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POORLY PREPARED HIKERS BEWARE

Mount Fuji inspectors waiting on most popular trail



BY HANA KUSUMOTO,
STARS AND STRIPES
Published: May 1, 2026

TOKYO — Hikers who aspire to summit Mount Fuji on its most popular trail can expect a “strict” inspection of their clothing and gear at the entry gate for the second year in a row, according to Yamanashi prefecture.

Inspectors from the prefecture will conduct “three-set gear checks” for hikers on the Yoshida trail on the northern side of the mountain, according to a prefectural news release April 27.

Congestion on the popular mountain is creating environmental and safety concerns and costing local governments for upkeep and

rescues. Last year, 205,100 people climbed Mount Fuji, with 59%, or about 121,068 hikers, taking the Yoshida trail, according to the Japan Ministry of the Environment.

Many accidents and rescues result from improperly clothed or equipped hikers navigating the rocks and cinders on the volcano’s flanks. Light clothing, such as T-shirts, shorts and sandals are significant safety concerns, according to the prefecture.

“Even in the summer, temperatures at the summit can drop below freezing, and the descent route consists mostly of loose rocks,” the release states. “Insufficient gear has repeatedly led to serious accidents.” The trail is scheduled to open July 1 and close Sept. 10,

according to the release.

The three items required are hiking boots or appropriate mountain footwear, two-piece rainwear consisting of jacket and pants, and clothing appropriate for cold weather, such as a fleece or warm jacket.

Again this year, hikers must reserve a spot on the Yoshida trail and expect to pay 4,000 yen, or \$25.44, in admission fees. The prefecture began accepting reservations April 27 for trail access, the release states.

The prefecture two years ago erected a trail gate at the 5th station and began limiting hikers to 4,000 per day.

Hikers should expect strict gear

inspections at the entry gate, an official at the Mount Fuji Tourism Promotion unit of the prefectural office said by phone Thursday.

Improperly dressed hikers will not be allowed past the gate, he said. However, stores at the station sell approved items.

The 5th station gate is closed from 2 p.m. to 3 a.m. except for those with reservations at mountain huts.

Some Japanese officials may speak to the media only on the condition of anonymity.

Mount Fuji is a popular destination for Japanese and foreign tourists and in recent years crowds have increased.

Three other trails in Shizuoka

prefecture lead to the summit: Subashiri, Gotemba and Fujinomiya.


Shizuoka also charges a 4,000 yen climbing fee to use its trails, according to the prefecture’s website. Prior payment can be made through a Shizuoka prefecture FUJI NAVI app, but payment can also be made at the gates without the app.

Registration opens May 8, according to the website. There is no limit to the number of people who can access the trails in the prefecture.

Hikers are also required to complete an online course covering rules, etiquette, hiking safety and environmental protection before they attempt the hike.

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@HanaKusumoto

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Oshino Village

PAGES 8-9

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Thrifting and fashion in Japan

STORY AND PHOTOS BY YERIANYS PADIN CARO, ZAMA MIDDLE HIGH SCHOOL SENIOR

Living in Japan has changed how I see fashion. Trends here are creative, bold, and one of my favorite ways to explore that is through thrifting. For me and my friends, thrifting is not just shopping. It is something we look forward to. It is how we hang out, get inspired, and build our own style without spending a lot of money.

On weekends, we usually go to second-hand stores near where we live. Every store has a different vibe. Some are super organized, while others feel like treasure hunts. You never know what you are going to find. One time I found a perfect oversized jacket, and another time my friend found shoes that looked brand new.

One thing that surprised me about thrifting in Japan is the quality. Most of the clothes are in great condition, and a lot of them look brand new. People take good care of their things here, so thrifting is really worth it. It is also great for students because you can try different styles without spending too much.

For me and my friends, thrifting is also about getting inspiration. We pay attention to how outfits are put together and talk about how we can recreate those looks in our own style. I also like going to Watmans near Camp Zama. They have a great selection, and I almost always find cute shirts and accessories there. It's one of my favorite spots because there's a good

mix of styles, and I can usually find something unique at a good price.

If you are thinking about thrifting in Japan, here are a few tips that really help. First, take your time and look through everything. Great finds are often hidden, so please be patient. Second, always check the quality before buying anything. Look at the tag for fabric content, feel the material, and check the stitching, and zippers to make sure the item will last. Third, try to look for unique pieces instead of just basic items. Things like vintage jackets, accessories, or one-of-a-kind denim can elevate your style. Finally, consider visiting thrift stores in areas outside of Tokyo. These stores are usually bigger, have more variety, and are often cheaper than the ones in the city.

Overall, thrifting in Japan has become one of my favorite things to do. It is affordable, fun, and a great way to express yourself. More than anything, thrifting has helped me see that fashion is not just about copying trends, but about figuring out what really fits you and making it your own.

Writer's bio: Yerianys Padin Caro is a senior at Zama Middle High School who enjoys staying involved in both academics and extracurriculars. She's currently taking fashion dual enrollment courses to prepare for a future career in fashion and recently started a fashion club to share her creativity and ideas with other students.



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Commodore Matthew Calbraith Perry (1794-1858)

Kurihama is the beach where Perry marked his first step in Japan.

Retracing Commodore Perry's footprint in Japan

STORY AND PHOTOS BY TAKAHIRO TAKIGUCHI, STRIPES JAPAN

To the unknowing passerby, Uruga and Kurihama, near Yokosuka Naval Base, may be small and ordinary looking Japanese towns. But both are where American Commodore Perry and his “Black Ships” landed in 1853, which marked the beginning of diplomacy and trade agreements between the U.S. and Japan.

In Japan, Matthew Calbraith Perry (1794 - 1858) is one of the most famous American admirals in history, as his arrival led to the modernization and industrialization of the country.

Up until the day Perry led four battleships of the East India Squadron to Uruga Bay, 3 miles south of Yokosuka, the Japanese were enjoying a relatively stable and peaceful society under the Shogunate government's closed-door policy.

The sudden arrival of Perry's gigantic battleships in Tokyo Gulf were a frightful sight for residents of the area. Despite local officials' demand to leave the country immediately, Perry refused and continued his request to meet with a representative of the ruling government, even daring to intimidate by firing blank shots from the ships' 73 canons.

Eventually, Japan would allow Perry to meet with Shogunate delegates at Kurihama Beach, southwest of Uruga Port. It was at this beach where Perry presented



A portrait of Commodore Perry painted by a Japanese artist

President Millard Fillmore's letter asking Japan to open the door for bilateral trading relations with open ports. Unsure of whether they should open the door but wanting to avoid a possible war with the U.S., Japan and Commodore Perry signed the U.S.- Japan Treaty of Peace and Amity on March 31, 1854, which designating Shimoda and Hakodate as international ports opened to the world. Today, visitors to both Uruga and Kurihama in Yokosuka City have a chance to touch a couple of the historical places and follow Perry's footprint.



American Admiral Perry's landing" in white kanji letters with the date of landing. A map of bronze relief on the pedestal stones showcases where Perry had stopped during his excursion. According to the map, his voyage lasted three years and included stops to Madeira, St. Helena, Cape Town, Mauritius, Ceylon, Singapore, Macao, Hong Kong, Shanghai and Okinawa before he finally reached mainland Japan.

Perry Park also has a memorial museum highlighting Perry's life, his excursion and the historical landing in detail through various documents, Perry's handwritten letters, along with drawings, scriptures and diorama models of Tokyo Gulf and Perry's fleet.

follow Perry's footprint.



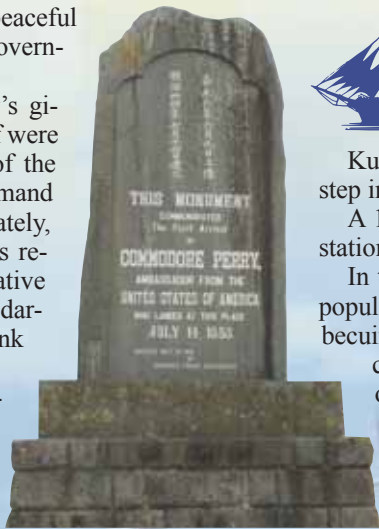
Kurihama The first step

Kurihama is the beach where Perry marked his first step in Japan.

A 15-minute walk from JR and Keikyu Kurihama stations, Kurihama Beach is a tiny, quiet beach.

In the summertime, this white-sand beach is quite popular with the locals who enjoy swimming and barbecuing. When I visited earlier this year, it was still cold and there were only a few people strolling on the beach where Perry delivered his letter from the President around 165 years ago.

Across the street, Perry Park features a large monument dedicated to Perry's arrival. The large stone has the following inscription: "This monument is to commemorate



Perry's landing at Kurihama Beach in 1854



Perry Park

ADDRESS: 7-14 Kurihama, Yokosuka City, Kanagawa Pref. (30-min. from Yokosuka Naval Base)

HOURS: 24/7 (Perry Museum: Tue - Sun, 9 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.)

ADMISSION: Free
PHONE: 046-834-7531



WEBSITE



At the Perry Commemorative Museum in Kurihama, follow the commodore's footprint through the dioramas of Tokyo Gulf featuring Perry's "Black Ship" fleet - USS Mississippi, USS Susquehanna, USS Powhatan and USS Macedonian.



Uruga Arrival of Black Ships

A 20-minute walk from the Perry Park, along Kurihama Beach and a path through the mountainside, brought me to a traditional Japanese-style lighthouse, called Tomyodo, on the west-end of Uruga Bay.

The two-storied wooden structure with a gray-tiled roof on stone walls looked as if it were a miniature castle tower. These days, the lighthouse is no longer in use but it stands beautifully in the landscape. According to a signboard there, the lighthouse was fueled with grapeseed oil and lit up the sea surface as far as 5 miles, which very easily could have led Perry as he approached Uruga. Built by the Shogunate Government in 1648, Tomyodo was replaced in the 1870s by a Western-style lighthouse built near Kannonzaki Cape.

A traditional Japanese-style “Tomyodo” lighthouse on the west-end of Uruga Bay.

Uruga, itself is a hair-pin shaped narrow bay that shields ships from heavy wind and high tide, offering an ideal port to any type of ship. As I strolled along the bayside, I got great views of the blue bay, fishing and cargo ships berthed in the port on one side and mountains on the other.

Old traditional houses and buildings line Kon-yacho district in the west bayside, reminiscent of the days when Perry arrived in port. There are two traditional Shinto shrines facing each other with a quarter



Kon-yacho District in West Uruga is filled with old traditional Japanese shrines, temples and townhouses, reminiscent of the era when Perry arrived.



Ride in a ferry modeled after the traditional boats of the era to get across Uruga Bay.



VIEW VIDEO!

mile of bay separating them. Both shrines have the same name of “Kano Jinja” (literally “shrine of wishes-come-true”), and are distinguished from each other by the location - Nishi Kano Shrine (west shrine) and Higashi Kano Shrine (east shrine).

Considered by Japanese as a “Power Spot,” a lot of tourists with wishes visit these shrines to worship.

There is a unique shrine tradition - if you get a magatama (comma-shaped bead) at Nishi Kano Shrine and put that into an omamoribukuro (amulet case) at Higashi Kano Shrine, it will bring you luck and your wish will come true, especially if it is regarding love life and weddings.

To obtain a magatame bead, I visited the Nishi Kano Shrine first. Built in 1842, the shrine is known for having more than 230 sculptures decorating the wooden eaves, giving it a kind of solemn and mysterious atmosphere.

I bought a magatama bead for 800 yen (\$5.25) at the shrine shop before jumping on a traditional-looking orange ferry boat to Higashi Kano Shrine. This short cruise is an enjoyable way to look out over the bay and appreciate the port and ships docked there.

The East Shrine, compared to its counterpart, is brighter and has a more open atmosphere with its tall shrine building and light green roof.

Walking up along the stone stairs, I faced the shrine and made a wish in the traditional manner. Then, to secure the granting of my wish, I spent another 800 yen for the coveted amulet case at the shrine shop.

The bead from the West Shrine fit in the cute amulet case perfectly. It sure will make my wish come true! As it is tiny and cute, this lucky charm can be a great souvenir for friends or family members.

Standing on the shrine looking down at the bay, I couldn't help but wonder how Perry felt when he saw this beautiful bay after his long cruise.

takiguchi.takahiro@stripes.com



Tomyodo (traditional lighthouse)

ADDRESS: 6 Nishiuraga, Yokosuka City, Kanagawa Pref.
ADMISSION: Free
PHONE: 046-822-8301



WEBSITE



Nishi Kano Jinja (west Kano shrine)

ADDRESS: 1-1-13 Nishi Uruga, Yokosuka City, Kanagawa Pref.
ADMISSION: Free
PHONE: 046-841-0179



WEBSITE



Higashi Kano Jinja (east Kano shrine)

ADDRESS: 2-21-25 Higashi Uruga, Yokosuka City, Kanagawa Pref.
ADMISSION: Free
PHONE: 046-841-5300



WEBSITE



Omamori and magatama.
According to tradition, if you buy a comma-shaped bead at the west shrine and place it inside the amulet case purchased at the east shrine, then your dream will come true.

SEE BLACK SHIP FESTIVAL
STORY ON PAGE 6





Photos courtesy of Shimoda City Tourism Association



Black Ship Festival to held in Shimoda May 15-17

BY TAKAHIRO TAKIGUCHI, STRIPES JAPAN

Perry and his Black Ships dropped by Shimoda after the successful signing of the Amity Treaty in 1854. He inspected the designated international port and determined 13 rules of usage of port and facility as an appendix to the Treaty.

To commemorate Perry's visit and his achievement, Shimoda City hosts an annual Black Ship Festival in mid-May.

During the 3-day festival, you can see a historical reenactment of the signing ceremony and a parade featuring people in classical American naval uniforms and kimono, as well as an open bazaar, concerts, a

fireworks display and more. It's one of Shimoda's livelier events and a celebration of the U.S.-Japan's historical connection.

takiguchi.takahiro@stripes.com

Black Ship Festival (Kurofune Matsuri)

ADDRESS: Shimoda City, Shizuoka Pref.

FESTIVAL PERIOD: May 15-17

PHONE: 0558-22-1531, 0558-22-3913



WEBSITE

EVENT SCHEDULE

May 15, p.m.

- Flower Offering to the monument of Perry's arrival (Perry Memorial Park)
- Concert of U.S. Seventh Fleet Band (Gyokusenji Temple)
- Memorial Service in front of tombs of Perry's crews (Gyokusenji Temple)
- Hawaiian Dance Performance (Madogahama Beach Park)
- Fireworks display (Shimoda Port)

May 16, a.m.

- Commemoration Ceremony of Perry's Arrival (Shimoda Park)
- Parade (main streets in the city)

May 16, p.m.

- Historical Reenactment of signing of Shimoda Treaty (Ryosenji temple)
- Kimono Fashion Show (Ryosenji temple)
- Performance of traditional Geisha dance (Ryosenji Temple)
- Performances of traditional Japanese Dance, Kurofune-Ondo and taiko drum (City Culture Hall Parking Lots)
- Kurofune Sunset Concert – a concert of Big Wing Jazz Orchestra by members of JMSDF Band and the Seventh Fleet Band (City Culture Hall)

May 17, a.m.

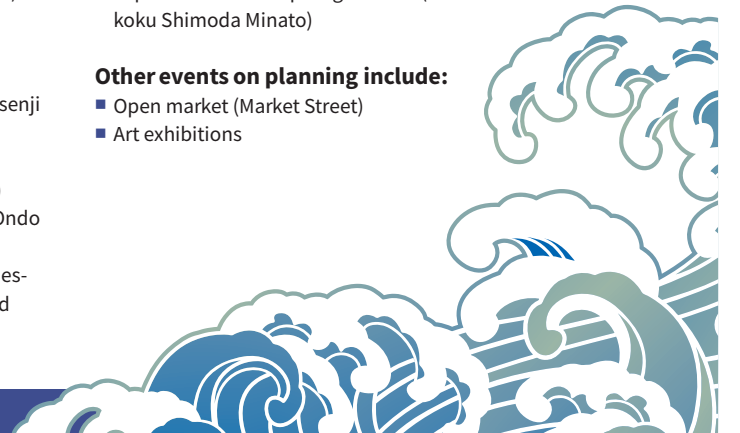
- Nigiwai Concert (City Cultural Hall Parking Lots)
- Nigiwai Parade (Main streets in the city)

May 17, p.m.

- Historical re-enactment of signing Shimoda Treaty (City Cultural Hall Parking Lots)
- Historical Costume Show (City Cultural Hall Parking Lots)
- Performances of T.C. Dance Company (City Cultural Hall Parking Lots)
- Japan-US Friendship Tug of War (Michinoeki Kai-koku Shimoda Minato)

Other events on planning include:

- Open market (Market Street)
- Art exhibitions



My faves

NIGHT VIEWS

BY TAKAHIRO TAKIGUCHI,
STRIPES JAPAN

Hang around long enough and you'll notice that in Japan's cities, the hustle and bustle often continues on into the night. What does change however, is the nightly glow of the streetlights and illuminations some of the major buildings host. I like the nostalgic feeling the glowing buildings and bright cityscapes bring.

During my travels around the country, I've seen many breathtaking night views, each one as unique as the next. Next time you head out, make sure to factor in a nighttime stroll and check out some of my favorite spots to get a good view of Japan's impressive evening glow.

Rainbow Bridge in Tokyo – Splendid night view of Tokyo Harbor

Tokyo Bay Connector Bridge, famously known as the Rainbow Bridge, is one you may have seen on postcards or travel sites.

This impressive bridge is only a 15-minute-drive from Hardy Barracks, and you can cross it along the Shutoko Expressway through a portion of Tokyo Harbor.

Driving through this bridge at night always overwhelms me with its views of the Tokyo Harbor, skyscrapers, Tokyo Tower and Tokyo Skytree all lit up in various colors. It's like traveling inside a jewelry box!

The 2,618-foot-long, 413-foot-high, two-story suspension bridge that connects the Odaiba waterfront district to the Shibaura Pier is actually painted white. At night, however, the bridge shines in vivid colors thanks to the 444 LED lights illuminating from sunset to midnight. Depending on the season, the colors of the bridge will change, but the holiday season is when you'll catch a full rainbow.

This isn't just a pretty bridge. This double-decker bridge accommodates an expressway, a toll-free highway, a monorail and pedestrian walkways. Walk across the bridge for the "Rainbow Promenade," which will take about 20 to 30 minutes. There are observatory points with benches on the bridge where you can stop and enjoy the gorgeous views and rest. Alternatively, get a great view of the bridge from Odaiba's Kaihin Park, where you'll also find a replica of the Statue of Liberty in the harbor.

Rainbow Bridge (Tokyo Bay Connector Bridge)

LOCATION: 3-33-19 Kaigan, Minato-ku, Tokyo
Rainbow promenade
HOURS: April - Oct., 9 a.m. - 9 p.m., Nov. - March, 10 a.m. - 6 p.m.
ADMISSION: Free

Kawasaki – Surrealistic night view of factories

Kawasaki City's waterfront district offers a unique night view with a steam-punkish look. The area is the nation's largest Keihin industrial zone, which, at night, gives a sort of industrial, sci-fi feeling many photographers in Japan flock to capture.

The artificial, somewhat surrealistic views of the various shaped factories created by lights, the orange of fire and grey smoke from chimneys, together with a backdrop of a port with gigantic tankers and cargo ships, is considered "cool."

Located in the center of such the industrial area, Kawasaki Marien is considered one of the best night view spots in the district and was nominated as a Japan night-view heritage site in 2014. The observation platform on its 10th floor (167-foot high) provides a panoramic view of the entire Kawasaki factory area; packed with power plants, chemical, metal factories and oil refining factories.

During my visit, I noticed many photographers setting up for the perfect shot as the sun started to set. For me, this view was surreal and reminded me of a gigantic spaceship from a sci-fi movie.

If you visit Kawasaki Marien for some unique photography, be sure to bring a tripod and telephoto lens along for optimal photos.

Rainbow Bridge in Tokyo



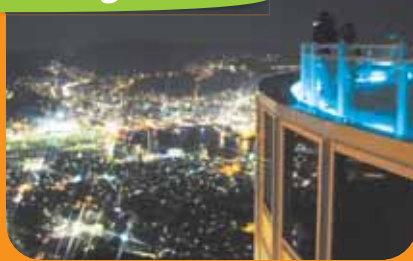
File photo

Kawasaki



Photo by Takahiro Takiguchi, Stripes Japan

Nagasaki



File photo

Atami



File photo

Kobe



Photos by Takahiro Takiguchi, Stripes Japan

Kawasaki Marien

LOCATION: 38-1 Higashi Oogishima, Kawasaki-ku, Kawasaki City, Kanagawa Pref.
HOURS: 9 a.m. - 9 p.m.
ADMISSION: free
TEL: 044-287-6000



WEBSITE

Kobe – A view worth \$10 million from Mount Rokko

Kobe is one of Japan's Three Great Night Views, along with Hakodate and Nagasaki. Mount Rokko and Mount Maya are especially famous for their "10-million-dollar nightviews."

Head to the summit of either of these and get ready to be wowed. Mount Maya is the more popular one to hike up, but if you're driving, check out Mount Rokko's Hachimaki Platform off Omote Rokko Driveway.

Whichever spot you choose, you'll know immediately why this is considered a 10-million-dollar view. As the sun starts to set, you'll see the city and port gradually illuminated in various colors against the wonderful backdrop of the golden sea and two artificial islands off Osaka Bay.

Hachimaki Observation Platform on Mt. Rokko (Omote Rokko Driveway)

LOCATION: Minami Rokko, Rokkozanchō, Nada-ku, Kobe City, Hyogo Pref.
PHONE: 078-230-1120

Atami – Hot springs with a vertical night view

Though many find themselves in Atami for a soak in the hot springs, this resort town also has a great view at night.

The topography and shape of the city has deemed it a moniker of the "Naples of Asia." You'll notice this unique location from its U-shaped coastline, surrounding mountains and hilly roads.

At night, the dozens of hotels packed into the area light up with Atami Castle as the centerpiece. Head to the castle observation deck for the panoramic view during the day. After sunset, many visitors stick around the parking lot for a view of the surrounding vertical spread of illuminated hotels and buildings.

There are many one-day hot spring facilities around the location, so you can enjoy a hot soak before or after you see the night view.

Atami Castle

LOCATION: 1993 Atami, Atami City, Shizuoka Pref.
PHONE: 0557-81-6206 (Japanese)



WEBSITE

Nagasaki – A 360-degree view of one of "World's 3 Best Night View Cities"

Designated as one of the "World's Three Best Night View Locations" in 2012 along with Hong Kong and Monaco, Nagasaki offers a picture-perfect night display.

To get the best view, head to the top of Mount Inasa near the city center, where the observation tower will give you a 360-degree panoramic look, 1,093 feet high above Nagasaki.

Time your visit for sunset and catch the golden crimson views of sky and sea silhouetted by the surrounding grey mountains and many islets dotting this corner of Japan. And, check out the restaurant next door for a meal and a view!

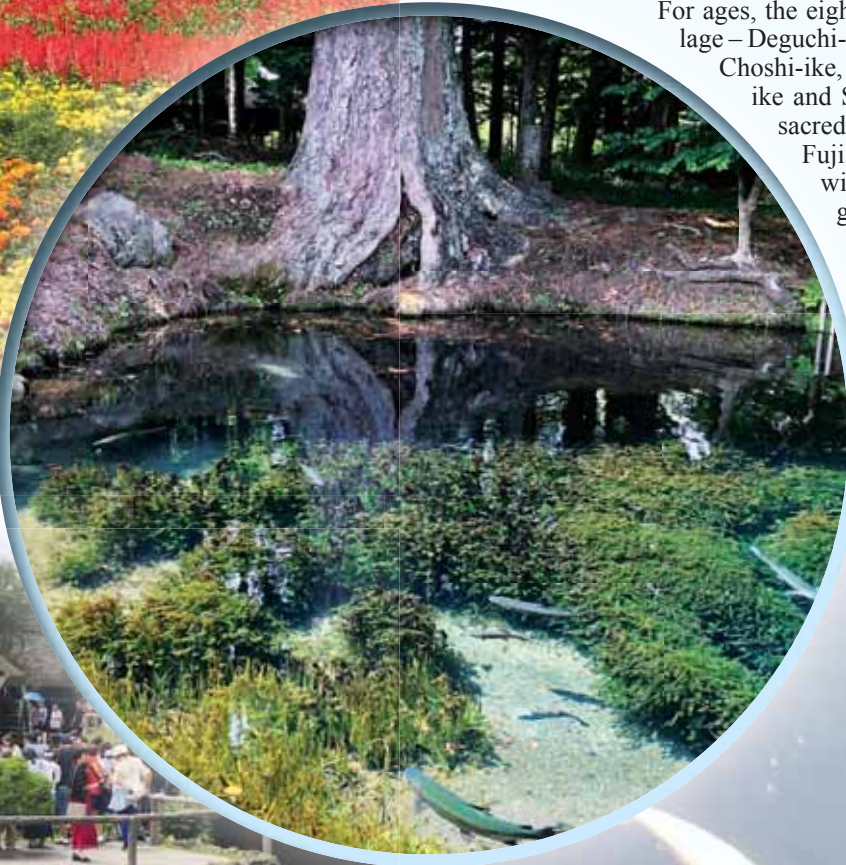
There are many ways to get to the summit of Mount Inasa, including by bus. But, try the cable car for a fun way to experience this beautiful location.

Mount Inasa (observation deck)

LOCATION: 407-6 Fuchimachi, Nagasaki City, Nagasaki Pref.
PHONE: 095-822-8888 (Japanese)



WEBSITE



Oshino Village

Exploring the home of...

STORY AND PHOTOS BY TAKAHIRO TAKIGUCHI, STRIPES JAPAN

Oshino Village is home to a set of eight ponds that were designated as a UNESCO World Heritage site in 2013. These ponds, known as Oshino Hakkai, are revered for their crystal clear waters, which come directly from the snow melting off nearby Mt. Fuji. As the snow melts, the waters filter down the mountain through porous layers of lava and have done so for over 80 years.

The extremely pure spring water was designated as one of the 100 Great Waters in Japan in 1985.

For ages, the eight ponds located in Oshino Village – Deguchi-ike, Okama-ike, Sokonashi-ike, Choshi-ike, Waku-ike, Nigori-ike, Kagami-ike and Shobu-ike – were considered a sacred site for pilgrims climbing Mt. Fuji. While each pond is enshrined with a different dragon king, pilgrims hopped in one pond after another to soak and purify themselves before their ascent up the sacred mountain.

According to legend, the ponds represent the 100 dragons that guard the mountain. The ponds are purifying waters which filter down from Mt. Fuji. Recently, the ponds have become a home of pure water for many tourists. We arrived in Oshino Village especially in the summer. Although the water is extremely fresh and high in purity to Fuji. We saw many people with shining leaves on their heads. According to legend, this very pond is the source of the green fresh water to sample a taste.



Oshino

Home of pure water

Age

g to local legend, the eight ponds rep- lar Star and the Big Dipper. Deguchi- is the Polar Star, while the other seven ositioned in points to corresponding orm the Big Dipper constellation.

my family and I took a trip to visit this e water.

d at Waku-ike pond to a crowded area full Oshino is known for the great views of Mt. Fuji, the winter.

the majestic mountain was covered in clouds, the resh mountain breeze over the ponds and cool, re- land air, however, were a reminder of our proxim-

Waku-ike pond, the largest and the most majes- ne eight ponds, which looked like a giant emerald reen water reflecting the sky and surrounding tree surface.

g to signboard on the pond, NASA used water from d for an experiment in making snow in space.

stal clear water, we saw many carp swimming among shwater plants just below the surface. We were able aste of the spring water from a dragon-shaped faucet



Oshino Village

LOCATION: 1514 Shinobugusa, Oshino-mura, Minamitsuru-gun, Yamanashi Pref. (Village Hall)

PHONE: 0555-84-3111



WEBSITE



Hannoki Bayashi Shiriyokan

HOURS: 9 a.m. – 5 p.m.

LOCATION: 265 Oshigusa, Oshino-mura, Tsuru-gun, Yamanashi Pref.

ADMISSION: middle schoolers or older - 300 yen, elementary schoolers - 150 yen, ages 1-5 - 100 yen

PHONE: 0555-84-2587



WEBSITE



near the pond. A surprise to us, the water was not too cold, though it was smooth and sweet.

Afterward, we headed toward the small open-air museum “Hannoki Bayashi Shiriyokan,” located near Waku-ike pond. The admis- sion is 300 yen (\$2) for middle school-

ers or older.

From the observatory platform at the entrance gate, we had a great view of the museum grounds, including a flower garden, traditional farmhouses and watermill with classic thatched roofs. We noticed one of the old farmhouses was open for visitors, so we made our way over there to check it out.

The 150-year old farmhouse exhibits various farming tools, household items, swords and armor. We checked out the dis- played items in glass case, while walking around the three-story wooden building.

Oshino is also known for tasty vegetables, soba, tofu and eggs. We were approached by a vendor on our walk in the area

and were offered a sample of grilled corn. This corn was fresh, crisp and sweet, unlike any ear of corn I could get in the city. This flavor, the vendor said, is due to the highland climate and extremely pure water from Fuji used to water the crop.

Tofu made in the village boasts a rich and full-bodied flavor. You can buy some at either Hakkai Tofu shop or Sumiya Tofuten in the village.

There are a lot of noodle shops in the village offering their own taste, too. We dropped by the noodle joint “Meisen Soba,” located in the parking lot. Various soba noodles, available hot or cold, will set you back between 700 to 1,000 yen. We sampled soba with mountain vegetables and ground potatoes. The soba noodle had a chewy yet smooth texture with a refreshing sweet aroma, which went along with the semi-bitter mountain vegeta- bles. It was delicious!

We wrapped up our tour by filling up our pet bottles with clean and tasty spring water at the noodle shop.

This short trip to Oshino left us refreshed, hydrated, and gave us a taste of how the pilgrims of yesteryear transited through the area in search of purification.

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Check out the video!



A cup of coffee, a great view and a small act of kindness in Kyoto

STORY AND PHOTOS BY AARON KIDD,
STARS AND STRIPES
Published: April 16, 2026

Uji Biyori is one of those rare cafés that makes you feel like you're being welcomed into someone's home.

This café along the river in Uji — a small city in Kyoto prefecture famous for producing some of Japan's best matcha — has a quiet, old-fashioned charm that instantly slows you down.

It's fitting that "biyori" translates to "perfect day."

The setting is magical here — riverside terrace seating, a peaceful neighborhood feel, and an interior filled with vintage décor, flowers, books and other small personal touches that make the space feel warm and lived-in.

Uji Biyori is run by a husband-and-wife team who are incredibly friendly and welcoming. They speak some English, which makes the experience even more accessible and personal, and their kindness isn't transactional — they're truly happy you've come.

The menu, which lists items in both English and Japanese, is straightforward: coffee, matcha drinks, yuzu tea, cocoa and a few desserts, including ice cream and matcha shiratama azuki, a classic Japanese dessert featuring green tea ice cream, chewy rice dumplings and sweet red beans.

Prices are very reasonable, considering the service comes with incredible views of the Uji River. All beverages cost 450 yen, or about \$2.85, with combos that include desserts starting at 700 yen.

I was sitting alone on the terrace enjoying a cup of the café's house blend with a scoop of matcha ice cream when the husband came out holding a harmonica. He asked if he could play a song for me, before closing his eyes and performing a heartfelt rendition of "Amazing Grace." I



Coffee and matcha ice cream are served riverside at Uji Biyori, a café run by a friendly couple in Uji.

realized partway through that it was Easter Sunday, which made the moment feel even more meaningful.

What I expected to be a short café visit suddenly turned into a small, human connection you don't often find while traveling. After walking inside to pay, the wife invited me into a nearby room filled with charming Japanese calligraphy art.

Uji Biyori's appeal is its warmth and sincerity — it's the kind of place that stays with you not because of what you ordered, but because of how it made you feel.

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EXCLUSIVE NEWS FROM:
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The owners of the Uji Biyori cafe in Uji, treat their customers more like good friends.

Uji Biyori

LOCATION: 59-3 Mataburi, Uji, Kyoto 611-0021
HOURS: The café is open irregularly, so call ahead before visiting.
PRICES: All beverages are 450 yen. Sets (drinks paired with sweets such as cheesecake, matcha and vanilla ice cream, or matcha shiratama azuki) start at 700 yen.
DRESS: Casual
DIRECTIONS: Situated along the east bank of the Uji River, a short walk from Uji Station.
PHONE: 0774-23-6631

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Photo courtesy of Imuraya Co., Ltd./PR Times



Anna Miller's

LOCATION: 2-26-34 Minamiaoyama, Minato-ku, Tokyo, 107-0062
DIRECTIONS: A minute walk from Gaienmae Station on the Tokyo Metro's Ginza Line.
HOURS: Open 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. Monday through Saturday and 9 a.m. to 8 p.m. Sunday and holidays.
PRICES: Pay 850 yen for a pie slice and up to 5,800 yen for a whole pie. Entree prices vary.
DRESS: Casual
OTHER INFO: Credit cards accepted. Takeout is available for pies and cheesecake only.

American pies served by waitresses in iconic uniforms make a comeback in Tokyo

BY JUAN KING,
STARS AND STRIPES
Published: April 23, 2026

A Tokyo restaurant is back in business luring hungry customers with the taste of home cooking, Pennsylvania Dutch style.

Anna Miller's reopened its doors on Feb. 13 on the first and second floors of the Seizan II building in Minami-Aoyama in Tokyo.

The restaurant specializes in American fare and delicious pies made on the spot daily. It made its initial debut in Japan in 1973, but has its roots in Hawaii, where it is still popular.

Anna Miller's once boasted more than 20 locations in the Tokyo metro area, but the last of those shuttered in summer 2022, with no plans to reopen. The company continued its online bakery and pop-up store sales.

But after three years and with increasing customer demand, Imuraya Co. Ltd. announced the reopening of its original location in Minami-Aoyama. The dining area at the new location fits about 30 people and was full when my

family was seated about 20 minutes after arriving. No reservations are accepted.

The menu includes made-to-order buttermilk pancakes, salads, burgers and other sandwiches, including a clubhouse and a pastrami Reuben, along with delectable American pies.

I tried the pancakes, which came in a two stack, added a side of soft scrambled eggs and two slices of bacon for 1,760 yen, or about \$11. The pancakes were good and went down easily with the maple syrup.

My son decided on the thick-cut hamburger on a whole wheat bun with a side of potato wedges. He wholly enjoyed it and gobbled everything up.

Besides the food, another unique feature of the restaurant is its staff, who wear traditional jumper-style waitress uniforms, part of Anna Miller's distinctive appeal. Note: it's OK to take photos, but do not include the staff.

The highlight of the visit was the selection of pie slices we ordered earlier.

A taste of a banana cream pie for me and an apple pie a la mode for my son was sufficient to cap off our in-store meals. Both pies tasted how they looked, rich and tasty, and the flaky pastry crusts solidified the American homemade pie experience.

Other options include Dutch-apple pie, fruits and cream, chocolate cream, cherry and cheesecake, plain or with blueberry or cherry fruit topping.

A slice will cost you 850 yen. Not too bad considering they are freshly made. A whole pie ranges from 5,400 yen to slightly more than 5,800 yen, depending on the choice.

A virtual shop allows you to peek inside and navigate the old Takanawa location, look at menu items and access Anna Miller's online shop and order pies for delivery.

If you opt for the in-store experience, it is best to get there early because lines grow and pies sell out fast. We were fortunate enough to snag a few slices to go.

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Day trippin' to Saitama

STORY AND PHOTOS BY LUIS SAMAYOA, STRIPES JAPAN

Saitama Prefecture is just north of Tokyo and very easy to drive to from Yokota Air Base. Recently, I decided to venture out and explore some of the local attractions in Saitama.

One of my stops was at the Saitama Railway Museum to learn about the evolution of trains from steam to electrical in Japan.

After paying my admissions fee of 1,600 yen (about \$10), I first stopped by the gift shop. They sold lots of train toys and miscellaneous items, including a cool necktie with a network map of Tokyo trains for 3,200 yen. Despite being 31 years old, this place brought out the kid in me.

Saitama Railway Museum

ADDRESS: 3-47 Onari-cho, Omiya-ku, Saitama City, Saitama Prefecture 330-0852

HOURS: Open 10 a.m.-5 p.m., Wednesday - Sunday, Closed on Tuesday.

OTHER INFO: Yen and cards are accepted. Parking is 1,000 yen all day. Accessible by JR train using the Higashi-Fussa Station and exiting at Tetsudō-Hakubutsukan Station



WEBSITE



What's old is new

The first room in the museum had many classic trains, including a very large steam engine. Compared to the enormous locomotives, I felt like an ant.

These vintage trains were very old but were in excellent condition, making them look like they were ready to go on their first ride.

Further down the room, they had express trains with a 70s-era feel. Visitors can enter the trains to check out the interiors. It was interesting to see the ashtrays inside the cabin, relics of the golden age of the smoking culture.

Near the end of the room, they had a brake system display that is slightly functional and interactive. The line was long with children waiting to test it out, but to me, it was worth the wait. Everything is in Japanese but there's no harm in just turning dials and seeing each lever's function.

They did have a simulator on this floor that cost 600 yen to experience. However, save your money, because there are other modern train simulators in the museum that are free to test!

Speeding like a Shinkansen

The next area was all about Japan's Shinkansen bullet train. The display allows visitors to walk through and approach the underbelly to appreciate the electrical components that work to make the train a fast and efficient way to travel long distances around Japan.



In the control room

In the final area of the museum was a construction and control room. This room was very interactive; however, a good understanding of Japanese or Google Translate is needed.

It was cool to see how things work behind the scenes. Although I couldn't do the talking portion, I could press the emergency button on the display, which was something I always was interested in doing.

Moving up the stairs, there was a train conductor simulator room, mostly free of charge. The only train that required payment was the Shinkansen, but everything else like the modern trains are free to use. Each simulator depicted what it was like to drive different trains on the Keihin-Tohoku line and Yamanote Line. I tried the Yamanote line simulator, and it was fun!

A visit to the Saitama Rail Museum is fun for the whole family, even those who are not train enthusiasts. The interactive displays were great for learning more about an important aspect of daily life in Japan.

Although some things are only in Japanese, there are lots of things to see and even try when visiting. The staff was very helpful here, even with language barriers, making navigating the museum easy.

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One-stop shopping at Laketown Aeon Mall in Saitama

STORY AND PHOTOS BY LUIS SAMAYOA, STRIPES JAPAN

Back in the U.S. we have the Mall of America in Minneapolis, the largest mall in the States. Here In Japan, they have their own version called Laketown Aeon.

Laketown Aeon mall is in Koshigaya, Saitama, about a 70-minute drive from Yokota Air Base and features over 700 stores and restaurants.

The massive retail center is separated into three shopping areas dissected by roads and landscaping but connected by overhead walkways and bridges.

Each portion of this one-stop shopping paradise has a different name and a variety of shops and eateries. I came here recently with nothing in mind to shop for, rather to see what the biggest mall in Japan was like.

Kaze building

Inside Kaze there were so many stores, including several high-end shops that usually make me feel out of my element. Though it was not my style, I felt comfortable browsing the fashion and luxury brands here. The building also had a lot of nice restaurants and cafés.



The Outlet

If you're looking for a deal, visit this outdoor shopping section. I enjoyed my walk around this area, especially since the weather was nice. The Outlet is the smallest of all three sections, but it did have a good number of standard brands you'd expect at an outlet, including Coach, Adidas, Jimmy Choo and Nike.

Mori building

I had most fun there because of the shops like Legos and Disney. This side of the mall felt like a regular Aeon Mall you can find around most cities in Japan and in Okinawa, only a whole lot bigger.

For being a very large complex in Saitama, my visit on a weekday wasn't as overwhelming as what I expected. I also didn't feel pressure to buy anything and spent a nice day window shopping.

Sometimes it feels like I must travel to different malls around Yokota to go find all the things I need to buy, but Laketown condenses all the shops I like into one complex. While it's a little far for a random weeknight visit, it's a good option when you want to

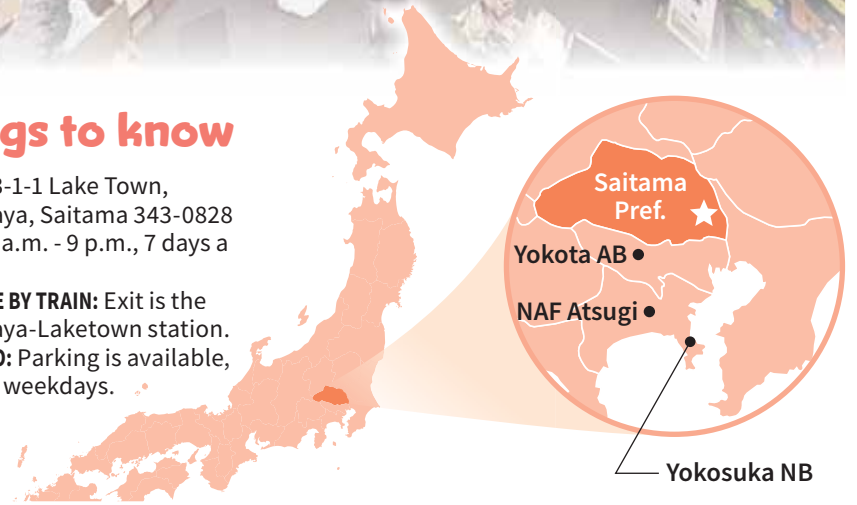
take a drive and get all your shopping done in one place.

samayoa.luis@stripes.com



Things to know

ADDRESS: 3-1-1 Lake Town, Koshigaya, Saitama 343-0828
HOURS: 10 a.m. - 9 p.m., 7 days a week.
ACCESSIBLE BY TRAIN: Exit is the Koshigaya-Laketown station.
OTHER INFO: Parking is available, Free on weekdays.



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Tender wagyu the reward for wait at steak restaurant near Negishi Housing

STORY AND PHOTOS BY TAKAHIRO TAKIGUCHI, STRIPES JAPAN

Thanks to its surroundings, an elegant port city of Yokohama is a treasure box of restaurants serving delicious meals. Among the many options, my family and I stopped at Grill Alabell, a steak restaurant perfect for both casual and celebratory family meals.

Grill Alabell is less than 20 minutes away from Negishi Housing Area and is very close to nearby attractions like Sankeien traditional Japanese garden, Hakkeijima

THINGS TO KNOW



WEBSITE

ADDRESS: 3-5 Shinsugita-cho, Isogo-ku, Yokohama City, Kanagawa Prefecture

HOURS: 11 a.m. – 3 p.m. 5:30 - 10 p.m.

PHONE: 045-349-2261

Sea Paradise or Yokohama Bayside Marina.

My daughter's office is close by and she'd heard of Alabell's great reputation for serving up juicy, high quality "kuroge wagyu" beef, so she took my wife and I to try it for ourselves.

The restaurant's nostalgic exterior complete with a red noren curtain and dimmed orange sign was reminiscent of a 1970s yoshoku restaurant. Inside the cozy wooden counter and table was inviting and had enough to comfortably seat 30 guests.

With my daughter's recommendation, we ordered the signature wagyu hamburger steak for 1,700 yen (or about \$11 for 210 grams), or you can order a larger, 300-gram portion for 2,470 yen. For 450 yen more, the steak will come with a side of rice or bread and soup.

After placing the order, we needed to wait for 15 or 20 minutes, as Alabell starts kneading the meat only after receiving orders and serves the steaks hot and fresh. You know, the wait felt a bit too long for me because I was hungry, but we were rewarded with nice, sizzling hamburger steak.

Each hamburger steak was cut in half where we could appreciate its rareness. We could cook our hamburger to our preference with the hot iron plate each steak was served on. I started eating when my meat was medium-rare, but my wife and daughter waited when theirs were well-done.

One bite and I was impressed by the flavorful, savory taste.

The very tender, melt-in-your-mouth patty relied entirely on the natural wagyu flavor of the meat. Since the meat itself was rich enough with full of flavor, I felt only rock salt and pepper were more than enough to season my dish. The restaurant also offers other sauces like demiglace, tomato, Japanese, salt and lemon, and onion sauces.

I tried adding the onion sauce to perfect the flavorful meal. While the natural sweetness of the meat itself really stands out, I felt that the sweet-and-sour onion sauce also worked well to highlight that sweetness even more.

Even though I preferred salt and pepper for such a high-quality hamburger, I'd like to try different sauces to see how they transform the flavor. So, on my next visit, I'd like to choose the popular demi-glace sauce for my hamburger.

The dinner was a perfect way to wrap up a Yokohama stroll. Don't miss out on a decadent meal at Alabell next time you're in the area!

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Zama teacher first from DOWEA in National Teachers Hall of Fame

BY MARC CASTANEDA,
STARS AND STRIPES
Published: May 1, 2026

Michael Anthony Pope, a science teacher at Camp Zama, the headquarters of U.S. Army Japan, considers himself one of the “forgotten ones.”

But Pope, who teaches at Zama American Middle-High School, will be remembered as the first teacher from the Department of Defense Education Activity to make the National Teachers Hall of Fame.

He was named on April 9 to the hall of fame class of 2026; a five-member group selected from a national pool of educators, according to a social media post on the hall of fame’s official Facebook page.

“I’m still processing all this,” Pope told Stars and Stripes during an April 21 video interview. “You don’t really think in the scope of ... your impact being forever engraved in this honor.”

The recognition carries meaning for educators like those in DODEA who work outside the United States, he said.

“As a teacher who is not on American soil, I call us the ‘forgotten ones,’” Pope said.

EXCLUSIVE NEWS FROM:
STARS AND STRIPES
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The National Teachers Hall of Fame, established in 1989 in Emporia, Kansas, honors career educators who have made lasting contributions to the profession. Nominees must have at least 20 years of full-time classroom experience and complete a rigorous selection process, according to an April 8 hall of fame news release.

The 2026 inductees will be formally recognized during an induction ceremony June 20 at Emporia State University in Kansas. The hall of fame did not respond to requests for further information by email and phone on April 30 and May 1.

Since its first induction ceremony in 1992, about 170 educators nationwide have been honored. A survey of the hall of famers listed online shows none affiliated with DODEA prior to Pope.

Pope’s selection places him among a small group of teachers recognized not only for classroom success but for their broader impact on education.

Pope has spent more than two decades teaching, including nearly 20 years with DODEA, working with military-connected students who often move frequently and adapt to new schools and cultures.

Pope said his approach to teaching is rooted in relationships and personal connection.

“Teaching is about human connection. It’s about relationships,” he said. “Learning is personal. Until you decide it’s something you want to do, you’re never going to be successful.”

That philosophy shapes how he engages students in the classroom, where he emphasizes relevance and ownership of learning, he said.

“I strive to make sure students are not just learning content, but understanding how it connects to them,” he said.

That approach has left a lasting impression, according to a student.

“He helped many students, like me, find a love for science and the desire to learn more,” James Trim, one of Pope’s seventh graders, said via email on April 30. “Not only did he teach us what’s in the book, but also valuable life lessons.”

His work also extends beyond his own classroom. Pope said he has focused on creating opportunities not just for his students, but for other educators across DODEA, also known as the Department of War Education Activity.

“A lot of the things I’ve done ... I set the groundwork for DOWEA teachers, because those opportunities did not exist,” Pope said.

Throughout his career, Pope has earned national and international recognition, including the Presidential Award for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Teaching, the nation’s highest honor for STEM educators.

“One teacher can be impactful if they remember what they’re here for, and that is to promote the profession and to teach our children,” he said.

For Pope, the moment represents more than a personal achievement.

“It’s not about me,” he said. “It’s about we.”

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Michael Anthony Pope, a science teacher at Zama Middle High School at Camp Zama, shown here in the classroom in an undated photograph, was one of five teachers nationwide named to the National Teachers Hall of Fame for 2026.

Photo courtesy of Michael A. Pope



Ryukyu Middle School Principal Deborah Connolly, who graduated from Yokota High School, returned to DOWEA as a professional to serve military-connected students.

GROWN UP AND GIVING BACK

Former DOWEA students now serving as educators

STORY AND PHOTO
BY MIRANDA FERGUSON,
U.S. ARMY

PACIFIC REGION – For many military-connected students, Department of War Education Activity (DOWEA) schools are more than classrooms – they are places of stability between PCS moves, where lifelong relationships are formed across continents and cultures. DOWEA schools prepare students for success; for some, that success is found in returning to the schools that defined their K-12 educational experience.

This Month of the Military Child, we not only celebrate our military-connected students today, but also those who passed through our schools as military children and returned to DOWEA as professionals, bringing a deep understanding of military life and a passion for giving back to the community that helped raise them.

Michelle Morales, a teacher at Yokosuka Middle School and the 2027 Pacific East District Teacher of the Year, credits her own experience as a DOWEA student with shaping how she teaches today.

“Being a military-connected student in DOWEA schools shaped me in ways I did not fully understand until I became a teacher,” Morales said. “I know what it feels like to be the new kid, to adapt quickly, and to say goodbye more often than you would like.”

Those memories are central to her classroom approach. Morales is intentional about creating consistency and structure – elements she knows are essential for students whose lives often include frequent moves and transitions.

“I understand how important it is to be a steady presence for students, and I never take that role lightly,” she said. “I try to be the teacher I needed when I was younger: someone who listens, notices, and cares.”

For Morales, teaching military-connected students is deeply personal.

“My ‘why’ is personal,” she said. “Military-connected students are incredibly resilient, but that resilience often comes from navigating challenges most adults would struggle with. I serve these students because I understand their world.”

Ryukyu Middle School Principal Deborah Connolly’s DOWEA story spans decades and continents. She attended Ramstein Elementary School in Germany, Yokota West Elementary School, and graduated from Yokota High School in 1994.

“The years of middle school and high school were life changing,” Connolly said. “They established relationships that made it possible to be successful in my adult life.”

She vividly remembers moments when the military community came together – especially following the 1991 eruption of Mount Pinatubo.

“It was amazing to see how quickly a community came together,” she said.

Those connections lasted beyond graduation. Connolly describes lifelong friendships that started overseas, including one that began unexpectedly when she ran into a fellow Yokota High School classmate on her first day of college stateside – in a state she’d never even visited – years before social media made such reunions commonplace.

“I am connected to people all over the world and have found that even though I don’t need to talk to them every day, the support is there forever,” she said.

Connolly returned to DOWEA in 2003 and has served students in Germany, Okinawa, and Yokosuka—as a teacher, reading specialist, assistant principal, and now principal.

Walking back into a DOWEA school as a professional felt surprisingly natural.

“It felt familiar – checking in, hearing the language and lingo,” she recalled. “Even after 20 years, it just felt right.”

As a school administrator today, Connolly draws daily from her experience as a military child.

“I remember what it felt like to be a student at a base school,” she said, noting the limitations and unique experiences that come with overseas life. “Technology might be different, but their experiences really aren’t.”

For Connolly, working for DOWEA is both service and gratitude.

“Working for this organization is an opportunity to give back,” she said. “It is serving those who serve us.”

Jacqueline Supnet, an administrative assistant at Kinnick High School, supports students, staff, and parents in her role. As a former DOWEA student, she brings a personal connection to her work.

Like many military children, she remembers constant change – and the resilience it built.

“Moving and starting over wasn’t always easy, but it taught me how to adapt quickly, connect with new people, and stay open to different experiences and cultures,” Supnet said.

Returning to a DOWEA school as a professional was a powerful moment.

“It was a full-circle experience – both nostalgic and rewarding,” Supnet said. “I went from being a student in that environment to becoming someone who now supports and contributes to it.”

Her experiences guide how she approaches her work each day, especially when interacting with students and families.

“Being a former student helps me relate to what students are going through,” she said. “It reminds me to approach my work with empathy, understanding, and care.”

Now a parent herself, Supnet finds added meaning in serving military-connected students.

“It’s meaningful to now be part of the support system that helps students feel seen, understood, and supported,” she said.