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Conbinni chain IDs multilingual clerks

BY JEREMY STILLWAGNER AND HANA KUSUMOTO, STARS AND STRIPES
 Published: August 29, 2024

TOKYO — Japan's second largest convenience store chain, in a bid for more of the country's tourist trade, recently asked its employees to wear badges indicating the languages they speak.

More than 3.1 million foreign travelers visited Japan in June, 9% more than the same month in 2019 and a new monthly record, according to the Japan National Tourism Organization.

The country is also home to about 55,000 active-duty U.S.

service members. Many, no doubt, stop at a convenience store for a snack, an umbrella or to use the ATM.

Accordingly, Lawson asked its multilingual workers to display their proficiency in any of seven languages — English, Chinese, Korean, Thai, Vietnamese, Indonesian and Nepali.

"This will allow foreign travelers to receive services more comfortably without feeling a language barrier," the company said in an Aug. 20 news release.

Lawson cited data from the Japan Tourism Agency that 25.06 million foreign tourists visited Japan in

2023, about 6 ½ times those in the previous year.

"In light of this situation, it is urgent to strengthen multilingual support in stores that are mainly used by foreign visitors to Japan," the Lawson release said.

The text on the foreign language badges is written in the indicated language, so foreign visitors can understand.

The staff may also wear badges indicating they are studying Japanese, a company spokesman told Stars and Stripes by phone Aug. 21.

"By clarifying the languages that store staff can speak, it will help reduce employee stress and misunderstandings and improve the working environment," said the spokesman, who declined to be



A Lawson convenience store clerk shows off a badge identifying himself as a speaker of the Nepali language. Photo courtesy of Lawson Inc.

convenience store chains in Japan and resulted from increase in foreign part-time employees at convenience stores, Japan Today reported Aug. 20. Approximately 13% of Lawson employees are foreigners, according to the company release.

Around 10% of employees working for three of the major convenience store chains, Lawson, Seven-Eleven Japan Co. and FamilyMart Co., are foreign workers, according to Japan Today.

The company has no data on how many employees are wearing the badges since the practice was initiated this month, the spokesman said.

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named per company policy.

The Lawson program is the first of its kind among the major

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Life's sunset in the Land of the Rising Sun

Respect for the Aged Day

BY TAKAHIRO TAKIGUCHI,
STRIPES JAPAN

Respect for the Aged Day may call to mind Japan's rapidly aging population, but that only underscores this national holiday's emphasis on honoring and appreciating the contributions senior citizens have made to society.

Celebrating this year on Sept. 16, this holiday traces its origins back to 1947 when a farming village in Hyogo Prefecture proclaimed Sept. 15 as "Day for the Elderly," or Toshiyori-no-Hi. They held a meeting to honor

seniors and listened to them speak in order to benefit from their words of wisdoms. The idea spread throughout the prefecture, then spread nationwide.

"Respect for the Aged Day (Keiro-no-Hi) was legislated in 1966 according to the National Holidays Act," said Yukihiko Miura from the holiday section of the National Cabinet Office's General Affairs Division. "The purpose of this holiday is to express respect for the elderly in our communities and wish them longevity."

"I think sometime after Japanese society started recovering from the devastation of the war, people began to think of how they could appreciate the elderly who had contributed so much to society, and how to glean from their wisdom," Miura added.

Although the holiday was originally observed on Sep. 15, the National Holidays Act was amended in 2003, introducing the so-called Happy Monday system which moved several holidays to Mondays to create three-day weekends. Respect for the Aged

Day has been celebrated on the third Monday of September ever since.

On this day, many communities honor the elderly with parties or ceremonies and present them with gifts. TV stations usually air senior-related programs such as features on the number of elderly in Japan or the oldest people in the country.

And school children often visit facilities for the elderly to entertain them with song and dance.

How will you honor the elderly in your community on Respect for the Aged Day?

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Western ways changing Okinawa longevity

Okinawa Prefecture was once long recognized for having the highest longevity rate out of all 47 prefectures in Japan. But times have changed according to a Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare study conducted every five years. Apparently, nothing really does last forever.

While a 1995 survey showed that overall there were 22 centenarians for

every 100,000 persons in Okinawa – 3.8 times the national average at the time – survey figures show longevity has been declining in Okinawa ever since. By 2005, male Okinawans had dropped from first to 25th place.

Most recently, in 2020, Okinawan women dropped to sixteenth place in the survey with a life expectancy of 87.88 years, slightly higher than the ministry’s national average of 87.60. Okinawan men, however, plummeted to 43rd place at 80.73 years, just shy of the national life expectancy for males of 81.49 years. The

results are no surprise to Dr. Mako Suzuki who predicted the trend a decade ago in an interview with Stars and Stripes in 2013.

Suzuki, now a retired medical doctor, Ryukyu University professor emeritus and co-author of the best-selling “The Okinawa Program: How the World’s Longest Lived People Achieved Everlasting Health,” conducted a 25-year study of the traditional Okinawa diet. He said the prefecture’s claim as a haven for centenarians (once the most per capita in the world) came from an old island lifestyle that literally has been dying out. This has opened the door to diseases associated with obesity – once rare on Okinawa – like diabetes, heart failure and strokes that are

now becoming all too common.

“The chief factor is diet,” he said in 2004, pointing a finger at ubiquitous fast-food chains like A&W, McDonald’s and Kentucky Fried Chicken. “Their (younger Okinawans’) eating habits are more westernized, which raises their cholesterol.”

While older Okinawans still take walks, he added, their younger counterparts, “have the tendency to hop into a car.”

“The last two factors are the



loss of the Okinawan culture and tradition in our everyday lives,” Suzuki said. “Traditionally, Okinawans were more involved with their community and religious activities, which kept them active.”



Silver Week glitters like gold

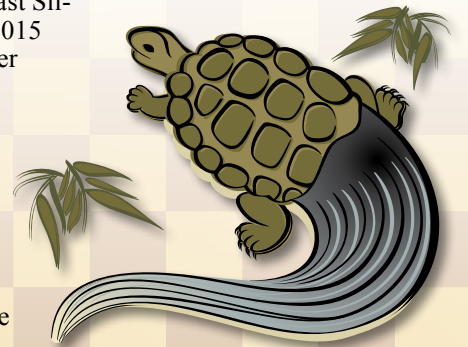
You may have heard of Golden Week, Japan’s string of four consecutive holidays from late April to early May, but you probably didn’t know that there is also a “Silver Week” which occurs once every few years in September. Here’s how it works:

Autumnal Equinox Day is a national holiday that falls on Sept. 23 (Sept. 22 during leap years). Japan’s National Holiday Act dictates that when Respect for the Aged Day, celebrated the third Monday in September, falls on Sept. 21, and it is not a leap year, the day between the two holidays becomes another holiday – National People’s Day.

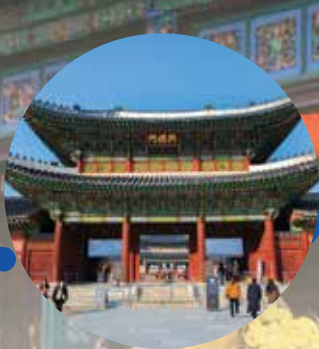
Combined with the weekend that precedes the Monday holiday, you get the five-day aptly

named, Silver Week. The last Silver Week occurred in 2015 after 2009. The next Silver Week will be in 2026. In the year 2024, Autumnal Equinox Day is celebrated on Sept. 22. Respect for the Aged Day falls on Sept. 16. It’s a shame that we don’t get a five-day off this year. But it can be named a “Bronze Week”, can’t it?

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Japan's autumn tra

Gleaning the reasons for ringing in

BY TAKAHIRO TAKIGUCHI,
STRIPES JAPAN

In the Land of the Rising Sun, September marks the waxing of autumn and the traditional harvest season in which local customs such as “tsukimi” (moon viewing), “inekari” (rice harvesting) and “Higan” memorial services take place throughout Japan.

These can be ideal opportunities to learn something about the local culture and maybe even experience a side of Japan that some modern Japanese miss out on these days. With that in mind, here are some basics to get you started:

Inekari (rice harvesting)

It's no surprise that in Japan – where 7.166 million tons of rice was produced in 2023, alone – much ado is made about harvesting this prized staple food. Its cultivation was once even considered sacred, involving invocations of an “inadama,” or rice spirit. When the grains began maturing in the fall, for example, green sheaves were offered to this deity whose generosity was celebrated at season's end.

A reflection of this practice can still be found in some traditional performing arts today; and “Inekari,” or rice harvesting, remains a traditional event in farming regions where harvest festivals are held annually. A few farms even allow visitors to join the time-honored tradition of harvesting rice.

Rice harvesting can be done manually with sickles, mechanically with a harvester or by using a combination of both. Regardless of the method, a number of guidelines are followed to preserve quality.

“We need to harvest rice at the right time with the right moisture content,” explains Shigeru Oyama, a rice farmer in Ibaraki Prefecture. “After threshing, we have to clean and dry the grain immediately.”

While most rice is harvested between September and October throughout Japan, Okinawa's warm temperatures afford two harvests a year.

In addition to harvesting 1,540 tons of rice between January and June of 2023, the island's farmers harvested a second 306-ton crop, between July and December, according to data from the Okinawa General Bureau.

Ishigaki Island is famed for its rice. It produces about 1,300 tons of annually – about 60 percent of all the rice grown in Okinawa Prefecture – due to its fertile soil and temperate climate which allow some fields to produce three crops annually. In the true spirit Japanese rice cultivation, Ishigaki is also famed for its many “hounensai,” or harvest, festivals that occur island-wide – especially from late July to early September.



Tsukimi (moon viewing)

Tsukimi is a long-held custom observed on the 15th night of eighth month (“jugo-ya”) and the 13th night of the ninth month (“jusan-ya”) of Japan's old lunar calendar. This year, the dates fall on Sept. 17 and Oct. 15, respectively. On these evenings, many take in the splendor of the Harvest Moon (and the less-famous “Hunters' Moon” in October) in all its awesome, orangish glory from their homes or yards.

Traditionally, tsukimi ranks with “yukimi” (snow viewing) and “hanami” (cherry-blossom viewing) as one of the three most favored settings for declarations of love and poetic outpourings of the soul.

This is also considered a time to wish for a rich harvest and prosperity for the coming year. It's customary to set out “tsukimi dango,” or moon-viewing dumplings, taro, soybeans, chestnuts, persimmons and other round-shaped seasonal foods, along with sake and sprigs of “susuki” grass on a portable table. The table is placed on a porch or in a corridor from which the moon is viewed.

There are a number of other customs that may be observed depending on where you are. As a kind of pre-harvest-fest activity, for example, the sprigs of susuki grass represent rice and are sometimes hung from the eaves of a home to ward off illness after an evening of moon viewing.

One old custom, slightly reminiscent of trick or treating in the States, encourages children to go around the neighborhood “stealing” the dumplings and other offerings on the tables. The stolen offerings are considered to have been accepted by the moon, thus the more stolen, the better.

In Okinawa, the light of the Harvest Moon was once used to divine households' fortunes for the coming year in some areas. Locals would make rice cakes with sweet beans called “fuchagi,” offer them to the moon, then climb a nearby hill to survey their village by moonlight. It was said that residents of homes that appeared dark would be prosperous, while those whose houses appeared bright would be less fortunate.



Photos courtesy of Kujukuri Shinko LLC

ditions

the season

Higan (memorial)

There is a saying in Japan that, “No heat or cold lasts over the equinox.” The autumnal and spring equinoxes are considered the border, and thus the end, of the respective hot and cold seasons. In Japan’s Buddhist tradition, these times also represent passing from one realm to the next.

Higan (literally, “other shore”) is a seven-day Buddhist memorial service held on the equinoxes (three days before and after). The concept can be likened to Memorial Day in the United States, in that it is a special time set aside to remember friends and family who have died.

Both the Vernal Equinox (Mar. 20 or 21) and Autumnal Equinox (Sept. 22 or 23) have been observed as holidays for more than 1,000 years in Japan. Originally, the Higan ceremony called on devout Buddhists to visit temples and offer prayers for the souls of the dead. Records indicate Higan was widely observed as far back as the 9th century A.D. when the equinoxes became religious holidays and the emperor called on

Buddhist monks to read scriptures for these rites.

Today, people visit family tombs in temples or common cemeteries to offer prayers for deceased family members and friends. Sweet rice-gluten balls, or “ohagi,” are commonly eaten during these periods. (The name ohagi comes from autumn flower “hagi,” or bush clover.)

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Under the moon

Best spots in mainland Japan

Moon viewing at Mukojima-Hyakkaen

More than 200 years since its foundation, Mukojima-Hyakkaen is a traditional Japanese garden known as a famous moon-viewing spot in Tokyo. The garden extends its opening hours until 9 p.m. on Sept. 16 - 18 for its traditional moon-viewing event, which includes performance of shinobue flute and koto, lantern-lighting and tea ceremonies. For more information, visit the website or call 03-3332-3018.



Osawanoike in Kyoto

“Osawanoike Kangetu-no-yube” Moon Viewing has been held on the oldest artificial pond in traditional Japanese temple garden in Kyoto since the Saga Emperor conducted one on a wooden boat about 1,100 years ago. Today, it is known as one of the three most famous moon-viewing events in Japan. Enjoy the traditional autumn event on a classical dragon-shaped Japanese boat on the beautiful pond. This year, the event is conducted for three days, Sept 15-17. Admission to the event site is 300 to 500 yen. Reservation is required if you go aboard a boat and Matcha tea set at Godaido Moon-viewing Hall with additional charge of 5,000 yen. For reservation or more information, visit the website or call Daikakuji Temple at 075-871-0071.



Photo courtesy of www.daikakuji.or.jp

Did you know? ‘Largest rice field mosaic in the world’ near Yokota AB

Similar to corn field art popular in the States, here in Japan you can see designs in some rice paddy fields. A short 1.5-hour drive from Yokota AB, Gyoda City, Saitama Prefecture has a 164-foot tower overlooking the impressive rice paddy art. Various rice plants that have different colors, shapes and heights are utilized in this organic canvas. In 2015, the Gyoda rice paddy art won Guinness World Record as the “largest rice field mosaic in the world.” This year’s theme is “Kiriko Festival of Noto - wishing the soonest recovery after an earthquake disaster.” The images of rice paddy art remain visible until end of October at Gyoda Ancient Lotus Park and Hall. 8 a.m. – 4:30 p.m., Admission: 200 - 400 yen. Tel: 048-559-0770 URL: <https://www.city.gyoda.lg.jp/>



- Takahiro Takiguchi, Stripes Japan

SEPTEMBER						
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Autumnal Equinox (Sept 22-23)
Jugo-ya (Harvest Moon) (Sept 17)

OCTOBER						
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Jusan-ya (Hunters' Moon) (Oct 15)



Sept. 26 - 29

TGS 2015 Photo by Aaron van Geffen, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0

Tokyo Game Show 2024

Gamer geek event returns to Makuhari Messe

BY FRANCESCO AGRESTI,
JAPAN TRAVEL

Japan is home to some of the biggest names in the gaming industry, so what better place is there to host one of the biggest and most important video game trade shows on earth? Welcome to the Tokyo Game Show! See what the gaming giants—Nintendo, Sony, Square Enix, Sega—have to offer; while you can also check out the indie developers, mobile game developers, and exciting VR games.

Attendee numbers grow exponentially each year as the hype increases for upcoming games. The four-day annual event is held inside the massive Makuhari Messe convention center, located just outside of Tokyo. This show lets the public get their hands on new systems and games, which are still in production, as well as sneak peeks at new trailers and debuts. Maybe you'll catch sight of some new Pokémon or Mario and friends. And if you don't see them at Tokyo Game Show, you can always go to Akihabara's Super Potato and Mandarake afterward to get your retro fix.

The first two days are open only for members of the press and other business-related officials, while the last two days are open to the public. It's these last two days where you can really appreciate the passion and dedication of the fans. As great as this sounds, be prepared to fight your way through dense crowds of gamers as you make way towards your favorite game. It's best to be wearing your most comfortable shoes and breathable clothes because you could be queuing quite a bit—especially if you intend to play more popular games.

All the major game developers and publishers are usually present—and as of 2018, Nintendo has rejoined the fray. If you don't fancy playing any games or joining the seemingly endless queues, you can just absorb the buzzing atmosphere



Photo by Computer Entertainment Association

Things to know

DATES: Sept. 26 - 29
TIME: 10 a.m. - 5 p.m.

Makuhari Messe
ADDRESS: 2-1 Nakase, Mihama-ku,
Chiba City, Chiba Prefecture
TEL: 04-3296-0001



WEBSITE

- Sept. 26 and 27 for businesses only; Sept. 28 and 29 for the general public.



Registration for business day tickets



Registration for general public tickets



Xbox booth at TGS
Photo by Juan Verni, CC BY-ND 2.0



PlayStation at 2018 event
Photo by Sergey Galyonkin, CC BY-SA 2.0

wearing costumes in the connecting hallway and it serves as a nice break from all the craziness on the show floor. This is the perfect opportunity to take snaps of your favorite video game characters and marvel at their expertly crafted costumes.

by walking around the convention hall. Giant flashing screens and a mishmash of sound effects from the hundred-plus games will send you into sensory overload.

As chaotic as this all sounds have no fear: people are well-mannered and very patient. Aside from games, the other main attractions are the booth beauties and cosplayers who are constantly surrounded by professional photographers and fans alike. There is a dedicated area for people

When you hear your stomach crying for fuel, stop by the food court to eat quick and easy food such as curry, yakisoba, fried chicken, and the like. If you are a gamer in any way, shape, or form, then you owe it to yourself to experience the Tokyo Game Show and immerse yourself in the gaming community.

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Stripes Sports Trivia

Considered one of the top centers of the 1960s, this former NHLer was named league MVP, among other awards, in '67 and '68. He played his entire 22-year career on one of the NHL's original 6 teams, which now hangs his No. 21 from the rafters. Who was the man that many called "Stosh"?

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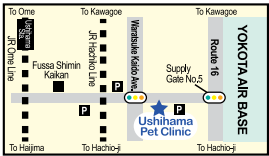
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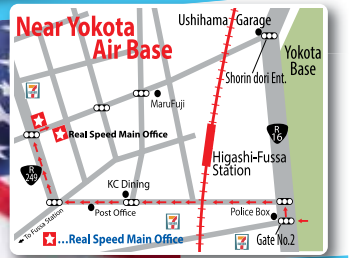
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The Weekly Crossword

by Margie E. Burke

ACROSS

- 1 Colorful parrot
- 6 Disaster relief org.
- 10 Many moons
- 14 Square things
- 15 News piece
- 16 Karate level
- 17 George Orwell, e.g.
- 19 Sandwich shop
- 20 Corrin or Stone
- 21 Oktoberfest duds
- 23 Take out a policy
- 25 Sidewalk stuff
- 26 More obese
- 28 "Now __ talking!"
- 29 Start of a list of examples
- 32 Cartoon art
- 36 1972 Eastwood flick, "__ Kidd"
- 37 Extremely cold
- 39 Do a yard chore
- 40 Like some films
- 42 What some SF taxis do
- 44 Tiny amount
- 46 Revolting sort?
- 47 Determined
- 50 Safari tree
- 52 Period of delay
- 54 Kind of cell
- 57 Military no-show
- 58 Corresponding
- 60 Fishy organ
- 61 Landlocked African land
- 62 Lucky number?
- 63 Nothing but
- 64 Husky's tow
- 65 Pollster's find

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DOWN

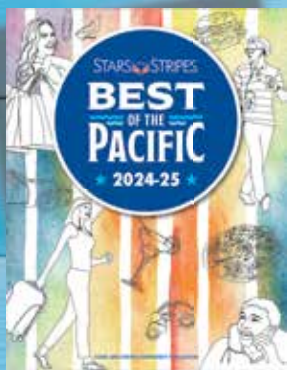
- 1 Lion's locks
- 2 Small amount
- 3 All in, say
- 4 Musical tempo
- 5 Lilliputian
- 6 Taxpayer, e.g.
- 7 Musical work
- 8 Many a Face-book repost
- 9 Punish with a fine
- 10 Navel base?
- 11 Gaggle members
- 12 Barkin or Burstyn
- 13 Period of work
- 18 Like pins and needles
- 22 Relating to coats of arms
- 24 Barracks boss
- 26 South Pacific getaway
- 27 Later
- 28 Crib cry
- 30 Mascara site
- 31 Rocks at the bar
- 33 Unoriginal
- 34 "Get going!"
- 35 Pitcher in a still life
- 38 Many a chalet
- 41 In a perfect world...
- 43 Party hearty
- 45 Weather headlines
- 47 Adult insect
- 48 Bad kind of situation
- 49 Facebook menace
- 50 Seating request
- 51 Boy with a bow
- 53 Bona fide
- 55 Neck and neck
- 56 Patch up
- 59 Winter hrs. in Chicago

Answers to Previous Crossword:

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

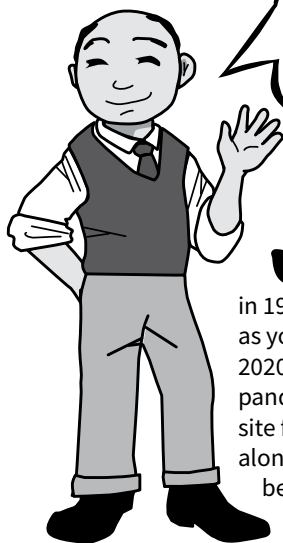
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DID YOU KNOW?

Japan has hosted the Olympics four times in the history – Tokyo (summer) in 1964, Sapporo (winter) in 1972 and Nagano (winter) in 1998. And, as you know, Tokyo also postponed the 2020 games until 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Tokyo was also chosen as the site for the 1940 summer games, but those, along with the 1944 games, never happened because of World War II.

Kanji of the week



Hama/hin (beach)

Language Lesson

Come here.

Kocchi ni kite.

SUDOKU

Edited by Margie E. Burke

Difficulty: Easy

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

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:

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

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Izu Shaboten Zoo well worth the drive

STORY AND PHOTOS BY KELLY AGEE,
STARS AND STRIPES
Published: August 29, 2024

Get to know some friendly animals on a day trip from Tokyo to a zoo full of friendly, exotic animals.

Donkeys, llamas and capybaras are among the 140 animals at Izu Shaboten Zoo, less than a three-hour drive from U.S. bases near the Japanese capital.

Founded in 1959, the zoo and botanical garden in Ito, a city on central Japan's Izu Peninsula, is right next to Mount Omuro, a 1,900-foot-high cinder cone volcano.

The most notable exhibit is Capybara Rainbow, an enclosure where visitors can pay 200 yen, or about \$1.40, to feed grass to them. The area is fenced much like a petting zoo and equipped with benches so guests can relax and wait for the capybaras to come to them. It was nice to relax among the capybaras, who are very well behaved, soft and adorable.

The capybara, typically twice the size of a beaver, is the world's largest rodent. A native of northern and central South America, it's a strong swimmer and adapted by evolution for a part-time aquatic life.

The zoo accommodates that by providing the Original Capybara Open-Air Bath, which is open



Meerkat

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every year from late November to early April.

Elsewhere on the grounds is a greenhouse with examples of more than 1,000 cactuses from Mexico, Madagascar, South America and Africa. Cactuses and succulents are sold at the cactus-hunting workshop at the greenhouse entrance, where visitors can pick their own pot and cactuses or succulent and take them home.

The zoo is alive with birds, rodents and monkeys. There is a bird enclosure in the park, which features ducks, pink flamingos, macaws, black swans and bicorn hornbills, a large Indo-Pacific bird that sports a yellow helmet.

I liked that the zoo doesn't have tiny cages; the animals look well taken care of. Some walk freely in the parks, including squirrel monkeys and peacocks. Several peacocks spread their feathers on the trail, which made for amazing photos.

The zoo has several activities, including a boat tour around the monkey area. Guests can interact and feed lemurs.

Throughout the day, the zoo puts on animal shows featuring dogs, parrots and monkeys. Showtimes are posted outside the venue.

Guests can also bring their pets if they are on a leash; they are prohibited in the free-roaming areas.

The zoo has several restaurants and a gift shop where guests can buy souvenirs.

The main restaurant is Gibbontei, also called the Forest Animal Restaurant. Try animal-themed dishes, including a capybara-shaped hamburger with a side salad and chips for 1,480 yen and duck omuhayashi, or rice omelet, shaped like a duck's face for 1,500 yen.

agee.kelly@stripes.com
@KellyA_Stripes



Capybara



Peacock



Pelicans

in Shizuoka Pref.

Things to know

Directions: 1317-13 Futo, Ito, Shizuoka

Less than 3 hours drive from all U.S. bases in the Tokyo area.

Times: Open daily, 9:30 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Costs: Weekday admission is 2,700 yen, or about \$18.80; 1,300 yen for elementary school students; 700 yen for infants. Expect to pay a bit more on holidays.

Food: An onsite eatery, Gibbontei, serves various animal-shaped dishes.





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