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SUMMER 2018

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Message from Incoming PAs

Bilal Khan, Incoming ALT PA

Yo yo yo, what's up?! If you're anything like my students, you will tilt your head to the side in bewilderment and hesitantly respond "I'm fine thank you. And you?"

Well, thanks for asking.

I'm very excited to become the next ALT PA of Kumamoto Prefecture, along with the lovely CIR PA Lily. I know many of you guys currently residing in the 'Moto, but for the ones who I am soon to meet, I give you my warmest regards. My name is Bilal Khan, and I'm going into my 3rd year as a JET participant. Originally from Richmond, Virginia, I decided to apply for JET after studying physics in college and deciding it wasn't the right career path for me. Luckily, I studied Japanese as well, and have consequently fallen in love with the language and culture and am excited to be living in Kumamoto City. Kumamoto, and Kyushu for the record, is such a beautiful area rich with lush greenery and delicious food, so I'm really grateful to have been placed here. I very much hope you all feel the same!



My hobbies include karaoke, gaming, training, and traveling. I really feel I should get into reading more, so that's something I'll be working on, in addition to studying a bit of Japanese. At this point, the lingering thought of "N1 or bust!" has taken over my mind, but I'll take it day by day. Otherwise, I'm taking it easy at the moment, but one day I have a feeling you will address me as "Dr. Khan," as I intend to return to the States after my time on JET is over and try my hand at playing doctor.

Anyways, I would like to conclude by giving a big thanks to Laura and Jonny, our PA's from 2016-2018, for being there when I needed them, for organizing and hosting awesome conferences and events, and for generally being all-around awesome people. I wish Jonny happiness in his marriage and family, and Laura the best with her future endeavors. I can only hope I may be able to help you guys, the readers, in the ways Jonny and Laura have helped me. よろしくお願ひします。

Message from Incoming PAs

Lily McDermott, Incoming CIR PA

Hello, Kumamoto! I'm looking forward to becoming the next CIR PA, along with the amazing ALT PA, Bilal. My name is Lily McDermott, and I'm going into my 3rd year as a JET participant. I'm originally from Toronto, Canada and I studied Linguistics at university.

For the past two years, I've worked as an elementary, junior high school and kindergarten ALT in Kashima, a small town abundant with natural spring water right next to Kumamoto City. (Check out the last YOKA Winter edition to find out more!) In Kashima, I thoroughly enjoyed eliciting smiles in my students by making silly faces and gestures during vocabulary practice. I also pursued *rouliqiu*, a modern Chinese racket sport incorporating the principles of tai chi.

My current hobbies include tea brewing, cooking, and deciphering the graphical overload on Japanese home cleaning products. I am particularly interested in West Indian, Iranian and Chinese home cooking.

To returning JETs, I am excited to work with you for another year. Let's pass on our knowledge and skills at this year's Orientation and SDC! To the new Kumamoto JETs, I am truly looking forward to meeting

all of you. I am confident that you will find that this prefecture has so much to offer. And finally, to Laura — thank you. You have really been the most amazing PA and predecessor I could ever have hoped for. I wish you and Jonny both the best of luck in the future. これからもよろしくお願ひします!



Irises, Kimonos and so much more

By Ola Akindès

It had only been a month and half since I moved to this strange land when we first met. Having lived for more than a decade in a city that is world-renown for the beautiful display of its annual tulips festival, I was not expecting to get rapt with wonder at the Iris Festival in Tamana. When I came to Japan, I could not understand any Japanese past the daily greetings. Every verbal communication had to be Google-translated. Nonetheless, a week before the Iris Festival in Tamana last year, I decided to go for a stroll around the festival's neighbourhood, to visit the centuries-old family-owned little shops, and connect with the merchants. You see, for me human connections and communication are not necessarily bound to languages.



White Hydrangeas at the Iris Festival

They transcend it. So, expectant and confident of spending an interesting time, I went from shop to shop, looking around, saying hellos and giving smiles away.

First I met a lady in her seventies, she owns an antique shop. I discovered that she was an alumnus of the senior high school where I teach. And so was her father before her. In her antiquity shop she had very rare pottery, crystals, Chinas, and sculptures. Her father had started the collection more than a century ago. Her story is a very beautiful one, but what amazed me most is that she could still communicate well in English despite the fact that more than five decades had passed since her last English lesson at Tamana Senior High School. She would not let me go without taking pictures with me and her friend who was visiting. She wrapped a small set of gold-plated porcelain from a famous Japanese artist and thanked me



Tamana Iris Festival flags

for being in Tamana, for bringing the world to our children. How could I be any more proud to be a teacher? With nostalgia, she told me about the foreign teacher who came from England and taught her for few years in her high school days, just after the war. She still remembered the names, the dates, the jokes... they couldn't keep in touch but they had imprinted each other's stories. Like mine was right now being impacted by hers.

After spending some time with her, I moved on to the next shop, a fabric specialist. I saw a beautiful collection of Japanese traditional dyes and indigo-dyed cottons. It brought me back to my childhood. My mother had been a dyeing artist for many years when I was in middle school. I loved the smell of indigo. I reminded me the smell of the earth after the rain. Such a unique fragrance. I didn't know that Japan has the same techniques and dyes that we have in my native Africa. And hop! Let's go to another shop...



Tamana Agricultural High School's masterpiece at the Iris Festival

On the side of the road I met another lady in her seventies. Very beautiful and distinguished in her posture. My eyes met and held hers for only a few seconds, we exchanged a nod and a smile. The next shop was a Kimono shop. They had a section with kimono accessories and another with modern summer clothing and handcrafted toys and charms. On my way out of that store, the shop owner handed me few handcrafted origami paper boxes. A gift from her mother, she

told me. Once again thanking me for being the teacher at Tamana Senior High School. She was also a former student from my school! I was so touched! All these people kept dotting on me because of me teaching in a remote little village in Japan. I couldn't believe the generosity and the selfless giving of these shop owners.

"Can I meet your mother?" I asked. "Sure. Here she is." the shop owner replied. Behind a small screen, near the back shop, an old lady was sitting and folding origami. With a thousand mimes and the help of Google translate, I asked her if she could teach me. "Of course!" she exclaimed with a bright smile in her eyes and on her face. I guess this nonagenarian was just thrilled to pass down one of her lifetime's hobbies and passions. The moments that followed were pure magic. Okasan could not speak a word of English and I could not express much in words. Nevertheless, we spent nearly



Finding Irises that match my Yukata

an hour, folding papers, laughing and sharing life. This was my first encounter with what is now my Japanese family.

While we were still folding the colorful strips of paper, the ballerina-like lady from off the street earlier came in the shop. She actually lived there. She was Okasan's second daughter. What were the chances...? We now reminisce on these events fondly, sure that these encounters had nothing to do with coincidence, but were purely divine appointments.

With its front on the commercial street, Okasan's house is one of the family properties overlooking the festival grounds. I have seen pictures of the pond that became the Iris Festival grounds dated before and after the war. She preciously kept the memories of the first festivals few decades ago, along with the pictures of the ladies' laundry day on the banks of the pond before mechanical and electric washers were introduced in Japan.

The Iris Festival in Tamana features too many awesome attractions to be listed. Here are some of the marking ones that I visited with my company of friends: the pottery craft shop, the barbecue meat stalls at nightfall, the tea ceremony and its exquisite traditional sweets, the live concerts, the costumed volunteers, the free coupons from yukata-wearing visitors. The absolute best street food I had this year was at the Tamana Iris Festival: a pressed down, shaken

and overflowing portion of shaved ice topped with an all-natural, locally produced and just perfectly sweet strawberry or citrus marmalade, a pure delight.

This summer, as I joined the Tamana Iris Festival for the second time since I came to Japan, Okasan and I regarded this festival as an anniversary and a celebration of our first encounter, a life-altering moment for both of us. Adorned in a colourful yukata with an up-do displaying the circumstantial flowery fascinator in my hair, I went with a half dozen other ALTs to pay my respects to this energetic and affectionate elder. We were all amazed again by her hospitality, as she kept serving us cold tea and snacks, insisting that we stayed, and telling us a thousand and one stories of long ago.

For me the Iris Festival in Tamana will never be a just display of the actual flowers, or an ordinary and familiar street festival, or a clamorous and crowded event just to hang out with friends. It will always have the tinge of the first time my eyes met those of Okasan. For a very long time, I will cherish the uniqueness of our relationship that, like the iris, gradually blooms revealing the beauty of life and the timelessness of a love that can overlook the years.



Iris in Tamana by Chase Sutherland



Iris in Tamana by Chase Sutherland



*Roses in
Minamata*

By Alicia Lim

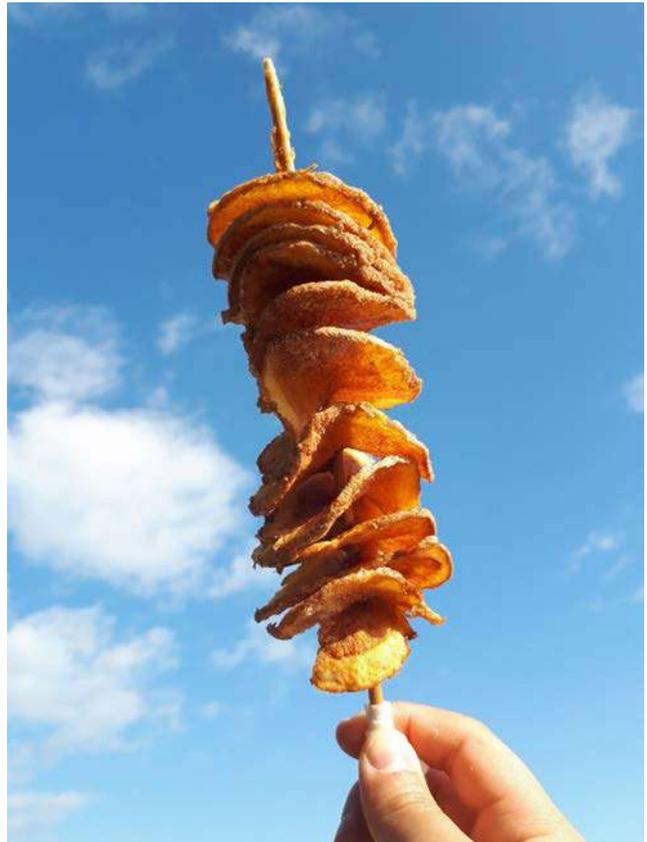
Photos by Alicia Lim



Hanabi



Dawn



Potato



On the way home

So Many Words

多くの言葉

By Cody M. Swall

It would take so many words
To say all I want to say

多くの言葉は必要だ
言いたいことを言うために

About all I have felt from
3 years ago 'til today

私が感じたこと全て
3年前から今日まで

With news of my acceptance
Came joy and trepidation

私が受け入れのニュースで
喜びと恐怖を感じた

Quickly followed by fatigue
Thanks to the flight duration

疲労はすぐに続いた
飛行時間のおかげで

It would take so many words
To describe those first few days

多くの言葉は必要だ
最初の数日を記述するために

I'm not even sure I could
It's like looking through a haze

自分ができるとは確信してない
霧を見ているような感じだ

I mean, three years I've been here
And experienced such bliss

だって、私はずっと3年間ここにいる
それと、すごい至福を経験した

Only now does it hit me
Just how much I'll miss...

今気づいたばかり
私はどれほど寂しい

What first comes to mind
Is service with a smile

最初気になるのは
笑顔でサービスすること

Work staff here are so polite
They go that extra mile

この場所の店員は本当に優しい
彼らげ期待されていることを超えて行く

And the streets, stores, and school floors
Are so beautiful and clean

そして、道も店も学校のフロアは
すごく美しくてきれいだ

There is so little litter
It's like living in a dream

ゴミは少ないから
夢の中に住むようだ

And what a dream it is, man
Have you ever looked outside

何と言う夢だ
外に見たことあるの？

Seeing all the green nature
It puts a spring in my stride

この緑自然を全て見るのは
活気を与えられる

Even in the city's heart
You can see mountains and trees

町の中でも
山と木が見える

Seeing first hand people caring for their land
Puts my mind at ease

人々が彼らの自宅を世話するを自分の目で見るのは
私を安心させる

Though at ease it will not stay
For I've only just begun

しかし、その気持ちは続かない
私はただ始まったばかり

Not all my words are pleasant
So buckle up, we're not done

私の言葉は全ていいのじゃない
覚悟して、私たちはまだ終わっていない

There are things that I won't miss
I bet many feel the same

寂しくさせないことがある
色んな人も同じことを感じてるかもしれない

Among the ranks of gaijin
Certain things have garnered fame

外人の中で
とあることは評判になった

Being treated like a star
Out of this I get a kick

スターのように扱われるって
これで私は楽しさを感じる

But it goes a bit too far
When I'm praised about chopsticks

しかし、ちょっとしすぎるね
お箸を使うことについて賞賛される時

I will not miss the weather
How it feels after June

天気も寂しくさせられない
6月の後の

I don't think I'd have made it
Without air-conditioned rooms

私は死ぬかもしれない
エアコンされている部屋がなかったら

And winter's no good either
Because though it's not too cold

冬もだめですね
だって、あまり寒くないけれど

The lack of insulation
Means all my blankets unfold

インシュレーションがないことは
私の毛布全部が展開するって意味だ

Earthquakes, typhoons, and kancho
These are also on my list

地震と台風とカンチョーも
私のリストにも載っています

Of things about this country
I assuredly won't miss

この国について
私は確かに逃すことはありません

But back to things I will miss
To those things I'll leave behind

私が寂しいことに戻ろう
私に残されるものに

When I make my way back home
These will still be on my mind

私がホームに帰る時に
これらはまだ思いだす

More than manners, or clean floors
Or green views outside our doors

作法よりも、きれいなフロアよりも
私たちのドアの外の緑景色よりも

I'll mostly miss the people

何よりも人々に会いたくなる

My precious students, my friends

私の大切な生徒たち、私の友達

They who make life worth living
From beginning to the end

人生を意味のあるものにするの彼ら
最初から最後まで

On this small island nation
where I'd decided to roam

この小さな島国で
私が旅すると決めた場所

They've become my family
And my home away from home

彼らは私の家族になった
私のホームから遠く離れているホーム

It would take so many words
For me to truly express

多くの言葉は必要だ
本当に表現するために

The depth of my gratitude
And degree to which I'm blessed

私の感謝の深さと
私が祝福されていることを

So very many more words
Than I even think exist

もっと多くの言葉
存在すると思うのよりも

But my hope is that by now
All of you have got the gist

しかし、私の希望は今
あなたたちはだいたい分かった

In so many words
What I'm trying to say is

多くの言葉で
私が言おうとしていることは

Thank you
That's it

ありがとう
それだけ



Rice paddies at Yamae Village by Eugene Kim

Photos by Sammuel McDowall



Sumoto Sunset



Sumoto Sunset



Double Rainbow in Sumoto



Double Rainbow in Sumoto

Seven Summer Songs

By Greg Corbett



Summer in Japan means fun times, festivals and fireworks. Of course, you could be content to simply fill your ears with the sounds of wind chimes and chirping cicadas, but why not take your Japanese 'natsu' experience to the next level by adding these great Japanese summertime songs to your playlist? Who knows? In a few years, you may listen back to these seven tunes and reminisce about how 2018 was the best summer ever. Music... start!

1. 'Natsuiro' – Yuzu

Album: Yuzu Ikka

A summertime staple, street musicians-turned-acoustic folk duo Yuzu's first single captures that summer feeling with three minutes of pop perfection.

Nice lyric!

大（おお）きな五時半（ごじはん）の夕焼（ゆうや）け 子供（こども）の頃（ころ）と同（おな）じように
海（うみ）も空（そら）も雲（くも）も僕等（ぼくら）でさえも 染（そ）めてゆくから

A big 5:30 sunset, like one from childhood

Will bathe the sea, the sky, the clouds, even us



2. 'Hanabi' – Mr. Children

Album: Supermarket Fantasy

What summer playlist would be complete without a song about fireworks? There are many other 'hanabi' themed hits, but it's hard to go past Kazutoshi Sakurai's endlessly hummable melodies. If you aren't inspired by this song, you are definitely made of stone.

Nice lyric!

決（け）して捕（つか）まえることの出来（でき）ない
花火（はなび）のような光（ひかり）だとして
もう一回（いっかい） もう一回（いっかい）
僕（ぼく）はこの手（て）を伸（の）ばしたい

Even if, like fireworks, there is a light that I can never grasp
I want to reach for it, one more time, one more time



3. 'Manatsu no Kajitsu' – Southern All Stars

Album: Imamura Jane

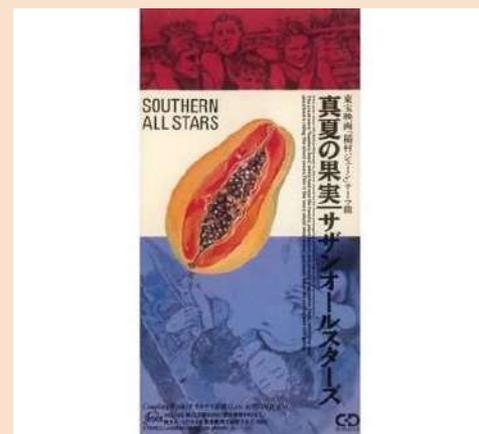
A favourite of lead singer Keisuke Kuwata and fans alike, this song by veteran pop/rockers Southern All Stars is frequently covered by artists both within Japan and all throughout Asia, with covers alone having sold more than 7 million copies. That adds up to a great song in any language.

Nice lyric!

砂（すな）に書（か）いた名前（なまえ）消（け）して
波（なみ）はどこへ帰（かえ）るのか

Where do the waves go

After they have erased a name written in the sand?



4. 'Summer Song' – Yui

Album: Holidays in the Sun

Prolific singer/songwriter Yui serves up an infectious, up-tempo tune about high school summer romance by the sea.

Nice lyric!

花火（はなび）の音（おと）に かき消（け）されてる
君（きみ）の言葉（ことば）が 夜風（よかぜ）と変（か）わる
Your words, erased by the sound of fireworks, turn to the night wind.



5. 'Inochi no Namae' – Ayaka Hirahara

Album: From To

With a song that should especially appeal to Studio Ghibli fans, Ayaka Hirahara lends her pure vocals to veteran Ghibli composer Joe Hisaishi's theme from 'Spirited Away'. I promise that listening to this song won't turn your parents into pigs.

Nice lyric!

真夏（まなつ）の光（ひかり）
あなたの肩（かた）に揺（ゆれ）れてた木漏れ日（こもれび）
Mid-summer light
Sunshine through the trees that swayed on your shoulder

6. 'Ano Natsu no Hanabi' – Dreams Come True

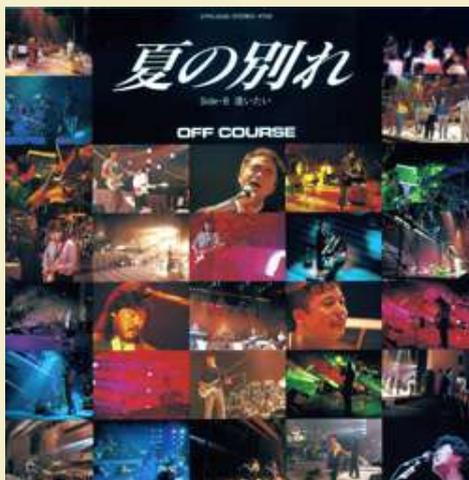
Album: The Swinging Star

Okay, just one more song about fireworks. This song has a groovy, feel-good vibe, with Miwa Yoshida's irresistible vocals and some affecting lyrics about summer nostalgia.

Nice lyric!

今頃（いまごろ）あなたもどこかで思（おも）い出（だ）しているの？
あの日（ひ）のこと

Are you somewhere, reminiscing about that day right now?



7. 'Natsu no Wakare' – Off Course

Album: Still a Long Way to Go

Finish the summer on a bittersweet note. Knowing that they were soon to split up, seminal pop/rock band Off Course chose this typically heartrending breakup song as their 36th and final single.

Nice lyric!

君（きみ）の声（こえ）がかすれて、「元気（げんき）でいてね」
うなずいて歩（ある）きだせば、夏（なつ）は夕（ゆう）ぐれ
Your voice breaks, "Take care"
If I nod my head and walk away, summer will end

Have a great summer everyone!

**All album images
from Wikipedia

By Alicia Lim and Libby Costales

in the fields

we sweat in the sun

washing trays endlessly, while

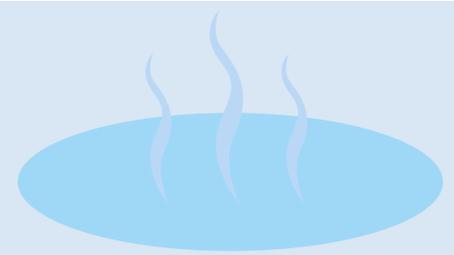
local man plants rice





Onsens

By Melissa Wright



One of the great things I've gotten to experience since coming to Japan is onsen. Coming from America, the concept of going to a communal bath was completely new to me and something that I was at first on the fence about. After a surprise trip to one with a group of friends though, I was hooked. I'd now like to take this opportunity to tell you about some of my favorites in the area.

The first is in Ashikita and is called "Otachimisaki Onsen Center". It's near the beach and camp ground that the Ashikita beach party is held at. It was the first onsen I ever went to and one of the best I've been to yet. It has a large indoor bath that overlooks the water. The view is absolutely stunning and the bath is large enough to enjoy with friends and not be too cramped with anyone else. It also has a cold bath and an outdoor bath. The outdoor bath has a nice view as well but is a little shallow and lukewarm. In addition to the onsen, the complex has abundant relaxing areas spread out over two floors. The upper floor balcony is very nice, especially when paired with sea salt ice cream, which can be purchased downstairs. Admission is 500円.



Otachimisaki Onsen Center

御立岬温泉センター

〒869-5305 熊本県葦北郡芦北町町田浦町124

The second is in Misato Town and is called "Samata no Yu". It's not easy to see from the main road, but look for this big statue (see below) and you'll know you're in the right place. This one is in the woods and next to a river. Before even entering the complex, you must descend down a wide staircase that has a huge tree growing in the center of it. You can take the staircase all the way down to river too, which is lined in plum and cherry trees (that are very pretty in spring). Inside the building, there is both an indoor and outdoor bath. The indoor bath has a varying temperature, depending on which end of it you're in, and is lined with large rocks, allowing everyone to find a spot that suits their tastes. There is also an electric bath and sauna (but I don't particularly care for electric baths). The outside bath is rock lined too but has varying depths in addition to varying temperatures. It overlooks the river and is surrounded by trees, which have a calming sound and makes for a very peaceful atmosphere. Admission is 500円.

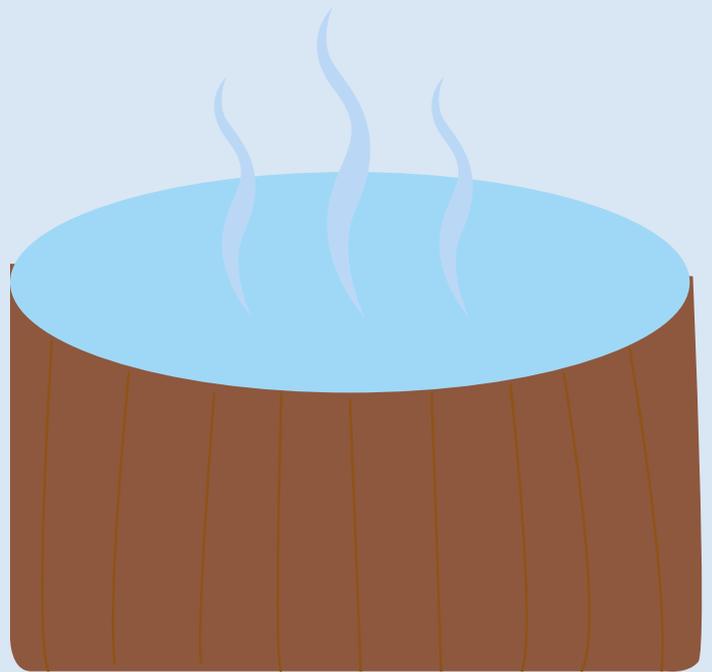


Photo courtesy of Cynthia Geisewite

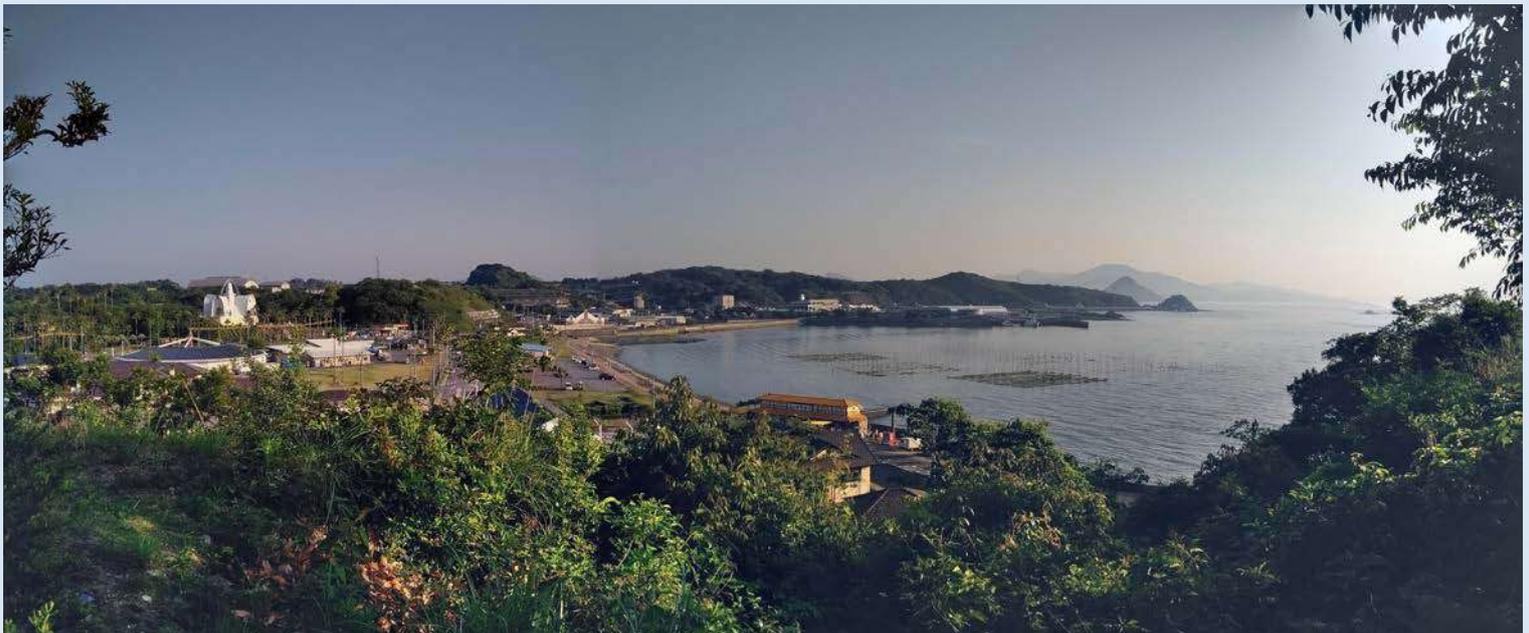
Samata no Yu

石段の郷 佐俣の湯

〒861-4412 熊本県下益城郡美里町佐俣 7 0 5, 日本



The third is on the first island of Amakusa, just past Misumi, and is called “Spa Thalasso”. It’s across the street from the Amakusa Shiro Memorial Hall and on a hill overlooking the sea. The complex is huge and has a restaurant in addition to a gift shop/snack area. The indoor bath is very large and overlooks the sea. It has different areas in it for water jet massages and an electric bath. It also has a separate cold bath. The temperature throughout is fairly uniform and warm but not too hot. The outside bath overlooks the sea as well and has canopied and un-canopied areas so you can pick your level of sun exposure. It’s also rock lined. Admission is 500円.



Spa Thalasso

スパ・タラソ天草

〒869-3602 熊本県上天草市大矢野町上 7 3 2-1 4

The fourth and final onsen I want to tell you about, is also in Amakusa, and is called “Yumigahama Onsen”. Unlike the others, this one doesn’t have a view of the ocean or woods and its outside façade is kind of unassuming. It’s a hidden gem though and truly one of the more unique ones that I’ve been to. It’s also an Inn, so upon entering you need to specify whether you’re there for the bath or to stay the night. Before even getting to the bath, the shower area has a wonderful exfoliating scrub that is locally made (which you can buy for home use at their gift shop). There are 4 baths that are spread out in a maze like cavern. The first indoor bath has a waterfall and rock feature. The second indoor bath is incredibly hot and a deep red color. From this point you can either go to the outside bath, which is small but has a nice little garden around it or to the final “indoor” bath. The final indoor bath is in a cave that is loaded with mineral deposits. The atmosphere is very interesting and the water level varies from one end to the other. The cave itself is man made and above ground but from the inside it looks completely natural and feels kind of mysterious and mystical. Plus caves are just cool. When you’re done with the onsen, there’s a nice little sand beach within walking distance, which is a good place to watch the sunset too. Onsen admission is 500円.



Yumigahama Onsen

弓ヶ浜温泉

〒869-3602 熊本県上天草市大矢野町上5 1 9 0-2



Photos by Justin Lau



Kamegawa dam



Mogushi beach



Shimoda onsen



Sunset coast



Pit stop



Ushibuka sunsets

Experiencing Yakushima

By Chase Sutherland

For this year's Golden Week I decided to go to Yakushima. It was a somewhat spontaneous decision, but I thought it would be a good time to see the small island's incredible natural wonders. I was there for a full week, but most people can see what they want to see within 4 or so days. It can be hard to choose what to see and plan accordingly, so I decided to make a small guide about Yakushima.

Getting there

You can take the plane or ferry to Yakushima. I believe that you can fly from both Fukuoka and Kagoshima airports. There's a few options for ferries.

Topy/Rocket – Very fast, but pricey. There's also more departure times.

Yakushima 2 – Fair price, but slower. Leaves once a day.

Hibiscus – The cheapest, but very slow. You sleep on the ferry when it ports at Tanegashima for the night.

What to do when you first get there

First, I would visit the Yakushima Environmental and Cultural Village Center. If you take the ferry, it's right next to the port and has a ton of great information and maps. There's also a cool little museum in the building that's worth checking out.

If you plan on doing some trekking but are put off by expensive boots and gear, you can always rent them when you get to Yakushima. The locals say that it rains 35 days a month in Yakushima, and I can attest to how much it can rain. Rain gear and hiking boots will be well worth it. You can rent gear in Miyanoura or Anbo, but I would call ahead first to see if they have your size.

A car and scooter is your best option if you want flexibility, but there are bus routes around the island. I rented a scooter so I only took the bus on my first day, but from what I remember they're a bit infrequent. If you do want to rent a car or scooter, definitely call ahead before you arrive.

Where to stay

There's a few youth hostels around the island. If you plan on taking the bus, definitely stay near Miyanoura Port. That's where most of the buses come from. If you're driving then you have more options.

I stayed in the southern part of the island at "the South Village Youth Hostel." It's a tranquil, quiet place where you can relax and see the stars at night. The rooms and facilities were great and you can also cook there or order dinner. The staff was super helpful and gave me a lot of tips. You can also rent rain, hiking, and snorkeling gear if you forgot.

If you're feeling adventurous and want to save money, there are a few campground sites around the island. Sometimes you can stay in a cabin or cook. My friend recommended Banyamine Camping Ground in Anbo.

Shiratani Unsuikyo

This is the place that first comes to mind when thinking of Yakushima. It also inspired the setting for Miyazaki's film "Princess Mononoke." The main attraction is the moss covered rocks and trees, deep within the forest. I honestly have never seen so much green in my entire life. It's like you've stepped back in time before civilization started. This place is always beautiful, but I think the best time to go is if there's a bit of rain.



Yakusugi Land

At Yakusugi Land you can see many Yakusugi, the famous Yakushima cedar trees that are over 1,000 years old. The great thing about Yakusugi Land is that there are multiple course options with different time lengths. If I remember right, the shortest one is 40 minutes and the longest is a few hours. The shorter courses had well maintained steps and trails, but the longer one was a bit more rugged. All in all, Yakusugi Land is a great forest trek that has something for everyone.



Mt. Miyanoura

Instead of seeing Jomon-sugi (the largest and oldest Yakushima cedar tree), I chose to climb Mt. Miyanoura, the tallest mountain in Kyushu. Both are long hikes, but Mt. Miyanoura is more challenging. The main highlight was seeing a 360-degree view from the top and how the vegetation and geography of the island changed the higher I got.



If you do decide to climb it, I highly recommend starting early in the morning and either leaving from Anbo or spending the night before in the hut at the base of the mountain. It took me 10 hours round trip plus lunch to climb Mt. Miyanoura. An added bonus is that a 3,000-year-old cedar tree called “Kigen sugi” is near the base of the mountain.



Kigen sugi



Kigen sugi



Waterfalls

In the southeastern part of Yakushima there are three phenomenal waterfalls right next to each other: Senpirono no taki, Ryujin no taki, and Toroki no taki. The most famous of the three is probably Senpirono no taki. From the viewpoint it’s quite far away, but the sheer scale of the slanting slabs of granite and water is breathtaking. Ryujin no taki is close to Senpiro, so you can park your car near the road and get an up-close look at the rapids. The entrance to Toroki no taki is a bit hard to find, but you can park at the nearby souvenir shop and walk down to the viewpoint. I went to this waterfall as kind of an afterthought, but I’m glad I did. It’s a great waterfall with beautiful, cascading water. It doesn’t take much time to hit all three waterfalls, and you also might be able hit Yakusugi Land in the same day.

The last (and most impressive) waterfall I saw was Oko no taki. This one is a bit farther out near the southwest, but so worth the trip. You can walk right up next to the gushing water and myriad streams running down from the top. I think I probably stared at it for a good two minutes or so. This waterfall is also near the Tsukazaki tidal pool, which is great for snorkeling. If you keep going north past the waterfall, you’ll hit Seibu Rindou, the legendary forest road!



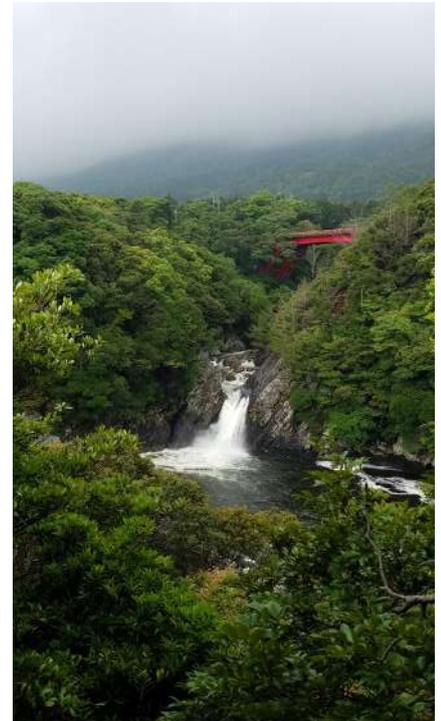
Oko no taki



Senpirono no taki



Ryujin no taki



Toroki no taki

Seibu Rindou

This forest road is very narrow, winding, and usually you have to let other cars pass by, but it's a unique experience. You'll see tons of monkeys and deer native to Yakushima. Seriously, the largest group I saw was about fifteen monkeys and eight deer together. They're both used to humans, but the deer are a bit more skittish. It's really something to see them living together. Both species are unique, with the Yakushima deer being the smallest species of deer in Japan. They looked little bigger than a goat! The Yakushima monkeys are also a slightly different color than the mainland monkeys. One word of caution: the road is closed at night, so be sure to pass through before sunset. Also, if you keep going past Seibu Rindou you'll reach Nagata beach, which unfortunately I didn't swim at due to weather, but I've heard it's gorgeous.



Yokogawa Gorge

Past Seibu Rindou and near Nagata beach is a hidden gem the locals told me about. The entrance is a bit hard to find, but the road is near the Cosmos gas station. After a 30-minute walk from the parking lot you'll be greeted with cool, fresh air and water that sparkles over bright granite rocks. It's a great place to eat your lunch, and you can also swim in the crystal clear water!



Ready? Go!

I hope you've enjoyed reading about my trip to Yakushima. It truly is an incredible place where you can experience nature at its finest. I did a lot of trekking, but I definitely want to visit again to enjoy its spectacular beaches. If you have any questions about Yakushima, please feel free to ask! Safe travels! ☺

Photos by
Joyce Tan



Aso crater



Sulfur at Aso-san



Nabegataki



Walking behind Nabegataki



Bended wisteria tree



Wisteria festival in late May



Wisteria festival in Kitakyushu

CLAM DIGGING IN KAMIAMAKUSA

By Olivia Saputra

Spring had passed, the weather had gotten warmer, and early summer was here. Japan's Golden Week was here as well and we were wondering where to go. I had always wanted to bring my little ones to Amakusa but I was wondering what my family could do there. Swimming at one of Amakusa's beaches was an option, but we didn't choose to do that this time.

An interesting seasonal activity that attracted me was clam digging. One of my Japanese friends posted pictures of her family doing it last year, so I thought that it would be quite a fun activity for my family. I searched the net and found a place called "Amakusa Leisure Land." This was a company located on a small island separated from the mainland. They provide activities such as fishing and clam digging (when in season).

Guests need to take a boat to reach the island from the company's parking lot. (Parking was free.) Taking the boat was fun and it was quite a quick ride to reach to the other side. It only took us 2 minutes to reach the small island with the company's boat.

One of the main activities at the place was fishing. As clam



digging was only allowed from a certain time, the guests who were waiting were asked to try fishing. It was 2500 yen per hour of fishing, and bait was provided for about 500 yen per set. Fishing was a new

experience for us and it was not as easy as we thought. We could not catch anything within an hour. Hopefully we will get better in the future.

For clam digging, everyone had to do it together as a group from the afternoon (starting at about 2pm). Buckets and shovels were provided, and in the end we needed to pay for the clams we collected and were charged per kilogram. The charge for the clams was not too expensive, and I recall some families really did collect a lot of clams to take home.

Overall, we were glad to have the opportunity to try this activity as a family. Once you manage to dig up a bunch of clams, you of course need to learn how to cook them when you get them home.

This is the website link for Amakusa Leisure Land: <http://turiland.jp/access.html> (Japanese only)

Written by Olivia Saputra, not a JET but currently teaching English part time at YMCA Kumamoto.

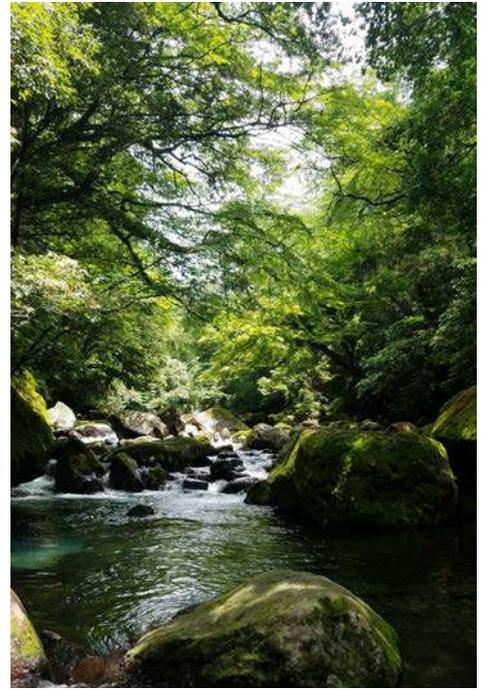




Kikuchi Gorge



Kikuchi Gorge



Kikuchi Gorge



A Meadow on Mt. Sobo



Tsutsuji Flowers

Photos by Chase Sutherland



Midway Up Mt. Sobo

The Merits of Kuma

By Katelyn DePalmer

Kuma-gun is sometimes referred to as “陸の孤島 (りくのことう)” meaning something along the lines of “isolated island on land,” due to its secluded location in the Hitoyoshi Basin. The district is made up of 9 towns and villages, each with a rich history and natural beauty. Kuma is actually not a difficult place to reach--it’s about it’s about 1.5 hours by from the center of Kumamoto City. The 219 highway stretches across the entire district, and the Yamae-Hitoyoshi IC Exit is a convenient stopping point for buses or cars in Hitoyoshi City. The historic black Steam Liner Hitoyoshi train also runs from Kumamoto Station to Hitoyoshi Station over weekends, passing through the gorgeous mountainsides and along the sparkling Kumagawa River.



Summer views from Mt. Takayama

In order to encourage more foreign visitors to the Hitoyoshi-Kuma area, I interviewed some locals, asking what they loved most about Kuma. I also asked them what their favorite Kuma-ben words or phrases were--if you ever wanted to talk like a rural rice farmer, here is your chance to learn.

*Some of these words are Kuma-ben, some are Kumamoto-ben, and some are Kyushu-ben. Try comparing them to your own town’s dialect!

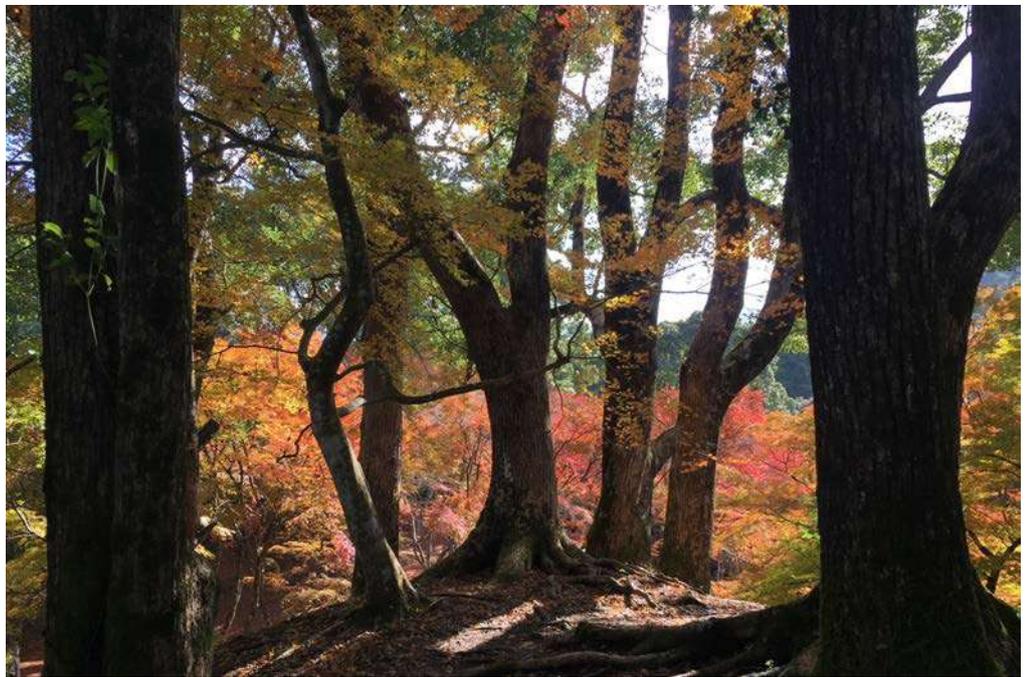


30 *Snow on Mt. Takayama*

The Merits of Kuma:

Joyce Tan's favorite thing about Kuma is "rafting on the Kumagawa. We also have really interesting people here--we just met a guy who worked in Kenya for 3 years, and one of our eikaiwa students speaks Spanish fluently!" Jamie Jove-Viniegra said she loved the scenery and the kind people. She also recommended "Hitoyoshi Castle ruins, and the clear and beautiful Kumagawa." Hiromi agreed, saying, "Kuma has nice scenery--it's green. I like the mountains very much. We have the mountains and the sea, and good food, like fresh vegetables, fruit, and fish." As Naomi simply put it, "Kuma is easy to live in."

When I asked my advanced Eikaiwa class about the "merits" of Kuma, they had quite a lot to say about their area. They taught



Autumn at Fumoto Castle Ruins

me that Kumagawa is one of the three fastest rivers in Japan, and used to carry the Sagara Family's Daimyo in a grand procession.

Tadashi said that his favorite things about Kuma is that it's full of people with "warm hearts," and is rich in historical heritage sites like Aoi Aso Shrine. John Embree, one of the first foreign visitors in Japan, wrote a book about Sue Village (*Suye Mura: A Japanese Village*), and earthenware pots from as far

back as the Yayoi Era (300 BCE - 300 CE) have been excavated from Menda. Masanobu (our Spanish speaker!) also enjoys Kuma's historic sites, like the ancient tombs scattered throughout the district, as well as the fresh fruits, vegetables, and fish available year-round. Kayo praised Kuma's clear water and delicious rice, which are the base of Kuma-shochu, which is best enjoyed on the rocks or with hot water. You can find "sakazuki" at every drinking party, where one glass of Kuma-shochu is shared among friends to show trust and respect.

Nature was high on the list of Kuma's merits: Yuka pointed out Mt. Shiragatake and Mt. Ichifusa as great hiking spots, and Masaharu and Yukiharu both suggested boating activities: whitewater rafting and "kuma-kudari," long wooden boats famous in the region. Aiko, Miho, and Kumiko enjoy Kuma's seasonal flowers: cherry blossoms at Mizukami Dam and Hitoyoshi Castle, irises in



Kumagawa-tetsudo at Okadome Park

Fukada, and tsukushibara (briar roses) in Nishiki are just a few beautiful displays of nature you can find in Kuma. No conversation about Kuma is complete without onsens, which are “kakenagashi,” meaning the water is free-flowing and not recycled in the tub.

With all these reasons to visit Kuma, what are you waiting for? Come see the deep green countryside for yourself.

Kumaben Favorites:

1. Joyce: Ko~ra doi - Great! (the longer the “kora,” the better)
2. Jamie: To-to-to - Can I take this? (And, confusingly, “you can take that.”)
3. Hiromi: Dogyan? Kogyan/Sogyan/Agyan - How? Like this, like that, like that (kind of way).
4. Katelyn: Yokeman - snack time, break time
5. Naomi: Ja-bai - That’s right
6. Masanobu: Odoma~shiran - OMG! When you’re so surprised, you have no words
Dareyame - (ばんしゃく) To drink something to cure your exhaustion
0. Aiko: (Taigya) mozoka! - (super) cute!
Ayahikitta - to be exhausted
0. Yukiharu: Mottainaka - don’t waste
0. Tadashi: Dandan-na/ne: thank you/sorry
0. Masaharu: Gamadasu - to work hard
0. Kumiko: Gurashika - to be sad
0. Yuka: Gya-- : “so,” very, much, etc
0. Tomoko: Ut-tate - to get dressed up



Sakura in Menda

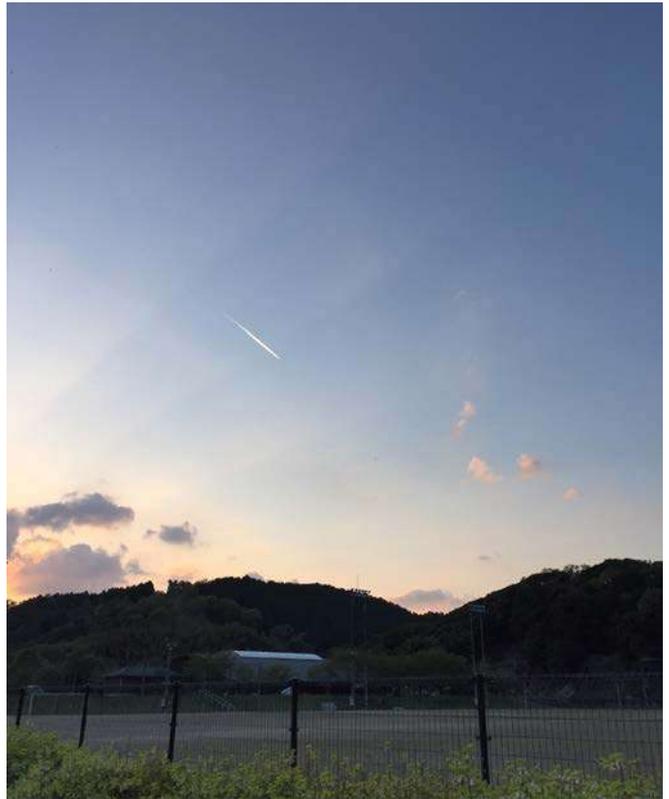


Asagiri's Advanced Eikaiwa

*Photos by
Eugene Kim*



Looking at Aso before the Driving Test



Walking at the park at Kuma Village



Seeing more rice paddies at Kuma Village

Summer Moments

By Ola Akindès

When you search online the words 'moments' and 'app', you find in the top results the application Moments from Facebook. Its description goes as follows "Moments helps you create shared photo albums with your friends and family."

When was the last time you stopped and looked at the events of your day, the marking moments, the happy ones or the dull ones? The melody of our life is a harmony of all these moments, I think. Fortunately for many, they oftentimes take selfies and the best shots of the places and events that they visit. I wonder how many of these gems we would remember on a bad day without having to scroll down our social media feed. That's the reason why we should probably regularly take a mental picture, as well, of the things that are happening around us. We may not always have a well-furnished feed of camera pictures, but our hearts and memories would vibrate with the thousands of moments that will rhythm our senile days I hope.

Should you be like me, who forget to grab a camera for a selfie because I am too busy enjoying the moments of life, the Facebook app will be of no use to you. I always get frustrated when I look at my Facebook Moments collections. They always feature random Facebook posts, pranks or cute baby and animal featuring videos. But no really significant moment finds their way to the online world. Not that life isn't amazing in our beautiful Kumamoto, but rather because it is. So much so, that it cannot easily be captured in a selfie. So I hope you can enjoy these few moments.

The Magic of the fireflies

We drove for a little less than an hour, from Tamana to Kikuchi. The weather couldn't have been better. We were told that the best time to see the fireflies was a day before the rain. So, we went, hoping to catch a glimpse of the cadenced but silent fireworks that Mother Nature had prepared for us. My Japanese teacher and now very good friend K always gracefully accepts being the driver of our impromptu escapades.

We might have been too excited, since we came way ahead of the recommended time to see the little flying stars. So we decided to have supper at a restaurant, in downtown Kikuchi. The walls were covered with consigned bottles of various sake, shōchū and other hard liquors. This tiny restaurant was granted almost a perfect score on the online reviews. And this with reason, the food was delicious. A rice porridge in crab broth, a juicy and unctuous paned eggplant, tempura vegetables and fried chicken with a fried rice dish that, so I was told, is a specialty of Kumamoto Prefecture.

With a very happy tummy, we joined the firefly festival. It was an hour-or-two walk inside the confines of the riverbed. As we got away from the city lights, the wall of bamboo and trees on the side of the river illuminated with thousands of intermittent, heartbeat-rhythmed lights, a gigantic Christmas tree-looking display of the beauty of nature and the reminder that we are part of something bigger, of something purely beautiful.

Rice planting and mud fights

I have never feared being hands-on. If you live in a rural area, you might want to try this during the next rice planting season. Not far from my small Tamana city, between Gyokuto and Tensui, lies a set of fields that are owned by a young farmer. He used to be a chef in Yamaguchi Prefecture, but moved a little less than a decade ago. His farms produce organic, traditionally maintained rice and other crops. Every year, as a kick off for the rice planting season, he organizes, with many others, a family day out where both children and parents can plant the rice they'll themselves harvest when the time is ripe. I joined my teacher colleague and her family to their annual muddy excursion.

Comfortably dressed we sat at the back of little pickup trucks and drove off a small pathway between branches, then slalomed down a steep, tiny, bumpy trail to the rice paddies. The bumps in the road made our five-minute ride even more thrilling. Buttered in our sunscreens and mosquito-repellent sprays we joined the farmers in the warm mud. Barefoot, facing east, we started transplanting the rice seedlings in lines, a few stems together at about a foot from each other. Our noisy group had roughly a dozen children, some as young as 4 or 5 years old, others in their pre-teen years, and just as much adults. In about an hour we could already admire the fruit of our labor: wavy lines of rice plants were now proudly erected in the previously barren paddies of mud. Each of these little green spots would produce about one bowl of rice, the farmer told us. All of us would meet again in few months to harvest our rice.

Planting rice wouldn't be as fun if it wasn't followed by the mud races and fights. There were no winners or losers, the goal being to get muddy. The children picked snails, adopted frogs or jumped in the stream on their way back to the cars. Finally we all had a garden hose water splash in the backyard of the farmer's house and a popsicle as a reward for our well-done labor.

As the rainy season approaches every year, announcing typhoons, landslides, the ever present heat and humidity, what better way to tame humidity and heat than having a mud fight?



Unloading the rice seedlings from the trucks



Family rice planting

Speaking French with the unusual suspects

If your first language is French, coming to Japan to teach English is not a common “condition”. For us Canadians it does happen, since our country is one of the special bilingual ones on this earth. Being a French speaker in Kumamoto Prefecture can be a pretty lonely business. I only met a handful of people able to speak French since last year. One of them, my Japanese sister, studied some French many decades ago in university. She can still understand a little bit of it. Thanks to her family being one of the oldest in my city, I was invited by the Tamana Lutheran Kindergarten to have an hour playtime in French with their little students. As a former Sunday school teacher, I love playing with children, singing songs and rhymes. Obviously, I said yes.

The kindergarten adopts a country as a theme for the year. The students would learn different things relating to that country throughout the year: culture, music, cuisine, dress-up parties, etc. Isn't it great to expose young children to different cultures that early? This year they chose FRANCE. Various guest speakers, cooking chefs, and other French speaking volunteers, like me, would visit all year round to expose the three- to five-year-old students to France, its language and culture. All the eighty curious, active and talkative little persons had something to say, both in Japanese and French!

I prepared few songs, a few collages, colorings, and even writing puzzles. By the end of my hour of volunteering, they sang their ABCs from the top of their lungs, knew “Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes” all in French, made French flags, some even wrote a few words in French. All of them came to me with a smile in their bright sparkling, staring eyes, and said: “MERCI!”

I am pretty sure there is an association, a group or organization somewhere near you, who needs your uniqueness and who cries out for it. Reaching out to them helps you remember and reconnect with who you are. That is what it did for me.



Visiting a local kindergarten



French language activity with kindergarteners

Two-wheeled

Along with the typical New Year's resolution takers, I decided to get rid of what I call my "gohan-baby". As you've probably seen, I do have a flab that I have never been able to lose. Annoyingly, that little monster seems to have gotten a life of its own recently. I used to be more active but, like any other, I get comfortable and lazy pretty fast. My friend from my gospel group, in a show of solidarity, introduced me to her cycling friend Ken, who then brought me to the man who is now my cycling Sensei, Toshinori San. It didn't take me long to figure out that I was out of my league.

Sensei, who is also the owner of the Xroad Bicycle Shop in Omuta, is a guru when it comes to cycling and has toured Canada, the USA, Australia, most countries in Europe and obviously Japan on his bike. Having traveled that much around the world, he is very fluent in English, which was of great help. He launched an extra beginner cycling group for my sake since I can't do hills and Japan has a lot of those. All the members of his other cycling groups that regularly meet for rides are not only fit and dedicated, but some are competitive, too. They span from their late teens to their seventies! Many are often on the podiums around Japan for challenges, races and other fun off-trail cycling events in Aso, Amakusa and all over the place.

So here I am, waking up before dawn, putting on my cycling gear, driving to our meeting point (since I'm not that fit yet to cycle there and still survive our rides) and cycling my butt off for three hours to wherever fate, or rather the careful planning for safety and effort balancing of Sensei, leads us. Nevertheless, I am now discovering how far I can go, how high I can fly, or better yet, spin.

I have now started to surprise myself by going for random spins around Kumamoto's countryside paths, tackling the ascent to Yamaga onsen to enjoy a foot spa, or going to the beach near Nagasu just for a quick splash.

Along the way I am meeting a set of very friendly and encouraging cyclists, and an even bigger crowd of locals who randomly hand me a fruit or a drink to encourage my efforts. All of them try to communicate in English or understand my shaky Japanese.

"But, what about gohan-baby," you say? I still don't have a bikini body, but who cares? I'm enjoying my journey around Kumamoto's cycling paths and all that comes along with it: the sores, the chafing and the fun!



Cycling pathway between Nagomi and Yamaga



Tamei Beach, Tamana



Foot massage on the way to the foot spa



Yamaga Foot Onsen



Yamaga Foot Onsen

Thoughts on Leaving

By Laura McGhee

Initially, I thought I would stay in Kumamoto for two, maybe three years tops. But now, in my fifth and final year on JET, I wonder where the time has gone! As I start filling up boxes with cards from former students, gifts from coworkers, and a random assortment of knick-knacks I got around the country, I cannot help but feel nostalgic.

Living in a foreign country has presented its own challenges, and trying everyday to adapt to a culture, language, and place different from what I was accustomed to was, in short, exhausting. But amidst the thousands of cultural faux pas I have committed while in this country, such as forgetting to take off the bathroom slippers when leaving the toilet (oops!), there have been remarkable experiences that have changed me.

One of these experiences has been getting into hiking. Spending the first 22 years of my life in the egregiously flat Midwest must be what has drawn me to the mountains. My first day at my base school, one of the English teachers gave me the grand tour of the school. We stopped in a hallway lined with windows and looked out toward Mt. Unzen, the active



Fall Foliage at Unzen

volcano just across the bay from our seaside town of Hondo. After hearing about how the volcano erupted in the 1700s and killed thousands of people, including many people in our town due to the tsunami that resulted from volcanic debris crashing into the bay, I felt a sense of impending danger. Why did I come here?

I asked, "What will you do if it erupts again?"

My colleague answered only with a smile. I am still trying to figure out what exactly that smile meant...

I then learned that many people climb this active volcano every day, and soon I wanted to give it a try as well. Seeing the mountains in the distance during my morning and evening commutes, the urge to explore became so overwhelming



Kaimon in Ibusuki

that it convinced me to finally become active after many long years of couch potato lifestyle. My first hike in Japan was around Mt. Unzen, and although my muscles felt like they were

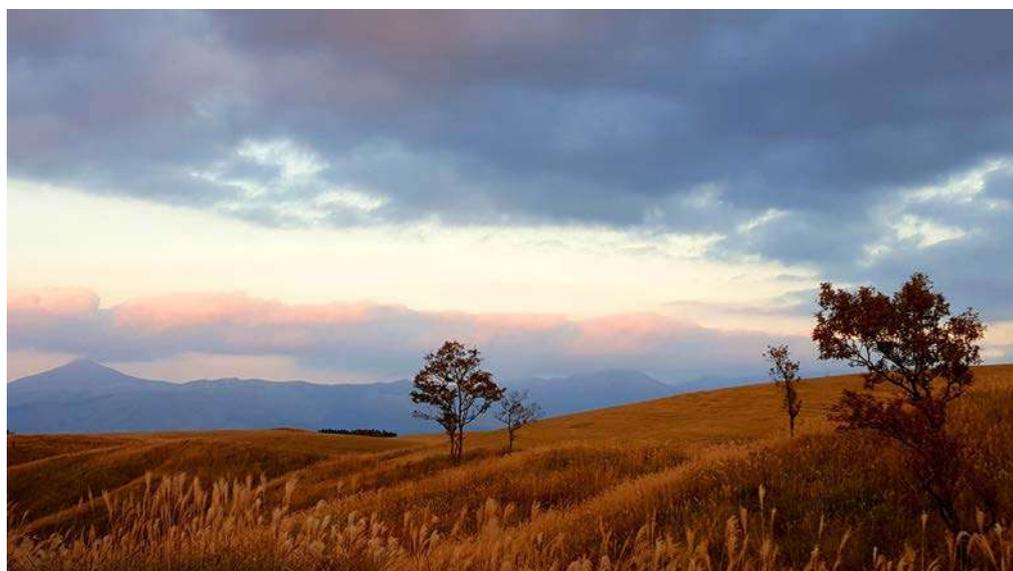
on fire every step of the way, the goal was clear and the rewards were great. If the feeling of accomplishment when reaching the peak was not enough, the views were sure convincing. I had never seen such beautiful scenery in person, like living in a photograph from National Geographic.

Layer upon layer of wild mountains gave way to wide valleys filled with small towns and patchwork farms, which in turn stretch out to meet the cobalt blue of the Ariake Sea. Even further, in the distant haze I could see the faint silhouettes of the hills of Amakusa. If I squinted, I could make out my town.

And yet, much closer was an immense pile of jagged boulders, smoldering and reeking of sulfur – the active crater of the very volcano upon which I was standing. Any sense of danger though was quickly diminished by the number of people around



Climbing Takachihonome in Kirishima



Aso-Kuju Plains



Kuju Sulfur Vents

me, all calmly enjoying the same views and a nice mid-hike bento lunch. I was hooked. Since then, I have used every spare weekend with nice weather to go on casual hikes around Kyushu and, when the chance presents, other parts of Japan and the world.

This interest in moving, surrounding myself with nature, and chasing a beautiful view is one souvenir that I will be taking home with me to the US.

But really, hiking is just one small thing that has changed me during my time here in Kumamoto. Basashi, Haiya Festivals, pottery, Kumamoto-ben, onigokko, the list goes on. But at the top of this list are my students, coworkers and friends. All these things have changed me, and I can only hope that I have brought some small, positive change to this place as well.



Golden Fields Surrounding Yufudake



Sunrise from Mt. Fuji



Atop Yufudake



Kirishima, Island in the Fog

Avoiding Saying “Goodbye”

By Jonny Cornish

“Then the moment comes that I was dreading ... but he says ‘See you soon’ instead.”

(Last interview with Iain Banks, one of my favourite authors, carried out by Stewart Kelly, for The Guardian.)

Students, coworkers, other JETs, host families, members of the local community, other people we have inexplicable encounters with. The relationships we forge on JET are often deep or profound, usually without us realising that they are so. I remember the faces and personalities of the handful of British JETs that I hung out with for three days at Tokyo Orientation, which was around five years ago. I remember thinking “these other JETs are going to be flung far across Japan from me. One to Hokkaido, one to Kobe, the others to places I don’t recognise. We’ll probably never see each other again after these three days, but what other option do I have than to engage with them, open myself up to them and really experience this time with them now?”

It turned out that one of them was placed in Oita, which I later found out was next to my placement, Kumamoto. I did meet with that JET a few times over the years, and even went to Tokyo for my first New Year’s in Japan and met a few of the others too. Some others though, particularly two of them I can remember right now (I can’t remember their names but that’s also true of people I’ve interacted with every day for years), I have never met again and in all likelihood never will. However, I could tell you about my experiences with them in that tiny blip that was Tokyo Orientation in great detail any time you asked, and it would evoke all the emotions and associations of that time in an instant.

Even if I hadn’t engaged with people, I think it would have been impossible not to engage with the place, or at least something. Pushing everything away and staying in a self-built blockade would have just delayed the inevitable and almost certainly caused damage down the line.

Having opened up to these people and remembering them now, I also remember not saying “goodbye” to them. It is such a final thing to say “goodbye”. Could you bring yourself to say to someone directly, “Well, we will never meet again. This is it.”? I also didn’t leave with empty promises or half-jokes of “definitely meeting up”. Insincerity on that front just makes something which is already difficult even worse.

Thinking of that time now, it is the same in many respects. The difference is simply that instead of 3 days of Tokyo Orientation, it is 5 years of my JET Programme experience in Kumamoto Prefecture. I am no further on how to avoid avoiding saying “goodbye”. I’ve had to part with many people who I have been close with over the years, even whole places of work. I have always used the excuse of “well I’ll still be in Kumamoto” to avoid saying “goodbye”. Now, at the end of my time on JET I am going to move to the UK with my wife, who is Japanese, and our daughter, who has lived her whole life here. I have already used the new excuse “well, my wife and daughter were born here so we’ll definitely come back now and again” to avoid saying “goodbye”.

We create such connections here in such a short amount of time. I suppose it is only natural that we don’t want to acknowledge that they are coming to an end, or even changing form. I’ve yet to find a way of saying “goodbye” even when the finality of a connection is clear. What else is there to do, other than avoid it?