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## Wide Island Update

Welcome to the autumn edition of Wide Island View! We trust most of you have had some time to adjust to Japan and we hope you are not experiencing the end of the elation period of culture shock. But just in case, we've stocked this issue with articles that we hope will inspire you and keep away those dreaded Japanese winter blues. Inside you'll find a delicious recipe for comfort food, ideas for

winter travel, AJET news and some background info on a topic of Japanese culture we know most of you have always wanted to know about, but were afraid to ask. We hope you enjoy this issue of Wide Island View and don't hesitate to write to us at wideislandview@gmail.com if you have any comments, suggestions or ideas for future articles. Thanks, and see you in January!

## Happy Reading!

MATT and JEN



Nemo and anemone (photo by Joshua Zimmerman)

## DIVING in Asia

by JOSHUA ZIMMERMAN

When traveling throughout Asia you'll no doubt see a lot of beautiful temples, landscapes and wildlife. However, you're probably missing out on some of the most interesting

sights that lie just a few meters below the waves.

Learning how to dive is surprisingly simple and cheap. You can get your diving license just about anywhere there is diving. This includes Japan. Throughout Asia, the set rate for a beginner course in diving is around \$300 USD. This usually includes all equipment rentals as well as 4 skill dives, but it's best to contact the dive shop to find out the local rates. The course takes

around 4 days and afterwards you can use your license anywhere in the world.

Once you have a license, the oceans are yours for the taking. Living in Japan gives you access to some of the best diving locations in the world, as well as some of the cheapest. Below are some of the places I've been to during the past year.

**Japan:** One of the more expensive places to dive in Asia, but it's also the most convenient for us. There are a large number of dive shops in Hiroshima Prefecture that offer weekend trips around Japan as well as longer trips to Okinawa and the rest of Asia. Okinawa has some world class diving, as well as many dive shops that speak English. I recommend Kashiwajima Island in Kochi for its beautiful ribbon eels. To find a dive shop in your area try a quick Google search, or ask a JTE for help.

**Thailand:** A lot of people end up learning how to dive in Thailand. While the diving in Thailand does get crowded, it is completely geared-up for foreigners, as well as being very cheap. It's very easy to add a diving course to your vacation package. I recommend Koh Tao Island for a relaxing getaway and numerous foreigner-friendly places to learn.

**Fiji:** Many divers will tell you that Fiji has the best diving in the world (trust me on this: divers love to brag about where they've been). They may be right. There are hundreds of islands with thousands of dive sites for you to

pick from. With world class coral and year round diving, Fiji is tough to beat for a dive location. Plus you're guaranteed to see sharks almost everywhere you go. With so many great locations it's tough to recommend only one single spot. I recommend doing heavy research and finding a location that suits your needs. The only problem with Fiji is the price of air tickets, due to its rather remote location.

**Philippines:** With over 1,000 islands, it's no wonder that diving is a main staple of the Philippines' tourism industry. The dive sites range from whale shark watching to vast coral reefs. The Philippines is well known for its large variety of shipwrecks. One popular location is Subic Bay near Manila. There you can see the remains of the USS New York, scuttled when the US fled during WWII. If you can get to Busuanga, you can dive the remains of a Japanese supply fleet sunk at the end of WWII, as well as search out the elusive dugong, a manatee-like marine mammal. I recommend Bohol Island. Not only is the location known for its wonderful diving, but there are plenty of sites to explore and activities to do out of the water as well.

Diving is a hobby that you can do both while living in Japan and traveling throughout Asia, as well as a hobby you can use when you return home. It's safe, easy and will always impress a date. You might as well give it a try during travels to some of the top locations in the world. If you're interested in diving tips as

*sen*, now is the best time to start. An *onsen* is essentially a "hot spring," but can be anything from a natural hot spring to an *ofuro*: an extremely nice sauna-meets-hot tub experience.

Here are a couple of tips before you head out to the locker room:

**1.** Most places will provide "towels". WARNING: By towel, I mean a long piece of material about the length of 4 wash cloths, which you can "hide" yourself behind as you walk through the *onsen* area. Note: If you are anything close to being the size of an average person, this towel will conceal only a rather small portion of you. For more coverage, it is wise to bring

# NIHONGO no BENKYOU

by ALEXIS FRANKS

## TODAY'S TOPIC:

**KANJI:** 日本の諺

**KANA:** にほんのことわざ

**ROMAJI:** nihon no kotowaza

**ENGLISH:** Japanese Proverb

## JAPANESE:

猿も木から落ちる。

## ROMAJI:

Saru mo ki kara ochiru.

## LITERAL TRANSLATION:

Even monkeys fall from trees.

## ENGLISH EQUIVALENT:

Anyone can make a mistake.

## VOCABULARY BUILDER:

猿・さる・saru・monkey  
N + も・N + mo・even N  
木・き・ki・tree/trees  
から・kara・from  
落ちる・おちる・ochiru・to fall

well as diving information, Japanese dive shops, photos and links, please visit my diving blog at [joshuadives.com](http://joshuadives.com), or feel free to email me. [✉](mailto:joshuadives@gmail.com)

## O-SUSUME DESU!

# ONSEN:

## An Acceptable Form of Social Bathing

by ANGELA PERRONE

The temperature is dropping and once again it's the time of year to get naked with your friends and the *obaachans* or *ojiichans* in your town, village, island etc...!

If you are thinking about going to an *on-*

your own towel. They usually have regular-sized towels also, but these are meant for post *onsen*-ing, and not as a form of protection from prying eyes in the bathing area itself.

**2.** Something to look out for at some nicer *ryokans* with *onsen*: they will provide you with a *yukata*. WARNING: Do not put the *yukata* in or near the water. Should it get wet, the hotel people may yell at you, especially if you leave it half wrung-out in the sink. (I learned this through experience).

A few *onsen* you might like to try, some comprising a joint *onsen*-hotel experience:

## HIROSHIMA

Just a short car ride from the entrance to Miyajima is the Teien No Yado Sekitei (庭園の宿石亭) *onsen*. It's a bit pricey (about ¥26400+ for one night), but it offers a gorgeous view.

About an hour outside of Hiroshima City you can (hopefully) find the Tawara *Onsen* (田原温泉). It is only about ¥10000 for a night, and is located in what seems to be a cute *inaka* area.

For those of you who like to ski, you might want to look into the Megahira *Onsen* (女鹿平温泉), a ski resort and *onsen*, in Hatsukaichi. One night bed and *onsen* ranges from ¥10000 to ¥20000. To use just the *onsen*, you can pay less than ¥1000 for the day.

In Takehara there is the Yusaka *Onsen* (湯坂温泉) surrounded by a forest. You can stay over night for under ¥20000.

Onomichi offers the Onomichi Furiiai No Sato (尾道ふりあいの里). Adults are ¥800.

In Fukuyama/Kannabe, there is an *onsen* right next to Fuji Grand and another one a little further down the road with a giant sign that says *Oyu* (お湯). Both are less than ¥1000.

## OUTSIDE HIROSHIMA

In Okayama Prefecture, look into the Seto Ohashi *Onsen* (瀬戸大橋温泉) and the Washyuu *Onsen* (鷺羽温泉), both of which are located near Kurashiki. Ehime Prefecture, which leads into the top of Shikoku, is known for Dougo *Onsen* (道後温泉) in Matsuyama.

Up near Tokyo is an area called Hakone, which is famous for its hot springs. If you are interested in Hakone, it features an endless supply of *onsen*, and is a really beautiful place to visit.

In Odaiba, located in Tokyo Bay, there is the Ooedo *Onsen* (大江戸温泉), which might be considered an *onsen* theme park. Clothes may be required in some areas.

## GIVE ME CLOTHES!

If being naked with a lot of people isn't your thing, check out Sensuijima, an island just off the village of Tomonoura (a 30-minute bus-ride from Fukuyama). At this *onsen*/spa, you get to wear shorts and a polo shirt (provided) while you go in and out of the *onsen*, ocean and small rooms that resemble a sauna/oven. Prices start from around 2500 yen and the invigorating experience is well worth it. What's more: you're not naked! For most of the experience, anyway.

For more information check out <http://onsen.mapple.net> or 温泉&やど, a magazine specializing in *onsen* around the country. §

## japaneseculture:

# “YAKUZA”

What are the *yakuza*? What are their historical origins? What do they eat? What do they drive? What is their natural habitat? Let's find out.

## 893

by JODY DENONCOUR

Most people with an interest in Japan have at least heard of the *yakuza*, Japan's centuries-old organized crime gangs. Frequently the subject of film and fiction, they are often portrayed as glitzy mafiosos. However, few people have a clear idea of their actual origins, or of the changes which have taken place in the organization during the last decade or so.

The stories differ depending on who you talk to, of course. It was early on, around 1603, that organized crime started to make an impression upon the people and culture of Japan. Tokugawa Ieyasu's forces had just ended hundreds of years of civil war; Japan was finally unified under one Shogunate. The sudden



Toyota Century: the Official *Inaka Yakuza* Car (photo from <http://catalogue.carview.co.jp>)

peace left as many as 500,000 samurai without practical work. Many adapted to the new order, becoming merchants or members of the growing bureaucracy. Some, however, unable to shed the soldier mentality, began to band together, adopting outlandish weapons, names, and styles and terrorizing townspeople. Notorious as early as 1612, these roving bands were known to the common people as *kabuki-mono* (literally, “the crazy ones”) or the *hatamoto-yakko*.

Modern day *yakuza*, however, claim no relation to the *hatamoto-yakko*. Instead, they find their own real or imaginary roots in the bands of angry townspeople that rose up in defense against these brigands and murderers--the *machi-yakko*, “servants of the town.” Modern *yakuza* have identified with these classic Robin Hood figures as “honorable outlaws.”

Any tie to either group, however, must 03

be viewed in spirit only. In the late 17th century, the Tokugawa shogunate cracked down on inter-gang warfare, wiping out both organizations. The first true forerunners of today's gangs arose nearly a century later, in the form of the *bakuto* (gamblers) and the *tekiya* (traveling peddlers).

The most likely direct ancestors of the *yakuza* were the members of the *bakuto*. Although officially illegal since 689 CE, gambling was a popular form of entertainment which, along with labor broking and other activities, became the province of the gangs. Many of the most characteristic and widely known facets of *yakuza* culture were passed down through this organization, the most widely recognized being extensive tattooing. In Tokugawa Japan, criminals were marked with a black ring around the arm for each offense committed; this was adopted and flaunted by the underworld denizens. These intricate and colorful tattoos were and are to this day mostly accomplished using hand-made tools—a long and painful process and therefore a mark of pride and endurance. It is also widely held that the name “*yakuza*” itself comes from the gambling enterprise: in the card game *oicho-kabu*, the worst of all losing hands was a combination of 8-9-3, sometimes pronounced as *ya*, *ku*, and *sa*. Hence the name *yakuza*, signifying that the gamblers themselves were “a bad hand,” born to lose.

The other major group, separate but related, was the *tekiya*. These wandering peddlers, unlike the gambling operations, operated largely under legal guises, running what essentially amounted to “protection” rackets in local markets.

Another long-standing part of *yakuza* culture inherited from these two groups is the tightly knit and firmly defined structure of their associations. They organized themselves into gangs or “families:” *gumi* which revolved around the *oyabun-kobun*, or “father-son” relationship, in which the *kobun* swore his undying loyalty and his life to his boss, in exchange for protection. The foundation of this framework reached back to the noble *bushido* code of the samurai, the principle of *giri* - devotion, obligation, and honor. Sometimes conflicting but always entwined was the idea of *ninjou* (“human feeling”), the counterbalance

## RECIPE:



# Meatloaf and Garlic Mashed Potatoes

by JULIA MAYEDA

### INGREDIENTS:

#### MEATLOAF

- 750 grams minced meat
- 40 Saltine Crackers, crushed
- 1 medium yellow onion, chopped
- 2 cloves garlic, finely chopped
- 1/3 cup ketchup
- 1 egg
- salt and pepper
- pinch of oregano
- ketchup for the top

#### GARLIC MASHED POTATOES

- 8 medium to large potatoes
- 100 grams sour cream
- 1/4 cup milk
- 2 cloves garlic, finely chopped
- 8 tbs butter
- 4 tbs Parmesan Cheese
- salt and pepper
- pinch of dill

### DIRECTIONS:

#### MEATLOAF

- Preheat oven to 180 degrees Celsius
- Mix all ingredients in a bowl; it's best to get a little messy and just go

at it with your hands

- Pack into a baking dish
- Coat with a layer of ketchup
- Bake until thoroughly cooked (in my old oven it takes a little over an hour)

#### GARLIC MASHED POTATOES

- Boil some water in a big pot
- Peel and wash potatoes
- Cut into bite-sized pieces
- Boil in water until the pieces crumble apart when stabbed with a fork
- Drain and put back into your pot
- Add the rest of the ingredients and mash using a blunt object (I use my rolling pin)
- Taste the potatoes and add extra ingredients if desired (I like to load on the Parmesan Cheese and garlic)

### NOTES:

- This is one of my favorite comfort foods when it's cold and I am starting to feel a little home sick (Sorry, I'm American, so it's an American comfort food).
- Back home I would make this just using hamburger meat, but since beef is so expensive here, I use the pork/beef mix.
- This is not a good meal if your're on a diet or watching what you eat, but it tastes fabulous!
- Prep Time: 1 hour
- Feeds: 4 hungry people

to the lawlessness of the gangs, who still styled themselves as “honorable outlaws” and took pains to see that civilians were not hurt in their transactions.

Despite the intricacy of these organiza-

tions, the gangs were yet to become the full-fledged mafia of the 20th century. They were “modernized” during and after the Meiji period, rising to the height of their power and influence after World War II. By the end of the war, many of

Japan's major cities had been fire-bombed into ruin; food and manufacturing were down 50% from 1937, and the urban populace faced widespread starvation. Into the chaos stepped the local *yakuza* gangs, setting up as many as 17,000 markets nationwide only two months after the country surrendered. As a result of popular demand and government inability to provide for the basic needs of the people, the gangs could charge exorbitant prices for their goods. Yet when government rations came late or not at all, this made all the difference between life and death for the common person. These markets remained largely unopposed thanks to the Occupation's disarming of the Japanese police force, a move which left large portions of the populace completely unprotected. During the war large numbers of foreigners had been captured and brought to Japan to serve as slave-labor in the factories

and war effort. Following Japan's surrender, some groups of workers banded together to attack towns, and the police entreated the *yakuza* for help. The gangs were often able to drive off the mobs, for which (some believe) the police force owed them a long debt of *giri*, perhaps explaining the blind eye turned so often to criminal activities in the past and the visual abundance of *yakuza* above ground.

Over time Japanese authorities have begun to crack down on organized criminal activity; anti-*yakuza* laws were passed in the early 1990s. Also, in many ways, the organization itself is changing. *Giri* and *ninjou* go unconsidered; members forgo the ritualistic ways of the past and retreat further undercover. Yet despite these modern changes and the lawlessness to which these gangs have historically subscribed, there is no

## JLAND • FACT

• In Japan, students are taught there are six continents, not seven, as is taught in most English-speaking countries. Europe and Asia are combined into one continent, Eurasia, a fact that is taught in Russia and Eastern Europe as well and is the preferred method of the geographic community.

doubt that much of their past nature has had its roots deep in the Japanese culture. §

### Works consulted:

*Yakuza: the Explosive Account of Japan's Criminal Underworld*, by Alec Dubro and David E. Kaplan  
*The Japanese Mafia: Yakuza, Law, and the State*, by Peter B. E. Hill  
*Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II*, by John W. Dower

## EVENT IN REVIEW:

Toby Ley reviews Buono Musica Review  
 (9/15/2007)

### Buono!Musica!2007

by **TOBY LEY**

Buono!Musica!2007: A weekend spent at a musical oasis. There was no J-pop. We didn't hear the Beatles once, perhaps because of the absence of department stores and konbinis.... Buono!Musica!2007 was simply a beautiful day and night of music, delicious food and camping.

Held in a campground in Sera-Nishi, a small town an hour drive north of Onomichi, it proved to be a secluded spot with plenty of green-space, overlooking a peaceful lake. There was room for lazing around with a beer, or even tossing a frisbee, if you felt up to that strenuous task! In the evening, a big bonfire was lit for people to relax around. There were also barbeque facilities near the stage, so we loaded up on supermarket goodies before we arrived. It really was an excellent little valley for seeing some great live music.

The campsite opened up at around mid-day on Saturday, allowing a good couple of hours to pitch tents and settle into the laid-back vibe before the music actually



Buono Musica (photo by Toby Ley)

began. There were a number of stalls selling a variety of beers and delicious food. The Portuguese grilled chicken was absolutely incredible and, as the evening wore on and the temperature dropped, there was also heart-warming hot, spiced wine on offer to keep us going.

But what about the music? Well, what I heard was great! The first act started at around 3pm and the music continued on until about 2 or 3am. The earlier acts were almost purely acoustic and had a distinct folk sound. Most of the performances consisted of just one or two people on stage at

a time. One stand-out act for me was Kyoto-based, solo artist Chiyuki Eda of Xanthipita. Xanthipita complemented her simple guitar riffs with melancholy but sweet vocals, giving a really gorgeous sound. If only I could have understood the lyrics....

Upping the tempo later on in the evening was Tokyo's Kijima Sound System: a band with at times six and at others, seven, members. These guys were awesome. They really performed well. A fantastic fusion of more traditional percussion with electronica and interesting base lines made this group a definite highlight of the weekend for me.

During the performance, one of the artists from KSS would occasionally change position and move in front of the band to start conducting a kind of spontaneous jam session. It was the first time I had seen a band member suddenly transform from performer

to conductor. It seemed a little strange at the time, but actually made for some pretty interesting music!

Whether you are into folk, hip-hop, jazz, techno, J-pop, grunge, classical or elec-

tronica, or even if you're tone-deaf, Buono Musica should definitely be on next year's "must attend" list. §

For more information on next year's Buono!Musica! check out <http://buono-musica.com/>

# OKINAWA



by **NATALIE ORAM**

Okinawa Prefecture (沖縄県) is Japan's southernmost prefecture and consists of hundreds of the Ryukyu islands in a chain over 1,000 km long. Okinawa has only been part of Japan since 1972. Naha is the capital city, and the airport is located here. Okinawa can get really hot and humid, and they frequently experience strong typhoons, so be sure to check the best time of year to go. I visited Okinawa at the very end of its rainy season, which lasts from the beginning of May to the end of June.

The first thing I noticed about Okinawa, other than the heat, was how different Okinawa is from the rest of Japan. For starters, the Okinawan people don't share the mainland population's apparent penchant for frenzied activity. Our taxi driver taught us the saying "*yonna yonna*" (よんなあよんな), which means "it is better if you take it easy and don't rush." This comes from the Okinawan language: *Uchina guchi*. The Okinawans also speak Japanese and a great many speak at least a little English, which makes ordering in a restaurant a much less painful experience than it can be on the mainland! Wearing their Kariyushi shirts (rather like a Hawaiian shirt), the locals seem to exude a relaxed air; even the businessmen wear them!

Many of my students say that they really dislike Okinawan cuisine. Eating out here doesn't have to be traditional however; my friends and I really enjoyed the many Mexican-style restaurants we came across, and I hope this trend catches on in Hiroshima! For nostalgic Americans, there is the fast-food chain A&W, where you can drink your weight in root beer floats. If you want to branch out and try some local specialties, I suggest *goya*, which looks like a cucumber but is covered in bumps and tastes very, very bitter. I enjoyed it so much that I

brought some home with me. However, it's not everyone's cup of tea. If you're after something sugary, desserts made from purple sweet potatoes can be found everywhere (and make great *omiyage*). For a slightly more familiar fix, why not try an Okinawan doughnut?

After wading your way through Okinawa's many culinary delights, you'll need something to wash it all down with. This is where *awamori*, Okinawa's specialty alcohol, comes in. It is made from distilling rice and has a very high alcohol content. It's easy to spot because the large jugs it comes in also contain snakes! If you are more of a beer drinker, Okinawa has its own brand, Orion. Those looking for something a little sweeter can try Okinawa's own pineapple wine, made from the pineapples which grow all over the islands.

If the wine alone doesn't satisfy your pineapple cravings, you can visit the Nago Pineapple Park, about two hours away from Naha by bus. This pineapple playground is fully equipped to entertain, even if it's raining. Your first stop is an automatic cart that takes you on a tour of the whole park whilst telling you its history. It's narrated in English, so there's no excuse for not learning while you're having fun! You are also given the opportunity to try all the pineapple wine, pineapple juice and pineapple products -including cakes, chocolate, and even perfume- you can handle.

Not too far from the Nago Pineapple Park is the world famous Okinawa Churaumi Aquarium. It houses the largest fish tank in the world, home to all kinds of fish and other sea creatures. Don't miss the feeding of the whale sharks! If you aren't able to fill a whole day with the aquarium, you can mosey on down to Emerald Beach at the Okinawa Ocean Expo Park. It is truly beautiful and you can rent a deck chair

and umbrella for total relaxation.

If chilling out on the beach is your idea of the perfect holiday, I suggest taking a package deal and staying at a fancy hotel on one of the smaller islands. However, if your budget is on the modest side, some of these hotels offer the use of their facilities and beaches to non-customers for a daily fee. Staying at one beach might be easier if you are pressed for time because it's inconvenient to get around Okinawa without a car. We are spoiled by the efficient train service in Hiroshima, and Okinawa only has one monorail that serves Naha. The buses are pretty expensive, but the taxis are cheaper than on the mainland. The best beaches are off the main island and you can go snorkeling at many places, as well as island hopping. There are lots of islands to choose from, but some are as far away as Taiwan. To the southwest is Ishigaki Island, from where you can take a glass-bottom boat for a view of the Kabira Bay. Ten minutes by ferry from Ishigaki Island is Taketomi Island where you will find the famous star-shaped sand.

Okinawa contains a plethora of exciting places and experiences not found in mainland Japan. I wholly recommend visiting the prefecture. So go exploring! §

## TRAVELTIPS

There are many cheap hotels to choose from in Okinawa. I recommend surfing the net for reviews by other people. Two good sites are <http://www.hostelworld.com> and <http://www.asia-rooms.com/reviews/japan/okinawa-hotel-reviews.html>. Also, if you are going to book a package deal, try to find one that includes a hotel, since the hotels used tend to be of a good standard.

• **November, All Month**

**Nanowrimo**

Write a novel!

Nanowrimo, or National Novel Writing Month, is a challenge to write a 50,000-word novel in the space of one month. There is no fee involved, but you can sign up on the Nanowrimo website for encouragement and ideas. The founders figured that November is cold and gloomy enough to make it an ideal month to hole up in your apartment and start writing down all of those story ideas that have been kicking around in your brain for years; they don't know how true it is for all of us here in Japan (kids, it's gonna be a cold November!). So stock up on food and kerosene for your heater and get to writin'! For more information, check out [www.nanowrimo.org](http://www.nanowrimo.org).

• **November 6**

**Last Day to sign up for Miyajima Cross Country Race**

Get in shape before you travel to the beaches this winter!

Race sign-up forms (in Japanese) are available on [www.gethiroshima.com](http://www.gethiroshima.com). There is also a postal furikomi available. There are two distances, 6km and 10km, and both cost 2500 yen.

• **November 15**

**Shichi-Go-San** (七五三, literally "seven-five-three," lucky numbers in Japanese numerology)

Ever wonder why all the children are wearing kimonos in November?

This festival day for three and seven year-old girls and three and five year-old boys celebrates their passage into "middle childhood." The children get to dress up in kimono and visit shrines to pray for a long and healthy life.

• **November 15**

**Walk on Coals at Daishoin Temple**

Try some coal-walking at Daishoin Temple on Miyajima. Why? Well, "to pray for protection from illness and disaster." Coal-walking starts at 11am.

• **November 17-18**

**AJET Sumo Trip/Space World**

Check out possibilities after JET: become an astronaut!

Space World, was built by Nippon Steel in 1990, on the grounds of a former iron

mill. The theme park has the only scale-one model of an upright US Space Shuttle in the world and also its own Space Camp, which provides instruction using the same equipment used by NASA astronauts. Be sure to check out the English instructions at the Alien Panic: Evolution ride. They are worth the price of admission!

• **November 23**

**Labour Thanksgiving Day** (勤労感謝の日, Kinrou Kansha no Hi)

Thank your boss!

This holiday celebrates labour and production. "Labour Thanksgiving Day is the modern name for an ancient rice harvest festival known as Niiname-sai (新嘗祭, Niiname-sai), believed to have been held as long ago as November of 678. Traditionally, it celebrated the year's hard work; during the Niiname-sai ceremony, the Emperor would dedicate the year's harvest to kami (spirits), and taste the rice for the first time. The modern holiday was established after World War II in 1948 as a day to mark some of the changes of the postwar constitution of Japan, including fundamental human rights and the expansion of workers rights. Currently Niiname-sai is held privately by the Imperial Family while Labour Thanksgiving Day has become a national holiday."

• **December 2**

**Miyajima Cross Country Race**

Run!

• **December 2**

**JLPT**

Put all of that studying to good use!

Good luck everyone!

• **December 20**

**Deadline for Oshima Sazan Road Race**

The race is February 3 and there is a 10km and a half-marathon available. See <http://www.gethiroshima.com/en/Events/details?eventid=1821> for more details.

• **December 23**

**Emperor's Birthday**

Wave to the Emperor!

One of only two days when the Imperial Palace opens its grounds to the general public (the other is January 2), the Emperor's Birthday is celebrated by lots of waving: the crowd waves tiny Japanese flags

and the royals wave to acknowledge the crowd.

• **December 31**

**Omisoka**

Clean!

Many people do an extensive house-cleaning on this day, in order to usher in the New Year organized and ready to go.

• **January 1**

**New Year's Day**

Happy New Year!

Japanese people send New Year's cards to wish one another well for the coming year. The cards are postcard-size and are usually printed with a design. They shouldn't arrive before January 1st, so the sender wraps a piece of paper around them with a rubber band, identifying them as New Year's cards. They are then kept by the post office until the New Year.

• **January 14**

**Coming of Age Day**

Created as a national holiday in 1948, Coming of Age Day (成人の日 seijin no hi) is celebrated by those turning 20. "Festivities include ceremonies held at local and prefectural offices and parties amongst family and friends to celebrate passage into adulthood."

**Sources**

[en.wikipedia.org](http://en.wikipedia.org)

[www.gethiroshima.com](http://www.gethiroshima.com)

**JLAND • FACT**

• There is one vending machine for every 23 people in Japan.

• In Japan, women are said to be pregnant for ten months, because length of pregnancy is determined by months without a menstrual cycle, from conception to birth.

• The numbers 4 and 9 are considered unlucky in Japan. 4 "shi" sounds like the word for "death", and 9 "ku" like the one for "pain". Hospitals usually miss out 4 and 9 when numbering rooms, and often they don't have fourth or ninth floors.



FEATURED PHOTO: 'Inland Sea, Fishing' by Spiffae

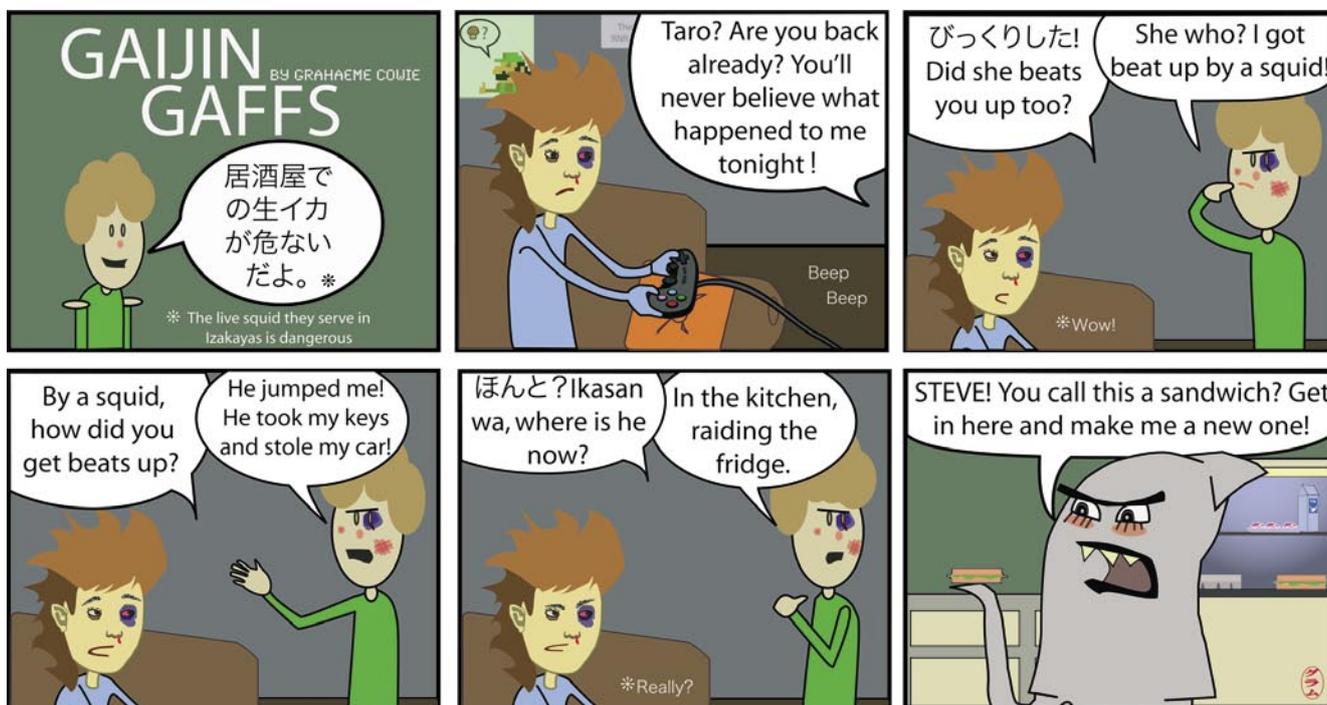
This issue's photo is by Spiffae. Katie, our resident photography expert, explains why she chose it:

"The colors in this photo are absolutely brilliant. The cool, almost dawn lighting of the background beautifully contrasts the artificially lit boat making it a magnificent image. But what I really love about this image is its symmetry. The image is almost perfectly symmetrical, with the exception of the fisherman (I assume) off to the side. The horizontal and diagonal lines keep your eye moving around the image, but the strong vertical lines bring you straight to the center where you find the subject. This is not a photo that screams JAPAN, but could easily be any fisherman, anywhere in the world."

To see more stunning shots of life in Japan, and to join in the fun yourself, go to the Hiroshima JETs photo page at: [www.flickr.com/groups/esid](http://www.flickr.com/groups/esid)

# Gaijin Gaffs

by GRAHAEME COWIE



CREDITS:  
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Designed by Kristin Licitis

CONTACT:  
[wideislandview@gmail.com](mailto:wideislandview@gmail.com)

NOTES:  
Questions? Comments? Something to contribute? This newsletter is written by and for JETs! If there is something you'd like to say, please don't hesitate to contact us.