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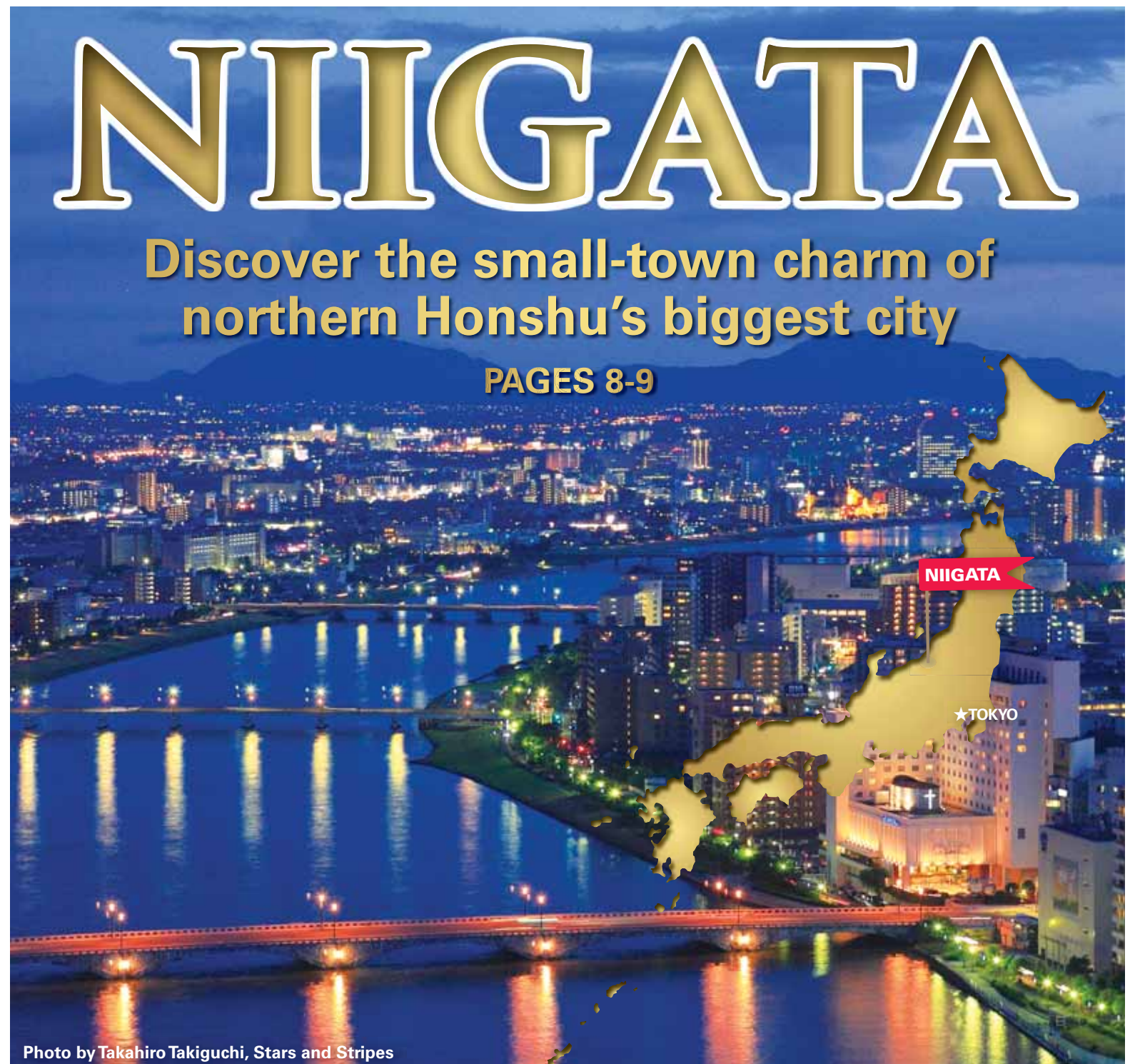


Photo by Takahiro Takiguchi, Stars and Stripes

Why Japanese melons are must-eat fruits!

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Don't forget to insure your bicycle!

STORY AND PHOTO BY NORIKO KUDO,
U.S. ARMY GARRISON JAPAN

CAMP ZAMA – Liability insurance is mandatory for bicycle owners of any age when riding within Kanagawa Prefecture, following a safety ordinance the prefectural

government passed in 2019.

The requirement for liability insurance includes Status of Forces Agreement personnel and their family members and applies to those who live on Camp Zama and Sagamiara Family Housing Area, as both installations are located within Kanagawa.

Kanagawa prefecture enacted a bike ordinance in 2019 to promote a safe and proper usage of bicycles that includes a mandatory enrollment in bicycle liability insurance, according to the Kanagawa Prefectural Government website.

The mandated insurance coverage is required for both adult and children bicycle riders. This is meant to promote risk

management and dispersal when it comes to bicycle-involved accidents and property damage, said Maj. Anthony Osborne, the deputy Staff Judge Advocate, assigned to U.S. Army Japan.

According to the KPG website, more than 5,000 bicycle-related accidents were reported in Kanagawa Prefecture last year. The website additionally states that Sagamiara City, in which Camp Zama partially resides, was responsible for a significant percentage of that number.

Perhaps most important to bicycle riders is the financial assistance liability insurance provides if an accident were to occur and the cyclist was deemed responsible, Osborne said.

According to the KPG website, in one case an elementary school student riding their bicycle home at night struck a female pedestrian. The woman suffered a fractured skull and went into a coma. Because the student did not have insurance, the student's mother was held liable and made to pay in damages about 95 million yen, or about \$873,000.

While there is no fine associated with riders who do not have insurance, there is a clear benefit to following the mandate and purchasing insurance, Osborne said.

"It's being able to have a fiscal buffer to help bear the cost of liability if you're in an accident,"

Osborne said. "That's what the insurance is all about."

For those who already have some sort of liability insurance that covers damages to life, limb or property, they are encouraged to check the details and see if that coverage already includes their bicycle. Otherwise, bicycle insurance can be purchased at most off-base convenience store electronic kiosks with the help of a friend or family member who can read Japanese.

Osborne said he purchased insurance last year at a "family plan" rate that cost the equivalent of just \$40 annually.

"If you ride a bicycle, it is prudent to purchase the insurance and have the policy in place so that if you were involved in an accident, you would have assistance bearing the cost," Osborne said.

Having the insurance helps to minimize every rider's risk, and helps promote the idea of SOFA members being good "ambassadors" in Japan, Osborne said.

More information on bicycle liability insurance can be found in the English-language rulebook on the KPG website here: <https://www.pref.kanagawa.jp/documents/46139/rulebook-english.pdf>.

Community members who have further questions regarding the policy can also call 262-7330.



Warrant Officer Albert Newbourn, assigned to the 35th Combat Sustainment Support Battalion, commutes on his bicycle on Camp Zama.



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Signs a loved one is struggling

Editor's Note: At Stripes Japan, we love to share your stories and share this space with our community members. Here is an article written by Jennifer Brown, a hospital corpsman at U.S. Naval Medical Center San Diego. If you have a story or photos to share, let us know at japan@stripes.com.

BY JENNIFER BROWN,
STRIPE JAPAN

When it comes to small talk, we can easily become pros at it. In fact, we can become so good that we can automatically generate the right response so that people won't probe too deeply into our personal lives. Instead of speaking up about what is bothering us, we try to avoid the discussion. However, no matter how skilled we are at avoiding the subject, talking out our internal struggles is a key to improving our well-being. Identifying the signs and symptoms of struggle in others can be tricky, but there are three tell-tale ones that can help you spot an issue: withdrawal, mood swings and changes in appetite and sleep.

Although there have been some changes, there is still a stigma around mental health and mental illness which can prevent people from seeking help or even offering it to those who may desperately need it. If your loved one starts to exhibit some of the abovementioned signs, it may be good to offer help or seek help for them if you're not sure how to go about it.

When a person begins to withdraw from others, it may at first be done as a coping mechanism. However, keep an eye out for when withdrawal crosses a line and the person avoids their social circle and activities they enjoy. Withdrawal can also be withdrawing internally even when you are around the individual. An example would be someone who seems distracted or even disassociated from the current moment. While dissociation can be normal at

times, if it seems to interfere with daily living, it might be a warning sign that someone is struggling.

Another sign of struggling are mood swings. While shifts in our mood are normal, it is the long-lasting ones that point to something a little more serious. For instance, someone who is usually more reserved and quieter in social settings may gradually start to become anxious and on edge. Similar to withdrawal, when the mood changes are impacting someone's well-being it may be time to check in with someone to see what is going on.

Finally, one more sign are changes in sleep or appetite. Both of these can be symptoms of many different ailments including stress, so that's why talking it out might help decipher what might actually be the problem. If the person struggling recently lost their job, for instance, the last thing on their mind might be eating something as their concerns are bills and finding another job. Sleeping too much or too little is also a sign someone might be avoiding their struggles or may be physically and emotionally exhausted from dealing with them.

Whether you're the one dealing with any of these ailments or you have a loved one who is, remember that reaching out, getting help or offering it is not a sign of weakness. Struggling is a part of being human and sometimes it takes a fellow human to help recognize in ourselves where we need support.

.....

Jennifer Brown is a hospital corpsman at U.S. Naval Medical Center San Diego. Originally from Florida, she joined the Navy in 2018 and has been stationed on Okinawa for two years and San Diego for under a year. During her free time, Brown enjoys spending time with animals, running, rock climbing, and hiking. She is an alumnus of the University of Central Florida and holds a Bachelor of Science in Psychology. Her professional interests include social work, animal welfare, and children.



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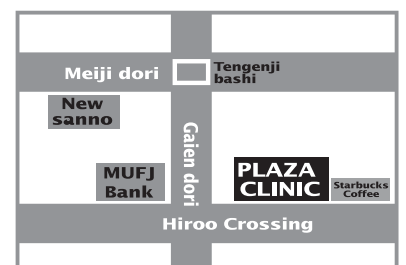


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Tama Hills eco tours resume

BY SETH ROBSON
STARS AND STRIPES
Published: May 27, 2021

TAMA HILLS RECREATION AREA — Two dozen Japanese visitors hiked across the U.S. military's sprawling recreation area in western Tokyo while learning about its history and the plants and animals that live there.

The "eco tour" was the first organized in more than a year by the 374th Airlift Wing at nearby Yokota Air Base. Access to U.S. facilities in Japan was limited last spring as coronavirus cases spiked among service members; however, restrictions have eased in recent months with more people in the military community getting vaccinated.

Tour leader Yoshitaka Yamaguchi, 69, a former environmental engineer at Yokota, led visitors on the trek through some of the recreation area's 483 acres.

The tours, which began in 2006 and happen only periodically, are a way for locals to see what's behind the barbed wire fence surrounding Tama Hills, Yamaguchi said.

"Usually, they're not allowed to come in, but over the fence they expect there are nice natural resources," he said, during a break in the hike. "They're also interested in the history."

Many locals already know about the base's past as a Japanese munition facility and Cold War-era bomb storage site.

Today, Tama Hills operates as



Japanese visitors take part in an "eco tour" at Tama Hills.

a recreation area for U.S. troops and their families stationed in and around the Japanese capital. It includes an 18-hole golf course, lodging, horseback riding, sports fields, mountain bike trails and camping areas.

The Japanese visitors observed small fish living in a pond near the base's front gate and some ancient stone steps. Yamaguchi held up a World War II-era photograph of a Japanese soldier standing at the top of the steps, which, at the time, were topped with a traditional Japanese torii gate and led to a Shinto shrine.

The visitors saw an old Japanese bathhouse and dining facility and went inside wartime

bunkers.

"People can feel the history," Yamaguchi said.

World War II relics are often neglected by local cities in Japan because they feel uncomfortable about them, according to 374th Civil Engineer Squadron environmental engineer Mutsuki Kitajima, 29, who also spoke to the visitors during the tour.

"We can still maintain these historical resources in good shape," he said.

One visitor, Hisao Yokota, 74, of Inagi City, said he'd played golf at Tama Hills but that the tour was his first time to see the recreation area, which he knew as a munitions site in his youth. He was particularly interested in the construction of old drains in the area.

The tours are a chance for the Air Force to show that it is properly maintaining the ecology and history of its facilities, Kitajima said.

"We can make a good understanding between the

local community and Yokota Air Base," he said.

Yamaguchi pointed out rare moss growing on a wall and a place where foxes prowl. He told the visitors about the tanuki, or raccoon dogs, that inhabit the forest and the rare goshawks that nest there.

Officially, there are 38 goshawks in the recreation area, including two fledglings.

The goshawks didn't make an appearance during Wednesday's tour, but Yamaguchi showed the visitors photos of the birds and pointed out the difference in plumage between juveniles and adults.

The preservation of the endangered birds is part of an environmental protection program that was recently judged the best on U.S. military bases overseas, Heyward Singleton, 47, Yokota's Installation Management Flight chief, said in a May 17 interview.

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EXCLUSIVE NEWS FROM:
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Nearly 40 goshawks nest at Tama Hills according to guides who hosted an "eco tour".



Japanese visitors tour a World War II-era munitions storage site at Tama Hills Recreation Area in western Tokyo on May 26. Photos by Akifumi Ishikawa, Stars and Stripes



Retro vending machines dispense tastes of yesteryear near Zama

“May your waiting time be filled with nostalgia and fun.”

On my first visit, I spotted a grinning old man enthusiastically popping coins into a 1960s-era Japanese curry machine. Nearby, a young couple leaned against a wooden railing, slurping steaming ramen from the same yellow plastic bowl.

My fellow diners on a later visit included a pair of Japanese celebrities — a comedy duo known as Wagyu — filming a segment for television.

When eating my way through a portion of the shop’s seemingly countless offerings, I was particularly taken with the toasted sandwiches (300 yen or about \$2.75) that, after a 60-second countdown, pop out tightly wrapped in piping hot aluminum foil. Tongs are available to keep you from burning your fingers.

There are two kinds available, corned beef and ham and cheese. I enjoyed the corned beef’s peppery flavor so much, I decided to have another.

A colleague preferred the ham and cheese, describing its familiar taste as “comfort food.”

Less impressive, for me anyway, were the instant noodles. You’ll likely find better quality at any Japanese convenience store, though those won’t come close to matching the Used Tire Market experience.

My colleague and I tried the udon with deep-fried



tofu (350 yen) that, unfortunately, proved to be a “blah” experience. The noodles were soggy, the soup was bland, and I couldn’t even bring myself to touch the tofu. A bowl of chashu ramen (also 300 yen) I shared with my 10-year-old son on a subsequent visit was superior by leaps and bounds.

Speaking of my son, he’s a big fan of the freshly popped American Popcorn

(150 yen), which comes in three flavors: salt, barbecue and chocolate. The machine keeps you entertained with an infectious ditty while you wait for a microwave inside to do its thing. The same machine sells a Japanese version of Pop Rocks (30 yen) that my son likes to shake into the popcorn bag before munching away.

Other options include tiny but meaty hamburgers served in a box, hot dogs with mustard, shrimp tempura, fried rice and something called “bread in a can.” No Michelin Star candidates here, but all are cheap, fast and fun.

Hot food isn’t all you’ll find at the used tire shop. There are also rusty machines selling candy cigarettes, AA and AAA batteries, medical masks, umbrellas, toy robots, plastic models and photos of teen singing sensations whose fame has long faded.

My favorite is a cardboard box that dispenses green apple-flavored gumballs with the push of a plastic button. If you’re lucky, you’ll get the one red gum-ball waiting inside.

Need coins? You’ll find a change machine inside a small room near the tire shop’s office crammed with classic arcade games. Many of the machines were inoperable during my visits, though several classics were up and running, including Pac-Man, Donkey Kong and Frogger.

kidd.aaron@stripes.com
Twitter: @kiddaaron



Retro-inspired bottles of mixed juice. Photo by Aaron Kidd, Stars and Stripes



Some people are drawn to the Used Tire Market in Sagami-hara, for a set of retreads or discounted rims. Photo by Akifumi Ishikawa, Stars and Stripes

Some people are drawn to the Used Tire Market in Sagami-hara for a set of retreads or discounted rims. Others come for the hot noodles, toasted sandwiches, glass-bottle Cokes and odd knickknacks offered by scores of vintage vending machines surrounding the shop.

“We started this service so that customers who come to the store to change tires can enjoy the waiting time,” says a note on the shop’s website.



BY AARON KIDD,
STARS AND STRIPES
Published: May 20, 2021

EXCLUSIVE NEWS FROM:
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DIRECTIONS: 2666-1 Shimomizo, Minami Ward, Sagami-hara, Kanagawa 252-0335. About a 15-minute drive from Camp Zama and Sagami General Depot.

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Photos courtesy of Live Japan

Why Japanese melons are must-eat fruits!

BY WESTPLAN,
LIVE JAPAN

and how to really
enjoy them

In recent years the deliciousness of Japanese fruit has been attracting attention overseas. Among the sought-after fruits, melons have gained popularity as a high-class fruit.

Various kinds of melons are grown throughout Japan, and prices range from inexpensive ones for everyday consumption to high-end melons intended for gift-giving.

Here's everything you need to know about Japanese melons, from the different varieties to when and how to eat them.

1

What kind of melons are grown in Japan?

Ibaraki Prefecture has the largest growing area and the highest production of melons, with about 40,000 tons harvested annually. Kumamoto and Hokkaido produce about 20,000 tons, and the rest of these relatively easy-to-grow fruits are cultivated from Tohoku to Kyushu.

Japanese muskmelons, considered a high-class fruit, are both fragrant and delicious and characterized by the net-like pattern of their surface. Varieties with green flesh include Earls melon and Andean melon, while Yubari melons and Lupia Red melons have orange flesh.

Smooth-skinned melons without an external mesh pattern include Home Run melons with whitish flesh and Prince melons with flesh that gradates from yellowish-green on the outside to orange in the center.

In terms of cultivation methods, some are grown in greenhouses, and others are not. Through specific temperature and watering control, greenhouse-grown melons are manipulated to grow only one fruit per plant.

Earls melon is grown through this cultivation method. Some Andean and Yubari melons are also grown in greenhouses. Prince and Home Run melons are grown in vinyl-covered "tunnels" and are cheaper than greenhouse-grown melons.

While visiting Japan, you can eat premium melons from famous production areas like Yubari melons from Hokkaido, Ibaraki melons from Ibaraki, and Earls melons from Shizuoka. In addition, home Run melons and Prince melons are also recommended as they can be bought at a reasonable price.

2

Understanding melon grades and ratings

Domestic Japanese melons are rated by grade and rank, with strict standards set by distributors. Grades include "particularly excellent," "excellent," "superior," "good," etc., based on sugar content, ripeness, appearance (shape, lack of blemishes, etc.), density and fineness of

the surface net pattern, and color.

The standards for size and weight rank are noted as S (small), M (middle), L (large), 2L (or LL), etc. In addition, Japanese melons are generally displayed by grade and rank such as "Excellent L" or "Good 2L."



3

Typical Japanese melon types

These are types of melons you'll typically find in Japan.



Earls melon

Earls melon is a high-class melon with juicy green flesh and exceptional sweetness gained by carefully growing a single fruit on each vine. Called "the king of melons," they are often given as gifts. Produced in Shizuoka, Ibaraki, Kumamoto, and other parts of the country, they are in season from early August to early September.



Ibara King melon

The Ibara King is a variety developed in Ibaraki prefecture, characterized by its smooth texture, refreshing sweetness, and elegant aroma. The flesh is green with high sugar content. In season from early May to early June, they are sometimes shipped in late April, and people eagerly look forward to their luxurious taste.



Yubari Melon

Yubari melons are grown exclusively in Yubari, Hokkaido. Their bright orange flesh is soft, sweet, juicy, and melts in your mouth. Yubari melons are in season from late June to early August. When the rind turns pale yellow, and the stem dies, they're ready to be eaten, but they ripen faster than other melons, so make sure to avoid over-ripening.



Lupia Red

Lupia Red melons have a beautiful finely netted surface. Their rind is thin, and the orange flesh is firm and long-lasting, but it's soft and easy to eat when ripe. The Lupia Red season is from July to September. Those grown in Hokkaido are sold with stems attached, while those from Ibaraki are shipped without.

Prince melon

The Prince melon was developed in Japan and first sold in 1961, gaining immediate popularity in average households due to its low price. Muskmelons are often 5,000 yen or more for a 1-kilogram melon, whereas Prince melons are smaller at only 600 to 700 grams but only cost about 1,000 yen.

The flesh is yellowish-green on the outside near the skin and orange as it gets closer to the center. The scent is light, but they're very sweet and juicy. Prince melons are grown in Kumamoto, Yamagata, Fukui, Hokkaido, and other areas, with their season varying slightly depending on the area but generally taking place from May to June.



4

How to choose the most delicious melons

Whether the melon has a netted surface or not, look for those that are not quite spherical but well-proportioned and symmetrical, with no deformities, scratches, discoloration, or blemishes. You'll have a melon that's sweet and delicious. Moreover, those that feel heavier have thicker, juicier flesh.

Also, keep in mind that since melons

are harvested and before they ripen, many found on supermarkets shelves are relatively immature. Therefore, those with a strong scent when sold may be overripe and should be avoided.

It is said that melons with a netted surface are most delicious when the net is raised and evenly distributed. The fineness of the net, however, does not seem to affect the sweetness of the melon.

5

The best way to eat Japanese melons and skillfully cut them

Generally, melons reach store shelves 4 to 5 days after being shipped from their production area, so it is best to eat them 2 to 3 days after purchase. To ripen, store at room temperature – not in the refrigerator.

Gently press the base of the melon (directly opposite the stem), and when it is soft, the melon is ripe enough to eat. Refrigerating the melon 2-3 hours before eating will make the taste stand out and provide just the right amount of coolness.

Greenhouse-grown melons are shipped year-round, but most are available from early May to July, which is the best time to eat melons.

To slice a melon, first cut off the stem, which is bitter.

After washing the stem's bitterness off the knife, cut the fruit vertically.

Then scoop out the seeds with a spoon.

Finally, if you cut each slice horizontally into smaller segments, it will be easier to eat with a fork.



6

Ways to enjoy melons

are usually purchased at supermarkets and department store fruit counters. However, if you plan to give one as a gift, fruit specialty stores or department stores where it can be boxed and wrapped are recommended.

You can pick melons yourself at some farms, and while the season differs by region, many are open from June to September. The farms offer different ways to enjoy melons, from harvesting to all-you-can-eat servings, so check in advance and make a reservation before visiting.

If you don't want to eat a whole melon, we recommend buying ready-to-eat melon slices at a department store or supermarket. Some restaurants serve prosciutto on cut melons as an hors d'oeuvre or melons for dessert.

Most melons are available around June. At that time of year, sweets using melons will appear as special menu items at cafes, restaurants, and other places. In addition to topping parfaits and cakes, other melon-centered desserts like melon sorbet or melon and whipped cream are also popular.

The fragrant sweetness of melons is also processed into chocolate and other sweets. So you'll definitely want to try the melon-flavored sweets sold at supermarkets and convenience stores.



7

Summary

There are many other types of Japanese melons in addition to those listed here. So be sure to make the sweetly scented, melt-in-your-mouth texture of these delicious, juicy fruits a part of any special occasion!

– Supervision: Representative Director of Ibaraki Food Culture Study Group (Izakaya Shushu, Ibaraki Local Sake Bar Management), Ibaraki melon purchaser, Mr. Norimoto Isaka



UP NORTH IN NIIGATA

Japan's biggest little city offers a wo

STORY AND PHOTOS BY
TAKAHIRO TAKIGUCHI,
STRIPES JAPAN

I have always associated the northern city of Niigata with frigid weather and heavy snowfall, full of the steep-roofed buildings essential for rugged wintery locales. However, when I visited this capital city of the prefecture with the same name recently I was pleasantly surprised.

My wife and I arrived to find a leisurely city where people strolled casually even during morning rush hour. There were fewer cars and pedestrians than I've seen in other core cities. The pristine streets made me feel like I was in a resort town, not one of northern Japan's largest cities. As for all the snow?

Well, it turns out that most of the roofs are like those farther south on the Kanto Plain. And a staffer at our hotel told me the city gets the least amount of snow in all of Niigata Prefecture; it hasn't seen more than 40 inches of annual snow for

the past 50 years; and winter temperatures rarely dip to 23 degrees Fahrenheit.

Located on northern Honshu Island facing the Sea of Japan, Niigata City is a relaxed elegant port town with traditional streets, famed sake breweries and quaint attractions that draw about 17 million tourists annually, according to its tourism data. With a population of about 789,461, it is the largest city in Japan's Hokuriku Region. A bullet train connects it to Tokyo via a two-hour commute.

The Shinano-gawa, Japan's longest river, runs through the middle of the city, separating the old traditional district from a sleek modern downtown. The six-arched Bandai Bridge spans the river. The 1,000-foot-long bridge was built in 1929 and is the city's de facto logo. A prime example of the large-arched bridges built in the 1920s, it is a government-designated heritage landmark.

It's easy to see why.

I couldn't help but notice how the regal gray concrete bridge straddled the river relatively low, creating a majestic reflection on the water's surface. My wife and I enjoyed strolling along the river at night, taking in the view of the bridge bathed in the orange glow of its lighting that refracted off the river below. I sight of true beauty.

Although Niigata has been an important port for more than 500 years, its modern history began when Japan signed the Japan-U.S. Friendship and Trade Treaty in 1858. It resulted in Niigata becoming one of Japan's first five ports to open for foreign trade after a centuries-long closed-door policy.

Since Niigata managed to escape major air raids during World War II, most of its old traditional buildings survived the war. However, many were lost to the Big Niigata Fire in 1955 and the Niigata Earthquake in 1964. Nonetheless, most of the city's attractions are concentrated on the bank of the Shinano River in the upscale Oohata district and its Furumachi, or Old Town, district which is also famed for its discrete upscale after-hours entertainment.

We were able to enjoy many of these sights during our two-night stay in Niigata City.

takiguchi.takahiro@stripes.com

Oohata District

Oohata is calm residential district with historical buildings, gardens, a museum, shrines and churches. One of the most beautiful Japanese gardens in northern Japan, the Niigata Saitou Villa, is the main attraction.

The villa was built by the Saitou Family, one of the five richest families of the region, in 1918. The main idea behind the design of 1.12-acre villa was to create a space without borders between the outdoors and indoors. When the windows are open, visitors can feel a sense of unity of between natural and manmade beauty. The number of



Furumachi District

Located about a 10-minute walk from Bandai Bridge, Furumachi is Niigata's old downtown. It used to be one of Japan's three famed high-end red-light districts, along with Gion, in Kyoto, and Tokyo's Shinbashi. Like Gion, it has since evolved into a center for traditional elite nightlife for those in the know, and a site-seeing attraction in and of itself for tourists.

Even today, you can see many old luxurious restaurants, along with bars and shops in elegant classical buildings on the streets. It is fun strolling around the district in the evening when the streets are most active. You may even come

The Niigata Saitou Villa

HOURS: April – September, 9:30 a.m.-6 p.m., October – March, 9:30 a.m.-5 p.m. (closed Mondays, December 28 – January 3)
ADDRESS: 576 Oohatacho, Chuo-ku, Niigata City
ADMISSION: 300 yen (\$2.50), ages 5-12, 100 yen
URL: saitouke.jp
TEL: 025-210-8350



Niigata Cathedral

HOURS: 9 a.m. – 6 p.m.
MASS: Sunday, 7 a.m., 9:30 a.m. and 11 a.m., First Sunday 12 a.m. (English Mass)
ADDRESS: 656 Ichibancho, Higashioohatadoori, Chuo-ku, Niigata City
URL: chathedral-niigata.jp
TEL: 025-222-5024



Imayotsukasa Brewery

HOURS: (tour) 9 a.m.-5 p.m.
ADDRESS: 1-1 Kagamigaoka, Chuo-ku, Niigata City
ADMISSION: free
URL: www.imayotsukasa.com/
TEL: (reservation) 025-245-3231



Ponshu

HOURS: 10 p.m.
ADDRESS: 1 Hanazaki-ku, Nii (20-mi from J Station)
ADMISSION: URL: www TEL: 025-24



NIIGATA World of charm

ers used in the halls is limited so as not to block view of garden.

okio Ishida, a volunteer guide, suggested we sit in the center of the hall to view the garden. “In this way,” he explained, “you can take in the garden and building as one.” We did and the garden appeared as beautiful nature scenes framed by the natural wood of the structure.

This garden encompasses landscapes such as mountains, rivers, falls and valleys, which can be enjoyed in each season. This includes plum and cherry blossoms in spring, the luscious green of huge magnified pine trees in summer, autumn leaves of more than a

ss a geisha or two; but unfortunately we didn’t get a chance to any during our visit.

fter enjoying a stroll through umachi, we stopped by one of restaurants, Inakaya, to sample a famous local dish, “wappamashi.” This is steamed rice and various ingredients in a round made of thin wood. These dishes, the dish is overwhelmingly popular throughout Japan, but it originated at this restaurant.

here were options such as chicken, oysters and salmon. I ordered the “sake kono” (salmon and salmon roe) wappameshi set

hundred maple trees, and views of snow in winter.

Guided tours in English are available from volunteer guides at no additional charge.

Niigata Cathedral stands a couple-of-minutes’ walk from the villa. It’s a beautiful church. Built by a Swiss architect in 1927, the church has two towers and a magnificent cathedra (bishop’s throne). A German-made pipe organ installed in 1929 is one of the oldest pipe organs still in use in Japan.

Strolling the paths around the villa and church was very fascinating. As we walked, the scenic figures and colors of the surrounding architecture changed from white walls with grey tiled roofs, to old red brick and then to black steel lattice.

There is also a prison on site. Views from the path of the villa’s gorgeous walls and the nearby prison have earned it the moniker of “Hell and Paradise Street.”



for 2,750 yen (\$25). It comes with local delicacies such as “noppei jiru,” a cold carrot, pork, potato and mushroom soup, “konyaku” jelly, fried fish cake and “jinbaso” (local crispy seaweed).

The tastes were very simple and gentle. It tasted as if no salts or sauces were applied. But the subtle flavor of each ingredient was distinguished and went well with the tasty local rice.

The classical wooden interior of the restaurant created a kind of folkloric atmosphere, ideal for savoring such local flavors.

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gata City

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Inakaya

HOURS: 11:30 a.m. - 2:30 p.m., 5 - 9 p.m.

ADDRESS: 9-1457 Furumachi-dori, Chuo-ku, Niigata City

URL: inakayaniigata.owst.jp/en

TEL: 025-223-1266



IN QUEST OF FINEST LOCAL SAKE

Niigata is known as one of the best sake brewing locales in Japan. There are 15 sake breweries, such as Koshinokanbai, Sasaiwai and Koshinohana, concentrated within the city. All of them are well known throughout Japan and have won various awards for their products.

One of the breweries, Imayotsukasa, offers brewery tours throughout the year by reservation.

Since sake making usually starts in October, we were not able to see the beginning stages of at the brewery. However, we were able to tour the facilities and see the huge storage tanks while learning from a guide how they brew sake.

Breweries in Niigata usually mill or polish rice much more than other breweries. Well-polished quality rice and Niigata’s soft water, along with expertise of its brewers, gives the local sake a fresh, gentle and fruity flavor. Long low-temperature fermentation makes it crisp, dry and smooth, according to the guide.

Sake from Niigata is often called “onnazake” (female



sake), while similarly famed sake from Kobe City’s Nada district is called “otokozake” (male sake) for its strong and full-bodied flavor. In fact, most of the tour participants with us were female. One young woman told me that she was fascinated with the gentle flavor of Niigata’s sake and was touring various breweries in the region.

After finishing our tour, we were able to sample all of the various products to our heart’s content at no extra cost.

Ponshukan is another must-visit site if you are interested in sake. Located on the third floor of JR Niigata Station, it is a museum-like shop where you can sample not only all 15 brands brewed in Niigata City, but all 53 brands produced throughout Niigata Prefecture.

For 500 yen you get five coins and a shot glass. You put a glass under the dispenser of the sake that you want to taste, insert a coin and press the button to fill it. In this way you can sample some or – if you’re able – all 53 brands to find your favorite.

– Takahiro Takiguchi,
Stripes Japan



Soothing Shizuoka

Editor's Note: At Stripes Japan, we love to share your stories and share this space with our community members. If you have a story or photos to share, send them to japan@stripes.com.

STORY AND PHOTOS BY
JAMES-PAUL JACOB,
STRIPES JAPAN

The weather is getting warmer and the water is becoming more and more enticing. But, you don't have to travel all the way to Okinawa for white sandy beaches and exceptionally blue waters. Just a short drive from Tokyo, the beaches out of travel magazines await.

Shizuoka was our destination when we had visitors from the States in search of great beaches, scenic landscapes, and places to treasure as memories. Unknown to most travelers, this peninsula south-west of Tokyo is a much-needed change of scenery compared to the bustle of the big city.



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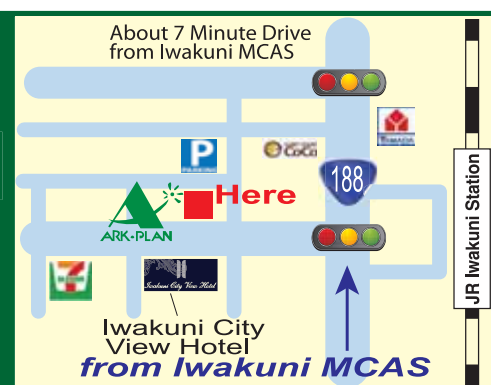
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For our stay, we booked Japanese traditional inn, or ryokan, Suzukado Hotel Shima Tenyu. Since an inclement thunderstorm rolled through on our first night, we relaxed at the hotel's outdoor onsen and enjoyed a four-course Kaiseki meal offered there.

The following day, the weather was perfect, and was thus spent traversing the coast and exploring its nooks and crannies.

Our hotel was near Zo, Nakanoshima and Takashima, a group of small islands only accessible via a small land bridge. Each day for one hour, the Tombolo land bridge appears, allowing visitors to get up close and admire the rock formations on these small islands. Be advised, you should probably wear some kind of water shoes and shorts to cross; the rocks are slippery and the waves, although small, can still get you wet. Surfers are a common sight here

because the waves are pretty gnarly.

The rest of our day was spent visiting the Ryugu Sea Cave, which also appears depending on the tide. Here, you can see the ocean swell from a little opening that connects to the sea. Nearby, there is also a sandbar with great views of the water and tiny islands, where tourists can try sand-sledding.

As the sun set, we enjoyed the final light of day at Kisami Ohama Beach. A nice

beach great for some quite time as it is away from the main tourist attractions.

Japan has so many hidden treasures, some of which are right around the corner. Our time in Shizuoka was well spent and our friends really enjoyed the off-the-beaten-path adventures we had there. A great place to cool down with beautiful beaches and areas only accessible at certain times of the day, make Shizuoka your next vacation spot!





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Hamamatsu Castle was once the residence of Tokugawa Ieyasu, the first Shogun of Japan.

HAMAMATSU CITY

Shizuoka Pref.

Choose your own adventure *in* Hamamatsu City

Enjoy mouthwatering unagi in the former home of Tokugawa Ieyasu

BY TODD FONG,
METROPOLIS MAGAZINE

Stretching from forested mountains in the north to the shores of the Pacific Ocean, Hamamatsu is the largest city in Shizuoka and has a long and storied history as both an industrial center and former home of one of the most famous warlords, Tokugawa Ieyasu. To most, Hamamatsu is just a blur along the Tokaido Shinkansen line between Tokyo and Kyoto. However, located approximately an hour from each of these two popular destinations, Hamamatsu is an intriguing spot to spend a relaxing weekend in a city still flying under the tourism radar.

Here is a list of ideas to pick and choose from to build your perfect getaway to Hamamatsu:

Accommodation

If you crave an escape from the city, Atagoya is a restored kominka (traditional Japanese house) that's large enough to enjoy with up to 15 of your friends. Although the house has seen 160 years of local history, the owner has spared no expense in renovating it to a modern luxury status.

Grab some popcorn for a movie night in the sitting room with an LCD projector and included Netflix and Hulu accounts, or curl up with a good book on a comfy sofa in the sunroom upstairs. In the hot summer months, access to the crystal-clear Atago River is right across the road, inviting you to cool down in its shallow, gentle current. For meals, take a short drive to the local supermarket or butchers and pick up some ingredients for a feast you can make in the kitchen, or outside on the barbecue. Surrounded by the mountain forests of Hamamatsu and the sounds of

the river running by, you'll forget that you're technically still within the city's limits.

If you prefer a bit of pampering over solitude when it comes to your accommodation, the Hoshino Resorts KAI Enshu is a hot spring ryokan along the shores of Lake Hamana, Japan's tenth largest lake. The theme running through KAI Enshu is tea, which you will find incorporated everywhere from the lovely tea field located on-site to the variety of teas served during meals and in the communal

travel library (no less than a dozen during our stay), the matcha-green accents on the staff's uniforms and even tea in the onsen (hot spring). Hana no Yu is one of the four onsen available to guests and is steeped in fragrant green tea leaves, adding a wonderful aroma and healing nutrients to the bathwater.

The rooms at KAI Enshu are spacious and comfortable, with a view of Lake Hamana from the window. Rooms have a private shower, but of course, who would need it when you have your choice of

four different onsen?

A stay at KAI Enshu includes a multi-course dinner that include Hamamatsu's famed unagi (freshwater eel) and other local delicacies, as well as a hearty Japanese-style breakfast. We were pampered by the attentive staff, who introduced themselves by name upon our arrival and were observant enough to set up my chopsticks for my left-handedness during meals.

Sightseeing

A circus of colors, the Hamamatsu Flower Park is a visual treat worth visiting year-round. Things kick off in February with the early blooming plum blossoms, then continue into spring when colorful tulips burst open amongst the hundreds of cherry trees exploding into soft-pink puffs. From there, dozen of varieties of seasonal flowers, including hanging trellises of wisteria, appear. Finally, when early winter arrives and the flowers are but a memory, the park is decorated for the holidays with thousands of Christmas lights.

Hamamatsu Castle Park is situated in the central part of the city and features a renovated castle tower of what



Left: The Hamamatsu Flower Park is a visual treat worth visiting year-round. Right: Ryotan-ji Temple is the family temple of the influential Ii family.



Left: Atagoya is a restored kominka (traditional Japanese house) that's large enough to enjoy with up to 15 of your friends. Right: Hoshino Resorts KAI Enshu's on-site tea field.



→ was once the residence of Tokugawa Ieyasu, the first Shogun of Japan. The castle is surrounded by roughly 400 cherry trees, which is most stunning in early spring — day or night, as both the trees and castle are illuminated. After visiting the castle, relax in the Zen surroundings of Shointei, a traditional Japanese teahouse just a few minutes walk away. The staff will serve you Japanese tea and sweets while you enjoy a peaceful view of the garden.

For more Japanese culture, head north into the mountains to discover two more of Hamamatsu's historically important spiritual sites. Ryotan-ji Temple is the family temple of the influential Ii family, whose members included Tokugawa Ieyasu's son-in-law and general, a daimyo (warlord) who signed most of the treaties opening trade with the West. The temple's hidden gem is a rock garden, once inaccessible to the public but now open to all and considered a National Place of Scenic Beauty.

High in the mountains, the upper shrine of Akihasan Hongu Akiha Jinja is dedicated to a Shinto god of fire and hosts a spectacular fire festival every December. During the rest of the year, the upper shrine provides a lovely view of the area, even as far out to the Pacific Ocean on exceptionally clear days. Several prominent warriors have left weapons as offerings to the god, including Takeda Shingen, one of Japan's most feared samurai generals. If you have both time and stamina, the hike from the lower to the upper shrine takes about two hours and climbs 750 vertical meters.



A meditation session workshop at Hoko-ji Temple.

Yamaha Innovation Road is the corporate museum of the Yamaha Corporation, founded in Hamamatsu in the late 19th century. A plethora of musical instruments are on display here, and visitors can actually play most of them.

Experiences

The shores of Lake Hamana make for a scenic and easy cycling experience, with a 67-kilometer cycling course that roughly follows the lake's perimeter. If you don't have the time or energy to invest in the entire course, you can cycle halfway and return on a sightseeing boat. Bicycle rental shops are located all along the route, so start and end almost anywhere you wish.

If you'd like to walk in the tabi (traditional Japanese footwear) of a Zen Buddhist monk for a day, Hoko-ji Temple offers a Zazen meditation experience. The experience takes about an hour, with a patient and good-natured monk explaining Zazen meditation before leading you

in a 15-minute meditation. After your experience, head to the temple cafeteria and try shojin ryori, vegetarian cuisine eaten by the monks, which at Hoko-ji can also come in the shapes and flavors of unagi (freshwater eels) and sashimi (fresh raw fish).

For a non-spiritual traditional experience, Meijiya Shoyu offers a tour and soy sauce-making experience at a factory using wooden casks and 18-month fermentation periods. Squeeze your own soy sauce in the final production process and taste the incredible umami flavor of soy sauce made using time-honored production methods.

Dining Out

Most of the unagi farmed in Japan comes from Lake Hamana. Fresh unagi is a dish Hamamatsu serves with pride. You'll find dozens of restaurants specializing in this seafood delicacy, including Kanzan-ji, situated on the lake's edge at the foot of the stairs leading to Kanzan-ji Temple. Try the



Fresh unagi is a dish Hamamatsu serves with pride, as most of the unagi farmed in Japan comes from Lake Hamana.

unaju, a box of unagi in a sweet sauce served over a fluffy bed of rice, or various fried foods like karaage (fried chicken) or ebi (shrimp) fry.

With 300 establishments in the city with gyoza on the menu, you'd be hard-pressed not to eat Hamamatsu gyoza. Ishimatsu Gyoza is one of the best-known Hamamatsu chains, serving juicy gyoza made with

tender Enshu pork and a slightly chewy skin. Order a plate of 24 pieces and watch how fast it disappears.

So there you have your list of things to see, do, and eat in Hamamatsu City. Choose your favorites, or if you can't decide, the proximity to both Tokyo and Kyoto means you can always come back again and again.



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Jomon ruins to be World Heritage site

near Misawa

STORY AND PHOTOS BY
TAKAHIRO TAKIGUCHI,
STRIPES JAPAN

Japan will soon be home to 20 World Heritage sites with the addition of Jomon ruins in the north.

The set of 17 settlement ruins, stone pillars and a cemetery scattered in parts of Hokkaido, Aomori, Iwate and Akita dating to the Jomon Period (10,000 B.C. – 200 B.C.) will be officially registered

in July.

The Sannai-Maruyama site is one of the largest among the 17 ruins and is only about an hour drive from Misawa Air Base. Here you'll find pit-dwellings, pillared buildings, stone tools and other ancient objects discovered.

Fortunately, this site is open to the public. The adjacent Sanmaru Museum showcases many of the artifacts found at the site.



Sanmaru Museum

The main attraction is the large pillar-supported building, which was reconstructed as a three-story building with 4.2-meter-wide floors. The roof has not been reconstructed since there are several possible theories as to its form.

"Some say it was used as light-house, some say it was an observation platform, and others say it was a kind of religious monument," Yasuyuki Iwata, of the Aomori Prefecture Cultural Properties Protection Division, said.

He added that the dwellers were ancestors of the Ainu, the indigenous people of Hokkaido.

Though the building is currently under repair, it should be open again at the end of June 2021.

Sanmaru Museum offers English-speaking volunteer guides to answer questions, so don't be afraid to ask. Make plans to visit if you're in the Misawa area as it's a rare opportunity to step back in time more than 5,000 years.

takiguchi.takahiro@stripes.com



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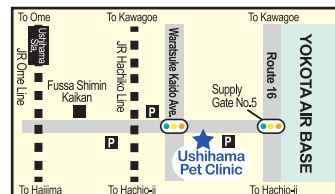
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Stripes Sports Trivia

Ben Roethlisberger and Antonio Brown led the potent Steelers offense together for nine years. The two superstars are both near the top of their positions. When it comes to their college days, the duo both played in the same non-power conference. Where did they go to school?

Answer

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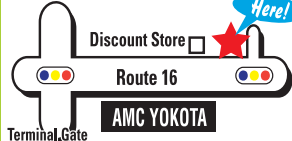
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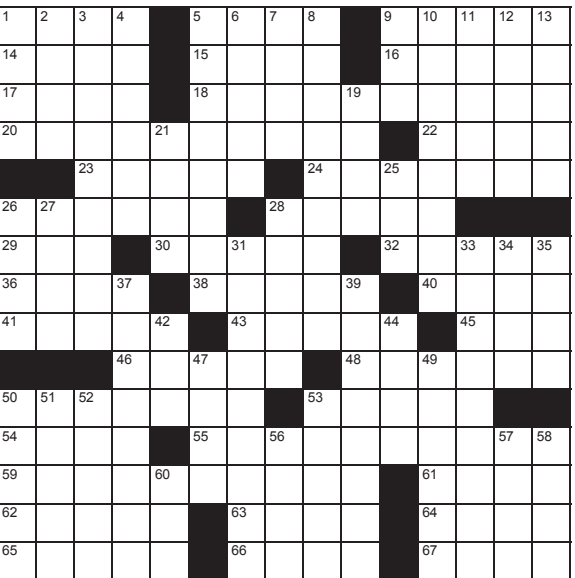
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The Weekly Crossword

by Margie E. Burke

ACROSS

- 1 Applies lightly
- 5 "Dancing Queen" quartet
- 9 60's sitcom, "Green _____"
- 14 Cambodia's continent
- 15 Squander, slangily
- 16 _____ change
- 17 Bruce of "The Hateful Eight"
- 18 Home of the NBA's Spurs
- 20 Dude ranch woe
- 22 Word in a Golding title
- 23 Captain Queeg's ship
- 24 Budget item
- 26 Swiss dwelling
- 28 Prefix with "state" or "act"
- 29 Car nut?
- 30 "Cheers" role
- 32 A bit lit
- 36 One of the Baldwins
- 38 Unsettled feeling
- 40 Kind of salmon
- 41 Twangy-sounding
- 43 Like a busybody
- 45 Removable locks
- 46 Sci-fi droid
- 48 Nine-day prayer
- 50 Circus performer
- 53 Closet wood
- 54 Not relevant
- 55 Lizard's relative
- 59 Trucker's turf
- 61 FDR's coin
- 62 Bakery treat
- 63 Type of keel
- 64 Impassioned
- 65 Bit of evidence
- 66 Bull's-eye hitter
- 67 Oscar-winning Jared



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- 3 Pet shop items
- 4 Open shoe
- 5 In _____ (not present)
- 6 Far from enthused
- 7 Pro _____ (gratis)
- 8 Cognizance
- 9 Be in a cast
- 10 Ill-tempered
- 11 Talk a blue streak
- 12 Mideast leaders
- 13 Fine china name
- 19 Counter call
- 21 Fudged the facts
- 25 Teacher's fave
- 26 "The _____ of the Cave Bear"
- 27 Waikiki wiggle
- 28 Fort Knox bar
- 31 Like many bibliographies
- 33 War-plane maneuver
- 34 Runner's sore spot
- 35 Lotus-position discipline

- 37 Vitamin A source
- 39 Slumlord's building
- 42 High ball
- 44 Skywalker's mentor
- 47 Stereo knob
- 49 Property defacer
- 50 Off the mark

- 51 Spiral shell
- 52 Revolving part
- 53 Supply party food
- 56 Hot stuff
- 57 Radiate
- 58 Give a facelift to
- 60 Johnny Bench was one

Answers to Last Week's Crossword:

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

SUDOKU

Difficulty: Easy

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

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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.

Answers to Last Week's Sudoku:

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

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