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Spend the day in

**Yokohama's Chinatown**

**& Motomachi**

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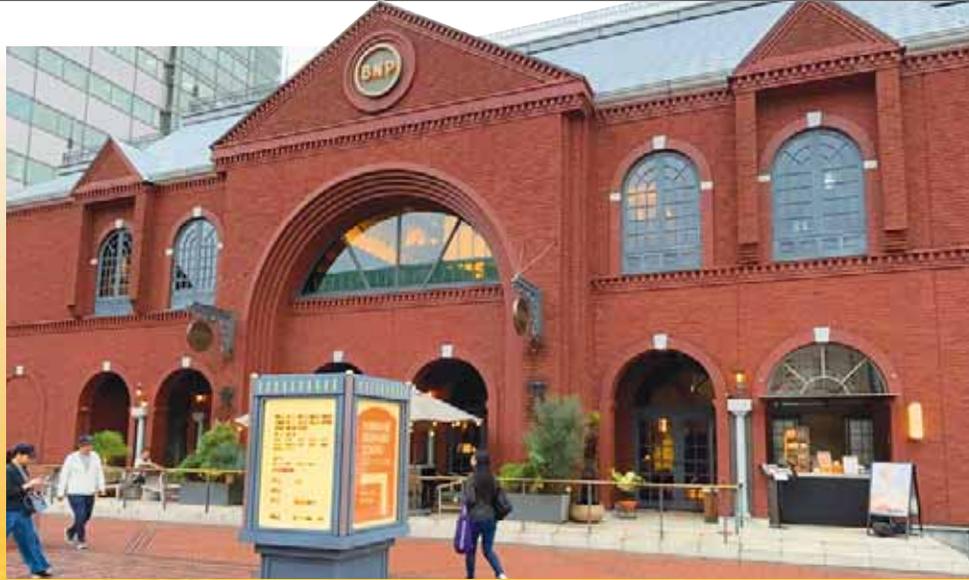
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Yebisu Garden Place, old brewery
with modern charm in Tokyo

STORY AND PHOTOS BY
TAKAHIRO TAKIGUCHI, STRIPES JAPAN

In the heart of the metropolis,
Ebisu is one of Tokyo's most
popular and desirable districts
to live or to spend a fun day
out. Here modern buildings
coexist with abundant greenery
and the area is flooded with
world-renowned restaurants,
luxury hotels and stylish shops.

Yebisu Garden Place is a
landmark in Ebisu featuring a
167-meter-tall office tower, two
museums, chic restaurants,
cafés, bars, and more. You'll
find plenty to do in this busy
complex, so don't miss it.

From JR Ebisu Station, the

complex is only a short,
five-minute walk along the
"Ebisu Skywalk" moving
walkway.

Since the complex was
built on the former site of the
Sapporo Beer brewing factory,
you'll find various beer stands
offering different types of beer
and traditional German dishes,
while elegant French restaurants
offer upscale dishes.

When I stepped off the
walkway and entered the vast
complex, a castle-like red-brick
entrance pavilion with a
classical clock tower nicely
welcomed me in the Clock
Square.



Things to know

ADDRESS: 4-20
Ebisu, Shibuya-ku,
Tokyo
PHONE:
03-5423-7111



WEBSITE

Walking among the
complex packed with
European-style buildings
made me feel as if I were
strolling along Rue Saint-
Honoré in Paris. As I
entered the Center Square,
the open area had many
benches where visitors can
do some people-watching
and rest while they plan
out where they'll go first.

My first stop was the
Yebisu Beer Museum. You
know, Yebisu

Beer is a premier Beer of
Japan first produced by
Sapporo Beer Brewery in
the 1890s. The museum
introduces the history with
interesting exhibits
featuring vintage bottle
designs, old advertisements,
manga and magazines.
They even have a large
brewing kettle retired from
the factory on display.

In the tasting salon, you
can try varieties of Yebisu
Beer samples and pick up
branded merchandise in
the museum shop.

Enjoy a leisurely walk in
the Yebisu Garden Place,
a sophisticated district
where the charms of
traditional and modern
Tokyo coexist.
takiguchi.takahiro@stripes.com

Advertisement for IKEUCHI car repair services. Includes logos, contact info for Sagamihiro Route 16 Shop and Hamura Shop, and QR codes.

Advertisement for Temple University Japan Campus. Features the university logo, owl mascot, and contact information for the Admissions Counseling Office.

Advertisement for AIZAN-TEI Restaurant. Includes photos of food, menu details, location map, and contact information.

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FEATURED ARTICLE



## The Enoshima Art Festival: A Celebration of the Sea, Sky, and Art

It's that time of year when the cold of winter starts to fade away, replaced with hints of green in the trees and a warm breeze that carries the feeling of something new. With the bright blue sky above and the wonders of nature blooming all around, what else is there to do but to enjoy it to the fullest? And what better way to enjoy these spring moments than at the Enoshima Art Festival, which combines spectacular seaside landscapes with art and culture. The stunning displays from the 2025 festival exemplified its theme, "An Art Festival Painted with the Heart in the Shonan Sky," a stunning display that put the sky on display as well as the art.

Held under the Shonan sky in Fujisawa City, Kanagawa Prefecture, this event aims to draw together participants, nature, and regional culture in a way that turns the traditional museum experience inside-out. Everyone is welcome to participate in this festival that celebrates the beauty and wonder of the vast skies. So, we hope you take the opportunity to visit Fujisawa during the festival season to see how talented creators have brought their mediums to life and how their artwork complements the greens and floral hues of Fujisawa, adding another dimension of beauty to the landscape to be enjoyed by all.

Previously known as the Enoshima International Art Festival, the event took a different approach in 2025, incorporating more fully the idea of having visitors experience the diverse range of artwork and programs against the backdrop of Shonan's natural landscape and sky. This fresh take treated the sky, the greenery, and the cultural backdrop of Enoshima as works of art, offering a delightful experience that invited visitors into a vibrant new world.

Each year, the festival features a different color found in the sky as its theme color. The theme colors of the 2025 festival were a pale orange and gray-blue that represented the changing colors of the sunset as dusk falls over the Shonan sea. The colored flags, found around town and at the event venues on flags and noren, transformed the entire area, from Enoden Enoshima Station through to Enoshima Island, into a creative space that is both beautiful and inspiring. There were a multitude of venues to see great art and become part of the display as you passed through shops, galleries, and gardens.

The first stop of the 2025 Enoshima Art Festival was Marudai, a long-established seafood restaurant, which greeted visitors at the gateway to Enoshima. On display in the shop window was a live painting by artist and poet Roy Taro, who created a work inspired by Enoshima. Getting up close and personal with art like this isn't something you get to do every day, and it sets the tone for the artistic exploration to follow.

The "Art-Seeking Walk (First Half)" exhibition was held at the UMIYAMA GALLERY, located inside the Enoshima Samuel Cocking Garden, until April 23, 2025. The greenhouse-like gallery space blended the artwork inside with the vibrant colors of the outdoors. There were 12 artists featured in this space, from painters to sculptors, whose works were later relocated to a different venue for the second half of the festival, offering yet another space in which to experience the artwork.

And while seeing the various works during the day offers a well-lit and detailed view of the artist's vision, there is something to be said about the joys of art as day turns to night. The Enoshima Art Festival remains a lively event through sunset and dusk, and the lights come on in the evening for a series of unforgettable moments.

The "MIRROR BOWLER Light ART ~Spring Evening~" by the art collective "Mirror Bowler" transformed the gardens into a mesmerizing show of color, shadow, and light. The installations were

at once a stark contrast to their natural surroundings and a part of it: chrome panels and neon lights snaked up tree trunks, while disco balls dangled nearby. On weekends, the installation was accompanied by music selected by a DJ, titled "Spring Evening: A Journey of Light and Sound."

If you enjoy music, consider tuning in to more events held around Enoshima around the time of the Golden Week holidays. In 2025, there were live performances, hands-on workshops, and other opportunities to engage more fully with local culture and your own creativity.

The festivities weren't confined to the island of Enoshima, either. Back on the mainland, Ryukouji Temple featured events such as "Opera at the Temple," which promised entertainment for the whole family. You can check the official website for more events and exhibition details.

So, the Enoshima Art Festival offers more than just artwork and installations; it hosts a variety of engaging events and charming venues, all set against the stunning natural and cultural backdrop of Shonan. The sea and the sky become one with the art, offering an amazing experience like no other.

This look back at the 2025 event may offer a taste of what is to come in 2026. The theme of the 2026 Enoshima Art Festival is yet to be announced (at the time of writing this article), but it is certain to awe and inspire. So, if you are in the Enoshima area this spring, keep an eye out for colored flags of this year's featured hues, and make some time to visit one or more of the venues—there's something for everyone, morning, noon, or night, at the Enoshima Art Festival. ■

### 2025 Event Details

Held from April 12th to June 1st, 2025

Please check the official website for more details.

► [www.enoshimart.com](http://www.enoshimart.com)

► [www.discover-fujisawa.jp/en](http://www.discover-fujisawa.jp/en)

# Tasty dumplings, great atmosphere in Yokohama's Chinatown

STORY AND PHOTOS BY LUIS SAMAYOA,  
STRIPES JAPAN

**M**y wife and I recently spent the day exploring Yokohama. If you're stationed in the Kanto Plain area, it's not a far drive or train ride.

We decided to spend some time getting to know Chinatown, a large district home to hundreds of restaurants and shops selling Chinese products, food and souvenirs. There are also cultural spots and activities to visit and try, including local shrines, Chinese tea cafés and street food stall hopping.

Yokohama's Chinatown is the largest in Japan and East Asia, according to the Japan National Tourism Organization. The small alleyways with crowds and restaurants serving a variety of Chinese cuisines, including Sichuan, Cantonese

and more, made me feel like I had teleported to China.

I've visited many places in Japan away from Tokyo, but sometimes the best adventures are just a train ride or short drive away. For those who are interested in saving a bit more, I would recommend taking the train since gas, toll roads and parking fees do add up.

**Pro tip:** There are many pedestrians in the area so avoid driving through the access roads where possible. On holidays and weekends, some parking lots may have no hourly cap limit and cost more, so park cautiously.

Here are some of the spots we visited in Chinatown to get a small sample of all this colorful, vibrant district has to offer.

samayoa.luis@stripes.com

## Dash for dumplings

Along the main shopping street in Chinatown, you'll find many dumping vendors. We stopped at Houtenkaku Tenshimpo on one of the corners because the prices seemed good and it had a good variety of options, including seafood, pork and sesame dumplings and beer to wash them down.

We took the risk and ordered pork soup dumplings for 1,000 yen (about \$6.45). We had our order in no time, and we ventured into an alleyway to eat. Here, everyone stands off to the side to enjoy the street food, so we decided to blend in with the locals and enjoy our pork dumplings. There are also dine-in options if standing outside is not what you want to do, or the weather is bad.

The dumplings were delicious and made us regret not ordering more. Each bite provided a burst of flavorful broth and tender pork. My mouth, stomach and wallet were happy with this little restaurant.

### ■ Houtenkaku Tenshimpo

**ADDRESS:** 231-0023 Kanagawa, Yokohama, Naka Ward, Yamashitacho

**OTHER INFO:** There is no parking available at this restaurant. Yen only.

## Visit to Mazu Miao Shrine

Just off the main shopping area in Chinatown, Mazu Miao Shrine is small but colorful.

We were captivated and decided to go in. The staff at the entrance directed us to a vending machine to purchase our entry ticket. The vending machine had a variety of items, not tickets, to purchase gold paper or incense sticks that double as admission to the shrine.

We selected the incense stick sets for 500 yen each, then proceeded up the stairs.

At the top, staff directed us to bow three times and place one of the lit sticks in each of the five areas before moving on to the ash tray.

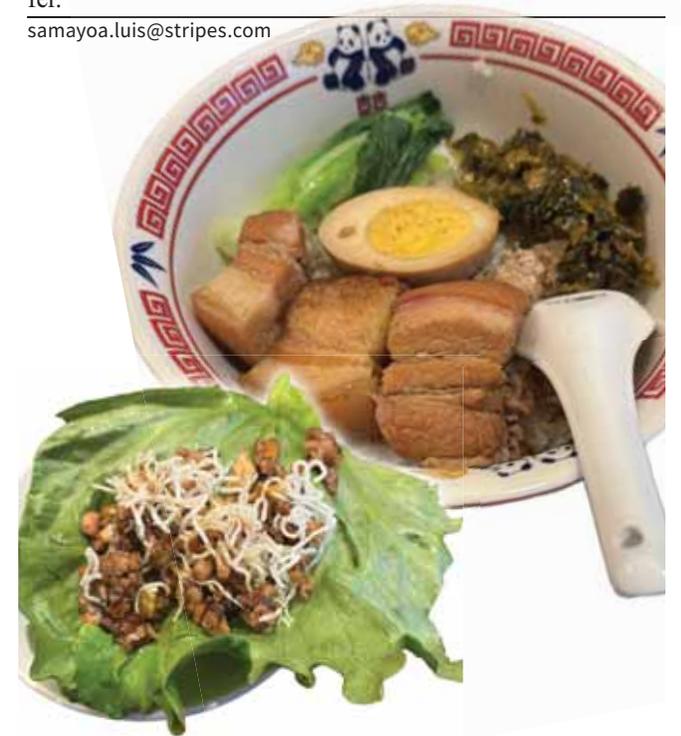
Upon entering the shrine, the next set of instructions was to pray at three separate gods "Kami." Although I had no clue what was going on, I followed my wife's lead and managed to do it right!

Looking up every time we finished praying, I was amazed by the beauty of this place. The colorful interiors were incredibly vivid, almost psychedelic in a way. Totally worth 500 yen. I have been to many shrines in Japan, but this shrine was in the top three of being most memorable.

### ■ Mazu Miao Shrine

**ADDRESS:** 136 Yamashitacho, Naka Ward, Yokohama, Kanagawa 231-0023

**OTHER INFO:** No photographs allowed inside. Cash only. No Parking.



## Lunchtime at Fukuryu Chinese Restaurant

We decided to grab one last bite in Chinatown before leaving the area. To be honest, choosing from the literal hundreds of restaurants can be overwhelming, so we picked Fukuryu, located directly across the street from the shrine.

Fortunately, the menu was great and there wasn't much of a burden on the wallet.

Though the menu was all in Japanese, Google Translate did its magic. There was a variety of items to order, but we kept it basic since it was our first time.

We ordered steamed pork buns, a 5-piece dumpling set, minced pork lettuce wraps and Lu Rou rice, a Taiwanese braised pork dish.

The flavors of each dish were amazing. Our appetizers, steamed pork buns and dumplings, arrived at our table quickly. Each bite packed a punch of warm and savory pork broth.

The Lu Rou rice was topped with soft boiled eggs, braised pork pieces and had a mild spice. It's a delicious and simple meal that isn't too heavy on the stomach and won't leave you tired after eating.

So far, our meal was delicious, but then came what was the best part of all the dishes we tried that day - the lettuce wraps. It was not my order, but I made sure to steal a lot from my wife's plate. Inside the lettuce was flavorful minced pork and fried noodles for an added crunch. One bite leaves you wanting more. I would come back to this restaurant just for these wraps.

Overall, the price itself may sound expensive, but it was only 4,225 yen (about \$27) for two people. The staff was very polite and also spoke a bit of English to help us order. This delectable meal was a great way to finish a visit to Chinatown.

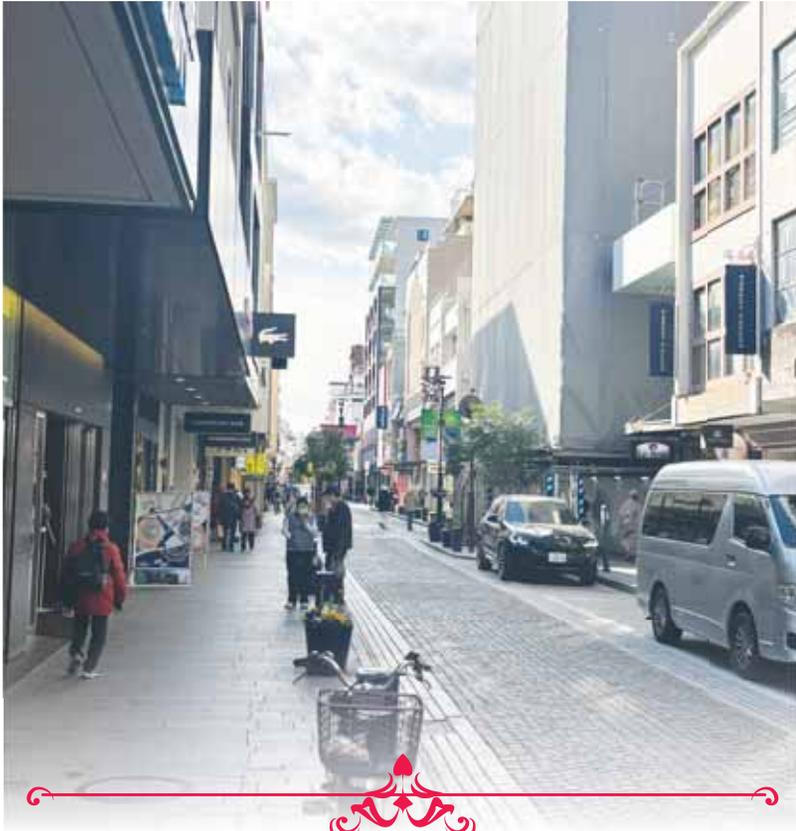
### ■ Fukuryu Chinese Restaurant

**ADDRESS:** 231-0023 Yamashita-cho, Naka-ku, Yokohama, Kanagawa Prefecture 106-15

**HOURS:** 11 a.m.- 3 p.m. and 5 p.m.- 10 p.m., Mon. - Sun.

**OTHER INFO:** Reservations can be made using [www.hotpepper.jp](http://www.hotpepper.jp) (Japanese only). No parking.





## Quick stroll in Motomachi

From Yokohama’s Chinatown, a walk to Motomachi, a high-end shopping district, is about a five-minute walk away.

We took a post-meal walk in the area and found a couple of stores worth a look.

First, we went into Humidor, a small tobacco shop selling collectibles like Zippo lighters, wood pipes and more.

They also sell the normal tobacco products you can get from a convenience store and have a small smoke area inside.

I didn’t buy anything, but was allowed to smoke with other customers in a warm environment where it’s okay to light up.

Next, we stopped in Itoya, a small branch of the big stationery store chain with a flagship in Ginza. The selection at this location included many kawaii items for artists and office workers. They sell lots of pens, colorful notebooks and some small DIY items which can be perfect for those who work at a desk or like to doodle.

During our stop, I grabbed some playing cards that had fish logos for myself and a new notebook with pens for my wife as a usable souvenir. The nicest part, the items were inexpensive.

Motomachi has many luxury brand stores. It personally wasn’t as attractive to us (99% mostly me) since almost all stores were expensive. I saw designer watches reaching thousands of dollars in and shirts costing over \$200. Yeah, enlisted pay is not at that level of luxury for me.

However, you will find a few shops in Motomachi that won’t burn a hole in your wallet. All in all, it’s still worth checking out if you’re in the area.

To those who are searching for luxury gifts to give to loved ones, this place is an option and it’s not as painful as visiting Ginza.

— Luis Samayoa, *Stripes Japan*

## Things to know

\*There are street coin-operated parking spots.



### ■ Humidor

**ADDRESS:** 1F Hyakudankan, 3-115 Motomachi, Naka Ward, Yokohama 231-0861  
**HOURS:** 10 a.m. - 7 p.m. daily.  
**OTHER INFO:** No parking is available. Cash and card are accepted.



### ■ Itoya

**ADDRESS:** 3-123 Motomachi, Naka ward, Yokohama, Kanagawa 231-0861  
**HOURS:** 11 a.m. - 7 p.m. daily.  
**OTHER INFO:** Cash and card are accepted.



# THE STORY OF JAPAN'S ICONIC SASEBO BURGER

STORY AND PHOTOS BY JANIQUA ROBINSON, STARS AND STRIPES  
 Published: February 26, 2026

**B**urgers may trace their origin to Hamburg, Germany, but American tastes continue to embrace new twists on the classic. In Japan, that search often leads to Sasebo, the second-largest city in Nagasaki prefecture and home of the Sasebo Burger.

A byproduct of the American presence established 80 years ago at Sasebo Naval Base, the Sasebo Burger has become a source of local pride. Local restaurants must earn the right to display a signboard featuring the Sasebo Burger Boy character through the Sasebo Burger Certification System.

“In 2003, Sasebo City asked Takashi Yanase to use the Hamburger Kid from ‘Anpanman’ as their image character,” according to tenpostar.com. Yanase instead created a new character specifically for the Sasebo Burger.

While certified restaurants display the same signboard, the Sasebo Burger is not defined by a single recipe or set of toppings. Each establishment prepares its own version, unified more by method than by ingredients.

The version served at Sasebo C&B Burgers “originated around 1950 when a recipe was passed down from an American soldier serving at a U.S. military base,” the restaurant wrote on its website.

A Sasebo Burger is “the collective term for a burger that is not pre-prepared but cooked

on a hot plate after an order is placed,” according to the site.

That approach resembles Western-style smash burgers, which are typically seasoned, portioned and pressed onto a flat-top grill, with cheese added after the initial flip.

The C&B Original Burger features a thin patty made from ground beef and pork, topped with an egg, lettuce, tomato, onion and a thick slice of bacon, finished with garlicky mayonnaise, ketchup, mustard and a cheese dressing.

The bun — decorated with a heart on top — stands out as distinctly American. As the patty is relatively thin, the thick and juicy bacon emerges as the dominant flavor, complemented by crunchy tater tots. The meal, served with a beverage, costs 2,350 yen, or just under \$15.

Another popular stop is the Sasebo Burger Museum, a saloon-style restaurant overlooking the Kujukyu Islands. Its ABC Burger includes a 100% beef patty, thinly sliced bacon, avocado, lettuce, tomato, cheese, mustard and mayonnaise on a soft, homemade bun.

The seasoned patty anchors the burger, balancing the rich toppings. Served with golden, crispy fries and a beverage, the meal costs 2,000 yen.

But don’t stop there. Sasebo is home to more than 20 restaurants serving their own take on the Sasebo Burger, offering visitors a wide range of flavors rooted in local tradition and international influence.

robinson.janiqua@stripes.com  
 @JaniquaRob

EXCLUSIVE NEWS FROM:  
**STARS AND STRIPES**  
 www.stripes.com

**SASEBO CITY**  
 SASEBO NB

**MCAS IWAKUNI**

### ■ Sasebo C&B Burgers

**LOCATION:** Lates Building 1F, 3-1 Shimogyo-cho, Sasebo City, Nagasaki Prefecture.  
**DIRECTIONS:** A seven-minute walk from Sasebo Station.  
**HOURS:** 11 a.m. to 8 p.m., Mondays, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday; 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. Saturdays, Sundays and holidays; last order at 7:45 p.m.  
**PRICES:** A C&B Original costs less than \$15.  
**PHONE:** 0956-59-6300



WEBSITE

### ■ Sasebo Burger Museum

**LOCATION:** 190-1 Funakoshicho, Sasebo City, Nagasaki Prefecture, 857-1231  
**DIRECTIONS:** A 15-minute drive from Sasebo Station.  
**HOURS:** Open daily, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.; last order is 4:30 p.m.  
**PRICES:** Expect to pay about \$13.  
**PHONE:** 0956-28-5533



WEBSITE

# Japan's Gachapon and the capsule toy craze

BY ROBERTO NERI AND ARDEN KREUZER, METROPOLIS MAGAZINE

Scroll social media long enough, and one thing becomes clear: Tokyo's gachapon scene doesn't move in straight lines. There are no official charts, no weekly rankings and no universally agreed-upon "best" capsule toy. What instead drives the scene is a constant churn of new releases, rediscoveries and oddities that briefly dominate feeds before quietly disappearing.



That unpredictability is one of the defining traits of gachapon culture. And yet, certain sets prove more shareable than others, drawing attention well beyond Japan. In this article, we'll walk through some of the most wanted gachapon of the year, as well as where to hunt for these elusive rarities.

Common types: Anime or game mascots, miniature toys, animal figurines, miniature furniture, keychains, rings, pouches and miniature food.

## 1 Polly Pocket: Nostalgia in capsule form



Photos courtesy of Metropolis Magazine

These tiny pastel playsets tap directly into millennial nostalgia. Each capsule compresses a miniature world that fits neatly into the palm of your hand. The appeal is immediate and emotional, making these sets especially popular with collectors who grew up with the originals.

**TYPE:** Miniature toy

**RUMORED LOCATIONS:** Gachagacha no Mori PAPA Ageo Shopping Avenue Store (Saitama), Gashapon Bandai Official Shop Mozo Wonder City Store (Nagoya)

**PRICE:** 400 yen

**MAKER:** Bandai



File photo

## 2 Coca-Cola Capsule Shops: When a brand becomes a scene

This Coca-Cola capsule series recreates miniature cans with detailed interiors inspired by the brand's visual history. These feel closer to tiny dioramas than standard merchandise. Their appeal lies in the fine details, from retro signage to carefully rendered textures that reward close inspection.



**TYPE:** Miniature food

**RUMORED LOCATIONS:** Bookstore Gashapon Department Store Orion Shobo Norte

**PRICE:** 500 yen

**MAKER:** Bandai

## 3 Japanese train melody



Photo from YouTube/ Techno Craj

For anyone living in Japan, this sound lives rent-free in the brain. From station jingles to polite recorded warnings, these capsules distill everyday transit noise into a strangely comforting collectible. It's the kind of gacha that makes sense only after you've heard it a thousand times.

**TYPE:** Sound, collectable

**RUMORED LOCATION:** Gacha Gacha no Mori Shinjuku SUBNADE

**PRICE:** 500 yen

**MAKER:** Toys Cabin

## 4 uni MITSUBISHI PENCIL mini



A fully functional mini pen or pencil paired with a charm, this set leans hard into practical novelty. It's small enough to disappear into a bag but usable enough to justify keeping it on your keys. The brand recognition adds to its quiet popularity.

**TYPE:** Functional miniature, keychain

**RUMORED LOCATION:** namco TOKYO Tokyu Kabukicho Tower, Gashapon Bandai Official Shop Akihabara Store, Capsule Lab Harajuku

**PRICE:** 300 yen

**MAKER:** Bandai

## 5 Cup noodle topping ring

This capsule-less release hides a ring inside a miniature Cup Noodles container. Each ring features a meticulously recreated topping, from shrimp to the famously vague "Nazo Niku."



**TYPE:** Miniature food, ring

**RUMORED LOCATION:** Bandai Namco Cross Store Tokyo

**PRICE:** 500 yen

**MAKER:** Kitan Club

## 6 The mini CD player that actually works

Complete with tiny discs and a working playback mechanism, this retro mini CD player relies on surprise. It looks like a static prop until someone presses play. Scarcity is part of the appeal, with most sightings now coming from resale platforms.



Photo from YouTube/ rainbowholicTV

**TYPE:** Functional miniature

**RUMORED LOCATIONS:** Extremely rare; resale sites like Mercari are your best bet

**PRICE:** 500+ yen

**MAKER:** Toys Spirits

## 7 mofusand strawberry chocolate cat mascot

These swinging mascots feature mofusand's signature cats holding chocolate-dipped strawberries. Cute without being loud, they sit squarely in the sweet spot of character merchandise.



**TYPE:** Keychain mascot

**RUMORED LOCATION:** None yet; Check on gashapon.jp for location updates

**PRICE:** 300 yen

**MAKER:** Bandai



## 8 CanCam anyone acrylic charm

Designed to hold a tiny photo, this acrylic charm is built for oshi-katsu culture. Slip in a puri-kura strip, a selfie or a favorite idol shot, and it becomes instantly personal. Its simplicity is what makes it so shareable.



**TYPE:** Functional miniature, keychain

**Rumored Location:** #C-Pla Shibuya, TOKYO GASHAPON STORE, #C-Pla Adhoc Shinjuku

**PRICE:** 300 yen

**MAKER:** Bandai



# 9 Obakenu night light

A tiny ghost-shaped night light with an on-off switch and replaceable batteries, this set blurs the line between toy and household object. It's functional, cute and surprisingly well-made for its size. Not bad for something that comes out of a capsule.



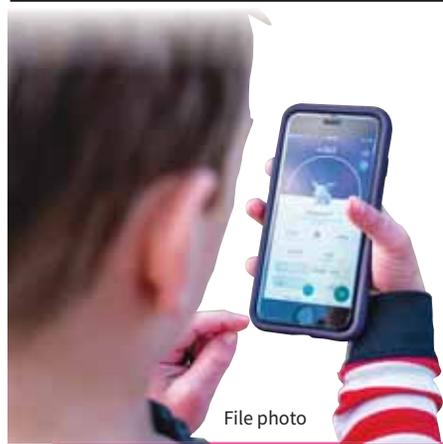
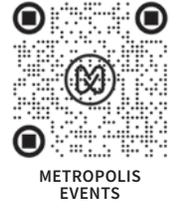
**TYPE:** Functional, mascot  
**RUMORED LOCATION:** Bandai Namco Cross Store Tokyo, #C-Pla Shibuya, #C-Pla Adhoc Shinjuku  
**PRICE:** 400 yen  
**MAKER:** Bandai

## Where to find Gachapon in Tokyo and why it's never guaranteed

Tokyo is home to the world's largest capsule hub, the Gashapon Department Store in Ikebukuro's Sunshine City, where stock rotates rapidly across thousands of machines. For Bandai-produced sets, the company's official site, gashapon.jp, can help identify possible locations. Ultimately, much of gachapon culture's appeal lies in its instability. New capsules appear constantly, and

today's viral hit can become tomorrow's forgotten item. The fun is never knowing what you'll find—or what might suddenly take over your feed next.

Toys are better when won as prizes. Take a look at our guide to Winning the Arcade Machines in Japan. (Check the QR code)



File photo

# Anime pop-up events in Tokyo

## The best ephemeral anime events this season

METROPOLIS MAGAZINE

Tokyo continues to set the pace for limited-run anime events, with new collaborations, exhibitions and themed cafés rolling out year-round. This year's lineup already includes major franchise



celebrations, immersive installations and returning fan favorites. From large-scale showcases to character cafés, here's your updated guide to the must-visit anime events in Tokyo.

This list is consistently updated throughout the year, so make sure to check back frequently!



Photo by Ouran Café

### Ouran High School Host Club Café

My Charaful Cafe Tokyo  
Until March 15

The Ouran High School Host Club café brings themed décor and character visuals to My Charaful Cafe in Tokyo. The menu includes items such as strawberry sandwiches and chocolate banana sandwiches, available for dine-in or takeaway. Don't worry about missing it as a separate Osaka run follows from Apr. 22 to July 5.



WEBSITE



Photo by Sanrio Co., Ltd.

### Cinnamoroll's Sky Blue Party

Sunshine 60 Observatory  
Until March 31

Sanrio celebrates Cinnamoroll's March 6 birthday with a themed event inside Sunshine 60 Observatory in Ikebukuro. The 60th-floor space transforms into a "birthday party in the clouds," complete with a cloud archway entrance, pastel decorations and character photo spots. Guests can play on a giant cake installation, try balloon-catching and rhythm games, and join a stamp rally to decorate Cinnamoroll's cake.



WEBSITE



Photo by San-X Co., Ltd.

### Chairoikoguma Café

S-Pik Cafe Tokyo  
Until Apr. 3

Chairoikoguma takes over S-Pik Cafe with a pastel-heavy themed menu inspired by beach imagery and soft colors. Dishes include a playful blue curry alongside photo-ready desserts and drinks tied to the character's aesthetic. The collaboration also features exclusive goods for fans who want to bring the theme home.



WEBSITE



Photo by The Tokyo Anime Award Festival

### Tokyo Anime Award Festival 2026 (TAAF)

TOHO Cinemas Ikebukuro, Toshima Civic Center  
March 13 (10 a.m.)–16 (8 p.m.)

The Tokyo Anime Award Festival returns to Ikebukuro under the theme "Tokyo, the Hub of Contemporary Animation." The program includes award-nominated feature and short films from around the world, plus industry events and hands-on opportunities for emerging creators. The festival concludes with the Tokyo Governor's Award presented to the Grand Prize winner.



WEBSITE



Photo by AnimeJapan

### AnimeJapan 2026

Tokyo Big Sight  
(East Halls 4–8, South Halls 1–4, Rooftop Exhibition Area)  
March 28–29 (9 a.m. – 5 p.m., last admission 4:30 p.m.)

AnimeJapan remains the country's largest annual anime industry event, filling Tokyo Big Sight with major studio booths and headline announcements. The convention hosts packed stage shows featuring voice actors and artists, alongside exclusive previews and production reveals. A dedicated Family Anime Festa area offers free-entry exhibits and character greetings aimed at younger fans.



WEBSITE

### Pokémon GO Fest 2026

Tokyo Bay Area  
May 29 (10 a.m.) – June 1 (8 p.m.)

Pokémon GO Fest 2026 returns to the Tokyo Bay Area and turns the waterfront into a citywide playground for Trainers. Players can complete exclusive Field Research, join themed raids, encounter rare spawns and unlock limited-time bonuses designed to encourage in-person group play. Community meetups, collaborative challenges and dedicated photo spots make this one of the largest Pokémon events of the year in Japan.



File photo



WEBSITE



METROPOLIS HOMEPAGE



METROPOLIS EVENTS

File photos

# Planning for cherry blossoms

LIVE JAPAN

**P**lanning your dream trip to Japan in spring for cherry blossom season? Here is where and when is the best time to see the cherry blossoms in Japan!

In this deep dive, we share the Japan cherry blossom forecast, talk about sakura viewing culture, and see where are the best places to see cherry blossoms in Japan.



The timing of cherry blossom season in Japan varies by region, with blooming typically beginning in late March and peaking in early April in central areas.

### When is peak cherry blossom season in Japan in 2026?

Cherry blossoms typically reach full bloom about five to seven days after first flowering, though timing can shift depending on temperature, rain, and wind. In most locations, peak viewing lasts around one week under stable conditions.

#### ■ Late March: Major Cities in Full Bloom

Peak season begins in the final days of March across western and central Japan. Tokyo (around March 26), Nagoya (around March 28), Fukuoka (around March 28), Hiroshima (around March 30), Osaka (around March 31), Kyoto (around March 31), Nara (around March 31), Shizuoka (around March 29), and Kochi (around March 27) will be at their best from late March into early April. Wakayama follows shortly after, reaching full bloom around April 2.

#### ■ Early to Mid-April: Central & Northern Honshu

The bloom front moves north in early April. Kanazawa (around April 7), Fukushima (around April 6), Sendai (around

April 9), Niigata (around April 11), Nagano (around April 10), Yamagata (around April 13), Akita (around April 17), and the Mount Fuji area at Kawaguchiko (around April 11) follow through early to mid-April.

#### ■ Mid to Late April: Tohoku to Hokkaido

Northern regions peak last. Morioka (around April 19), Aomori (around April 22), and Sapporo (around April 29) bring the season to a close from mid- to late April.

Early-blooming varieties can still be enjoyed in southern areas such as Kawazu and Miurakaigan until early March.

### Where to see early and late-blooming sakura

If you want to see cherry blossoms before the main season, head south of Tokyo, where some varieties bloom as early as January.

#### ■ Atami (Shizuoka)

Located about 1.5 hours from Tokyo, about 58 Atami-zakura trees bloom along a peaceful stream in late January to early February, about a month ahead of Japan's standard cherry blossoms.

#### ■ Kawazu (Shizuoka)

About three hours from Tokyo, Kawazu-zakura is a unique cherry blossom variety that blooms in late February to early March, nearly a month earlier than typical sakura. About 850

vibrant pink flowers line a 4km stretch of the Kawazu River, creating a stunning early spring scene.

#### ■ Miurakaigan (Kanagawa)

About 1.5 hours from Tokyo, Miurakaigan offers a smaller-scale but picturesque cherry blossom viewing experience in mid-to-late February.

### Where to see cherry blossoms in April-May

Blossoms in the Greater Tokyo region may bloom from March to April.

#### ■ Tohoku Region (Sendai and beyond)

In Sendai, sakura usually start blooming at the end of March, slightly later than in Tokyo.

#### ■ Hokkaido (Sapporo and beyond)

The last cherry blossoms in Japan typically bloom in late April to early May, making Hokkaido one of the final places to enjoy sakura season.

## Cherry blossom forecast

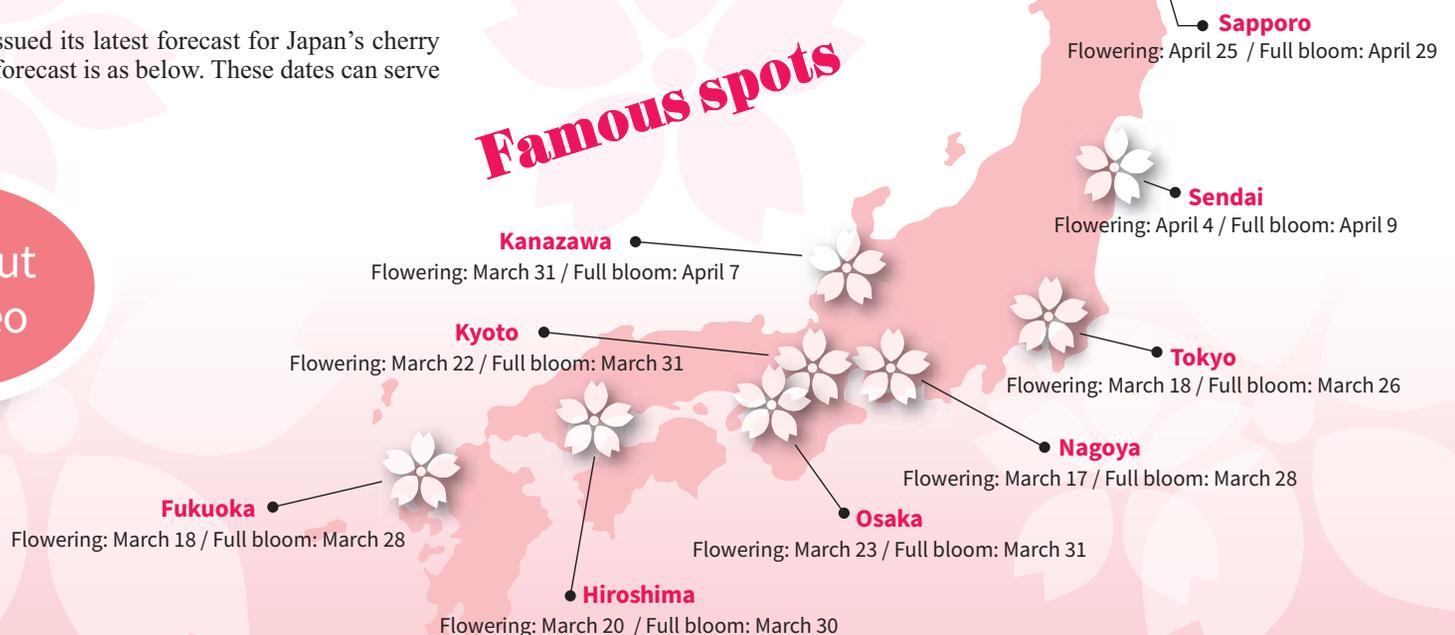
The Japan Meteorological Corporation issued its latest forecast for Japan's cherry blossom season on February 20, 2026. The forecast is as below. These dates can serve as a reference for planning your trip.

Check out the video



Best Cherry Blossom Spots in Japan (Live Japan)

### Famous spots



**Where is the best place to see the cherry blossoms?**

Japan has over 1,000 stunning cherry blossom spots, so choosing the best one can be tough. To help, we've listed beautiful locations by region.

**NORTHERN JAPAN  
Hokkaido**

**Moerenuma Park (Sapporo)**

Designed by sculptor Isamu Noguchi, this artistic park has big sculptures and bursts with bright pink cherry blossoms in spring.

**Goryokaku Tower and Fort Goryokaku (Hakodate)**

A star-shaped, French-style fort and national historic site surrounded by famous cherry blossoms. The 107m-high Goryokaku Tower gives a unique bird's-eye view of Hokkaido's blooms.

**Asahigaoka Park (Furano)**

One of Japan's Hundred Views, this spot offers amazing views of the Furano Basin and Tokachi mountains, with 3,000 cherry trees adding to the beauty.

**Mt. Tengu (Otaru)**

Named after mythical creatures, this mountain has great views of Otaru and the Sea of Japan. In spring, lighted cherry trees create a striking scene.

**Asahikawa Park (Asahikawa)**

With about 3,500 cherry trees, this popular Hokkaido park lights up the blossoms at night during the season.



Sakura blossoms around Goryokaku (Hakodate, Hokkaido)



Kakunodate Bukeyashiki-dori (Akita)

**NORTHEASTERN JAPAN  
Tohoku Region**

**Hirosaki Park (Aomori)**

Covering 49 hectares with about 2,600 cherry trees, Hirosaki Park is one of Japan's best sakura spots.

**Mt. Iwaki (Aomori)**

sacred mountain with around 6,500 cherry trees along a 20km road, Mt. Iwaki blooms beautifully from late April to early May.

**Kakunodate Bukeyashiki-dori (Akita)**

Famous for its preserved samurai district, Kakunodate lights up with pink weeping cherry trees in late April, contrasting with the black fences of samurai homes.

**Miharu Takizakura (Fukushima)**

A national treasure and one of Japan's Three Most Famous Cherry Blossom Trees, this 1,000-year-old weeping cherry is surrounded by a visitor path.

**Hitome Senbonzakura (Miyagi)**

Spanning 8 kilometers along the Shiroishi River, this spot offers a gorgeous view of cherry trees with the snowy Zao Mountains behind.

**Tsutsujigaoka Park (Miyagi)**

Three hundred years ago, Date Tsunamura of the Date Clan planted 1,000 sakura trees here. Despite challenges over the years, replanting efforts have maintained the park's allure, now featuring over 360 diverse sakura trees.

**EASTERN JAPAN  
Kanto-Koshin Region**

**Meguro River (Tokyo)**

Stretching 3.8 kilometers, this river is lined with about 800 cherry trees that bloom vibrantly in spring, enhanced by nearby cafes and restaurants for dining and drinks.

**Rikugien Gardens (Tokyo)**

A tranquil, historic Japanese landscape garden, recognized as a Special Place of Scenic Beauty, famous for its graceful weeping cherry trees during spring.

**Shinjuku Gyoen National Garden (Tokyo)**

Celebrated as a masterpiece of Japanese garden design, Shinjuku Gyoen boasts around 1,000 cherry trees across 65 varieties, delivering a spectacular spring display.

**Ueno Park (Tokyo)**

Home to roughly 1,200 cherry trees, Ueno Park is a leading spot for sakura viewing, attracting nearly 2 million visitors each spring—especially enchanting in the evening with illuminated bonbori lanterns.

**Yoyogi Park (Tokyo)**

One of Tokyo's largest parks, Yoyogi Park draws crowds in spring for hanami under its sprawling cherry blossoms, perfect for gatherings.

**Lake Kawaguchi (Yamanashi)**

Nestled against the stunning backdrop of Mount Fuji, the shores of Lake Kawaguchi become a captivating cherry blossom retreat each spring. Nearby, Arakurayama Sengen Park (Chureito Pagoda) is also a popular stop worth exploring.



Cherry blossoms at night along Chidorigafuchi Park (Tokyo)

**SEE MORE ON  
PAGE 10**

CONTINUED  
FROM PAGE 9



Matsumoto Castle (Nagano)

#### CENTRAL JAPAN

## Hokuriku and Tokai Region

### Nagoya Castle (Aichi)

A major Nagoya attraction, this castle is encircled by about 1,000 cherry trees of 10 types, like Yoshino and Shidare, making for gorgeous spring scenery. Its annual Spring Festival, held from late March to early April, includes a light-up event that showcases the blossoms and castle, plus local Nagoya food and drinks at Shachihokodo and traditional Japanese games.

### Matsumoto Castle (Nagano)

Japan's oldest five-tiered, six-story castle, Matsumoto Castle shines in spring with its cherry blossoms. The evening illumination along the outer moat creates a romantic, enchanting vibe.

### Shinshu Zenkoji Temple (Nagano)

Established in 642, this historic temple is surrounded by a beautiful mix of cherry trees and weeping cherry blossoms, enhancing its spiritual charm.

### Takato Castle Ruins Park (Nagano)

With about 1,500 cherry trees, this park ranks among Japan's top 100 cherry blossom spots and is a must-see during peak bloom season.

### Ueda Castle Park (Nagano)

Built in 1583, Ueda Castle is famous for its surrounding area, where over 1,000 cherry trees bloom, forming a stunning spring spectacle.

### Kenrokuen Garden (Ishikawa)

One of Japan's three most famous gardens, Kenrokuen features around 420 cherry trees across 40 varieties, blooming in mid-April. It's also listed among Japan's 100 Best Sakura Spots.



Kumamoto Castle (Kumamoto)

#### WEST JAPAN

## Kyushu Region

### Fukuoka Castle (Fukuoka)

At Fukuoka Castle, history meets nature during its spring cherry blossom festival. The event brings illuminations, local food, traditional performances, and a variety of fun activities.

### Kumamoto Castle (Kumamoto)

One of Japan's most famous castles, Kumamoto Castle provides a striking setting for cherry blossom viewing. Its wide grounds are filled with cherry trees, offering a perfect mix of spring beauty and historic architecture.

## MID-WESTERN JAPAN Kansai/Kinki Region

### Himeji Castle (Hyogo)

Known for its over 1,000 cherry trees, Himeji Castle provides a special sakura experience, including boat tours in the moat beneath pink petals during its cherry blossom festival.

### Tō-ji Temple (Kyoto)

Home to Japan's tallest wooden pagoda, Tō-ji Temple is surrounded by about 200 striking cherry trees, creating a captivating sight. Nearby Kyoto restaurants offer a chance to dine with blossom views.

### Ninna-ji Temple (Kyoto)

Famous for its late-blooming Omuro-zakura cherry trees, Ninna-ji pairs them with a five-story pagoda. This scenic spot is a national beauty and one of Japan's top 100 sakura locations.

### Yoshimine-dera Temple (Kyoto)

Founded in 1029, Yoshimine-dera is renowned for its lovely weeping cherry blossoms, nestled among Kyoto's western mountains.

### Mount Yoshino (Nara)

Mount Yoshino features around 30,000 white wild cherry trees across its valleys and ridges, delivering an incredible springtime sakura display.



Mount Yoshino (Nara)

#### SOUTHWESTERN JAPAN

## Chugoku and Shikoku Region

### Hijiyama Park (Hiroshima)

Famous for its 1,300 cherry trees and sweeping city views, Hijiyama Park is Hiroshima's top hanami spot. It offers great photo ops near Henry Moore's Arch, family-friendly areas by the Manga Library, and lively evening picnics along winding paths under the blossoms.

### Hiroshima Castle (Hiroshima)

Surrounded by about 350 cherry trees along its grounds and moat banks, Hiroshima Castle blooms in early April, creating classic Japanese scenery.

### Matsuyama Castle (Ehime)

One of Japan's 12 pre-Edo Period castles still standing, Matsuyama Castle is a beautiful spot for cherry blossom viewing. Its historic grounds are dotted with many cherry trees, blending natural splendor with historical charm during the spring bloom.

### Ritsurin Garden (Kagawa)

Celebrated for its scenic charm, Ritsurin Garden offers a peaceful setting for cherry blossom viewing. Its tidy paths and ponds are framed by delicate cherry tree blooms, making it a calm and picturesque retreat for visitors.



Ritsurin Garden (Kagawa)



### Why is the season important?

Cherry blossom season is significant in Japan due to its historical and cultural importance. Originating as a national pastime in the 8th century, the practice of viewing cherry blossoms, or ‘sakura’, symbolizes the transient nature of life.

This concept, known as “mono no aware” in Japanese, reflects on the brief yet beautiful life of the blossoms, which bloom for only about a week to ten days. The appreciation of sakura’s fleeting beauty has deeply influenced the Japanese mindset, emphasizing the impermanence of life and the importance of cherishing each moment.

### Does Japan have cherry blossom festivals?

Yes, Japan hosts numerous cherry blossom festivals centered around the traditional practice of “hanami,” or flower viewing. These festivals occur during the brief cherry blossom season, which lasts only a few weeks.

People gather in parks and streets lined with sakura trees to enjoy picnics and celebrate the blossoms. The timing of these festivals varies across Japan, starting in the warmer southwest and ending in the colder north.

Additionally, “yozakura,” the viewing of illuminated cherry blossoms at night, is a popular activity during these festivals.



Blossoms along the Meguro River (Tokyo)



Shinjuku Gyoen National Garden (Tokyo)

### Can I join hanami events?

Yes, you can definitely participate in hanami events in Japan! To enjoy these cherry blossom viewing parties, you’ll need a few essentials.

- Bring a waterproof tarp or picnic blanket, easily available at 100 yen shops, or use a large plastic garbage bag.
- Stock up on your favorite drinks and sakura-themed bentos or snacks from convenience stores or supermarkets.
- Don’t forget wet wipes, chopsticks, a garbage bag, a camera, and warm clothing for the cooler evenings of early spring.
- For an extra special experience, consider renting a kimono for daytime strolling and photo opportunities.

## Speakin’ Japanese

### Sakura shout-out

A symbol of spring in Japan, cherry blossoms or “sakura” are enjoyed throughout Japan. The cherry blossom front moves from south (starting in February on Okinawa) to north, arriving on the Kanto Plain around the end of March and reaching Misawa by the end of April. Under the gorgeous pale pinkish colors of branches, locals often sit down and enjoy their hanami party with sake, beer and all sorts of delicious food. So, as cherry blossoms get ready to bloom, make some plans to enjoy them with your Japanese friends. Here’s some Japanese words and phrases that will help you enjoy the cherry blossoms.

**“Sakura wa itsu sakimasu ka?”**  
= When do cherry blossoms start blooming?  
(“itsu” = when, “sakimasu” = bloom)

**“Sakura no meisho wa doko desuka?”**  
= Where are some cherry blossom attractions?  
(“meisho” = attractions, “doko” = where)

**“Sakura ga mankai desu.”**  
= Cherry blossoms are in full bloom.  
(“mankai” = in full bloom)

**“Kirei desu!”** = They are beautiful!  
(“kirei” = beautiful)  
**“Ii nioi desu.”** = They smell good.  
(“ii nioi” = good smell)

**“Watashi wa sakura ga daisuki desu”**  
= I love cherry blossoms.  
(“watashi” = I, “daisuki desu” = love)

**“Sakura no shashin wo ippai tori mashita.”**  
= I took a lot of photos of cherry blossoms.  
(“shashin” = photo, “ippai” = a lot of, “tori” = take/shoot )

**“Hanami ni iki masen ka?”**  
= Let’s go look at cherry blossoms, shall we?  
(“hanami” = cherry blossom viewing/party, “iki masen ka?” = let’s go)

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.

**“Yozakura kenbutsu ni ikimasu.”**  
= I will go to see cherry blossoms at night.  
(“yozakura” = cherry blossoms at night, “kenbutsu” = view, “ikimasu” = will go)

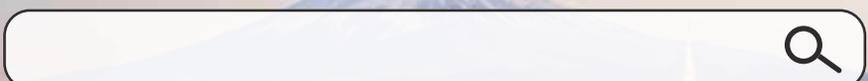
**“Hanami wo shimasen ka?”**  
= Let’s have a hanami party, shall we?  
(“hanami” = cherry blossom party/viewing, “shimasen ka” = let’s do)

**“Moo ippai ikaga desuka?”**  
= How about another refill of sake?  
(“moo ippai” = another refill (of sake), “ikaga desuka?” = how about)

**“Hanabira ga matte imasu.”**  
= Petals are fluttering in the air.  
(“hanabira” = petals, “matte” = flutter in the air)

**“Totemo kimochi ga ii desu.”**  
= It is very refreshing.  
(“totemo” = very, “kimochi ga ii” = refreshing)

- Takahiro Takiguchi, Stripes Japan





Photos courtesy of Ifing beauty

# Diving into Japanese hair care

BY LUIS SAMAYOA, STRIPES JAPAN

Being stationed in Japan has made me appreciate Japan's self-care routine culture, so it's been easy to incorporate many aspects into my daily regimen. I used to have long hair and took care of it with salon-grade shampoos and conditioners. It'd been a while since I'd tried those products, so I thought it might be cool to see what they sell in Japan.

My wife recommended a brand called Tokio, which sells a Premium Inkarami series of shampoo and conditioners.

In the States, many salon grade shampoos have a floral or perfume scent, which is something I am accustomed to. But in Japan, some salon grade shampoos have a heavy chemical scent. For Inkarami Premium shampoo and treatment, the stench is incredibly hard

and a full 180 degrees opposite to what I am used to.

If you can tolerate the scent, the results are impressive. Ever since I started using this brand, I haven't gone back to western haircare. This shampoo is designed for damaged hair.

The brand offers three types of shampoos, each different in treatment capability (and scent): Platinum, Premium, and Hyper series.

Tokio Platinum is designed for moderately damaged hair. It's one of the easiest to obtain and is available on Japan Amazon and sometimes at Don Quixote stores. This shampoo and treatment set is light, and the chemical scent isn't as hard as the next 2 levels.

Tokio Premium is made for those who have moderately damaged hair or dried hair. The scent is harsh in chemicals. This is available on Japan Amazon and Ifing beauty website.

Tokio Hyper can only be bought at a salon certified to sell it. This is for heavy, damaged or dry hair. I use it just because I love the care it gives to my hair (overkill, but I like it). To find it, check out Ifing to see which salons carry it because it's not available online.

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File photo



IFING BEAUTY WEBSITE (JAPANESE ONLY)

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# Limited-time sweets bring sakura flavors to 7-Eleven

BY KIM BERGSTRÖM, JAPAN TRAVEL

Spring in Japan is as much about seasonal treats as it is about cherry blossoms, and convenience stores are right at the heart of the experience. From February 24th, a colorful lineup of limited-time sweets will arrive at Seven-Eleven Japan stores nationwide, offering travelers an easy and affordable way to taste the flavors of the season.

The new range features five desserts inspired by classic spring ingredients such as cherry blossom, strawberry, and matcha. Designed to capture the feeling of renewal that comes with Japan's changing seasons, these sweets are perfect for a quick snack between sightseeing stops or a light dessert after a meal.

One highlight is the **Melty Sakura Milk Pudding** (from February 24th), a smooth milk pudding infused with a delicate cherry blossom aroma and topped with sakura sauce and whipped cream. Its soft pink color and gentle floral taste make it a simple introduction to Japan's famous seasonal flavors.

Also arriving on February 24th is the traditional **Sakura Mochi**,



Melty Sakura Milk Pudding

made using domestically produced glutinous rice flour that is slowly steamed to create a pleasantly chewy texture. Filled with smooth red bean paste from Hokkaido's Tokachi region, it offers a classic Japanese sweet experience with a subtle cherry blossom

fragrance.

For something more elaborate, the **Sakura and Uji Matcha Japanese Parfait** layers matcha jelly, sakura mousse, and matcha mousse with toppings including dango dumplings and whipped cream. The combination of pale pink and vibrant green captures the visual beauty of spring.

From March 3rd, two more treats join the lineup. The **Chewy Japanese Crepe: Sakura and Strawberry** blends Japanese and Western styles with cherry blossom bean paste, sakura cream, and strawberry sauce. Meanwhile, the **Whole Uji Matcha Strawberry Daifuku**

wraps a fresh strawberry in rich matcha bean paste and soft mochi for a balance of sweetness and gentle bitterness.



Sakura Mochi

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Chewy Japanese Crepe: Sakura and Strawberry

Photos courtesy of Seven-Eleven Japan Co., Ltd. Via PR Times



SEARCH YOUR NEAREST SEVEN ELEVEN!



Sakura and Uji Matcha Japanese Parfait

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March 8

# Test your zen at Mt. Takao Fire-Walking Festival

BY TAKAHIRO TAKIGUCHI, STRIPES JAPAN

**H**ead to Takao Mountains in western Tokyo for a yearly rite of passage you've got to see to believe.

On the second Sunday of March every year, the temple hosts Hiwatarisai, a fire-walking festival, to wish for peace and the safe and happy life of all people. This year, the event will take place on March 8 and will be limited to 1,000 ticketed participants. Tickets are available on a first come-first serve basis.

During Hiwatarisai, cypress branches piled in a long brazier are ignited and the mountaineering ascetics in white traditional wear and small skullcaps walk barefoot while chanting and blowing on conch horns.

After the fire has subsided, visitors are invited to walk barefoot on the warm ground. The ritual and those who walk along the embers are thought to be totally purified and will have their wishes granted.

After participating in the unique event, take the opportunity to hike up to the top of Takaosan or, if you want a break, take the cable car or chairlift.

Takaosan is a three-star Michelin star-rated tourist destination and about a short 45-minute drive from Yokota Air Base. Here not only will you find a great hike with a great view at the top, but multiple shrines, temples and even hot springs close by.

The mountain itself is considered as strong power spot and is home to a 1300-year-old Yakuo-in Buddhist temple on the mountain where hermits or mountaineering ascetics live.

Takaosan offers great views of Tokyo and the surrounding nature, so a visit there is great any time. But, don't miss the Hiwatarisai Festival, as this one is only once a year and definitely one-of-a-kind.

[takiguchi.takahiro@stripes.com](mailto:takiguchi.takahiro@stripes.com)

## Things to know

**HOURS:** March 8, event starts at 1 p.m.

**LOCATION:** at Kitoden Square of Takaozan Temple, 2177 Takaomachi, Hachioji City, Tokyo

**PHONE:** 042-661-1115



WEBSITE



Photos courtesy of Takaosan Yakuo-in



# Discover Tokugawa Ieyasu's legacy at Sumpu Castle!

STORY AND PHOTOS BY TAKAHIRO TAKIGUCHI, STRIPES JAPAN

**H**ead to the majestic Sumpu Castle park in Shizuoka City's center to trace the footsteps of a historical feudal lord!

The 18-time Emmy Award winning FX drama "Shogun" features Tokugawa Ieyasu (portrayed by Japanese actor Hiroyuki Sanada), the first Edo shogun, who lived at this castle. Tokugawa passed the Shogunate onto his son in the early 1600s and spent his final years at Sumpu until his death in 1616.

As you stroll the historical site you can follow in the footsteps of the great samurai leader who laid the foundations of Edo, which is now modern-day Tokyo. When my wife and I visited the 440-year-old castle site, we were actually overwhelmed by the massive stone walls and traditional towers and bridges!

In 1896, the castle buildings were demolished and the inner moat was also piled up with soils to give way to an Imperial army garrison.

In the 1880-90s, some of the castle buildings were reconstructed using traditional techniques. During our stroll, we were able

to appreciate the well-restored wooden bridges and watch towers which gave us a glimpse into the castle's majestic past.

If you have time, head to the Momijiyama Garden where you can enjoy tea and wagashi sweets in an elegant teahouse overlooking its beautiful traditional garden.

You can also take a 40-minute cruise on the "Aoi-bune," guided sightseeing boat tours of the moats. If you're a fan of the shogun, this is the destination you won't want to miss!

[takiguchi.takahiro@stripes.com](mailto:takiguchi.takahiro@stripes.com)



VIEW VIDEO!

## Things to know

**HOURS:** 9 a.m. – 4:30 p.m. Closed Mondays.

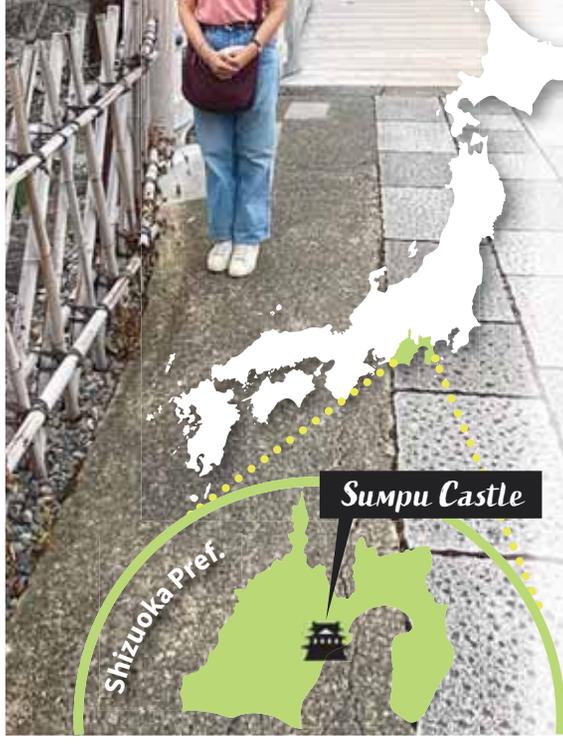
**ADMISSION:** High school students or older: 360 yen; elementary and middle school students: 120 yen

**ADDRESS:** 1-1 Sumpujo Park, Aoi-ku, Suzuoka City, Shizuoka Prefecture

**PHONE:** 054-251-0016



WEBSITE



# Shin-Yokohama Ramen Museum paradise for noodle fans

STORY AND PHOTOS BY LUIS SAMAYOA,  
STRIPES JAPAN

An exploration of Yokohama is not complete without a stop at the Shin-Yokohama Ramen Museum. This inexpensive experience feeds you ramen facts and ramen bowls, if you're up for the challenge.

The museum is split into two floors. The ground floor has displays breaking down the history of ramen in Japan. On this floor, there is a gift shop and a section to purchase a "make-your-own-ramen" kit for 600 yen (about \$4). The kit includes all the ingredients for a bowl of ramen like broth and noodles and is personalized with a custom photo for the lid cover of the kit box.

We purchased our own and were able to complete all the steps in English with some help of using Google Translate on our phone. The only downside was there wasn't much creative freedom with this process, but it's pretty cool to have our own personalized ramen to make at home.

After learning about ramen, we took the stairs to the basement floor, the star of the museum. As you walk down the stairs, you get a view of the floor layout from above for a feeling you've strayed into Japan's Showa Era. The entire floor is decorated to look like the old alleyways with building facades of

hostess clubs, onsens and shops. A neat way to feel like you're living in the past.

Inside the makeshift buildings there were different ramen shops and candy stores. We walked around and had time to try out two of the 8 shops open during our visit.

## Things to know

**ADDRESS:** 2-14-21 Shinyokohama, Kohoku ward, Yokohama, Kanagawa 222-0033

**OTHER INFO:** Card and yen payments are okay! Parking is available, 30 minutes are free with admission.



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First, we went to Shindo Ramen, a shop originally from Thailand, and tried the Thai take on tonkotsu (pork bone) ramen. Oddly, the ramen had a strong fishy, umami flavor, a bit too fishy for our taste, but not terrible.

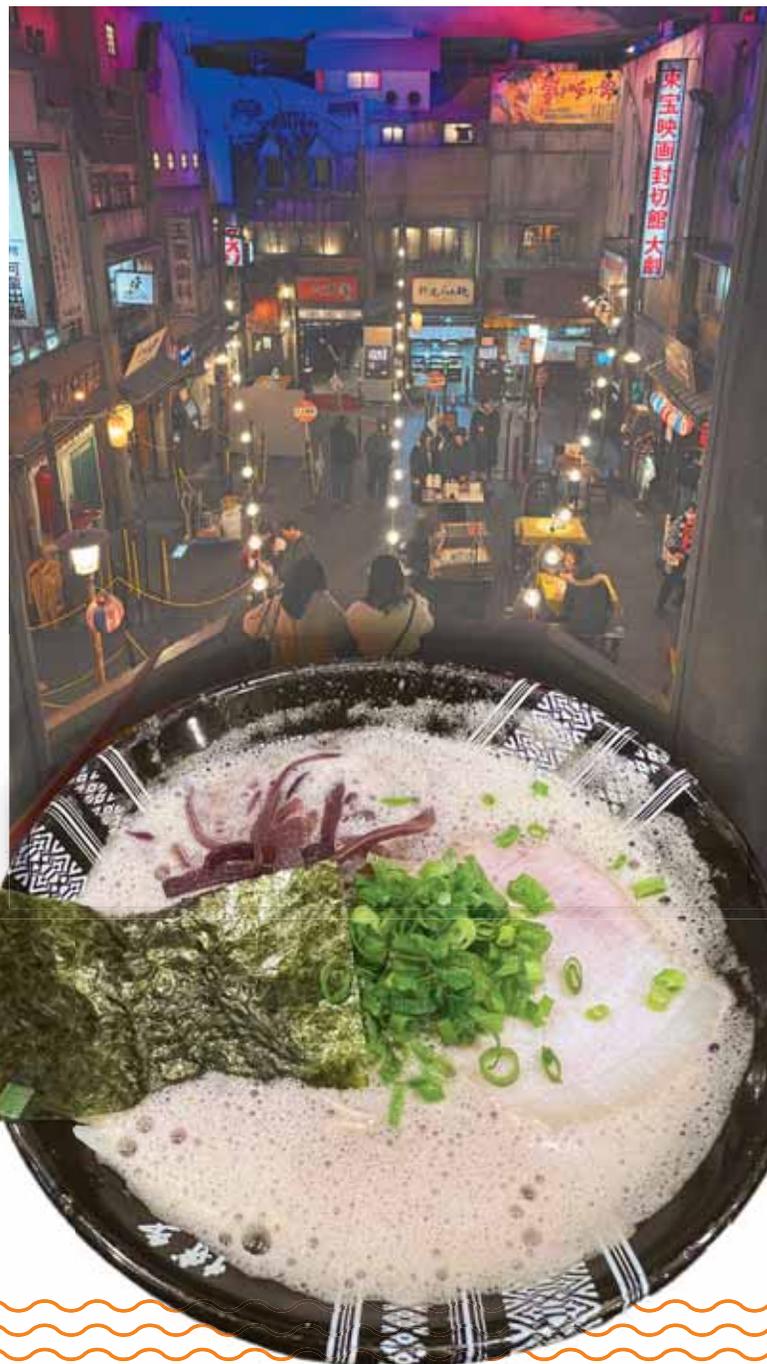
Next, we tried tonkotsu cappuccino ramen from Hakata Issou, a shop serving Fukuoka Prefecture-style ramen. The milky, foamy pork broth was flavorful and I wanted seconds.

Ranging from around 600 to 1,400 yen per bowl, the ramen at the museum shops was inexpensive. The aesthetics and the meals you can have here really make it worth a visit with family and friends.

If you plan on checking out the Shin-Yokohama

Ramen Museum, make sure to visit with an empty stomach so you have plenty of room to slurp down some noodles!

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# Never too late to wish for lucky year with soba near Zama, Atsugi!

STORY AND PHOTOS BY TAKAHIRO TAKIGUCHI,  
STRIPES JAPAN

One of Japan's most cherished year-end practices is eating "toshikoshi soba" (year-crossing soba) because the thin, long noodles symbolize longevity and good fortune.

Although New Year has passed, it is never a bad time to enjoy a steaming or chilly bowl of soba noodles. Sagami, a soba restaurant in Isehara City, their delicious noodles are made using spring water from the Tanzawa Mountain Range. Isehara is about a 30-minute drive from Camp Zama and NAF Atsugi area.

When my family and I visited, we were seated at a low tatami table in the spacious, but cozy dining area.

From the menu, my wife ordered large-shrimp tempura soba for 1,740 yen (\$11), my daughter chose zaru soba for 1,100 yen, and I opted for a large portion of zaru soba for 1,340 yen.

When the meals arrived, my wife's and daughter's zaru soba were served in two-tiered square bamboo baskets, along with a dipping broth with green onions and wasabi. My large portion came stacked in three tiers. We were overwhelmed by the generous servings.

We enjoyed our soba noodles in a traditional way – first tasting the noodles on their own, then with green onions and wasabi, and finally dipping them into the broth with the condiments. This method allows you to appreciate the quality of the noodles and the subtle

changes in flavor and texture.

I saw the dark-gray soba had a wonderful aroma, and the sweetness of the buckwheat deepened with every bite. It was far more delicious than I had expected.

According to the menu book, the restaurant uses buckwheat from Hokkaido Prefecture and mills it into powder everyday using a stone mill on site to prevent oxidation during storage. I agree with it saying that for delicious soba, the three essentials, freshly milled, freshly kneaded and freshly boiled noodles are indispensable.

The dipping broth was perfectly balanced, not too sweet, salty, not too light and not bitter. The harmony of the flavors with every bite was excellent.

The fried tempura my wife ordered included jumbo prawns, thick-cut shiitake mushrooms, okra, lotus root, and pumpkin. I bit to sample some and saw the batter was slightly thick but remained crisp and tasty. The crunchy vegetables paired nicely with the thin, springy noodles. Although it came with a dipping broth, ginger and grated daikon, the delicious dish did not require any additional condiments.

Sagami is a Nagoya-based washoku restaurant chain with 163 shops. In addition to soba, it offers many other popular washoku dishes, such as sushi, unagi, and sukiyaki. Other guests were ordering misonikomi udon, a popular Nagoya soul food, but we're saving that for our next visit.

Our delicious lunch at Sagami was wonderful and a reminder that soba is good to have no matter the time of year.

takiguchi.takahiro@stripes.com



WEBSITE

## Washoku restaurant Sagami

**LOCATION:** 740-1 Itado, Isehara City, Kanagawa Prefecture

**HOURS:** 11 a.m. – 10 p.m. Closed Wednesdays.

**PHONE:** 0463-92-3185

# Stripes Sports Trivia

Unofficially named "McCovey Cove," this body of water is a fun target for right-handed sluggers at which team's home park?

**Answer**

*San Francisco Giants*

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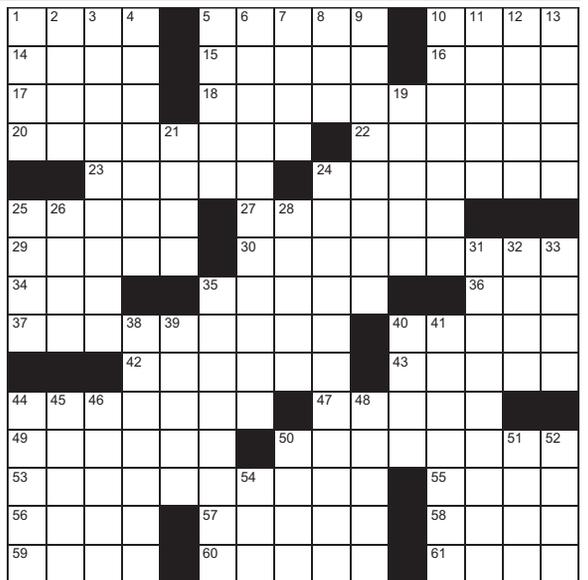
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## The Weekly Crossword

by Margie E. Burke

### ACROSS

- 1 Be nomadic
- 5 Gyro holders
- 10 Arsenal stash
- 14 Thor's father
- 15 Concerning, old-style
- 16 Skin swelling
- 17 Pie à la \_\_\_
- 18 Capitol building
- 20 Evictor's phrase, "Vacate the \_\_\_"
- 22 Briefly halted
- 23 Edmonton athlete
- 24 Things often cut
- 25 Roadside pop
- 27 Gave a ring
- 29 Build up
- 30 Relief from symptoms
- 34 Canine cry
- 35 Sweeten the deal
- 36 \_\_\_ de Janiero
- 37 Filled with stories
- 40 Series opener?
- 42 Curtis of hair care
- 43 Belittle
- 44 Carbonated
- 47 Put to the test
- 49 "Mad Men" character Don
- 50 Film legend Marlene
- 53 Temperance
- 55 In \_\_\_ land (spacy)
- 56 Revered one
- 57 Not a soul
- 58 Lay \_\_\_ the line
- 59 Till compartment
- 60 Lacking slack
- 61 Brings home



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### DOWN

- 1 Boisterous play
- 2 Glade target
- 3 VCR insert
- 4 They may be bitter
- 5 Out of fashion
- 6 Translated orally
- 7 Pekoe and oolong
- 8 Crumb carrier
- 9 "Get moving!"
- 10 Is plentiful
- 11 Awaken
- 12 Frugal fellow
- 13 Olympic racers
- 19 Rabbits' relatives
- 21 Society's woes
- 24 Successful passes on the gridiron
- 25 Hawke of "Stranger Things"
- 26 Mideast land
- 28 Studly fellow
- 31 Brighten
- 32 Lubricates
- 33 Stem swelling
- 35 Broad-minded
- 38 Wedding settings
- 39 Steer away
- 40 "Hurry up and \_\_\_"
- 41 First co-ed college
- 44 Own up to
- 45 Wear away
- 46 Dangerous household gas
- 48 Soprano Fleming
- 50 Singer Celine
- 51 What a stent will prevent
- 52 \_\_\_ Christian Andersen
- 54 Hammer slantingly

### Answers to Previous Crossword:

A	M	O	S	P	U	R	S	E	L	E	A	D
L	O	P	E	A	B	E	T	S	A	U	R	A
D	E	E	R	R	E	C	A	P	T	U	R	E
A	N	N	A	F	A	R	I	S	A	R	O	S
S	P	I	T	T	H	E	R	E				
O	N	E	H	O	R	S	E	N	O	N	F	A
W	A	S	R	O	A	R	E	D	C	O	L	E
E	V	A	S	I	O	N	A	L	B	E	R	T
N	A	M	E	P	A	S	T	E	L	T	A	R
S	L	E	D	G	E	A	S	S	U	R	E	R
A	I	R	E	R	S	T	O	P				
C	A	S	T	S	E	C	O	N	O	M	I	S
A	L	L	I	T	E	R	A	T	E	P	A	L
L	M	A	O	L	I	S	T	S	E	N	O	S
L	A	W	N	M	E	M	O	S	R	O	W	S

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## DID YOU KNOW?

Coffee farming on Okinawa has existed for about 100 years. The island's proximity to the north end of the "coffee belt," an area between the Tropic of Capricorn (23.5 degrees south) and the Tropic of Cancer (23.5 degrees north), has led some to believe it makes it a suitable location for excellent coffee.

Kanji of the week

暗

kura(-i) / an[dark]

## Language Lesson

Help!

Tasukete!

## SUDOKU

Edited by Margie E. Burke

Difficulty: Easy

		9	6					
	4	9		8				
8			4					
					2		4	7
	8	7				9	6	
4			8					
6	5		7					4
	7						1	
2		8		1		6		5

### HOW TO SOLVE:

Each row must contain the numbers 1 to 9; each column must contain the numbers 1 to 9; and each set of 3 by 3 boxes must contain the numbers 1 to 9.

Answer to Previous Sudoku:

5	2	8	1	3	9	6	7	4
4	3	6	8	5	7	2	9	1
9	7	1	4	6	2	5	8	3
1	4	7	2	8	5	3	6	9
8	9	3	7	1	6	4	5	2
2	6	5	9	4	3	7	1	8
6	5	4	3	9	1	8	2	7
3	1	2	6	7	8	9	4	5
7	8	9	5	2	4	1	3	6

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