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Quinlan Fletcher
It's no secret...
...for anyone that knows me that I live and breathe anime and manga, so when I’m not teaching or trying to learn Japanese I’m engrossed in the latest manga, or re-watching classic anime.

When I came to Kumamoto, I made it my mission to find all the best anime spots in Kyushu. So let me share what I have discovered so far.

I’ll start with an anime which is arguably the closest to my heart—One Piece! The epic saga of pirates, dreams and power giving fruit that is still going strong.

In fact, if I had to pick anything in the world to be it might be to become Luffy, the main character.

Never lose sight of your goal...
Not only is it an excuse to visit places in the prefecture you might not normally visit, you also get to see the greatest pirates of all time in all their glory.

It’s a win-win! So please check the map I included to see where your nearest one is! Next up will be Sanji and Usopp in December, with the rest to follow in late fiscal year 2019 and 2020!

And for those of you looking for more of One Piece, head to Fukuoka to the Mugiwara store! Located on the 7th floor of the Parco building, Tenjin, Fukuoka. I am not ashamed to say that I spent too much time and money in here.

But it was worth it.

I also recommend the Jump store in Canal City, but that needs a whole other article....

Hitoyoshi, where the mangaka Yuki Midorikawa came from, and which heavily influenced her fantastic Manga, “Natsume Yujin Cho”.

next time...

there’s more...
CANAL CITY HAKATA

Photographs: Peter Georgantis

Peter Georgantis
Winter is no doubt not everyone’s season of choice. While winter in Kumamoto may be shorter and significantly less snowy than in other parts of Japan, maybe the mere thought of falling snow leaves you both figuratively and literally cold, and no-one could blame you if that icy winter wind sends you diving under the kotatsu and reaching for the nearest hot pot of nabe. Still, winter is coming, marching inexorably towards us like so many icicled zombie things from Game of Thrones.

So perhaps there’s nothing else to do but embrace the inevitable winter chill and find its good points through song. Winter provides endless material for lyrics about failed romance, serves up more loneliness-related snow similes than you can shake a snowshoe at, and even offers inspiration for a few surprisingly upbeat tunes as well. Huddle up and hear these seven songs that will thaw the metaphorical snow before it piles up in your heart.

Happy winter and keep warm everyone!

**Winter Again:** GLAY
**Album:** HEAVY GAUGE

*Kick out the icy jams in style with this glam-rockin’ track from GLAY, appropriately titled, ‘Winter, again’.*

*I look up at the clouds overhead, and question the passing of time. Where is the final destination of the sadness that we all carry?*
WONDERFUL WINTER SONGS

Greg Corbett

Sayonara - Off Course
Album: Selection 1978-1981

Let the heartbreak songs begin! As the title may suggest, this is a song about saying goodbye. Written by lead singer Kazumasa Oda, this song curiously made its debut on a best of album, but has been covered by at least a dozen artists and even re-recorded in a new style by Oda himself.

Nice lyric!

Konayuki - Ramioromen
Album: Horizon

Remioromen’s song about ‘powdered snow’ was a huge hit, selling some 850,000 copies. Its popularity endures, with one karaoke provider claiming it to be the most commonly sung winter song of all. The song has also racked up a staggering 2 million rentals at Tsutaya. It’s still talked about a lot, with Japanese TV variety shows referencing the song often.

Nice lyric!

It’s raining outside again today.
Finally, it turns to snow
It will pile up inside our hearts

Hey, powdered snow,
if you colour our hearts white
We’ll wrap up our solitude
and return you to the sky
WONDERFUL WINTER SONGS
Greg Corbett

Rockers Back Number have the kind of quaint yet heartfelt lyrics that resonate with us all, and this song is no exception. Incidentally, Back Number’s biggest hit is called ‘Christmas Song’, which is really worth checking out as well.

Nice lyric!

君（きみ）の毎日（まいにち）に僕（ぼく）は似合（にあ）わないな 白（しろ）い空（そら）から 雪（ゆき）が落（お）ちた

別（べつ）にいいさと吐（は）き出（だ）したため息（いき）が 少（すこ）し残（のこ）って 寂（さび）しそうに消（き）えた

Maybe I don’t fit it with your every day, snow falls from the white sky
A sigh that says, ‘oh well’ lingers briefly, then forlornly disappears

The Southern All Stars frontman’s seventh single about ‘white lovers’ seems to bear no connection to the popular Hokkaido cookie of the same name, but carved out a reputation of its own, selling a million copies and winning Song of the Year at the Japan Gold Disc Awards and the Gold Prize at the Japan Record Awards.

Nice lyric!

I put out the fire in my heart with tears
And watched the season pass by

Shiroi Koinitotachi - Keisuke Kuwata
Album: TOP OF THE POPS

Heroine - Back Number
Album: Chandelier

Heroine - Back Number: Chandelier

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Nice lyric!

I put out the fire in my heart with tears
And watched the season pass by
A simple, charming song about saying goodbye to someone on a train at Tokyo Station. Interestingly, it also coined a new Japanese word, with writer Shozo Ise stating that ‘nagoriyuki’ - referring to lingering snow that falls at the end of winter or beginning of spring - first appeared in this song. Ise also says that he was pressured to change it to a phrase that already existed, ‘nagori no yuki’. It’s lucky that he didn’t cave in - 40 years later the Japan Meteorology Association chose ‘nagoriyuki’ as one of their ‘36 season words’, and it has pride of place in all good dictionaries. As for the song, it seems as if just about every Japanese artist has done their own cover version. What better way to end this winter list than with a song to set your sights on the beginning of spring.

Nagoriyuki - Kagoyahime
Album: Sankaitate no Uta

You pressed your face to the window as the train started moving, trying to say something
Scared of your lips mouthing ‘goodbye’,
I looked down

Outside the window, flowers of snow keep on fluttering down
Unceasingly, colouring our town

HAPPY WINTER AND
keep warm
everyone!

Yuki no Hana - Mika Nakashima
Album: LOVE

This song bagged the Gold Prize at the 45th Japan Record Awards and won songwriter Satomi an award for Best Songwriter. If singer Mika Nakashima looks cold in the film clip, it’s probably because she is - she requested that the studio be 0 degrees just for the filming.

Nice lyric!
VIEWS FROM KUMAMOTO

Niamh Merry

View from Honmyoji, Kumamoto City (1)

View from Honmyoji, Kumamoto City (2)

Photographs Niamh Merry
VIEWS FROM KUMAMOTO
Ni amh Merry

Makizaki, Hachimangu, Kumamoto City
Utage-bune, Ashikita
I was asked to write something about my involvement in sports whilst living in Japan and I struggled for a while trying to think of a good angle to approach it from. In the end I figured I would just write it as a blog entry. It got too long so I left out playing American football, kickboxing and MMA. If you are interested in any of these while you live in Kumamoto, just send me a message via Facebook or an email.

Before I came to Japan, I never had any interest in Japan and thought everyone was a black belt in Karate. I only applied for the JET Programme as I wanted to pay off my student loan and to do my Overseas Experience (OE) somewhere different to the usual NZ OE of two years in the UK. I had an option of teaching in Korea, but when the interview takes place in the back of a liquor store in a seedy part of Auckland City, I figured that the Japanese consulate is a better bet.

After arriving in Kumamoto and the pleasantries of being a new ALT in my area had finished, I suddenly found myself a long, long way from home. I was homesick for some familiarity of NZ in my life. I grew up playing sports, so it was only natural that I would gravitate back to something that had helped to build friendships throughout my life.

I asked around at my schools about playing rugby and one teacher knew of another teacher who played rugby. They offered me a spot on the Kumamoto Teachers’ team. The majority of the players were P.E teachers and who also happened to be the strongest team in Kumamoto. I thought that I would be better served helping a weaker team and so joined the third best team named, Picasso.
The story goes that while the leaders of the team were thinking of a new team name they were in a cafe and there was a picture by Picasso and the owner suggested this, go figure. The difference between first and third were a world apart and I was left frustrated by aspects of the Japanese culture that had invaded rugby. In NZ, you play your best players regardless of anything else. In Japan I had to deal with the ‘senpai/kōhai’ factor which meant that older, out-of-shape players who never bothered turning up to training were played ahead of younger better players. The absence of a coach also meant that personnel changes weren’t able to be made during the game. ‘gaman’ and ‘ganbattemasu’ were acceptable excuses for failure. We would do well during the season but could never beat the teacher’s team who had asked me to join them originally. The other issue was that the season was 8 months long, with only six teams. This meant that you would be lucky if you played more than two games in a month. Over the years we were fortunate to have enough ALTs coming into the prefecture that joined our team. Eventually, we had enough players to enter a ‘foreign’ team into the Kumamoto 7’s rugby tournament. To the surprise of everyone we won the prefectural championship and qualified for the Kyushu tournament. It was interesting that some of the tactics we used to win were outlawed the following year. Japanese rule interpretations were always a mystery to me.

We headed up to the Kyushu tournament and didn’t do as well as hoped losing the first game and then going as far as the quarter finals in pool B. It wasn’t helped that our Ozu ALT from South Africa, Austin ‘The Raging Bull’ Gardiner suffered a nasty ankle dislocation in one of the games. All bad stories have a silver lining, and after spending three weeks in the hospital the JET insurance paid for his mother’s ticket and subsidized his brother and sister’s tickets to come and visit him. So play hard while you have your insurance.

After most of the ALTs had returned back home I made the decision to leave Picasso to join the Teachers’ team. The captain and coach of Picasso took Alastair and me to dinner in an attempt to convince us into staying, but I saw no potential for change and wanted to enjoy my rugby so we started the next season with the Teachers’ team. I guess the most surprising thing playing for a winning team in Japan was their expectation that they would win every game based on past performances. From my perspective each game could be won or lost depending on how you and the opposition played. We won two out of three Prefectural championships and went to the Kyushu tournament where we got smashed from bigger teams. I started to lose interest in rugby around this time when we had to forfeit our games because of the teacher’s commitment to sports or cultural festivals during the year.

Rules?

Goodbye Picasso
Around this time a friend from NZ living in Fukuoka had wanted to start a touch rugby team. I joined and there was some resemblance of home. A great non-contact sport that can be enjoyed by boys and girls of all ages. We went to the annual JET touch rugby tournament in Tokushima and I was amazed at the majority of Commonwealth participants. It was just like home! I came back to Kumamoto and started the 熊本かんつ with the idea of having more fun with the ALTs around me. We entered the Tokushima competition the next year and surprisingly we came third. It was quite enjoyable listening to them calling our name over the loud speaker when we were late for our game. Around this time, Japan touch rugby started to push for more involvement and we saw more one-day tournaments happening in Kumamoto and Fukuoka. A number of North Americans also joined our team and we branched into American flag football. This was great fun because it was non-contact, but there were no allowances for playing a mixed team. We didn't mind, and at that tournament we had our biggest turnout of 17 ALTs. We have gone on to be the second best flag football team in Kyushu, but have no hope of beating the younger Japan champion team.

Are you interested in having a go? Organizing the events is quite stressful with translating team enrollment forms, transferring money, collecting money, people pulling out at the last minute and organizing transport for ALTs scattered around the prefecture. We have members from Hitoyoshi, Amakusa, Aso, Tamana and we even have a flag footballer from Kagoshima!

Regardless of the trouble it takes to get things going there's nothing better than making friends while playing sports. Sitting around eating lunch and talking about the food we are going to eat at Costco and the food we miss from back home takes me back home. It has been an amazing experience and for myself watching someone catch a pass or diving for a flag to stop a touchdown gives me a newfound respect for the person regardless of their nationality, kanji ability or qualifications. Getting out and learning the rules while having a go is the New Zealand mantra, and I've been so privileged to experience it in Japan.

It made me happy that at a recent reunion party for my old rugby team, Picasso it is tradition to have their achievements listed on the welcome banner. It had that lone tournament the ALTs had won for them.
Ashes to Ashes

Shrine at Kumamoto City

Yugen
OKONOMIYAKI AND FISHING

Fernando Luna

This is what happened in my first couple of weeks as a new ALT in Kumamoto. So, one day I decided to do some exploring around the area that I would come to call my home. I came across a little okonomiyaki restaurant near my apartment. The owner, Mazuda-san, was a little old man in his early 60’s. When I walked into his shop, he seemed happy to see a foreigner. We started talking and Mazuda-san told me he had been running the okonomiyaki shop for more than 40 years. He had these cool looking posters of Japanese fish hanging on the walls. They were drawn in almost like a calligraphy style. I asked him about the paintings fish that he had hanging up on the walls. He blew up! Like a little kid at show-n-tell ready to tell me everything about his favorite hobby, which also happened to be mine.

Mazuda-san started telling that he went fishing every weekend, he would even close shop during the week to go on a fishing trip if the weather was nice. When I showed him the fish that I had caught on my fishing trips in Mexico, he completely lost it! He stopped talking mid-sentence and ran up to his room that was located above his shop. And as quickly as he ran up, he came down. But not empty-handed, he brought with him all his tackle and fishing gear. He looked me straight in the face and said, “you are going fishing with me next Sunday, be here at 8 am and don’t worry about anything. I’ll take care of it”. And just like that, I was going fishing with a man I had just met no more than a couple of hours ago.
I never thought I would become friends with an old-timer while in my first couple of weeks in Japan. But I’m very happy that I met Mr. Mazuda and look forward to many more fishing trips together. My advice to anyone that reads this, whether it’s your first time or your hundredth time in Japan: talk to the older Japanese folk, because they will show you the real treasures of Japan, whether it be a physical place, or in my case, a memorable moment and a lifelong friend.
Just the other night I was letting my thoughts wander and it occurred to me that I had had an idea lingering upon my mind for some time now. This idea had entered my consciousness when I was first being introduced to a number of the teachers in my area, as well as being shown the local schools. This idea was suddenly put into sharp relief when I recently attended a school sports festival at an elementary school up in the mountains.

I was struck by two contrasting trains of thought the entire time that I was at the sports festival. The first was that the sense of culture and community that I felt was tremendous, far stronger and more visceral than anything I had ever felt back home. Many members of the community, both young and old, came out to spend the day with the kids. The children participated in a variety of activities, and there were many activities where the adults could help the children, and others that were just for the adults. The entire event felt more like a family get together than a school sports festival. I was particularly interested in a couple of traditional dances that included traditional clothing. I couldn’t help but to be somewhat envious as I do not have anything that could be called traditional clothing, and not even a single traditional dance.

The other thought that occurred to me was one that carried a hollow kind of sadness. The entire student body of the school I was visiting was only 15 students. 15 students for the entire school. Right next to the elementary school stands the middle school, having gone unused for many years now. The principal told me that at one point the combined student body between the middle school and elementary school was over 600 students. From over 600 to just 15 in just a single generation, that’s an astonishing drop in attendance.
I couldn’t get this nagging sense of sadness out of my head, especially as I saw two more schools that had been shut down due to shrinking attendance. One was a middle school, the other was an elementary school. I couldn’t help but look at the situation at hand and feel that something special was fading away. That the beautiful places and people I had met would fade away into memory. Granted, there are a variety of factors that contributed to this decline. The most obvious reason is that, on average, Japanese people are having less children. However, people moving for economic reasons, new schools being built that absorb a portion of the student body, and other such things contribute to this change.

It was as these thoughts occurred to me that I reframed my point of view, tried to see things from a different angle. I compared the situation here to the situation that I grew up with back in the states. Here I am surrounded by the lush landscape of Kyushu. Vibrant forests cover the mountains and valleys, bisected by clean rivers. The landscape is often covered with a patchwork of picturesque farms growing rice, tea and a variety of fruits and vegetables. The people here have been very friendly and accepting of me, I am constantly greeted by smiling strangers, both young and old.

The school sports festival itself was also an overall positive experience. As I stated before the sense of community was tremendous and the people were very friendly and happy. It occurred to me that the 15 students there might be better off for having such a small student body. They get a tremendous amount of attention from the teachers and the entire energy of the community is focused on them, in a positive way. The school is also surrounded by a beautiful landscape and there is a genuine sense of culture. It is as if the whole essence of the community has been purified and concentrated for those students. Something that could hardly be said to be a bad thing for the students on an individual basis. Not to mention that where I am from some parents pay considerable sums of money to private tutors for the kind of specialized attention that these particular students receive.
Would the people here be better off of the situation was like my home? Would it be better if the population was booming so fast that they couldn’t build new schools fast enough? Or that the teachers and resources were stretched so thin that they couldn’t adequately attend to the needs of the students? Would this place be better if the elegant shrines and verdant farms were paved over to build vapid strip malls and cookie cutter housing complexes? Would the kids grow up happier if they felt that they were just another faceless cog in the machine? I am inclined to think not.

When I meet new people they often ask where I am from. I am rarely able to accurately answer this question, because it would take a lot of time and energy. It is particularly confusing because there is a town with the same name, and in the same place, as the town I grew up in, but the town I grew up in is gone. The woods I played in cleared for shopping centers, the people I grew up with forced to move by rising prices. Most people where I am from don’t talk to their neighbors and there is only a very superficial sense of community. My hometown has been erased as surely as if it had been wiped out by a flood or a volcanic eruption. Now a completely different place stands in the same spot and carries the same name. It occurred to me that many of these children will never have to experience such a thing. The place where they grew up has continued to exist and will continue to exist for some time.
With this I find myself at a weird conflux of thoughts. On the one hand if a culture doesn’t maintain itself, it will fade from existence, if it doesn’t remain dynamic then it will cease to develop and become irrelevant. However, if the rate of change is too fast then anything resembling a distinct culture will be swept away in the flood. The seemingly obvious answer is to maintain some kind of middle ground, but that is far easier said than done. In the end all that I can say is that I have experienced something special here. Exactly what is hard to describe, words like culture and community do not fully describe the concept. What I have found here is human connection, deep and rich. I only hope that I can contribute to this great place, and these great people. Hopefully I will even be able to bring a small piece of this connection and positivity back home with me when the time comes.
Nervously clutching the steering wheel, I peer ahead through the mist and sheets of rain. Water is pouring down in the second typhoon since I moved to Japan, and it is my first time driving.

I left early, and am feeling fairly certain I can make it to the board of education safely AND on time. I glance every so often at my iPhone (equipped with a Japanese SIM card), unused to Siri’s voice and direction and not 100% trusting of it, but she seems functional. 30 minutes into the drive however, I come to the abrupt realization that she is just as clueless as me.

After crossing several bridges over stormy ocean, the rain has decreased in fervor and I am getting the hang of this driving business. I am stopped in a short line of cars at a traffic light, and have been for about 2 minutes, enjoying the patter of rain on the roof and windshield when Siri blurts out this bit of what I can only assume is an incredibly delayed advice for all Japanese drivers: “STAY IN THE LEFT LANE!”

Thanks Siri, thanks a lot.
HOME IMPROVEMENT

Kelley Gathright

I am not a psychiatrist, but I think I can offer some helpful advice for those JETs who find themselves feeling down or irked by old apartments and houses. If you are displeased by something, first ask yourself:

A: Can I do something about it? and
B: If I can do something about it, why the hell am I still sitting here displeased?

If your porch is non-existent and water is creeping under your door, then go get a shovel and dig, even if that is during a typhoon.

If your genkan is moldy, and everything that touches it for too long also molds (like rugs), then equip yourself and go to WAAAAAR!

If your roof is leaking...call a professional. I have yet to solve that with any combination of optimism or hard work.

This philosophy shall help you retain sanity.
Have you ever seen so many tourists in Kumamoto? It’s more international these days in the city than a Manly Café Halloween party. This is all thanks to the International sporting event, the Rugby World Cup.

Kumamoto hosted two games; October 6th France v Tonga, and October 13th Wales v Uruguay. The new mall and bus terminal, Sakuramachi, was alive with the bustling crowds of residents and visitors alike. The Fanzone brought people together for the love of rugby (or beer) and friendly competition. Getting 28,000 rugby fans from various locations in the city/Kyushu to the try line that is EgaoKenkou Stadium, was a well-run smooth operation. This is thanks to all the planning and co-ordination between public officials, private volunteers, and industries.

Kumamoto City ALTs were given the chance to volunteer (in exchange for a sweet black polo shirt souvenir of the Rugby World Cup) in and around the Fanzone area, helping rugby fans to get to the game, and to recommend eateries where they could fill their tummies with good Kumamoto tucker.

A total of 15 ALTs volunteered over the two days, standing under the hot sun for hours and coming to aid of lost and confused visitors to the city. It was a great opportunity to get involved in the community, take part in an international sporting event, and show visitors the kindness of Kumamoto residents. The two Kumamoto City CIRs were also there, hauling the long shift from midday well into the night to greet the punters on return.
I volunteered on October 13th, the day of the Wales v Uruguay match. It was a hot day but with a nice Autumn breeze, and we were able to walk about and seek shade when necessary. Even though there were so many people, the atmosphere remained peaceful and joyful. My main job was to stay around the entrance to the bus reservation area and explain to people their options for getting to the game. Sometimes, this resulted in helping groups of tipsy people decide the most efficient and best way for them. It was surprising for me that many people hadn’t decided how they were actually getting to the game but continued to drink and relax under the hot sun till the final ギリギリ hour. It’s good that the organisation was so smooth, that it allowed people to really enjoy themselves and not stress. It was fun talking to some of the rugby fans too. One fella was curious saying “you don’t look Japanese, how did you get this gig?”, then laughing “saying of course, how silly of me”, when I answered that I live in Kumamoto. When I later saw this same man, he cheered “Go New Zealand!!!” Although I was mainly helping the Welsh and other visiting foreigners, one Japanese man and his son approached me and used some English to ask me how to get to the stadium. I was very impressed. In the end, he was confused to begin with so his question and my answer weren’t what he needed, but some Japanese staff helped them on their way. Later, once my volunteer stint had ended, I returned to town to watch the historical Japan v Scotland game. It seemed that every pub in town was spilling with customers watching the rugby. It was such a great atmosphere. The pub clientele, from Wales, Japan, etc. alike all counted down the final 5 seconds of the match then burst into cheering as Japan won. “Nippon” *clap clap clap* “Nippon” *clap clap clap*
I was able to attend the France v Tonga game on October 6th. Growing up in New Zealand, I attended a lot of local rugby games, but it was my first World Cup game. I was extremely impressed at how people of different nations supported different countries. Things that really made me smile were watching everyone taking selfies together and seeing people’s costumes (particularly the French supporters!). But particularly, I loved seeing people just lying down on the grass chilling with a beer before they entered the stadium. I hadn’t seen such a casual summer like atmosphere since I’d last been in New Zealand two years ago. It made me realise how used to living in Japan and Japanese culture I’ve become. It’s interesting how cultures come together in good will during sporting events, and how visitors to an area, bring fresh winds to locals and “expats” alike.

Night falls...
The inclusiveness of rugby and how you can be on the team even if you’re not born in the country you’re representing, is really something in a world that is becoming more conservative. There was one supporter at the France v Tonga game who really took his love for the game seriously – maybe you’ve seen him. He had a painted on Tonga rugby shirt and was stopped numerous times for selfies by other fans. He happened to make it into my Instagram story (random crowd shot), whereupon my youngest brother with his keen eyes spotted him, saying, “I saw that guy on TV the other day. He was at an Ireland game and had a painted on Irish rugby shirt”. It’s funny how not only the rugby teams become well-known during the tournament.

In November and December, there will be the Women’s Handball World Championship taking place in Kumamoto, Yatsushiro, and Yamaga. So, make sure to get out and about and enjoy the international atmosphere!
"Atsuka~" might be a constant heard during the summer in Kyushu. It’s hot, it’s humid, and it also has some of the best nature, onsen, and memorable spots in all of Japan. Join KumAJET on our journey this summer and autumn, to places in all corners of Kumamoto Prefecture!
The plan today was to hike through Kikuchi Gorge, swim at a watering hole (which the reader may note is not in Kikuchi Gorge, do not swim in Kikuchi Gorge, a scary man will come out from the shadows to gently admonish you) and jump off a bridge or two, visit an onsen, and get back to town in time for fireworks.

After driving through many winding minutes of mountain roads, we came upon the gorge, parking below the hiking trail. An easy thirty minute circuit took us across two or three bridges and over and around the clear water of the gorge. With a short break for lunch, the group reconvened at the watering hole, jumping off of various high objects into the freezing water. Post-watering hole, Kikuchi Grand Hotel’s onsen beckoned, known for its alkaline and radium baths, and the cold day ended with a perfect warm onsen. Mission accomplished!

It was on a crisp August morning, at least as crisp as it ever gets during Kyushu’s unending summer humidity, that a couple dozen JETs found themselves converging onto Kikuchi Gorge, a nice little spot tucked away into the shadow of Aso Caldera.
Kikuchi - 菊池
Every year, the first weekend of September marks the Ashikita Beach Party for Kumamoto JETs and friends from around the prefecture. This year was no exception, beginning early in the day with explorations of Cape Otachi and lasting late into the night with swimmers enjoying the Shiranui Sea.

Despite a small snag with our cabins, a casualty of the difficulties of intercultural communication, six cabins, forty-eight people signed up to stay overnight, and even more here for just the day promised a stellar event. The cloudy sky threatened overhead, but with only smatterings of rain, the sky cleared up just in time for a vibrant sunset.

As the night went on and barbecue grills were lit, people journeyed between the beach and the campsite, either on a steep, precarious set of wood and dirt stairs or a languorously switchbacked paved trail. The ocean was a potent lure, even at night, and bioluminescent algae flickered and sparked with every movement through the water. Food was shared, drinks were drunk, lookouts were looked out from, and we ended the beach party, as always, with an onsen.
In further hopes of exploring the great nature Kumamoto has to offer, KumAJET ventured to an off-the-beaten-path campsite called Okuyatani Valley, Mother Nature KIRARI. Nestled on a mountain slope adjacent to the Yatani Gorge in Yamaga, this campsite boasts tents, cabins, a slide, a deep swimming pool with a water slide (although the water was already turned off for the off-season when we went). Our goals were to swim a bit in Yatani Gorge, give JETs from across the prefecture a chance to come together and get to know one another, and enjoy the cool mountain air.

In the afternoon, several intrepid members of our group descended down into the gorge in search of a swimming spot. Although they did not make it to the recommended spot, they did encounter a small section of the gorge tucked away beneath another campsite. The area boasted a magnificent waterfall, frigid yet rejuvenating water, and a neglected beach ball enjoyed by all.
The following morning, many of the campers drove down the road to meet up with the neighbor of KumAJET’s very own Lottie and Kelli to lend our efforts to ridding chestnut saplings of a vine that wraps around the young tree and stifles its growth. We were rewarded with a lunch including locally made chestnut rice (栗ご飯). Finally, we set off to close the adventure with, you guessed it, a stop at an onsen.
See you next time!