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Wide Island Update

We made it to the second edition! Thank you for the honest comments on our first issue of the Wide Island View. We were also so happy to have people respond to be part of the team. Without you, this newsletter is not possible. If you are still interested in getting involved please email us at wideislandview@gmail.com. If you

have ideas for articles as well we would love to hear from you. This issue we have many new contributing writers discussing a variety of different winter activities to keep you moving during this cold and potentially downheartening time in Japan. So chin up this winter - keep warm under your *kotatsu*, grab a green tea, and...

Happy Reading!

Nikki, Kristin & Casey

skiing, anyone?

by NIKKI MCMULLAN

When the bitter Japanese winter hits, it is tempting to slip under the *kotatsu* and, stocked up with enough *mochi*, green tea and copies of "The Daily Yomiuri" to see us through till mid-March, hit 'hibernation' on the body clock. For those of you swaying towards a spot of just such indulgent isolation, a little word of warning – the fierce weather does nothing to dissuade either the NHK man or the Jehovah's Witnesses from their regular calls so sooner or later you will be

dragged begrudgingly from your seasonal slumber.

With that in mind, why not make the best of the cold weather and hit the slopes instead? Hiroshima has a plethora of snow-parks, many of which are within easy reach of the city by public bus. But which to choose? Wide Island View solicited the advice of one of Japan's top snowboarders to find out where best to head for a good day's adrenalin-pumping downhill action:



A Wide Island Wonderland

Takashi Yamada has high standards when it comes to looking for a snow-park. Originally from Gifu, Takashi now lives in Hiroshima and, as one of the top 50 snowboarders in Japan (he came second in the West Japan short turn event last year and hopes to be placed in the top 20 in the national championships this March in Hokkaido), he knows good snow: 'Hiroshima may not have the best snow in Japan but the artificial snow machines that have been introduced over the last few years have made a big difference,' he says. 'The best snow-park in the area is Mizuho Highland which is just across the border in Shimane. There are regular buses from Hiroshima city, runs for all levels, and usually very good conditions. As such, it is also the most expensive resort in the area – a day pass will set you back 5,500yen and an afternoon 4,200yen. Afternoon skiing begins at noon so it is a good option for anyone averse to unnecessary early rises.

For something a little less pricey, Takashi suggests Pine Ridge Resorts

(frequently referred to by its old name, Geihoku Kokusai). At 4,300yen a day (or 4,800yen for an afternoon plus nighter ticket) and just two hours by bus from the city centre, it's a good alternative.

For beginners looking for simple runs and simple prices, try Osa. The 'pay per hour' pricing system means you can shell out as little as 3,500yen for 4 hours or, should you discover a natural aptitude for the sport, 5,000yen for 10 hours.

If you're looking for lessons, expect to pay around 4,000yen for a two hour lesson. Instructors will rarely speak English (although Takashi – who works at Osa – speaks very good English) but they are used to having foreigners in their classes and are, he assures me, master gesturers.

Equipment hire will cost 3,500-4,500yen for a day. You can also hire clothes for about the same price. People whose proportions differ greatly from

those of the typical Japanese person are advised to call ahead to enquire about sizes because many parks will unfortunately not carry large *gaijin* sizes.

Some travel agents offer excellent package deals which include transport, lift pass, equipment hire and lunch. Many resorts also offer group discounts so bringing a few friends along can cut costs. The other way to reduce expenditure is to arrive around lunch time and buy a lift pass from someone who is leaving. Many families will head home around this time and will sell you their day pass for less than you'll pay at the gate.

Takashi estimates that, especially with the introduction of faux snow machines, we will be able to ski and snowboard in Hiroshima until mid March if not beyond. Start now and who knows? By the end of the season you could be cutting up the slopes with the best of them. §

O-SUSUME DESU!

by JENNIFER MIYOSHI

Jennifer Miyoshi reviews the book *Freakonomics*, by Steven D. Levitt and Stephen J. Dubner.

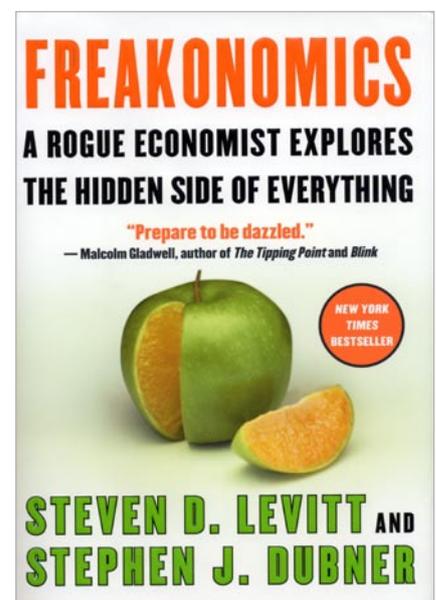
For a brief moment in college, I considered being an economics major because it seemed practical. However, when I saw the fat textbooks filled with numbers and jargon that would have put me to sleep after five minutes, I immediately changed my mind and took some classes on Latin America instead. I vowed I would never look at another econ book again but then I came across *Freakonomics: A Rogue Economist Explores the Hidden Side of Everything* by Steven D. Levitt and Stephen J. Dubner.

I like reading a lot but I was very skeptical about reading a book related to economics for recreational purposes. I don't have much time to read so I have to choose wisely but at the insistence of my sister, who usually has excellent taste in books, I decided to give it a chance. After all, the book's title has the word "freak" in it and I like that word.

Why do drug dealers still live with their

mothers? How is the Ku Klux Klan like a group of real-estate agents? How much do parents really matter? How did the legalization of abortion in the United States contribute to the crime drop in the 1990s? What do school teachers and sumo wrestlers have in common?

These questions and their answers are what the new field of study called 'freakonomics' is all about; those questions that are sometimes asked and rarely answered. Some of these questions discuss very serious and heated topics such as race, poverty, and abortion while other questions are rather more obscure and – well – freakish. Using the tools and strategies of economics, Levitt examines these questions thoroughly and presents his findings with confidence. Many people may not agree with the conclusions he and his co-author come to because they challenge conventional wisdom but the authors at the very least offer an alternative way of looking at the world. Their insights are entertaining and thought-provoking and make for an enjoyable read. Be sure to pay careful attention to the chapter about school



Front cover

teachers and sumo wrestlers!

For more information check out the website: <http://www.freakonomics.com/thebook.php> §

JANUARY • FEBRUARY CALENDAR

- **January 25-26**

Hiroshima Mid-Year Conference

It's mid-year time! Come and learn some more about teaching and mingle with some folks that have been out in the *inaka* for the past six months.

- **February 3**

Setsubun

Setsubun is the day before the beginning of spring according to the lunar calendar. The Japanese perform rituals on *setsubun* to chase away evil spirits. In the 13th century it was traditional to burn dried sardine heads and wood and play drums to scare away evil spirits. Today these activities are not commonly practiced, yet some people still decorate their doorways with fish heads and holy leaves to ward off evil. A more common practice today is throwing roasted soy beans called *fuku mame* (fortune beans) around your house and local temples and shrines. When throwing the beans it is customary to shout "*Oni wa soto! Fuku wa uchi!*" (Devils out, happiness in!). After throwing the beans you should pick up and eat the number of beans that corresponds to your age, as this will supposedly bring you health and happiness.

- **February 3-4**

Yuki Gassen Takano-cho in Shobara

This is the annual Snowball Festival held in northern Hiroshima prefecture. It is a childhood activity taken to the next level. Winners of the festival go on to the national competition held in Hokkaido, to compete against teams from all over the world. Come cheer on the *Henna Gaijin* Team led by Martyn Reynolds. For more information about the festival, contact Martyn at Martyn.Reynolds@gmail.com

- **February 11**

Kenkoku Kinenbi National Holiday

Kenkoku Kinenbi is Japan's National Foundation Day. According to Japanese history, this was the day the first emperor was crowned in 660 BC.

- **February 14**

Valentine's Day

Valentine's Day, like in so many other countries, is a day of love in Japan. It

is said that Valentine's Day was introduced to Japan by a Japanese confectionary company in 1958. It differs from the western Valentine's Day in that it is customary in Japan for only women to give chocolate to men. There are two types of chocolate giving: *Girl choco*, obligatory chocolate that women give to male friends and coworkers; and *honmei choco*, chocolate that a woman gives to a man that she is serious about. Men return the favor on White Day, March 14.

- **February 17**

Hadaka Matsuri in Okayama Prefecture

The *Hadaka Matsuri* is the Naked Man Festival. Although many cities boast about their Naked Man Festival, the Okayama festival is one of the oldest and largest in Japan – and is something that everyone should go to (if not participate in) at least once. It takes place at the Saidaiji temple. Thousands of men strip down to *fundoshi* (Japanese loincloth), purify their bodies with cold water, and at midnight battle to gain possession of the *shingi* (sacred stick). If, after battling fierce competitors and braving the cold weather, they succeed in obtaining the stick, they are guaranteed happiness for the rest of the year. This is an event that must be seen to be believed. Okayama AJET organizes buses to take people to and from Okayama City to Saidaiji Temple, followed by an event in the city afterwards. Look in your inboxes for future emails with more information.



An excellent view at *Hadaka Matsuri*

Hadaka Matsuri in Kui, Hiroshima Prefecture

A smaller version of the Okayama Naked Man Festival on the same night. They still have the naked men and copious amounts of *sake*, and they throw

mochi at the spectators. For more information please contact Theresa Wang at h.theresa.wang@gmail.com

- **Late February**

Kaki Matsuri in Hiroshima Prefecture

Middle to late February is when Hiroshima's oyster farmers harvest their largest crops of oysters. Many of the islands and coastal towns in Hiroshima hold a festival in honor of the oyster harvest. There are stalls selling oysters prepared in all different ways as well as the traditional festival stalls. Check out www.gethiroshima.com for more information on the dates and times of the oyster festivals around the prefecture.

- **February 26-28**

JET Returners' Conference in Yokohama

A conference for second and third-year JETs who plan to return to their country of origin at the end of the current contracted year. Learn about job opportunities after JET and how to deal with reverse culture shock in your home country. CLAIR has sent information to those eligible to go. Closing day for applications is January 26. To download an application form go to the JET website: <http://www.jetprogramme.org/e/current/conferences/returners.html>

- **March 3**

Hina Matsuri

The *Hina Matsuri* or Dolls Festival is celebrated by families to honor their daughters. It is also known as the Girls' Festival. Households with daughters display dolls in their windows with peach blossoms. The Dolls Festival is a modified version of a Chinese tradition. The Chinese tradition was to transfer bad fortunes to dolls and throw them into the river. It is now Japanese tradition to drink sweet *sake*.

References:

<http://www.tanutech.com/japan/valentine.html>

<http://www.city.okayama.okayama.jp/saidaiji/guide/eyo/English/eyo.htm>

<http://www.japan-guide.com/e/e2062.html>

japaneSECulture: “MUSIC”

Aimee Cook looks for a new way to stay ‘upbear’ this winter.

ON A DIFFERENT NOTE

by AIMEE COOK

I stood huddled outside the music room door in my socks, debating whether or not I really wanted to enter. Wide Island H.Q. had requested that I cover an aspect of Japanese culture; in particular, an aspect of culture that the busy *gaijin*-about-town might like to get involved in to keep themselves warm during the winter of discontent. With that in mind, I had been asked for a few words about Japanese musical instruments. Keep you warm? Musical instruments? Perhaps they knew something I didn't – after all, before coming to Japan a heated table was only the stuff of dreams. ‘Besides,’ I was told, ‘You might even have fun.’ It was with this damning prophecy ringing in my ears, and bearing about as much musical knowledge as there are copies of Mills & Boon publications in the Vatican library, that I stood attempting to infiltrate the secrecy of the music room.

Unfortunately, once inside, there was no instrument of ethnic-looking character to be found. More unfortunately still, neither the teacher nor the students seemed to have knowledge of any either. After many enthusiastic hand gestures on my part, the teacher started to pull something down from a top shelf. Oh dear. This did not bode well. Students gathered round and we all sat staring at the thing. No one, it would seem, knew how to play it. Not even which side to sit on.

The koto (for thus it was), rather handsome-looking piece of



Japanese Junior High school students practice the koto in music class

grained wood. It's often described as a Japanese thirteen-stringed zither. That meant nothing to me either. Finally the music teacher forced three picks onto my fingers and thumb and showed me how to strum it. As I tentatively plucked at it she translated the sheet music into numbered fingering. This was easier than I'd imagined, rather like playing the bass guitar at school. And the sound? Pleasingly and reassuringly, oriental. Then, as I started to practice the same refrain over and over, a strange thing happened. I started to have fun. Maybe Wide Island were onto something after all.

However, one instrument does not a musical history make - clearly I required more information. Luckily, Brian Wood, a third year ALT based in Kurahashi (near Kure), was rumoured to be hot on Japanese instruments. Brian has been playing the *shamisen* for about a year. The *shamisen* is the most safe-looking of all Japanese instruments, a guitar-banjo cross-breed. It sounds, at times, like a sitar, at times like a twangy country and western guitar. It has three strings and numbers down the neck to indicate fingering positions, rather like fretless frets. Disturbingly, it is made from cat and, more recently, dog skin. There are also different styles, getting bigger the further north up the country

you travel; a smaller version is native to Okinawa and a much bigger style can be found in the north. This larger instrument is used to perform *tsuguro jamisen*, a more rhythmic, *genki* musical style designed, appropriately enough, to keep the player warm, replete with paddle slapping.

Brian tells me that while players of stringed instruments would be obvious candidates, the technique is very different from that used to play a guitar. Rather than strumming, the playing style involves a paddle, both to pick the strings and determine rhythm. Brian makes it look disgustingly easy. He lets me loose on it, only confirming my suspicions: If I thought I was bad on the guitar, this sorry little attempt sees me reach new depths of woefulness. The paddle technique is, indeed, difficult to attempt cack-handedly, let alone master.

Brian also plays the most iconic of all the Japanese instruments, the *taiko*. (Nobody likes a clever bastard.) Anyone unfortunate enough to witness the breathtakingly poor British Council party in Tokyo would appreciate the enlivening affect taiko can have on the spirits. This performance managed to turn what at first resembled a limp engagement party at the bowling club

into a shindig. There's a real sense of spectacle surrounding *taiko*, incorporating costume and dance. This is truly life-affirming stuff. As a clever man once said, the rhythm of life is a powerful thing.

As luck would have it, Brian's group was performing that weekend. Ondo Kiyomori *Taiko* Hozon-Kai, as they are known, was fortunate enough to be on the bill with Imafuku Yu, a bit of a *taiko* celebrity in these parts. At one point, sweating and stripped naked to the waist, he was throwing everything into driving out a rhythm on a standing *taiko* drum the size of a wagon wheel (no, not the biscuity treat). During

the mandatory audience participation moment, I was dragged up on stage to have a bash (literally). Under the glare of stage lights I gingerly hit the skin with what resembled large rolling pins. Luckily, it's not difficult - I can imagine a beginner would pick this up quickly - and I believe I held my own not too badly. But the best commendation came from the old man sitting beside me in the audience when I returned to my seat: The same type of man who stares nervous JETs down in the street was smiling so hard his faced could have split.

So will I be taking up the pursuit of Occidental music? Well, no. But

that's not to say someone with a hair's breadth more musical aptitude than myself couldn't become skilled fairly quickly. What's more, there's an arsenal of instruments out there for the willing - the *biwa*, the *shakuhachi*...But, hell, I might once in a while even drift by the music department at school. After all, it's the only room in the building with a carpeted floor. Enough to keep me warm in fact... §

recipe!

GREEN BEANS and TOFU in PEANUT SAUCE

by JANE PUCHNIAK

This issue's recipe beautifully fuses Japanese and Thai flavours.

INGREDIENTS:

- ¼ cup and 1 tbsp peanut oil (to be used at different stages)
- 1 lb Extra Firm Tofu (*Momen Tofu*), drained and sliced lengthwise into 8 (1/4" thick) pieces
- 1 lb green beans, trimmed
- ¼ cup and ½ cup water (to be used at different stages)
- ½ tsp salt
- ½ chopped, peeled, fresh ginger
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- ⅛ - ¼ tsp red pepper flakes
- ⅓ cup peanut butter
- 1 tbsp soy sauce
- 1 tsp sugar
- 2 tbsp chopped toasted peanuts (optional)



Diagnosis: delicious!

DIRECTIONS:

- Heat ¼ cup oil in a large skillet over medium-high heat and add tofu. Cook for about 6 minutes until golden brown, turning once. Remove from pan and drain on paper towels.
- In the same skillet, add beans. Cook for 3 minutes, stirring occasionally, until beans are flecked with bright green and golden brown. Add ¼ cup water and cover loosely. Cook for 3-4 minutes until crisp and tender. Season with ½ tsp salt.
- Remove beans from pan and reserve.
- Reduce heat to medium. Place remaining oil, ginger, garlic and red pepper in same pan. Stir until fragrant. Add peanut butter, ½ cup water, soy sauce and sugar.
- Cook and stir for one minute until ingredients are combined.
- Return beans to skillet and toss to coat.

- To serve: Divide beans on plates and top with overlapping tofu slices. Sprinkle with chopped salted peanuts if desired.

NOTES:

- If you can't find peanut oil, other oils are fine to use.
- If you can't find red pepper flakes, cayenne pepper will work as a substitute. Cayenne pepper is a little stronger so use sparingly at first.
- For a crispier texture, cook the tofu until it is a deep golden brown.

SUMMARY:

Prep time: 15 minutes
Cooking time: 15 minutes
Makes: 4 servings.

NIHONGO no BENKYOU

by ALEXIS FRANKS

TODAY'S TOPIC:

KANJI: 広島弁

KANA: ひろしまべん

ROMAJI: Hiroshimaben

ENGLISH: Hiroshima Dialect

EXPLANATION:

Hiroshima dialect has an unfortunate reputation as a "rough" and "dirty" version of the Japanese language, in part because of the city's historical *yakuza* connection. However, this reputation is fading gradually as Hiroshima's non-native population grows and as the Japanese language becomes more nationally standardized.

FOCUS:

ぶち

ROMAJI:

Buchi

MEANING:

Very; 'way' (as in 'way cool')
The standard Japanese equivalent is とても (totemo)

USAGE:

このシャツが**ぶち**高いよね

kono shatsu wa buchi takai yo ne

This shirt is way expensive, isn't it?

NOTES:

The word ぶち (buchi), although used frequently by Hiroshima's twenty-something crowd, is losing popularity among the younger generations, who prefer the more standard (and currently more fashionable) adjective 超 (ちょう, chou).

AJETbulletin

the latest from Hiroshima AJET

by LISA and CASEY

Akemashite Omedeto Gozaimasu, fellow JETs!

We hope that everyone had a wonderful holiday season full of *bonenkai*, travels, friends, family, and keeping warm as the temperatures have dropped. We want to thank everyone who came on the trip to Fukuoka and those who attended the first ever Hiroshima AJET *Bonenkai*. Both events were a huge success, and we hope that you had as much fun as we did.

To recap for those that did not go: In late November a busload of us headed to Fukuoka to watch sumo. We arrived just in time to watch the top-ranking *rikishi* (sumo wrestlers) take the stage. If you think sumo looks neat on TV, I promise you it is ten times cooler in person! This was our third time seeing sumo and we still are beside ourselves every time we stand next to one of the wrestlers. At the end of the day everyone threw their seat pillows into the ring, a now common ritual regardless of the intensity or outcome of the last match. Despite the misty rain all day Sunday and a few sleepy heads from Saturday night's debauchery, we headed to Spaceworld. The park was practically empty and

we owned the place. A great trip!

In December we held our *Bonenkai* at Ninnikuya in Hiroshima City. The food was delicious and full of garlic, which probably prevented many random kisses later in the night... We had so much fun the restaurant ran out of alcohol! Many concluded the night at MAC Bar for some illegal dancing. Again, thanks to all that came and we hope it was fun for you.

We are in the process of planning some winter and spring events, and are even beginning to think about the summer. Keep your calendars open on March 3rd as we are going to hold the first Hiroshima JET Prom. We are also possibly planning a Quiz Night, Carps game, and hopefully one last big outdoorsy weekend trip for spring. One last big adventure! Look for our emails in your inboxes from the HiroshimaAJET listserve for more information.

If you have any suggestions for events, or questions in general, send us an email at HiroshimaAJET@hotmail.com. Until next time, stay warm - before you know it the cherry blossoms will be blooming. §



Bonenkai debauchery

MONGOLIA

Gers, Genghis Kahn, and Greek Food

by MATT HAZEL



The view from the train

When I imagined Mongolia before traveling there this summer with my girlfriend Tanya, I thought of *gers*, nomads, and wide open spaces; I imagined a country unchanged by time. In reality, just 15 years into their new democratic, capitalist way of life, Mongolia is a country in transition. Mongolians are truly embracing the modern, yet holding on to their traditional lifestyles and proud history. It's an exciting time to visit Mongolia as it tries to find the right balance for the future.

With so much to see and do, it is impossible to do the country justice in a short holiday, but here are my top five tips on places that, even on a short trip, you can't afford to miss:

TOP 5 TRIP TIPS

NUMBER 1: UNWIND IN ULAANBAATAR

No trip to Mongolia would be complete without visiting Ulaanbaatar (or UB, as it is commonly referred to). It is the biggest city in Mongolia and also the coldest capital in the world, with temperatures of -40° Celsius in winter. It's a very walkable city, with most of the major attractions situated near the city center. The best of these is probably

the Natural History Museum, especially for those interested in dinosaurs. UB is also the jumping off point for any in-country travel. Moreover, where else in the world can you see a huge image of Genghis Khan on the hillside? While the rest of the world remembers Mongolia's founder as a blood-thirsty conqueror and tyrant, his people have nothing but love and admiration for him – so much so that there's even talk of re-naming UB after him.

NUMBER 2: SKIP THE FLIGHT AND TAKE THE TRANS-MONGOLIAN RAILWAY

We thought about taking the easy way out and flying to Ulaanbaatar, a two hour flight from Beijing. Instead, we took the Trans-Mongolian Railroad, which is the first section of the Trans-Siberian Railway that travels from Beijing to Moscow. As it was, this short section took 32 hours. We shared a sleeper car with a friendly Mongolian couple. The train was comfortable and the views, including wild horses and the wide blue Mongolian sky, were gorgeous. At one point a storm in the Gobi desert coated the inside of the train and all of us with a layer of dust. The Japanese tourists onboard were ready with their masks!

TRAVELTIPS:

GENERAL INFO

<http://www.mongoliatourism.gov.mn/index.php>

LODGING

We stayed at the Zaya Hostel in UB. Zaya, the owner, speaks Chinese, Russian, Mongolian and English, and can help with transportation difficulties or help you arrange a *ger* stay.

For more information:

<http://www.magicnet.mn/~backpackza/>

TRANSPORTATION

There are direct flights from Japan, but I highly recommend taking the train. Getting into Mongolia by train is relatively easy, since you can reserve tickets on the Trans-Mongolian, which leaves from Beijing. Unfortunately, you can't reserve tickets on the Trans-Siberian train that is coming from Moscow to Beijing. All you can do is go to the train station the day before the train arrives and scramble for a ticket, if they have an open seat. Long lines, language barriers, and a nearly full train make this an unreliable option. That leaves you two other options: you can fly, which, while expensive and somewhat limited (there is only one flight a day), only takes two hours to Beijing; or you can take a train to the border, then take a bus to Beijing. The latter seems like a good idea until you realize it is going to take two days and it pays to speak Chinese, since you want to arrive in Beijing and not Shanghai.

Bear in mind that unless you are from the USA (Americans don't need a Mongolian visa) you will have to buy not only a visa for Mongolia, which will cost you around US\$80, but also a mul-

The Trans-Mongolian is something everyone traveling to Mongolia should experience at least once, but be prepared – it's a long trip. I'd suggest bringing instant noodles (hot water is provided in each car), drinks, some cards and books and, of course, a mask - just in case there's a dust storm.



The view from the train

NUMBER 3: BLOW SOME CASH AT THE BLACK MARKET

The UB Black Market is like a giant swap meet and one of the most interesting shopping experiences I'm sure I'll ever have. You can buy pretty much anything you'd like there, from North Face jackets to Mongolian rugs. But you have to be extremely careful, since it's one of the more dangerous places in UB for a number of reasons. According to our guidebook, some tourists had been pelted by rocks for daring to take pictures there a few years back, so leave those cameras at home! There are also numerous pickpockets, some of the slash and grab variety, so it's best not to bring anything at all, just enough money for the cab ride and some shopping.

Even following these precautions, someone still tried to pickpocket me, only to be stopped by a safety pin I had attached to my zippered and velcroed shorts pocket. You can imagine how happy he was about that.

NUMBER 4: FEAST ON FOREIGN FOODS

Since Mongolian food is based on the nomads' need to use whatever they have on hand while roaming, many of their staples are dairy-based. Yak milk, for example, is prominent in their diet. Unfortunately, such treats as milk tea,

hard milk curds and greasy goulash don't always sit well on the foreign palate. One of the unexpected pleasures of staying in Ulaanbaatar, however, was the wide selection of foreign foods available. If you're in the mood for a Big Mac and fries you're out of luck, but UB has a wide selection of outstanding international restaurants and only one chain restaurant. We ate *chimichangas* at Los Banditos, a joint Indian and Mexican restaurant, and I tried the best *gyros* (a Greek pita) I've ever had at The Silk Road Bar and Grill. We had delicious American-style pizza at the UB Deli and salivated over the amazing pastries at Chez Bernard.

Oh, and that chain? It's a Mongolian Grill, the first of its kind in Mongolia!

NUMBER 5: GO NATIVE WITH A GER STAY AT TERELJ NATIONAL PARK

Terelj National Park is about 40 miles away from UB; it is beautiful and sparsely populated, with scattered *ger* camps in the mountain foothills. Most of these serve the tourist population, but instead of staying in a tourists' *ger* camp, we decided to do a *ger* homestay, which turned out to be well worth it.

During the day, our driver took us sightseeing around the park. At the end of the day, he drove us to another *ger* homestead where we started our horseback ride back to where we were staying. Tanya and I were accompanied by two teenagers who were expert riders, as almost all of the children in Mongolia are.



Our host family's daughter in front of their *ger*

The trip back to the *ger* took about two hours; two hours of beautiful scenery and exhilaration. I couldn't believe that we were horseback riding in Mongolia, sharing trails with free range cattle and riding through the countryside. Highly recommended. §

TRAVELTIPS continued...

multiple entry visa for China, which comes in at a steep US\$150. These must be purchased before you enter the country.

For more information:

<http://www.seat61.com/Trans-Siberian.htm>

SAFETY

Watch out for missing manhole covers in UB. Seriously! The city leaves them open for the street kids; even in summer the nights can be incredibly cold, so hypothermia is always a risk.

CHARITIES

Mongolians were hard hit by the collapse of the Soviet Union and also by the move from communism to capitalism in the early '90s. At one time UB had a street kid population numbering in the thousands. Things are improving thanks to organizations like the Christina Noble House. If you're thinking of visiting Mongolia, please bring something from the wish-list found on her website.

For more information:

<http://www.cncf.org/>

I also have some info on my website:

<http://mattchazel.blogspot.com/>



PICTURE PERFECT

Calling anyone who owns a camera! Have you seen the Hiroshima JET photo site yet? As a public site, anyone is free to join or simply to peruse other people's pictures. You can upload any pictures at all from your time in Japan. As inspiration, members also set up regular photo challenges, the latest of which is "Take a picture in Japan that looks like it was taken in another country".

In association with this photo site we will be featuring one particularly impressive photo in each edition of the Wide Island View. This edition's choice was taken by Matt Rose (see left).

FEATURED PHOTO:

'Works of art on Hiroshima city's Peace Boulevard' by **Matt Rose**.

Think you can do better?
Go to www.flickr.com/groups/esid

Gaijin Gaffs

by GRAHAEME COWIE



Questions? Comments? Opinions? Something to contribute? This newsletter is written by and for JETs!
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