

WINTER
2017



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- 3 How to Survive Winter in Japan**
by Zaynab Nakhid
- 6 A Winter Night's Tale**
by Denise Wiley
- 7 Learning from Six-Year-Olds**
by Mary Ellen Greenwood
- 9 JHS: Japanese Horror Story**
by Jazmin Guerrero
- 11 Photographs**
*Denise Wiley, Joyce Tan, Laura McGhee, Zaynab Nakhid,
Susannah Roberts, Richie Luu*
- 21 Babies on a Plane - How to Deal with the Unknown**
by Jonny Cornish
- 24 Kumamoto, Kyushu's Own Winter Wonderland**
by Zaynab Nakhid
- 27 Ode to Natto**
by Mary Ellen Greenwood

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How to Survive Winter in Japan

I'm by no means an expert. But after having lived here a year and surviving winter with no heat equipment but my air condition and some blankets because I was being cheap, I have finally decided that the money wasn't worth it... or was it? This time I decided to prepare early and try to stay warm using as little money as possible.

Using second hand stores like Second Street, after winter sales and other leaving JETs' stuff, I was able to get stuff cheaply. Now it's the middle of my second winter and I finally decided what was best for me. Here's what worked for me and what didn't.

NB: my guide to finding all things winter was contained in this link. All credits to the author for putting together such an amazing list:

<http://www.survivingjapan.com/2010/11/8-ways-to-winterize-your-japanese.html?m=1>

Get a 石油ストーブ (Sekiyu Stoubu)

25,000-35,000円-

Most Japanese people use these when it comes to winter since they do not have indoor heating. A lot of people including your JTEs will tell you to just use your air condition. I'm here to tell you that in lieu of saving that money upfront it will all be spent on your electricity bill in the upcoming months.

Advice: Get a used 石油ストーブ even if you're only staying for a year. It typically costs around 円15,000 in second hand stores. You can buy the kerosene for it at the gas station or places like Direx.

I highly recommend this even if you're only staying for one year.

*Be sure to open the windows and air out your apartment every few hours to prevent the build-up of carbon monoxide.

Kerosene for 1 month:
1,436円

Air condition bill:
10,000円

Advice

Put the light on in your room and then close the door. Any cracks through which light can be seen must be taped up.

I also recommend the bubble wrap and the stop panel if your apartment is just a bunch of sliding glass doors like mine.

Insulate Your House

85円/1 -

The article speaks about those tape things to put in the cracks of your house. I bought some last year but I underestimated winter back then. This year I went all out and bought some for each and every crack in my house. This includes the spaces between doors and around windows. They cost about 85円 so they aren't expensive but buying a lot certainly does let the cost add up.

ADVANTAGE: It keeps the room warm.

DISADVANTAGE: You have to peel it all off in spring.

電気毛布
電気ヒーター
電気毛毯
電気敷物

Advice

Getting a timer so that it can switch on automatically an hour before you wake up will be perfect for your morning showers.

Electrical Heater

3,000円 -

No: THESE CANNOT HEAT A ROOM! My JTEs advised me to get this. Perhaps they were thinking about me saving money? Idk.

These are space heaters and are only good for heating up the spaces right in front of them. However, if you have the typically small Japanese bathroom then these are perfect for getting them warm so that you don't turn to ice once you're finished taking a shower. I recommend one that is higher than 700 Watts.

These are easily found at secondhand stores.

電気毛布 Electric Blankets

2,000円-

I love these! Long live electric blankets! Put them under your bed sheets and you'll never be cold while sleeping.

I use mine to warm up the bed before I sleep however when it goes into the negatives I put the setting on low and leave it on all night.

Kotatsu

(prices vary)

I got my kotatsu from a JET that was leaving. I didn't need one but I bought it for the experience and made use of it. Since I barely sit at home and when I do the heater is on I never really needed one. However instead of turning on my heater sometimes I just sit by the kotatsu and use my laptop instead. It's warm and comfortable. Get it as a winter present for you. #TreatYoSelf

Warm Series from Nitori ニトリ-

Living room mat:
4,000円

Futon (ふとん) cover:
3,000円~

Fleece blanket:
3,000円

Fleece pillow case
covers: 764-1500円

Find a Nitori! It's seriously really cheap. They have the Nitori warm series that comes out around November. They have warm mats, blankets and kotatsu covers.

These are amazing because they're warm and do not use electricity.

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Fleece (Uniqlo and GU) *prices vary* 1900円 -

Fleece is life! They stop the cold from biting you. I recommend getting a bunch of those fuzzy fleece pants and jackets to wear at home. Also find the thickest socks that you can in GU. These are better for me at home than the heat tech socks. Get enough to sleep in and wear during the day. They are literally life savers.

Yutanpo Hot Water Bottles 500-1500円 -

I don't recommend these. I was told to buy one in my first year and they're really warm but sort of wasteful, messy and difficult to prepare once you're tired. Instead they have an electric version to them which I'd recommend. This wastes electricity though and so I gave away mine. Buying nice warm fleece socks from GU and using the electric blanket suffices for me now.

Hokkairo

230円

My teachers swear by these. I use them sometimes. Like when my hands are just too cold. I usually forget about them though so this is up to your preference.

Humidifier

I recommend this for those of us who get sick during winter. It happens to me a lot so I turn this on when I have a sore throat which makes it easier for me to breathe.

Seidenki (静電気) Bracelets: Static Shock Bracelets

You can get these in Daiso for 100円. If you have a problem with static electricity when you touch your car door or any metal I recommend asking for these in Daiso and wearing them when you go outside. Of course there are prettier but more expensive ones in the malls.

That completes my list of staying warm. Insulating my house really worked this year and I got back my electric bill which was 3200円. I thought that maybe it was a fluke since winter started but then I got my second bill and it was also the same. This is compared to last year's 円101,250 electric bill from using my air condition. Let me know if you'd like more advice on winter or stuff on this list.
Happy Winter!

Zaynab currently lives in the coldest place in Kyushu which is comparable to the coldest place on earth because, "What is insulation?"

When she's not freezing to death by walking from her house to school she is busy updating her blog. Follow her at <https://themuslimjet.wordpress.com/>



A Winter Night's Tale

One night, as I struggled to fall asleep under the weight of four blankets, my mind drifted towards my island home, Jamaica. I've been thinking a lot about the first home-cooked meal I'll want to caress my taste buds when I go home.

If I have my way, it will be ackee and saltfish, Jamaica's national dish and my absolute favourite thing to eat in this world. A little bit of education for those who don't know - ackee is fruit/vegetable that grows year round in many tropical climates. Cooked without care, it is highly toxic food and can be fatal within mere hours of eating - no joke! Ackee is prepared with salted codfish, onions, thyme, sweet peppers and garlic for a heavenly taste that even Andrew Zimmerman on The Travel Channel's Bizarre Foods agrees that it's worth dying for. If ackee ever poisons me, I'll die smiling.

But back to the weight of four blankets. It's been a really cold winter this year. I've spent the winter in much colder climates but for some reason, it seems that you can't escape the cold in Japan. School is cold, home is cold. And there's a running track of Jamaican curse words playing in my head every time someone turns off the heater and starts crying for "samui" five minutes later.

**If ackee ever
poisons me,
I'll die smiling**

I'm faring much better this year though, I think. Perhaps my body has adjusted to the low temperatures or maybe I'm just more prepared mentally. Either way, I'm looking forward to warmer days, without turtlenecks and gloves, frozen windscreens and ice guard tyres, and the nauseating smell of kerosene. Here in Aso, I have to contend with those things longer than most, at least until the end of April. But I think I'll be good, long as there are no more natural disasters to contend with.

In the meantime, my winter game is working pretty well for me. I start each day burning the fire with reggae music, and end it by watching a hilarious rerun of Family Guy. I'm taking it one day at a time, and on this particular day, I'll rest easy under my four blankets knowing that as long as I'm alive, I'll never subscribe to the notion that Valentine's Day is about me buying chocolate for the men I know.



Learning From Six-Year-Olds

Elementary school doesn't exhaust me like it once did back when I was in the midst of the dreaded low phase of cultural fatigue. Contrarily, I now leave Elementary school on Friday afternoons feeling energized and inspired. I have my students to thank for this. I learn so much from these tiny humans. They know patience, presence and joy better than any adult I know.

Two weeks ago, at the beginning of class, one of my first graders got into an argument with her desk mate. I couldn't understand what happened, but they were clearly upset with each other. The teacher, Ms. Araki, stopped the class to see what was the matter and both students started crying upon trying to explain. They got out their tears, apologized to each other, and proceeded to move along, as if nothing had ever happened. Within minutes they were happy as clams, singing 'The Fruit Market' song with the rest of us.

I admired the way these tots were able to experience their emotions, release them, forgive and move on... the way it should be. As children, we know how to deal with our emotions in a healthy way. But many of us, myself included, tend to forget as we grow up.

Upon getting upset or afraid, I have a tendency to try to numb my emotions, and push them down, in an effort to ignore them and in turn, avoid the uncomfortable

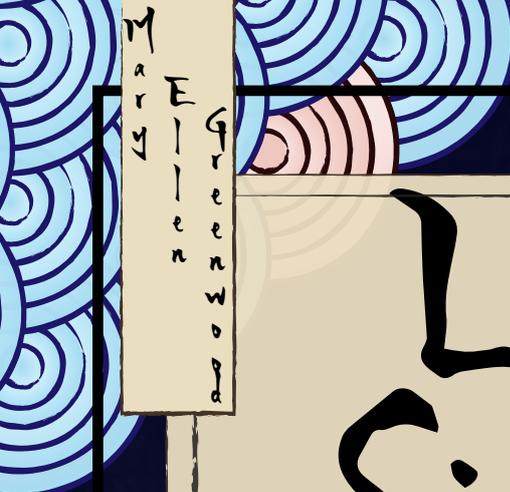
sensation of actually feeling them. The thing is, doing this doesn't make them disappear. Rather, denying the release of emotions actually invites them to reside within and embed themselves inside bodily tissue, only to be regurgitated in some other unhealthy form down the road. Like sickness, anxiety or lashing out at somebody unfairly, for example.

'Feelings' aren't some ephemeral fragments of our imaginations... they are actual, physical things. They're no less real than the bunch of atoms that make up a flu virus or your big toe. Feelings and emotions are energy. And this energy is constantly flowing, whether it flows out of you, or deeper into you. You can't make it disappear... that would be too easy.

I know this now and I'm trying to relearn how to deal with my emotions in a healthy way. Therefore, witnessing how this silly argument was dealt with by a couple of six-year-olds did not go unnoticed.

It was enlightening!

The youngster-induced enlightenment didn't end there. Later in the same class, we were practicing the names of fruits and set up the 'fruit basket' game to review what they had learned. We arranged our chairs in a big circle and the game commenced. If you've ever played this, you know it's fast-paced and rather hectic.



Learn from
the
kids

Learning From Six-Year-Olds

One gal, Yumi, is very shy and this game was clearly not for her. When it came her turn to stand in the centre of the circle, she completely froze, and ended up standing there for about a minute, looking terrified. In an effort to end the poor girl's terror, Mrs. Araki gave her permission to say it in Japanese instead. But she continued to stand there, frozen. The teacher entered the circle to help her and whispered options of things that she could say in her ear. Eventually, she quietly uttered 'pineapple' and the game resumed.

Not long after, Yumi's turn came again. This time, the teacher didn't have to help. Two of the other children shot up and entered the middle of the circle to help Yumi, who again looked like she was going to cry. Haruna, took the role of whispering options into Yumi's ear, while Sota, stood by her side with his arm around her. Yumi was taking her time, but her classmates were endlessly patient and supportive.

Yumi's turn came a third time, and about six students stood up to help her out this time. Haruna realized that this was too many, as Yumi looked overwhelmed, so she took it upon herself to assign the helper role to another student (not even claiming it for herself, as I would have expected) and urged everyone else to sit down.

A scared Yumi received the help and support she needed, once again. When she sat down I noticed the boy next to her put his hand on her back and he kept it there.

It goes without saying... these kids are amazing.

I was blown away by the love, patience and kindness these kids displayed so naturally. Not once did any of them show an ounce of judgment or frustration towards Yumi's inability to perform the seemingly simple task on her own. And the teacher didn't command them to do any of this, it was all of their own accord.

Children are much more in touch with their inherent tendency to act lovingly. And they do it unquestioningly and without a backwards glance. What a wonderful world we'd live in if more of us stayed in touch with these loving tendencies into our adult lives. Sometimes I wonder why I stand up in front of the kids, acting as if I know more than them. That one's up for debate.

See the full story at <https://sailonsilvergirlweb.wordpress.com/>

JHS JAPANESE HORROR STORY

"I'm sure we've all noticed..."

"Oh it's awful isn't it?"

"...the recent blight among us..."

"I just don't know what lead them to do it..."

"I'm speaking, of course, about the windbreakers."

It's that time of year again. Kumamoto is stuck in transit much like an awkward teen waiting for their bangs to grow out, and we suffer the fallout. Is it an icy tundra? Is it snowing? Is it a balmy 10 degrees outside? Far more pressing, how does this tug of war come as a surprise to anyone anymore?

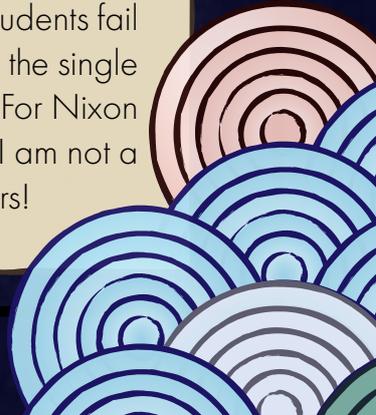
And yet with each year we struggle. For some people it's the constant opening of windows in the face of the perilous influenza air. For others it's the freezing classroom seemingly built in an underground bunker with no hope of sunshine. But for one school, this year, the threat is far more insidious.

That's right. Windbreakers. To you and I they are nothing more than a lightweight jacket meant to provide comfort against damp winds. But to the fair teachers at ***** JHS they are: the reefer.

They are gateway drugs, short skirts, bubblegum stuck to the bottom of desks, broken vending machines. They are the equivalent of two acne-scarred teenagers furiously grinding away in an old pickup truck at Make-out Point.

Why is this? It's shocking, really, that you even have to ask because the problem should be glaringly obvious. And if it isn't, dear reader, that must mean you are sympathetic with those rabble rousers.

Because when you get down to the nitty gritty, the problem is that these students fail to realize what one simple addendum to the rules can do to society. It is the single chink in the armor that has caused the undoing of many a great regime! For Nixon it was the smallest piece of duct tape that led to those infamous words, "I am not a crook!" For ***** JHS, it is the audacity of wearing outerwear indoors!



JHS

JAPANESE HORROR STORY

Ah yes, realization is slowly dawning on you, isn't it? You are beginning to realize what is at stake.

Outerwear indoors? Why, that makes no sense! It's downright preposterous! Umbrellas are meant for rain, rain boots for dirty puddles, windbreakers for windy conditions! Bring them indoors and we might as well be riding our bikes in the hallways, parking our cars in the classroom, and shotgunning beers before class.

Never fear, though, for there is a dark knight in the wings, a wonderful savior to set this story right. Armed with only a red pen and a paltry paycheck bereft of a few zeros, this beautiful educator has declared no more.

No more hiding behind our desks. No more listening for that hideous rustle of nylon and polyester obscenely rubbing against one another. It's time we took our schools back from the terror of lightweight fashion!

With a pure heart, this wonderful man rose from his peers and stole back the morning meeting, turning a 15 minute engagement into 40, and implored us to look into our hearts and ask, 'Can we stand such a slight?'

Will we allow icy temperatures to dictate our lives? Will we let basic human comfort get in the way of professional decorum? I say, no! No rain, no snow, not even the dreaded influenza will keep us from experiencing the beauty that is a crisp gakuran!

My friends, what a fire he lit under those teachers! They straightened their backs, threw off their brightly colored lap blankets, and marched down the hallways with conviction in their step, no longer afraid of what might be lying in wait for them.

Thanks to this unnamed hero, ***** JHS has been released from the clutches of indecency. But I implore you now, dear readers, to look at your own schools, listen for that horrible rustle, look out for that glint of shine off reflective patches, and be diligent!

For the real terror does not lie with the Cheetolini in the West, oh no -- it lies here. In our very own backyards, in the East, in our schools.

Beware of the scourge! Beware of the Japanese Horror Story.....



Yamaga Winter Lantern Festival

Denise Wiley

Yamaga Winter Lantern Festival

Denise Wiley



Photo Gallery



View from the Top
Joyce Tan



Waiting for Spring Again
Joyce Tan



Mystic Mt. Aso
Joyce Tan



Smokin'
Joyce Tan



Festive Lights at Kurokawa Onsen
Joyce Tan



Daily Life at Mt. Aso
Joyce Tan



Among the Clouds at Daikanbo
Joyce Tan

The Year of the Chicken Is Here
Laura McGhee



Hazy Sunset
Laura McGhee



Aso Kumamoto
Zaynab Nakhid



Uchinomaki Aso Kumamoto
Zaynab Nakhid



Star Wars - Odori, Sapporo Hokkaido
Zaynab Nakhid



Kumamon - Odori Sapporo Hokkaido
Zaynab Nakhid



Tsunagi Bronze
Susannah Roberts



Street Views
Susannah Roberts



Sunset from Akasaki Sho
Susannah Roberts

Seasons
Richie Luu



Babies on a Plane

How to deal with the unknown

There were no snakes (that I know of), if Samuel L Jackson was also on board, I couldn't see him, and there were (probably) no witness protection programs being carried out by FBI agents. However, on my plane trip from Kumamoto to London and back with my wife and 8-month-old daughter, there were some tenuous similarities to the film Snakes on a Plane.

The Build-Up

The film sparked a lot of hype on the internet years before its release, which only intensified as it became known that Samuel L Jackson would star in it, and that its recently changed name Pacific Airflight 121 would change back to the original Snakes on a Plane.

The build-up began about two years prior to the journey, when I was imagining a future with my (now) wife, Ranko, and I thought "If we had children, I would want them to spend time both in Japan and the UK, and so a 12-hour-baby-plane situation would be unavoidable." I put that thought in a drawer near the bottom of the wardrobe of my mind, under a load of old jumpers, and hoped that it would just stay there; able to be accessed in dire need, but hopefully out of the way of daily goings-on.

In the summer of 2016, after getting married and having Jenny, our daughter, come into the world, the thought burst out of the wardrobe, came down stairs, looked me directly in the eyes over breakfast and said, "It's time."

The thought contained promises of joy and wonder, was very polite and courteous, but for some reason had the head of a wolf and never stopped growling.

We booked return flight tickets from Kumamoto to London for Christmas 2016 the next day. It was the first time I had used a travel agent to book a flight, but when you have a baby and you want to take her onto a plane, it is good to have someone you can ask the question, "Are you sure we will have seats together with a bassinette?" in person, so that the answer can be guaranteed countless times.

The bassinette tip was one of many that I had found researching how to take babies on planes. I had also not heard of the word "bassinette" before. I found a fitting one-line summary of all of the advice towards the end of my research. It said, "I always order a whiskey right at the beginning of the flight. It helps me relax a little, helps me stay calm with the kids, and most importantly lets me not care so much about what the other passengers are thinking when my children are screaming."

The Journey

Spoiler warning for the film "Snakes on a Plane"

In the film, the terror starts off very low, builds up gradually as the snakes start appearing, then kind of diminishes as we realise that the antivenom is waiting, the passengers stop fighting to band together, and that really, Samuel L Jackson is on board, and there is no way that he is going to die.

Babies on a Plane

How to deal with the unknown

In the journey out from Kumamoto, there were spikes of emotion in unexpected places, and when I had thought the climax of difficulty would be, there was serene calm with only slight underlying fear. This is the fear that one experiences as one sees one's baby asleep, wondering when they will wake-up screaming with no warning. It can be unintentionally forgotten, but not quelled by will.

The Journey began at 5:30am JST, with milk and then a taxi drive to the airport. After hauling the luggage out of the taxi and walking over to the entrance of the airport, I allowed a slight sense of complacency to permeate through my thoughts. I knew that I had put this journey on a pedestal and that, in reality, of course it wasn't going to be so bad.

The doors to the airport didn't open as we approached them, and a quick glance revealed that none of the lights behind the doors were on either. The numbers "06:30-21:30" appeared out of the Japanese text in front of me. No wonder the taxi-driver had sounded confused and hesitant when we demanded that we arrive at the airport at 6:00am. In the true Japanese spirit, he had thought not to question the customer, and just deliver the service the customer wanted, to the best of his ability.

After being let into the staff entrance area to wait so that we would not freeze in the cold, everything was smooth. The flight at 7:40am from Kumamoto to Tokyo was stressful but only because we made it so. Jenny was having a great time while we worried about when to give her milk, how much to give her, whether her ears were painful or not, and whether she should be sleeping or awake. The only snakes on that plane were metaphorical, created by us.

Sitting in the area of the gate for our flight to London in Haneda airport was comforting. We saw other couples with young children and babies, with one parent Japanese and the other British. For the first time for us, Ranko, Jenny and I were a normal sight. The other parents didn't proclaim in amazement their love of how white Jenny's skin was, or satisfy their need of classification by verbally confirming that Jenny was, in their eyes, a hafu. We didn't even get any suggestions for Jenny to be a model, nor did we receive any insistence that only having one child is mottainai. When the announcement that our flight was going to be delayed by 5 hours came, of course we were irritated and we slightly despaired, but it was nice to know that we would go through the flight with other people in a similar situation to us.

Babies on a Plane

How to deal with the unknown

The Destination

In the end, the door-to-door journey was around 25 hours. Total sleep time for me and my wife was probably a good 2 hours, while Jenny had slept for about 8 hours. Most of that was on the flight and the rest was during the car journey from the airport to the house in London. She did spend the first 30 minutes in the car screaming, but it would have truly been odd if she had not protested any stage of the journey. She destroyed my trepidation about the journey with her joy, compliance and sleep; much like how Samuel L Jackson shot the windows of the cockpit out so that the subsequent depressurisation caused all the snakes to be vented from the plane.

All that was left was the love given and received by family and friends in the UK (and being jet-lagged by 9 hours with an 8-month-old baby who is also jet-lagged by 9 hours).

The Sequel

While, unfortunately, there is no official sequel to Snakes on a Plane, the hype it created simply by being cannot easily be generated again. The imagination of the masses was fed upon very successfully by the team that created Snakes on a Plane. They knew that if they simply had that premise, that title and Samuel L Jackson, people would do the rest.

There was a "sequel" to the first plane trip a week and a half later to come back home to Kumamoto, and there will be many more long plane journeys with my daughter as she grows up. Like Snakes on a Plane, the stir caused by the premise was a bigger sensation than the event itself, and any sequels to the film or subsequent plane journeys will be much more rooted in reality and carried out with a lot less fuss and wild speculation.

The Unknown

Finding a method to deal with unknown, challenging events other than internally projecting them into unconquerable fantasies is itself a challenge. On the JET Programme I think we have to deal with the unknown often and sometimes can't help but overly worry about it (if we are given enough warning). When those times come, just think of outrageous films like Sharknado, Mega Shark vs Giant Octopus and Hot Tub Time Machine. The hype is a bigger deal than the film itself, and with every sequel there is significantly less hype, until it just becomes expected and normal. Or, in the least, you will be comforted by remembering that films like that even exist.

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Kumamoto

KYUSHU'S OWN WINTER WONDERLAND

It's that time of the year again. Where it's cold, and the sun barely comes out and you just don't have the energy to go outside. What's worse, Japanese apartments offer little to no insulation making the indoors just as cold as the outdoors. However, winter itself does not have to be that bad. There are tons of great events and places to go to if you know where to look. Of course the big names are the Sapporo Snow festival in Hokkaido and the Nagasaki Lantern festival, but there are actually places here in our very own Kumamoto (the only prefecture in Kyushu that can boast about having temperatures that sometimes rivals that of Hokkaido), specifically Aso. For those of you who are looking for stuff to do, here is a list of things and places that you can go to.

A S O

Aso is that picturesque tiny 'city' nestled in the caldera of a volcano. Due to its height above sea level, Aso typically gets a lot of snow every year. Go to Aso on a snowy weekend and stop in one of the cafés where you can sit and watch the snow fall outside. Even though it can snow for up to 4 days straight in Aso, you will hardly see any on the ground itself. This may be due to it being in a caldera where steam typically rises out of the ground every once in a while. For grounds with more snow, the adventurous ones can take a drive up to the Aso Milk road or Namino which is on the rim of the caldera itself. A drive up to Mt. Aso itself also yields grounds full of snow, perfect for building snow men, snow angels or the Japanese かまくら (Kamakura) snow houses. However, please note that because the temperature can go as low as -10, there is a lot of ice on the ground so it is advisable to have snow tyres fitted to your car.

Also, because of the volcano, Aso boasts natural outdoor onsens heated by the volcano itself. The most famous is Uchinomaki Onsen in Aso City which you can visit to get rid of the winter chill.

Cafes in Aso

- Miyuki: <http://www.aso-miyuki.com/> 〒869-2301 Kumamoto-ken, Aso-shi, Uchinomaki, ミユキ
- Bakery Genki: <https://www.facebook.com/genki808/>
- Coffee Plaza East: 1561 Kurokawa, Aso-shi, Kumamoto-ken 869-2225, Japan

Koga Falls Aso

古閑の滝
(こがのたき)

Koga falls in Aso is said to be most beautiful in winter. After seeing it I will have to agree. The falls freeze during the winter into beautiful icicles giving off the image of a real winter wonderland.



(Photo by Denise Wiley)

Koga Falls: Ichinomiyamachi Sakanashi, Aso, Kumamoto Prefecture 869-2611, Japan

Kuju Forest Park Ski Area

If you like to ski or snowboard there are places to do so in Kyushu. The Kuju Forest Ski Area in Aso Kuju Park is actually in Oita prefecture. 20 minutes from Aso's border. It is a modest ski area and the lifts are not that high but it does beat having to spend money for a plane ticket to Hokkaido just to be able to ski. The facility has everything including clothes and equipment for rent along with a cafeteria. The prices for everything is shown on their English website.

Website: <http://www.kujyuski.co.jp/english/index.html>

Address: 612-1 Yutsubo, Kokonoe Town, Kusu District, Oita Prefecture

Ruin
at
the
Senomoto
Plateau

This is found in Senomoto Kogen in Minami Oguni, Aso. It is a forest filled with trees of ice. However, this place is a bit difficult to go to since the trees and icicles can only be seen when the weather is around -3 °C.

Website (Japanese): http://www.jalan.net/kankou/spt_43423ab2080125357/?screenId=OUW3701

Ice-Skating in ASPA

If you like ice-skating there is a rink in the ASPA Kikuyo, which is just outside of Kumamoto city. I am not sure if they are open all year round but there is something special about ice-skating during winter. :)

Website: <http://www.kato-shokai.net/asupa/index.html>

ASPA skating rink directions: Japan, 〒869-1101 Kumamoto-ken, Kikuchi-gun, Kikuyō-machi, Tsukure, 菊陽町津久礼2472

Kurokawa Onsen

It is winter, the place is cold and the best thing to do at this time will be to visit a nice hot onsen. If you haven't been already, check out the Kurokawa Onsen in Minami-Oguni Aso. The Kurokawa onsen area actually consists of a bunch of onsens and ryokans. As such you can choose your favourite and visit that one. I will provide the link to their English website below.

Website: http://www.kurokawaonsen.or.jp/eng_new/

That's a list of some places that you can visit during the winter time. Of course there are festivals held during the winter such as the Aso shrine fire festival held every march at the Aso Shrine in Ichinomiya. Since this list is based on places that I visited and my experiences it only includes the northern areas of Kumamoto. If anyone else has great suggestions for places or towns to visit during the winter, please feel free to let everyone know on the KumAJET facebook page.

ODE TO NATTO

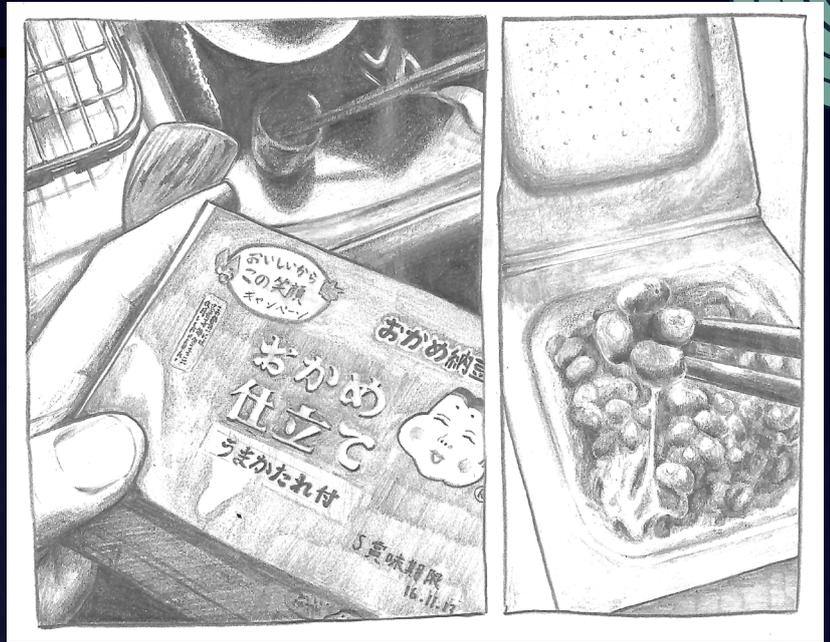


Illustration by: Neil Webb Illustration Instagram: @nrwebb

When we met I despised you, I thought you were vile.
Eating gym short-smelling mucus just wasn't my style.
But trying new things is a notion I believe in
So I tried you, nearly puked and claimed "Ugh... I can't even."

I avoided you like the plague for months, for that, please forgive me.
You deserved a second chance, this time, first impressions weren't the key.
For you, my taste was acquired, like J-pop or beer
It's developed into a love that's true, honest and sincere.
The nihonjin, they gasp, when they find out we're an item
A gaijin like me, loving you, has been known to delight 'em.

You're great with kimchi, on rice, or in a sushi roll
But I prefer you unaccompanied, your natural beauty feeds my soul.
Perfectly portioned, sauce included, in your styrofoam abode
With you, there are no dishes, you ease up on my work load.
Healthy as can be, and packed with protein 'n vitamin K
But trendy super food or not, you'll always be my bae.

They say love is blind, and I believe it to be true.
Because, let's be honest, you look like phlegmy goo.
But don't change, my darling, though you may appear bizarre
As Bruno Mars once said 'I love you just the way you are.'

I worry 'bout when I leave Japan, will our bond remain intact?
I can't deny, you were paramount in my decision to re-contract

Constantly bewildered by my newfound home in this foreign land.
But natto, you get me. So by your side I will stand.

(Actually, that's silly, I won't string you along.
Inside my belly is where we both know you belong.)



AKOY