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STORY AND PHOTOS BY JUAN KING,
STARS AND STRIPES
Published: December 5, 2024

The crisp autumn air of this mountainous region invites you to its relaxing environment in western Saitama prefecture.

Nagatoro, a small, picturesque town in Chichibu city, features the hiker-friendly Mount Hodo and boasts plenty of other touristy activities to enjoy.

A trip there during the Veterans Day weekend allowed an opportunity for my family to check out the budding fall foliage on this small mountain rising to 1,630 feet.

Starting at the Mount Hodo Ropeway Base Station, which is about 700 feet up the mountain, we stepped onboard the small, cramped yellow ropeway car that fits about a dozen or more people.

A round-trip ticket costs 1,200 yen, or \$7.80, for adults, and 600 yen for children younger than 12. Information and maps are available in English at the base station kiosk.

The five-minute ropeway ascent was fun and allowed us to see more of the beautiful surrounding landscape and Chichibu city.

Once at the top, we hiked a short distance and found a small café featuring a variety of snacks, including Japanese hot noodle dishes such as ramen, udon and cooler treats, and eight assorted flavors of gelato for sale. Be sure to discard your trash appropriately.

A few minutes more of walking and we discovered a small zoo, a welcome attraction for my son and me. Established in 1960 as a monkey park, according to the website, Mount Hodo Zoo now features giant rabbits, goats, sheep, a llama, Japanese macaques or snow monkeys, a red fox, Japanese sika deer, some reptiles, fish and more.

Vending machines with carrots and other treats were available for 100 yen to feed some of the mammals there, including dozens of highly active macaques to whom visitors could toss treats.

EXCLUSIVE NEWS FROM:
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The view from Mount Hodo overlooks a picturesque part of Saitama prefecture just north of Tokyo.

SEE MOUNTAIN ON PAGE 3

What is a goshuin?

Pages 4-6



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MONKEY AROUND IN JIGOKUDANI

Nagano Pref.



JAPAN TRAVEL

Jigokudani is famous for its hot spring-loving macaque monkeys. It's the only place in the world where wild monkeys bathe in hot springs. Located at an altitude of 850 meters in Nagano prefecture, the steep cliffs and steam rising from the hot springs is how Jigokudani earned its name, also meaning Hell Valley.

The severe environment of ice and snow — buried for one third of the year — is home to the Japanese macaques or snow monkeys. The monkeys have turned this frozen and harsh place into their own paradise and since 1964, when the monkey park was opened, it's been a popular place to watch the monkeys bathe in the hot springs.

The monkey park was created by Sogo Hara, an employee of the Nagano Electric Railway. He observed that as the habitats of the monkeys shrank due to increasing ski resorts and lifts that the monkeys often invaded and raided farms down the mountain. As they became known as pests, farmers began to hunt the creatures — until, at last, the monkeys were found in a hot spring resort for people.

Once photographed, they became a worldwide phenomenon. Hara had his ticket to saving the monkeys' natural habitat. The manmade hot springs of Jigokudani Monkey Park are fed by natural sources and provide the monkeys — and guests — with enjoyment.

The monkeys are uncaged and unfenced, free to roam and be in their natural environment. The park is first and foremost a conservation area. Guests are not allowed to feed the animals as it disrupts the balance and makes the monkeys too reluctant to return to their natural habitats at night.

Thanks to the park staff feeding the monkeys throughout the year (though not enough that the monkeys become reliant) the cute little macaques can be found near the hot springs any time of year. Visitors can delight in watching the macaques go through their daily rituals such as grooming, eating, and socializing. It's a truly special place to be able to see this unusual red-faced monkey troop.



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Yaen-Koen
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Explore Miyagase Lakeside Park near Atsugi

Watch the video



STORY AND PHOTO BY TAKAHIRO TAKIGUCHI, STRIPES JAPAN

Nestled within the Tanazawa mountain range, you'll find Miyagase Lakeside Park, a popular spot for autumn leaf viewing near NAF Atsugi.

The man-made lake is only a 45-minute drive from the base and has a trail which makes for good walking or a fresh run. This lake serves as a reservoir which provides drinking water to Tokyo and Yokohama City. Dogs on leashes are allowed to visit this park as well, so don't forget to bring your furry friend.

I visited in early November and the mountain showed early signs of fall. My wife and I enjoyed a brisk walk around the spacious park with a 315-meter-long and a 23-meter-high suspension bridge with a nice view of the surrounding area.

So, if you're on Atsugi or Camp Zama, make plans to head out and enjoy one of Japan's most colorful seasons at Miyagase Lakeside Park. The peak autumn colors are projected for late November.

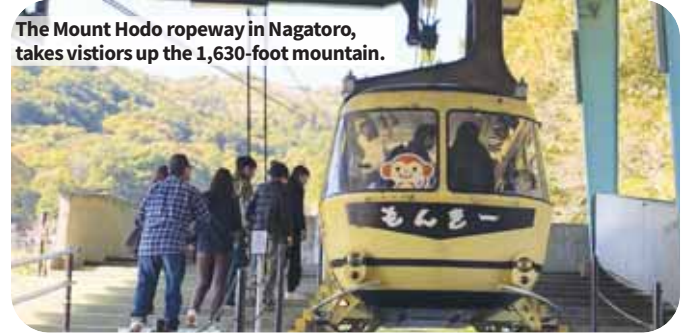
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Things to know

LOCATION: 940-4 Miyagase, Kiyokawa Village, Aiko-gun, Kanagawa Prefecture
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WEBSITE



The Mount Hodo ropeway in Nagatoro, takes visitors up the 1,630-foot mountain.

MOUNTAIN: More than hiking

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

After spending more than an hour at the summit, we headed back toward the station for the descent. The whole experience could take more than a couple of hours depending on your choice of the ropeway or the hike up the mountain and a visit to the zoo.

The plan for my next visit is to do the hike both up and down the mountain for fitness and a chance to see the many plum blossom trees planted there.

You can find all types of other tourist attractions in Nagatoro, including a guided wooden boat ride down the Arakawa River, a visit to the Nagatoro Town Local History Museum, the Saitama Museum of Natural History, or just a visit to see the architecture of the many temples with a beautiful mountain backdrop.

king.juan@stripes.com
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— Things to know —



ADDRESS: 1766-1 Nagatoro, Nagatoro-machi, Chichibu-gun, Saitama Prefecture; a two-hour drive from Yokota Air Base on the Kan-Etsu Expressway.

TIMES: Mount Nagatoro is open all day; the Mount Hodo Ropeway is open daily from 9:40 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.; the ropeway operates every 30 minutes on weekdays, every 15 minutes on weekends; the Mount Hodo Zoo is open daily from 10 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

COSTS: A ropeway roundtrip is 1,200 yen for adults, 600 yen for 12 and younger; zoo admission is 500 yen for adults, 250 yen for 12 and younger.

FOOD: A small cafe offers a variety of hot food and cold treats.



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What is a goshuin

All about traditional
(and why you'll be ac



BY LUCIO MAURIZI,
LIVE JAPAN

Goshuin are large stamps, handwritten by monks, that work as a kind of proof that you have visited a specific temple or shrine. Simple in concept, this document is full of symbolic, religious, and historical meanings.

Many people are fascinated by kanji (Chinese characters adopted and adapted by the Japanese language). Sometimes it's their shape that intrigues even those who don't understand their meaning.

Often, their appeal is the power they intrinsically carry beyond the word or concept they express. Shodo, the art of calligraphy in Japan has also been associated, for a time, to the art of sword-wielding, inferring to the many styles masters could use, as well as their propensity to use quick or slow strokes, wide or narrow movements, and so on.

Undeniably, though, what is most associated with kanji writing for Japanese people and foreigners alike, is a sense of spirituality that seems to be embedded with the characters themselves, regardless of whether such kanji actually have a mystical connotation.

This is probably the reason behind hosts of people choosing to synthesize their entire life or belief system with a kanji tattoo (although, often, poor research on the part of the person wearing the tattoo leads to undesirable effects).

Many westerners like to see "their name" written in kanji simply because having something written in kanji, even though one might not understand its meaning, makes for a really great memento.

Similarly, the popularity of goshuin grew among foreigners and Japanese people as well. So let's dive in, and let's make sure you know everything there is to know about these ancient seals.

● What is a goshuin and where do I get one?

As mentioned earlier, goshuin are hand-written seals that you can obtain from many temples and shrines across Japan, but not from all. The places where you can usually find goshuin are Buddhist temples and Shinto shrines. However, it's important to note that these very large religions (or philosophies) have several different branches.

In fact, some sects, like the Jodo Shinshu (Buddhist "School of the Pure Land"), do not offer goshuin to visitors. Nevertheless, more often than not, you'll be able to find a stand where the shuin is prepared, upon request.

The goshuin can be easily confused with the more common and less tradition-charged tourist stamps, so it's worth looking at both. Japan has a very close relation to stamps. Whereas in most countries, a signature on a document validates it, in Japan, personal stamps are overwhelmingly used for the same purpose.

At the same time, a stamp is also a printed memento that is easily collectible in virtually every place in the country: train stations, tourist landmarks, stores, and, of course, temples and shrines. A stamp will present something connecting it to the place you visited, in the shape of images and words.

You can get the book itself (goshuincho) for around 1,000 yen at most larger temples, and the stamps from then on will cost somewhere under 500 yen.

The goshuin, at glance, might look like a convoluted

stamp, but it is vastly different from its "tourist memento" counterpart.

If you decide to collect also tourist stamps, along with goshuin, remember that you should keep them in separate books. The goshuincho is meant to hold only sacred seals.

It's not uncommon for those who prepare the goshuin to flip through the pages to make sure they write their seal on the right one, and if they see something other than a goshuin on your book you might be lectured on the sacredness of the goshuincho, or even be denied a new seal.

These seals are unique in that they are handwritten and, usually, made by Buddhist monks or Shinto kannushi (lit. God master). The kannushi are the people responsible for the maintenance of the Shinto shrine, as well as for leading the worshiping of the god.

In the past, they were considered the intermediaries between "common" people and the god. In other words, you're receiving the seal from what is considered, by believers, an emissary of Kamisama. It's pretty exciting when compared to a self-placed stamp.

Although the procedure to create a goshuin is the same everywhere, each temple or shrine has a different goshuin and a different style. At first, the monk (or kannushi) will carve the temple's symbol in the book. He will then inscribe the name of the temple, as well as the date of your visit.

They may also add prayers, or symbols for which the location is known. Some locations offer multiple goshuin. You can choose the one you'd like, or you could have them all added to your collection.

● What to know and what to prepare to get your very own goshuin

When visiting a Buddhist or Shinto temple or shrine, first make sure that they do offer goshuin (in most cases they will). The areas in which goshuin are prepared are usually marked only in Japanese, but we can help.

One way to identify the right place is by identifying the signs. Even if you can't read kanji, Buddhist temples will always mark the right area with 御朱印所 (goshuin jo), 朱印所 (Shuin jo), or 納経所 (Nokyo jo). Shinto shrines will have a sign reading 授与所 (Juyo jo), or 社務所 (Shamu sho).

Even memorizing just the shape of these kanji can be a challenge, but it still won't be hard to find the right place. You could approach any of the staff, or monks (or even Japanese visitors) to direct you by asking, "Goshuin wa doko de morae masuka?" ("Where can I get goshuin?").

You can simplify further by asking "Goshuin wa, doko?" (lit. "Goshuin, where?"). Most people would understand even



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uin?

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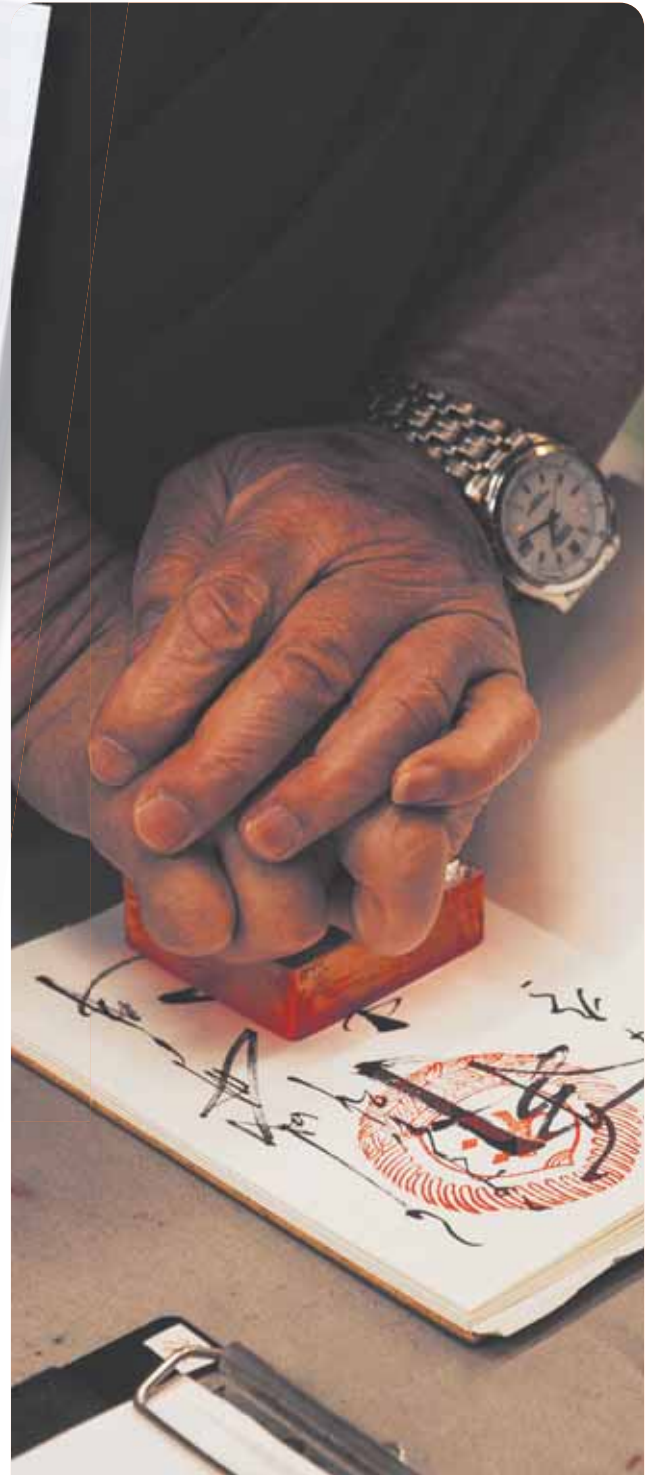
Japanese shrine seals addicted to collecting them!



File Photos



The goshuin of Yoshiwara Shrine in Minamisenju, Tokyo.
Photos courtesy of Live Japan



SEE GOSHUIN ON PAGE 6

a simple “Goshuin, please?” Depending on the crowd, you may be able to receive your stamp right away, or you may have to wait a few minutes, in which case you’ll be given a ticket, or a tag with a number to collect your stamp later.

If you’re in a particularly popular place, ask for your goshuin as soon as you enter, and then enjoy the rest of the visit. You’ll save a lot of time!

In the past, people would offer sutra in exchange for seals. Nowadays, most places will ask for a certain sum of money (usually between ¥300 and ¥1000 – although prices don’t often go above ¥500). In some cases, there will be no price specified. Still, it’s customary to leave an offer, called hatsuhoryou (again, usually ¥300 – probably because of the relation the number 3 has with religion, culture, folklore, and superstition in Japan).

On occasions, you may even see a sign that only asks for your good thoughts and spirit. Although not necessary, it’s customary to leave the exact amount of money when asking for a goshuin. And if it’s possible, don’t miss the chance of watching the artists at work. They are often very skilled.

We talked about the stamps, the art, the where, and how-to, but there are still some essential factors to consider, particularly how to store your stamps.

Why is the goshuin so ritualistic? Origin and history

Unfortunately, like many other traditional customs of Japan, tracing the origin of the goshuin back to its inception is not an easy task. For this reason, we still can’t know for sure where it originated or even why, but many sources point in the same direction, and the most widely accepted theory is that they used to be just what they are now.

Devout people in many areas of Japan would embark on what was (and still is) called junrei. This word refers to a pilgrimage visiting several Buddhist and Shinto temples and shrines (usually 33, 66, or 88), dating as far back as the Nara Period (710-794). Pilgrims would travel to worship places and receive a goshuin, which proved they had been there.

But that was not all. Originally, the goshuin was given in exchange for a shakyo (sutra). The shakyo was a means to spread Buddha’s word while simultaneously praying for one’s greatest wish. The shakyo was believed to be a mirror of one’s self. They were written by hand, brief and beautiful in nature; they were considered a symbol of one’s piety.

Donating the sutra to the temple or shrine, pilgrims demonstrated how devout they were, and received something to remind themselves and show others that their positive nature had been acknowledged by many sacred places.

The transition of goshuin into modern times

Many people still collect goshuin for the same reasons pilgrims in the past did. In fact, a lot of pilgrims still visit several locations collecting seals. For a long time, until relatively recently, goshuin were something that only devout people or the elderly would go after. Things changed considerably in the past few years. Collecting shuin has become a widespread hobby among all ages, nationalities, and faiths.

For some hard-core enthusiasts, it has become such an obsession that it gave life to an expression: “shuin girl,” referring to young adults (generally women but not exclusively) who relentlessly visit hundreds of temples and shrines and collect an impressive number of stamps to take home.

親自在菩薩 行深般若波羅蜜多時 照見
五蘊皆空 度一切苦厄 舍利子 色不異
空 空不異色 色即是空 空即是色 受想
行識亦復如是 舍利子 是諸法空相 不
生不滅 不垢不淨 不增不減 是故空中
無色 無受想行識 無眼耳鼻舌身意 無
色聲香味觸法 無眼界 乃至無意識界 無
盡 無苦集滅道 無智亦無得 以無所得故
菩提薩埵 依般若波羅蜜多故 心無罣礙
無罣礙故 無有恐怖 遠離一切顛倒夢想
究竟涅槃 三世諸佛 依般若波羅蜜多故
得阿耨多羅三藐三菩提 故知般若波羅蜜
多 是大神呪 是大明呪 是無上呪 是無
等等呪 能除一切苦 真實不虛 故說般若
波羅蜜多呪 即說呪曰 羯諦 羯諦 波羅
羯諦 波羅僧 羯諦 菩薩摩訶 般若心經

般若心經

般若心經
(han·nya·shin·kyo)
Heart Sutra



Goshuin stamp marking Hinamatsuri (Dolls Festival) at Tomisaki Shrine in Chiba. Photo courtesy of Live Japan



File Photo



(Top) 100 paintings with a horse riding motif depicting notable historical figures of Japan on the ceiling of the worship hall at Yasaki Inari Shrine in Asakusa, Tokyo.

(Left) Goshuin stamp of Yasaki Inari Shrine.

Photos courtesy of Live Japan

GOSHUIN: A spiritual connection

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5

Goshuincho a passport to the next life

Regardless of the reason behind collecting goshuin, or one’s religious beliefs, this seal carries a very deeply rooted spiritual connotation for many devout people, and certainly for the monks and kannushi who write them. For this reason, you won’t be able to receive a goshuin unless you hand them the appropriate book: the goshuincho.

The kanji forming the word shuin (朱 and 印) literally mean respectively “red/orange ink” and “stamp.” Along with the particle “go” preceding them, goshuin could be translated into “the sacred vermilion stamp.” Chō means book.

The goshuincho is, therefore, a book designed to collect these important seals, which should not be placed just anywhere. As explained earlier, pilgrims would collect the seals as evidence of their devoutness and piety, but there was an ulterior reason. The idea was that they would carry their goshuincho to the afterlife to prove to the deity they would encounter that they had led a righteous life in the eyes of the god.

It wouldn’t be hard to find such books. Most temples carry their own version of goshuincho, but they are relatively easy to find also in bookstores. Because of the younger generation’s interest in this practice, it is now common to find several books with many different motifs and colors, as well as more somber, elegant ones for those who would prefer that kind of design.

There are mostly two different kinds of goshuincho. One resembles a regular notebook, in shape. It has a hardcover and regular pages (although the texture is thicker and more porous). The one that is overwhelmingly used, though, is the goshuincho with the “accordion” pages. This book has pages that unfold into a unique long page showing several seals in a line.

You can choose to collect one goshuin on each side of the

page, but be mindful of the fact that they are designed to carry only one per page, so, if you opt to collect more in one book, you may have to deal with ink transpiring on the back of the page and potentially ruin another seal. Depending on how you decide to use your goshuincho, you’ll generally be able to collect 20-40 seals in one book.

Although you can buy goshuincho of different sizes, the most common (and traditional) one is 11cm x 16 cm.

Some people today use different books to separate seals from temples and those from shrines. It’s hard to understand where and why this practice first started taking place, but what is certain is that in origin, there was no such distinction. Ultimately it’s up to you.

Ultimately, regardless of one’s beliefs or motivation behind collecting these stamps, it’s always important to understand and respect the culture that created them.

Useful things to remember

A goshuincho and the stamps in it are proof of one’s visit to the temple. For this reason, they usually don’t make for good presents. While many people may not know the intrinsic meaning of the book, many Japanese or devout people (or simply those passionate about Japanese culture and customs) may find your well-meaning souvenir inappropriate

or even downright offensive.

Nowadays, you’re not required to, but in the past, you could receive a goshuin only after praying. If you want to experience the full tradition and meaning behind earning a sacred seal (or maybe to impress some bystanders and monks), you could ask where and when the next worshipping service will take place.

If you’re patient, by the time you fill your goshuincho, you’ll have a truly memorable and unique souvenir of your trip to Japan. Great designs, and if you like kanji, amazing calligraphy. In many cases, shodo is what attracts many Japanese collectors to this hobby.

What’s important to remember, though, is that the goshuin, while generally beautiful to look at, is a symbol of a much deeper relationship between the book itself and the owner.

It’s a tangible sign of the connection between a place and its spirituality, and the person who earned the seal. The religion, the philosophy, the tradition, and the history behind what could otherwise appear as a simple, albeit beautiful memento, is what makes the goshuin a priceless item and the banner of an entire faith.

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Stripes Sports Trivia

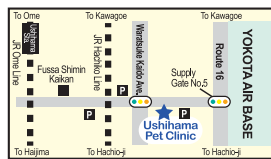
The price of an MLB team, these days, is pretty astronomical. In 2012, the Dodgers were purchased for \$2 billion. More recently, the lowly Marlins fetched \$1.3B. The cheapest purchase of a current franchise was, go figure, one that has stayed in the family for nearly 50 years. Which franchise cost only \$8.7 million in 1973?

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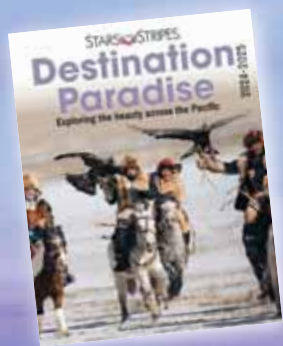
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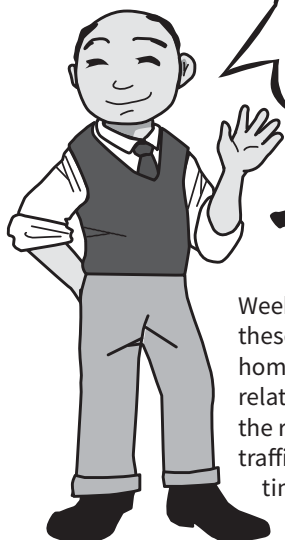
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STARS AND STRIPES



DID YOU KNOW?

The three most important holidays in Japan are o-shogatsu (Jan. 1-3), o-bon (Aug. 13-15) and Golden Week (Apr. 29 – May 5). Traditionally, during these weeks, Japanese go back to their hometowns to spend some time with their relatives. This means even more people on the roads. So, consider this your warning, as traffic will be worse than usual during this time.

Kanji of the week

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Language Lesson

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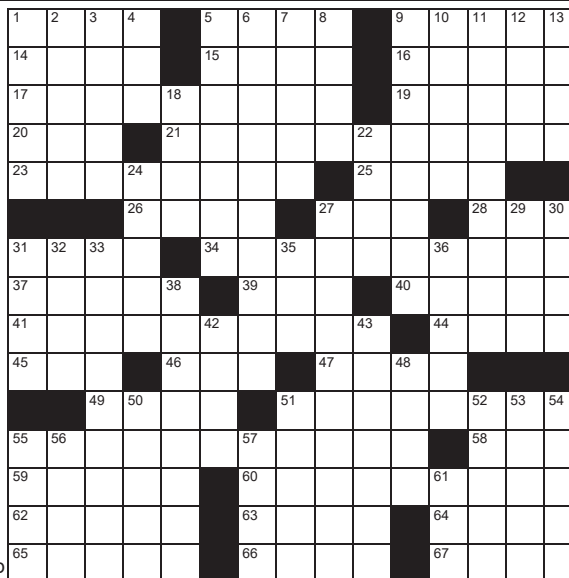
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The Weekly Crossword

by Margie E. Burke

ACROSS

- Aberdeen native
- Sickly-looking
- Tanker mishap
- Hardly racy
- In ___ of (rather than)
- "My Three Sons" son
- Remove from a computer
- Cruise flick, "All the Right ___"
- "Fat chance!"
- Disposition
- Points, for example
- Poetic adverb
- Wallet fillers
- In great shape
- Schedule abbr.
- Time gone by
- Wrecking ball job
- Winning
- One for the road
- Sing like Bing
- Fertilized, in a way
- Play opener
- Sailor's affirmative
- November honoree
- Like some mattresses
- Cornfield invader
- Rift-causing
- Put on a show
- Hollywood's Knotts
- Make like
- Set apart
- Ludicrous
- Mellows, maybe
- "Excuse me..."
- Uptight
- Read (over)
- Small boat



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- Fails to mention
- Royal flush card
- Did a tailor's job
- Blue-eyed feline
- Lends a hand
- Festive time
- Of word meanings
- Trailer
- Whitney's cotton gin, e.g.
- Property claim
- "___ we forget ..."
- Leave slack-jawed
- Staircase part
- Wreck but good
- Thumb's neighbor
- Give the heave-ho
- Poet Sexton
- Family man
- Yawl call
- Town officer, in New England
- Yoga need

- Airport shuttles
- Person no longer hitched
- Pond swimmer
- Widely varied
- Tease
- Checkers
- San ___, Calif.
- Coeur d'Alene locale
- Ballot caster
- 2001 film, "___ at the Gates"
- Put forth
- Supreme Court count
- Rush order?
- Roam (about)

Answers to Previous Crossword:

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

SUDOKU

Difficulty: Medium

Edited by Margie E. Burke

HOW TO SOLVE:

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

Answer to Previous Sudoku:

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

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

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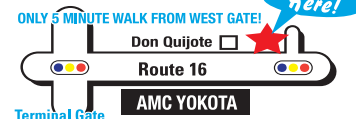


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Where to view illuminations

SHIROI KOIBITO PARK ILLUMINATION (HOKKAIDO):

Until Mar. 31, 4 - 7:30 p.m.
The indoor of park buildings will be beautifully illuminated; 7-minute walk from Miyanosawa Station; exit Sapporo Nishi I.C. free parking; 011-666-1481



MISAWA PHANTASIA(AOMORI):

Until Jan. 13, 4 p.m. - midnight
Featuring a 16-meter tall 'big tree' with 10,000 LED lights and dozens of suspended balls illuminated in various colors in the Nakayoshi Park; 5-minute walk from Misawa AB main gate; 0176-53-2175



ARTS TOWADA WINTER ILLUMINATION 2024 (AOMORI):

Dec. 15 - Feb. 16, 4:30 - 9 p.m.
Blue 300,000 LED lights decorate with the snow covered in front of Towada Modern Arts Museum; 35-minute bus ride from JR Shichinohe Towada Station; 0176-51-6772



KOIWAI WINTER LIGHTS (IWATE):

Until Jan. 13, 4 - 8 p.m., close on Dec. 31
Featuring illumination decorates with 2 mil. LED lights themed with "Galaxy Farm Night"; 1,000 yen for 12 or older; 15-minute drive from Morioka I.C. on Tohoku Express; 019 692-4321



TOKYO SKYTREE DREAM CHRISTMAS 2024 (TOKYO):

Until Dec. 25
Enjoy 460,000 lights around the Skytree Town. Collaborates with TV Tokyo event "TV Tokyo winter park in Tokyo Skytree Town" to provide special event and gourmet foods; Oshiage or Tokyo Skytree Station. 0570-55-0634



MARUNOUCHI ILLUMINATION 2024 (TOKYO):

Until Feb. 16, 3 - 11 p.m. (Dec. 1 - 31, 3-midnight)
Around 286 street trees can be decorated with 1 mil. Champagne gold LED lights around Otemachi and Yoyogi Park; JR Tokyo Station; 03-5218-5100



OMOTESANDO FENDI ILLUMINATION 2024 (TOKYO):

Until Dec. 28; Sunset - 10 p.m.
Omotesando Fendi Illumination 2024 with the theme of "Re-Crystallized," decorated on a 23-ft tree with the LED lights on the center of open space at the venue along with "light curtain" consisting of 6,000 icicle appears on the upper part of stairway. JR Harajuku or Omote Sandō Station; 03-3497-0310



SHIBUYA BLUE GROTT 2024 (TOKYO):

Until Dec. 25; 5 - 10 p.m.
Illumination of 770,000 LED lights with the theme of "Blue Grotto" through Shibuya Koen Street and Yoyogi Park; walking distance from Shibuya and Harajuku Station



SAGAMI LAKE ILLUMILLION (KANAGAWA):

Until May 11
About 6 mil. LED lights are decorated around the Sagamiko Resort Pleasure Forrest. Amusement Park, Hot Spring, Camping and BBQ area is also available. 2,000 yen for adults, 1,300 yen under 12.10-minute bus ride from JR Sagamiko or Hashimoto Station; 7-minute drive from Sagamiko Higashi I.C on Chuo Express. 0570-037-353



NORAD launches Santa tracker

STARS AND STRIPES
Published: December 1, 2024

The North American Aerospace Defense Command's Santa tracker launched Dec. 1 and is ready to track Santa on Dec. 24 for the program's 69th year.

NORAD monitors and defends North American airspace 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. On Dec. 24, NORAD has one additional mission: tracking Santa Claus as he makes his way across the globe delivering presents to children.

NORAD Tracks Santa has been the defense command's Christmas tradition since 1955, and has attracted millions of people from around the world to its website (www.noradsanta.org) each year.

The website features Santa's North Pole Village which includes a Santa tracker

countdown, holiday games, a movie theater, holiday music, a web store and more. The site is available in nine languages: English, French, Spanish, German, Italian, Japanese, Portuguese, Chinese and Korean.

According to a news release, on Dec. 24, trackers worldwide can call 1-877-HI-NORAD to ask live operators about Santa's location from 6 a.m. to midnight MST. Also on Dec. 24, website visitors will see Santa's flight from 4 a.m. to midnight MST.

Users can count down the days until Santa's journey on mobile devices with the official NORAD Tracks Santa app, which is available in the Apple and Google Play stores. NORAD Tracks Santa will also be available on Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and X, and on contributor platforms Amazon Alexa, SiriusXM and OnStar.

Track Santa on your device!

See Website



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Watch Youtube



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MOTHER FARM ILLUMINATION (CHIBA):

Until Feb. 24 and Weekend only, (Every night: Dec. 24, 25 and Dec. 28 - Jan 5); 4 - 7:30 p.m.
Annual theme is flower garden of light that is featuring the lighting flower garden, princess flower dress and rainbow tunnel; 1,500 yen for over 15, 800 yen for under 12. Shuttle bus service is available from Kimitsu Station. 0439-37-3211



30TH KOBE LUMINARIE (HYOGO):

From Jan. 24 to Feb. 2, Sunset - 9:30 p.m.
Held since Dec. 1995, entrusted with the requisition of the victims of the Hanshin-Awaji earthquake and the reconstruction and regeneration of the city. 7 minute walk from JR Motomachi Station. 078-230-1001



BIHOKU PARK ILLUMINATION (HIROSHIMA):

Until Jan. 13; Tue - Sun, 9:30 a.m. - 9 p.m., close on Dec. 31 and Jan. 1
Various illumination decorated with over 700,000 LED lights throughout the park, live performance and fireworks are scheduled on the weekends. 450 yen for over 15, 210 yen for over 65; 0824-72-7000



KIRAKIRA FESTIVAL IN SASEBO (NAGASAKI):

Festival opens until Dec. 22 (Illumination opens until Jan. 13), 5 - 11 p.m.
Decorate around the shopping street in Sasebo city and the illumination selected by annual Sasebo news on the Shimanose Art Center wall is remarkable; Live performance and dance battle are scheduled through the event; 15-minute walk from JR Sasebo Station; 0956-24-4411



SOUTHEAST BOTANICAL GARDEN ILLUMINATION (OKINAWA):

Until May 25, 5 - 10 p.m.
Decorates the light tunnels, tree house and light carpets with 1.8 mil. LED lights to illuminate trees and the promenade fantastically. 2,300 yen for adult, 1,350 yen for ages 13 - 17; 800 yen for ages 4 - 12; 5-minute drive from Okinawa Kita I.C.; 098-939-2555



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Sid Frazier

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