

The Mikan

EHIME JET'S OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER: WRITING AND PICTURES BY MIKANS, FOR MIKANS

MAY
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IN THIS ISSUE

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR.....	3
PA MESSAGE.....	4
VIVA VOCE by Katie Malone.....	5
DISPATCH FROM MIKAN MOUNTAIN by Harrison Fuerst.....	6
CONFERENCE FOR RETURNING JETS by Annie Vuong	8
5 INGREDIENT SOUP BY Jia Ern Loy	11
SNOW IN YOUR BACKYARD by Jamie Mackay	12
YOUR SURVIVAL GUIDE TO GIFT GIVING by Jessica Shepherd	14
WHAT'S TOASTMASTERS by Lobelia Cheng	16
MOTIVATING THE MOTIVATOR by Tamara Graham	18
VIETNAMESE SPRING ROLLS by Zung Do	21
ABSTRACT INK by Drago Flores	22
MIKANS IN TAIWAN by Annie Vuong	24
BEING AN ALT by Jia Ern Loy	27
YORKSHIRE STYLE GREEK AUBERGINE SALAD by Victoria Murphy	28
CUCUMBER TATAKI By Victoria Murphy	29
PHO GA By Zung Do	30

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR



Dear Ehimenians,

Now that we are in the midst of Japan's wonderfully temperate spring, I am happy to present to you another edition of the Mikan—Spring edition.

In this issue we have been able to greatly expand on our content thanks to all of our wonderful contributors. More authors, more stories, more pictures, along with widening our reader base is why I feel so proud to share this issue with you. A sincere thanks to all of those who contributed their writing, recipes, photos and artwork—we could not have done it without your time and effort.

It has been an awesome and eventful three years in Japan for me so far, the last being most precious and swiftly coming to an end. With that in mind, I will be stepping down as editor of the Mikan and handing over the reigns to **Harrison Fuerst** (editor, writer and recruiter) and Melania Jusuf (layout and design). Once again, we will be seeking the help of all of you wonderful Ehime JETs to pen your thoughts when that time comes. Please contact Harrison if you have any stories to share. We are especially looking to recruit more writers. We want stories about your life in Japan. Cultural interest stories, travel stories, informational pieces, recipes, comics, photos, and so on. As long as you enjoy writing it, there will be someone who will enjoy reading it.

Happy Writing and Reading!

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Annie Vuong".

Annie Vuong
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*For more information about becoming part of the team please contact Harrison at: isitatomic@gmail.com

PA MESSAGE

To Our Fellow Mikans,

We have had a great time as your PAs. We want to say thank you, from the bottom of our hearts, for helping to make it a wonderful year. Thanks to your kindness and support, being a PA was a really rewarding experience. We had an amazing time serving you Ehime-ites, and we were some of the luckiest PAs in Japan to work with such an awesome and outgoing group of JETs.

As many of you know, both of us are leaving Ehime in August, to go back to our respective home countries. To those who are staying in Ehime for another year, we hope you enjoy all of what Ehime and Japan has to offer, and contribute as much as you can to your local communities. To those who are leaving this year, we wish you the best of luck in all your future endeavors and hope you achieve everything you strive for. We will miss all of you guys and hope that the 2012 – 2013 JET year will be wonderful as this year has.

Thank you so much, and we hope to see you all somewhere in the world in the near future.

Daisuke Yoshida & Victoria Murphy

Ehime Prefectural Advisor 2011– 2012



VIVA-VOCE

BY KATIE MALONE, OZU, ALT 2nd YEAR

Uchiko, March 10th, 2012. Backstage, barefoot, making faces, doing stretches, and crazy dance moves with my friend Chiharu, as we shake off the chill of the concert hall and last minute nerves. Before we know it, our act is introduced. Putting our shoes back on and we walk out to see the crowd of people watching, waiting. Chiharu takes a seat at the piano. I move to centre stage, and we begin to connect with the audience of 'Uchiko Loves Tohoku' the same way I have connected to the community here time and again—through song.

Music, particularly singing, has always been a part of my life. Though I was never disciplined enough to be able play anything beyond basic piano, I found my strength through my voice. Extracurricular activities at school centred on solo and choral singing. My world of music further expanded with classical singing lessons through intermediate and high school. However, seeking a change in university, I decided to focus on interests other than music. I instead turned my focus towards psychology and Japanese.

I didn't expect to return to performing once I left high school. But after moving to Ozu as an ALT, one of the first teachers who spoke to me at my base junior high school was the music teacher. I was asked if I could perform with the orchestra at the upcoming school festival. I jumped at the chance, not knowing at the time that this initial performance would later lead to further guest solos at Minami JHS's orchestral performances. As the date for the school festival approached, I joined the PTA chorus as well. I just couldn't stop smiling during practices with the students, teachers and PTA. After weeks of feeling awkward and out of place, I had finally discovered my niche. I could sing and contribute to the harmonies just the same as all the other music lovers around me. I hadn't even realised until this point how much I missed making music—until I was hearing and making music once more.

After the school festival was over, one of my English conversation class members introduced me to a local choir, the Ozu Fujikage Chorus. The members consisted mostly of retired teachers and grandparents but all of them kindly took me under their wings. They always anticipate any problems that I may have, make sure I have the right music, uniform, and update me with any changes to our usual schedule. Despite the language barrier, my previous choral experience helps me to follow our choir director when she says things like 'Again, with feeling!' 'This time, Altos only,' and 'Sopranos, you're screeching!' It made me realize that choral directors are the same in every country!

Through my local choir, I had the chance to join with many other choristers in the Nanyo area to be part of the mass choir for Seiyō City's annual performance of Beethoven's 9th Symphony. This



was an amazing experience, especially because the German lyrics meant that we were all on an even playing field language-wise. The practices were a highlight of my week, and it was great to be able to use my voice in the classical style that I hadn't sung in for years.

Building from my involvement with the local choir and my base school's orchestra, I have been able to create a wonderful friendship with the pianist in my local choir, Chiharu Nishiyama. Thanks to her support and wonderful piano accompaniment, I have been able to perform at elementary school concerts, piano recitals, as well as the Imabari 'Jam for Japan' and 'Uchiko Loves Tohoku' charity events.

Music has definitely helped me to feel more at home here in Ozu. It has given me a space to share my passion with others, and, more importantly, shown me that I can connect to my community outside of work-related matters. Oftentimes as JETs, the most rewarding aspects of our work extend beyond the classroom. Music has helped to fill the gap that can lie between work and home life.

If you aren't already, go out and get involved in your local area. Be it music, sports, cooking, art, dance, theatre, anything. If you use your existing network of colleagues, neighbours and students, you will find that there are many opportunities for you to share your interests with others or try something new. Finding your own niche may be a challenge at first, but once you figure out what you're interested in, spread the word and opportunities will present themselves. As for communication gaps: it depends on the activity as to how much of a challenge this will present—in sport, music, dance and so on. Sometimes it's just as easy to pick things up through observation, which is also one of the most vital skills needed for a JET to thrive. You don't have to be fluent in Japanese or an expert in your field to participate, just be willing to put yourself out there.

Although we are here as representatives of our home countries and cultures, we are also individuals with unique passions and interests. Find something that gives you the opportunity to be yourself, and eventually your passion will build yourself a home wherever you are.

DISPATCH FROM MIKAN MOUNTAIN

BY HARRISON FUERST, MISAKI, ALT 1st YEAR

We Ehimeans love our citrus, it's no secret. Simply saying, though, that we enjoy "going to the store to buy oranges" would be unforgivably crude, wouldn't it? It's more akin to gliding through outdoor markets and down shopping aisles on a happy cloud with a basket full of dekopon, some ponkan, maybe an amanatsu or setoka, a harumi or haruka, and a handful of kiyomi. At some of the omiyage shops you can even see little Hello Kitty holding a bottle of POM juice. Add to this the array of derivative mikan liquors, sweets, treats and pastries that are made all over the prefecture and the possibilities for deliciousness are endless. But each morsel of mikan goodness has to make the journey from shrub to shelf, and the start of that journey for YOUR mikans may very well be the wind-swept mountaintops of Ikata-cho's Cape Sada (Sadamisaki).

In my little ferry town of Misaki, the peninsular tip of Ikata and westernmost point in Shikoku, most families have a hand in either the mikan or sweet potato trade. This rural community, like countless others that dot the length of Sadamisaki, is truly a picturesque marvel of spatial economy. Residential and commercial buildings lay huddled together at sea level on the coast, while the forested mountain terraces above are home to a complex network of narrow roads, monorail transports, and terrace plantations. My own students often divide their time on weekends between tending the orchard and playing video games, while their parents take on any extra work they can after their day jobs as teachers or firefighters or nurses. The elderly too seem always to be walking the streets with their karuikago, light basket backpacks made of woven bamboo for carrying bushels of mikans. Having spent some time farming in China's southern Guangdong province, I was determined to get my hands dirty and help work the mikan trenches. As luck would have it, I found a close ally in our school's Social Studies teacher, Mr. Asano.

Nestled within the terrace farming community named Hiraiso, the Asanos have built not only their home and a sourcing point for Ehime's mikan industry, but also an international workcamp volunteer program. Beginning in February, I was invited to come and learn the ropes of the mikan harvest with the Asanos, their friends, and a team of (mostly) international volunteers. The workcamp volunteers had generally come through a program called NICE (Never-ending International workCamps Exchange) and were a motley bunch: North Americans, Europeans, East Asians and Japanese folks from other cities. Most have since completed their period of volunteer; and there is currently only one workcamper, an Italian, living in the Asano family's workcamp house dubbed "Kikuya".

My own mikan work experience began on a cold Saturday morning as I put together the necessary farming arsenal between sips of coffee: inari zushi bento, jacket, working pants and gloves, jika tabi, and belt for the stem cutting tool holster. Twenty minutes and one incredibly steep winding drive later, the Asanos were gearing up outside of their house as I arrived. Mr. Asano's son, a student of mine, led me down a steep path through hedgerows, rusted gates, stone markers and dormant orchards. An odd mechanical sound attracted our attention and,



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1. Port town panorama in the blinding sun
2. Misaki, the maw of Cape Sada!
3. A grocer on the redstone lane

much to my amusement, a local Hiraiso worker chugged slowly by from behind us, smiling from his perch on the tiny mikan crate transport platform that rides along the monorail system. About 10 minutes into our descent we reached the day's work site and ran into two of the international volunteers, a young woman from Michigan and a German High School graduate. For five hours we worked tree by tree transferring mikans to buckets, buckets to crates, crates to trucks. Our well-deserved respite came in the form of a noontime picnic overlooking the sparkling ocean, laughing and watching the maritime traffic from our little mikan mountain.

So, how exactly does one harvest a mikan? Well, once you're properly geared up you will need your stem cutters and a collection bucket. Affix your stem cutter holster to your belt with its little clip for easy access. As for the buckets, each one of ours has rope threaded through the top that is also tied around an inverted Y-shaped piece of wood. After you've selected your target mikan tree, find a sturdy branch from which to hang your bucket and get to work on the mikans. Harvesting should be done in two cuts: one to snip it from the tree, and the other close to the rind. This repetitive action provides mikan work with its distinct rhythm, as particular as a railroad spike hammer or chain gang pickaxe, a symphony of rustling and snip-snipping. Whether here in Hiraiso or elsewhere in Ehime, there is always mikan work to be done. So next time you find yourself stuck driving behind a little white mikan truck chugging along at a snail's pace, stop muttering under your breath and think about doing some work at an orchard! You won't regret it.



- 4. Densoji, Zen Temple of Misaki
- 5. Path to the Ferry Port
- 6. Late night sake and udon at granny's place

CONFERENCE FOR RETURNING JETs - SYNOPSIS

BY ANNIE VUONG, MATSUNO, ALT 3rd YEAR

The 2012 Conference for Returning JETs held from March 5th to 7th in Chiba prefecture was surprisingly absent of our own Ehime returners. Besides Josh Aresty and myself, there perhaps were not any other Ehime folks around. However, for those who are returning and did not have a chance to attend, then this article is for you.

There is a lot I could try and cram into a few pages, but most useful would be to direct you towards the actual presentation documents and PowerPoint's, along with a few of the notes I took while listening to the first day's presentations. The PowerPoints and handouts can all be accessed through JET's webpage.

useful websites

Link to Presentation Handouts: <http://www.jetprogramme.org/e/current/conferences/handouts/2012returners.html>

JET Alumni Association:

<http://www.jetprogramme.org/e/former/jetaa.html>

JET Resume Interview & Tips:

<http://jetresumes.blogspot.jp/>

Vince Ricci's presentation on Resume Interview & Tips at CRJ

(Includes sample ALT and CIR resumes)

<http://jetresumes.blogspot.jp/2012/03/crj-slides-2012.html>

Seeing as I lack my own Annie-clones, I can only offer bits of information on the workshops I attended. Please bear with me even if it doesn't directly relate. I only attended the workshops pertaining to North America and my own fields of interest. Anything beyond that realm will require a little more digging on your own behalf.

Keynote Speech by Ian de Stains

First were some book recommendations if you're feeling lost or confused about the future: A Whole New Mind by Daniel Pink, Five Minds for the Future by Howard Gardner. The speaker also recommended trying out the Meyer's-Briggs test to determine what kind of personality you are. Are you an introvert or extrovert type of thinker? This test goes beyond the simple personality test and may help to narrow down some directions you could be taking towards a future career. The overall main message from Mr. de Stains is to believe in your own integrity. Whether it's in terms of morals or personal goals, stick to that and you'll more likely to feel satisfaction with whatever you chose to do, whether it be big or small.

Reverse Culture Shock by Dr. Adam Komisarof

As with culture shock, reverse culture shock is a serious and tangible issue for some people. Be prepared for it by being aware of its existence and taking steps to ease the transition back home. You can do so by keeping



in contact with your friends (both those back home and still in Japan). Joining AJET's alumni association helps to connect you with others in your home community who will understand what you've experienced in Japan, both the good and the bad.

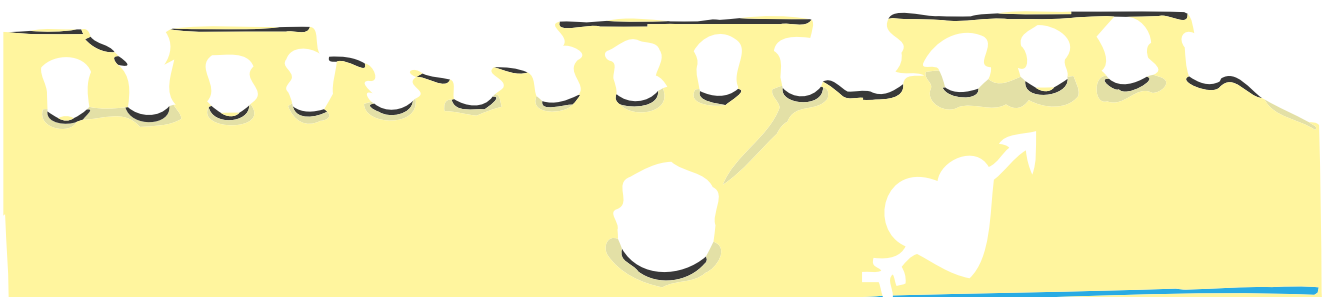
Business Panel Discussion

This open discussion consisted of Eric Korpiel (Education Management speaker), Leah Gowron (Graduate Studies speaker), and Jennifer Jakubowski (Cross-Cultural Consulting speaker).

Each of these speakers were once on JET themselves. They related the pathways they took after JET to how they got where they are now. After a bit of background information, there was an open question and answer session for the audience to voice what was on their minds. The most useful element of this workshop was how their answers integrated advice for all who are about to re-enter the world outside of JET.

A few of their suggestions that I found enlightening:

- Take the time to figure out what you want to do, and what field you want to be in. Don't go blindly perusing wanted ads and taking any job that comes your way.
- Connect back to your university alumni, there are people there to help you get started if needed. Also connect with the AAJET (alumni association) once you return. There are people around to support you still.
- What's your "Elevator Speech"? Figure out your game plan or goal and how you can succinctly and eloquently express it if the opportunity arises.
- Informational interviews are the way to go if you aren't sure about what type of career you want to get into. This also helps to build your networking circle and knowledge base of a potential job.
- Informational Interviews - what are they? It's interviewing people who already work at a company that you potentially want to join. The goal is not to ask for a job, but to find out more information about the job, and to increase your networking circle. They should be short and kept to the goal of learning about the industry (how to get started, how to get qualified, and figuring out whether you actually want to be working there or not). Once you've done your research, then comes the step of seeking out a real interview.
- Once you leave JET you are no longer a big fish in a small pond, so be prepared to pay your dues. Even if it's the initial unglamorous and low paying jobs, it's easier to look for work when you have work. Instead of saying that you're unemployed, think of it as being 'differently employed.' You'll get bogged down and more depressed by looking for that one perfect job 24/7. Being busy will keep you motivated.
- Pick 5-6 dream organizations that you want to work for and then do your research.
- Along that line, be preemptive about knowing what your audience (or potential employer) needs or wants. Think about your skill-set that you have here now on JET, and consider in what way you can use this skill-set to promote yourself to that dream organization. Should be saying to yourself: "Here's how I can be the best benefit to you and your company."
- On the topic of skill-sets. Carefully consider all that you have learned and experienced during your time on JET and be sure to present them. Don't leave it up to the interviewer to fill in the blanks regarding your talents or potential.

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- Not only should you be thinking about selling yourself to a company (or whatever organization you have in mind), but you should also be asking if the company is a good fit for you. Think of it as a two-way street.
 - Beyond just knowing a company's mission statement you should also be asking about the company's functional skills and services. Ask the intelligent questions to progress you in the interview process. The point is to set the interviewer up to imagine you in that job.
 - For those planning on staying Japan, you could think about connecting with the foreigners already in the industry that you want to work in.
 - Make your own business cards.
 - Facebook and LinkedIn. Clean up your Facebook profile, currently it's not illegal for a potential employer to ask permission to look over your shoulder while you access your homepage for them to view. LinkedIn is gaining momentum within the professional social circles. It would be a good idea to set up a profile and start connecting to other individuals within and around your field.
 - Email addresses. Try to avoid giving the interviewer pre-conceived notions about your person or character based on a strange email name.
 - Don't forget basic etiquette: typos on resumes, different or strange fonts, not sending thank you letters after interviews. All of this can be easily researched by searching for Interview or Resume etiquette 101 online.
 - About resumes, let it be focused on your accomplishments and not just your history. What is it that you have been able to get done? A possible method is to present your skills first, then relate it back to JET. This allows the potential employer to see what you can do for them, rather than simply what you did.

I found the business panel to be the most informative session of the entire conference. Resumes, CVs & Interview Techniques presented by Vince Ricci were equally beneficial although it only covered North American style resumes. The most immediately useful point of Mr. Ricci's presentation is how he already has a website full of information for JETs wanting more information on how to perfect their resume. (See links provided earlier). There's also a useful section pertaining to anyone who wants to seek further employment in Japan.

There are a few more useful points I could include but to keep within a rational reading frame I only summarized the workshops that were attended by all participants. Please check the website for further information on any specific workshops that were offered.

Despite missing out on three days of work, the chance to attend this conference was definitely worthwhile. Personally I still don't have a clear grasp of exactly what I'll be doing in a year's time. However, I do feel armed with the confidence and capability to better seek out whatever new adventures that comes next.

Final words of advice: Definitely clean up your Facebook page - you never know who may be looking. Also, start up a LinkedIn account. Networking, networking, networking was the catchphrase for the entire conference. As a JET by now you probably have no problem socializing with other JETs, your Japanese community, or both. This is of course a wonderful skill to have for your own mental and emotional health. The next step beyond the fun-type of socializing is to develop your professional-type of socializing. Keep in contact with those you work with, even when you leave. It's your own responsibility to maintain these connections, since it is these bonds that will continue to strengthen you and push you further to wherever it is you want to go.

FIVE INGREDIENT BROCCOLI SOUP

BY: JIA ERN LOY, MATSUYAMA, ALT 2nd YEAR

Everyone loves soup. It's warm, tasty, and best of all you can make a huge pot of it and eat it over several days—perfect for lazy folk like me. The great thing about this soup is that it's really simple to make, and all the ingredients are easily available. Ever read recipes with ingredient lists that call for things like essence of emerald or husked pomadillos* and thought to yourself, *who has things like that lying about their kitchen?* That's right, not me. Recently, in an attempt to be more efficient (read: lazy), I made a decision to only make dishes that contain no more than five separate ingredients, and don't take longer to prepare than to eat. This broccoli soup fits both criteria perfectly, and is my go-to recipe for those cold winter evenings when you just don't want to leave the house.

INGREDIENTS

2 medium-sized broccoli heads, cut into florets
1 medium-sized onion, peeled and diced
1 tablespoon olive oil
~ 3 cups water
1/4 cup grated cheese of your liking (I've used cheddar, gouda and red leicester all with success)
Salt and black pepper to taste (Fine, I realise this technically bumps the ingredient list up to seven, but I thought five-ingredient soup sounded way more impressive. Besides, if you don't have salt and pepper in your kitchen, why are you even reading this?)

DIRECTIONS

1. Fry onions in olive oil with salt and pepper over medium heat until it begins to brown
2. Transfer onions onto a separate dish, then in the same pot (I like using a deep wok), add water and bring to boil.
3. Add broccoli florets, cover and boil for 8-10 minutes until soft (don't worry if the water does not completely cover the broccoli in the pot). You should be able to break the broccoli up easily with a fork.
4. Turn off heat and add onions back in.
5. Puree in a blender or food processor until desired level of smoothness/chunkiness is reached
6. Toss in cheese, stir, and enjoy. Serves 4.

NOTES

- 2 medium-sized broccoli heads translates into three Japanese-sized ones at my local supermarket.
- Cheese can be bought at Kaldis in Matsuyama. If you don't fancy making the trip, shredded cheese available at most Japanese supermarkets should work as well.
- Feel free to vary the proportions according to preference, but do not omit the onion. If you don't like the taste of onion, you can substitute with celery, carrot, or any combination of flavourful vegetables, but onion works best in my experience.
- The recipe can be made vegan-friendly by omitting the cheese. You might want to add more salt though.
- *Essence of emerald is a type of seasoning containing about 348 different spices. It is not used in the making of this soup. Husked pomadillos do not exist, although should you ever find any I heard they go remarkably well with green banana beans.



SNOW IN YOUR BACKYARD

BY JAMIE MACKAY, KUMAKOGEN, ALT ^{1st} YEAR

The transition from autumn to winter can be a tough one. Having just wrapped up the fall term of school, which can be a roller coaster of emotions and experiences for first year JETs, we now have to start thinking about whether we will stick around for another year. While it may appear that outdoor activities are on a three-month hiatus, the reality is that Ehime is home to three of the five ski & snowboard slopes in Shikoku. Whether it's your first time seeing snow or you're looking for a place to perfect your 180° grinds they all have something to offer.

CONTROLLED CHAOS

For JETs hailing from places where snow is just a normal part of winter, skiing and snowboarding may be nothing out of the ordinary. However for those who have never experienced ascending to the top of a mountain to strap board(s) onto your feet and then charging down, all the while risking embarrassing tumbles along the way; winter sports may seem like a strange way to get your kicks. But just talk to anybody who has gone on a skiing/snowboarding trip last winter and you'll begin to understand why people keep returning to the mountains all just to hurdle themselves down again. Riding down a snowy mountain with the wind rushing past as you embrace the slippery side of Mother Nature is nothing short of exhilarating. To be sure, all students of the slopes have to pay homage to the snow gods by taking their fare share of faceplants. However, that feeling of accomplishment and oneness with nature gained from the first fall-free run down the slope is an addictive feeling you will seek again and again.



GEAR UP!

So you want to hit the slopes but don't have the gear? Well there are a few options available. If you haven't noticed by now, generally when Japanese people decide to pursue a hobby they go at it full force, which can, and often does, include purchasing brand-new equipment and accessories to look the part. It's not uncommon to see a beginner who hasn't figured out how to make it to the bottom of the slope yet decked out from head to toe in the latest gear, including new board, boots, bindings. Going that route can add up to a hefty price tag and probably isn't worth it unless you're sure you'll be hitting the slopes on a regular basis. If you just want to test the waters, or in this case snow, every slope has a rental shop that can provide you with everything you need for the day (board or ski set 3000~3500 yen, clothing set 3000~3500 yen). If you end up wanting to hit the slopes again but shelling out 7000 yen every time seems like too much, check out the used goods shops (Hard-off, Off-house, etc.). One of the benefits of being surrounded by consumers that constantly desire the latest and greatest goods is that their slightly used gear is often available at great bargains, especially in the off season. Also, there's always gear available from departing ALTs so check out the forums in spring and summer.

THE SLOPES

The slopes in Ehime are typical of what you would expect of a region where snow falls annually but only stays on the ground for a handful of days. In other words, these slopes are small, having one to three short runs, none of which are particularly difficult. These runs heavily depend on snow machines to make up for infrequent natural snowfall. Those desiring fresh powder and

kilometers of trails will have to look farther north of Ehime for snowy satisfaction. For the rest of us looking to escape out from under the kotatsu and go outside for a day of winter fun without travelling too far these slopes are great. If doing tricks is your thing, all the slopes have trick parks with sizeable jumps and boxes to test your skills (helmet required). There are three slopes in Ehime where a person can indulge their ski, snowboard, or even sledding desires, these vary in size, pricing options, and accessibility.

The smallest of the slopes is Ishizuchi Ski and Snowboard Resort (www.ishizuchi.com/ski), and as its name implies, it sits at the top of Mt. Ishizuchi. It only has one main run that splits mid-way providing a short "difficult" run option. The slope has to be reached via the Ishizuchi Ropeway which adds to the total cost of this slope (full day lift ticket+ropeway pass=6,200 yen). One advantage of this slope, as a result of its height, is that it receives the most natural snowfall of any slope in Ehime. It can be reached either by car (500 yen parking fee) or by bus from Iyo Saijo station. It also runs occasional specials; this past season had a monthly discount of 1000 yen on the 14th of each month, and a ladies' day discount of 1000 yen on Wednesdays.

The resort with the longest runs is Sol-Fa Oda Ski Gerende (www.sol-fa.com). This slope has one main run for intermediate level skiers/boarders. It's the longest in all of Shikoku measuring in at 1.2km. The beginner run (also known as bunny slope in ski jargon) is also quite long and wide with its own dedicated lift providing a lot of room to practice turns for those just strapping in and starting out. Oda, as it's commonly referred to, is located in Uchiko-cho just across the border from Kumakogen-cho and is the popular choice for Kochi residents and skiers. The average price for a full day lift ticket is 4000 yen, but on crowded days you might be better off buying the 11-ride lift ticket for 2000 yen since lift lines can get rather long and you might end up paying more to wait in line than to actually ski. The biggest drawback for Oda is that it's not accessible by public transportation and the road to the slope can get quite narrow and is frequently covered with snow. It's best to go with someone who has a car equipped with snow tires or chains (parking fee is 1000 yen percar).

Finally, the third slope is Kuma Ski Land (KSL) (www.kumax.co.jp) This slope is probably the best overall option when weighing out all the pros and cons (though I may be biased since it's right in my backyard). While Kuma Ski Land's runs aren't as long as Oda's (about 600m), there are three

runs with varying difficulty (2 intermediate and 1 beginner) which gives more variety to your day and also spreads out the crowds a bit. Another advantage is that they are able to operate two separate lifts to the top so the lift lines don't get too long. The third and best advantage for those coming from the direction of Matsuyama without wheels is that KSL has a bus stop right in front of it (Rokubudo teryusho六部堂停留所, or just say "Kuma Ski Land deguchi") that runs to and from Matsuyama (JR Bus Matsuyama←→Ochide (落出)). Once you get there, just give a call to the top (0892-21-2000) and the shuttle will pick you up and bring you to the base of the slope. If you're a night owl, night skiing/boarding is open until midnight pretty much every day of the season (special night-time lift option of 2 hours for 2500 yen). KSL has the most pricing options, but they also have some unique fees and procedures compared to most other slopes in Japan. Their lift ticket options are 4, 6, and 8 hours (3000, 3500, 4000 yen) and an 11-lift ride pass (2500 yen). However instead of charging for the parking lot, they charge everyone who enters the facility an entrance fee of 1000 yen/person (the parking lot is free of charge) which is a bit steep compared to splitting a parking lot fee among multiple people. KSL also has an electronic gate at the lift that detects your pass and allows you entrance. While convenient, they charge you a 1000

yen deposit for the lift pass card that is refunded when you return it to the front desk when you leave (don't forget!). For comparison purposes a full day lift ticket+entry fee=5000 yen (in total, 6000 yen upfront with a 1000 yen refunded at the end). For the brand new beginner, one bonus of KSL is they have a bunny slope lift for free (before buying a main lift ticket, but after paying 1000 yen entry fee) there you can get acquainted with your equipment and how to navigate down a hill without having to pay for a full (main) lift ticket until you feel ready. KSL holds different events throughout the season, but the most well known are Opening Day Free Access and Free Access if in a Christmas costume on Christmas Day.

INSTRUCTION

As for those who want to try it for the first time, you can pay for a lesson, although around here they are all going to be in Japanese. I have mixed feelings about the pace of the snowboard instruction (no idea about ski lessons), not to mention the additional cost. So my advice would be to pester your JET or Japanese friends to take you out and teach you the basics, we were all taught by someone with the patience of saints at one point in our lives so most of us are more than willing to pass on the favor. And if you still can't find anyone, gimme a shout, chances are if it's winter I'll be out there already!



YOUR SURVIVAL GUIDE TO GIFT GIVING ETIQUETTE IN JAPAN

BY JESSICA SHEPHERD, MATSUYAMA, ALT 1ST YEAR

Whether you are fresh off the plane, or have been part of Ehime's permanent fixtures for longer than those tiny figures inhabiting the Botchan Mechanical Clock, you are probably still learning about Japan's many particular customs and traditions. Having been here for less than a year, I am constantly awed and baffled by some of the unique practices of the land of Cherry Blossom viewing and all-you-can-drink karaoke bars. However, after experiencing many social faux-pas and made a blundering fool of myself on numerous occasions, I have become familiar to arguably one of the most elaborate and intricate customs: that of gift giving and reciprocation. Below, I will shine light on some of the gifting scenarios that newcomers and veterans alike will most likely encounter over their stay in the country of omiyage.



Wrapping and Presentation

Often as important as the gift itself, presentation in the form of gift wrapping and decorated envelopes in Japanese culture is meant to be admired and appreciated as a first impression. Wrapping paper and boxes are common, usually adorned with cute characters, pretty designs or with a variety of colors, bows and ribbons. Japan

has been given bad hype for using excessive wrapping paper, and so a traditional solution to this modern problem is to use: furoshiki (cloth wrapping). This is increasing in popularity as a reusable alternative to wrapping paper. Japanese gift giving is an art and it should be treated as such.

Colors

Be aware of the implications of the colors you are choosing to wrap your gifts. For instance, red and white are usually used for Valentine's Day while gold and silver are used for weddings. Note that the combination of black and white are reserved for funerals. In general, red is a safe base color for any auspicious event. You should research colors beforehand.

Giri

Most Japanese nationals usually feel an obligation to reciprocate a gesture of kindness or a gift. This is called Giri. Therefore, giving a gift may result in getting one in return in the future, this return gift varies in degrees of value. Keep in mind that you may

also be expected to reciprocate if you receive a favor. This can inadvertently lead to an infinite loop of favors and gift giving.

Choose Perishable / Edible Gifts

Most Japanese houses are very small and don't have extra space for useless things that clutter. When offering a gift, keep this in mind. Avoid things like ornaments, vases, kitchenware and novelty item; it's already understood that most people have these things. Buying these kinds of decorative gifts imply that you don't approve of the other person's taste. Best stick to a present that can be put to good use or be consumed. No one needs a mismatched souvenir shot-glass from your vacation in Hawaii; opt for the mini-bar Hawaiian rum instead.

Fruit

At first it may seem odd to foreigners, but giving fruit as gifts in Japan is customary when wanting to express concrete gratitude to someone. Gift fruit—such as grapes, cherries, peaches and melons—are meticulously cultivated and different from regular, everyday fruit. The fruit is meant to be flawless. In fact, Japan is home to the most expensive fruit shop in the world: Sembikiya. You can find one at Takashimaya department store in Matsuyama.

There, you can find luxury fruit specimens ranging from anywhere between ¥2,000 for a peach to the famous ¥50,000 watermelon. An appropriate time to gift fruit can be when visiting a sick friend or when being invited into a colleague's home. Of course, the fruit is meant to be eaten. So, if you ever receive a melon as a gift, go ahead and enjoy every superior morsel.



Social Protocol

Omiyage

It's socially expected to bring back a little something for your friends and colleagues when you return from your work or leisure related travels. This is called omiyage, which essentially means "souvenir." How much you spend on a gift isn't important, it's the gesture that is truly appreciated. It's a token that shows to others that even though you were away, you were thinking of them. You can usually find box sets in varying sizes conveniently

packaged and individually wrapped for you. All you need to do is buy a box at a souvenir shop, airport or train station and distribute the contents at work, to your family and even to your friends, if your budget allows it.

Gifts of Money for Big Occasions

Weddings, graduations, babies, hospitalizations and funerals are just some of the occasions for which you will most likely need to prepare a gift of money. Depending on your closeness to the person concerned, amounts can vary greatly. If you are lucky, you will have, or have had, the joy of experiencing a Japanese wedding during your stay in Japan. However, there is also the matter of the wedding reception fee. If you are a distant friend or colleague of the bride or groom, the typical cost is ¥30,000

per person, ¥50,000 for good friends and ¥70,000 plus, for family. Usually the amount of ¥10,000 bills gifted is given in odd numbers (3, 5, 7, ...): even

numbers are considered bad luck for a marriage since they can be divide between the bride and groom. Of course, no gift of money is complete without the appropriate fancy envelope tied with Mizuhiki knots in which to put the money. Once again, this is related to wrapping, so please research the right colors and knots beforehand.

Bear in mind, giving flowers is an acceptable added gift for these occasions, but never give a potted plant to someone who is sick; it's considered bad luck as it symbolizes that the sickness will take root and grow.

Gift Reciprocation

Now, if you are the one experiencing one of these big occasions mentioned above, it's a different scenario. Prepare to be reciprocating gifts until the cows come home. When you receive a gift of money for such an event, you often must give a half-value gift in return called "uchi iwai." As mentioned earlier, it should be something perishable or edible, as well as something

useful like maybe a silk handkerchief. It ought to be given during or after the event has taken place, within a couple of months after the reception. Last October in Japan, I got happily married and we received many shiny

envelopes of odd numbers of bills. Then, we spent the following month painstakingly choosing individual gifts, and creatively wrapping and handwriting personalized "Thank You" cards for the 70 people who had contributed. It was completely worth it after seeing the look of sincere appreciation on their faces.

Aisatsu temiage

One day, you may find your neighbor from two doors down knocking on your door, offering you washing powder. It's not because he thinks you're dirty. It's all part of Aisatsu, the act of visiting someone at their home. In this situation, the neighbor may be about to make extra noise like construction, or they just had a baby who could cry late at night. For this inconvenience, your neighbor offers temiage, or "small souvenir" in English, in guise of an apology. The temiage would be something inexpensive and disposable about which the receiver doesn't feel too bad of getting, like towels, plastic bags, tissues, or even soap. Yet again, if you are doing some construction or are about to have a new addition to the family, please consider doing Aisatsu and giving temiage as well.

Holidays

Holidays: a time for family celebrations and expressions of love everywhere in the world. On Christmas, if you have children, giving presents is now becoming part of Japan's popular culture. Note that the holiday has no religious implication in the vast majority of Japanese households. Also, if you have a romantic partner, it's best you get something for them as well: jewelry for women is a good example. Sorry, you can't get out of it! Don't forget to grab a bucket of the Kernel's fried chicken and reserve your Christmas cake weeks in advance to have a perfect Christmas Eve dinner with your dearest or the folks. If you're wondering "Why KFC?", it's because of the Kernel's uncanny resemblance to Santa Claus, that's all. In the end, Yule time is thankfully one of the occasions you don't need to give gifts to friends or coworkers.

In Japan, New Years is much more family-oriented than KFC Day, and is also not geared towards coworkers and friends. Making and giving greeting cards to you family called nengajyo is customary. As for Valentine's Day on February 14th, girls give chocolates and sometimes marshmallows to boys, sometimes obligatorily. Then a month later, there is White Day on March 14th when boys must reciprocate to the giver by giving something white, like cookies or white chocolate. Or... sometimes they don't. This is a very delicate and complicated process that deserves an entire article unto itself. And finally, there are birthdays. Mostly a family affair, but in my experience, on the day of, you can buy cake for yourself and the celebrated person to share.

Vast, deep and complex, we have only begun to scratch the surface of the art of gift giving and reciprocation. It requires study, thought, practice and especially care. Though it may seem like a lot of trouble at first, it's worth creating bonds with the people you meet along your way. And after a while, it becomes second nature, and even quite enjoyable. Hopefully, this abridged Survival Guide has given you the knowledge needed to make more informed gift giving decisions and helped you on the path to becoming a gift-giving guru, bringing smiles to people's faces, one good deed at a time.



WHAT'S TOASTMASTERS?

BY: LOBELIA CHENG, MATSUYAMA, ALT 3rd YEAR

Glossophobia, fear of public speaking.

Studies have shown that for many people, the fear of speaking in front of a crowd ranks right up there with the fear of death. This may sound implausible to ALTs whose job it is to speak in front of a class of more than 30 students several times a day, but a quick bit of (unscientific) research on the internet will confirm this matter. The search terms "fear public speaking" obtained a hit of 49,600,000 search results on Google. Amazingly enough, entering the suggested phrase "fear public speaking more than death" gives an even bigger number—a whooping 231,000,000 hits. That's right—two hundred and thirty-one million hits. In fact, some studies have found that 75% of the population has some form of speech anxiety. I, myself, am one of those people who detest the thought of having to speak in front of people. Why am I telling you all this? It is because I want to tell you more about Toastmasters and the club we have here in Matsuyama and how it has helped me to overcome this daunting fear of public speaking.

So what exactly is Toastmasters, and what do we do?

Toastmasters International (TI) is a non-profit educational organization that operates clubs worldwide for the purpose of helping its members improve their communication, public speaking and leadership skills. Members work through a self-directed program of communication and leadership projects at their own pace in order to acquire the arts of speaking, listening, and thinking. While some people may be natural-born speakers and entertainers who thrive on being in the limelight, not everyone is blessed with such a love or talent. However, let me assure you: there is hope for the rest of us. It is possible to conquer the fear of public speaking and develop the confidence necessary to be a good communicator through practice, even cultivate a love of speaking in front of an audience.

Toastmasters clubs offer the chance to practice making either prepared or impromptu speeches in a safe and supportive environment. As mentioned earlier, learning is completely self-directed. In other words, there are no teachers. Everyone is an equal, and members learn from one another. Members take turns filling different roles, such as being the Toastmaster of the Day (i.e., the MC), a speaker, an evaluator, a timer, and so on at each meeting. There

are ample opportunities to practice speaking in front of people. Toastmasters' most versatile aspect is how meetings are structured in a way as to emphasize listening skills along with speaking skills. After all, it would not be possible to give useful feedback to the speakers if one were not listening attentively. The ability to actually listen to others and offer constructive criticism is part and parcel of being a good communicator. These are some of the most valuable skills that an effective leader can hope to possess. Members who are interested in contributing to their clubs further and putting their leadership skills to the test can also take on the responsibility of running a club as one of the club officers.

The club in Matsuyama was started by Josh Aresty (3rd year high school ALT in Matsuyama) and it is in the final stages of becoming chartered. Like most of the clubs in Japan, we meet once a month formally on Sunday. Our members include both native English speakers and Japanese people from all walks of life, so it is also a nice way to meet people who do not work in public schools. In addition to refining your communicative and leadership skills, you also get to learn about a fascinating range of topics, since the interests and backgrounds of our members are wide and varied. A sampling of speeches that I have listened to off the top of my head: toilets (and what it tells us about Japanese culture), the mating habits of dragonflies, hanafuda, the naming conventions of typhoons in and outside of Japan, how helicopters fly, tiny habits, banana labels, Buddhism, and so on. How is that for expanding on your general knowledge?

We also have meetings on Monday nights three times a month, one of which is in Japanese, so for those who are interested in putting their Japanese to the test, or at the very least, have the tables turned on you and experience what most of our students no doubt go through, you will find an attentive audience. Speaking in Toastmasters goes beyond mere conversation. And if you can successfully convey your message to a group of listeners, then you will have absolutely no problems talking to another person on a one-to-one basis.

Another great thing about joining Toastmasters in Japan is that there is a tremendous amount of interaction between the clubs throughout the country. Here in Matsuyama, we have had visitors from not only Imabari, but also from the prefectures of Takamatsu, Tokushima, and Kochi. Some of our members have

GLOSSOPHOBIA,
FEAR OF
PUBLIC SPEAKING



also attended the charter ceremony, area contests, and training seminar held in the other prefectures.

While the name “Toastmasters” may not be very well recognized within Japan, it is definitely well-known in other parts of the world. For JETs who are still unsure with regards to their future career path, being a member of Toastmasters goes a long way towards assuring your potential employer that you are a great communicator. Besides, with all that speaking practice that you are getting, how can you not ace that job interview? At the very least it will give you a leg-up where others may be lacking in.

If you are looking for something a little different from your usual cultural exchange, why not give Toastmasters a shot? Not only will you get to participate in an exciting symposium of ideas and opinions, all the while boosting your transferrable skills in this competitive job market. Whether you are shy and want to improve your public speaking skills, or whether you simply adore the spotlight, there really is something for everyone in Toastmasters.

We’d love to hear from you! If you have any questions, please feel free to contact us at the following email addresses J

Josh Aresty: jaresty@gmail.com

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MOTIVATING THE MOTIVATOR

BY: TAMARA GRAHAM, MATSUYAMA, ALT 4th YEAR

Erin Falconer, Editor in Chief of PickTheBrain.com, writes;

"IF YOU WANT TO MAKE THINGS HAPPEN, THE ABILITY TO MOTIVATE YOURSELF AND OTHERS IS A CRUCIAL SKILL. AT WORK, HOME, AND EVERYWHERE IN BETWEEN, PEOPLE USE MOTIVATION TO GET RESULTS. MOTIVATION REQUIRES A DELICATE BALANCE OF COMMUNICATION, STRUCTURE, AND INCENTIVES."

According to the Collins English Dictionary, complete and Unabridged 10th edition 2009©, motivation can be defined as:

- the act or an instance of motivating
- desire to do; interest or drive
- incentive or inducement
- Psychol: the process that arouses, sustains and regulates human and animal behavior.

Every year at the Skills Development Seminar, there is a session on motivation. I have always appreciated this particular workshop and its helpful hints on how to get my students excited about learning English. We share ideas and experiences in an attempt to improve our performance. In my experience over the last four years however, I have observed something that I think bears discussing. The focus is usually on getting students interested in learning English and motivating them to look outside of Japan and their own culture. In my humble opinion, JETs have been doing a fair job at fulfilling their role as motivators. My question is this, who then, motivates the motivators?

We each come to this country with different experiences and from various backgrounds. We have different skill sets to offer and bring differing points of view to the table. However, we all have one thing in common: we are foreigners here. We are away from home, our familiar surroundings and 'our way' of doing things.

We give stickers to our students for jobs well done or for good effort. We create exciting and interesting games to catch and hold their interest in English. We sing, dance, act, join their club activities, clown around, get serious and much more, just to motivate our students. When we receive positive responses we are happy. That one student who says thank you or tries his hardest in a thirty second conversation all in English, leaves us elated, over the moon. Then there are the not so good days. The unresponsive class, the last minute changes to schedule, the lack of information from our schools regarding various meetings or outings or poor communication with that particular teacher; there are many things that affect us and impact on our performance. There are many variables that can come into play in the school environment that can discourage ALTs. One might even be tempted to ask: Where are our stickers and rewards for a job well done? And NO, the pay cheque doesn't count sometimes.

In my search to find some advice, pearl of wisdom to counter the negative effects of the 'not so good days', I discovered a different approach that I found enlightening. I found this information to be quite helpful with applications even beyond JET life.



Motivation is central to creativity, productivity and happiness. Motivation is what causes us to act, and when we act, we create movement, growth and change, we feel involved, powerful through experiencing how we can change the world, and we create more of what we love in our lives. And all of this gives our lives purpose and happiness. (www.psychologytoday.com/basics/motivation)

This is an excerpt of a post by Cath Duncan from Agile Living and The Bottom-line Bookclub. (See the full article here: <http://www.productiveflourishing.com/how-to-recover-from-10-types-of-demotivation/>)

Ms. Cath Duncan takes the approach of understanding and tackling the factors that cause us to become de-motivated in the first place. The writer goes on to list ten different types of de-motivation and strategies that should help you to get motivated again.

We are de-motivated by fear, setting the wrong goals, lack of clarity about what you want, values conflict, lack of autonomy, lack of challenge, grief, burn-out, loneliness and not knowing what to do next.

Perhaps you have already seen something in this list, which speaks to your situation. I want to include just a few of the types of de-motivation and the strategies Ms. Duncan put forward.

"LACK OF AUTONOMY"

In his book, *Drive*, Daniel Pink writes of how when it comes to doing creative work, having some freedom to decide what we do, when we do it, how we do it and who we do it with is core to igniting and sustaining motivation, creativity and productivity.

How to get motivated again: Consider how much freedom you have in relation to the goals you've been trying to pursue. Are there areas where you feel constricted and controlled? Consider how you could gradually introduce more autonomy in your task, time, technique, location and team, and then if you're employed, have a discussion with your manager and ask for greater autonomy in a few specific areas of your work.

In our varied situations on JET, it is not always possible to ask for greater autonomy. However, we can exercise autonomy in the activities we prepare and to some extent, in the execution of duties in and out of the classroom.

"LACK OF CHALLENGE"

When it comes to dealing with challenges, there's a sweet spot. Too great a challenge and the fear becomes too great and saps our motivation and if the challenge is too small, we quickly get bored and struggle to stay motivated. We're designed to be living, growing creatures and we need constant challenge and opportunities to master new skills. Without challenge, our Essential Self steps in and demotivates us as a way of telling us that we've departed from the path that's right for us.

How to get motivated again: Review your goals and the projects you're working on. Are they challenging you? Are they going to require you to grow in order to achieve them or are you treading water in your comfort zone doing only the things you know you can do? Try tweaking your goals to make them a bit more challenging, take on projects that will require you to grow and find a new thing or two to learn to stimulate yourself.



"NOT KNOWING WHAT TO DO NEXT"

Your end-goal might be nice and clear, but if you haven't taken time to chunk your end-goal down into smaller goals, you'll get stuck, confused and demotivated when it's time to take action. Some projects are small and familiar enough that they don't need a plan, but if you're often worrying that you don't know what to do next and you don't have a clear plan, then this might be the source of your demotivation.

How to get motivated again: If you want to keep your motivation flowing steadily through all stages of your projects, take time to create clear project plans and to schedule your plans into your calendar.

Use your fears to point you to the potential risks you need to manage in your plan. Write down all your, "I-don't-know-how-to" concerns and turn these into research questions. The first part of any planning stage is research, and you'll find new research questions along the way, so realize that conducting research should be part of your action plan at every stage of your project. Finally, ask yourself what smaller goals need to be achieved for you to achieve your end-goal and schedule deadlines for yourself.

"BURN-OUT"

If you're feeling tired all the time, have lost your energy for socializing, and the idea of taking a snooze sounds more compelling than the stuff you're usually interested in, then you've probably pushed yourself too long and hard and you may be burned out.

Your Essential Self will always work to motivate you to move towards what you most need and away from goals, projects and ways of working that take you away from what your Essential Self craves. So if you're burned out and needing sleep, your Essential Self may even sap the motivation from the things that you're usually really ignited about —just to get you to meet your core needs again.

How to get motivated again: Sleep. And then when you're done sleeping and the quality of your thinking has been restored, check back in with your Essential Self about what's most important to you and start to build sustainable ways of doing more of what's important to you."

We want to do and be our best at whatever we are involved in but there are times when we need to take a break. We need to step back and breathe. Some of us have a tendency to become overly involved in our work and when the desired results are not forthcoming, we become depressed and even despondent. We have to be careful that in our bid to achieve success, we don't burn the candle from both ends and burn ourselves out.

"Goal-setting, planning, organizing and accountability structures are often touted as the big solution to demotivation and the silver bullet that will get you creative and productive again, but notice that it's only a useful strategy for dealing with some types of demotivation. With many other types of demotivation, goal-setting, planning, organizing and accountability structures will only make your demotivation problem worse."

Finally, find the cause of your problems if you can, then use the correct strategies to counter those issues. If we are healthy in body, mind and spirit, then we can excel in any area. These strategies can serve well in the classroom setting and in life after JET as well so keep trying your best but take time to smell the roses. Assess your goals regularly to ensure you are on the best path for you. Find your balance, get motivated and try to stay that way!



VIETNAMESE SPRING ROLLS



BY: ZUNG DO, MATSUYAMA, ALT 4th YEAR

PLACE SHRIMP HALVES ON THE OUTSIDE OF THE ROLL NEXT TO A LEAF OF LETTUCE WHEN WRAPPING TO GIVE IT EXTRA APPEAL.

INGREDIENTS:

- 1 pack of rice paper
- ½ package of vermicelli rice noodles—cook by placing in a pot of boiling water. Remove when soft and drain.
- 1 pack of shrimp—peel and de-vein, cook by throwing into boiling water for 1 min, cool and slice in half
- 1 pack of thinly sliced pork—season to taste with soy sauce and sugar (keeping the fat gives it more flavor)
- 1 red lettuce
- 1 cucumber—peel and julienne
- 1 pack of bean sprouts—wash and drain

SAUCE:

- 1/4 cup of fish sauce
- 3/4 cups of water
- 2 tablespoons of sugar
- 2 cloves of garlic, chopped
- ½ lemon juice

TO PREPARE SAUCE:

Boil water, add fish sauce and sugar. Check taste and add more water or sugar as required. Cool. Once cool add garlic and lemon juice. Add more lemon juice as required.

TO PREPARE SPRING ROLL:

Dip rice paper into hot/warm water. Place lettuce leaf in the middle, followed by some rice noodles, two prawn halves, some pork, cucumbers and bean sprouts. Wrap.

ABSTRACT INK: JAPAN IN A PAINTBRUSH

BY: DRAGO FLORES, IKATA, CIR 1st YEAR

What does it tell you when arguably the most famous abstract artist of the 20th century, Pablo Picasso, says "Had I been born Chinese I would have been a calligrapher, not a painter"? Eastern Calligraphy, with roots dating back thousands of years, has evolved from its humble and crude stone and chisel beginnings to a means of fluid communication and high art. Shodō (書道) "The Way of the Brush", handed down through the generations, used by Japanese princes and monks alike, is to this day regarded both as a means for communication and of spiritual awakening. Though unaccustomed Western eyes may be intimidated by its complexity, what is certain is that Shodō is more than just painting: It is a connection to thousands of years of history dating back into Korea and China; it is connecting with language at a deeper level; and at some levels it is a spiritual pathway to enlightenment.

HISTORY

The story of shodo begins tens of thousands of years ago before the brush even existed. In dimly lit caves such as the ones of Zhongwei, China, our ancestors took stones to stone and chiseled away into history their everyday life: horned animals, fellow hunters, bows and arrows. Written language in the East, just as was the case in the West, was born out of pictures.

At least as far back as 3,000BC one finds examples written on animal bones and that can be traced directly to characters in modern use. From here these characters and their use gradually spread

until at one point roughly two thousand years when it was decreed a unification of writing was necessary and a standard of 3,300 characters were selected. It was at this time that the development of a brush gave way to more fluid characters, which in turn allowed for the development of different schools of style.

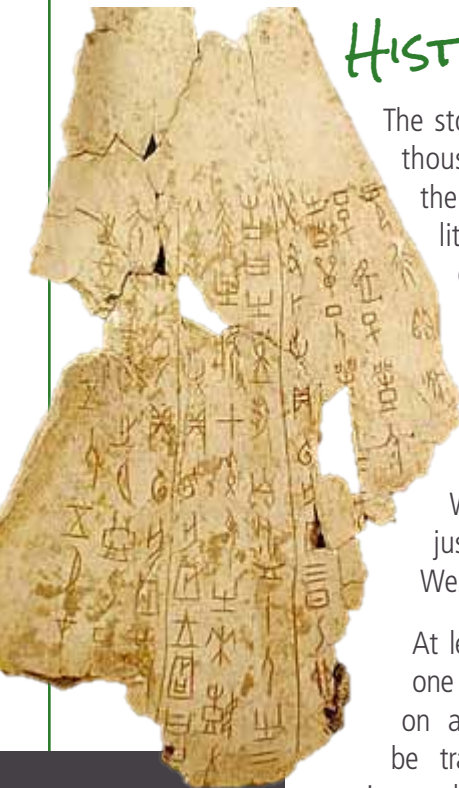
However, it was not even until the middle of the first millennium AD that the use of Chinese characters made its way across Korea and into Japan. Once there, its adopters faced the challenge of matching an already existing way of speaking with a foreign way of writing. In fact, for centuries Japan dealt with this problem almost by ignoring it completely. For hundreds of years characters known as Manyōgana (万葉仮名) existed in Japanese that were simply grammatical and the reader had to know which ones were which. (and you thought learning Japanese is difficult today?)

Eventually the cursive 草書 (Sōsho) style of Manyōgana, developed mainly by women at the time, gave way to what we all know today as hiragana.

Now I challenge you to see painting a character as connecting yourself with history on a more abstract level: See in that brush the stone chisel used in Zhongwei, in that character you paint the history of that character and the part you play in its evolution of language.

LANGUAGE

The Japanese language is by no small measure difficult for the average native English speaker to use in daily conversation, let alone write. The grammar is the reverse, there are no spaces in between words, and a single particle (despite now made "simpler" with the advent of hiragana) used incorrectly changes the entire meaning of the sentence. Yes, it is certainly a tall hurdle to overcome.



One of the hardest challenges, though once cleared, most useful is that of the kanji. Japanese has 2,136 official kanji for everyday-use (called 常用 Jōyō). How does a recent college graduate go about committing to memory that many kanji? The way everyone else does: rote memorization. Games and memorizing gimmicks are nice at the beginning when you learn the first 100. Just as how seeing 人 as two legs helps you remember the kanji for person. But at a certain point one just has to sit down and do like the princes of ancient China did and copy by hand until even your hand memorizes the movements.

Shodō offers someone who is learning kanji the perfect way to explore this new language while at the same time not becoming a social recluse. There are plenty of clubs out there where one can get their hands dirty, make new friends, and be artistic all the while learning bit by bit a language that surrounds you every day.

MEDITATION

In Zen Buddhism, 筆禪道 Hitsuzendō (Way to God through the Brush) shodō is more than just painting. With the right frame of mind and open heart, the brush is believed to be a way to spiritual peace.



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Painting the most lovely character or the most divine ens (the circle that represents both enlightenment and the void) comes not out of years of practice, it is said, but out of state of 無心 (mushin) mindlessness in the sense that one's mind must be free of distractions and thus free of thoughts.

The way the brush hits the paper, the weight the painter puts on the brush, and the final lift from the surface are all said to be indicators of the person's mental state. Years of practice mean little in Zen Buddhism in the face of one moment of complete 無心.

Though I cannot claim to have even achieved such a state (because I tend to think of how much my



legs hurt sitting seiza) I can attest to the calming powers of shodō. Concentrate on painting the perfect character and you soon make a mistake and grow frustrated. Think only of the now and the characters and you will achieve peace and beauty, both in terms of inner-mind and outer product.

Do not let the fear of being imperfect keep you from trying if only just once. Painting is an expression of your character and shodō is no different; Picasso knew this, Zen Buddhists know this. So it is that with shodō you learn not only how to express your character but how to do it while learning a new language, connecting you with thousands of years of history, and perhaps even journeying on a personal pathway to spiritual enlightenment.

The image below is my calligraphy set. ① Ink stone and ink blocks are the foundation (a good cheap set will do). ② Brushes come in all sizes and materials (ask the storekeeper for a set of good beginner's brushes if nothing else). ③ Like chopsticks, a little brush-rest 筆置き is very useful. ④ A little ceramic container to hold water for when you grind the ink and last but not least, ⑤ don't forget the paper!

MIKANS IN TAIWAN



BY ANNIE VUONG, MATSUNO, ALT 3rd YEAR

Taiwan, an isle oft forgotten in the nomadic JET's tour of Asia. But lest it only be known as "that island that's not really China but is technically China," let me tell you why Taiwan's the perfect spot for neophytes to Asia.

If you've ever been to China, Vietnam, or any of the more rugged and noisily swarming places east of Europe then you must already realize that Japan is one of the exceptions to the ring of Asia's jewels. This isn't to say that it's better or worse in any way but with Japan having assimilated so much of western culture, once you get across the language and culture barriers you can pretty much go about 'normal life' in an expected fashion. However, coming from a person who's been living here for about three years this may be a big understatement. Since you could argue that I've already adapted enough of the culture to not realize the difference anymore, or that I've failed to even notice any big difference since the beginning.

But regardless, if it were a quiz of "Which amongst these does not belong" and all the quantifiers were countries in Asia, then let me be so bold as to say that it has to be Japan. Taiwan on the other hand, is not quite China vast and not quite Japan polite, but it has elements of somewhere in between that a travelling partner of mine put it most eloquently as: The perfect stepping-stone to China and beyond.

BEYOND SIMPLY HOW CHEAP EVERYTHING IS, HERE ARE A COUPLE MORE REASONS TO GO VISIT:

TRANSPORTATION

Taipei was one of the easiest cities I've ever had to navigate around. Unlike Tokyo with its competing train lines and subways, the system is simple enough to figure out even for the completely directionless traveler. Signs and maps are always in both Chinese and English, plus they even have an eco-friendly token system in place of paper tickets.



Food

If you like the spicy stuff just ask the cooks to use a heavy hand with seasoning while they're frying up your mix of veggies and noodles. On the other hand for the more mild of palates, there are dumplings and soups galore—comfort food on just about every corner. Most recommended would be the soup dumplings that scald your tongue if you're too hasty to bite into one.

Language

Look no further if you want prime examples of the English you've been teaching used right before your ears. More than a handful of times I've heard the slightly awkward but ever so useful phrases of "Go straight, turn right, and you'll find it on your left" when trying to find my way around the city. Even more surprising is when you and a bunch of your backpacked buddies are lost on a random street corner and a truck driver turns around and asks in perfect English: "Where do you wanna go?" For all those non-Chinese speakers out there, Japanese can also become the lingua of commerce when you are meandering the night markets. With so many tourists coming from Japan, if ever English proves difficult, resorting to Japanese might just do the trick.

MORE PERSPECTIVES...

VICTORIA MURPHY

Best thing to do in Taiwan?

Drink. Taiwan is famous for inventing the ever so delicious bubble tea, however, that is just one of the multitude of beverages offered! Their fruit juices are tantalizingly delicious, all inclusive with huge pieces of fresh fruit.

Most pleasant difference between Taiwan and Japan?

Cost of public transportation. Most of the central area was accessible by the MRT (Taiwan's subway system) for about 60 TWD a trip! The stations themselves were clean and spacey as well. All in all a lovely way to travel.

Most unpleasant difference between Taiwan and Japan?

Not being able to understand the language. It's been a while since I was in an environment where I couldn't speak the native language at all. However the Taiwanese are generally very good at English. Between their English and my shogakko enhanced gesturing skills, basic communication wasn't really a problem.

General thoughts about the country?

Taipei was an exciting place to go. It struck me as somewhere that would be easy to live in. The city gave off a vibe that was somewhere between: Singapore with its great food and shopping, Japan with its polite people, and Hong Kong with it's down to earth attitude.



DAISUKE YOSHIDA

Best thing to do?

EATING! One of the things I truly enjoyed was consuming the wonderful local dishes. Taiwanese (or Chinese) food can be expensive here in Japan—with the spices and tastes obviously catered to meet Japanese taste buds. The dishes I had in Taiwan were very reasonably priced, but most importantly: authentic and extremely delicious. I definitely enjoyed the kick in some of the spicy dishes that I had. I absolutely recommend eating at the night market where all the locals go. It's a great place for people watching and enjoying Taiwan's amazing food culture.

Most pleasant difference?

Like Japan, public transportation was amazing, convenient and fast. In Taipei City, you could get to most locations with the use of the MRT. But the biggest difference with Japan was the price. For just about 100 yen, you could take a 30-minute train ride anywhere and visit many places under a great budget.

Most unpleasant difference?

There were many stray dogs and cats all over Taipei City. I was surprised to see so many and worried about their safety as they crossed the busy roads.

EMMA CRAWFORD

Best thing to do?

I would definitely recommend making a trip out to see Guandu Temple. The architecture was stunning and everything from the ceilings to the walls was extremely colourful and elaborately decorated. The rooves are what I found most amazing, because there were worlds and stories being played out wherever you looked by beautifully crafted figurines.

Most pleasant difference?

The most pleasant difference would have to be the refreshing untidiness of Taiwan that Japan lacks. Imagine old beat-up scooters lined up along every road, half-kept vegetation, overflowing bunches of flowers, and assortments of houses and apartments each with their own character. Taipei's quirky and capricious character is what leads to an adventure in every stroll you take.

Most unpleasant difference?

To be honest, if you're going to stay for a short-term there isn't much that will make your experience unpleasant. All except for certain pungent and overpowering smells of particular local dishes (try the stinky tofu if you're brave)!

General thoughts?

With its close proximity to Japan (only a few hours flight from Osaka), Taiwan was the perfect place to go to mix things up a bit. The people were friendly, the food was GREAT and super cheap, along with a clean and fast metro system exploring the country was a breeze.



Being an ALT

The many sides
to the job...

In the classroom



In the staffroom



Outside school

On the side



With such awesome skills,
who wouldn't hire us after JET??

YORKSHIRE STYLE GREEK AUBERGINE SALAD

BY VICTORIA MURPHY, MATSUYAMA, 4th YEAR

BRIEF HISTORY OF THE EGGPLANT

Aubergine, or eggplant has many nicknames but most unflattering of all would be its ancient nickname of "mad apple." This stems from how the vegetable actually belongs to the nightshade family that includes the poisonous plant Belladonna.

Around the world today it is known as: la berenjena in Spain, aubergine in France, eggfruit in Australia, garden fruit in West Africa, melanzana in Italy, and melitzana in Greece. The last two being derived from its old latin name of mala insana—mad apple.



INGREDIENTS

(serves 4 as a side)

- 2 aubergines
- 2 large tomatoes
- 1 carrot
- ½ onion
- 2 cloves of garlic
- Juice of a lemon
- Parsley (optional)



METHOD

Step 1: Cut your aubergines into slices, salt and leave for 20 minutes. After 20 minutes, wash the salt away. Note: This step can be skipped but the aubergine will absorb more oil when you fry it.

Step 2: Cut your aubergines, carrots and tomatoes into small cubes. Dice your onion and garlic.

Step 3: Fry your aubergines, onions, garlic and carrots together in olive oil until everything looks browned.

Step 4: Add tomato and cook for a couple of minutes longer.

Step 5: Add the lemon juice and parsley, stir. Finished!



CUCUMBER TATAKI

BY VICTORIA MURPHY, MATSUYAMA, 4th YEAR

INGREDIENTS

(serves 4 as a side)

2 Japanese cucumbers

2 tbsp vinegar

1 tbsp sugar

½ tsp salt

1 tsp sesame oil

In the first edition of Vicky's Kitchen, we gave you tools to make the basis of all Japanese food. This time round we'll be looking at a couple of dishes that can accompany your main. Often I find myself saying, I wish salad could be more interesting. I want to be healthy and eat vegetables but there's only so much ごま dressing that I can take. If you want to eat vegetables but are tired of salads here are a couple of quick and simple ways to spice up the greener side of your meals.

METHOD

Step 1: This is the fun part! Put the cucumber on a chopping board and take out a rolling pin. Whack the cucumber until it breaks into pieces. This actually requires just the right amount of strength—too much enthusiasm will cause your kitchen to have beautiful new cucumber wallpaper, not enough and the cucumber will stare mockingly back at you completely unharmed. Apply just the right amount of force and the cucumber will crumble before your mighty rolling pin in a controlled manner. Whack up and down the length of the cucumber until it has naturally broken into pieces. Use your fingers to aid in further separating.

Step 2: Place the cucumber in a sealable bag with vinegar, ginger, salt, sesame oil and sugar. Shake and then leave in a refrigerator for 20 minutes.

Step 3: Take the cucumber out of the bag and place in a stylish manner on a plate. Finished!



CUCUMBER TATAKI LITERALLY:
SLAMMED CUCUMBER.

PHỞ Gà (PRONOUNCED "FUH GAH")



BY: ZUNG DO, MATSUYAMA, ALT 4th YEAR

When I get hungry for some home cooking, and craving a special meal to hit the spot and give me that warm feeling inside, I make phở gà (pronounced «fuh gah»). I hope you can enjoy it too. As they say in Vietnamese "Ăn ngon nhé"

Add noodles to bowl, followed by the chicken, onions and then spoon over broth and enjoy.

BROTH:

8 cups of water
200 grams Chicken bones
1 medium yellow onion, unpeeled and cut in half
3 inch piece of ginger, unpeeled
1 ½ inch piece of cinnamon stick
1 whole clove
1-2 tablespoon sugar
1-2 tablespoon salt
Optional: Fish sauce (to taste)

TO MAKE BROTH:

1. Broil or grill the onion halves, ginger and cinnamon until charred. Scrap off the black charred bit.
1. Boil water in pot. Quickly wash the chicken bones in boiling water for 2 min. Discard water. Place clean chicken bones into the pot, with ginger. Cook for 1 hour. Place the remaining ingredients into the broth. Continue to cook. (The longer the better)



TOPPING:

- 1 packet of flat thin rice noodles (cooked)
- 200g chicken breasts or thighs
- Green onions
- Thinly sliced yellow onion
- Clean chicken thighs or breasts with salt and place into the boiling broth.
- Boil until the chicken is cooked (ie. no longer pink inside).
- Remove chicken from the broth and shred into small pieces.