

CONTENTS

- 01 **FEATURE:**
Let's Film Festival Round-Up
by Bill Lawson
- 02 **RECIPE:**
Avocado Crab Salad
by Theresa Wang
- 03 **EVENTS CALENDAR:**
May - June
- 04 **JAPANESE CULTURE:**
**Religion: Shinto and Buddhism
in 1000 Words**
by Berin McKenzie
- 05 **AJET Bulletin**
by Lisa and Casey
- 06 **O-SUSUME DESU:**
Willing Workers on Organic Farms
by Robert Brower
- 07 **NIHONGO NO BENKYOU:**
Hiroshimaben
by Alexis Franks
- 08 **LOCAL ACTIVITY:**
**Gaijin in Motion: Getting Fit in
Japan**
by Casey Lary
- 10 **TRAVEL:**
Kyushu: Our Aso-san Adventure
by Hannah Feerick
- 11 **J-LAND FACT**
- 12 **PICTURE PERFECT:**
featuring Jason Rosenholtz-Witt
COMIC:
Gaijin Gaffs
by Grahaeme Cowie

CREDITS:
©2007 Wide Island View
Designed by Kristin Licitis

CONTACT:
wideislandview@gmail.com

Wide Island Update

Hello and welcome to the latest edition of The Wide Island View. By the time you read this you will be in the post-Golden Week recovery period. We hope you all had a wonderful break wherever you were. While most of us were away, Hiroshima City was alive with the annual flower festival, with appearances this year from Hard Gay, Miss Hawaii and various other popular celebrities. Why on earth did we all leave?!

In this issue of the Wide Island View, we have covered everything from outdoor adventures to spiritual enlightenment, from

sand-bathing to organic farming. We hope you enjoy it!

If you would like to write for the Wide Island View, don't hesitate to drop us a line at wideislandview@gmail.com.

STOP PRESS!

Casey and Nikki are both leaving Japan this summer so Kristin needs two new enthusiastic editors to take their places. If you think you might be interested, please email us at the usual gmail address and we will provide you with more details.

Happy Reading!

NIKKI, KRISTIN, and CASEY

Let's Film Festival!

by **BILL LAWSON**

Rainy Day + Movies = Great Time!
Bill Lawson reviews the Fukuyama
Let's Film Festival.

On April 22, people who travelled from all over Hiroshima on a rainy day to see the Let's Film Festival were treated to a great rain-drenched movie-a-thon. The evening was filled with zombies, musicals, comedy and animation. The subject matter was diversified and many reflected on our lives in Japan. It was an outstanding showing by all those who participated- a Steven Spielberg may be among us!

The second annual Fukuyama Let's Film Festival had one thing in common with last year's inaugural event - rain! And what better way is there to spend a rainy day than watching movies with friends? Compared to last year, the festival grew immeasurably, showing vast improvement and firmly establishing itself as a Hiroshima events staple. The venue, Nohohon Café, had been renovated since last year and provided the



Grahaeme Cowie (left) and Bill Lawson show off their awards

perfect place for seventy-odd people to watch movies together. Movie theaters are way overrated - they don't have sofas or pound cake.

The event started out with the thirty-second commercials category, a new addition to this year's festival. The six entries all delivered laughs aplenty and got the event off to a great start. The winner, determined by an audience vote, was "Facial Hair Coach" by Gaijin Invasion. Team members included Matt Hazel, Josh Zimmerman, Rory Finch,

Simon Aebersold, Marc Milsten and yours truly. Since I was on that team and in the commercial, I'm not going to tell you about it. You know the part in the joke where the person says "You had to be there"? Well this is one of those times. For those of you who weren't there, the good news is that the organizers of the festival are in the process of making a web page where all the films and commercials can be viewed so you'll be able to judge for yourselves before long.

Next up was the main event: five-minute films. There were three times as many films this year as last, with a total of twelve entries in the five-minute film category. Films were required to make use of a prop (an overflowing ashtray), a location (a statue or monument) and this line "You should be dancing". The big winner of the night, again determined by an audience vote, was "The

Blue Man," an animated film about a day in Metropolis by Grahaeme Cowie. In his emotionally charged acceptance speech he told the audience about his plans to pursue a future career in animation. I can testify that he will surely find great success down that road. His talk of future plans also gave hope to all those people (or maybe just me...) who came to Japan to figure out what they wanted to do with their life.

After the event, I circulated with a tape recorder interviewing people and learned a great deal from this experience – first and foremost that hitting the record button is very critical when wanting to record! My lack of technological genius having left me now quoteless, you'll have to take my word for it that everybody thought the event was highly entertaining. Grahaeme Cowie and Natasha Mekhail went to great lengths to start the festival and they were de-

lighted with both the quantity and the quality of the entries. Grahaeme talked with great passion about his hopes for the future of this event; namely that it become an event that can be enjoyed by people regardless of their location and regardless of their film-school or non-film-school background. Having witnessed the enthusiasm from the audience during his speech, I have no doubt that the Let's Film Festival will indeed continue to flourish for years to come.

For more information about the event, the upcoming web page or to give suggestions for next year's event, please email letsfilmfestival@gmail.com. Next year Matt Hazel and I will be taking over the reins, so start thinking of ideas and get those cameras rolling! §

RECIPE:

Avocado and Crab Salad

by THERESA WANG

INGREDIENTS:

- 1 pack imitation crab meat
- 4 cups salad greens
- 1 avocado
- 1 large tomato, sliced, or 1 cup cherry or grape tomatoes
- ¼ cup whole almonds
- Your favorite salad dressing (vinaigrette is my personal recommendation)

DIRECTIONS:

- Wash the salad greens, then tear into bite-size pieces and arrange on a plate.
- Add the tomatoes.
- Slice the avocado into bite-size segments and place on top of the greens and tomatoes.
- If the crab meat is packaged in large chunks, tear them up into smaller pieces before adding to the salad.
- Crush the almonds by placing them inside a plastic bag and pounding with a meat hammer. Scatter the crushed almonds on top of the salad.



- Drizzle the salad dressing over everything for the finishing touch.

NOTES:

- If you have nut allergies, you can substitute toasted sesame seeds for the crushed almonds.
- Look in your supermarket for mixed lettuce bags - they are slightly more expensive than your average iceberg but definitely worth it.
- When choosing an avocado, keep in mind that a ripe avocado's skin should be dark brown, not green. An unripe avocado will be very hard, while a ripe

one should be firm but give a bit when gently squeezed. To speed up the ripening process, tap off the small knob at the top of the avocado and place it in a paper bag. Don't store it inside the refrigerator. Conversely, if you buy an avocado at the peak of ripeness and want to save it for the next day, store it in the refrigerator.

SUMMARY:

- Serves: 1 as a main course, 2 as a salad starter
- Prep time: 10 minutes

• **May 3rd**

Kenpou Kinenbi, National Holiday
 Constitution Day. This is the day when the new constitution came into effect after WWII.

• **May 4th**

Midorii no Hi, National Holiday
 Green Day. May 4th was a holiday in previous years simply because of a law that stated that any single day slotted between two national holidays should be a holiday. Now it has its very own *raison d'être* - Green Day, previously celebrated on the Showa Emperor's birthday (April 29th) because of his love of greenery and nature, has been relocated.



Koinobori (carp banners) in honour of Children's Day

• **May 5th**

Kodomo no Hi, National Holiday
 May 5th, Children's Day, was known until WWII as Boys' Day and was used as a means of encouraging military service. After the war, it was renamed Children's Day but, as Girls' Day also exists on March 3rd, many people still refer to this as Boys' Day.

On this day, and in the month running up to it, households with sons of elementary school age or younger will display huge carp banners (*koinobori*) in their gardens. The carp is a symbol of perseverance coming from an old Chinese legend in which carp swam up a waterfall and turned into dragons. The Japanese rarely refer to the dragon when recounting the tale but the carp's perseverance lives on in their story.

• **May 19th**

AJET Baseball Bonanza

Spend a chilled Saturday afternoon with friends, sipping beer and watching the Swallows take on the mighty Carp. Email hiroshimaajet@hotmail.com for tickets or for more information.

• **May 21st**

Polysics Concert

Live music fan Jason Rosenholtz-Witt recommends this concert to anyone who enjoys good music and wants to see an incredible Japanese band: "Polysics are a Japanese new wave/synth-pop band who personally dub their unique style as 'technicolor pogo punk'. They're a band who like to be hyper and catch energy using a rock sound mixed with pop and electronics all merged together to create such a new sound that no one has heard anything like it before. Their song lyrics often consist of Japanese, English or just plain gibberish ("Space Language"). The band has been noted for their extremely energetic live performances and their wild gimmicky outfits. You'd be crazy to miss this."

The concert starts at 7pm at Namiki Junction in Hiroshima city (on Ebisu Dori opposite Tenmaya, next to McDonald's) and costs 3000 yen (including a free drink).

• **May 28th - 30th**

Kobe Re-contracting Conference

If you're re-contracting after your first year here on JET, you'll be headed to this three-day meeting / chance to catch up with all those Tokyo Orientation almost-friends.



Japanese girls in *yukata* out for a stroll at the Toukasan Festival

• **June 1st - 3rd**

Toukasan

This is Hiroshima's annual summer kick-off festival. After this weekend women can wear light *yukata* instead of thick *kimono* until autumn. Before the weekend of Toukasan young women hunt for the most beautiful and unique *yukata* of the season to wear while promenading down the streets of Hiroshima. There are male *yukata*, but men are more often seen wearing *jinbei*, which resemble Japanese pajamas. You can also join the huge lines of people visiting Enryuji temple (located

at the corner between Chuo-dori and the Peace Blvd) to pray for good luck and to buy a Toukasan fan (called a *yakuyoke uchiwa*). Or you can stay street-side and take in some *bon* dancing, *taiko* drumming or purchase some traditional festival grub from the dozens of stalls. If you only wear your *yukata* once this year, make it now. You can buy *yukata* sets for 4000yen and *jinbei* for 1500yen at places like Uniqlo. (If you wimp out, your other chance is the Miyajima fireworks in August!)

• **June 9th and 10th**

Otagawa Yume Hiroba Flea Market

If you have things you can't take home with you, why not sell them at Hiroshima city's monthly flea market? Setting up a stall is easy - just call Hiroshima Recycler's Association on 082-845 5551. Alternatively, if you're looking for a bargain yourself, go and peruse others' unwanted treasures. To get there, go to Bairin on the Kabe line and walk towards the river. Starts at 8am. Also on May 12-13th and July 7th-8th.

• **June 16th and 17th**

Miyajima Triathlon

The entry deadline has passed but supporters are welcomed. The action starts on Miyajima, where competitors will begin a 2.5km swim to the mainland before biking and then running a combination of 75km taking them all the way to Hatsu-kaichi. Your support would no doubt be appreciated!

• **July 6th - 8th**

San-In Beach Party, Kozomi Beach, Tottori

This event is an excellent way to kick-start your summer - pack a tent, fill your car with some friends, and head out for a weekend dancing, music, and some quality beach time! Details of performing acts and ticket price to be announced soon. An email will also be sent through the Hiroshima AJET yahooogroup.

• **June 30th**

Hiroshima AJET Sayonara Party

The end of the JET contract year is approaching and many current JETs are leaving Japan. Come and say goodbye to everyone and reminisce about how the year has flown by. The Sayonara Party will be held at a beer garden in Hiroshima City. Details will be announced by the Hiroshima AJET yahooogroup.

“RELIGION”

A beginner's guide to Japan's two major religions.

SHINTO AND BUDDHISM: THE 1000 WORD VERSION

by **BERIN MCKENZIE**

So. Japanese religion in 1000 words or less? I can do better than that. I can do it in four. “Wonderfully simple. Brilliantly complex.” How's that?

The religious landscape in Japan today is dominated by Shinto and Buddhism, as it has been for over 1000 years. The fact that these two religions have managed to exist side by side is testament not only to the similarities inherent within them, such as ancestor worship, but also to the conscious efforts on both sides to co-exist - the identification of Shinto deities as manifestations of various Buddha for example. It also serves to underscore the syncretic nature of the Japanese themselves.

The Japanese stand accused of being religiously promiscuous, in that there is no seeming conflict of interest in identifying with two or more religions. This may seem incongruous to those of monotheistic faiths such as Christianity or Islam, however it serves to highlight the different pattern of religious observance in Japan.

The following will be a brief outline of the two main faiths in modern day Japan. As with any writings on religion, it is not to be taken as gospel (see what I did there?) rather serving as a sketch of a hint of a whisper of a sliver of a draft of a superficial outline of an attempt at a tiny overview of a topic that is inherently of the Human Condition and one which starts to shed some light on the complexities of modern Japanese society.

So this is (blasphemously briefly) how it works:



A mother and her child pray together

SHINTO

Shinto (神道) is the indigenous religion to these isles. Commonly referred to as the “national religion,” it is in fact no such thing. The decree separating church and state by the Occupation Forces following WWII ended government control of Shinto, a situation that had really only existed since it was seized upon by nationalist forces during the Meiji Restoration in 1868.

Shinto lacks any central holy text and the closest to a Bible or Koran it can muster is the *Kojiki*, or “Record of Ancient Matters” written in 712CE*. The *Kojiki* brought together existing myths and legends to describe the mythological origins of the Japanese race in order to establish an indigenous counter to the newly arrived Buddhist faith. By the time of its introduction to Japan in the 5th Century CE, Buddhism was already a “world religion” and brought with it not only highly developed systems of belief and observance but whole new architectural and artistic styles. This forced the hand of Japan's existing, though disparate, belief systems and resulted in the creation and indeed the very definition of Shinto. In addition Shinto, as a “native” religion, helped cement the Yamato clan, tentative new rulers of a fragmented but unifying country, as central to the “Japanese” identity.

Shinto is often referred to as animistic in that the belief system in part dictates that all natural objects are imbued with *kami*. These *kami* are not “gods” per se (although this is almost invariably how the word is translated); rather they are objects or phenomena of nature such as trees, mountains or rivers that inspire awe or are seen as out of the ordinary. It is important to note that these *kami* are not seen as omnipotent beings beyond this realm, but rather a very real part of this plane. The *kamidana* (deity shelf) seen in many Japanese homes acts as a means to make offerings to these *kami*.

Although there is a lack of theology inherent in Shinto, many practitioners follow an almost Confucian outlook on life. Humans are for the main part seen to be inherently good, with evil acts being ascribed to evil spirits. Purification through prayer and ritual is therefore a large part of the religious process.

Today, Shinto may be more easily thought of as a centralized, ingrained system of rather organic beliefs as opposed to an “observed” religion. Many of the rituals associated with it are so deeply ingrained in Japanese culture that they are simply seen as part of “being Japanese” rather than adherence to any particular creed.



Kamidana (diety shelf)

BUDDHISM

Buddhism (仏教, *bukkyou*), said to have been founded in India in the 5th Century BCE**, arrived in Japan via China and Korea. Initially it was adopted by the upper classes and from there disseminated down through society. Since its introduction, domestic Buddhism has divided into various sects, each with their own beliefs in regard to the attainment of enlightenment.

Particular to East Asia is the “populist” Mahayana branch of Buddhism, and the main paths represented in Japan are the Zen, Pure Land (the biggest) and

Nichiren schools. The Nichiren school is particular to Japan and was founded by a Japanese monk of that name in the 13th Century CE.

Nichiren Buddhism maintains that enlightenment is available to all, and through the teachings of the Lotus Sutra, its central tenet, teaches that it is the one true way to enlightenment; a stand that puts it at odds with other branches of the religion. The Nichiren school has had a large impact on Japanese society and politics, particularly with the rise of the so-called “New Religions” which have developed since the mid-late 19th Century CE. These include for example, the Soka Gakkai movement, which is behind the New Komeito political party which enjoys a majority coalition arrangement with the LDP.

THE NEW KIDS ON THE BLOCK

Other new religions, many of which sprang up following the end of WWII as well as since the bursting of the Japanese “bubble” economy in the late

1980s, have direct origins that are often more difficult to trace. Many of them, in no small part thanks to the 1995 Sarin gas attack on the Tokyo subway system by the Aum Shinrikyo cult, are regarded with a certain amount of suspicion.

1000 words isn't much is it? Believe me when I say that there are terabytes of information regarding religion in Japan available online and more importantly there are 130-odd million people in your general vicinity that can help to guide you through the intricacies of belief in this country. It is a fascinating topic that is inherently alive and evolving and one which contributes in no small part to the identity and indeed direction of modern Japan. Get on in there. §

*CE: Common Era - The PC “AD”

**BCE: Before the Common Era - The PC “BC”

AJET bulletin

by LISA and CASEY

The latest news from Hiroshima AJET

Hello Hiroshima JETs!

QUIZ NIGHT

At the 2007 Hiroshima AJET Quiz Night the phrase ‘with age comes wisdom’ proved to be true when The Geezers took home the victory. Chairs were a hot commodity with a whopping 17 teams cramming into Kemby’s to participate in the competition - teams resorted to sitting on the stage and even on team members’ laps in search of comfort. After 8 rounds of taxing trivia, The Geezers came out on top. Team members Bill Lawson, Marc Milsten, Tanya Lee, Matt Hazel, Gil Forsyth, and Jody Denoncour reveled in their victory and were very happy to receive their gift certificates to The Shack/Kemby’s. Team Cotton and Clover, with members Nikki McMullan, Patrick Kipfmiller, Tiffany Caroffino, and Graham Ruddle, had a promising come-



Hiroshima AJET Quiz Night winners “The Geezers” celebrate their victory (from left: Marc Milsten, Bill Lawson, Gil Forsyth, Jody Denoncour, Matt Hazel, and Tanya Lee, celebrate after their victory)

back in the second half of the evening, but fell just short of The Geezers in the end. They were awarded second place and gift certificates to Starbucks. Third place went to a non-JET team, called The Force and the Fury who took home a bag of chocolate goodies from the foreign foods store Jupiter.

From entrance fees and the raffle, the total donation to the Bangladesh Habitat

for Humanity team was 32,700yen. On behalf of the Bangladesh Habitat team, a big thank you for your support and donations. From AJET we want to thank everyone for an incredible turn-out and for making the 2007 Charity Quiz Night a huge success. The biggest thanks go to Shannon and Peter Coelho and Alex Kaye for all of their help and hard work.

In a post-victory conversation, Bill Law-

son said of the evening: "It was awesome!" That pretty much sums it up.

UPCOMING EVENTS

As the 2006-2007 JET year starts to wind down, AJET is preparing some events to end the year with a bang. No Hiroshima JET should leave Japan without going to a Hiroshima Carp baseball game! With that in mind, May 19th we will have the annual Hiroshima JET Baseball Bonanza. Come and witness the Carp pummel the vicious Yakult Swallows while enjoying the company of friends and attempting to learn all the Carp fight chants. More information will be sent out through the yahoo group listserve (which you can still join by emailing us at hiroshimaajet@hotmail.com).

Our last and final event of the year will be the JET Sayonara party on Saturday June 30th. It will be at a beer garden in Hiroshima city. This will be our last event, and your chance to say farewell to all those who are leaving Japan in late July and early August. There is no better way to say goodbye to your fellow *gaijin* friends than to watch the sunset from a rooftop bar, pitcher of beer in hand. More information will be announced through the listserve as the date approaches.

HIROSHIMA AJET 2007-2008: Review, renew and revamp

With the end of the year fast approach-

ing, AJET is looking for new leadership for the 2007-2008 JET year. Take a chance and add an additional challenge to your second or third year on JET! Boost your resume! Read on to see how AJET will be restructured next year.

Lisa is staying a third year and will remain on the AJET team, but Casey will be handing over her duties as AJET co-chair. With the new year, Hiroshima AJET will take on a new and improved structure. Instead of having two co-chairs running the show, we would like to divide AJET responsibilities among four co-chairs, each in charge of a different branch of the Hiroshima AJET Committee. There will be a Graphics and Computer Specialist, Local Events Coordinator, National Events Coordinator, and Charity Coordinator. Below are job descriptions of each:

- **Graphics and Computer Specialist:** This person will be in charge of making advertisements for the various AJET events throughout the year and will create and maintain the Hiroshima AJET website.
- **Local Events Coordinator:** This person will be in charge of any events that take place within Hiroshima prefecture. This includes such activities as quiz nights, sporting events and parties.
- **National Events Coordinator:** This person will be in charge of events that

take place outside of the prefecture, usually weekend trips such as going to sumo and hiking Mt. Fuji. They will also be responsible for being in contact with other prefectures' AJET reps to organize joint events.

- **Charity Coordinator:** This person will be in charge of organizing charity events throughout the year to help raise money for local and international organizations, as well as attempting to create philanthropic activities for JETs to participate in.

By delegating out the numerous duties of AJET we hope to have better events and have more people involved. Certain responsibilities will be shared throughout the year, like the lucky person who gets to write the AJET update for the Wide Island View. It is not required that you speak Japanese although, like in most situations in Japan, it doesn't hurt. It would be great to see a mix of city and prefectural JETs on the 2007-2008 AJET Committee. If you're interested in working with the AJET Committee or have further questions, please email hiroshimaajet@hotmail.com. Either of us will happily share with you our experiences on AJET and why we have loved being involved over the past year.

We look forward to hearing from you and seeing as many of you as possible at our future events!

O-SUSUME DESU!

by **ROBERT BROWER**

a new way to travel: WILLING WORKERS ON ORGANIC FARMS

For me, life in Japan wasn't at all what I had expected. Actually it was my goal to come here with as few expectations as possible, but visions of my new life in Japan had nonetheless found their way into my head long before I ever arrived. The problem with expectation is that it often doesn't match reality. I came to Hiroshima in August 2003 to teach English at a high school in a small city suburb. I waited for the Japanese people to invite me out – to show me the sights, introduce me to their culture, and to teach me their language. I waited and I got increas-



Working the fields on an organic farm in Hongo

ingly confused and frustrated. Eventually I came to realize that if I wanted to meet interesting Japanese people, have memo-

rable Japanese experiences and connect on the level that I hoped for, I would have to be more pro-active in my efforts.

It was around that time that I learned about an organization called Willing Workers On Organic Farms (WWOOF). WWOOF is a global project dedicated to helping those interested in working on organic farms. On their webpage, www.wwoof.org, there is a list of participating countries. Once you pay a membership fee for a specific country's organization, you are granted access to a list of all of the farms in the country who accept WWOOF members. Since each organization is separate, using your Japan membership in New Zealand, for example, is not viable. In order to WWOOF in New Zealand you would have to obtain a new membership. WWOOFing is a great way to travel cheaply and a way to immerse yourself in a culture that sightseeing alone will not allow you to experience.

So let me break it down for you: instead of travelling to other Asian countries, instead of surfing in Okinawa or boarding in Hokkaido, you can use your holidays to work right here in little rural towns throughout Japan - and you can even NOT get paid for it! This is the point where you might exclaim "That sounds awesome! How do I sign up?" But wait, there's more! You also get to pay a WWOOF Japan membership fee of 4000 yen! This WWOOF thing sounds too good to be true - I know.

The reality is there's a lot more to it than that. Now that we've gotten the minor negatives out of the way, here are a few far more weighty reasons why WWOOF might be a good idea for you. Upon becoming a member of WWOOF Japan at wwoofjapan.org you gain access to a list of all the hosts in Japan. The list is organized by location so you can perform a search based on where you want to go and then read about each host to get a vibe for what kind of people they are and what kind of work they do. There are also testimonials (both good and bad) on the website to help you decide where to go and how long to stay. Most hosts will accept 'WWOOFers' for as little as a weekend and as long as three months. Usually if you request to stay longer than two weeks, the host will suggest that you try it out and if, at the end of this trial period, you and they are both happy, you can then extend your stay. As a WWOOFer, you can work in an inn or *pension*, help at a restaurant or shop, work for a massage/holistic medicine

retreat or, of course, farm. Farming, which makes up the majority of the WWOOFing opportunities, includes work on fruit farms, vegetable farms, livestock farms and various combinations of the three. The work you do can involve anything from shovelling snow to planting spinach, making charcoal to packaging grapes, or even taking the dog for a walk. In return for your hard work, you get all meals, a room, and occasionally other benefits too.



The Friendship Inn, Hokkaido

During my one year membership I visited three places and each was a unique experience. I started in Hokkaido over winter break at the Friendship Inn. Yes, you can WWOOF year-round. I went to a nice European-style *pension* about a 5 minute walk from Niseko Hirafu, the largest ski resort in Hokkaido. All the guests at the *pension* were skiers and most were Japanese. I served breakfast and dinner, cleaned rooms and had 7-8 hours free every afternoon. They gave me a free lift-pass and I snowboarded 6 of the 10 days I was there. There was nothing specifically organic or farm-related about this place. The work was also not great: cleaning rooms, shovelling snow and serving meals. But the food was excellent (the best I've eaten in Japan), I was able to practice lots of Japanese with the guests and the family, the people were very cool and the over-all experience was positive.

The following summer I worked on two different farms. One was the Sakamoto Farm here in Hongo, Hiroshima-ken. This was one of the best experiences I've had in Japan. I felt at home from the moment I walked in the door. We worked together on the farm, we ate together in their family kitchen and they did their best to give me many different experiences, even introducing me to some other cool people in the surrounding area. Even though the husband speaks English, Korean and Chinese, they were happy to let me

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

JAPANESE:

たいぎい

ROMAJI:

Taigii

MEANING:

Difficult or troublesome

The standard Japanese equivalent is たいへん (taihen)

USAGE:

英語の宿題をするの、たいぎいよ。

Eigo no shukudai wo suru no, taigii yo.

English homework is a lot of trouble!

practice Japanese for most of the time I was there. We worked with all sorts of vegetables doing everything from prepping the fields, to planting, pruning, and picking. I learned so much about organic fertilizers and farming in general that it's hard to believe I was only there for two weeks. They also had about 500 chickens, some ducks and two donkeys. I even got to drive the tractor - I tilled a whole field (after the first few minutes, not as fun as it sounds) and drove it home in the evening (way more fun than it sounds!) The Sakamotos accept WWOOFers all the time and you can come for only a weekend if that's all the time you have.

There was one WWOOF experience that was less than what I'd hoped for. Down on Kyushu I stayed about two weeks on the Nakamura farm. They were very nice people but we just didn't do a good enough job of communicating what each of us was after. I picked



Picking grapes

some fruit but mostly I worked in their shop (selling fruit and vegetables from the neighborhood). I met some interesting people but I was hoping to do more actual farming. I strongly suggest that anyone who might be interested in doing WWOOF ask a lot of questions concerning the work that the host does

and what work WWOOFers themselves have a chance to do at that time of year. It is also important to clarify how much work you'll be doing. Nobody wants to come across as a picky and lazy foreigner so be polite and considerate, but be sure that you have a good understanding of the details. It can also help to motivate the host to utilize you if you are genuinely interested in what they're doing.

I approached WWOOF like a home-stay program. I lived with Japanese families and experienced life from their perspective. I learned a lot about farming and got to do some good work. Simultaneously I learned a lot about Japanese people and Japanese culture. I met some warm and caring people

who were interested in me and where I come from. We talked, joked, ate, and relaxed together. Every place I went the people were welcoming and generous, kind and considerate. They gave me opportunities to see and experience a Japan that I hadn't yet had the chance to see.

WWOOFing is the perfect holiday for anyone who wants to see rural Japan at its most bare and very best. If you are willing to put in the hard work, I highly recommend that you give it a go. It's rewarding, cheap, original and educational. What more can one ask for from a holiday?

local **ACTIVITY:** by **CASEY LARY**

Casey outlines different fun and exciting ways to get and stay fit in Japan!

GAIJIN IN MOTION: GETTING FIT IN JAPAN

Hanami time has passed and all at once we are on the brink of summer; so before the heat and humidity settle in, it's time to get outside and get active. With a little guidance, a foreigner in Japan can easily enjoy activities they did back home, or just as easily start something new. Don't let language be a barrier. With its mountainous terrain, Japan is an outdoor adventurer's dream! Here is a brief guide on how to get involved in some of the easiest and most accessible outdoor activities in Hiroshima.

The easiest way to start getting involved in new activities is to join a group or club. There are numerous hiking, running, cycling, and alpine clubs throughout the prefecture. Universities and specialist sports shops are great places to start your enquiries. Although many clubs are very exclusive (i.e. for close friends or coworkers) there are some that let visitors join and the local foreigner turning up could just make their



Bouldering at Hiroshima City climbing gym CERO

day. Few groups have English speakers so bring your dictionary and look at it as another way to practice Japanese. Alternatively, round up a few other English teachers to start a group of your own. Doing activities with friends is always more fun!

If joining an organized club doesn't appeal, find a specialty store in your area and become friends with the owners or staff. They will know all the right people and will also be a great source of information on the best places in your area for your desired activity. In addition, they will make sure that you are fully equipped before you set out

to try your new sport and will fix your equipment if it breaks. A specialty shop is also the best place to look for private or group lessons.

One of the biggest hurdles to taking up activities in Japan is finding equipment that is large enough for foreigners, with shoes causing the most difficulty. Women who are happy to wear men's shoes should have little problem but few stores in Hiroshima sell shoes large enough for western men. Yanbo's Running in Hiroshima City, however, stocks shoes up to an American size 12 (30cm). Yanbo recommends that customers call ahead (082-247-4424) to find out when he receives his new shipment of shoes because the largest sizes sell fast. Special order shoes can take up to 6 months to arrive. Otherwise, ordering from your favorite shoe store at home and having them sent over is your most reliable option.

Finding clothes might not be as easy as back home but it is possible if you shop around and ask for advice. It is a bit frustrating that they offer more workout clothes for dogs than gaijin, isn't it?

Now that you look the part and know where to get information, what activities are there to do? I spoke to experts in each of the following fields to find out their tips:



One of the many bridges on the Shimanami Kaido cycling route (by Matt Hazel)

Running

Running is by far the easiest and cheapest outdoor activity to take up. With just a pair of shoes you can run for miles, exploring your town and surrounding rice fields as you go. If you lack the motivation to run, Sasaki Yanbo (of Yanbo's Running) recommends preparing for one of the numerous races held in Hiroshima. From September to December there is at least one race held every weekend somewhere in Hiroshima or in a neighboring prefecture. In January there is a lull in races because of the New Year celebrations, but the number of races picks up again between February and May.

Look for information and advertisements posted around your town or at local sports stores. The hardest part about these races is signing up - the registration forms are in Japanese and the deadline for entry is usually around a month in advance, but with the help of a Japanese friend or colleague entry is perfectly possible so don't be put off.

Cycling

Local bike shop owners and cyclists admit that on the whole Hiroshima is not the best place for cycling - neither Mitsuo-san nor Nekomoto-san, who each own bike shops in Hiroshima City, consider Hiroshima's roads particularly bike-friendly, but there are plenty of off-road places for a novice to get started. Nekomoto-san recommends going to parks such as Shinrin Chuo Park in Hongo, and Mominoki Shinrin Park in Yoshiwa in northern Hiroshima

where there are special bike paths. Nekomoto-san also suggests heading out to the numerous islands in the Seto Inland Sea. The weather is nice and with sparse local transportation cycling is the best way to explore. On the GetHiroshima webpage, there is a fabulous link with a wealth of information on cycling in Hiroshima. (<http://www.gethiroshima.com/en/Places/HealthFitness/details?placeid=50264>). Bikes are allowed on trains as long as the wheels have been removed and you carry the whole thing in a special travel bag, which can be bought at any bike shop.

If you haven't yet explored the Seto Inland Sea by bike, follow Nekomoto-san's advice and make sure you do so this spring - Hiroshima is home to one of the most famous bike rides in Japan called the Shimanami Kaido. It is a 78km ride that starts in Onomichi and takes you across various islands before finally arriving in Imabari on Shikoku. The route offers incredible views of the Seto Inland Sea and is a great way to see islands that you might otherwise not make it out to. The ride is long but fairly easy and safe with a separate bike road. The hardest parts of the ride are circling uphill to reach the numerous bridges connecting the islands. Bicycles can easily be rented in Onomichi. For more information check out www.kancycling.com/Destinations/Shimanami/Shimanami.html. avid cyclist or complete beginner, this ride is raved about by anyone who has done it and is highly recommended.

Climbing

For those seeking an activity that is a bit more adventurous, rock climbing may be perfect for you. As much fun as it would be to immediately go out and scale vertical cliffs like Spiderman, without proper training and equipment it is very dangerous. Aya Hayashi, a Hiroshima resident who spent 6 years working in America as a climbing instructor, says that the best place for a foreigner to start climbing is in one of the local indoor climbing gyms: "At the gym you can meet people who can introduce you to the Japanese climbing world and a few climbing techniques along the way."

Aya explained that the most popular type of indoor climbing is called 'bouldering.' This requires no special equipment, except for climbing shoes (which can be borrowed from many gyms). It involves climbing up 10 to 15 ft walls while following a specific path. Once you have become comfortable with this, you can advance to top rope/belayed climbing, which is the most common in outdoor areas. Once you establish contacts at a gym and learn the basics, you will have the chance to try out Mikura and Bicchu, two famous outdoor climbing areas in the Chugoku region.

There are two climbing gyms in Hiroshima city; CERO near Yokogawa station, and the Green Arena in central Hiroshima City. Depending on your location, you may be closer to a gym in a neighboring prefecture. Here is a link to the gyms in the Chugoku region: <http://www17.big.or.jp/~yuuko/climbing/gym/gym0-e.html#chugoku>.

As regards equipment, popular chain store Assess, which can be found in both Itsukaichi and Fukuyama, will see to your every need. The stores have their own climbing walls allowing you to try out your equipment right away if you want.

Now armed with an arsenal of information on getting active in Japan, step up to the challenge and get moving. Before you know it you will be in peak physical condition and ready to embrace the rapidly-approaching swimsuit season. §

KYUSHU

our Aso-san adventure

by HANNAH FEERICK



Lisa Van Muyen and Larissa Kirkland hiking Mt Nakadake with the caldera in the background

This mammoth story begins with us girls flicking through our guide books to Japan, searching for something to keep us out of trouble for the long weekend in November. Too exhausted from dancing the previous evening to read, we were all nonetheless struck by the pictures. In particular, the sparse beauty of The Aso National Park caught our eye and inspired us to embark on what turned out to be a mind-boggling trip.

Having set our sights on Kyushu, we got to work organising the adventure: hiring cars, booking accommodation, finding maps, digging out trainers, creating a rather eclectic music collection and filling the car with snacks for the journey. Eventually, two extremely excited car-loads headed south from Hiroshima station on a sunny autumnal day. Our destination was Aso-san, but with the convenience of our cars we were able to explore some other great places including the famous *onsen* village of Kurokawa, the Hells of Beppu and a variety of little mountain villages in between.

The mountains in central Kyushu that constitute Aso National Park are an-

cient formations, created by many years of volcanic activity. The Aso caldera is the world's largest volcanic crater and contains five peaks, one of which is still active today. Grassy highlands and towering peaks make it a prime area for walking, whilst all that volcanic activity makes it ideal for hot-spring bathing.

Here are a few suggestions to ensure your own trip to Kyushu goes with a bang.

Drive along in your automobile.

Hiring cars and cruising around was a great way to see the breathtaking views of Aso's smouldering craters. Without the cars, getting to Aso-san is possible but much more difficult. Moreover, some of the roads in the Aso area are very famous - the Yamanami Highway, for example - and without your own car, they're far harder to experience fully.

We embarked on the road that winds its way into the world's largest volcanic crater, rather like coins circling into a charity donations machine. We caught a glimpse of the perfect cone of Kom-zuka ("mound of rice") as we spiralled

TRAVELTIPS

GETTING THERE

To get to Aso by train, take the *shinkansen* from Hiroshima to Hakata then change to one of the lines bound for Kumamoto. Finally, take the Hohi line to Aso station.

If you are up for the challenge of driving in Japan then hire cars from Hiroshima. Fill a car and share costs - it's the cheapest option. Most cars are automatic but you can request a manual if you reserve early enough. The small cars always book up first so plan ahead unless you want to be driving a van.

To reserve a car use one of the websites below, and then turn up with your international/Japanese driving licence, passport and money. Also remember to always fill the car up with petrol just before you return it. They will charge you an arm and a leg for whatever they have to refill themselves - we learned the hard way.

GETTING AROUND

By far the best way to see this region is to have your own transport. However there are buses and trains linking all the tourist destinations like Aso-san's crater and the onsens in Beppu. Check out the Japan National Tourism Organisation (JNTO) link below for times and fares.

LINKS

The best car hire companies with pick-up points near Hiroshima station:

- www.tocoo.jp/english
- www.hertz.com
- www.nissan-rentacar.com

Information on alternative transport to Kyushu:

- www.hyperdia.com

Tourist information and maps on the local area:

- www.jnto.go.jp

Accommodation and campsites:

- www.geocities.com/kumamotoguide/camp



The impressive caldera in Mount Aso

past, before finally coming to rest at the foot of Mount Nakadake, the fuming active crater.

Forming a group and hiring cars was great as not only did we have tremendous fun, but we also saw vistas unparalleled in any other region of Japan. Additionally, by filling the cars we did the whole trip on a remarkably small budget. If, like us, cruising in your car with friends while wearing your stylish sunglasses with the car stereo blasting floats your boat, then Aso is the place to set your compass to.

Marvel at the majestic mountains.

Catching a glimpse of Mt. Aso's main crater with its milky green lake, humongous bubbles and jets of steam was my most vivid memory of the Kyushu road trip. Since good roads make the crater easily accessible by both tour bus and private car, there are Japanese tourists galore. Next to the crater there were many well-worn paths winding through the black martian landscape, heavy with visitors. But the most stupendous views glimpsed came when we took a chance and headed off-road on foot, following little-used tracks into the mountains. Whilst the climb was steep and the path unkept, the views into the active crater, framed by the magnificent mountains were absolutely beautiful.

Embrace the *onsen* craze.

Upon mentioning our Aso excursion to Japanese friends, the unequivocal

response always involved *onsen* recommendations. The quaint beauty of Kurokawa persuaded me that this was something that had to be embraced. Kurokawa is the most famous *onsen*



Kurokawa visitors decked out in *yukata*

village in the Aso area, so a fitting place for my first dip. The village itself is extremely small; its sole purpose is for relaxation. The main reason Kurokawa exists is because of the natural hot water that comes from the river that runs through it. With the discovery of this natural phenomenon *onsen* popped up along its banks to use the hot water for their pools. The village was transformed into a resort destination and is now visited by those seeking a brief respite from their daily lives.

The *onsen* we chose was a labyrinth of tunnels and caves - a truly original *onsen* experience. In the evening the streets are all lit by lanterns and you'll see *yukata*-clad visitors padding from one spa to the next. This town does come with a warning though: it smells! The hot springs are all completely natural so the eggy smell of sulphur lingers all around. Be warned!

Beppu: where people pay to be buried in hot volcanic sand

For my next *onsen* experience I found myself wearing a glorified dressing gown and having a little old Japanese lady use her spade to cover me in hot sand. It was probably one of the most bizarre experiences of my time in Japan. However, I can now confirm that lying up to the neck in warm sand is actually remarkably relaxing. It's a great way to soothe those aching muscles from hiking and, at the very least, it's a truly Japanese experience.

Beppu has the second largest volume of natural hot water after Yellowstone National Park in America. The whole town is like one big *onsen* below the surface. Aside from the hot sand and numerous regular *onsen*, Beppu has nine "hells" better known as *jigoku*. These different geothermal hot-springs spout out multi-coloured water and bubbling sulphuric mud. *Onsen*-lovers beware: due to the extreme temperature of these hot-springs taking a quick dip is not allowed.

Rough it Japanese-style.

Whilst there are many hotels in the Aso region, we opted for the budget option and all piled in a cabin at the Aso Fantasy Forest. Being a stone's throw from both Kurokawa and the National Park made this the ideal place for us to use as a springboard for exploring the local area. Actually, the site was a little tricky to find and we had to be escorted there by the local policeman! Embarrassing as this grand arrival was, it definitely endeared us to the lovely couple running the site. The greatest thing about this campsite was the outdoor hot spring. It was the perfect way to warm up after having a barbeque in November. Brrr! §

JLAND • FACT

Ever wondered why the shinkansen are called what they are?

Nozomi (the fastest train) means hope; *Hikari* (the medium-speed train) means light; and *Kodama* (the slowest train) means echo. Now you know!



This issue's photo is by Jason Rosenholtz-Witt. Katie, our resident photography expert, explains why she chose it:

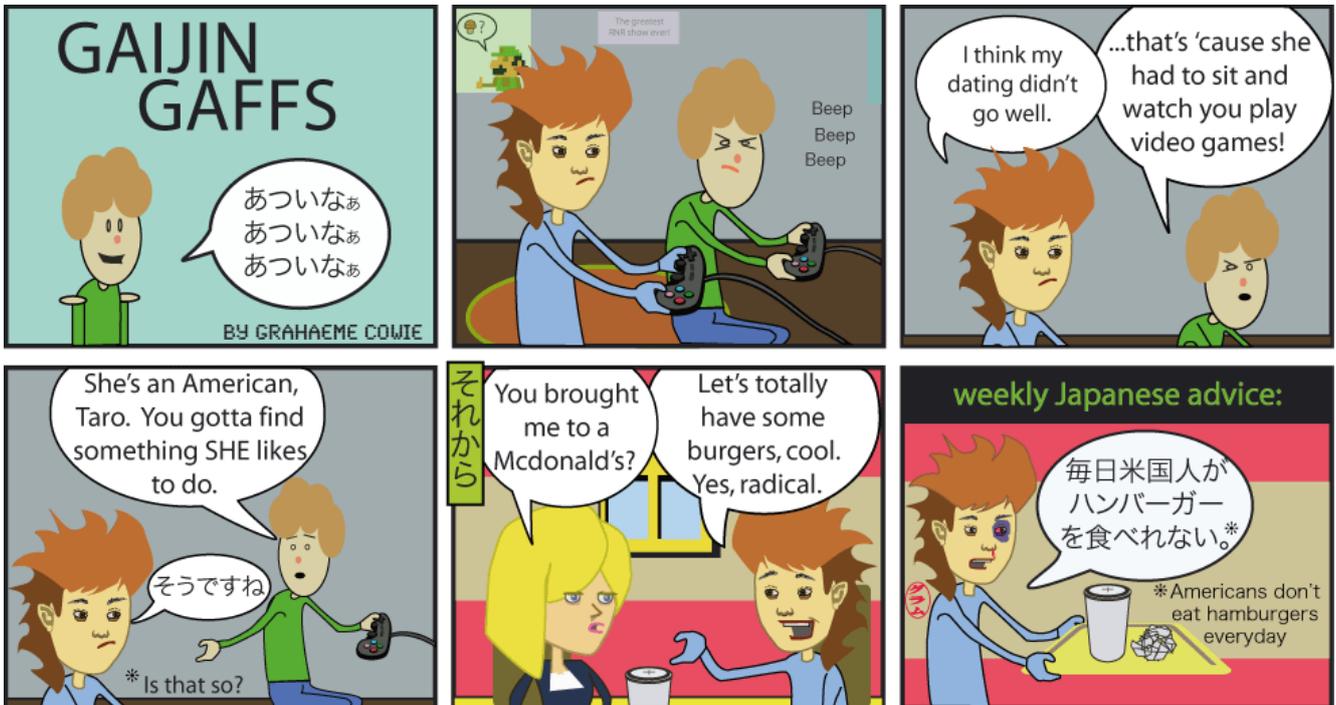
Katie says: "It is really difficult to photograph food and make it look delicious. Most people don't ever look at their sushi up close and realize what a work of art it really is. It's a great perspective as well. My mouth waters when I look at this image - and I don't even like anago!"

FEATURED PHOTO:
'Anago Delight!' by **Jason Rosenholtz-Witt**

Think you can do better? Want to get involved in the Hiroshima JET Flickr Group? Go to: www.flickr.com/groups/esid. Anyone can contribute photos to this free site, or you can just check out all of the prefecture's budding photographers' best efforts.

Gaijin Gaffs

by GRAHAEME COWIE



Questions? Comments? Opinions? Something to contribute? This newsletter is written by and for JETs!
If there is something you'd like to say, please don't hesitate: wideislandview@gmail.com