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Wide Island Update

Editor's Statement

Welcome to the May/June edition of Wide Island View! In this issue, you'll find articles on Vietnam, a little-known Japanese martial art, tea ceremony, a delicious recipe and a few cocktails, a weird and wonderful cartoon and a guide to upcoming spring events. 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 July!

We're looking for new editors and designers to take over next year!

Hi! We're looking for anyone interested in taking over both the design position and the editor positions next year. If you'd like to be a part of keeping Wide Island afloat, please contact Jen or Matt at wideislandview@gmail.com. In the short term, we are looking for a cartoonist to take over starting from the July edition.

We need your story ideas and submissions! If you've traveled during your stay in Japan, or have a vast knowledge or interest in an aspect of Japanese culture that you'd like to share with your fellow JETs, please feel free to write us at wideislandview@gmail.com.

Happy Reading!

MATT and JEN



Viewing the Utensils: Tea Bowls, Tea Scoop and Tea Container (photo by Jennifer Thwaites)

O-SUSUME DESU! CHAKAI

by JENNIFER THWAITES

*And you thought tea ceremony was boring!
Review of Onomichi's Botan Chakai-*

A few weeks ago I sacrificed my usual Sunday morning lie-in in order to attend

Onomichi's annual *Botan Chakai*, or, literally: "Peony Tea Meeting". A *chakai* is a kind of tea ceremony (*chanoyu*) gathering at which a group of guests (sometimes up to fifty in one sitting) come together to enjoy relatively simple servings of *usucha* (thin *matcha* tea) and one or more small snacks (*okashi*), which are distributed and consumed in a set fashion, according to the customs of the particular tea ceremony school

of which the *chakai* host is a member. *Chakai*, which are often public events, are numerous: they are often held at a temple in connection with offering tea to the gods, but may also, for example, honour the first tea of the year or the opening of the hearth (which is only used in tea ceremonies during the winter months). *Botan Chakai* is held in April to enjoy the newly-bloomed peonies in the grounds of the temples which host the event.

Chakai are ticketed events and the host does not necessarily know all the guests personally. In addition, since there may be a large number of guests, the host cannot herself make tea for each individual present. Therefore, the first two or three guests are served tea prepared by the host in front of the group, and the other guests drink tea that has been whisked in an adjacent room and carried out by assistants of the host. A large number of guests can, in this way, all be served within quite a short time.

Attending a *chakai* for the first time can

MAY • JUNE • JULY CALENDAR

• May 17/18

Fukuyama Rose Festival

Started in 1956, the Rose Festival is the largest event held in Fukuyama. Come check out the many varieties of roses, watch performances and eat delicious food.

• May 31

Let's Enjoy Film Festival

The 3rd annual Let's Enjoy Film Festival is held in Fukuyama. JETs and people from the community will present their 5-minute short films and commercials and the winner will be picked by the audience. Come just to watch or submit your own film!

• June ?

AJET Carp Game

AJET reps will send out info for this game soon.

• July 4-6

San-In Beach Party

Three days of beach party craziness in Tottori-ken.

• July 12

Hiroshima AJET Leaver's Party

Held every year at the Mitsukoshi rooftop

be a daunting prospect for anyone, with or without experience of tea ceremony practices and good Japanese language skills, and I wouldn't like to go to one alone. Special tools should be brought: *kaishi* (paper on which snacks are placed shortly before eating), a knife for cutting larger cakes, a pouch for carrying these and any uneaten tidbits and a small fan, which is the symbol of the guest in *chano-yu*. From the way the guest holds her hands on her lap to the manner in which she cleans the serving chopsticks with her *kaishi*, to say nothing of receiving and drinking the tea itself, every movement should be carried out in a particular way and other guests may be especially interested to see how a foreigner fares throughout this etiquette obstacle course. Then, of course, there is the (potential) challenge of sitting *seiza* for long periods of time. Famously useless at sitting *seiza*, on this particular occasion I could only manage about fifteen minutes before numbness, followed swiftly by agony, set in. However, the setting of a narrow *tatami* room, ringed completely by very smartly dressed, older ladies

beer garden in Hiroshima, this raucous event brings together JETs from all over the ken. AJET will inform you of prices and times soon.

• July 21

Marine Day (海の日 *Umi no Hi*)

Also known as 'Ocean Day', is a day of gratitude for the blessings of the oceans; there are no traditional ceremonies associated with the day.

• Movies:

May 10	The Hunting Party
May 17	Charlie Wilson's War
	I'm Not There
	Blades of Glory
May 21	Prince Caspian
May 24	Rambo
	Michael Clayton
	I'm Not There
May 31	27 Dresses
	21
June 7	Sleuth
June 14	Juno
June 21	Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull
	August Rush
July 5	Speed Racer
July 19	Ponyo on the Cliff

NIHONGO no BENKYOU

by ALEXIS FRANKS

TOPIC 1:

日本の諺
にほんのことわざ
nihon no kotowaza
Japanese Proverb

JAPANESE:

朝の紅顔、夕べの白骨。

ROMAJI:

Asa no kougan, yuube no hakkou.

LITERAL TRANSLATION:

The morning's rosy face, the evening's bleached bones.

ENGLISH EQUIVALENT:

Life is short.

VOCABULARY BUILDER:

- 朝, あさ, *asa*, morning
- 紅顔, こうが^ん, *kougan*, rosy (ruddy) face
- 夕べ, ゆうべ, *yuube*, evening
- 白骨, はっこう, *hakkou*, bleached (white) bones

TOPIC 2:

日本の擬声語
にほんのぎせいご
nihon no giseigo
Japanese Onomatopoeia

JAPANESE:

ぴちぴちする

ROMAJI:

pichi pichi suru

MEANING:

to be young and lively

EXAMPLE:

- 彼はぴちぴちした男の子です
ね。
- *Kare wa pichi pichi shita otoko no ko desu ne.*
- He's a lively little boy, isn't he?

all sitting perfectly still and composedly didn't exactly encourage informality and, in each of the three separate stages of the *Botan Chakai*, I persevered and ended up suffering increasingly severe pain in my legs which left me unable to stand up for several minutes following the final ceremony, while my eighty year-old tea ceremony sensei put me to shame by rising up gracefully and gliding away almost the minute it ended.

If I haven't just scared away those of you who might once have wanted to experience a *chakai*, let me explain what I loved about the one I went to. To start with, it was a great opportunity to enter two of Onomichi's beautiful temples, Jikanji and Tenneiji, as something other than a sightseer. First, we waited as a big group to be called to a formal ceremony at Jikanji, during which we watched the host prepare a ceremonial cup of thin *mattcha*, drank our own when it was brought by the assistants and (before drinking the tea) ate a perfect little curved pink cake filled with red bean paste. One of

the best moments of the whole morning for me was sitting in the absolutely silent *tatami* room watching the kimono-clad host prepare tea carefully and beautifully, using exactly the same movements I've been learning (imperfectly) for the past eighteen months. It was also interesting to examine the utensils from the ceremony afterwards: the tea container, tea scoop and tea bowl which, if used at a *chakai* are always particularly beautiful or unique and which, after the principal guest requests it, are ceremonially cleaned and displayed at the end for all guests to inspect. At this point, the main principles of tea ceremony: harmony, respect, purity and tranquillity were well and truly broken, as the whole room swarmed forward to see, and I was forced to defend my place near the utensils from a couple of little old ladies who clearly didn't mind pushing in! After that, it was time to slip back into our shoes and proceed slowly in small groups under sun umbrellas down Onomichi's twisting, narrow lanes to Tenneiji where the final two stages were to take place.

We had to wait quite a long time to be admitted to the second stage of the *chakai*. It seemed to me that during the waiting periods the "work" of this event took place: the prolonged greetings and introductions that went on because most of the guests were affiliated to one of numerous tea ceremony groups that meet to learn and practice and, therefore, everyone knew everyone and fellow students, teachers and teachers' teachers had to be acknowledged and greeted with respect.

The second stage of the *chakai* - in format very similar to the first- was unexpectedly (for me anyway, given my distinct lack of kanji skills and therefore ability to suss these things out beforehand) interesting because of the sweet served. Often, a *chakai* will reflect in some way what is happening in the world at that particular point in time, be it the season or a current holiday and, since 2008 is the year of the Olympics, the snack was five little multi-coloured candy rings (*continued on page 8*)

book review

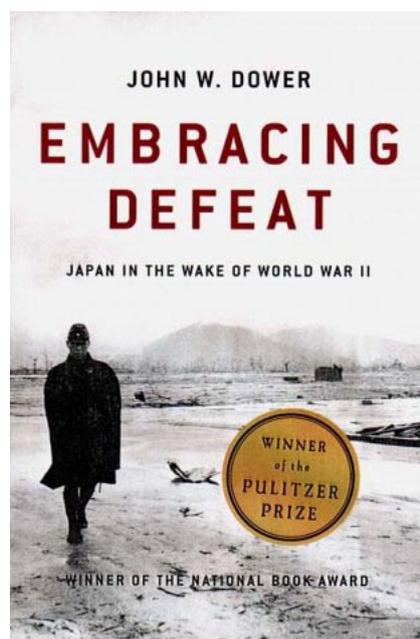
by MATT HAZEL

"Embracing Defeat"

Matt Hazel reviews John Dower's award-winning book about the post-war occupation of Japan.

John Dower's *Embracing Defeat* may seem like a daunting read at first glance. It won a Pulitzer Prize and a US National Book Award. It's about the occupation of Japan. It's close to 700 pages long. So it's not exactly light-reading in both senses of the word. But those expecting a dry, academic re-telling (as I was), are in for a surprise. The strength of this fascinating book is that Dower focuses on individual stories of the occupation. Meticulously researched (150 of those pages are notes and an index), he has culled through an amazing amount of research material to give both Japanese and American perspectives on the occupation of Japan by Allied Forces that lasted from 1945 to 1952.

Major figures of the occupation like Hirohito and MacArthur are discussed at length, but Dower also writes about people like Beate Sirota, an American who was the



first civilian woman to arrive in Japan after the war, eventually helping to draft the new Japanese Constitution and fighting for the inclusion of legal equality for men and women in Japan, and Dr. Takashi Nagai, a physician and Nagasaki atomic bomb survivor who devoted the last years of his life to writing hugely popular essays about the spiritual crisis arising from living in the nuclear age.

The book starts with the shock that regular people experienced on hearing Emper-

or Hirohito's voice for the first time, as he announced the unconditional surrender of Japan. Dower has combed through diaries, newspapers and other primary source documents to give first person accounts of what it was like to experience this paradigm shift. What emerges is not for the faint of heart; the Japanese suffered through a horrible ordeal during the war, but after it they faced mass starvation and a sense of displacement, as everything they had been told to fight for had been turned inside out. Soldiers were stranded thousands of miles from home, facing imprisonment or death; the economy was in shambles, with food and other provisions controlled by black-marketers; and the government that had led the people to war was being propped up by the Allied forces to stave off complete anarchy. Ironically, this suffering was coupled with a sense of hope, since the occupation did create a chance for a more open, democratic culture, one that was sadly only partially realized.

After reading the book, I begin to think more and more about the older people I see everyday: had they had to face starvation, loss of their families, their homes or their livelihoods? I'm sure many of them did and the fact that they survived through it to make Japan what it is today is all the more amazing. §

travel: VIETNAM

Deborah Kane spent seven weeks traveling in Vietnam. This is the advice she has to offer based on that experience.

A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO VIETNAM

by **DEBORAH KANE**

White sand beaches, cool mountain resorts, a sad war history, varied culinary delights, beautiful children, pockets of poverty and talented artists. Vietnam has a lot to offer the soul. And to top it off, most of the Vietnamese you will meet on your travels speak great English.

I spent seven weeks in Vietnam last year. My friend and I volunteered in orphanages and a day care centre for disabled children in a small town in central Vietnam for one month before backpacking from Ho Chi Minh City up to the Chinese border for the remainder of our stay.

The average Vietnamese earns UD\$2 per day and this is mostly earned through backbreaking, labour-intensive farming which you can see from the main highway running the length of the country. Therefore, our tourist dollars means a lot to the economy of Vietnam. Ravaged by war during the 60s and 70s, Vietnam has come a long way in recovery, but is still suffering the effects, which can be seen if you have someone to point out the discreet signs.

Anytime is a great time to visit Vietnam. There are two seasons in Vietnam: the wet and the dry. I experienced the wet season in May and June and it was a sweat bucket, but great for sunbathing and swimming. The beginning and end of the year are pleasant, but take along a jersey for those cooler nights.

The Vietnamese people are friendly and surprisingly non-judgmental about your origins. It is a safe place to travel as long as you have common sense. Only once was I made to feel uncomfortable by an opiate addict who looked like he came from Mordor. A watching local fruit-store owner screamed the madman off.



Grass-roofed huts on the beach (photo by Deborah Kane)



Fruit vendor on the beach (photo by Deborah Kane)

Accommodation

Accommodation is wide-ranging. We did our travels on a tight budget which was easy, and finally splashed out US\$30 (for two!) on our last night in Hanoi at a hotel which was very luxurious. The least we paid was US\$6 (yes for two again), but this was for a room without air-conditioning. The average cost for an average room is about US\$10 - \$12 per night for a twin/double room.

Transportation

Transportation is easy. There are many options and it is dirt cheap. Trains run the length of the country with 4 different classes: soft sleeper, hard sleeper, soft seat and hard seat. Book soft sleeper if you can for any overnight journeys, but hard seat is fine for a four or five hour trip, and you will be bound to see an old lady gleefully tucking into a duck embryo.



Donating time (photo by Deborah Kane)

The tourist buses are cheap and run often. You can jump on and off at your leisure. I talked to a couple buying a Ho Chi Minh to Hanoi ticket for US\$16. The local buses and minivans are a precarious but cheap way to travel. They leave you fearing for your safety sometimes, with 28 people so jam-packed into a minivan that the door is kept

open. The long distance local buses also carry puppies and chickens!

Make sure you catch a ride on a motorbike, too. They are an easy way to get around where the buses don't go, and north in the hillside town of Sapa (bordering China), a bike and guide hired for the day is a perfect way to visit minority villages and to view the stunning tiered rice paddies.

JLAND • FACT

- Japan has about three minor earthquakes every day of the year, with an average of around 1500 per year.
- Approximately 80% of the world's bluefin tuna catch is used for sushi (sushiFAQ.com).
- Yonaguni Island (Japan's westernmost inhabited island and part of Okinawa-Ken) is only 125km away from Taiwan.

Culinary Delights

A positive by-product of the French occupation in the 1800s was the skill of making a great baguette. They are sold anywhere and everywhere and are cheap: from a street vendor you will pay 1,000 – 2,000 dong. There is an abundance of inexpensive tropical fruit, especially the mangosteen. And of course there is also the infamous Durian which has been banned from airplanes due to the interesting and strong smell (they are delicious if you dare). There is also a bit of Fear Factor vs Anthony Bourdain if

TRAVELTIPS

- Carry small denomination American notes all the time – a lot of Vietnamese claim to have no change for the bigger notes. Some sellers may also reject your money if notes are torn or dirty.
- Take a bunch of re-hydration sachets with you if you go mid-year to avoid those muscle cramps.
- Pack lightly and then fill up the remaining spaces with new tailor made clothes from Hoi An. Plan what you want to get made before you leave, and take magazine pictures, sketches or even a favorite piece of material. The tailors are very talented and fast.
- Book train travel a few days beforehand through your hotel or a street travel agent or else you might only be able to get a hard sleeper on a long journey – tough and very loud.
- Take note of the Lonely Planet safety advice - especially about keeping the mesh screen windows down on train journeys to avoid rocks being thrown in the windows.
- Flights into Ho Chi Minh and out of Hanoi (or vice versa) work perfectly to avoid doubling back.
- Go and hunt down an orphanage; the children will love to get their hands on you. Take a cash donation, toys or learning materials, or just give a little time.
- Feel like a holiday helping out and traveling at the same time? Visit www.volunteer.org.nz for some great opportunities.

you want it. My fellow volunteers asked our in-house cook to prepare dog meat and duck egg embryo for our last meal. Watching someone squirm trying to eat the baby duck bill with some never-seen-the-light-of-day feathers is one of my top Vietnamese memories. The duck embryo has remarkable health benefits apparently. They are eaten abundantly throughout the country.

Spend your money in Vietnam – the economy needs it and children in the orphanages need your love and attention so spend some time with them. §



Chillin' Out CHILI

by **ANDREA COLE**
& **JULIA MAYEDA**

CHILI INGREDIENTS:

- 300 grams of minced meat
- 1 large yellow onion, chopped
- 4 little green peppers chopped
- 6 button mushrooms, chopped
- 1 can of kidney beans (432 grams)
- 400 grams tomato paste
- 600 grams of water
- 3 cloves of garlic, chopped
- 5 chicken bouillon cubes
- 1/2 tsp paprika
- 1 tsp cumin
- 1 - 2 tsp chili powder
- salt and pepper
- shredded cheese

DIRECTIONS:

- Brown meat and garlic in a large pan and season with salt and pepper, empty and drain all the fat
- Using the fat that is left in the pan saute onions, green peppers and mushrooms until tender and season with salt and pepper
- Add the meat, tomato paste, water, kidney beans, chicken bouillon cubes, paprika, cumin and chilli powder
- Bring to a boil, reduce heat, cover and simmer
- Add salt and pepper to your tastes
- Chill out and let the chili simmer for an hour or more so all the flavor powers may unite together
- Serve hot with some shredded cheese on top

NOTES:

- If you like it a little spicy, add some extra cumin and chili powder or serve with some hot sauce
- Preparation Time: about an hour and a half
- Feeds 4 hungry people

Cream Biscuits with Dill

by **FOODANDWINE.COM**

BISCUIT INGREDIENTS:

- 2 cups flour, plus a little extra for dusting
- 1 1/2 TBS chopped dill
- 2 tsp baking powder
- 1 tsp salt
- 1 tsp sugar
- 1 1/4 cups plus 2 TBS cream

DIRECTIONS:

- Preheat the oven to 210°C
- Line a large baking sheet with parchment paper
- In a large bowl, whisk the 2 cups of flour with the dill, baking powder, salt and sugar
- Add the cream and mix with a wooden spoon just until a dough forms.
- On a lightly floured work surface, gently knead the biscuit dough until it comes together and pat it into a 3/4-inch-thick disk
- Using a floured 2 1/4-inch round cookie cutter, stamp out as many biscuits as possible
- Combine the scraps and repeat to make more biscuits
- Transfer the biscuits to the prepared baking sheet and bake for about 22 minutes, rotating the pan halfway through, until lightly golden on top
- Serve hot or warm.

NOTES:

- These biscuits are soooo tasty!
- I don't have a cookie cutter so I just used an upside down glass
- Preparation Time: 30 minutes
- Makes about 12 biscuits

Strawberry MARTINI

by **MICHAEL HALUALANI**

45ml = 1 shot 5ml = 1 tsp

STRAWBERRY MARTINI

INGREDIENTS:

- 3 strawberries
- 90 ml Vodka
- 20 ml Creme de Cassis
- 20 ml lime juice
- 5 ml caster sugar or gum sugar

DIRECTIONS:

Muddle the strawberries in a cocktail shaker (or a glass will do). Then add ice and the remaining ingredients. Shake and strain into a martini glass. Straining the drink is important if you don't want to have little strawberry seeds in your drink. Also, caster sugar can be difficult to find so you can use gum sugar (the syrup that Japanese often put in their coffee), or even regular sugar. Just make sure you stir it to dissolve the sugar before putting it in your glass. Garnish this drink with a strawberry or lime and enjoy!

STRAWBERRY BASIL MARTINI

INGREDIENTS:

- 3 strawberries
- 3 to 4 large fresh basil leaves
- 60 ml Vodka
- 5 ml cranberry juice
- 5 ml balsamic vinegar (apple cider vinegar works well also)
- 5 ml caster sugar or gum sugar
- pinch of black pepper

DIRECTIONS:

Muddle the basil leaves. Make sure you really squash them up to get the basil essence out of the leaves. Then add the strawberries and muddle them as well. Next add ice and the remaining ingredients, shake and strain into a martini glass. This cocktail is a little more daring but I promise it's great. Just make sure you only add a touch of vinegar because it has such a powerful flavor. As goes with all cocktails, try and add your own creativity into the drink by changing the ratios or substituting different ingredients with whatever sounds good to you. And remember, with spring already here this is the time to get strawberries that are absolutely mouthwatering, so take advantage of that and make yourself a delicious drink to help you relax after a day of work, or to start a night out on the weekend.

かんぱい!

japaneseculture: “Iaido”

BE PREPARED!

by SIMON GILBERT

When you think of a Japanese martial art, what's the first thing that comes to your mind? Maybe karate, or judo? Before I came to Japan, those would have been my answers too. Indeed, before my predecessor mentioned she studied it, I'd never even heard of *Iaido*, but once I knew the opportunity was there I leapt at the chance to learn it, and I'm very glad I did, for *Iaido* is quintessentially Japanese and has given me a great opportunity to experience a part of Japanese culture steeped in history and tradition.

Meaning approximately “The way of mental presence and immediate reaction”, *Iaido* was developed early in the sixteenth century by a man called Hayashizaki Jinsuke Shigenobu, with the aim of gaining an advantage over opponents in combat before they could draw their sword. Back then assassination attempts were very common and could happen at any time, so being prepared to draw your sword at a moment's notice from any position was essential, thus while there are some *waza* (techniques) from combat positions, there

are also many from normal sitting and standing positions. *Iaido* was very popular with samurai, as being prepared to fight from any position was an essential skill for them.

Today, *Iaido* has branched into two main schools, the *Muso Jikiden Eishin Ryu* and *Muso Shinden Ryu*, the aim of both being to develop the mind, body and spirit, with the emphasis on remaining calm and in control of ourselves even when under pressure or facing difficult situations. It teaches us always to be prepared for anything, wherever we are and whatever we are doing. This does not just mean having an aware state of mind, but rigorously training so a technique can be used to resolve a situation if necessary. With a sword, of course, this is deadly, but that is not the whole point. Both in business and in our personal lives the ability to be decisive when the situation calls for it is vital. So, while we may no longer walk down the street carrying a sword, *Iaido's* ability to train us to be prepared and decisive means it is still relevant today.

But what exactly is *Iaido*? It is a sword-based martial art focusing on self-defence, and is practised mainly by adults (it is seen as the martial art you turn to last after having practised others, hence you very rarely see children studying it). The various techniques studied are known as *waza*, and each *waza* has four distinct phases to it. First, smoothly and precisely drawing a sword and cutting the opponent(s) (*Nukitsuke*) before the

main two-handed cut down (*Kirioroshi*). Blood is then removed from the sword (*Chiburi*) before the sword is once again smoothly and precisely sheathed (*Noto*).

There are three different types of swords used – a wooden sword for complete beginners, *iaito* (plated alloy blunt practice swords) for the more experienced, and some advanced members use real swords (katanas). *Iaido* is practised wearing a *hakama* (baggy pleated trousers), a *keiki gi* (a training jacket) and an *iai obi* (a sword belt worn under the *hakama* to keep the sword in place). Unlike other Japanese martial arts such as karate, there is nothing on the uniform to indicate what rank you are.

In *Iaido* the *waza* are generally practised alone against an imaginary enemy, as otherwise it is rather dangerous. However, there are some choreographed *waza* that two very skilled people can perform together.

Grades in *Iaido* range from *shodan* (first *Dan*) to *judan* (tenth *Dan*), first being the lowest and tenth the highest. As in practice, in exams practitioners are examined solely on forms with no sparring, and we are tested on how well we can cope with performing certain *waza* under pressure.

Iaido is like any other martial art: hard work, persistence and dedication are needed to get the most out of it and truly improve and enjoy it. But I have found it totally worth it, as it has given me the opportunity to meet many new people and experience a traditional piece of Japanese culture, as well as allowing me to improve how I react to difficult or unexpected situations. It has truly helped me to “be prepared”. Why not give it a try, if you can, and be ready to experience something just a little bit different! §

Sources:

Iaido article on Wikipedia:
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iaido>

The British Kendo Association *Iaido* and *Jodo* website:
<http://www.iaido-jodo.org.uk/content/disciplines.htm>

<http://www.iaido-jodo.org.uk/content/disciplines-iaido.htm>



Ms. Arai, myself and Morisaki-sensei



FEATURED PHOTO: 'Winter Grapevines'
by **Alex Henri**

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

"The vibrant colors and sharp angles of 'Winter Grapevines' made this photo stand out from the rest. The dark blues in contrast with the white snow give the image that cool feeling of the sun setting behind the mountains."

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

Gaijin Gaffs

by **GRAHAEME COWIE**



(continued from page 3)
joined on a piece of string. **かわいい!**

The *chakai* ended (more than three hours after it began) on a slightly more relaxed, *matcha*-less note with a "break-fast" of a wrapped sticky rice ball, some beautifully-presented smoked cheese and fish and a small cup of black tea. For me, one of the funniest things about the *chakai* was watching people not eat the food set in front of them. Eating half a tiny cake, delicately wrapping

the rest in *kaishi* and tucking it into the special pouch guests carry with them is one thing, but putting a steaming hot rice ball directly into your bag is quite another! Seeing other guests stash part of a beautiful little meal away with a furtive smile reflected the feeling I had about the event in general: at first glance quite formal and proper, but with a lot of fun and mischief going on under the surface.

If you are at all interested in tea ceremony or you'd just like the experience,

find out from your local community centre or from a friend in the know about *chakai* events near you and give one a try! Onomichi's *Botan Chakai* and *Sakura Chakai* both take place around April. I would recommend a crash course in guest etiquette (and what to bring with you) if you are a complete beginner or you might find yourself totally at sea, but it's definitely well worth the effort, even if you only do it once! **S**