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Close encounters at the commissary

BY LISA SMITH MOLINARI,
SPECIAL TO STARS AND STRIPES

I scurried through the commissary doors and out of the rain, grabbing the last small cart in the vestibule. I preferred the smaller, more maneuverable carts, but as my luck would have it, this one had a wheel that screeched every fourth rotation like a cornered rat. Muttering discontentedly to myself, I dug in my purse for my grocery list, which I found torn and crumpled at the bottom. It was one of those days.

My temperamental bladder urged me to stop at the ladies room before beginning my lonely sojourn through the commissary aisles. At the mirrors, I noted that my hair was protesting the humidity by imitating a dirty, wet mop. I tried to spruce it up with a brush from my purse, which only made it frizzy.



SEE ENCOUNTERS ON PAGE 2

Ready, Set,



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ENCOUNTERS: No place for you to hide

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Retrieving my squeaky cart, I resolved to complete the task at hand, but in the produce section, the bananas were too ripe, the avocados were too hard, and I couldn't for the life of me figure out which end of the bags opened.

I moved on to the meat coolers against the back wall, where cellophane-wrapped beef, pork and poultry parts lay out on display. Seeing slabs of oozing red steak and swollen mounds of hamburger meat reminded me of the painful throb in my gut. Retrieving a pen from my purse, I scribbled "feminine products" on the bottom of my grocery list.

Somewhere in the snack food aisle, I realized I was ravenous. Someone had thoughtfully left a coupon for Pringles on the shelf, which compelled me to throw two cans into my cart. Oreo Thins are so tasty, I recalled while reaching for a bag, especially with ice cream, which I reminded myself to pick up when I got to the freezer section.

Crampy and squeaking, my reject cart and I wheeled our way through the next few aisles, scratching items off the crumpled list, and impulsively adding hormone-induced extras such as frozen pizza bites, Peanut M&Ms and a half-pound block of cheese.

Aisle six contained many necessary goods for a woman of my age. I stooped low to retrieve a humongous canister of orange-flavored fiber laxative powder. A few feet further, I scanned the bottles of pain relievers, finally selecting maximum strength capsules that would target my womanly symptoms. And finally, I stood before the colorful display of feminine products. Just as I selected a large box that would meet my absorbency needs, it happened.

The Meat and Potatoes of Life

Lisa Smith Molinari

"Hey Lisa! How've you been?"

Shaken from my shopping trance, my eyes darted toward the source of the masculine voice calling my name. "Oh, hey Jerry!" I said to my husband's former co-worker with a startled tremble that gave a guilty impression. "I'm just fine ... uh, how are you these days? I heard you got married, huh?"

As we exchanged the kind of idle chitchat that one does at the commissary, Jerry's eyes naturally glanced at the shelves beside us, at the large box in my hands, and down into my cart at an array of products and foodstuffs that told my personal and very private story. Although he had stumbled into this innocent interaction unknowingly, I could see that he felt as awkward as I did.

I resisted the impulse to run and hide behind a nearby display of shoe inserts, and quickly brought the conversation to a friendly conclusion. "It's been great to see you, Jerry. You and Francis really need to catch up!"

Breathing a sigh of relief, I shoved my misfit cart, which now seemed to be whimpering, forward, determined to snag my last few items and get the hell outta there. However, our mutual suffering continued when Jerry and I ran

into each other again in front of the dog food, at the deli and in the check-out line, where I was forced to reveal my embarrassing items again on the conveyor belt for the world to inspect and judge.

Teetering precariously on the threshold of hell, I overtipped the bagger, snatched a can of Pringles for the car ride home and careened out of the parking lot as fast as the base speed limit would allow.

Read more of Lisa Smith Molinari's columns at: themeatandpotatoesoflife.com and in Lisa's book, *The Meat and Potatoes of Life: My True Lit Com*

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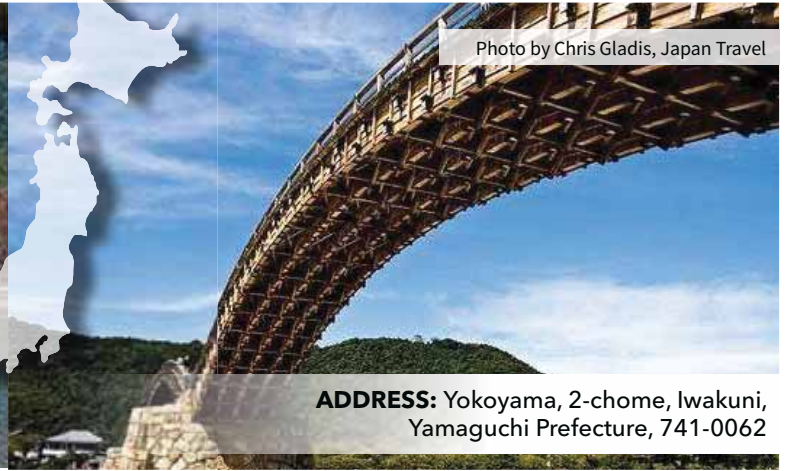


Photo by Chris Gladis, Japan Travel

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Kintai-kyo: Bridge of the Samurai

BY JUSTIN VELGUS,
JAPAN TRAVEL

The year was 1600 and the people of Iwakuni had a problem. Namely, the fierce and unpredictable Nishiki River was difficult and dangerous to cross. However, samurai living on the

Nishiki side of the river needed a safe means to reach the Yokoyama where they performed duties around the castle and castle town.

Time and time again bridges were built to ford the river, but each time heavy rains washed the bridges away. More specifically, the driftwood piled up on the columns of

the bridge and collapsed it. It was 73 years later that a design issued by the third lord of the Iwakuni domain, Hiroyoshi Kikkawa, was finally successful. The result is the beautifully functional Kintai-kyo, or the Kintai Bridge.

While the Iwakuni lord lay sick from a serious illness, he hired a Chinese monk Dokuryu to take care of him. While caring for him, Dokuryu showed him a book called "Seiko-shi". It detailed the history of Dokuryu's town and one page had a picture of an arched bridge. From that inspiration the rest is history.

The original bridge stretched 200 meters in five magnificent arches. The arches are supported by stone supports that are cemented deep into the riverbed. The beauty of design inspired the name "Kintai" which means woven gold sash. It is to the traditional Nishiki style obi worn with kimono.

After 276 years of service, the bridge succumbed to nature once again. Disrepair left the bridge

weakened during WWII. MCAS Iwakuni nearby once belonged to the Japanese military, so it is fair to assume their priorities were elsewhere during and immediately after the war. In 1950, the fatal Kijiya Typhoon swept through the area.

The town people petitioned the Iwakuni City Council to rebuild the bridge with the original design. The council wanted a less expensive and secure concrete bridge. Eventually, however, the citizens prevailed and the bridge was reconstructed three years later and has stood since 1953. The original bridge's engineering is even impressive by today's standards, so the original design was kept the same. The bridge is a major tourist attraction and one of the most recognized bridges in all of Japan.

Historically, only samurai were allowed to cross the bridge. Today, anyone willing to pay the small admission price may cross. There is another bridge if you want to cross, but it is a bit of a walk. The Nishiki side of the bridge has hotels and a tourism information center. The

Yokoyama side has a park which is great for cherry blossom viewing, several restaurants and ice cream shops, and some gift shops.

Although the river is now just a small stream, it remains historically important.

The bridge is near other attractions in town, such as Iwakuni Castle, an area to view the sacred white snakes of Iwakuni, and hiking trails. Festivals are held in the area throughout the year, including a samurai march and a fireworks display.

One specialty is cormorant fishing demonstrations. This fishing technique involves fishing with cormorant birds. Strings are tied around the neck to allow the birds to eat small fish, but the big ones get stuck and are gathered by the fishermen.

Thanks to MCAS Iwakuni, you'll find more than your average amount of Japanese people that can speak simple English in town. This makes traveling easier and allows for some fun conversations with locals.

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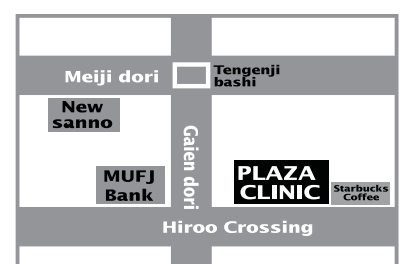


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Check it out



Impressive shrine sits on godly island near Iwakuni

BY TAKAHIRO TAKIGUCHI,
STRIPES JAPAN

One of Japan’s three most scenic attractions, the must-see Miyajima Island is just 40-minute drive from MCAS Iwakuni.

The red-colored Itsukushima Shrine and its large torii gate built on the shore of the island are very beautiful and attract more than 4 million tourists every year.

Although most of the shrine is closed to the public, you can walk around its main deck, along the main altar and noh performance stage. And, when it is at low tide, you can walk along the sea floor right up to the gate for a close look. It’s amazing that such a gigantic gate stands firmly by its own weight with four supporting pillars.

According to legend, because the island had been worshiped as a god for centuries, the shrine could not be erected on the island. And to this day, there are no cemeteries on

Itsukushima Shrine

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the island because no one is allowed to die there. Nor are folks allowed to be born there. When either time comes, it must be done on the mainland.

takiguchi.takahiro@stripes.com

File Photos

Speakin' Japanese

Autumn audibles

Autumn has arrived! Here are some useful words and phrases that might come in handy when getting into the spirit of the season.

“Suzushiku natte kimashita.” = It has gotten cool.
(“suzushiku” = cool; “natte kimashita” = has gotten)

“Aki ga totemo suki desu.” = I really like autumn.
(“aki” = autumn; “totemo suki desu” = really like)

“Tsukimi ga shitai desu.” = I want to go moon watching.
(“tsukimi” = moon watching; “shitai desu” = want to)

“Aki no mangetsu ga ichiban kirei desu.” = The autumn full moon is the most beautiful.
(“mangetsu” = full moon; “ichiban” = most [literally, No. 1]; “kirei” = beautiful)

“Aki no mushi no koe ga kikoemasu.” = I hear the song of autumn insects.
(“mushi” = insect; “koe” = song [voice])

“Octoobaa Festival ni ikimasho.” = Let’s go to the October festival.
(“ni ikimasho” = 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.

“Koyo ga tanoshimi desu.” = I am looking forward to seeing the red leaves.
(“koyo” = red leaves; “ga tanoshimi desu” = be looking forward to)

“Sanma ga oishii kisetu desu.” = Local mackerel are delicious this time of year.
(“sanma” = local mackerel; “kisetu” = time of year [season])

•Autumn foods
“sanma” = local mackerel
“shiitake” = shiitake mushrooms
“shinmai” = the year’s new rice
“budo” = grapes
“kuri” = chestnuts

•Old Japanese saying
“Aki nasu wa yome ni kuwaseruna.” = Don’t let your wife eat autumn eggplant.
(This saying has two meanings. It means that autumn eggplant is too good to share with your wife. Another meaning is that autumn eggplant has less seeds so, it is bad luck for those trying to have babies.)

– Stripes Japan

Autumn has arrived! Here are some useful words and phrases that might come in handy when getting into the spirit of the season.

“It has gotten cool.”
= Suzushiku natte kimashita.

- suzushiku = cool
- natte kimashita = has gotten

“I really like autumn.”
= Aki ga totemo suki desu.

- aki = autumn
- totemo suki desu = really like

“I want to go moon watching.”
= Tsukimi ga shitai desu.

- tsukimi = moon watching
- shitai desu = want to

“The autumn full moon is the most beautiful.”
= Aki no mangetsu ga ichiban kirei desu.

- mangetsu = full moon
- ichiban = best, No. 1
- kirei = beautiful

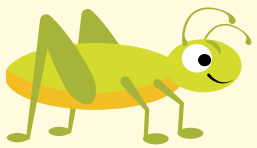
FULL
LESSON ▶



Crickets herald the arrival of the nice season of autumn with a bell-like beautiful voice. They are actually great musicians. The sound of crickets chirping in the evening often reminds us Japanese that autumn has come.

Practice this phrase:

“We can hear the nice autumn sounds of crickets’ singing.”
= Mushinokoega shimasu.



- mushi = bug
- koe = voice, sound, singing,
- ... ga shimasu = there is/we can hear

Use the seasonal Japanese phrase on your evening walk, surrounded by the lively cricket sounds. It sure will remind you that a nice, cool season has come at last.

VIDEO
LESSON ▶



In Japan, autumn is considered the best season for enjoying the arts.

As it's neither too hot, nor too cold in this season, we consider it the best time to visit concert halls and art museums to appreciate the arts. It is also a good season to be inspired to play or listen to music, draw pictures or do calligraphy at home.

“It’s the autumn for arts, isn’t it?”

= Geijutsu no aki desune?

- geijutsu = arts
- no = of
- aki = autumn/fall
- ...desune? = It is..., isn't it?



VIDEO
LESSON ▶



**Speakin’
Japanese**

BY TAKAHIRO TAKIGUCHI,
STRIPES JAPAN

Suzushiku natte
kimashita.

If you look and listen around you, there are signs that fall is on its way. In Japan, the days are getting shorter and you can hear a nice sound of crickets chirping around you in the evening.

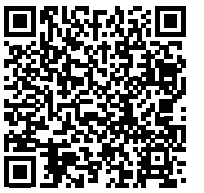
“It feels like autumn is setting in.”
= Akimeite kimashita.

秋めいてきました

- akimeite 秋めいて = like autumn
- kimashita きました = it's getting



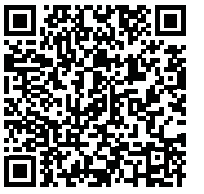
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LESSON ▶



“It’s a beautiful autumn day after the typhoon passed!”
= Taifuuikka no akibare desu!
台風一過の秋晴れです!

- akibare 秋晴れ = a beautiful autumn day
- taifuuikka 台風一過 = after typhoon passed
- ... desu です = it is ...

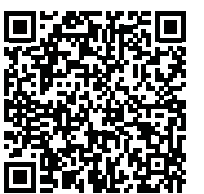
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“I came here to hunt for autumn colors.”
= Momijigarini kimashita.
紅葉狩りに来ました

- momijigari 紅葉狩り = autumn leaves hunting
- kimashita 来ました = I/We came here

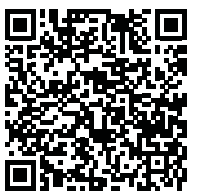
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“Let’s enjoy seasonal autumn food.”
= Akino mikaku wo tanoshimi-masho.
秋の味覚を楽しみましょう

- aki no mikaku 秋の味覚 = autumn food
- tanoshimi-masho 楽しみましょう = Let's enjoy

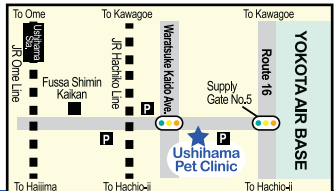
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Fall foliage fun near Iwakuni

STORY AND PHOTOS BY LINDA CORDES,
IWAKUNIFOODIE.COM

It's almost that time of the year again. That time when sweaters and boots are being pulled out and soup recipes are being researched. I want to twirl around and sing, "It's the most wonderful time of the year!" Not only because I love soup and sweaters, but mostly because of my excitement for fall colors. The reds, yellows, and oranges that pop up all over the place every year in November. While Japan has so many beautiful spots to enjoy the fall colors, there are some amazing places in and around Iwakuni. These are some of my favorite fall foliage spots!



Momijidani Park at Kintai

This has long been one of my favorite fall foliage spots!

I spend most of my lunch breaks walking around here just taking in the colors and this scenery. Most people don't even realize this gorgeous spot is in Iwakuni. Located in the Kintai area, Momijidani Park is one place I highly recommend during fall.

This is also where one of the hiking paths up to the Iwakuni Castle begins. It's a nice little hike any time of the year, but it can be quite buggy in the summer.



Miyajima

Miyajima is beautiful any time of the year, but

it is extra beautiful in the fall. Momijidani Park on Miyajima is my favorite spot to head to in November, but there are some other places that I love to visit for fall colors.

Be sure to walk all the way through the park and continue exploring around the back portion. It's really gorgeous all the way through.

Afterwards, head over to the Daishoin Temple.

Just like the Momijidani Park area, be sure to walk around the entire temple grounds.

Hiking up to Mt. Misen or taking the ropeway up is also very beautiful in the fall.



Mitaki Temple in Hiroshima

Mitaki Temple is one of Hiroshima City's best kept secrets. Hard to imagine this temple and the lovely grounds that surround it are just 15 minutes away from downtown Hiroshima (depending on traffic).

There's a little pagoda on the grounds with a few maple trees around it that I love.

When walking up to the temple, there is a lovely spot on the left where you can enjoy a matcha and a sweet (for a fee) while looking at a garden with a waterfall.

I recommend visiting Mitaki Temple early in the morning. The parking lot is not very big and it fills up very quickly. The first time I went, I arrived a little after 0800 (on a weekday) and I got one of the last spots. When I was ready to leave, there were people waiting for a parking space to open up.

This is another spot that is really nice to visit just about any time of the year. I went in the rain one summer, and it was so green and so pretty. Be sure to walk around and see everything. The grounds are quite large.

They are open from 8 a.m. – 5 p.m.



Buttsuji Temple in Mihara

Buttsuji is also a temple that is nice to visit any time of the year. I first visited this temple in December a couple of years ago and really enjoyed walking around the temple grounds. As I walked around, however, I noticed all of the maple leaves on the ground. I started thinking about how amazing this place must be in the fall and decided I needed to come back the following fall.

It was pretty crowded, but so worth it. The colors were amazing! Looking at these photos is making me want to go again this year.

Last year, I visited Buttsuji on the 19th of November. It was very beautiful, but a lot of leaves had already fallen off so I couldn't help but wonder how it was the weekend prior to that. Of course, every year it is a little bit different because it all depends on Mother Nature. Typically, if you visit around the second and third week of November, you will be able to enjoy the pretty colors.

Buttsuji has a few different parking areas, but they do fill up pretty quickly and stay pretty full throughout the day. We had to park at one of the lots that was further away, but it was a very nice walk to the temple grounds from there so we didn't mind at all.

There are so many beautiful spots to enjoy the autumn colors that are not too far from Iwakuni, and I hope these places help you plan some fall adventures!



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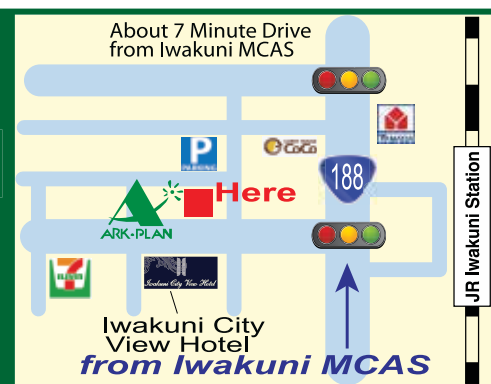
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1 Venus Line



A drive on scenic Venus Line

STORY AND PHOTOS BY TAKAHIRO TAKIGUCHI,
STRIPES JAPAN

As the high temps and pandemic continue, there's nothing better than a quick escape to get some cool air in the beautiful country landscape. Lately, my wife and I have been experiencing some cabin fever since we've been cooped up at home for the better part of the 18 months. So, we decided to head toward Nagano Prefecture's nice, cool mountainous terrain.

Scenic highway in Nagano Prefecture

On a Saturday morning in late August, we left our home in Yokosuka City around 5 a.m. looking forward to getting a view of Nagano's beautiful mountains and breathing in the fresh, cool highland breeze. The traffic was unexpectedly smooth, and we made great time getting to Suwa IC via the Yoko-Yoko, Tomei, Ken-o and Chuo Expressways. From there, we stopped for a coffee at a 7-Eleven and made our way on the Venus Line highway, known for the exquisite views of Nagano's landscapes.

The Venus Line is a 47-mile-long stretch connecting Chino City and Utsukushigahara Heights, and besides the views, also features beautiful parks and a large open-air museum perfect for breaks along the way.

We enjoyed the drive along the Venus Line and were able to spot bright green hills, lush forests of pine trees, the majestic Southern Alps of Japan and the crystal-clear lakes from the road. Although it was a bit cloudy, the complicated colors and shapes of clouds added a kind of nice effect on the celestial landscape and made us feel as if we were dreaming.

Two beautiful lakes

Our first stop on the Venus Line was Lake Tateshinako, a tiny man-made lake located 4,100 feet above sea level. We took a brisk walk on the lakeside promenade surrounded by white birch and pine trees.

Next, we took a short 10-minute drive to Lake Shirakabako, much larger and surrounded by dozens of hotels and restaurants. Unfortunately, most of the businesses here were closed due to the state of emergency. From the lake's observation deck, we got a view of the water and a fountain splashing at its center.

Exploring the hills of Mt. Kirigamine

Next stop on our Venus Line trip we stopped at Fujimidai parking lot for a view of Mt. Kirigamine. The temperature here was below 65 degrees Fahrenheit, so my wife wore her jacket as we took a short hike up a hill to get a look at the foliage. As the name Fujimidai (literally, Mt. Fuji viewing spot) indicates, we could see Mt. Fuji standing high over the tall mountain ranges of the Southern Alps. No words could describe the great view!

Nearby, Kurumayamagata is another parking lot featuring a couple of restaurants and lodging facilities, and also serves as a mountain hiker station. We weren't here to hike as we are not hardcore hikers, but we did take a leisurely walk for 30 minutes to check out the large marsh and wooden trails and enjoy the fresh, cool mountain breeze.

3 Yamabe Winery



Open-air museum like ruins of old civilization

Utsukushigahara (literally, beautiful field) is a plateau 6,562-feet high above sea level and marks the end of the Venus Line. On this plateau, the open-air museum greets visitors with 350 modern sculptures and artwork. Walking amongst the beautiful pieces in this "museum in the sky" made us feel as if we were exploring in the ruins of an old civilization.

Yamabe Town — home to tasty grapes, veggies

After we spent a couple of hours taking in the fresh air and complex art, we drove to Yamabe Town,

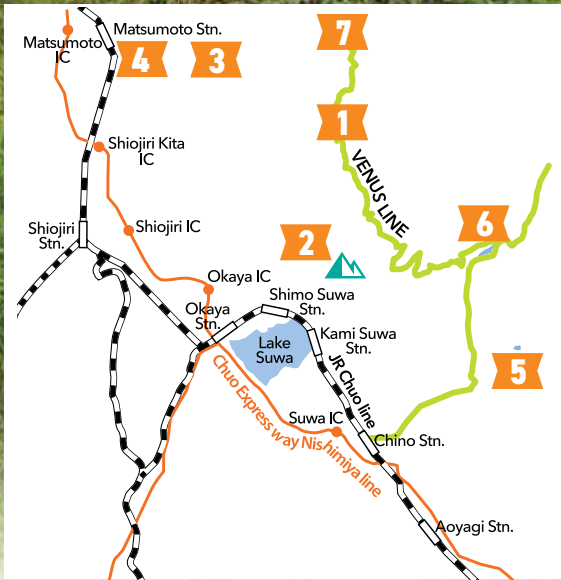
famous for its parked the car market and pure

Back on the Matsumoto, an tory and culture so we avoided c lunch boxes in c

Compared to is an elegant c Since it was to we explored Na

2 Fujimidai (Kirigamine)





ine

4 Yoikana Brewery



Lined with clay-walled and tiled-roof buildings, the architecture and ambiance here were great and very telling of why Matsumoto is a popular tourist destination.

One block from Nawatedori Street, we made a stop at Yoikana Shuzo, an old sake brewery we've visited before. We were driving and were not able to sample sake products this time. But, if you are not the designated driver, don't forget to sample the brewery's high-end sake brand "Metoba-no-izumi," as the extremely mellow and smooth flavor pairs well with any food.

Yoikana Shuzo didn't let us go home empty-handed. Instead of sampling sake, the staff filled up a large bottle with Metoba water, spring water drawn from their well which is used for brewing high-end sake.

It was 6 p.m. when we left Matsumoto and began our journey back to Yokosuka. We had smooth traffic on the way home as well and were back home by 10 p.m.

Our one-day drive along the Venus Line recharged us enough to last until the next time we're able to go out for a drive. It's only four hours from Tokyo and many of the Kanto Plain's U.S. military bases. If you're due for some recharging, plan your own trip to the mountains via the scenic and refreshing Venus Line.

takiguchi.takahiro@stripes.com



Speakin' Japanese

BY TAKAHIRO TAKIGUCHI,
STRIPE JAPAN

Since I have felt a kind of cabin fever at home in my steamy city, I decided to drive down to Utsukushigahara Open-Air Museum an impressive 6,562-feet high above sea level. Here I could take a nice deep breath of fresh, cool air. As the hot days continue, let's take a rest, get relaxed and enjoy some nice deep breaths in a cool place.



Shinkokyu wo shimasho!
= Let's take a deep breath!

VIDEO
LESSON

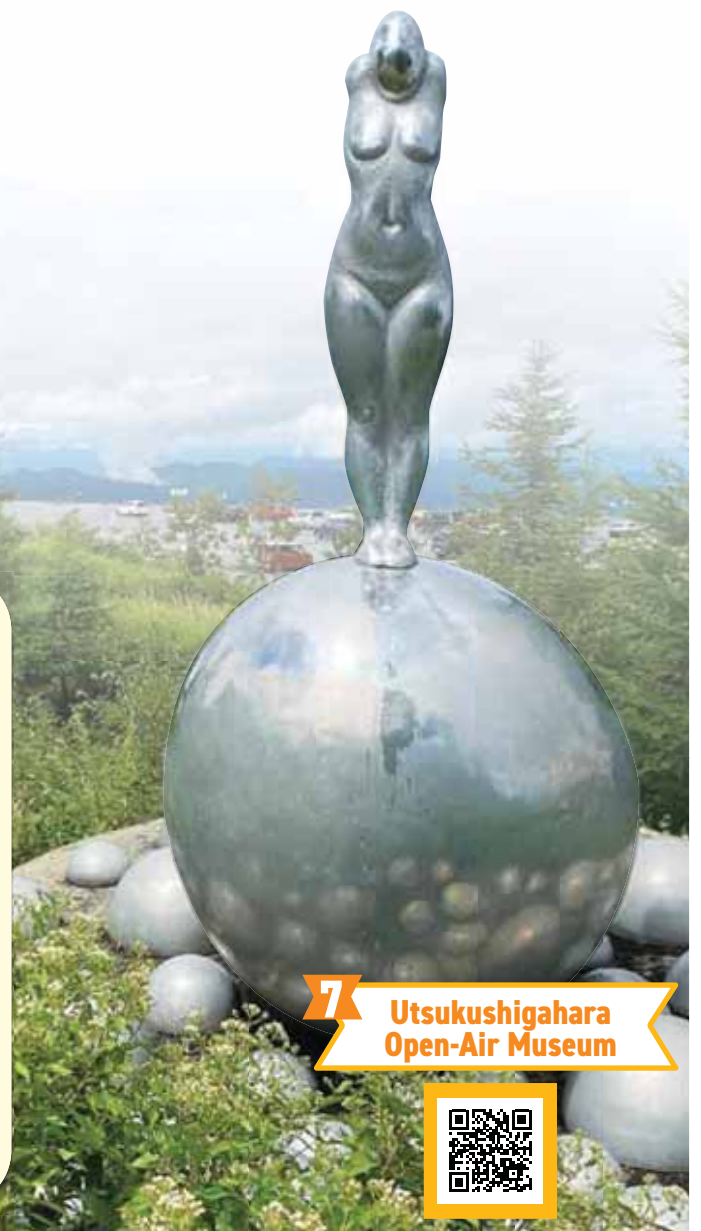


grapes and highland vegetables. We at a town winery and local farmer's chased a lot of fresh vegetables.

The elegant city of Matsumoto

road, it took us 30 minutes to reach old castle city with plenty of rich his-. By this time, it was already 4 p.m. crowded restaurants and enjoyed bento our car.

o other old castle towns, Matsumoto city despite its traditional atmosphere. o late to visit the castle or museums, akamachidori and Nawatedori Streets.





Forest Therapy

A popular wellness trend that was born in Japan

STORY AND PHOTOS BY
ALENA ECKELMANN,
JAPAN TRAVEL

Japan is a mecca for forest lovers. In fact, the country's best kept secret is Japan's forests. On the International Day of the Forest on March 21 we celebrate our tree friends and all other beings of the woods, and what better way doing this than going for a slow walk in a nearby forest.

About 70% of Japan is covered by forest and there are a great number of National Parks and Recreational Forest where access to forest is convenient and where forest experiences are facilitated.

One such forest experience is Forest Therapy, which has gained popularity internationally in recent years as a recognized health management practice.

The roots of Forest Therapy are in the Japan of the 1980s. It all started with shinrin-yoku, or "forest bathing", a word that is now part of the vocabulary of all trendy health bloggers and wellness gurus around the world.

Now, 40 years later, there are 65 Forest Therapy centers in Japan in locations ranging from Hokkaido to Okinawa. Each



A "bed" in the forest is a nice way to relax.

center has a Forest Therapy base and trails as well as certified Forest Therapy guides.

There are not many English-speaking trained Forest Therapy guides in Japan yet but their number is increasing. In addition, there are some Japanese guides who were trained by international Forest Therapy associations but they operate in Japan and usually speak English very well.

Why not join a Forest Thera-

py walk the next time you come to Japan? Whether you are a beginner or already a seasoned practitioner of Forest Bathing, it will be a wonderful experience in one of Japan's great forests.

Slower than hiking

When we go hiking or trekking, we walk through forests and mountains but often there is little time to linger and appreciate nature. We are on a schedule and we want to get from A to B.

Often the only time we stop is when we take a snapshot.

Our walk is often rather speedy and often we talk to our fellow walkers. We aim for good health by getting some mileage under our belt and even track our achievements with an app on our smartphone or on another electronic device. We don't pay much attention to the forest that we are passing through because often we talk to our fellow walkers.


With Forest Therapy, the key is to go slow, very slow that is, and to immerse yourself with all your senses. Imagine nature as being a big bathtub where you soak in its colors, scents and sounds, all while being fully clothed, and you get the idea.

Walk with a Forest Therapy guide

Forest Therapy walks are typically done with a guide. This is someone who has trained to be a Forest Therapy Guide and who is licensed.

Forest Therapy guides know the area that they are taking people to. They know the trails, the specifics of the landscape and the local flora and fauna. Yet, they are neither Tourist Guides nor Nature Guides.

Learning about the local sights or getting a lesson in how to identify trees, flowers or birds is not the objective of a Forest Therapy walk.

What the Forest Therapy guides are there for is to stimulate your perception and lead you to engage all your senses. Many of us are a little rusty in really using our senses. The guide will prompt you and encourage you by issuing 'invitations' to connect with nature by using one of your senses or all of them. 



Lie down and look up to get a new perspective on life. Shapes and colors and changing seasons are all good prompts for a sense experience.

→ Out of the head and into the body

Our senses are the interface between the outside world and our inside world. They let us experience our surroundings and connect with what is around us. The five senses are functions of our body that we take for granted but we don't really take advantage of this gift anymore.

When do we really see, hear, smell, taste and feel things around us, much less nature where we spend so little time these days.

Many of us live in their heads and through their mobile devices. We think about the world rather than actually sense it with our body. Virtual experiences replace the real thing.

Let's take an imaginary walk into the forest:

Do you notice the faint sent of the shrubs next to the trail?

How about listening to the murmur of the little stream that runs by the trail?

Does the breeze of wind gently blowing through the valley cool your skin?

Do you notice the different shades of green around you and the different shapes of trees and leaves?

Invitations and sharing

For the duration of a Forest Therapy walk of 2 to 3 hours, there is a series of these invitations that are focused on stimulating and using your senses.

After each experience, the group comes together and participants are encouraged to share some impressions.

The group, together with the guide, might be moving from one place in the forest to another, or place themselves in just one location and from there take short walks out and back.

At some point during the Forest Therapy session, participants will share a cup of tea and some snacks, or even a bento box.

Healing fragrance from the forest

In recent years there has been an increasing interest in the 'life of trees' and the relationships between



Forest Therapy walks are guided walks. The guide facilitates the experience.

trees, and between trees and other inhabitants of the forest. More and more insights come to light and they tell us that the forests are webs of living beings other than humans who interact with each other, defend themselves and help each other.

While being in the forest, you are breathing in wood essential oils from the trees around you. These essential oils are called phytoncides and they are defined as "anti-microbial volatile organic compounds" that are emitted by trees to protect themselves against insects.

When we walk through a forest and breathe in forest air, we also breathe in these phytoncides. Our bodies react to these "chemicals" by producing more white blood cells, also called "natural killer cells", or short NK. Thanks to the activity of these cells in our bodies we are protected against tumors and virus infections.

Health benefits

Forest Therapy is not just a re-discovery of the old-age wisdom that being in nature and walking in forests is good for the body and mind, but there is actually a wealth of scientific data that proves it.

These data were gathered from a series of experiments and they show that a slow walk in the bush will boost your immune system,

reduces stress and encourages healing. There is a wealth of information about the health benefits of Forest Therapy available on the Internet.

For example, a Forest Therapy walk helps to increase the parasympathetic nerve activity and decrease the sympathetic nerve activity. The sympathetic nervous system helps people cope with stressful situations. Its activation results in a rise in blood pressure, an accelerated heart rate and other body actions that prepare you for a "fight or flight" response in a dangerous situation.

It is interesting that many of our daily life situations in the 21st century resemble this scenario. This is why many people are constantly in a "flight or fight" mode. They can never relax, calm down and take things easy. For this to happen, you need to activate the parasympathetic nervous system. And a Forest Therapy walk does exactly that!

Forest Therapy plus alpha

While the health benefits are already convincing enough, Forest Therapy should be fun and relaxing. This is why Forest Therapy bases and guides in Japan continuously expand their repertoire of Forest Therapy experiences to find something for everyone. All happens in the forest of course! Here

are some of the options:

- There are walks for solo people and walks for families with children.
- There are walks that incorporate yoga or meditation.
- Some other walks include handi-craft experiences, such as natural dying or making a bracelet with wooden beads.
- There is even a "book café" in the forest. What better way to relax after a forest walk than having a cup of coffee and flicking through some books that feature nature themes.

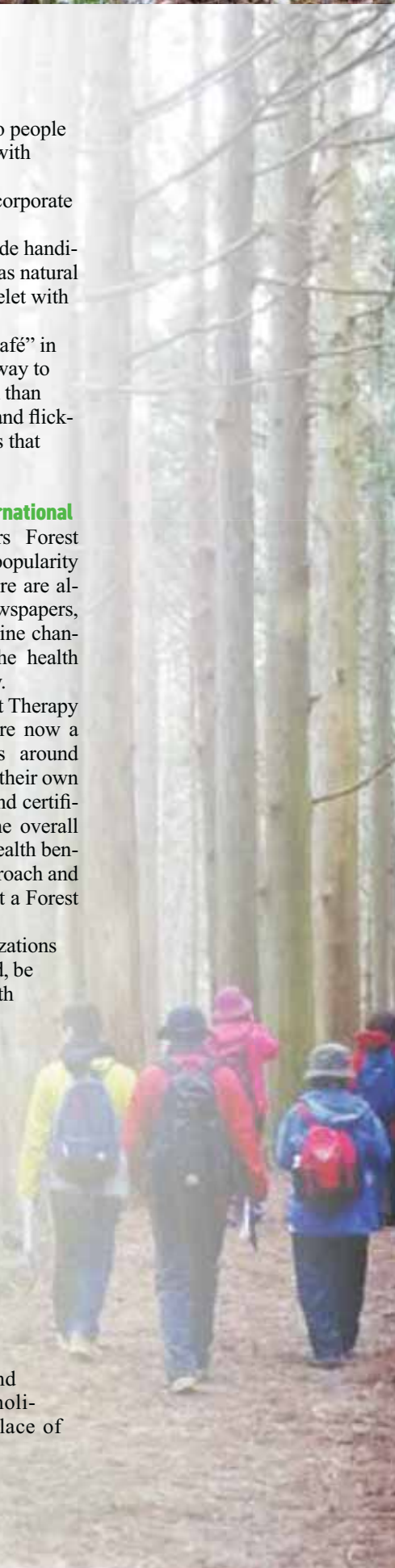
Forest Therapy goes international

In the last five years Forest Therapy has gained in popularity outside of Japan too. There are already many reports in newspapers, magazines, on TV, on online channels and portals about the health benefits of Forest Therapy.

In addition to the Forest Therapy Society in Japan, there are now a number of organizations around the world that have set up their own Forest Therapy training and certification schemes. While the overall idea is the same and the health benefits are the same, the approach and method of how to conduct a Forest Therapy walk differ.

Forest Therapy organizations in each region of the world, be it North America or South America, Europe, Asia or Australia, for example, have incorporated elements that have roots in their region. A quick internet research will let you know whether there are any Forest Therapy clubs, groups or events available near you.

Why not try out a Forest Therapy walk closer to home first and then join one on your holiday in Japan, the birthplace of Forest Bathing!







Dinner and a comedy show are expat staples at Irish pub in central Tokyo

AN SOLAS
LOCATION: Sendagaya Apartment Building 103, Toei Housing Building 1, 5-22 Sendagaya, Shibuya-ku, Tokyo
HOURS: Walking distance from Shinjuku Station via the Southeast Exit
PRICES: 700 yen to 1300 yen for most menu items; cover charge for the monthly comedy show is 1,500 yen.



STORY AND PHOTOS BY KELLY AGEE,
STARS AND STRIPES
Published: April 14, 2022

An Irish pub on a street corner in Shibuya is a likely place to find expats from around the world, a bite of traditional Irish food and a good laugh. Now that pandemic emergency measures in Tokyo are a thing of the recent past, a little bit of comedy is just what the virologist ordered. Monthly stand-up nights at the An Solas Irish Pub deliver a wicked roster of comedians from around the world who perform their routines in English. I caught the Come Again Comedy show, a troupe of nine comedians, in early April at a cover charge of 1,500 yen, or about \$12.25. I didn't know what to expect or if the show would be funny or if the jokes would be lost in translation, but the bar

EXCLUSIVE NEWS FROM:
STARS AND STRIPES
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filled with laughter during the whole show. The headliner, Evans Musoka, 34, a native of Nairobi, Kenya, has been a comedian for 10 years and has performed in 14 countries in Southeast Asia and Africa. In Kenya, he performed in Swahili, but adjusted his jokes once he started performing in Japan. "When I moved here and I noticed my material doesn't work, I had to change my comedy around because of the different people and different culture," Musoka said, "and this actually helped me to become more universal." Comedian Jon Sabay, 39, a native of Dallas, said the comedy nights are a great way for people from around the world to connect through laughter. "Living in Japan when you are not from Japan is a pretty unique experience," he said. "Japan is a very welcoming place but at the same time it can make you feel quite foreign. There is a shared understanding that it is very unique that we are all here in Japan. So, it is just

nice to revel in that and celebrate it." Comedy night at An Solas (Irish for "The Light") rolls around again at 6 p.m. on May 21. In the meantime, the pub is a pretty good spot for authentic Irish fare. The staff speaks English and English menus are available. Typical selections include a roast beef sandwich for 1,100 yen, fish and chips for 700 yen, shepherd's pie for 1,100 yen and Irish lamb stew for 1,200 yen. It sounds like a meat-eater's paradise, but I found a veggie tofu burger for 1,100 yen. The burger is topped with fresh avocado, tomatoes, red onions, radish sprouts, lettuce and balsamic sauce. It is a good portion sandwich and comes with a side of fries. Good laughs, good service and good food make An Solas worth the trip, but the real attraction for me was the warm and friendly Irish-pub atmosphere. Add to that a clientele of expats from around the world, and it's definitely a destination to experience.

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Sample plant-based cuisine, 'phantom beans' near Yokota

STORY AND PHOTOS BY RAY MCINTOSH,
STARS AND STRIPES
Published: April 28, 2022

Hoccori Cafe offers meat-eaters and vegetarians alike a chance to try plant-based cuisine in a calming cottage environment in western Tokyo. This Tachikawa cafe specializes in healthy, organic vegetarian meals that rely heavily on local ingredients. Most of Hoccori's vegetables are grown right in Tachikawa without chemical pesticides.

During a visit in April, I tried the spicy black curry, which came with a salad. For another 350 yen, you can include a small bowl of black senishi soybean miso soup. Extra rice is available for 250-650 yen, depending on how much you would like.

I also tried the "whimsical snack and drink set," which was a gluten-free and vegan black sesame cake. This dish did include nuts and soy, which are common allergens, and it was not marked on the menu or on the "whimsical snack" sign.

According to the menu, the enzymatic brown rice is mixed with "phantom beans," black senishi soybeans, Himalayan rock salt and red salt and is cooked at high pressure and high temperature.

Hoccori Cafe uses black senseok soybeans in many dishes. The menu says they are produced in

Hokkaido and have five times more antioxidants than regular soybeans and twice as much polyphenol as traditional red beans.

The menu claims the food is completely nutritious and "highly detoxifying," with a wide range of beneficial effects, including prevention of modern diseases, anti-aging and dieting.

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The cafe also offers a vegan and gluten-free section for handmade sweets made from "safe ingredients," according to its menu. This includes a Japanese sweet potato wrapped in delicious red bean paste and sprinkled with soybean flour with brown rice.

The meals on average cost around 1,200 yen, or about \$9.40, and many dishes include a serving of coffee or tea. The savory dishes are portioned large enough to share or eat on your own, while the seasonal desserts or "whimsical snacks" are on the smaller side.

Hoccori has daily veggie bowls, and the gluten-free "whimsical snack" options change frequently.

Around half of the food is partially and the other half is fully vegan. Vegetarian dishes include pizza rice (which has cheese) and "veggie pork" (which has egg).

The "whimsical snack" is guaranteed to be gluten-free

Hoccori Cafe

LOCATION: 2-5-8 Shibasakicho, Tachikawa, Tokyo

aHOURS: 11:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., Tuesday through Saturday

PRICES: Average drink cost is 500 yen and 1,200 yen for meals. Cash only; takeout is available.

DRESS: Casual

DIRECTIONS: A 10-minute walk from the south exit of Tachikawa Station.

TEL: 042-595-8379

but is not guaranteed always to be vegan, so you must check.

A section of the menu is set devoted exclusively to the cafe's unique teas. The seasonal drink of April is hot lemonade, which costs 650 yen. The cafe offers a small dish of soy milk with coffees and teas.

Hoccori offers vocational cooking classes for anyone interested in how the cafe prepares its food. These cost around 7,500 yen per person, and the lessons are only in Japanese. More information on cooking classes can be found on the Hoccori Cafe Facebook page.

Hoccori is a 20-minute, direct train ride from Fussa Station, near Yokota Air Base. The cafe is in a small building in a busy section of Tachikawa and just a 10-minute walk from Showa Park.

The dining environment is a cozy, cottage vibe and seats about 20 indoors. The interior is decorated with dried flowers, small figurines of geese and other creatures, crochet details and plenty of wooden accents.

The shop does not have an English menu, but the owner knows some English. A translation app on your phone will come in handy. Some items have pictures on the menu, and those that are vegan are labeled as having no animal products.



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SWEET HISTORY

The tale behind Japan's favorite potato

STORY AND PHOTOS BY SHOJI KUDAKA,
STRIPES JAPAN

In Japan and Okinawa, the beloved sweet potato is considered the taste of autumn. Rich in nutrition such as starch, sugar, fiber, and vitamin C, this root vegetable is popular for those seeking a healthy way to satisfy their sweet tooth.

You'll find that "sweet potato" goes by many names here, including satsumaimo (which means potato of Satsuma), karaimo (Chinese potato), kansho (sweet potato), Ryukyuimo (Ryukyu's potato), or Noguniimo. The names for sweet potatoes and the crop itself are



Noguni Sokan Guu, a shrine in Kadena Town, is dedicated to the historical figure who is credited with bringing the sweet potato to Okinawa.

deeply rooted in the history of Okinawa and Japan.

These delicious purple-skin

and starchy-sweet root vegetables first arrived in 1605 in Okinawa during the Ryukyu Kingdom (1429 – 1879), according to Kadena Town. Noguni Sokan, a government official from Noguni Village (part of present-day Kadena Town), is credited with bringing and cultivating sweet potatoes from Fujian of Ming (present-day China).

Soon, neighboring villages on Okinawa would receive saplings and start to cultivate their own crops of sweet potato. Shinjo Gima, who governed Gima Village, now known as a part of Naha, was the one who helped accelerate the spread after studying the crop and finding that it fit in with the island climate, could be harvested every 5 to six months and, as a bonus, had a good taste.

In 15 years, sweet potato spread across the island and soon could also be found on the mainland.

As early as 1611, sweet potatoes appeared in Satsuma Domain, a present from King Sho Nei Ryukyu, who reigned from 1589 to 1620. Then, in 1615, sweet potatoes arrived in Nagasaki Prefecture with the help of the "English Samurai" William Adams, the first British person to come to Japan. Adams sent a crop he found during port call in Naha to Richard Cocks, director of the British East India Company's outpost in Hirado at the time.

Cocks' diary notes that he received a bag of sweet potatoes from William Adams on June 2 of 1615. Around that time, he also received another pack of the root vegetables from William Eaton, another member of the company, who was visiting Ryukyu. Cocks planted the crops in a garden, the first documented cultivation of sweet potatoes in the country, according to Hirado City.

In 1698, Hisamoto Tanegashima, a lord of Tanegashima island in Satsuma domain, received a basket of sweet potatoes from King Shotei of Ryukyu, who reigned from 1669 to 1709. Then the Lord ordered his subordinate to cultivate the crop.

By 1735, the Satsuma



A monument standing just outside of Kadena Marina commemorates "Noguniimo Declaration," which was made by Kadena Town in 2005.

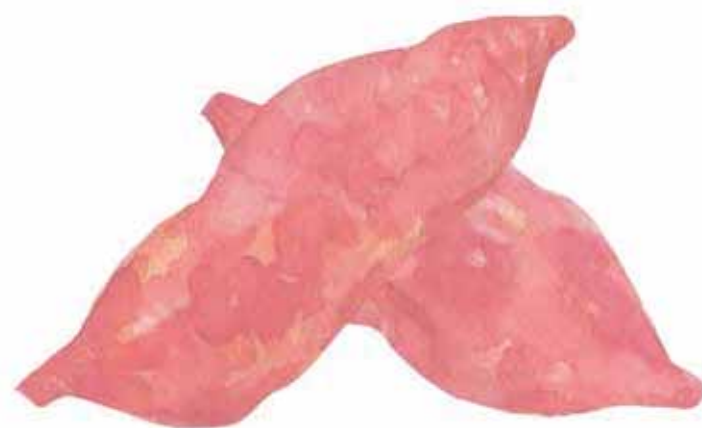
Domain's sweet potatoes reached what is now modern-day Maku-hari in Chiba Prefecture. The crop was commissioned to scholar Konyo Aoki by Yoshimune Tokugawa, the eighth shogun of the Tokugawa, as a means to fight off famine. From the 17 sweet potatoes, Aoki succeeded in harvesting about 500 liters of the crop, according to Chiba Prefecture.

Later, sweet potatoes would continue to be the go-to crop when famine struck in the 18th

and 19th centuries, then again during the food shortages pre- and post-WWII (1939-1945).

Though today, Japan is in "hoshoku no jidai", or an era of food satiation and without threat of famine, the love of sweet potatoes continues. So, next time you enjoy a steamed sweet potato from your local grocer, remember this simple, delicious root is steeped in rich history, too!

kudaka.shoji@stripes.com



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Sid Frazier

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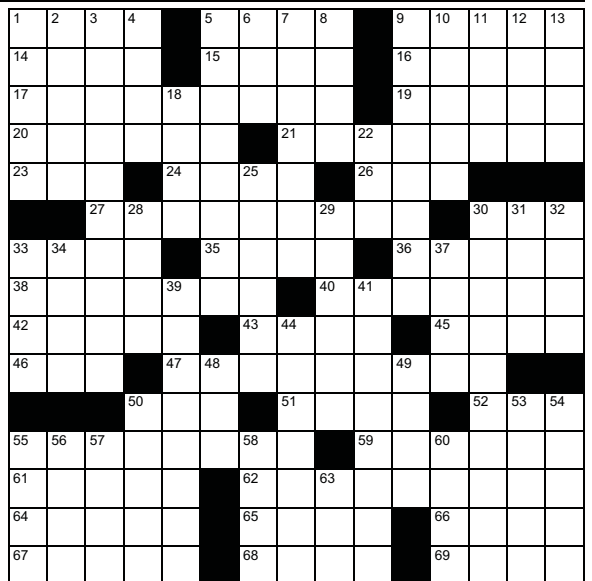
Sat. & Holiday Close at 5pm (Closed Sun.)

The Weekly Crossword

by Margie E. Burke

ACROSS

- Heavy reading
- Pageant wear
- Rosie, on "The Jetsons"
- Enthusiasm
- A while ago
- Day or thing starter
- Message in a cell
- Arctic bear
- Snub, in a way
- Texas town in a George Strait song title
- WSJ alternative
- Sharp blow
- Tupperware top
- Joint woe
- Type
- French cheese
- Part of the foot
- Type of campus bldg.
- Semicircular window
- Backslide
- More than plump
- Do laps, perhaps
- APR part
- River bottom
- Ones seeking change
- Luxurious resort
- Meeting, slangily
- Test for teens
- Apt to topple
- Schumer's group
- Kind of panel
- Not up to a task
- Calendar entry
- De Niro film, "Cape ____"
- Basketball dunk
- Sugar ____
- Swirling current
- Name on toy fuel trucks



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- Scientific suffix
- Kept up
- Gas brand of old
- To an extent
- Santa ____ winds
- Kind of nerve
- Control spot
- Payback of sorts
- Grape-shaped
- Fight starter
- Kind of surgery
- Novice
- Formerly, once
- ____ Baba
- Make a collar
- Roger of "Cheers"
- Flourish
- Like some winter roads
- Lean to the side
- Spoon-playing site
- Amorphous mass
- Bumpkin
- Pub projectile
- Alice's affair
- Go-between

- Saw the light, with "up"
- NYC sight
- Herd dog name
- Blackjack option
- Trip planner's aid
- Overflows (with)
- Like hand-me-downs
- Old Chevy model
- Downhill racer
- Mikey's cereal
- Don Johnson series, "____"
- Scoundrel

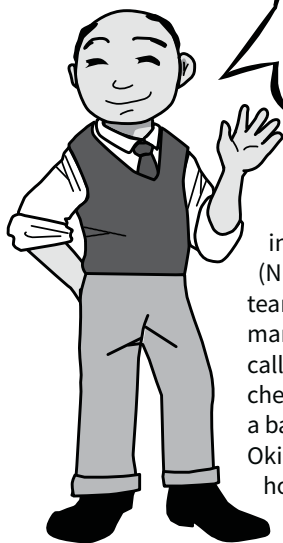
Answers to Previous Crossword:



DOWN

- "Round and Round" singer Campbell

DID YOU KNOW?



Today, just like the National and American Leagues in Major League Baseball, there are two leagues in the Nippon Professional Baseball (NPB) - Central and Pacific. With the 12 teams scattered from Hokkaido to Kyushu, many of Japan's major cities have a team to call their own. For those on the mainland, check out the team closest to you and visit a ballpark during the season. Although Okinawa doesn't have a team, the island hosts Spring Training for many squads, and games are easy and often free to attend in February!

Kanji of the week

螢

Kei/hotaru (firefly)

Language Lesson

Feel free.

Okigaru ni.

SUDOKU

Difficulty: Easy

Edited by Margie E. Burke

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:

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

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OCTOBER

OKTOBERFEST 7TH TO 9TH

The Dragon has the best Oktoberfest tent in Korea! Come for authentic Bavarian cuisine, our very own crafted Märzen beer, German yodeling bands, bouncy castles, and games.



NOVEMBER

THANKSGIVING BUFFET

Bring your family and friends to join the Dragon family for huge Thanksgiving buffet spread.

HOLIDAY MEALS TO GO

Looking for ways to share the the holiday spirit? Order our holiday meals to go and enjoy them with loved ones in the comfort of your home.



DECEMBER

CHRISTMAS AT THE DRAGON

The week of Christmas is full of gingerbread houses, cookies & egg nog, storytelling w/ Santa, and a hearty Christmas Day buffet.

NEW YEAR EVE PARTY

Don't miss out on the Greatest Party of the YEAR!



MORE INFORMATION COMING SOON

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