

WINTER 2013

The Mikan

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



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STAFF

Managing Editor / Content Director
Harrison Fuerst

Graphic Designer
Jiemin Liao

Cover Photo: **Harrison Fuerst**
Title Logo: **Melania Jusuf**



FROM THE EDITOR

Greetings Ehimeans!

As we slog through the Ehime winter and its creeping hours of darkness, freezing offices and bone dry air, take heart! For there is a warm and citrusy orange light upon us, and it shines for thee.

Ahem — we present to you, at long last, the Winter 2013 issue of The Mikan!

As Annie and Melania have moved on, my wife Jiemin and I have taken hold of these time-tested orange reins and hit the ground running. Thanks to Jiemin's design efforts and the commitment of all of our article contributors, we have quite the assortment of content on offer this issue.

You'll discover how to refine your work ethic and implement immersive teaching strategies, study up on the significance of Japan's ekiden and the (less than savory) qualities of natto, and learn how to build rapport with colleagues by muddling through training exercises together! Even the more seasoned JETs out there may learn of some interesting new places to visit by checking out our featured list of favorite Matsuyama hotspots.

Once again, many thanks to all of our contributors for their time and effort, and for anyone interested in becoming part of our elite Mikan team, please get in touch with me at [isitatonic\[at\]gmail.com](mailto:isitatonic[at]gmail.com)!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Harrison Fuerst'.

Harrison Fuerst
Managing Editor / Content Director

RA SPOTLIGHT



Drago Flores 🍊

Konnichiwa Ehime! I came to Ikata in 2011 and work as the CIR planning events around holidays and working with our sister city in Minnesota, USA, where I am originally from. When I'm not in the office I'm editing photos and movies, cooking my own meals, traveling (I'll admit I often go to Kochi) and trying to learn how to play the guitar. See you at this year's Shimanami Kaido bike ride to Onomichi in May!!



Heather Sevicke-Jones 🍊

Hey Ehime! I come from New Zealand but now live in Imabari and teach at one Secondary Education School here. I have been RA for Toyo A since last April. I enjoy learning taiko, tea ceremony and travelling around Japan and Asia.

PA MESSAGE

Heya!

They say times flies, and for us, well, it's flown quite a ways since we arrived four-and-a-half years ago. They're kicking us off the JET program 'cause frankly, we've been here for too long and they want fresh, young, bright-eyed youths like many of you, rather than crusty, old men like us.

As we close out our tenure as PAs, we'd like to say thanks for putting up with us. We've enjoyed the experience and hope we were able to help any of you that had questions or problems during the year. We'd like to think things have gone smoothly this year, and that's in large part thanks to everyone's efforts and all the support we've received.

To those that are sticking around, we hope you continue to enjoy yourselves in your jobs and daily lives and continue to convince everyone in Ehime how awesome the lot of us are. To those of you going home, we hope you have the chance to experience everything that Ehime and Japan have to offer in the next few months.

In February and March we will be working with the prefectural office to select new members for the 2013-2014 PA/RA team. If you're interested, or have questions about the positions available, holler at us at ehimepa@gmail.com. Before we go we wanna leave our Love Princess in good hands!

Warm regards,
Steve Lydon and Dansby
Ehime Prefectural Advisors



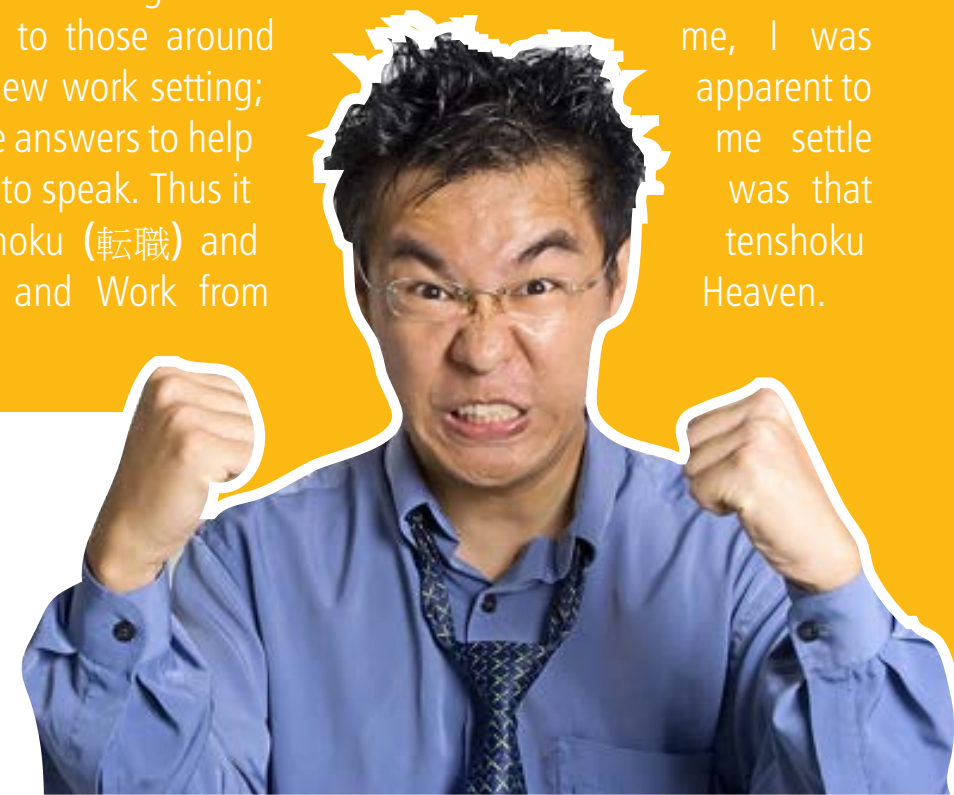
“MY VACATION TIME!”

WORK-LIFE BALANCE STRUGGLES IN JAPAN

BY DRAGO FLORES, 2nd YEAR CIR

Your workplace in Japan — whether you are teaching, coordinating and planning international cultural exchange events, or translating and interpreting — does not engender the same work environment that you were used to in your home country. Suddenly you find that certain cultural aspects of that previous environment, certain things that you considered at one point to be quite normal and unremarkable, stand out in stark contrast to the new “normal.” Nowhere, I find, is this situation truer than in the attitude that is held by the Japanese employee in regard to their work. An attitude that can be summed up in the word *tenshoku* — a word that, depending on the kanji used to write it, has two completely different meanings and is the source of your discomfort.

One of the most vivid memories of my time on the JET program is from November 2011; my boss walked over to me from his desk across the room, handed me a post-it riddled book, and told me to give it a look-over. You see, apparent to him and to those around me, I was not adjusting well to my new work setting; me, this book contained the answers to help me settle down and see the light, so to speak. Thus it was that I first learned about *tenshoku* (転職) and (天職): Provisional Work and Work from Heaven.



My work is not a stepping-stone, provisional; it is my destiny to work where I am now, and it is my duty to make the best of what I have been given — from heaven. This is what he wanted me to grasp.

“My work is not a stepping-stone, provisional; it is my destiny to work where I am now, and it is my duty to make the best of what I have been given — from heaven.”

Unfortunately, it seems that this work we are bound to is in fact temporary. Whether or not I consider it to be a gift from above is of no difference given that I will undoubtedly be undertaking different tasks under a different organization in five years or less. Even if I wanted to stay forever, it would come to an inevitable end. Regardless, in the aforementioned two Japanese words lies

the subtle difference. Understanding this point, the Japanese viewpoint on work and our place in it, will help you assimilate and come to terms with your situation.

Admittedly, it is not easy to completely integrate because language barriers keep us from connecting on that very crucial language level. But take away those barriers and are you left with harmony? Perfect agreement? No! Any Kyoami could have told you that.

By and large, JET participants align themselves with the following three points.

1. Our time in Japan is transient,
2. Travelling is a fun learning experience, and
3. Allotted vacation time is a right.

Because of (1) we strive to make the most of our short time in Japan by engaging in (2), and we do that by using the mindset in (3) — all as long as we are not putting undue stress on our workplace. The problem is that these ideas, even if communicated clearly and succinctly to your BOE, will not make sense; they will probably not agree that you are being equitable. Why?

I challenge you to look into the book at your office where everyone writes down exactly when they took 有休 **or yūkyū** (paid vacation). Take a look at how many days of **yūkyū** your coworkers have used in the current year (previous years are probably towards the back of the binder) and try to find anyone who has used all of their allotted time. You probably will not. You may not even find someone who has used *half*. I have a coworker who used *one* day, just one day of vacation time in 2012.



Bear in mind that this is no anomaly. People in Ehime are not exceptionally hard-working; that is, they are no more hard-working than most Japanese. According to a 2010 survey by the Japanese Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, Japanese on average use less than half (48.2%) of their allotted **yūkyū** (the average national allotted **yūkyū** is eighteen days) and the smaller the organization, the less time-off employees seem to take.

So it should come as no surprise now when you look at your small school in Japan and your supervisor looking at your vacation request sternly. It's because none of the other teachers or coworkers are doing what you are doing!

But there are exceptions. Sixty-five-year-old Shikoku Electric employee and eikaiwa friend Mr. Suzuki countered these claims by informing me, "New employees in our company have fifteen days of paid holidays a year. I didn't forget to use my paid holidays when I was a new employee... maybe I used ten days." A living example of someone who used more than half of their vacation days, even as a new employee. When asked what he would think if a new employee used *all* of their paid vacation, he said it would be "no problem," adding that "Vacation time is a right. [Furthermore,] our labor union and our corporation recommend we use all of it."



So, I tracked down that law and just as he said, there it was: Article 39. Article 39 of the Japanese Labor Standards Law stipulates that “継続し、又は分割した十労働日の有給休暇を与えなければならない” [An employer shall grant annual paid leave of 10 working days, consecutive or divided]. In other words, the five extra days a new employee gets at Shikoku Electric are a bonus. Only after one has been employed for over a year and a half is additional leave required by law (incrementally, based on years employed). In fact, the extra ten days of paid vacation time that many, if not most, JETs receive is not technically required by law until an employee has worked continuously for six years!

Several JETs became very aware of Article 39 last fall when, for reasons unclear to this writer, their BOEs wiped half of their vacation days off the board, leaving them with the national minimum of ten.

But whether we have ten, fifteen, or twenty days of *yūkyū* at our disposal, we ought not to use our vacation days whenever we please. We have our rights, and we have our responsibilities as representatives of our countries and public working officials.

You see, what I didn't realize when my boss taught me about *tenshoku* was that when he said 転職 (provisional work), he was actually talking about our rights; and that when he said 天職 (work from heaven), he was actually talking about our responsibilities.

On the one hand, we have a right to change jobs and choose our future. It is our right to

leave and move on, to go home, to change our life when we want. And yet, on the other hand we have an immediate responsibility to do our work, *today*, which includes a responsibility to the people, students, and town around us. I challenge you to internalize this idea: Do not treat any responsibility as temporary and therefore unimportant. Our daily responsibilities, trying as they may be, are very real and deserve our full attention and dedication.

Thus, even now as some of us ready ourselves to return home, let us remember *tenshoku*. We are going home — but before we do, we need to refocus our hearts on our responsibilities and finish off our time here in Ehime with only the most positive of relations with the people we have come to know both through and outside of work.

As far as we can, we should use our paid holidays to have a happy life.

— Mr. Suzuki



Further Reading

- “Who Works the Longest Hours?” – <http://bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-18144319>
- “Work and Leisure in the U.S. and Europe: Why So Different?” – <http://www.nber.org/chapters/c0073.pdf>
- Japanese Institute for Labor and Training. “Working Hours” – <http://www.jil.go.jp/english/workinglifeprofile/2011-2012/05.htm>

TRANSITIONS: TEACHING USING A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

BY KYLE DUSKE, 2nd YEAR ALT

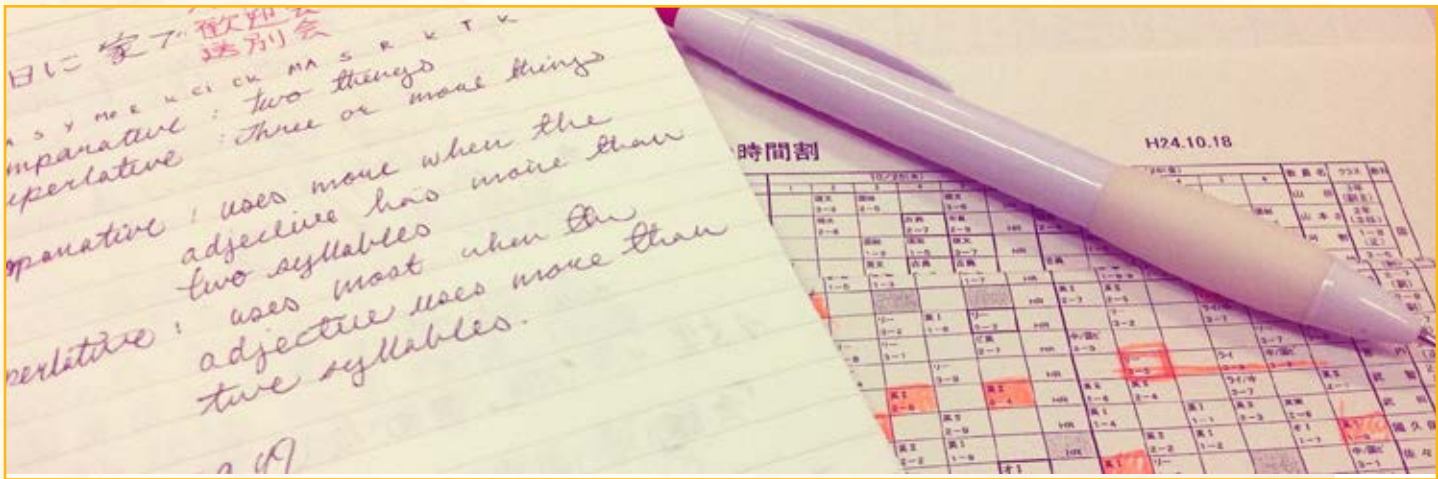
When teaching a foreign language, it is quite important to have most if not all of the class conducted in the target language. Japan is currently undergoing a transition that intends to enforce this through a new course of study. This transition will not be easy as there are many barriers; however, with the right mindset and preparation this transition does not have to be as difficult as many expect. Below I will outline a few simple steps to help aid teachers who may be in transition.

KEEP IT SIMPLE

You are never too good for the basics. This is something that is often forgotten in many classes. If teachers remember to continually reinforce simple language and commands through repetitive use, the students will adapt and find themselves more ready for daily use of their target language.

This type of simple language can be used in every class and can be learnt quite quickly. However, if it is not used regularly it can be forgotten just as quickly. So keep it simple and never give up on the basics.

Commands such as "Sit down," "Stand up," "Pass the papers back," "Hand your homework in," "Answer the question," etc, should always be done in the target language. It is also important to use numbers and other simple language consistently. It may even be a good idea to have the students write their names and the date on all assignments using the target language.



REPEAT YOURSELF

If you are finding it difficult to adjust to teaching strictly in the target language begin to repeat yourself. If you give a command in the non-target language immediately repeat it in the target language. This will begin to become time consuming. To compensate for this limit your use of the non-target language.

REPEAT AFTER ME

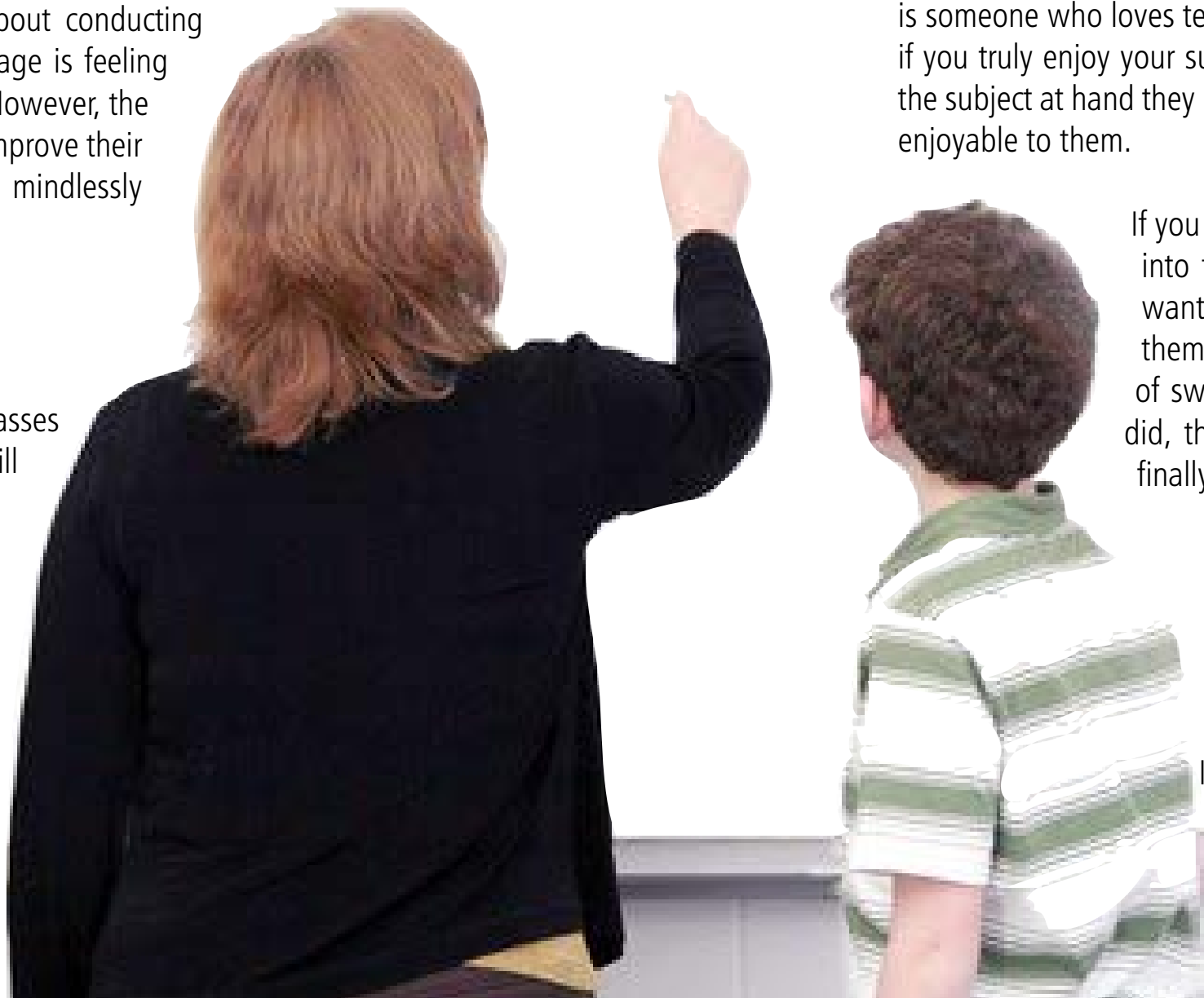
Chorus reading may not be overly effective in language acquisition however it will help the students warm up their tongues and stay engaged in class. If things are starting to get quiet or you feel you are speaking far more than the students simply have them repeat key words or phrases after you from time to time.

BELIEVE IN YOUR STUDENTS

One of the most difficult things about conducting a class wholly in your target language is feeling like you are not being understood. However, the point in class is for the students to improve their foreign language abilities, not to mindlessly complete the scheduled tasks.

BE PATIENT

Your transition to conducting classes wholly in your target language will not be simple. Many times it will seem like the students are lost, but if they are given the time to adapt to your new methods of teaching their overall learning outcome will likely be much greater. Give it a month or two. The students will struggle, but when it all starts to click you may find yourself pleasantly surprised with their improvement.



DO AS I DO

A great teacher is not one who has mastered their chosen subject, but rather someone who can empathize with their students' struggle while offering them the appropriate structure to foster a desired learning outcome. A great teacher is someone who loves teaching as much as they love learning. Students can sense if you truly enjoy your subject or not. If you can show them how much you enjoy the subject at hand they may start to understand how the subject can become more enjoyable to them.

If you are still having a hard time preparing yourself to transition into teaching using the target language, consider this: If you wanted to teach someone how to swim you would never take them to the nearest baseball field, lecture them about the theory of swimming and show them a few basic stroke forms. If you did, they would likely flounder (if not drown) when they were finally let into the water.

We want to make our classrooms immersive places where both teachers and students can learn, develop and make mistakes. When it comes to teaching a foreign language the first step in developing such an atmosphere is simply using the target language. I once had a Japanese high school student tell me they did not enjoy studying English because they had not actually used English in years. With that being said, ask yourself — “When was the last time my students and I *really* used our chosen language of study?”

LET'S MATSUYAMA!

A JET'S GUIDE TO PLUGGING INTO MATSUYAMA'S LOCAL SCENE

BY HARRISON FUERST, 2nd YEAR ALT



Photo: <http://www.hostels.com>

SEN GUESTHOUSE

道後多幸町4-14

<http://senguesthouse-matsuyama.com/>

When it comes to finding that perfect mixture of value and personality in Matsuyama lodging, Sen Guesthouse simply can't be beat. Sure you could crawl into a capsule hotel, but odds are the guy at the front desk isn't the least bit interested in enjoying a glass of his homebrewed liquor with you. Not only are Sen's doughty proprietors Matt and Noriko two of the coolest and most helpful folks you're likely to meet in the doing-stuff-in-Matsuyama circuit, but the place itself mirrors the character of the owners through its relaxing and homey atmosphere. For a mere ¥2,700 per night in the mixed dorm you'll be able to enjoy Matsuyama with this fixture of Matsuyama's Dogo community as your launching point, and enjoy a stay worth writing home about. Tell 'em Harrison sent you!

HOSHIZORA JETT

二番町1丁目8-4LXビルB1-F

<http://www.hoshizorajett.jp/>

The only dive bar around where you can find old school Famicom games encased within its tables, Hoshizora JETT is the one true Matsuyama livehouse where rock 'n roll is king. An integral part of Matsuyama's local music scene, Hoshizora JETT regularly hosts DJ events, jam sessions, local release parties and performances by Japan's better known underground rock outfits. Fans of pop punk and experimental noise rub shoulders with garage rockers and DJs of various stripes; proof that here, community is everything. To be sure, the ¥300 per glass Suntory Malts kept on tap may also have something to do with bringing folks together. Stop by any time between 7 p.m. and 3 a.m., and don't forget to catch the raucous band that gave the venue its name, Guitar Wolf, as they tear up the stage on March 10th.



Photo: <http://dj-jyuka.img.jugem.jp/>

OTO-DOKE

三番町2丁目10-9,
第3クリーンビル3F
<http://www.oto-doke.com/>

One of the more recent additions to the Matsuyama livehouse community, Oto-doke has staked out its niche as the place for a range of electronic forms of music. With occasional exceptions, the DJ parties here pump out a steady stream of house, techno, and experimental sound collages channeled through more electronic bits 'n bobs than you could fit in a Hardoff warehouse. Oto-doke is absolutely worth a visit if you prefer the sound of pumping bass to raspy vocals and scratchy guitars. Alternatively, its close proximity to Hoshizora Jett makes it easy to include in anyone's weekend livehouse crawl.



Photo: <http://www.oto-doke.com>



道後湯之町1-39
<http://wanitosai.untokoshō.com/>

Photo courtesy of Matthew Iannarone

If you've taken a stroll around the Dogo area recently, chances are you may have admired the front door of Wani to Sai; it's that place with the doorknob in the shape of an outstretched hand! Known fondly to some as the Circus Bar, Wani to Sai isn't your average watering hole. Taka the owner, having lived the better part of a decade in Italy, is also a bona fide marionette street performer. He's infused the space with a simultaneously whimsical and intimate vibe, something like the set of an Italian version of the film *Amélie* filmed on location in Matsuyama. While the peculiar assortment of knickknacks and handmade puppet creations may pique your interest initially, the impeccable beer selection will seal the deal. Enjoy any one of the fine Belgian and German beers available with a complimentary snack, and pretend that you don't even know what Asahi Super Dry means anymore. If you hit it off with the management, you may even bear witness to an impromptu marionette performance.

MORE MUSIC

大手町1丁目9-10
<http://www.moremusic.co.jp/>

For any audiophiles out there who don't enjoy the tedium of digging through record crates, More Music provides an excellent alternative to Matsuyama's vinyl-only shops. The lady behind the desk speaks superb English and may actually talk your ear off about her years living in Los Angeles. You won't mind though, because it's cute as heck to hear an older Japanese lady simply rave about her Top 10 Indie-Pop Bands of the 2000s. As you might expect, you'll find quite the assortment of indie albums here, but really the entire store's catalogue is quite diverse in terms of era and genre. More Music is even within walking distance of Matsuyama JR, so why not stop by the next time you plan on taking the train?



Photo: <http://www.e-komachi.com>



http://blog.livedoor.jp/angels_egg

EARTHBEAT

千舟町3丁目1-5 藤村ビル4F
<http://earthbeat.info/>

If it's vinyl you seek, head over to Earthbeat and you shall receive. Helmed by a DJ with a passion for hip-hop and reggae, this one room record trove has a bit of everything. You'll be free to choose from old Japanese mambo albums, international hip-hop instrumentals, surf guitar, and a whole boatload of reggae classics. Of course, you can feel free to give a listen to any records of interest and try before you buy. Just realize it's entirely possible to spend an entire afternoon doing this if you aren't careful! The first record that I purchased in Japan was from Earthbeat, and it has certainly not been the last. Happy crate digging!



Photo: <http://www.e-komachi.com>

CAFE MAGNOLIA

今治市玉川町長谷甲 1060-1

<http://www.cafe-magnolia.jp/>

Okay, I am partly cheating with this one — but only partly! While *technically* located on the outskirts of the city of Imabari, the majority of Magnolia's clientele hail from Matsuyama. I don't blame them for making the trek, either, as here is the one place that offers the absolute best vegan cuisine in Ehime. Delicious blueberry tofu cheesecakes with a hint of white miso, delectable *fu* (wheat-gluten bread) sandwiches and many, many more unique creations make every visit more than worth it. If you feel at home in the vegan kitchen, you can also purchase soup stocks, sauces, and other rare vegetarian finds like packaged lentils once you're finished with your lunch or hot chai. If you find that Magnolia is a bit too out of the way or lacking in the meat department, Matsuyama's *Fumikaden* is a viable macrobiotic alternative.

Honorable Mentions

NATURAL GREEN

千舟町 5 丁目 2-7 1F

Don't miss this gem of a corner shop perched along one of the side streets branching out from Shieki. Easily identified by the produce that's usually on display outside, Natural Green is foodie heaven. Whether you want some darn good pasta sauce, niche cooking oils, rice milk or tempeh, it's all here.

CASA GUCCA

三番町 7 丁目 11-9 第二竹田ビル 2F/3F

<http://www.casagucca.com/>

For those of you who are simply rolling in the Yenjamins, there is no better place than Casa Gucca to scale your wardrobe and apartment furnishings up to the high end. Custom designed clothing, shoes, furniture and jewelry take up two levels of the boutique's chic interior. For the right price they'll even negotiate producing items through a commission system. For a glimpse of their handiwork, check out the kitchy tables found in Hoshizora Jett.

DOKUKINOKO

一番町 1 丁目 11-8 ヨコハタビル 2F

<http://www.hoshizorajett.jp/kinoko/>

Not far from the main entrance of Okaido is *Dokukinoko* (Toadstool), a fantastic little vintage clothing and accessory shop with downright generous prices. Specializing in the 60s and 70s aesthetic range, this tiny shop is fashion light-years ahead of larger chain stores like Gintengai's *Kuranosuke*, which are extremely hit or miss — though mostly just miss. The super friendly owner is the wife of one of the gents working over at Hoshizora JETT, too, so you'll be making mad connections in no time. Bulkier fellows beware, however, as you may need to shed a few of those excess gaijin pounds before the slim fit shirts will do you any justice. *Ganbare!!* Oh, and don't forget to ask for the name of the Japanese mod band that's probably playing over the in-store speaker system; they are bound to be good.

Photo: hoshizorajett.com/dokukinoko



COUNTING PULSES



BY DAMON ROBINSON, 1st YEAR ALT

7, 8, 9, 10... 11... 12...

We all have those days where, ready to leave, something pushes us to start a conversation and we wind up staying at school far longer than we planned. I had one of them last semester. All packed up, I crossed the empty *shokuinshitsu* (staff room) to check the next day's schedule; at that school, there's always something going on I'm not told about.

Out popped *kouchou-sensei*. He's a friendly guy who's always ready to lend his opinion on politics and current events. I was expecting the sort, and readied to deflect the conversation.

"Damon," he said, "why don't you come check out the AED training?"

I was surprised. I had just been complaining about the students' Japanese influencing mine, and didn't have the willpower to miss a chance to come into contact with directed, professional, practical Japanese, even if that meant braving a drafty gym.

I figured the school must have been paying a flat fee for the training, as instead of observing I was quite nearly forced into participating. But it was actually taught by volunteers from the local fire department, and there were middle aged women from the community also participating.

Forgoing my usual "Are you stupid?" (° ㍈ °) glare that follows whenever someone assumes the *gaikokujin* present in an obviously Japanese environment can't speak Japanese, I dove right into the training. The formulaic, stilted Japanese and accompanying sequence of actions were as much theatrics for me as they were for the Japanese participants, and it was this aspect that allowed me to really get into it.

The scene came alive, and I placed enormous pressure on myself to play the role perfectly. There is a heavy emphasis on teamwork in AED, which fits in perfectly with the rules, manner, and culture I see drilled into the students' heads everyday.

Chest compressions and artificial respiration are done in shifts according to the number of

people present. To keep track (30 compressions to a respiration session) and to alert others to how much has been done, counting is an absolute necessity. I quickly found that I had extreme difficulty counting quickly past 10. It was shocking to think that bumbling something so simple could impair rescue efforts.

Out of rotation for the moment I turned my attention to the Japanese participants, trying to discern how they could produce the syllables quickly and understandably. It became clear that they were using shortcuts, shortened forms of the numbers that enabled them to keep pace. The shortcuts themselves are fascinating, a combinations of sounds not expressable in *hiragana*, but close enough to those of English to be viable lesson material for those students who still seem not to understand there are phonetical differences between languages.

All in all it was an exciting, humbling few hours, I picked up a skill and have some new leads for teaching. I'm also much more open to hanging around after work hours!



AN EKIDEN PRIMER

BY CHRISTIAN VILLEGAS, 1st YEAR ALT

On Sunday, December 2nd, Imabari city's elementary schools competed in the 25th annual Namikata Ekiden held in Namikata-cho. Forty-three boys' teams and forty-two girls' teams competed in an eight-person relay that covered 13 kilometers, or 8 miles. An *ekiden* is a long distance relay race where each member of a relay team runs a portion of the total distance. The first ekiden was in 1917, and was part of a commemorative celebration to mark the relocation of Japan's capital from Kyoto to Tokyo. Relay teams from the two cities started in Kyoto and ran to the next *eki* (station) to pass a sash called a *tasuki* to the next awaiting relay team member. This first

ekiden took three days to complete. Today, ekidens are part of the Japanese school's fall and winter sports programs.

Ekidens are very different from Western cross country races. While cross country involves everyone running a set distance (from 1.6 kilometers or 1 mile, to 3.2 kilometers or 2 miles for American elementary students) at the same time, Namikata Ekiden runners cover distances ranging from 1.4 to 2 kilometers depending on which leg of the relay they are tasked to run. Relay teams each have a *tasuki* which they pass along at exchange points marking the end of one team member's race and the beginning of another's. There is a clear emphasis on teamwork and contribution when one has to reach the exchange point fast enough to ensure a lead for their team.

Leading up to the relay, I had the opportunity to run with students of mine from two elementary schools: Kanbe Elementary School and Hidaka Elementary School. Having biked and run solo since I first arrived in Japan, I enjoyed having a group to train with. Kanbe Elementary practiced relay drills leading up to the ekiden, with students sprinting laps and practicing handoffs of the *tasuki* on their outdoor field. Hidaka Elementary held 2km time trials in a nearby park. I was able to play the "rabbit" and run ahead in the relay drills to push the pace with my Kanbe students. Though I did fall to 10th place in the 2km time trial with my Hidaka students, I honestly gave my best effort to avoid being beaten by kids one-third to half my age. I'm still amazed at how dedicated my students were to keep up with me or to put me in my place.



On race day, I could see the look of determination on every student's face. The winning boys' team from last year was from Hidaka Elementary, and the winning girls' team was from Toriu Elementary. The ekiden was held in Namikata Park on a cold and drizzling day, as spectators lined the 13km course ready to shout "*ganbatte!*" The boys' race started at 10 a.m. with the girls' race starting 10 minutes later. The same route was used in both races, and this staggered start allowed for a continuous but manageable line of runners at each exchange point. The course route was a loop, so the area of the starting line was also the area for the finish line. Being unfamiliar with the course route, I was only able to observe the runners past the first exchange point and at the start/finish line. As the minutes passed by, runners who completed their leg of the ekiden returned to the start/finish line to await their team's finishing "anchor runner." Parents and teachers were receiving updates via cell phones and walkie-talkies throughout the race from fellow spectators lined up along the length of the course.

Eventually the first place team reached the finish. This year's winning boys' team came from Shimizu Elementary School with a time of 47 minutes and 8 seconds. Hidaka elementary school came in second place with a time of 47 minutes and 31 seconds, with Betsuku Elementary placing third and clocking in at 47 minutes and 43 seconds. In a repeat performance, the girls' team of Toriu Elementary took first place with a time of 49 minutes and 31 seconds. Noma Elementary came in second place with a time of 50 minutes and 49 seconds, with Ohnishi Elementary finishing third with a time of 51 minutes flat.

While I had hoped that Hidaka Elementary could have repeated their success from last year, their second place finish was evident enough of their perseverance in staying with the lead teams. Congratulations to all the runners involved as I look forward to next year's Namikata Ekiden. Being outrun by kids one-third to half my age never gets old.

Results of the 25th annual Namikata ekiden race:
http://www.city.imabari.ehime.jp/taiiku/parts/namikata_ekiden.pdf



THE

FOREIGNER'S ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO NATTO

BY JIA ERN LOY, 3rd YEAR ALT

Perhaps you've just arrived in Japan and are wondering what culinary *horrors* delights it holds. Or perhaps you've been here several years, but never really ventured beyond your warm cocoon of cup ramen and Maccy D's.

Or quite possibly you're just an unsuspecting individual taking a stroll through the supermarket when you come across an innocuous styrofoam container, nestled comfortably between *gyoza* on its left and pickled baby tentacles on its right. You reach out for it, unaware that this moment will change your life forever...

SO, WHAT IS NATTO?

Natto is a traditional Japanese food enjoyed in Japan. It is typically eaten with breakfast, lunch, or dinner, as well as any time one fancies cleansing their palate with a taste of hell.

The word *natto* (納豆) in Japanese means fermented soybeans. That is exactly what natto is. By "fermented" they must mean "swirled through buckets of sludge and force fed to a herd of goats, with the resultant vomit collected and processed through a sewage plant." The end product is a pile of slimy beans that give off the tangy aroma of decomposing cat.

Natto comes in several varieties depending on the type of bean and style of preparation. Some common varieties include 糸引納豆 (*itojiki natto*), 水戸納豆 (*mito natto*) and 雪割納豆 (*yukiwari natto*). Strangely enough, all these translate into the same thing in English: *pretty darn nasty*.

For your convenience, natto comes pre-packaged in individual containers. The portion size of each container is approximately 40 grams, or *far too large*. To ~~mask the flavour~~ complement the beans, each container comes with a packet of soy sauce, and another containing a mysterious yellow paste known as *karashi*. This sounds suspiciously like *crapsh*** but is apparently mustard!

Natto comes in a variety of packaging, mostly designed to convince the buyer that he does, in fact, want to tuck into a steamy box of rancid beans. Packaging frequently features eye-catching slogans or funky graphics; anything to distract you from the actual contents lying within.

Individual packages are uncommon, and natto is normally sold in packs of two, three, sometimes even four, because after all, who in their right mind wants to buy just *one box* of the stuff?

HOW TO EAT NATTO?

The first thing that hits you as you peel back the lid of the container is the smell. This actually isn't all that bad — If you're the kind of person who regularly enjoys smelling unwashed socks with your head wedged in a compost heap.

Before digging in, the beans first have to be 'activated'. Before digging in, the beans first have to be "activated." To do this, the eater has to stir up the natto, generating viscous, gooey strands of, well—goo. Kind of like how your food would look if a spider drooled all over it. This step is crucial, and there is much debate as to what the optimal number of stirs is, as well as which stirring implement best achieves the desired effect. This is, of course, all immaterial. Stirring simply puts off the moment of actual eating, but also prolongs the release of noxious fumes into the surrounding air. It's a no-win situation with this food.

Some people will tell you that once you get over the initial smell, the taste that follows is much better. These people are what are universally known as *liars*. Your first mouthful of natto will be an explosion of flavours in your mouth. These will range from unpleasant to excrement-like. It's hard to describe the exact taste, but try to imagine rinsing your mouth out with a swamp. Except in comparison, natto makes the actual swamp taste like a jar of spring water.

With each successive mouthful you can almost feel your taste buds wilt as they lose the will to live. This is an added bonus though, as it saves you the trouble of having to surgically remove your tongue after the experience.

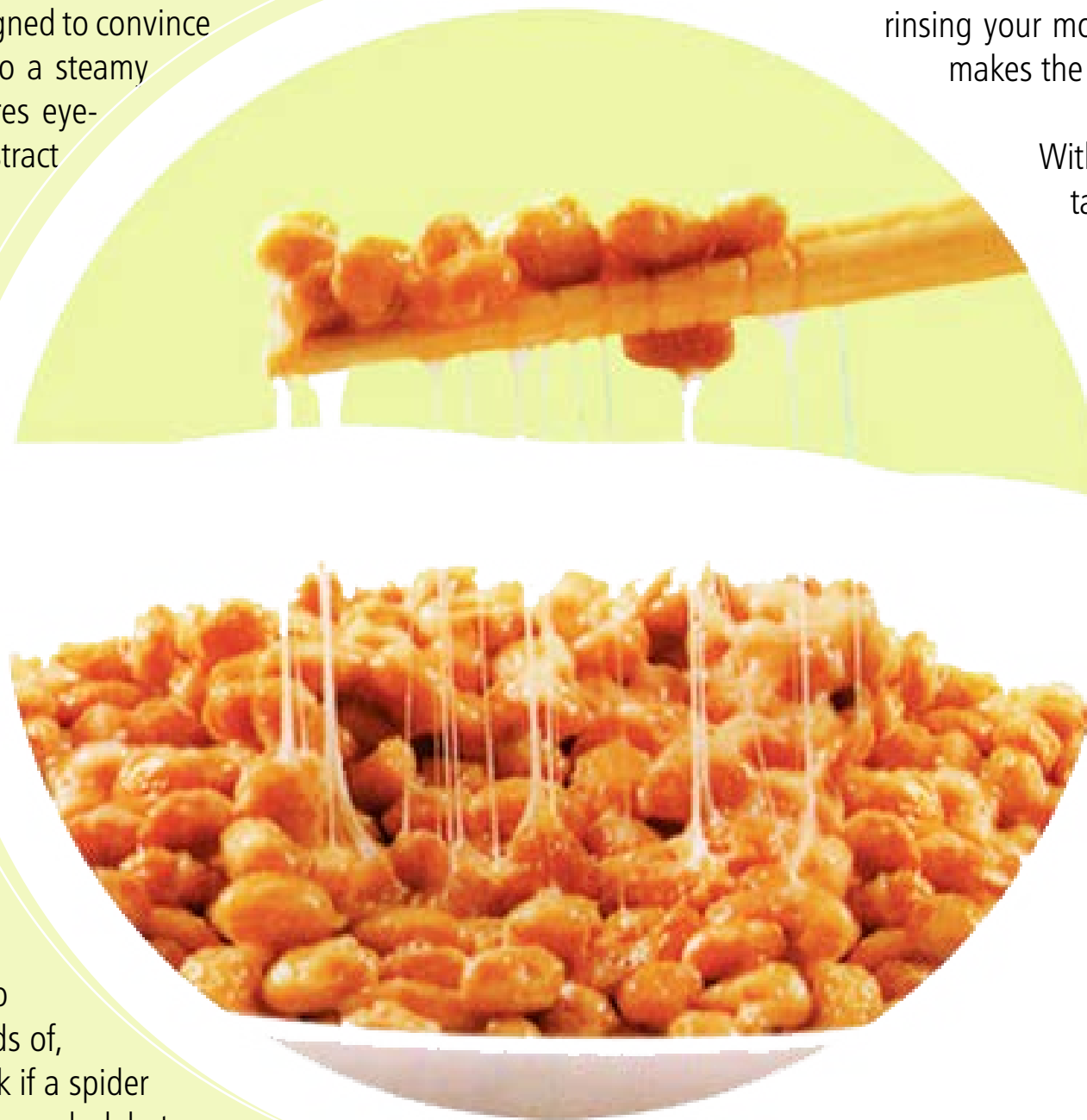
Natto is typically eaten over rice or noodles, though in the absence of either, a bed of slugs would do just as well. Some people prefer to eat natto on its own, likening the experience to coating your tongue over and over again with the slime of a thousand frogs.

If enjoying natto on its own, there are several steps one should follow in order to enhance the experience. This is the universally preferred method:

1. Open package
2. Die a little inside
3. Enter time machine
4. Travel 10 minutes forward in time
5. Exit to finished container of natto
6. Celebrate

Understandably, for various reasons a time machine may not always be available. In such cases, it is best to follow these steps instead:

1. Open package
2. Kill self





SO WHY EAT NATTO?

Despite its questionable reputation, consumption of natto continues to grow. Recent trends suggest that the dish is gaining popularity among the youth of Japan. The 2016 edition of the Legitimate Index of Evidence and Statistics estimates that “well over three Japanese people under the age of twenty regularly enjoy natto for breakfast.”

There are several reasons to eat natto, one of them being the medical benefits associated with its consumption. Research has shown that natto is effective at combating an array of medical complaints ranging from heart disease to baldness. Goodness knows which inspired individual discovered the link between natto and hair growth, but no doubt there is an entire community of hair loss sufferers out there wanting to thank him.



These farmers have obviously never tasted the final product of their crop.

Natto is also claimed to prevent obesity. This is quite possibly because eaters are often forced to empty the contents of their stomach before they manage to finish the rest their meal. For those of you considering bulimia and are unsure of how to start, here's your answer.

Finally, natto is said to have memory boosting effects. A study done on a group of people who had eaten natto showed that they were a whopping 100% more likely to remember the experience as compared to the group that hadn't previously eaten any. Who can blame them? After eating the stuff I doubt I'd be in a hurry to forget it myself.

So there you have it – the next time you reach out for that styrofoam container in the supermarket, think about all that goodness packed into one rotten little bean. And while you're at it, why not go for those pickled baby tentacles too?

Mmm, double the fermentation, double the goodness...



EVENT CALENDAR

NANYO B

April

Ikata Moo Moo Festival (Last weekend in April)

A favorite local festival featuring beef *yakiniku*, live music, an arm wrestling contest and more!

Uwa Renge Festival (April 29th - Showa Day)

Seiyo's biggest festival of the year. *Renge* is a type of small clover-like flower. Come and feast upon the culinary delights of over 150 festival food stalls, play some mud soccer, and make some *mochi*!

“Pokopen Yokochou” - Nostalgia Alley

Every Sunday from April to November in Ozu from 10 until 3:30, come shops open up in Ozu selling candy, games, and collectibles from 1950s Japan.

Pokopen website: <http://pokopen.yokochou.com/>

Ozu city website with a map:

<http://www.city.ozu.ehime.jp/sightseeing/map/pokopen.html>

May

The Uchiko Big Kite Battle (May 5th)

内子町大凧合戦

Enjoy a 500 year-old tradition that brings together over 1000 giant kites and their fliers, all fighting to vanquish their opponents by cutting their kite lines. You can also check out the Kite Dance with *taiko* accompaniment.

Yawatahama Mountain Carnival GO! (May 26th)

Mountain Bike Tournament & Festival

TOYO A

March

Imabari International Fair (March 10th - 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.)

Held at Imabari's Saisai Cafe, the Imabari International fair is a chance for non-Japanese residents to share aspects of their home countries with the community. There will be an art corner, performances of various kinds, and of course... food! JETs from all over Ehime are encouraged to attend, especially if you're able to cook your favorite dish or sing your favorite song.

For questions and interested volunteers, please get in touch with Akiko Tokura from the Imabari International Exchange Association at akikotokura@iciea.jp

Saisaikiteya Website: <http://saisaikiteya.com/>

May

Shimanami Kaido Ride (Date TBA)

Join with JETs from the around the prefecture as we descend upon Imabari to tackle the Shimanami Kaido by bicycle, riding from Imabari to Onomichi in one exhilarating day. Amazing vistas, island temples, and a pirate museum await you! Easily rent a bike or bring your own, and enjoy toll-free passage to Hiroshima-ken. Keep your ear to the ground for more details as summer approaches!