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Christmas Market in Yokohama Red Brick Warehouse
Photo by Miyuki Takiguchi, Stripes Japan
Surviving holiday visits from elderly relatives

B eing stationed overseas in the military has its perks. No, I’m not talking about sightseeing and travel. I’m not referring to exposure to history and culture. I’m not discussing foreign language immersion. What I mean is this: when you PCS overseas, you won’t have to endure as many visits from relatives.

There, I said it. Unless you’ve been stationed in Hawaii — in which case your home has probably become a revolving door of freeload ing family and friends — living overseas affords you a layer of protection against unwanted company, and gives you the ultimate excuse to enjoy the holidays however you wish. As in, “The airline tickets cost $700 each, darn it ... Looks like we’ll be Zooming you on Thanksgiving again this year, Aunt Millie.”

When our family was stationed overseas, we couldn’t afford to visit us often either. At first, it seemed strange celebrating Thanksgiving and Christmas without visits to and from extended family members. But ultimately, we enjoyed some of our most memorable holidays skiing in the Alps, renting a cottage in France, pub bing in Ireland, visiting German Christmas markets, touring Prague, hiking in Switzerland, roaming around Italy. Left to our own devices, we managed to create grand family adventures.

Enjoy the freedom living overseas affords while you can, because you will, one day, receive orders back to the continental U.S. And as they say, “Payback’s a ...” Well, you know. Your other relatives have been covering for you during your overseas tours.

Aunt Millie.

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Military doctors and public health officers are advocating for a new vaccine mandate for active-duty troops that they say would prevent most cervical cancer in women and slow the growing threat of throat cancer in men.

Even amid resistance to the Pentagon’s COVID-19 vaccination mandate, they are urging all active-duty troops up to age 26 to be inoculated against HPV if they haven’t already taken the vaccine.

An editorial in the November issue of the journal Military Medicine lists some of the numerous vaccinations that are already required of service members. It argues that “it is time for the military” to add the HPV vaccine to the list.

With more than half of the 1.3 million service members in the catch-up vaccination age range of less than 26 years of age, we are poised to have more than half of the service members in white dress, Hope said, but also the vaccine mandates would address, Hope said, but also the tremendous patients with abnormal Pap smears before deployment.

The vast majority of HPV-related throat cancers are in white men, and some studies have shown that military veterans are at greater risk.

Certain strains of HPV cause vaccination rates for HPV-related throat cancers are in white men, and some studies have shown that military veterans are at greater risk.

Just 16% of men that age had received at least one dose. “There’s been this stigma around the vaccine, and there’s also been a stigma for men,” Hope said. “They just think it’s a women’s disease.” Service member HPV vaccination rates are lower than civilian rates, she said, with only 26% of active-duty women 17 to 26 years old reporting that they received one shot and less than half of those getting the second dose. Only 6% of active-duty men the same age reported getting even one shot.

“The vaccination rate for male HPV is low,” Hope said. “But for men, it’s abysmal. That’s obviously our big missing piece.” German virologist Harald zur Hausen, who was awarded a Nobel Prize for demonstrating the connection between HPV and cervical cancer and laid the groundwork for the vaccine, has argued that it’s at least equally vital for males to be vaccinated as females because they act as HPV superspreaders.

“All over the world, young men between 15 and 45 have far more sexual partners than girls in the same age group. They transmit the infection relatively easily,” zur Hausen told Germany’s dw.com news outlet.

The HPV vaccine is one of only two cancer-preventive vaccines in existence. The other, the hepatitis-B vaccine, which prevents some forms of liver cancer, has been required for military recruits since 2002.

“It’s not only cancer that the vaccine mandates would address, Hope said, but also the time, trauma and expense in dealing with female troops’ pre-cancers found during routine checkups.

“All these Pap-smear visits, the biopsies, it requires a lot of visits, and it costs a lot of money and a lot of time away from work,” she said. “We’ve had numerous patients with abnormal Pap smears before deployment. It can delay deployment.”

ABBY MONTGOMERY, Nancy.nancy@stripes.com

For more information, call: (046)825-0061 Fax: (046)822-0561 (Mon – Sat: 10:00-18:00)
Every year thousands of people flock to parks, malls and other attractions to marvel at the elaborate and colorful light displays – from the northern island of Hokkaido to the southern islands of Okinawa – set up to ring in the holiday spirit with dazzling brilliance throughout Japan.

These displays, or “illuminations,” are some of Japan’s most popular winter attractions, drawing as many as 80,000 annual visitors to smaller locales such as the Itoman Peaceful Illumination in Okinawa, and millions in bigger cities on the mainland.

In addition to promoting the holiday spirit, there are more practical reasons for winter illuminations in Japan, according to Takashi Otomo of the Japan Illumination Association.

“Daytime is getting shorter, the air becomes dry and clear, the temperature difference between day and night decreases and fine weather is continuous – all these wintertime factors in Japan make optimal illuminations that look beautiful,” he said. “Actually, winter is the best season for illuminations in Japan.”

The tradition of winter illuminations in Japan is generally considered to have started in Osaka when Tsutenkaku Tower was lit up for the National Industrial Exposition in 1903. The following year, Meiji-Ya, a high-end import grocer, displayed a lighted Christmas tree outside in Tokyo’s Ginza Ward to commemorate Japan’s victory in the Russo-Japanese War. However, Otomo said the practice likely started earlier.

“In the 1890s, some foreign ships berthed at Kobe Port would be decorated with lights to celebrate various occasions,” he said. “Kobe locals who saw these illuminations adopted them for their own celebrations; that would be the very start of this tradition (in Japan).”

Although public facilities have been decorated with illuminations for longer than a century, individuals started illuminating their houses about 20 years ago, according to Keiji Nishimura, managing director of the Japan Illumination Association.

“Company employees who were dispatched overseas were introduced to holiday illuminations and brought back this Western holiday tradition to their homes in Japan,” Nishimura said. “It has gradually spread year after year and today, you can see illuminated houses throughout the nation.”

“These days, we are seeing individuals purchase some expensive illumination devices that had only been used for public space in the past,” Otomo added. “As people are becoming more aware of the beauty of holiday illuminations, and home illuminations are catching on, I expect to see them continue to increase every year.”

The spread of home illuminations, in part, is a result of the modern-day light-emitting diode, or LED, which makes this energy-consuming tradition more efficient and less expensive. “There are a lot of merits to using LEDs,” Otomo said.

One LED consumes only 0.06 watts, less than 10 percent of what a conventional electric bulb uses. It also produces a lot less heat, reducing the risk of fire to trees and wooden structures.

As an added bonus, recently
developed blue and white LEDs allow for more diverse and creative displays. While the home illuminations are growing, public light displays become more sophisticated every year, introducing visual and sound effects.

The recent trend in public illuminations is to create elaborate illusions by combining different LED lights with high-tech 3-D projection mapping, according to Nishimura. While Kanucha Resort Stardest Fantasia in Okinawa will display 1 million LED lights, Sagamino Illumillion in Kanagawa Prefecture will display 6 million LED lights in sync with music. Luckily, for those not yet ready to invest in millions of LEDs and laser lights for their front yard, most of the public illuminations are free and easy to access by public transportation. However, while a few may run until late February, most end after Christmas or New Year’s. Many of these are held outdoors, so they are great for maintaining social distancing guidelines while still allowing your family to enjoy one of the holiday season favorites safely. There are many to visit within a short drive from your base. Below are a few good options near some of the bases in Japan. Stay safe and happy holidays!

takiguchi.takahiro@stripes.com

ILLUMINATIONS NEAR YOU

YOKOHAMA MILIGHT - YOKOHAMA MINATO MIRAI ILLUMINATIONS (Kanagawa pref.)
ADDRESS: Yokohama Station East Exit-Minato Mirai Grand Mall Park Sakura Dori
WEBSITE: http://ymm.illumination.jp/
ADMISSION: Free
G From 4 p.m. to 11 p.m.
G Runs through Feb. 13, 2022

THE JEWEL OF SHONAN (Kanagawa pref.)
ADDRESS: 2-3-28 Enoshima Fujisawa, Kanagawa Pref. 251-0036
WEBSITE: https://enoshima-seacandle.com/event/shonannohoseki/
ADMISSION: Prices vary by attraction from 200 yen per adult/100 yen per child up to 800 yen per adult/400 yen per child. Group prices, one day passes available.
G From 5 p.m. to 8 p.m.
G Runs through Feb. 28, 2022

FLOWER FANTASY - THE GARDEN OF ILLUMINATED FLOWERS 2020-2021 (Tochigi pref.)
ADDRESS: 607 Hasamacho, Ashikaga, Tochigi Pref. 329-4216
WEBSITE: https://www.ashikaga.co.jp/flowerfantasy_special2021/jp/
ADMISSION: Adults: 1,000 yen Children: 600 yen
G From 3:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.
G Runs through Feb. 14, 2022

* Please follow base guidelines set by your command if, and when, you decide to travel.
* Locations above require temperature checks, face masks, and adhere to social-distancing practices.

With information from Metropolis Japan.

Light conversation

During the holiday season, towns and parks across Japan are decked out in beautiful lights. If you are checking out some illuminations, here are some helpful Japanese words and phrases to make the experience even more fun.

“Dokode inumasen ga mirare masuka?” = Where can I see illuminations?
“inumasen” = illumination, “dokode” = where, “miraremasuka” = can see)

“Icumenasen wo mini ikimasen ka?” = Let’s go see illuminations, shall we?
“mini” = to see, “ikimasen ka?” = let’s go, shall we?

“Kirei desu ne?” = It’s beautiful, isn’t it?
“kirei” = beautiful, “desu ne?” = isn’t it?

“Reinboo Burijji ga raitoappu shite masu.” = The Rainbow Bridge is lit up.
“Reinboo Burijji” = Rainbow Bridge, “raitoappu” = light up

“Samu desu ne?” = It is cold, isn’t it?
“samu” = cold

“Konde imasu ne?” = It is crowded, isn’t it?
“konede” = crowded

“Ashimoto ni kiwo tsukete kudasai.” = Watch your step, please.
“ashimoto” = step, “kiwo tsukete” = watch/take care of, “kudasai” = please

“Shashin wo tori masho ka?” = Shall I take a picture?
“tori masho” = will take

“Atatakai koohii wo katte kimasho ka?” = Shall I go buy hot coffee?
“atatakai” = warm, “koohii” = coffee, “katte kimasho” = will go and buy

“Tanoshikatta desu.” = I enjoyed it.

WHEN ON OKINAWA

You can also say it in “Uchinaaguchi” (island dialect) like this:
“Churasan yaa?” = It is beautiful, isn’t it?
“churasan” = beautiful, “yaa?” = isn’t it?

“Umusatan.” = I enjoyed it.

-Takahiro Takiguchi, Stripes Japan

Pronunciation key: “A” is short (like “ah”); “E” is short (like “get”); “I” is short (like “it”); “O” is long (like “old”); “U” is long (like “tube”); and “AI” is a long “I” (like “hike”). Most words are pronounced with equal emphasis on each syllable, but “OU” is a long “O” with emphasis on that syllable.

Takiguchi.takahiro@stripes.com
Here are the best onsen hot springs in Japan? I believe it is Kusatsu Onsen. This is without a doubt one of the onsen areas many Japanese would like to visit once in their lives, and I was no exception. Last fall, I made the 3-hour trek via train and bus to this hot spring mecca. At JR Ueno Station, I hopped on the Tokkyu Kusatsu, a limited express train, bound for the JR Naganohara-Kusatsu-guchi Station. It was about 2.5-hour ride, then a 30-minute bus ride to the Kusatsu Bus Terminal.

About Kusatsu Onsen Resort

Kusatsu Onsen, along with Gero Onsen in Gifu and Arima Onsen in Hyogo, is one of the three most renowned in Japan. At 32,300 liters of water flowing per minute, the onsen holds the title of the most water flow in the country. Bearing a strong smell of hydrogen sulfide, these waters are also the most acidic. Kusatsu Town sits 1,200 meters above sea level and the weather makes it a great spot for soaking in the hot springs and skiing in the winter and hiking, cycling and golfing in the spring and summer. And, if you have tattoos, this area has various baths which are tattoo-friendly and do not require you covering them up.

Yubatake (Hot Spring Field)

About a 10-minute walk from the terminal took me to Yubatake, or onsen field, which is the symbol of the onsen resort. It was designated one of Japan’s national scenic spots in 2017. From here, you can walk to all of the major attractions in the area. As much as 4,400 liters of hot spring water well up from this field per minute. The field adjusts its temperature, which is suitable for bathing as it flows into wooden barrels and is distributed to local hotels and public baths. Try the foot baths around this area for a relaxing break.

Chouju-ten (Bun shop)

After lunch, I made my way to Saino-kawara, but not before a manjyu shop I passed caught my attention. Chouju-ten sells manjyu sweet buns with different fillings. Three cheerful, elderly staff members stood on the street aggressively offering fresh, piping-hot buns paired with a free cup of green tea. You can pick between sweet red bean paste, chestnut paste, and green bean paste. This is a great opportunity to have a little sweet dessert after lunch.

Saino-kawara park & outdoor bath

Saino-kawara Park is located only about 500 meters from Yubatake. Here, about 1,400 liters of hot water wells up and makes an onsen river. There are several free foot baths, giving tourists time for rest. A few minutes’ walk from the entrance took me to Saino-Kawara Outdoor Bath. According to my guidebook, the men’s section is large enough to accommodate around 100 people at a time. The women’s is a bit smaller, and still the combined dimension is about 500 square meters. Most onsen do not accept bathers with tattoos, but this one does! I felt as though I was bathing in luxury with the wonderful mountainous view this onsen provides.
Royal course
For my overnight stay, I booked the Kusatsu Onsen Hotel Village. This hotel is surrounded by lush forest and was a regular lodging choice for the former emperor and empress on state visits to the annual Kusatsu International Music Academy. The next morning, I joined a guided tour for the Royal Course offered by the hotel. This is a guided hike on a trail favored by the former emperor and empress. The guide was a wealth of information and this nature walk was invigorating. Hotel guests can participate in the guided tour, but the trail is open to the public.

Otaki-no-yu Onsen
I finished my trip to Kusatsu with one last bath at the Otaki-no-yu Onsen, a 10-minute-walk from the hotel. The onsen is famous for awase bath, which has a set of several baths with different temperatures. The baths in the men's section ranged from 38 to 46 degrees Celsius. You start at the lowest temperature bath and then gradually move up, as it is believed to be a healthier way of taking a bath. It was a funny experience for me to move from a bath to another several times in a short minute.

After my relaxing and healthy bath, I left the onsen and hopped on the loop bus headed for the terminal for only 100 yen.

The onsen town has excellent baths and restaurants, and its symbol, Yubatake, is superb enough to have tourists to come back to see it again. The surrounding nature is also a plus as it will refresh and heal visitor’s hearts and minds. Make plans for your relaxing getaway to Kusatsu soon!

Katayanagi.Kihiro@stripes.com

Kusatsu Onsen Tourism Association
ADDRESS: 28 Kusatsu Town, Agatsuma County, Gunma Prefecture
HOURS: 8:30 a.m. – 6 p.m.
URL: https://www.kusatsu-onsen.ne.jp
TEL: 0279-88-0800

Chouju-ten (bun shop)
ADDRESS: 495-1 Oazakusatsu, Kusatsu Town, Agatsuma County, Gunma Prefecture
HOURS: 8 a.m. – 6 p.m.
URL: https://tabelog.com/gunma/A1004/A100402/10007878/
TEL: 0279-88-6661

Sai-no-kawara Onsen
ADDRESS: 521-3 Oazakusatsu, Kusatsu Town, Agatsuma County, Gunma Prefecture
HOURS: Apr – Nov 7 a.m. – 8 p.m. / Dec – Mar 9 a.m. – 8 p.m. (entry closes at 7:30 p.m. all the year)
URL: http://sainokawara.com/en/
TEL: 0278-88-6167

Otaki-no-yu Onsen
ADDRESS: 596-13 Oazakusatsu, Kusatsu Town, Agatsuma County, Gunma Prefecture
HOURS: 9 a.m. – 9 p.m. (entry closes at 8 p.m.)
URL: http://ohtakinoyu.com/en/
TEL: 0279-88-2600

Tattoo-friendly onsen
According to the Kusatsu Onsen Tourism Association, the following onsen baths allow patrons with tattoos. No tattoo coverings are required, nor are there any other rules regarding size or amount of tattoos. If you have any questions, please check with the onsen at the websites below.
• Sai-no-kawara Onsen (http://sainokawara.com/en)
• Otaki-no-yu Onsen (http://ohtakinoyu.com/en)
• Goza-no-yu Onsen (http://gozanoyu.com/en)

Facilities with private onsen available
• Kusatsu Now Resort Hotel (https://www.kusatsu-now.co.jp/private-baths/)
• Nakamura-ya Hotel (https://kusatsu-nakamura-ya.com/hotsping)
• Gensen-Ichi-no-yu Hotel (https://www.kusatsu-ichinoyu.com/private-baths/)

Kusatsu Onsen Hotel Village
ADDRESS: 618 Kusatsu, Kusatsu Town, Agatsuma County, Gunma Prefecture
URL: http://www.hotelvillage.co.jp/en/
TEL: 0279-88-3232

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Boasting the greatest height of domestic single peak mountains in the country, Mount Fuji is loved as a sightseeing attraction representative of Japan throughout the world. In fact, over 300,000 mountaineers flock to it every year.

In addition to being registered as a World Cultural Heritage in 2013, recent years have once more seen various features in the media seeking to express the allure of the mountain, further calling attention to it. Now, we will reveal 17 of Mount Fuji’s unknown secrets, conquering the peak of this majestic symbol of Japan!

1. What is ‘Red Fuji’?

“Red Fuji” is a phenomenon that occurs during sunrise and sunset when the mountain shines in bright red.

Usually, Mount Fuji impresses with the contrast of the blue mountain range’s peak, being covered in white snow. Under certain conditions, it changes its appearance to a crimson color of sublime beauty.

The time between late summer and early autumn brings several factors together that make this possible, including clear air and altostratus clouds that reflect the red light.

A rare phenomenon, “Red Fuji” is a seasonal word. Because the snow on Mt. Fuji’s peak begins to melt and exposes the reddish at the beginning of summer, the tinged sunlight emphasizes this and the mountain appears vividly red.

The ukiyo-e artist Katsushika Hokusai’s famous work called “Fine Wind, Clear Morning” (gaifū kaisei) of the “Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji” series is the reason why the “Red Fuji” became so famous.

Gai means southerly breeze; with the cirrocumulus clouds floating in the scenery of a blue sky, the drawing of the revered mountain’s crimson-dyed appearance boasts a spectacular impact.

2. Mossie, Japan’s very own Nessie in lake Motosu

In the 1970s, an unidentified mysterious animal (UMA) later named “Mossie” was sighted in Yamanashi Prefecture’s Lake Motosu, and it caused a huge stir during the time of its alleged sighting.

Mossie is said to be 30 meters (about 98 feet) in length, with a few humps at the time.

Nevertheless, there are many theories. One of the most well-accepted one is that it was probably an enormous sturgeon that was released into Lake Motosu during the time of its alleged sighting.

Sturgeons don’t usually grow to the size of the reported UMA, but the conjecture is that being released into Lake Motosu gave it a unique growth environment, allowing it to reach the size purported in the claims.

3. Mt. Fuji was the first ski site in Japan

Skiing is a representative sport of the winter season, and many today still flock to ski resorts when winter rolls around to have a bit of fun in the snow. But you didn’t know that Mt. Fuji was actually the site of the very first bout of ski activity in Japan!

Back in 1911, when Austrian soldiers, Major Theodor Edler von Lerch - known as the father of skiing in Japan - and Egon Edler von Kratzer skied down from the 9th stage of Mt. Fuji, it marked the start of the sport in Japan.

There’s still a plaque on the 5th stage of Mt. Fuji commemorating this event down to this day! Here’s another trivia for you: The first two Japanese to successfully ski downhill from the Fuji mountain top were Kōki Takei and Hājime Katsuda in the year 1935.

4. The top 3 things Japanese want to dream of!

“1. Fuji, 2. hawk, 3. eggplant!” is the top three of things to dream of during the first night of the new year.

If Mount Fuji, a hawk, or an eggplant appears in the first dream of the first night of the New Year, it is said to be an auspicious omen.

There are only speculations about the origin of this, but one explanation states that these three words sound similar to other good things; Fuji sounds like buji (be in good health), taka (hawk) sounds like takai (to succeed), and nasu (eggplant) sounds like nasu (the fulfillment of a wish).

5. Where are those famous Fuji pictures taken?

If you want to photograph Mount Fuji’s scenery, you cannot ignore the Fuji Five Lakes! At the lakes Kawaguchiko, Saiko, Yamanakako, Shojiko, and Moto-suko, formed when the cave-ins of the mountain’s eruptions were filled with water, various pictures of sceneries can be taken, from lake shores to Mount Fuji.

Among them, Kawaguchiko and Yamanakako are famous as locations that numerous photographers visit, regardless of whether they’re professionals or amateurs. If you are especially lucky, you can encounter both the rare Red Fuji and Upside-down Fuji at once!

This world-famous view of Mount Fuji can be seen at Arakurayama Sengen Park in the city of Fujisohida, Yamanashi Prefecture. With the sublime slope in the background, the scenery of Chureito Pagoda, a piece of sublime Japanese architecture, makes for a magnificent view.

The seasonal cherry blossoms and autumn leaves make it that much more exciting!
Mount Fuji

Mount Fuji is one of the most iconic and recognizable mountains in the world. It is located on the island of Honshu in Japan and is the highest mountain in Japan. Mount Fuji is known for its beautiful shape and symmetrical form, which is said to resemble the shape of a woman's face. It is also considered a sacred mountain and is a popular destination for hiking and climbing.

8 Is it true that Mount Fuji has a front and backside?

Mount Fuji is often referred to as having a front and backside, with the southern side being considered the “front” and the northern side being considered the “back.” This is due to the mountain’s shape, which is wide and flat on the southern side and narrow and steep on the northern side. The southern side is also known as “Mt. Fuji” and is considered the more picturesque side, while the northern side is known as “Shindo Fuji” and is considered the more challenging and less visually appealing side.

9 Mount Fuji originally was called ‘Immortal mountain’!

Mount Fuji has a rich history and is associated with many legends and stories. One of the most famous is the tale of Kaguya, a princess who fell in love with a humble farmer and married him. When she realized they were not of the same social status, she took her own life. Her grief-stricken lover placed her body on top of the mountain and poured the elixir of immortality on her, hoping to bring her back to life. However, she remained on the mountain, turned to stone, and became remembered as one of the mountain’s spirits.

10 Mount Fuji’s peak

Mount Fuji has a beautiful peak that is often referred to as “the Immortal Mountain” or “the Immortal Mountain Peak.” It is said to be the highest peak in Japan and is a popular destination for climbers and hikers. The peak is also said to be a sacred place and is associated with many legends and stories, such as the tale of Kaguya and the elixir of immortality.

11 ‘Dokkoisho’ is said to have originated from Mt. Fuji

The phrase “Dokkoisho” is said to have originated from Mount Fuji. It is a Japanese phrase that translates to “let’s go up the mountain.” It is often used by climbers and hikers to encourage each other to continue climbing and to express their determination to reach the summit.

See Fuji on Page 10

Mount Fuji is a beautiful and iconic mountain that is loved by people all over the world. Its beauty and majesty continue to inspire people to this day, and it remains an important symbol of Japan’s rich history and culture.
12 This rare Mount Fuji doesn’t appear often!

When Mount Fuji is reflected up-side-down on the calm, waveless waters of alake, you see “Upside-down Fuji.” This can be seen on days with clear air and without any wind, allowing us to enjoy various different scenery that change with the season. This is the upside-down image that is printed on the back of 1,000-yen bills!

13 You can have a wedding at Mount Fuji?!

At Fujisan Hongō Sengen Taisha, wedding ceremonies can be held at the main hall on days without festivals or events. The vermilion-lacquered precincts are beautiful; cherry blossoms and wisteria bloom at the lush Asama shrine that is also a popular sightseeing destination. The wedding ceremony itself is en-gulfed in traditional court music as the ancient ceremonial rites are performed; blessed words are not only cast upon friends and family but also on the many tourists that visit the Asama shrine.

Should there be such a ceremony as you visit the shrine yourself, let yourself be engulfed by the warm atmosphere and share the happiness of the couple.

14 An active volcano comprised of three volcanoes

Mt. Fuji is a popular place that many mountaineers try to tackle during the summer climbing season, giving the impression that it’s completely safe and harmless. But, wait! Did you know that Mt. Fuji is actually still considered an active volcano? In fact, while it looks like a single mountain, Mount Fuji is made up of three successive volcanoes. At the base of Mount Fuji the Komitake Volcano, the first eruptions of which may have occurred some 600,000 years ago. Around 100,000 years ago, the Ko-Fuji (Older Fuji) Volcano was superimposed on it, and on top of this, the Shin-Fuji (Younger Fuji) Volcano formed around 10,000 years ago, forming the mountain we know today.

Because the last time Mt. Fuji erupted was more than 300 years ago, for a while it was classified as a dor-mant volcano. Sometime around the 1960s, however, the Meteorological Office changed the definition of an active volcano to all volcanoes that have ever been record-ed to erupt before.

Ever since then, Mt. Fuji has been classified as an active volcano. In 2003, the Coordinating Committee for Predic-tion of Volcano Erup-tions redefined an active volcano as a volcano that has erupted within the last 10,000 years and is still show-ing signs of tumoral activity.

Mt. Fuji continues to be classified as an active volcano under this new definition as well.

15 Is Mount Fuji on private land? Who owns it?

“Who does Mount Fuji belong to?” is a question that most Japanese would answer with “Everyone.” However, a part of it – from 3,360m to the top – is actually private land!

Mt. Fuji strides across Shizuoka Prefecture and Yamanashi Prefecture, so debates about who actually owns the place came up from time to time. Many naturally assume as a Mount Fuji fact that such an iconic mountain would be owned by the state. But the truth is, from the 8th stage and up-wards, Mt. Fuji is the private terri-to ry of Fujisan Hongō Sengen Taisha, which owns more than 3,300 temples around the island nation.

Takakura Ieyasu, the shogun of the Edo period who won the Battle of Sekigahara, constructed around 30 buildings such as the main hall as an expression of gratitude; it is said that in 1606, he donated the area from Mount Fuji’s Eighth Station upward to become Fujisan Hongō Sengen Tai-sha’s shrine grounds.

16 The first woman to climb disguised as a man

Nowadays, Mt. Fuji is an enjoyable mountain climbing site for both men and women, but did you know that women were prohibited from this activity until 1872?

Specifically for Mt. Fuji, women were only allowed up to the 2nd stage. Back then, pilgrims would journey up Mt. Fuji for seclusion training, and having women around apparently interfered with the training, hence the prohibition.

Therefore, when Tatsuko Takakawa, a woman who really wanted to climb Mt. Fuji made her climb, she had to clip her hair short and dress up as a man to do so — a show of her steely deter-mination.

In 1833, Tatsu and five other men reached the summit without incident, and that’s why she’s said to be the first woman to climb Mt. Fuji.

After this, Tatsu became an advocate for gender equality and worked towards lifting the prohibition on women climbing Mt. Fuji.

17 The first non-Japanese to climb Mt. Fuji?

Regular visitors to Mt. Fuji will probably know about the Rutherford Alcock memorial plaque near Fujiminoi-ya City’s Murayamaseg- en Shrine Information Center.

Sir Alcock was the first British ambassado-r in Japan. He reached Mt. Fuji’s summit in 1860 together with his pet dog and 100 guards and is said to be the first non-Japanese to climb Mt. Fuji to the top.

This experience was recorded in one of the books he later wrote, The Capital of the Tycoon. The first non-Japanese woman to reach Mt. Fuji’s peak was Lady Fanny Parkes in the year 1867.
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Akita prefecture is located in Northwest Tohoku, stretching along the coast facing the Sea of Japan. The name may sound familiar to dog lovers, but Akita has much more going for it besides its association with the famous dog breed. Beneath the surface, Akita promises a range of discoveries to delight visitors to the region.

From the ancient customs of the Nanahage beasts to the old samurai town of Kakunodate, Akita’s culture is diverse. For festival fans, Akita can promise some true highlights – witness the giant bamboo pole festival fans, Akita can promise some true highlights – witness the giant bamboo pole lanterns of the Kanto Festival in summer, or the ‘kamakura’ snow igloos of Yokote during the colder months.

Here are the top 10 things to do in Akita, in no particular order:

1. **Kakunodate Samurai District**

   Explore traditional samurai architecture in the ancient samurai district of Kakunodate, where you’ll follow long, wide roads bordered by tall weeping trees – popular in the cherry blossom season.

   Popular spots include the Aoyagi Samurai Manor – which is perhaps the most well preserved across Japan. The estate features the Main House, an Armory, several galleries, the Akita Folk Museum, the Samurai Tool Museum and a beautiful garden connecting everything together.

   As well as well-maintained premises, a range of interactive activities will be sure to make your visit a memorable one. Try handling a samurai sword, wearing a helmet and even lifting a traditional Kago carriage used in the Edo period.

   Along the road, you can also drop by the Denshokan Museum, which exhibits traditional crafts and even allows you to witness demonstrations by master craftsmen. Here you can see Kaba-zaiku – craftsmanship that uses the bark of wild cherry trees to create distinctive patterns unique to this area of Japan.

2. **Ando Jozo Brewery**

   This traditional brewery has been making miso and soy sauce for hundreds of years in the southern part of Kakunodate.

   Traditional techniques honed through the ages, as well as taking inspiration from Ibaraki’s Hitachi region, have made Ando Jozo a regional favorite.

   Visitors can enjoy touring the historical premises as well tasting the miso/soy sauce samples.

3. **Akita Pref. Tokyo**

   Located in the Towada-Hachimantai National Park in Akita Prefecture, everything about Nyuto Onsen oozes style and sophistication. Beautifully set within a peaceful mountain valley covered with acres of virgin beech forest, this is one place where you can find real seclusion and an escape from the often suffocating pace of city life.

   Interestingly enough, the name Nyuto Onsen actually refers to a conglomerate of seven different spas located around the same mountain.

   Although all of them are relatively close to each other, you will either need your own transport or be prepared to walk several kilometers if you wish to see more than one of them.

4. **Akita Festival Center**

   Akita’s Kanto Festival, held annually every August, is a daunting spectacle and one of Tohoku’s best.

   Kanto refers to the giant bamboo poles decorated with bamboo lanterns. They are hoisted up high along the parade routes by dexterous dancers performing all manner of techniques – no small feat when you consider the largest weigh up to 50 kg.

   Find out for yourself at Akita’s Festival Center – handily open all year round. As well as learning a plethora of information about kanto and other local festivals, those who book in advance can try out the art of kanto themselves, under the instruction of a trained supervisor.
The Namahage are a traditional folklore symbol for the Oga region of Akita. While visually demonic-like in appearance, they are considered messengers of the mountain gods. February’s Namahage Sendo Festival sees a kagura-like performance take place at Shinzan Shrine, whilst the New Year sees them visit local villages in a tradition that continues to this day.

Throughout the rest of the year, the Namahage Museum in central Oga is the best place to witness and learn all about this local custom – and even try on the costumes for yourself.

The neighboring Oga Mayama Denshokan offers the chance to observe a live reenactment of the New Year custom. Well worth the entry to see the drama unfold!

Located at Senshu Park, Kubota Castle was built when the Satake clan, back in 1600, was forced to move north following defeat at the Battle of Sekigahara.

From the top floor of the castle, you can see the Akita downtown and central business district areas, all the way out to the Oga peninsula and the ocean beyond.

The castle grounds offer great scenery year around, especially during the cherry blossom bloom in Spring. In summer, lotus flowers dominate the surrounding moat.

Dakigaeri Gorge offers majestic scenery to those who make the effort to visit this area a little further out of Kakunodate.

Follow the old logging trail through tunnels and across bridges as it hugs the cliffs edge, high above an iridescent blue river.

Autumn is the busiest season but the rest of the warmer-weather months provide fantastic views with very few crowds.

Lake Tazawa in Akita is a stunning example of the natural beauty of northern Japan. With a rich history and variety of activities for tourists, whether you like hiking, swimming, boating, eating, or even just a relaxing stay at a hot springs inn, Lake Tazawa has all of that and much more.

Surrounding the lake is beautiful mountain scenery, and the relaxing atmosphere will help you wind down the second you arrive.

A trip to Akita prefecture is not all about sightseeing, with the region home to many local dishes well-known across Japan.

Kiritanpo are pounded rice skewers, which go great with miso and are often served in a hotpot, alongside maitake mushroom and Hinai chicken. This breed of chicken is native to Akita and tastes great in any number of dishes, including yakitori.

Inaniwa udon is a thin and chewy variant of this well-known noodle and considered one of the top 3 for udon brands across Japan.
Den is something you want to eat during the cold winter. You can readily eat den at a Japanese restaurant or a pub. It is a meal of boiling things like chopped radish and eggs, or tasty chikuwa fish cakes in a soy sauce or kombu soup stock for a long time to gain flavor. The ingredients inside den are called “odenate.”

History
Den originated back to dengaku, that is the meal of cutting tofu into rectangles and eating with miso on top. The popular way of putting “o” at the beginning of every word the court ladies used inside the Imperial Court in the Heian period and dengaku were mixed together and it became the name “oden.”

Differences in areas
Mainly in eastern Japan people use the concentrated taste of soy sauce to cook den so the color of the soup looks darker and in western Japan, people use the light taste of soy sauce to cook den so the color of the soup looks paler. In Kyushu or Okinawa, a richer taste is popular and the soup has the flavor of chicken or nymous tushi. In Kyoto, a delicate taste is popular and the soup has the flavor of shaved dried mackerel and kelp.

Convenience store den
Convenience stores sell den from autumn until spring. Lawson, one of the biggest convenience stores, uses a base soup of katsusubi (dried bonito flakes) from kairin and kelp from Hokkaido. For the Chubu region they add a flavor of muroaji-bushi (horse mackerel flakes). And for the Kyushu region, they add a flavor of beef, chicken and flying fish. There are different kinds of flavors depending on the area.

A unique canned den
You can even buy den from some vending machines. The ingredients inside are almost the same as regular den, but the odentane are not anything fragile like tofu. It can be preserved for a long time and can be used as emergency food in case of a disaster.

Introduction of oden
Den is a scrumptious winter soul food

Welcome to the first of a series of articles spotlighting select Japanese recipes from the new anime series, Isekai Izakaya Nobu! Whether you’re a fan already or have just stumbled upon the show, one thing is for sure: the dishes of gourmet anime Isekai Izakaya —Koto Aitheria no Izakaya Nobu— look absolutely amazing! Japanese star chef Ryuta Kijima created simple recipes based on the food served at Izakaya Nobu itself, for you to cook in your own kitchen at home. (Even if you’re not a giant anime fan, you’re still bound to enjoy these authentic Japanese foods!)

Today, we’re savoring the main dish of the first episode “Potatoes in Oden.” As the name suggests, den is the star of Nobu’s menu this time! It’s a one-pot dish that is an iconic Japanese winter food recipe and features plenty of ingredients: eggs, daikon, potatoes, and more delights! During the cold months, Japanese convenience stores sell den as bowls of different sizes or as individual ingredients, making it a much-beloved snack or meal all throughout Japan. Now, let’s start cooking!

Japanese oden daikon steak
Often seen in many food anime, daikon radish has recently found its way into Western supermarkets — but how to cook with daikon remains somewhat elusive! We think you’ll agree that when soaked in a hearty oden broth and then fried or grilled, this curious veggie turns a delicious emergency food in case of a disaster.

Yield
Makes 2 servings

Ingredients
- 2 Oden daikon pieces (*1)
- 2 Green onions
- 1 tablespoon Salad oil
- 10g Butter
- Sauce: 2 teaspoons soy sauce, 2 teaspoons cooking sake, 1 teaspoon mirin

Preparation
1) Chop the green onion finely.
2) Use a paper towel to soak up extra soup from your daikon pieces. Put them in an oiled, cold frying pan before turning up the heat.
3) Flip the daikon once they’re golden brown, put a lid on the pan and fry for another 5 minutes on low heat. Then arrange them on a plate.
4) Making the sauce: mix all ingredients for the sauce in the hot pan. Once little bubbles form, add the butter and mix well.
5) Pour the sauce over your daikon steak with a spoon. Top with green onions.
6) Itadakimasu!

*1 Chef Kijima uses daikon that has already been boiled in an odon soup. If you’re in Japan, you can easily buy the daikon readily made at a convenience store or buy odon soup and make it yourself. If you’re not in Japan, simply make oden soup yourself using dashi soup stock and seasoning it with soy sauce, sake, and sugar. Bring it to a boil, then put the daikon in and let it simmer for about 15 minutes. Important: the longer the daikon sits in the soup, the better it tastes! If you have time, turn off the heat and let the daikon swim in the soup for an hour or more.

*2 Chef Kijima uses oden-boiled potatoes. Buy or make them the same way as the daikon described above.

*3 Fukujinzuke are pickled vegetables, a popular Japanese condiment. If you cannot find them in the Asian supermarket of your choice, you can make them yourself. Cut vegetables of your choice (commonly used: daikon, cucumber, eggplant, Lotus root, and so on. Feel free to add "less exotic" veggies such as carrots, white turnip, and ginger.) Boil them in a sauce made of sugar, soy sauce, mirin, sake, and rice vinegar and then cool in the refrigerator.

With these quick and easy recipes, you can bring both the taste and atmosphere of Izakaya Nobu to your own kitchen. And don’t hesitate to enjoy Chef Kijima’s creative creations with a frosty beer!
Strikes Sports Trivia

There are more than 120 college football teams that play for the FBS National Championship. That means that at least 120 head coaches in the nation. Alabama won the title again last season, head coach Nick Saban’s sixth championship. Aside from Saban, only three other current coaches have won a title. Who are they?

Answer

Jimbo Fisher, Dabo Swinney & Urban Meyer

Nemui desu.

I'm sleepy.

Language Lesson

Answer to Previous Sudoku:

Answers to Previous Crossword:

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Photo taken by Kiyonori Hasegawa