed in heat and surrounded by the screams of cicadas. As a friend once said, "I always wanted to live this life. I always wanted to wear that ice. I always wanted a paradise. I always wanted a paradise."

Sean Mulvihill





hello!

# Message from the Prefectural Representative

Although Golden Week is over, there are still many chances for after-school adventures and weekend getaways this month. There are dozens of upcoming events to keep even the most active of ALTs busy - fill up your schedules and enjoy the gorgeous Spring weather before the infamous Hyogo rainy season hits!

It might be a clichéd proverb, but this year's (unusual) April showers certainly have brought the May flowers. If the vivid splashes of azaleas haven't filled your flower fix, head to Asago-shi's Shirai **Oomachi Fuji Park** (白井大町藤公園) to catch the end of the wisteria season, Sanda's **Youtakuji Temple** (永澤寺) for a carpet of phlox flowers, or to **Awaji** for one of the Spring flower exhibitions. If flowers aren't your thing, show off your trivia mastery at the **Tajima Pub Quiz** this weekend. Unfortunately, this year's Awaji Camping Trip is full, but you can avoid FOMO with a sunset cruise at the **AJET Block 6 Biwa Boat Ball**. Spend your post-ball recovery day browsing the handicrafts and food at the **Kamigamo Shrine market** in Kyoto.

Once the appeal of alcohol returns, toast to the weather at Osaka's **Oktoberfest** in Nagai Park from May 15th-31st, or venture farther out to Tottori prefecture's **Mt. Daisen Beer Festival**, held on June 13th and 14th. For something closer to home, take advantage of the **Tajimawaru premium tour bus** - unlimited Saturday/Sunday/holiday travel on Tajima-area buses for only 500円. Visit top Tajima attractions, including the Takeda Castle ruins, Izumi castle town, and Kinohaki Onsen.



Oomachi Fuji Koen - Asago



Youtakuji Phlox Field - Sanda

With so many opportunities for socializing, travel, and school involvement, I'm reminded of one of my favorite quotations, attributed to Neil Barringham: "the grass is greener where you water it." It is easy to stretch yourself thin with so much going on in the warmer months, so take care and prioritize what makes you healthy and happy.

Erika Horwege

kicchiri kitchen

# Broccoli & Japanese-style Peanut Dressing



"~ae" ( ~ 和え ) is a popular type of vegetable dish in Japan that consists of blanched vegetables with a slightly sweet and nutty savoury dressing. The most popular version of this dish is probably 白和え (shiroae) which is a tofu and sesame dressing, usually mixed with blanched spinach. Other common combinations include green beans with sesame, and broccoli with a peanut dressing.

I love this style of cooking as it's a nice middle ground between salads and stir-fried vegetables. As much as I like munching on raw veggie sticks and salads, sometimes I don't feel like they're filling enough, but in the warmer months a stir-fry can also feel too heavy. If you blanch at the idea of blanched vegetables (pun very much intended) this delicious dish may be just what you need to change your mind. Happy cooking!

## Ingredients

- >> 100g broccoli (about ½), cut into bit-sized pieces
- >> 1 Tbs. salt
- >> 4Tbsp. crunchy peanut butter
- >> 2-3Tbsp. milk or soy milk
- >> 2 tsp. sugar
- >> 1 tsp. soy sauce

- >> Serves 2 as a side dish
- >> Prep & cooking time: under 10 minutes

## Method

**One** Add the salt to a small saucepan of water and bring to the boil.

**Two** Rinse the broccoli and add to the saucepan. Blanch for about a minute (usually about when the water starts to bubble again).

**Three** Drain and run under cold water a couple of times to cool it down. Set aside to drain.

**Four** Add the peanut butter to a large bowl and mix well. Add the milk or soy milk, sugar and soy sauce. Mix well.

**Five** Add the broccoli and mix well.

Helen Yuan



# Augmenting Capital: the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank

It's been hard to miss the growing attention given to the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) over the past few months, but like so many things out there in the news related world, we may come to recognize the name without really having a clear idea of what it is or its purpose. Below are a few essential questions and answers to help provide a better understanding of this new financial body.

**What is the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank? Can you put it in layman's terms?**

The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), first proposed by the Chinese government, is a new regional institution whose purpose is to finance development and infrastructure projects in Asia. Need a new dam, highway, nuclear reactor? It'll help you finance it. In short if countries need money to fund projects whether in transportation or energy, they can go to the AIIB and ask for support.

**Aren't there already international institutions responsible for funding projects in developing nations?**

Yes, currently the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank are two organizations that currently seek to promote economic growth for each of its contributing members and other developing nations. The Asian Development Bank also already exists specifically to create positive economic outcomes in Asian countries. So why a new investment bank? It's largely due to the

perception that these institutions are essentially extensions of the United States' policy arm and don't give other nations a fair say in the use of funds. If you're a country like China who desires a larger role in regional and global affairs these existing institutions don't offer the opportunity to increase your influence. Creating your own developmental bank solves that problem.

**There's all this talk about it, is it even up and running yet?**

Currently, no. In October 2014 a signing ceremony in Beijing formally established the bank and a number of countries signed the Memorandum of Understanding and since then other countries have continued to apply for membership. As of now the AIIB and its participating members are in the process of finalizing the Articles of Agreements and it's estimated that it will be ready by the end of 2015.

**Participating members? Who is joining this new Chinese-led investment bank?**

21 countries were at the signing ceremony and became Prospective Founding Members (PFMs), after the ceremony 36 countries have been approved as PFMs and the AIIB has also received applications from countries

seeking ordinary membership. A full list of its members can be found at <http://aiibank.org/members.html>.

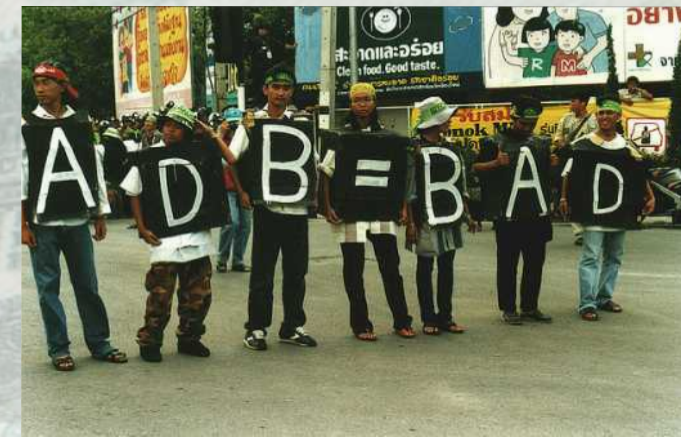
It might be easier to answer the question, who isn't joining or who hasn't issued a statement of commitment. The United States and Japan are the two that stand out.

The United States especially has criticized many of its European allies for joining and playing into China's hands. Those European nations have countered, arguing they'll have a better opportunity to influence China's leadership of the new investment bank as members,

rather than outsiders. Both the U.S. and Japan hold the largest influence over the current Asian Development Bank. In addition, institutions like the World Bank and IMF since the Cold War have been dominated by the U.S. Ironically enough, both the World Bank and IMF have welcomed and endorsed the AIIB as a positive step in supporting developing nations. It should also be noted that officials in the Chinese government have stated that both countries are welcome to apply and join the institution if they choose to.

With one more institution and more money to nations that need it, this sounds like a good thing. It is, right?

There will always be a debate between quantity and quality. Is one more financial institution a good thing? Potentially. It's no secret that similar organizations like the ones mentioned above, have largely failed to bring the promised growth and prosperity they often speak of and that many projects they currently fund can cause enormous environmental, cultural, and social disruption. Fears that the AIIB will not have high enough standards and safety measures have been one of the American government's biggest issues with the new organization.



However, it can't be denied that access to more money at a macro-level offers advantages to countries looking to boost economic growth. We'll have to wait and see whether it's done correctly or not. China's motives cannot be

overlooked either. Such an institution will lengthen its own policy arm and allow it to continue to compete for influence throughout the region. Of course, the question, is a larger regional and global role for China a good thing, is also up for debate with no clear cut answer.

Sean Mulvihill

Images:

- >> ADB=BAD by international rivers on Flickr commons
- >> AIIB courtesy of Wiki Commons





# Block 6's Kinosaki Car Rally Madness

On Saturday the 18th of April, thirty or so intrepid travelers and a handful of tenacious volunteers attempted to complete the first ever AJET Block 6 Car Rally. Months of careful planning and organization accumulated in one mammoth adventure all over Hyogo Prefecture.

Dear reader let it be known that your author is not, and nor will she ever be, a fan of the early morning, but for the sake of adventure she rose at 6:30am and made her way to Maiko Park where she donned her onesie - as that was Team Jaguar Puffs costume - and bumbled half-awake into her team's vehicle. The team then set off towards Himeji castle with a small detour to Mt. Rokko to retrieve a forgotten wallet.

Each team was given a list of tasks to complete ranging from simple - taking a picture of a team member filling up on gas, to the more difficult -

catching a fish with your hands. In addition there were several checkpoints littered across the countryside with tasks and clues for each new location - find the dinosaur, climb to the top of a pagoda and drink hot spring water to name a few. Each team took to the challenges with gusto, perhaps too much gusto.

You see despite the thoughtful and meticulous planning of the organizers they forgot to include one small factor - just how desperately each team wanted to cross off everything on our lists and the lengths and detours we would go to do it. As a result a leisurely well mapped eight stop drive through the countryside became a five stop race against the clock that may or may not have involved some very intense team building exercises in navigation and communication.

However fear not, for your intrepid travelers were made of sterner stuff with surprisingly competitive natures. We made our way from Himeji to Takeda to find a well hidden dinosaur to Yabu, sample a delicious milkshake to Mikata, explore a magnificent temple with a brief stop at a beach near Toyooka, and create an elaborate sandcastle that would later be destroyed in a variety of spectacular fashions before finally ending our trip in beautiful Kinosaki.

When the journey was finally over we made our way to a cabin in Yoka for the night, where we ate, drank and were merry - as well as very very tired. Despite the hopes for a wild night, in the end many of us retired for the night shortly after the sumptuous banquet prepared for us by the priceless volunteers. For those of us that did persevere into the early hours of the morning there was laughter, stories, and brilliant company.



Team Froth - Sarah Duncan



Team Sassy - Amy Grassow



Team Froth - Sarah Duncan



Team Jaguar Puffs



Team Sankura - Ashlie O'Neill



The trip was hellishly long, fraught with complications as is expected of a first time event but hands down it was one of the best weekends I have ever had. Early morning or not, I will be doing it again, and I think if you have the chance, you should too.

Rackle Beaman

Images courtesy of Riana Kaber and Rhian Lloyd, Team photos as credited



# Stamp Rallies: Not Just for Kids - Naha

The capital (actually the prefectural seat, but that's beside the point) of Okinawa has been an important center for the island from the time it was still the Ryukyu Kingdom. This kingdom had strong ties to both China and Japan until it was annexed by the latter in 1879. During World War II, Naha and its surrounding areas were the site of the Battle of Okinawa. At its conclusion, nearly one-fourth of the Okinawan citizens had perished and the American military first started creating bases. The intersection of Ryukyuan, Japanese, and American culture has created many unique foods and customs.



## Getting There and Around

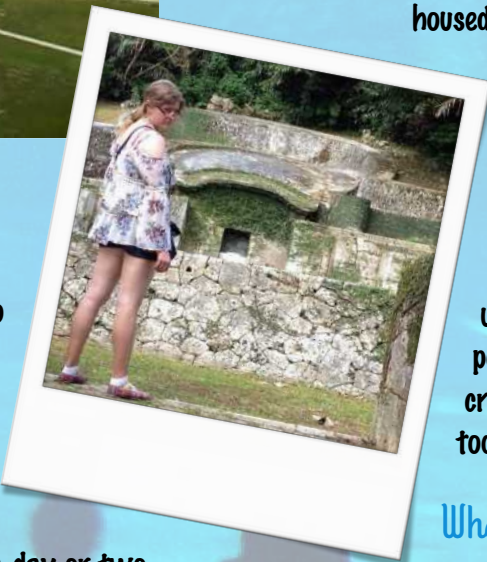
Peach offers reasonably priced flights to both Naha and Ishigaki. Thus, if you're looking to save some of your cash to instead buy some of the delicious foods Okinawa has to offer, I would definitely recommend using the low-cost airline. Naha has an easily navigable train line. You can buy one-day or two-day passes as well, which is quite convenient. However, its range is fairly limited. If you want to reach some of the farther away attractions, you'll need to either take a bus (another JET we ran into said it takes a long time, limiting what you can accomplish) or rent a car. We used the Times rental service and it was pretty easy and affordable.

## Where to Stay

Naha has many Toyoko Inns throughout the city. We stayed at one very close to Omoromachi Station, which you can easily walk to from Kokusai dori if you miss the last train. Toyoko Inns are all the same, so if you've stayed in one, you've stayed in them all.

## What to Eat

Oh, the food. There are many unique options in Okinawa, some of which are unappealing to a finicky eater such as myself, but many of which I was only too happy to stuff in my face. My favorites included taco rice, especially the insanely cheap and large portions served at King Taco, ひらやち (a thin Okinawan okonomiyaki), THE Okinawan omiyage ちんすこう, and pretty much everything from Donut Ball Heaven on Kokusai dori. Other restaurants we ventured to included Gajumaru, which is housed in a large tree, Sui Ryu, Nanbusoba, and Tacos Ya, all of which were pretty decent. Some of the options at these restaurants included goat sashimi, beef sushi, habushu (snake liquor), Okinawan soba, chanpuru (stir-fry), and umibudou (sea grapes). Blue Seal is a popular Okinawan chain of ice cream stores and hits the sweet tooth quite nicely.



## What to Do

Fairly close to Omoromachi Station is the Art and Prefectural Museum. The exhibits were a little small for the price, in my opinion, but they were still enjoyable. Kokusai dori is one of the main tourist attractions in Naha. It houses many restaurants and stores, such as a Pokemon Center. Nearby are also the Maikishi fish market and the

Tsuboya Pottery Museum. The museum includes an iPad audio tour, which was pretty neat.

Shuri jo is one of my favorite castles in the country. Its architecture is pretty interesting given its Ryukyuan roots, and there is also a stamp rally you can participate in. If you get more than 11 stamps, you can receive a sticker set! If you have good timing, a nice Japanese visitor may also give you ちんすこう. Fairly close to the castle grounds is Shikina-en. On the way, you'll encounter a stone path and a cemetery with a pink crypt. For reference, that's what I want. The garden is beautiful and there is a cute resident tabby. Farther along the train line is Sueyoshi forest, which is beautiful and has many paths to gallowant through. My favorite of the nature-heavy attractions is Fukushu-en. It is a celebration of the friendship between Naha and a Chinese sister city and is absolutely gorgeous. The local wildlife have also learned to stalk people in the hopes of being fed. The carp in particular will swim after you as you meander about. On top of that, it has free entry (at least for American citizens!!)

Farther afield are the Peace Park and the Churaumi Aquarium. The park has several interesting aspects. There



is a large Buddha with a rock collection underneath, a butterfly garden, an extremely well-done and informative museum about the Battle of Okinawa, an observation deck, and memorial towers from each prefecture. Churaumi is located in the Ocean Expo Park, so you have options if you decide to stay longer. There are dolphin, manatee, and sea turtle exhibits outside of the aquarium. Inside, your first stop is a tidal pool. Unshockingly, there isn't any soap provided once you've finished touching the seastars. I found all of the marine life quite fascinating and became (perhaps irrationally) excited by the sharks in particular. The scale between humans and whale sharks is incredible.

## Last Minute Points

- >> Bring sunscreen. Use it. Love it.
- >> Eat taco rice. All of it.
- >> The music scene is pretty active. Check out shows while you visit if you're so inclined.
- >> Many people are unhappy with the military's presence. Keep this in mind, especially if you are American.

Naha makes for a nice weekend getaway, even if you can't rent a car. Just be sure you actually use the sunscreen you pack instead of getting weird burn lines like I did.

Brittany Teodorski



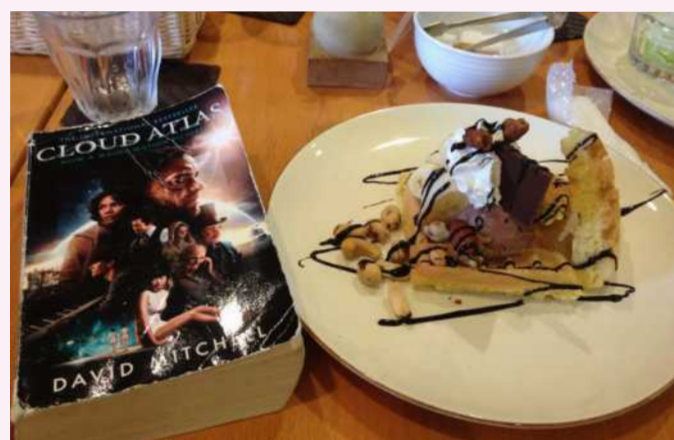
# HAJET Book Club 9: Cloud Atlas by David Mitchell

On Sunday, April 5, the HAJET Book Club met to discuss Cloud Atlas by David Mitchell. In hopes of enjoying the cherry blossoms, we met near Akashi Koen (Akashi JR station), rather than the usual Sannomiya/Motomachi area of Kobe. Alas, rain foiled our plans for hanami, so instead we found ourselves in a small café near the station: Café Fino. With many members still finishing their spring travels, our group was small and relaxed. The café was well lit and comfortable, with the standard café fare of parfaits, waffles, and sandwiches available.



After ordering and lamenting one last time about the weather, we began our discussion of Cloud Atlas. The novel,

made up of six separate but connecting stories, received similar reception, with an average rating of 3 out of 5 stars. We discussed our favorite characters and stories and for those who had seen the film, we were able to compare the plotlines.



As the afternoon progressed, we were blessed with a short respite from rain. Many seized the opportunity to walk and explore Akashi Koen. We enjoyed the cherry blossoms before returning to Sannomiya and heading our separate ways.

For next time, we will be discussing From the Fatherland with Love by Ryū Murakami (translated by Ralph McCarthy, 664 pages.) From the Fatherland with

Love imagines an alternative reality where Japan's economy has collapsed and is now facing invasion from the North Korean government. The story stars former-terrorist Ishihara and his crew and their fight and struggle to prevent the fall of Fukuoka. Ryū Murakami was awarded the prestigious Akutagawa Prize in 1976 for his first novel, and is known to for exploring both the connection between violence and technology and critiques of contemporary Japanese society.

If you are interested in attending, we will be meeting Sunday, June 14. Please refer to the [Facebook page](#) for event details. Contracts are soon ending and many JETs will be leaving Japan. Come join us for what may be the last HAJET Book Club for these folks so we can wish them well!



Larisa Kile

Photos by Sarah McGowan

## Book Club 10 -

From the Fatherland with Love - Ryu Murakami

Date: Sunday, June 14th

Time: 2:00-4:00 pm

Location: TBD



# Five Books to Read this Month

Find a perfect place outside during the great weather, grab a book, and start reading.

## Child 44 by Tom Rob Smith

It's not always tempting to read a novel before its film release, but when Tom Hardy plays the leading role it's another matter. Hardy, like so many of my favorites, skirts the film industry's edges seamlessly going between Hollywood blockbusters and low-key independent titles. His decision to do Child 44 should be reason enough to race toward this already National Bestseller before it hits theaters here in Japan. Set in Stalinist Russia, former MGB Agent Leo Demidov must investigate a series of child murders that ultimately lead to much darker systemic horrors. As the first part in a trilogy you'll have much more to look forward to in the near future.

## From the Fatherland with Love by Ryū Murakami

If you've been a consistent member of Hyogo AJET's

Book Club you know that Ryū Murakami's From the Fatherland with Love has been runner-up as the book to read time and time again. Finally though, this novel will have its time in the spotlight as it at last secured enough votes to be the topic of discussion for Hyogo AJET Book Club 10. Often known as "The Other Murakami," Ryū Murakami's novel is a fiction in which North Korea sees an opportunity during an economic collapse to invade Japan. As the Japanese government is powerless to stop the invasion, the country must rely on prior dissident Ishihara and his fellow disenchanted youth to resist the North Korean forces. If you'd like to join the discussion, join the Facebook group and come to the next meeting on Sunday, June 14.

## Go Set a Watchman by Harper Lee

Although surrounded by controversy there's no doubt a general excitement surrounds the release of Harper Lee's second novel. After her Pulitzer Prize winning To Kill a Mockingbird was published in 1960, Lee largely remained quiet, letting her single work echo powerfully for years.

However, fans of the original story (I can't see how you couldn't be) will be able to continue where To Kill a Mockingbird finished as Go Set a Watchman is a sequel. Scout Finch, now an adult, returns to Alabama to visit her father Atticus 20 years after the events of the original story, and, like most coming home sagas, Scout must face her past and successfully navigate her feelings as well as her father's.

## Message to Adolf, Part 1 & 11 by Osamu Tezuka

Many know that Takarazuka City is known for their spectacular revue, but it is also home to the Osamu Tezuka Manga Museum. Manga-enthusiasts will be well associated with the name Osamu Tezuka, if not you're probably familiar with his most famous work Astro Boy. However, the museum has recently debuted the manga series "Adolf ni Tsugu--Boku wa Senso no Kataribe ni Naritai" (Message to Adolf--I want to become a storyteller of wars) and will be viewable until June 29. If you find yourself unable to make your way to the exhibit,

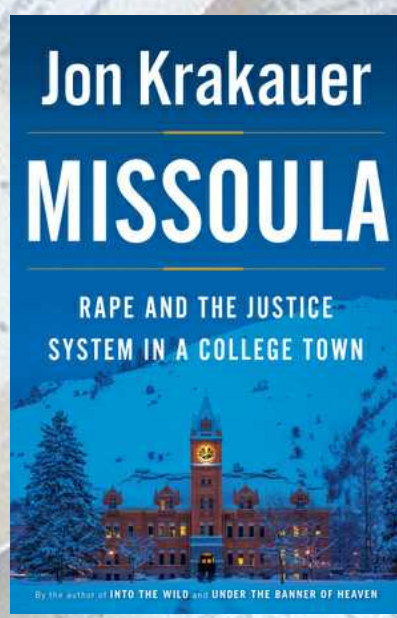
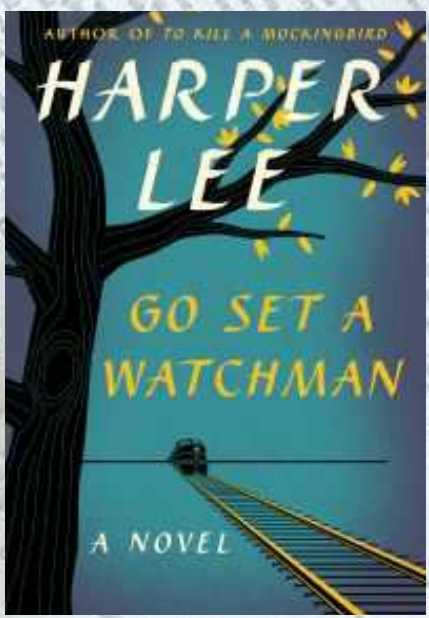
pick up the published copies and enjoy the series on your own time. Different from most of his other works, the series touches on peace during wartime and is unique given Japan's current struggle in regards to their own horrific role in the past.

Details: Ends June 29, ¥700, at Takarazuka City Tezuka Osamu Manga Museum

## Missoula by Jon Krakauer

One of the best and most controversial investigative reporters today and another one of my favorites, Jon Krakauer is probably best known for Into the Wild and Under the Banner of Heaven. His next book Missoula tackles the issue of campus rape, an issue fortunately gaining more and more attention over the past few months. As always, Krakauer puts a human face on a national problem and the heartbreaking failures that persist in the current system.

Sean Mulvihill





## The Durants

Miss something? This is the 10th installment of *The Durants*. Start from [the beginning](#) or catch up on [part 9](#) on the *Hyogo Times* [website](#).

X.

Katie's violent swearing ripped her traveling companions from their slumber. "Rakowsky's gone and cut himself a new one!" Frustration cut through her voice. "We can't infiltrate the guilds by ourselves, Orsin."

The large man rose gracefully and padded over to his comrade's corpse. The sword was still pinning it to the earth. He glanced at Bionca. She blanched and looked away quickly, bile rising in her throat. Orsin's large fist surrounded the hilt before he slowly extracted it. He thrust the blade into the girl's hands.

"We should move on. Mama's waiting." The group somberly packed up and followed Orsin.

Vaslara had the distinct feeling of having once been a bustling hub of activity. The town square was a grave to grandeur. What few people were in the streets waved to Orsin and Katie before disappearing upon catching sight of the strangers. They were led down twisting alleyways. Hopelessly lost without their guides, all but Bionca were relieved once they reached the Orsin residence. The son cleared his throat and called out while opening the door. "Mama, I'm back. We have visitors."

Stepping in was like being transported back to Hyra. Nostalgia and self-pity swirled with the guilt in Bionca's stomach. It was arid and adorned with swatches of cloth typically used for Hyran robes. A woman with deep, rich

crimson hair swayed into the hallway.

"Eddy, I'm so happy you're back. And you too, Katie." She pulled them both into a tight bear-hug. After releasing them, she scanned the remaining people crowding into her home. Her eyes flicked questioningly to Orsin before stopping between Oscar and Drake. "Hmmm, familiar somehow. And so very much alike. You should really make up, you know. You never know how long you have left." Drake stiffened.

"And twins. How charming. Same goes for the two of you." Finally, her gaze settled on Bionca. She gave the briefest of calculating looks before turning to her son. "Be a dear, Eddy, and fix up my clinic for me. I should really check up on all of you. Make sure all your parts are working. Oh, and how rude of me! I'm Lynn Orsin. Welcome to Vaslera."

The assembled bunch murmured thanks awkwardly, looking away from their overbearing host.

"Katie, dear, you first. Let's look at your pretty bones."

An uncomfortable silence descended upon the group. The minutes stretched into hours until, finally, Katie emerged from Lynn's makeshift clinic. She side-glanced Orsin before dropping to the floor. Lynn exited soon after and beckoned Bionca forward.

Apprehensive, the girl followed. Once inside, the woman spun on her heel and gripped Bionca's shoulders. "Forgive me if I'm insensitive, but I am so fascinated by your skin and hair. Have they always been like that? I've never seen anything like it! Is your mother the quiet and surly one or the quiet and guarded one? Where's your

father? Can I genome you?" Her nails had begun to dig into Bionca's skin, who stood dumbfounded with her mouth hanging open.

Lynn withdrew her hands. "Oh, love, I'm so sorry. I've overwhelmed you, haven't I?" She embraced the shaking girl gently, smoothing down the gold and bistre hair she was so curious about. "Here. Let's sit you down. You can talk to me about anything. Your secrets are safe with me." She began scanning Bionca. "It's also okay if you don't want to say anything. I can certainly talk more than enough for two people." Lynn giggled at her own expense, then looked deeply into Bionca's eyes, a motherly concern welling behind her own.

A single sob shuddered through the young woman's body. "I just...I've lost so much...in such a short time." Her whispers were halting. "My first friend, my father, my home...." She lowered her gaze, tears falling off her chin.

"Oh, sweetheart." Bionca was pulled into another hug, this one bone-crushing.

"And I feel like, even though I should rely on my mother more, we're farther apart than ever...." Her voice was muffled against Lynn's shoulder.

"Oh, my dear, I know it's hard. I almost lost my Sam once. But then we raised Eddy together. Now he and Sam work to rid our world of the Volarchy's corrupted systems." She pulled away and searched Bionca's tear-stained face. "I sense that you've not gotten over the deaths in your life. And honey, you never really will." She brushed some of the moisture glistening on the girl's cheek off. "But if you want my advice, work toward something in their memory. That's helped my boy and my Sam." Beneath them, the ground shook. Sighing, Lynn pinched the bridge of her nose. "It never ends, does it?"

The next day, after everyone had slept fitfully, the front was kicked open and a loud holler rang through.

"Honey, I have some bodies for you to check. Damn comet took out so many of us."

Lynn appeared, both relief and worry on her face. "Welcome home, my love."

"Sammy?" Drake stood transfixed in a doorway.

"Is that you, brother dearest?" Sam's face lit up. "I'm surprised you got out of hellhole Hyra! What about Viv and Dev?" Drake's expression faltered and he slumped against the door jamb. "You know what, nevermind. We'll talk later, bro." Sam returned to dragging the bodies into the house. "Can you get Ed to help me with this? I feel so old anymore."

"I'm here Mom. We need to talk about our guild-crashing strategy, too. Things have changed."

"Sorry to butt in," Bionca slipped under Drake's arm. "But I'd like to help take down the Volarchy. Tell me what I can do."

Sam, Lynn, and Mina nodded in approval. Drake fidgeted while Orsin peered thoughtfully at the girl. Gaia inhaled sharply. "Bionca, I don't think this is a good idea. I know you're still upset about your father and the doctor, but this is not the best way to honor them."

Bionca looked coldly at her mother, a sneer forming. "Mother, I don't expect you to understand, but this is something I just need to do." Gaia stared at her daughter sadly before retreating back into the darkness.

Brittany Teodorski



# Birthday Suit Loincloths: Okayama

*Who are you? Where are from originally? What year are you on JET? Where do you teach? What level?*

My name is Nicole Finch, and I'm from the hockey loving, maple syrup drinking country of Canada. I'm a 3rd year JET in Okayama City, Okayama, where I teach at two academic high schools, one academic junior high school, and one special needs school.

*Why did you apply for the JET program or come to teach in Japan?*

It's one thing to learn about another culture via books and the Internet. It's an entirely different thing to actually immerse yourself and experience culture. I applied for JET because I wanted to understand the world, and not just know of it. I also couldn't resist the challenge of surviving in a completely foreign culture.



*How did you end up in your prefecture? Was it a preference of yours?*

Somebody at Tokyo Orientation mentioned something about a dart aimlessly thrown at a map of Japan... lol. No, it wasn't my preference to end up in Okayama. When I received my contract, I had to Google "Where the heck is Okayama". I didn't know anything about it, but it turned out to be the best "decision" JET ever made for me.

17 << Hyogo Times >> May



*What has been your favorite memory in your prefecture so far?*

Leaving Okayama to go to Osaka! Ha... just kidding! My best memory in Okayama would have to be hanging out with intriguing, like-minded ALTs and Japanese people in my community. I know... sounds so cliché, but the relationships are what make the experience; Sunday GoT parties, Friday café nights, monthly AJET BBQs...

*Is there a "best" time to visit your prefecture?*

I would recommend coming to Okayama in mid-February for Hadakamatsuri (Naked Man Festival). Thousands of loin-cloth clad men fighting for STICKS... you can't go wrong!

*What are your "Must Do's" for visiting JETs?*

1. Hadakamatsuri on the third Saturday of every February (See above for more details)

2. Kibi Bike Trail

The Kibi Bike Trail is a popular 17km long cycling trail that starts in Bizen Ichinomiya and ends in Soja City, and known for its association with the legend of Momotaro. Rent a bike for ¥1000 at Bizen Ichinomiya station (10 minutes from Okayama station on the Kibi Line; ¥210), and stop along the many sightseeing spots along the trail, including the



legendary Kibitsu Shrine, Bitchu-Kokubunji Pagoda Temple, and Tsukuriyama-kofun. Don't forget to take a slight detour for some amazing home-made ice-cream at Yasutomi Bokujo, a family run dairy farm.

3. Eat an Okayama peach

Okayama white peaches are famous for their association with the legend of Momotaro, the boy who was born out of a peach and went on to do great things. These peaches are cultivated to perfection with the utmost care and technique. This coddling process produces the softest, sweetest fruit around. The peach season is from June to September.

4. The Momotaro Uraja Festival in early August

The Momotaro Uraja Festival is a 2-day celebration held annually on the first weekend in August. Dancers, dressed in flamboyant ogre costumes, swarm the streets of Okayama City to perform choreographed dances. This festival celebrates the ogre, Ura, who is featured in the tale of Momotaro.



5. Drink locally brewed beer at Kibidote Microbrewery

It would be a tragedy to come all the way to Okayama, and NOT taste our locally brewed beer at Kibidote. Their beer has been featured at many beer festivals in the Chugoku region, giving them quite the reputation. Brewed

in a tiny wooden house next to Asahi River, their ales come in a variety of flavours from coffee to mint to white peach. The best part would have to be their free shuttle van service to and from Okayama Station. This local gem gets quite packed on the weekends, so it's best to call 086-235-5712 to reserve a table and request transportation.



*What do you feel is unique to your prefecture, something JETs can't find anywhere else?*

Naked men fighting for sticks!!!!!! Need I say more? Look out for Okayama AJET's event on FB next January to sign up as a runner or participant.

*Anything else you want to add?*

Unfortunately, I didn't re-contract for the 2015-2016 school year. I will be leaving Japan this August, but if anyone wants more information about the sunny prefecture, Okayama, please feel free to message me on FB or via email [nicole.finch29@gmail.com](mailto:nicole.finch29@gmail.com).

Nicole Finch



calendar

# may

Outside Hyogo	Awaji	Hanshin	Kobe
AJET Events	Tajima	Tamba	Harima

monday	tuesday	wednesday	thursday	friday	saturday	sunday
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
	<div data-bbox="549 567 801 808">long-term</div>	<div data-bbox="884 588 1558 661">Takehiko Inoue Interprets Gaudi's Universe</div>	<div data-bbox="1587 588 1944 661">8-31 Kinosaki Onpaku</div>	<div data-bbox="1973 588 2448 661">Awaji Flower Exhibition 2015</div>		
		<div data-bbox="854 714 1676 787">Awaji Exhibition: The World of the Takarazuka Review</div>	<div data-bbox="1706 714 2136 787">Exhibition: Bohemian Glass</div>	<div data-bbox="2151 714 2448 787">Tajimawaru Bus</div>		
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
				<div data-bbox="1706 955 2018 1018">Aoi Matsuri (Kyoto)</div>		
				<div data-bbox="1706 1050 2018 1113">Ako Antique Market</div>	<div data-bbox="2122 1050 2374 1113">Tajima Pub Quiz</div>	<div data-bbox="2537 1050 2745 1113">Kobe Festival</div>
				<div data-bbox="2047 1144 2448 1207">Osaka Oktoberfest (Osaka)</div>		
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
					<div data-bbox="2077 1354 2433 1417">Minatogawa Craft Fair</div>	<div data-bbox="2493 1354 2834 1417">Block 6 Biwa Boat Ball</div>
					<div data-bbox="2240 1449 2641 1512">HAJET Awaji Camping Trip</div>	
<div data-bbox="1291 1522 1676 1585">Osaka Oktoberfest (Osaka)</div>						
25	26	27	28	29	30	31
					<div data-bbox="2018 1753 2478 1816">Aloha Summer Festival (Osaka)</div>	
					<div data-bbox="2300 1837 2582 1900">Aoi Peron Festival</div>	
<div data-bbox="1291 1911 1676 1974">Osaka Oktoberfest (Osaka)</div>						



