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# JAPAN

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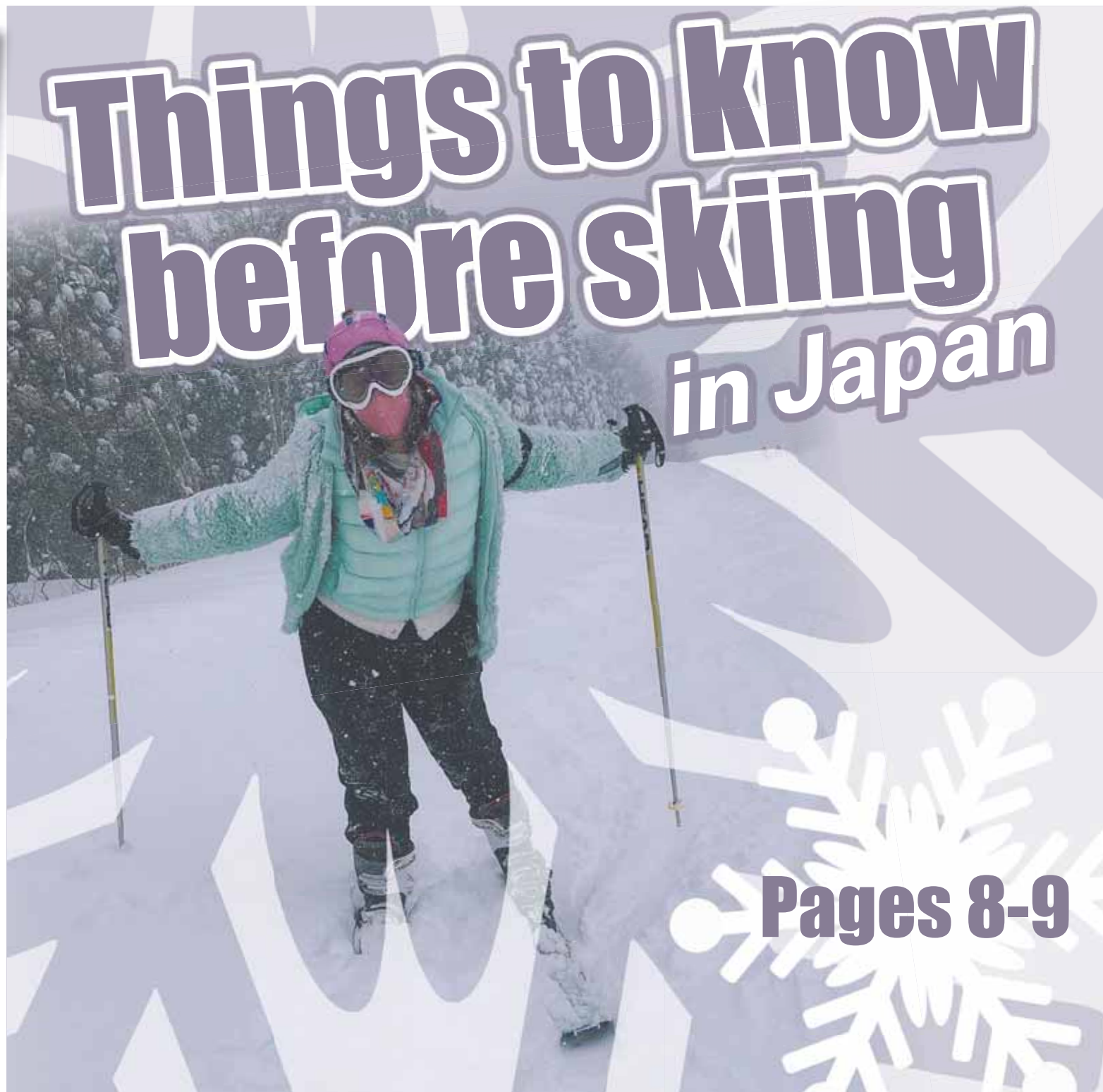
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# Resolving to put on 'Big Girl Pants' in 2022

The travel mug's worth of coffee I'd consumed that morning hit my bladder with the force of a runaway train, making me squirm in the commissary checkout line. Grabbing items from my cart and tossing them onto the conveyor belt, I huffed rhythmically under my mask as if I was having birthing contractions until the urge passed.

It subsided long enough for me to get home, but struck again as I was carrying grocery bags in from the car. Although the bread got squished when I dropped bags in our front hallway, I made it to the bathroom with only minor spillage.

After doing a bit of "accident abatement" in the bathroom sink, I put on a fresh pair of undies and threw my spot-rinsed pants into the dryer. "No harm, no foul," I thought, proud of my ability to adapt to life's little challenges.

Pants-less, but still wearing socks and shoes, I descended the basement stairs to stash groceries into our second refrigerator. As I was loading potatoes into the crisper, the doorbell rang.

Oh geez.

Thankfully, I heard my husband, Francis, walk down our creaky staircase from his home office and open the door. "Hey John, c'mon in! You don't mind

dogs, do you?" Then I remembered - John was here to appraise our house ... including the basement. My eyes darted around the dank, subterranean space under our 125-year-old home for a place to hide.

This was not the only time I'd found myself in a predicament due to my "droopy bladder." Doctors at every military clinic where we had lived had told me that my bladder issues were the result of giving birth to three large babies, including two nine-pounders. Apparently, my bladder wasn't where it used to be, and the doctors recommended surgery. But who has time for surgery? Who will cook, clean, run errands, drive kids, walk dogs, shovel snow and buy groceries at the commissary? As a long-time military spouse, I was conditioned to believe that my job was to manage the household, without vacations or medical leave. It was part of the bargain I made when I married

a career military man.

When Francis was on active duty, I had to do what it took to manage our family, whether he was home or away. That meant that, if I got sick while he was deployed, and felt the urge to throw up while driving the kids in heavy traffic down I-264, I'd better reach around and grab that empty Big Gulp cup on the floor of the minivan. (Yes, that really happened.) Subconsciously, I believed it would be selfish of me to turn away from the needs of my family for a long period of time to address minor health issues, droopy bladders included.

After deciding against climbing into a dusty storage bin containing old Halloween decorations, I cleared my throat and called, "Francis? Honey? Could you come to the top of the basement stairs for just a sec?" Francis looked down at me with initial shock, then giggled knowingly. Using hand gestures

and exaggerated facial expressions as if playing charades, I commanded him to get my pants from the dryer and throw them down to me before John the appraiser was traumatized by the sight of my bare, flaky winter legs topped by Warner briefs.

Disaster may have been averted, but the incident prompted me to self-reflect. Military spouses serve their families, which is honorable. They put aside careers, personal goals and sometimes physical and mental health issues to manage the family while their spouse serves the country. But a time may come when they should make themselves a priority. We are conditioned to feel selfish if we put ourselves first, but we must strike a reasonable balance between our needs and our duty to our military family.

As I turned out the basement light, now fully clothed, a switch flipped in my thinking. In the New Year, I would make myself a priority. I won't be left standing pants-less in the basement again — I will resolve to take care of myself now.

Read more of Lisa Smith Molinari's columns at:  
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## Mental Notes with Hilary Valdez

## Choices and decisions

BY HILARY VALDEZ,  
STRIPE JAPAN

“We are our choices” – Jean Paul Sartre

A choice is not the same as a decision. But, we cannot choose not to choose. Daily, people make roughly 35,000 choices. Chicken or beef? Drive the Mercedes or the Lamborghini? Wear high heels or tennis shoes? The Happy Meal or a dozen Krispy Kreme donuts. All these decisions lead to decision fatigue. If you're tired don't make BIG decisions. Should I join the Marine Corps or stay with Walmart for another week?

Before making BIG decisions, get plenty of rest and have a clear mind. Being mentally exhausted is not a good time to make decisions. If you are burned out emotionally and mentally take a few minutes or days to clear the daze in your head. Being rested will prevent impulsive decisions such as should we run away and get married, or should I tell my parents first? Ask yourself, is this the best time to make the decision to get married? Maybe it's time to decide not to decide. In each moment in your life, you are free to decide.

Choices are needed to clarify priorities; decisions are needed to make things happen. Don't let your emotions make your decisions. A decision is a situation in which you have more than one option. The option you choose can have some effect of the outcome. People often avoid making decisions out of fear of making a mistake. Actually, the failure to make decisions is one of life's biggest mistakes. When making decisions the best option is based on your priorities.



If you or the group cannot make a decision you may be experiencing analysis paralysis. Maybe it's time to consult the Magic 8-Ball. Decisions require making up one's mind. With a choice we are debating whether it's a right or wrong one. Choices are opportunities to select an option. In decision-making, objectives must be established; objectives are in order of importance; alternative actions developed. We make choices based on our values, and beliefs.

To make deliberate thoughtful decisions identify the decision, gather information, identify alternatives, weigh the evidence, choose among alternatives, take action, and review your decision, according to the University of Massachusetts-Dartmouth. Now that we have entered the New Year, it's time to make decisions and choices for the rest of the year.

Every day is a fresh start. Stay positive. Enter the new year with gratitude. Every day is an opportunity for kindness. Choosing to improve is change. Take an inventory of yourself and search for the potential inside of you waiting to emerge into a new you. Whatever you decide, stay committed to it. Don't make resolutions without an action plan. Stay busy and enjoy your life so you have no time for hate or violence. Concentrate on being happy and choosing to be happy. Being happy confuses people. You are responsible for your happiness.

“What the new year brings to you will depend a great deal on what you bring to the new year,” Vern

McLellan said. Focus on your strengths, not your weaknesses. Be with people who have positive energy. Remember: one-third of the population likes you, one-third dislikes you; and one-third of the population is indifferent to you. Pick the people who you like and ignore the rest. Your life is not a popularity contest. Just meander about life being content. Enjoy your own company. Impress yourself, not others.

When you wake up in the morning don't say to yourself: “I decided not to decide!” Make a small decision. A manageable decision. Like making the bed, taking out the garbage or washing the dishes. Don't yell at the kids. Give warm fuzzies not cold prickles. We live in a static world filled with tension. But one smile or one act of kindness creates a ripple effect of positive energy. Positivity begins with you. Make a new year's resolution to have a positive outlook on life and look at the bright side of life's challenges. Surprise yourself,

show up happy every day. Sure, people will talk behind you back, “Why is he/she happy all the time.” Keep 'em guessing!

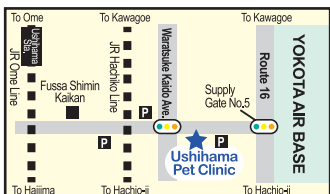
Hilary Valdez is a retiree living in Japan. He is an experienced Mental Health professional and Resiliency Trainer. Valdez is a former Marine and has worked with the military most of his career and most recently worked at Camp Zama as a Master Resiliency Trainer. Valdez now has a private practice and publishes books on social and psychological issues. His books are available on Amazon and for Kindle. Learn more about Valdez and contact him at [www.hilaryvaldez.com](http://www.hilaryvaldez.com) or at [InstantInsights@hotmail.com](mailto:InstantInsights@hotmail.com)

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# As Year of the Tiger roars in, 2022 does not promise perfection, but strength

BY DAVE ORNAUER,  
STARS AND STRIPES

**G**iven the challenges we've faced in 2021, the continued battle with the once-in-a-century coronavirus pandemic and how it has changed life for us all, what wouldn't we all give for some good fortune as the New Year approaches?

The Chinese Zodiac could offer an indicator of good things to come: 2022 is the Year of the Tiger, known as the king of beasts in China. The Zodiac sign Tiger symbolizes strength, braveness and the exorcising of evil, all of which could breathe fresh air into our lives, especially after the last two years. The Tiger is considered a guardian of children; Chinese kids frequently wear hats or shoes with the image of the tiger for good fortune.

The Tigers ranks third among the creatures in the Chinese Zodiac. In order, they are: rodent, ox, tiger, rabbit, dragon, serpent, equine, goat, baboon,

rooster, canine and boar.

Years of the Tiger include 2010, 1998, 1986, 1974, 1962, 1950, 1938 and so on in increments of 12 years. Technically, the Chinese or Lunar New Year in 2022 takes place on Feb. 1 and ends on Jan. 21, 2023.

In general, people born in the Year of the Tiger are brave, competitive, unpredictable and confident, according to the thechinesezodiac.org. They are charming and well-liked by others. But sometimes, they can be impetuous, irritable and overindulgent.

Ever stubborn and possessing tough judgment, the Tiger works actively and expresses themselves boldly, doing things in a high-handed manner. They're authoritative and never go back on what they say.

With great confidence and indomitable fortitude, they can be competent leaders. They might not make preparations for anything, but they can handle anything that comes along.

There are five types of Tiger, each with different characteristics. This year is of Water Tiger. Other possible Tiger year types are wood, fire, earth and metal, according to travelchinaguide.com.

The Tiger in general is most compatible with one born in a year of the horse, dog or pig and are worst placed alongside those born in a year of the ox, snake, goat or monkey.

A monkey and tiger have clashing personalities, want and need different things and will argue in a relationship. Tigers and snakes don't understand each other and the relationship will be full of suspicion and frostiness.

## Among things that bring Tigers luck are:

- The numbers 1, 3 and 4 and numbers containing them, such as 13 and 43.
- The 16th and 27th days of any Chinese lunar month.
- The colors blue, gray and orange.
- Yellow lilies and Cineraria.
- The directions east, north and south.
- The third, seventh and 10th Chinese lunar months.

## Things to Tigers to avoid are:

- Unlucky numbers 6, 7 and 8 and numbers containing them, such as 87 and 67.
- The color brown.
- Southwest direction.
- The first, fourth, fifth and 11th Chinese lunar months

## Among the many famous (or in some cases infamous) people who were born in the Year of the Tiger were:

Queen Elizabeth II of England (April 21, 1926), Soviet strongman Joseph Stalin (Dec. 18, 1878), socialist revolutionary Karl Marx (May 5, 1818), Louis XIV of France (Sept. 5, 1638), author Charles Dickens (Feb. 7, 1812), nonviolence icon Mahatma Gandhi (Oct. 2, 1869), R&B musician-singer-songwriter Stevie Wonder (May 13, 1950), author H.G. Wells (Sept. 21, 1866), composers Johannes Brahms (May 7, 1833), Felix Mendelssohn (Feb. 3, 1809) and Ludwig van Beethoven (Dec. 16, 1770), and former U.N. secretary-general Kofi Annan (April 8, 1938).

Whatever sign you might happen to be, may the New Year bless you with joy, happiness and good fortune.

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# Enjoy enormous all-you-can-eat naan

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STORY AND PHOTOS BY KELLY AGEE,  
STARS AND STRIPES  
Published: December 23, 2021

**W**hile exploring central Tokyo on a recent afternoon, I got fairly hungry for Indian food.

An internet search found the nearest lunch option at Andhra Kitchen, a quick, three-minute walk from Okachimachi Station, not far from bustling Ueno.

The lunch menu at Andhra is relatively small, with just four sets for customers to choose from. It was easy to order because they do have an English menu.

I am a vegetarian, so I opted for set A, which included vegetarian curries, naan, rice, salad and a lassi all for 880 yen, or about \$7.76. The food came out

fast, so if you need a quick bite to eat while out and about in the area, this is the place for you.

I enjoyed the giant-sized, all-you-can-eat naan. It was quite soft and boasted a nice, buttery flavor. You can also have as much rice as you want, according to the menu.

I was surprised by the quality of the curry; being a Texan, I really enjoy spicy food, and to me, it had the right amount of spice and flavor.

I didn't enjoy the white basmati rice, though. I prefer yellow jasmine

rice with my Indian food. The salad was small and basic, containing lettuce, carrots and tomatoes.

My companion, an omnivore, ordered the chicken mutton curry with his set. He didn't enjoy the curry, saying it overpowered the flavor of the chicken.

I recommend this place if you want cheap, fast Indian food. But, if you are an Indian enthusiast and are in the mood for authentic dishes, I recommend choosing another location in the area.

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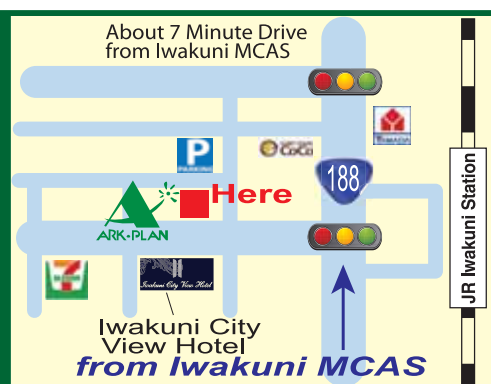
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## First-class skiing,



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STORY AND PHOTOS BY BRENT VERCO, NISEKOML

Niseko is a world-famous ski resort deep in Japan's northernmost prefecture Hokkaido. The Niseko resort area is about a two-hour bus ride from Japan's 5th largest city of Sapporo.

Whilst Niseko is mostly known for its amazing powder snow and ski town nightlife, it's also an exciting destination in the summer months and is quickly earning a reputation as the adventure capital of Japan.

Many US servicemembers have been traveling to Niseko this season, particularly given the challenges and limitations of international travel. We caught up with Brent Verco from Niseko Military Leave (NisekoML), a military tourism provider in Niseko.

### ► Why Niseko?

Niseko gets around 12 meters of snowfall per year with most of it falling as light dry powder with lots of air trapped inside. The unique Hokkaido snow with about only about four percent water content allows for advanced riders to float over the powder and beginners will also appreciate falling on a very forgiving surface.

Niseko United is made up of four individual resorts that climb the sides of the impressive Mount Annupuri and meet at the summit. This means that you can always find a side of the mountain that is most favorable to the wind, light and snowfall. In short, a trip to Niseko means you have a very high chance of experiencing amazing Japanese powder. With ski runs spanning over 48 kilometers, there is always something to discover even for locals who have been riding here for years.

### ► Brief introduction to Niseko

Niseko started out as not one resort, but four independently owned resorts meeting at the summit of the Annupuri Mountain. Some visitors have their favorite resort and choose to buy tickets for just one of the four resorts, but most punters take the opportunity to purchase a "Niseko United" all-mountain pass that allows them to enjoy all tracks the mountain has to offer.

If you purchase an all-mountain lift ticket, you are also eligible for a free shuttle bus that connects all four resorts and gives you a chance to see a bit more of the terrain and local village. Another great thing about riding all four resorts is that the weather does not affect the mountain equally. Sometimes one resort can be sheltered from strong winds, or an evening snowfall can really favor a different side. It's worth checking the weather report and asking a local rider for advice as Niseko weather can change very quickly.

### ► How to get to Niseko?

The most common and recommended option if you are traveling independently is take one of the dedicated shuttle bus services that service the New Chitose Airport. The Hokkaido Resort Liner has been running for over 10 years and will get you to Niseko in about two and a half hours from the airport. If you are travelling from Okinawa, Peach Airlines fly direct once a day over the winter ski season.

Another popular option is to take the JR train. It's a little longer than the shuttle and does involve changing to a local train at Otaru but the train offers a stunning view of Hokkaido's coastline. If you're taking the local train, make sure to get off at Kutchan Station as the Hirafu Station is not serviced by public transport.

Renting a car and driving from the airport is not recommended unless you are familiar with the route and have some snow driving experience.

### ► When to ski Niseko?

The resort usually opens during the first week of December and the peak season runs through mid-March. Advance skiers who want to run the backcountry gates should wait until early January when these areas are fully operational.

Niseko also has spring skiing a lot later than its more southern neighbors and the resort is typically open until the beginning of April. Spring skiing is not to be overlooked for families with young children as it can be a much more comfortable experience up on the mountain with the very cold conditions that can occur in peak season.

### ► What if I don't ski?

There are still some great mid-winter adventures to be had in Niseko even if you don't ski. Some recommended options include lounging around in area onsen, partaking in some delicious food tours, winter rafting, snowshoeing, barhopping and sampling some of the new distilleries in the area. Niseko's non-ski options are great and offer plenty for everyone in your group.

### ► Where to stay?

Niseko has a range of accommodation from backpacker Inns to some high-end homes us mere mortals will only ever get to drive past and wonder what it must be like on the inside. Many visitors settle on "middle of the road" condos in the lower Hirafu area offering Niseko nightlife and ski lifts all within walking distance.

For true powder lovers, there are plenty of ski-in ski out options and the resort of Niseko Village really stands head and shoulders above others in this regard.

Niseko Village has many amenities perfect for a great day on and off the slopes, Vanessa Han, the Marketing Communications Manager there said. "Niseko Village offers award-winning hotels with spa and onsen facilities, a dining and retail village hub, luxury residences, an international snow school and alpine activities. Ski in-ski out really is easier to manage if you are travelling with kids too," she added.



# to Niseko snowboarding and more

Niseko

## ► Enjoying Niseko Village

On the Dream Niseko Tour, four servicemembers who won the NisekoML prize giveaway earlier this year, were able to enjoy Niseko Village. Many local businesses hoping to get some much needed support from domestic military tourism were kind enough to help out by donating gloves, ski lessons, photography, accommodation and lift tickets.

Brandon E, one of the prize winners, said he and his family had a great time exploring the area. "It's been a long time since we had a snow holiday,

and it was also the first time for our 1-year-old son got to experience snow," Brandon said.

## ► Traveling for groups

There are also some new options for group military travel. On a tour of military folks earlier in the season hosted by NisekoML, 23 members had the opportunity to try some runs on the great snow Niseko brings every year. Though the latest tour set for January 2022 has been canceled due to COVID-19 concerns, NisekoML is closely watching the



More information on catching some snow in Niseko.



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# Things to know

*Editor's Note: Use this story for planning purposes for when we can travel again. Always follow the guidelines set by your base command and please practice preventative measures at all times including wearing a facemask, social distancing and washing/sanitizing your hands often.*

STORY AND PHOTOS BY ERICA EARL,  
STARS AND STRIPES

It's that time of year that is held sacred to fans of outdoor sports—ski and snowboard season. Japan is so well known for its favorable slope conditions that the snow here has earned an international nickname among enthusiasts, JaPOW, a portmanteau of “Japan” and “powder.”

Whether you are a novice or a veteran to winter sports, Japan has something to offer you. I have been skiing for over a decade, and between the months of December and March, carving down the mountain is pretty much all I can think about. Each corner of the world has something special that makes snow sports unique to that region, and here is no exception. If hitting the slopes is on your agenda while stationed in the Land of the Rising Sun, take some of my must-know tips and tricks for enjoying Japan's pristine powder.

earl.eric@stripes.com  
Twitter: @ThisEarlGirl

In the West, most resort areas use green circles, blue squares and black diamonds as indicators of the difficulty of the run. In Japan, there are a variety of different markers. Some are marked this way that most Americans are familiar with, but other places replace blue with red to mark intermediate trails. Also, there is no national standard in Japan for these markings, so a red in one resort might be a black in another. Chairlifts tend not to be marked, so consult the area's maps before heading up a lift, because once you're up the mountain, there is only one way down, as taking lifts back down is not permitted!

I recommend beginner and intermediate levels try a simple run to test the conditions before heading up higher. Japanese trails tend not to be as heavily marked as in the States. For example, you may encounter a fork in the trail with no indicator of which is the more advanced way down. Make sure to consult the area map first to avoid getting yourself in a situation where you are accidentally on a more advanced slope than you intended (it has happened to me) or consider going with a guide or a friend who is familiar with the course. The most important safety factor is being aware of your own ability.



Learn  
the trail  
markers

## Best places to ski Niseko

This is the only place on this list where I haven't actually skied, but as it is in Hokkaido and famed for its deep powder and high-quality winding runs. It is a holy grail for me, and if you go here, I will be instantly jealous.

### Naeba and Kagura

These two resorts are connected by a gondola called the Dragon-dola, a beautiful 25-min ride that takes you past some beautiful winter-scapes. I recommend taking two days here, one to just do Naeba, home of a fun four-kilometer dynamic downhill run that is great for intermediate skiers, and one day for Kagura, which offers some exciting backcountry trails. Note that Kagura can be confusing to navigate, so make sure to have a course map on you! Naeba also offers childcare.

### Myoko Suginohara

Myoko Suginohara, located in the larger Myoko Kogen area, is home of the longest run in Japan at 8.5 kilometers. The wide, meandering paths makes this place a good choice for beginner and intermediate skiers.

### Hakuba Valley

Located in Nagano, the location of the 1998 Winter Olympics, this area has a lot of renowned, interconnecting resorts that you can access by purchasing an all-mountain pass. It is also one of the most foreigner-friendly resorts, with many English speakers and Australian transplants. This area has exciting courses for all levels, some thrilling terrain parks, and bragging rights to say you've skied where the Olympic greats did.



Know  
back  
ru  
  
Tal  
advan  
of base

Niseko

Naeba and Kagura

Myoko Suginohara

Hakuba Valley

# Now before skiing in Japan

## Learn some simple Japanese

I always say that the most dangerous part of skiing is other skiers. When you are flying down the mountain, you must remember that you are not the only one there. I always wear brightly colored snowsuits, and it isn't just for fashion, but also to stand out against the white snow and oft-inevitable fog at higher elevations. In addition to visibility, learning some Japanese words can help keep you safe on the slopes. You may hear people saying "migi!" or "hidari!" to let you know which side of you they will pass on to avoid collisions. Migi means right, and hidari means left. It is not enough to say "sumimasen" (excuse me) because downhill skiers are not responsible for getting out of your way or knowing which direction you are coming from. Being aware of others giving these cues, and using them yourself, can avoid an accident. Beyond this, always remember that it is your responsibility to be aware of the downhill skier and snowboarder and avoid hitting them. Also, never enter a connecting course without glancing up the mountain first. It's just like merging onto a freeway, the people already on the path you are entering have the right of way.

## Know the country rules

As mentioned, Japan is famous for its powdery snow, and it can be a paradise for pow hounds looking to ride steep and deep. However, going off-piste, or off-trail, is not allowed at all resorts. You risk getting your ski pass confiscated if you go off the designated and defined runs at places that do not allow it. It is indicated on maps and lifts if this is allowed or not. Even if it is permitted, be aware that if you need to be rescued from any backcountry or off-piste areas, you will be charged for it, as those areas are not patrolled. An off-trail rescue can cost around 140,000-230,000 Yen (\$1200-\$2000). Do your research and know your limits before making any plans to ski off-boundary. To get the similar thrill with less risk, many resorts have marked ungroomed slopes.

## Take advantage of trips

The outdoor recreation centers at U.S. military bases in Japan offer skiing and snowboarding trips nearly every weekend this time of year, to include day trips and overnight ones. I highly recommend taking advantage of these trips if you are eligible. Transport is included, so you don't have to worry about the drive or having snow chains. You can also rent gear from base outdoor rec centers at a cheaper price than most of the resorts. A few times at Yokota Air Base, the outdoor rec staff were also able to score a deal for discounted lift tickets for people who signed up through the base. And finally, it is a great way to meet people with similar interests, especially if you are stationed here solo like I am. Check with your installation's Force Support Squadron or Morale, Welfare and Recreation office for schedules and rates.



## Speakin' Japanese Winter season greetings

Here are some useful Japanese phrases for the winter season.

**"Samui desu, ne?"** = It is cold, isn't it?  
**"Atataakai desu, ne?"** = It is warm, isn't it?  
**"Atsui desu, ne?"** = It is hot, isn't it?

These expressions are often used with **"Ohayo Gozaimasu"** (good morning), **"Konnichiwa"** (good afternoon) or **"Konbanwa"** (good evening). **"Desu, ne?"** = it is, isn't it?

**"Yuki ga furisou desu."** = It looks like it is going to snow.  
**"... sou desu"** = looks like going to be ...  
 These phrases are also used in daily conversations:  
**"Ame ga furisou desu."** = It looks like it is going to rain.  
**"Hare sou desu."** = It looks like going to be fine.  
**"Yoi otenki desu."** = It is a beautiful day.

When you have to see a doctor, you can use some of the following phrases:

**"Atama ga itai desu."** = I have a headache.  
**"... ga itai desu"** = "I have an ache/pain in ..."  
**"Nodo ga itai desu."** = My throat hurts.  
**"Onaka ga itai desu."** = I have a stomachache.  
**"Netsu ga arimasu."** = I have a fever.  
**"Seki ga demasu."** = I have a cough.  
**"Kaze wo hikimashita."** = I caught a cold.

Pronunciation key: "A" is short (like "ah"); "E" is short (like "get"); "I" is short (like "it"); "O" is long (like "old"); "U" is long (like "tube"); and "AI" is a long "I" (like "hike"). Most words are pronounced with equal emphasis on each syllable, but "OU" is a long "O" with emphasis on that syllable.

—Takahiro Takiguchi,  
Stripes Japan



# Enjoy the snow, ice near you

Fujiq Highlands Ice Skating

Akasaka Sacas Ice Skating Rink

## 1 Tokyo Midtown Mitsui Fudosan Skate Rink near Yokota, Yokosuka, Zama, Atsugi

Being one of the largest outdoor ice rinks within Tokyo, the rink can accommodate 210 skaters. You can access the food facilities next to the rink with your skates on. Coin lockers are available and you can rent skates. To prevent accidents, all skaters are required to wear helmets and gloves in the rink. Helmets are provided for free by the rink, but you must bring your gloves. The rink is beautifully lit up from 5 p.m.-9 p.m. every day.

**LOCATION:** 9-7-1 Akasaka, Minato-ku, Tokyo

**PERIOD:** Nov. 18 - Feb. 27

**HOURS:** 11 a.m. - 9 p.m.

### ADMISSION:

**Mon.-Fri.:** Adults; 2,000 yen, Junior high schoolers or younger; 1,500 yen.

**Sat., Sun. and holidays:** Adults; 2,500 yen, Junior high schoolers or younger; 2,000 yen

\* Admission includes rental skates and a coffee ticket.

**URL:** [www.tokyo-midtown.com](http://www.tokyo-midtown.com)

**TEL:** 03-3475-3100

## 2 Art Rink in Yokohama Red Brick Warehouse near Yokosuka, Yokota, Zama, Atsugi

As the name indicates, this outdoor ice rink is decorated with drawings, illustrations and illuminations by Japanese artists Moeno Otsu and unpis. Besides the art, you can enjoy beautiful night views and illumination of Yokohama Port and the Red Brick Warehouse while skating.

**LOCATION:** 1-1-2 Shinko, Naka-ku, Yokohama City, Kanagawa Prefecture

**PERIOD:** Oct. 4 - Feb. 20

### HOURS:

**Mon. - Fri.:** 1 p.m. - 9 p.m.,

**Sat., Sun. and holidays:** 11 a.m. - 9 p.m.

### ADMISSION:

**Adults:** 700 yen

**Kindergarteners through High schoolers:** 500 yen

**Rental skates:** 500 yen

**URL:** <http://akarenga-artrink.yafjp.org/>

**TEL:** 045-211-1515

## 3 Hakone-en Sledding Square near Zama, Atsugi and Fuji

This location has the latest model snow machine, which provides quality artificial powder snow. You can

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BY TAKAHIRO TAKIGUCHI,  
STRIPES JAPAN

Besides the ski resorts, there are many places in Japan where you, your family and friends can skate, sled or just play in the snow.

Since ice skating was the first winter sport introduced to Japan about 147 years ago, today numerous climate-controlled indoor ice rinks are located throughout the nation, including one in the southernmost island of Okinawa. Various outdoor ice rinks are available during wintertime, as well.

You can enjoy ice skating in the center of Tokyo at the beautifully illuminated Tokyo Midtown Outdoor Skate Rink. You may want to take your children to Hakone-en Sledding Square in Kanagawa Prefecture where they can sleigh, make snowmen or toss snowballs at one another.

Winter is here, so get off base and enjoy all the great activities Japan has to offer.

[takiguchi.takahiro@stripes.com](mailto:takiguchi.takahiro@stripes.com)

sled, make snowman or toss snowballs in the square while enjoying a majestic view of Mount Fuji. Rental wears and shoes are available. On Saturdays, Sundays and holidays, penguins from the Hakone-en Aquarium visit the square to play with children.

**LOCATION:** 139 Motohakone, Hakone Town, Kanagawa Prefecture

**PERIOD:** Dec. 20 - Feb. 28

**HOURS:** 9 a.m. - 4 p.m.

**ADMISSION:** 800 yen for 2 hours (including a rental sled)

**URL:** [www.princehotels.co.jp/amuse/hakone-en/](http://www.princehotels.co.jp/amuse/hakone-en/)

**TEL:** 0460-83-1151

## 4 Wonder Rink near Iwakuni

Housed in The Outlets Hiroshima, the largest shopping mall and amusement facility in the region, Wonder Rink offers a magical skating experience under colorful illuminations. The bright modern rink is housed in a sports complex that also includes an indoor field with a large trampoline. The skate rink

is divided by various activities, such as bumper-car, curling and ice bike, so both adults and children can enjoy the attractions.

**LOCATION:** 4-1-1 Ishiuchi Higashi, Saeki-ku, Hirashima City, Hiroshima Prefecture (50-minute drive from MCAS Iwakuni)

**HOURS:** 10 a.m. - 10 p.m.

**URL:** <https://www.wonder-hiroshima.jp/>

**TEL:** 082-208-4015

## 5 Papio Ice Arena near Sasebo

Both skilled and beginning skaters can enjoy skating in the large-sized ice skating rink (30-meter by 60-meter) at Papio Ice Arena. It offers various different skating shoes for rental depending on the level of skaters. For beginners, buckle-style (lace-less) shoes are available, so even a small child can get on a pair and participate.

**LOCATION:** 15-30 Chiyo Ichhome, Hakata-ku, Fukuoka City, Fukuoka Prefecture (90-minute drive from Sasebo Naval Base)

**HOURS:** 10 a.m. - 7 p.m.

### ADMISSION:

**Adults:** 1,800 yen

**High schoolers:** 1,450 yen

**Elementary schoolers or younger:** 1,100 yen

**URL:** <https://www.papio.jp/arena/>

**TEL:** 092-633-2468

## 6 Sports World Southern Hill Okinawa

Sports World Southern Hill is the only ice rink located on Okinawa. The rink is open throughout the year. The full-size rink (28 meter by 58 meter) enables you to enjoy any type of skating, from figure skating to ice hockey. Various skating lessons are available. The rink is beautifully lit up during nighttime.

**LOCATION:** 460-1 Miyadaira, Minamikazehara Town, Okinawa

### HOURS:

**Mon. - Fri.:** 11 a.m. - 8 p.m.

**Sat., Sun.:** 10 a.m. - 9 p.m.

**Holidays:** 10 a.m. - 8 p.m.

**ADMISSION: Adults:** 1,700 yen

**High schoolers:** 1,500 yen

**Elementary schoolers:** 1,300 yen

**5 or younger:** 1,100 yen

**URL:** [http://southern-hill.com/iceskating\\_j/](http://southern-hill.com/iceskating_j/)

**TEL:** 098-888-5858



Maruyamagawa Park Ice Skating Rink





VIEW VIDEO



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# A traditional 'Hatsumode' visit to Samukawa Shrine

STORY AND PHOTOS BY  
TAKAHIRO TAKIGUCHI,  
STRIPES JAPAN

In The Land of Rising Sun everything is reborn with the new year! In the early days of January, we often call any action and event by using the prefix "Hatsu-," which literally means "first time." So, our first visit to a Buddhist temple or Shinto shrine in the new year to wish for good luck is called "Hatsumode."

Visiting area shrines or temples for Hatsumode is a great time to see the new year decorations and illuminations many put on for their visitors. Don't miss the traditional Matsukazari decorations of bamboo stalks and pine branches, and the Shimekazari decorations of strewn straw rope with angular strips of white paper. These decorations are believed to purify the air and invite new life into the space.

This year, my wife, daughter and I made our Hatsumode visit to Samukawa Jinja, a majestic Shinto shrine near Camp Zama. This beautiful shrine in Kanagawa Prefecture has existed for over 1600 years and is considered one of the most prestigious in the Kanto Plain.

Around two million visitors make a stop at Samukawa yearly seeking protection from the Gods enshrined her to ward off bad luck. For Hatsumode, however, more than 500,000 visitors make this their stop during the Oshogatsu period of January 1 through Jan. 3.

During our visit, we walked the stone-paved access illuminated with stone lanterns up to the Shinmon main gate. The Gate featured gorgeous multi-colored nebuta lantern

floats depicting human figures modeled after Susano-no-mikoto, a Japanese mythology god who beats evil spirits.

After entering the main shrine grounds, we cast a coin, made two bows, clapped our hands twice, then bowed deeply at the front of the main hall to make our wish.

As luck would have it, our visit on Jan. 2 coincided with a tradition celebrated this very day every year at the shrine. Tsuinasai is a new year purification ceremony involving chanting and taiko drums by the shrine's Shinto priests to ward off evil and bad luck. The ceremony started at 8 p.m. when all the lights of the shrine were turned off. In the cold darkness, along with hundreds of other visitors, we listened for nearly an hour as the priests conducted the ceremony. The mysterious ritual reminded me of Easter Vigil of Roman Catholic, which celebrate Christ's resurrection with candlelight in darkness.

At the end of the ceremony, the lights came back on and each visitor was given a shrine envelop with a small bamboo bow and arrow inside. This amulet is believed to protect the holder from bad luck throughout the new year.

Though we were frozen and tired, we left the shrine with a sense of excitement and renewal. Outside the backgate of the shrine, dozens of food booths greeted visitors for some much-needed warmth and nourishment.

Samukawa Shrine is beautiful Shinto shrine worth visiting and wishing for a happy new year free from any bad luck!

takiguchi.takahiro@stripes.com

## Speakin' Japanese

VIEW VIDEO



Akemashite Omedeto Gozaimasu! (A happy new year!)

The old year has gone and we are in the new year of 2022. I feel totally refreshed in the new year. For a traditional "Hatsumode" New Year's visit to a shrine, my family and I visited Samukawa Shrine, a majestic Shinto shrine near Camp Zama. Now, let's exchange our new year greetings with our family and friends in Japanese.

Today's Japanese phrase:

**"Kotoshimo yoroshiku onegai shimasu!"**  
今年もよろしくお祈いします!

– I look forward to your continued good will in the new year!

**"kotoshi"** 今年 = this year,  
**"mo"** も = also,  
**"yoroshiku"** よろしく = good care,  
**"onegai shimasu"** お祈いします = Please give me

I wish you a blessed, happy new year. I hope you will keep watching our videos to learn more Japanese phrases this year.

Kotoshimo yoroshiku onegai shimasu!

- Takahiro Takiguchi,  
Stripes Japan

Pronunciation key: "A" is short (like "ah"); "E" is short (like "get"); "I" is short (like "it"); "O" is long (like "old"); "U" is long (like "tube"); and "AI" is a long "I" (like "hike"). Most words are pronounced with equal emphasis on each syllable, but "OU" is a long "O" with emphasis on that syllable.



**Samukawa Jinja (Shinto shrine)**  
**Location:**  
3916 Miyayama, Samukawa Town,  
Koza-gun, Kanagawa Prefecture

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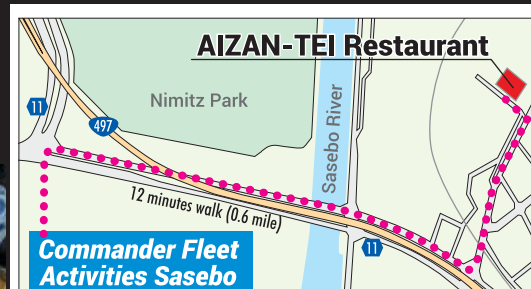
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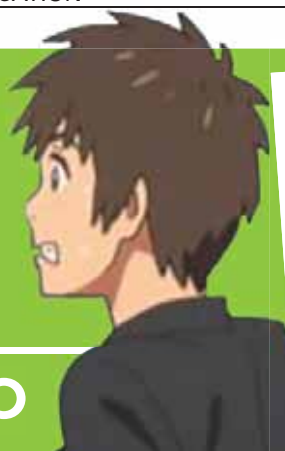


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# Kimi no na wa Your Name

## Real-life locations in Tokyo



STORY AND PHOTOS BY JIANNE SORIANO,  
JAPANTRAVEL

Makoto Shinkai's 2016 hit film, *Your Name* (君の名は, Kimi no na wa) captured the heart of millions. It toppled Hayao Miyazaki's *Spirited Away* and claimed the throne as the highest-grossing animated film of all time.

Relive the tale of star-crossed lovers, Taki and Mitsuha by going on a *Your Name* pilgrimage and visit the real-life locations (or locations that inspired many parts of the film) all in Tokyo.



### The National Art Centre

The restaurant that Taki and Okudera-senpai dined at during their date is called "Salon de la Rond" and is located on the second floor of The National Art Centre. To get a better view, I suggest going up to the third floor. The restaurant opens at 11AM.



There are also some shots of the Art Centre during the date like the brown-lined walls and glass-panelled directions. Going inside the facility is free of charge.



### Yotsuya Station

For their date, Taki and Okudera-senpai meet up at Yotsuya Station. To get a better view, take the Akasaka exit and look back. Unfortunately, there was construction going on when I visited so the actual part of the station that is in the film did not have the "Yotsuya Station" sign (the right side) so I opted for the other side.



The view of Okudera-senpai and Taki talking is the same one when you walk further.



The stairs that Taki is seen panting at in the film is also here. Walk to the left and you'll see a flight of stairs.



### Suga Shrine The way to Suga Shrine

It's a little bit of walk from Yotsuya Station to Suga Shrine so I suggest using Google maps to navigate. Once you spot Lawson 100 store, turn and walk a little until you spot these signs (location on Google Map). Unfortunately, the sign is too high for me to take the actual angle as in the film (!).



The intersection also appears in the film; however, there was construction going on when I went so I was not able to take a shot. But walking further, you'll recognize this spot which is also in the film when Taki was finding the way (location on Google map).



From there, take the left and keep walking and you'll see a vending machine that welcomes you to the "Holy Land" of *Your Name*. You know you're near the sacred spot.



Keep walking and you'll finally spot a flight of stairs with red railings.

### Stairs to Suga Shrine

The stairs to Suga Shrine is perhaps the most iconic location of the film. The first promotional materials is set here and film's hopeful ending also takes place here.



The stairs itself is nothing special. Locals past by it normally. But having seen the film, the significance of it changes particularly when you think about Taki and Mitsuha meeting here. While the view is not a hundred percent similar as it is in the film, the resemblance is pretty close.

One of the best things about these spots is that they're not crowded. They're everyday, mundane places that people use or pass by. Yet, to those of us who has watched the film, the spots take on a whole new meaning as we imagine ourselves taking Mitsuha and Taki's footsteps.



The following set of locations that are featured in *Your Name* are a little bit more off the radar in the film, but they still show where Makoto Shinkai drew inspiration from. These real-life locations also makes Taki and Mitsuha's journey feel much closer to us.

## NTT Docomo Yoyogi Building

Exiting from Shinanomachi Station, the NTT Docomo Yoyogi Building is visible from your right side. This is also taken from the same angle that is featured in the film. Be careful not to take pictures in the middle of the road as the shooting area is nestled between two intersecting roads.

The building appears as part of the Tokyo montage:



## Shinanomachi Station

In your front, there is a flight of stairs to a pedestrian bridge. This is the same pedestrian that Taki is in after his date with Okudera-senpai.

The bridge is somewhat significant in the film as well because this is when Taki starts to think about and even realize his feelings for Mitsuha.



## Shinjuku Intersection

This intersection is near the Shinjuku Police Station and the famous LOVE statue. It appears during a montage scene after Mitsuha and Taki realized that they've switched bodies.

Similar to other spots in the film, be sure not to take a photo in the middle of the road. It would be recommended to use a wide angle lens to get an exact shot of the one featured in the film.



## Yunika Vision

Yunika Vision is located in Shinjuku and is a giant television screen that broadcasts news, advertisements and music videos.

In the film, Yunika Vision is where the fall of the Tiamat comet is broadcast. The area is crowded and busy so be careful when taking photos not to block the pedestrian crossing.



# Walk the same path as Taki and Mitsuha



- 1 The National Art Centre**  
7 Chome-22-2 Roppongi, Minato City, Tokyo 106-8558  
Open 10:00 - 18:00
- 2 Yotsuya Station**  
JR Chūō Line (Rapid), JR Chūō-Sōbu Line  
Tokyo Metro Marunouchi Line (station number M-12)  
Tokyo Metro Namboku Line (station number N-08)
- 3 Suga Shrine**  
5-banchi Sugacho, Shinjuku City, Tokyo 160-0018  
Open 24 hours
- 4 NTT Docomo Yoyogi Building**  
5 Chome-24-10 Sendagaya, Shibuya City, Tokyo 151-0051
- Shinanomachi Station**  
JR Chūō-Sōbu Line
- 5 Intersection behind Shinjuku Police Station**  
1 Chome-25 Nishi-Shinjuku, Shinjuku City, Tokyo
- 6 Yunika Vision**  
3 Chome-23-7 Shinjuku, Shinjuku City, Tokyo 160-0022



And that's it for the Tokyo Your Name spots. A few other mentions would include Cafe La Bohème, the inspiration for the restaurant where Taki and Okudera-senpai work and Meiji Memorial Picture Gallery which was briefly shown when Mitsuha (in Taki's body) is excited to be exploring Tokyo.

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# Want to glimpse our metaverse future?

# Theme parks are already on the case

BY TODD MARTENS, LOS ANGELES TIMES

**T**he promise of augmented reality so far has largely been just that — promises of a future seen through filters for our mobile phone apps or simple games that place characters with little movement on our camera screens. But if this whole metaverse thing — the concept of a persistent, evolving on-line world that we don't log into as much as live inside — is ever going to take off, we're going to need more.

Our theme parks, which increasingly are centered on the concepts of games and play, may offer a glimpse of where the future is heading.

In the not-too-distant future Universal Studios Hollywood will import a Mario Kart-themed ride from Japan that is centered on augmented reality, an attraction designed to create the illusion that we're interacting with virtual objects and characters. Unlike most AR-enhanced mobile phone apps, where the images are tailored to an individual's screen, the use of visor-like glasses will allow all guests on the ride to engage with the digital creations in real-time.

And earlier this month the Walt Disney Co. quietly announced that it is “in conversations” with Illumix, a Redwood City, Calif.-based AR firm that has been rooted in games (Five Nights at Freddy's AR: Special Delivery) and e-commerce but is quickly expanding into physical realms. Illumix tech offers a range of experiences, including entertainment that merges physical and digital effects as well as more personally grounded character interactions.

One of the demos previewed by Illumix as part of the experimental tech program Disney Accelerator just happened to show some over-the-top, vintage cartoon-inspired interactions in Mickey's Toontown, an area of Disneyland that the company would later announce would be reimaged with more green space and a number of interactive, play-focused activities.

These were tech demos and shouldn't be viewed as guarantees that any will show up in the park, but the proof-of-concept projects signal that an augmented reality-enhanced future is getting closer. Among the tantalizing scenes shown: an animated overlay in the Toontown area of the park with cartoon explosions intermingled with real-world smoke, a glimpse of Buzz Lightyear soaring around and through Disney California Adventure, and Minnie Mouse hanging out on a Main Street, U.S.A., balcony to offer birthday greetings to a young fan.

What impressed most about Illumix's demos was the way in which the augmented reality characters appear to move with and understand their surroundings rather than appear like virtual stickers. Illumix founder Kirin Sinha says she has to be delicate in discussing her company's potential collaborations with Disney, but she ultimately sees the gaming world continuing to influence physical spaces.

“It's this idea that it's constantly evolving — based on other people, your preferences, choices you made in the past, virtual events. We can take what's happening in the digital

content world and bring that to physical experiences,” Sinha says.

It's easy to imagine augmented reality providing digital overlays of lands and for the park to better respond to birthdays and anniversaries. Or, for a theme park history buff like myself, a way for the phone to provide location-based historical knowledge with corresponding historical image overlays.

Theme parks, of course, offer perhaps the easiest way to understand the concept of the metaverse, which is often spoken of as an all-encompassing and persistent virtual world where we shop, play, work, communicate and watch entertainment — the metaverse is a virtual theme park, if you will. Early examples, such as Epic Games' Fortnite or the content creation game universe Roblox, are, like Second Life before them, rooted in the video game space. Meta, the newly rebranded Facebook, has focused its conversations on virtual reality or productivity tools such as virtual meetings.

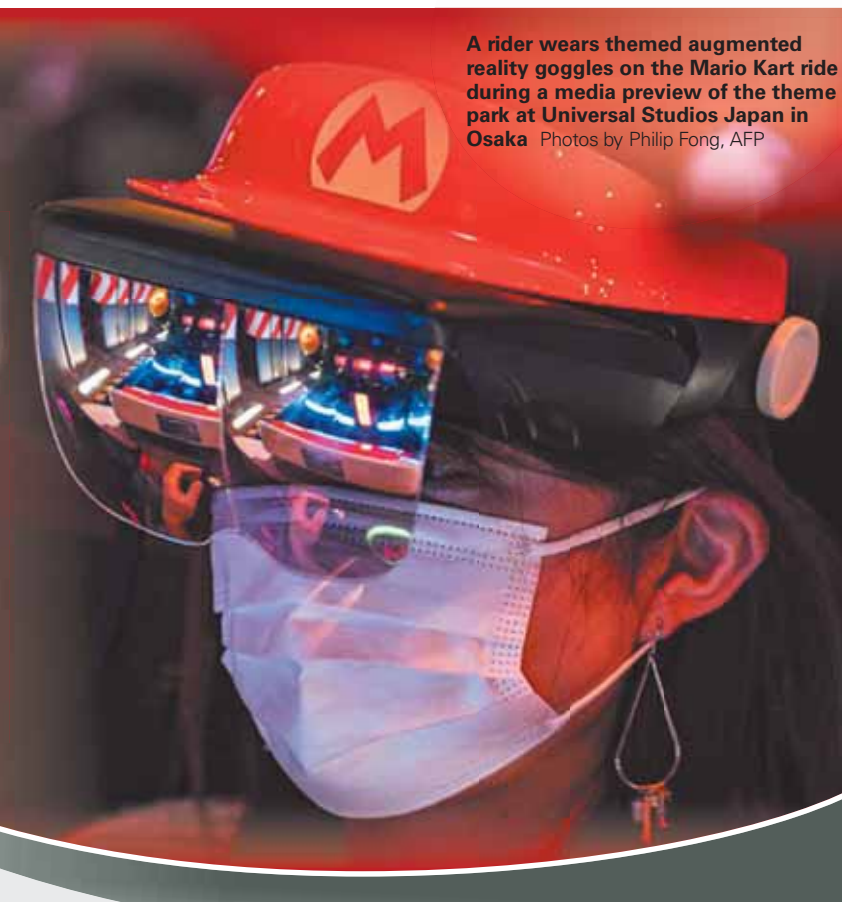
But the concept that we'll wake up and plug into a virtual world for all of our daily interactions is a bit dystopian, likely far off and will probably never be a reality unless climate change forces it to be. More likely it is something akin to the Disneyland model, where entertainment, technology, architecture and more come together in spaces that blur technological lines.

“There's the ‘Ready Player One’ version of a metaverse, where we all live and work and our lives are totally digital. I don't think that's ultimately where this is going, to a point where we're not in this physical world,” says Sinha. “I don't think there's any evidence to suggest that people actually like doing that.”

“However,” she continues, “if you look at the companies that are excelling in the metaverse, of course they would want to frame the metaverse as a future where everyone is going to live their entire lives in that company's world. That's the story you're going to go out and pitch, but the reality, if you zoom back, is that the metaverse is about taking the separation of the physical and digital and combining them.”

Disney of late has been talking of building its own metaverse, and that is represented in how the worlds of Star Wars influenced a theme park land, which in turn influenced a virtual reality game. Film and television are merging into a singular world that's represented in a theme park and

A rider wears themed augmented reality goggles on the Mario Kart ride during a media preview of the theme park at Universal Studios Japan in Osaka. Photos by Philip Fong, AFP



interactive entertainment such as games. Disney has even teased what appear to be augmented reality glasses that can up the educational content in a park such as Walt Disney World's Animal Kingdom.

Then, of course, there's the experiment that is the Star Wars Galactic Starcruiser, a multi-day “Star Wars”-themed hotel that's spoken of as a cruise ship-like experience on land.

But it's really offering guests the opportunity to spend thousands of dollars to turn themselves into Star Wars avatars, allowing those willing to spring for the rooms, which start at just shy of \$5,000 for two guests, to immerse themselves in a live-action video game. If it works, it's the ultimate realization of an interactive-driven, play-focused society, one where a metaverse isn't something we simply plug into but can constantly surround us. The Starcruiser's thesis is that there is no barrier between the storyteller and story participant.

Games and tech have been heading in this direction for decades. That's been the promise of everything from Dungeons & Dragons to The Legend of Zelda to immersive theater projects such as “Sleep No More.”

Universal's Mario Kart attraction — dubbed Mario Kart: Koopa's Challenge at Universal Studios Japan — and Walt Disney World's Galactic Starcruiser in Florida are ambitious bets that mass audiences will continue to crave less passive experiences — a furthering of a trend that was formalized with Disney's Toy Story Midway Mania ride and has continued to this day with Disney California Adventure's Web Slingers: A Spider-Man Adventure.

It's also a contention that the metaverse won't define our world so much as influence it. Think, perhaps, of a future where entertainment becomes something of a wall-less theme park. Let's just hope the headaches of both worlds — the strollers and the lines of a theme park, and the dangerous misinformation of the modern internet — get sorted somewhere along the way.

Guests on a Mario Kart-inspired ride at Universal Studios Japan, which utilizes augmented reality techniques



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**Answer**

Steve Nash

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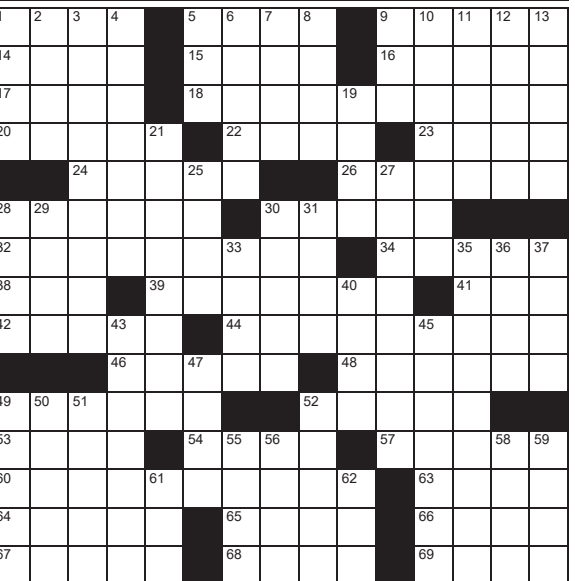
Sat. & Holiday Close at 5pm (Closed Sun.)

## The Weekly Crossword

by Margie E. Burke

### ACROSS

- Music genre
- Conn. neighbor
- Come in second
- "\_\_\_ Karenina"
- Film segment
- Soft palate sound
- Glance over
- Type of cherry
- Beat around the bush
- Measure (out)
- Bead anagram
- Expenditures
- Provide counsel
- Toto's only Billboard #1
- Piano technician
- Yellow-flowered weed
- Home on the range
- Turn red, perhaps
- Silver flaw
- Romano, for one
- Marsh plant
- Throw in, as a question
- Clear the slate
- Was a lodger
- Fictional band, \_\_\_ Tap
- Bottle dweller
- Crescent
- Malta money
- Listlessness
- Magnetic force
- Fruity pastry
- Shade of pink
- Furthermore
- Result of honing
- Small hill
- Follow, as advice
- Consider to be



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- Roman 1900
- 1836 battle site
- Paddock papa
- Petty argument
- Pipe material
- City on the Seine
- Out of sorts?
- Christmas candies
- Waste away
- Astin of "Rudy"
- Catchall phrase
- Fancy party
- Remove, as a monarch
- Puts two and two together?
- Joan portrayer in "Mommie Dearest"
- Metric heavy weight
- College credit
- Western blue flag, e.g.
- Strolling site
- Nonchalance
- Surveyed
- All dried out
- Military bigwig
- Like some questions
- Oscar winner Guinness
- Something to pick up
- Stage, as a show
- Preface, briefly
- "Silly" bird
- Home of the Jazz
- Agitate
- Hankering
- Tabloid twosome
- \_\_\_-in-one
- Doze (off)

### Answers to Previous Crossword:

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

## DID YOU KNOW?

Every year, 8.6 million Japanese climb the more than 15,000 mountains and 200 volcanos, which share about 70 percent of the Japanese archipelago. In 2016, the government of Japan created a new national holiday, "Mountain Day" on August 11, to let people familiarize themselves and appreciate the blessings of mountains. So, if you want to fit in on this island, go climb yourself a mountain or two, slacker.

## Kanji of the week

売

Uuru/bai (sell)

## Language Lesson

Interesting!

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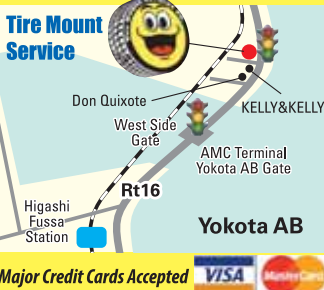
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## SUDOKU

Difficulty: Medium

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

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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.

Answer to Previous Sudoku:

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

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