INSIDE INFO

PASTOR REACHES OUT TO HOMELESS NEAR YOKOTA
Page 3

SENIORS ANNOUNCE POST-GRADUATION PLANS IN PARADE
Page 4

BEHIND-THE-SCENES LOOK AT ANIMATING 60-FOOT ROBOT
Page 5

CEMETERIES IN JAPAN
Pages 6-7

PIGGIN’ AROUND AT TOKYO’S MIPIG CAFÉ
Page 11

Popping up Tokyo Disneyland's Pooh Popcorn at home
Page 12

Akita
Let area’s rich history and culture draw you in
Pages 8-10
By Hilary Valdez

Hopes and dreams

People spend a lot of their time daydreaming. I noticed this at work. Some psychologists may call this concentration difficulties. Some call it, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. Call it what you want. I paid no attention to them. I daydreamed to escape from stress and childhood pressures.

When I was a kid, I dreamed of walking around the world and shaking every person’s hand. I wanted to meet everyone! Then I did the math. I had to change that dream. I was a jittery child. I didn’t like being a kid. I wanted to hurry up and explore the world. But here I was, stuck in fifth grade. I wanted to be free. I wanted adventure. The big question for me was - how do I start my life adventure? I needed a plan. It all seemed so...illusive. I knew Santa Clause wouldn’t help me. What I noticed was daydreaming boosted my creativity and problem-solving skills.

So, I kept daydreaming.

I pondered, how do I achieve my dream as a global adventurer, without telling my parents that I wanted to leave home? Aspirations #1: What do I need to do? I have no training and no money. What is a dream? It’s a strong desire and a hope for my future, a vision of what I want, which at that point seemed unattainable. But I had a possibility focus. If I could dream it, I could achieve it. Aspiration #2: Get childhood disorder. Call it what you want. I paid no attention to them. I daydreamed about. Dreams can come true if you really desire them to come true. In my dream lies my direction. I knew that I daydreamed about. Dreams can come true if you really desire them to come true. In my dream lies my direction. I knew that I daydreamed about. Dreams can come true if you really desire them to come true. In my dream lies my direction. I knew that I daydreamed about. Dreams can come true if you really desire them to come true. In my dream lies my direction. I knew that I daydreamed about. Dreams can come true if you really desire them to come true. In my dream lies my direction. I knew that I daydreamed about. Dreams can come true if you really desire them to come true. In my dream lies my direction. I knew that I daydreamed about. Dreams can come true if you really desire them to come true. In my dream lies my direction. I knew that I daydreamed about. Dreams can come true if you really desire them to come true. In my dream lies my direction. I knew that I daydreamed about. Dreams can come true if you really desire them to come true. In my dream lies my direction. I knew that I daydreamed about. Dreams can come true if you really desire them to come true. In my dream lies my direction. I knew that I daydreamed about. Dreams can come true if you really desire them to come true. In my dream lies my direction. I knew that I daydreamed about. Dreams can come true if you really desire them to come true. In my dream lies my direction. I knew that I daydreamed about. Dreams can come true if you really desire them to come true. In my dream lies my direction. I knew that I daydreamed about. Dreams can come true if you really desire them to come true. In my dream lies my direction. I knew that I daydreamed about. Dreams can come true if you really desire them to come true. In my dream lies my direction. I knew that I daydreamed about. Dreams can come true if you really desire them to come true. In my dream lies my direction. I knew that I daydreamed about. Dreams can come true if you really desire them to come true. In my dream lies my direction. I knew that I daydreamed about. Dreams can come true if you really desire them to come true. In my dream lies my direction. I knew that I daydreamed about. Dreams can come true if you really desire them to come true. In my dream lies my direction. I knew that I daydreamed about. Dreams can come true if you really desire them to come true. In my dream lies my direction. I knew that I daydreamed about. Dreams can come true if you really desire them to come true. In my dream lies my direction. I knew that I daydreamed about. Dreams can come true if you really desire them to come true. In my dream lies my direction. I knew that I daydreamed about. Dreams can come true if you really desire them to come true. In my dream lies my direction. I knew that I daydreamed about. Dreams can come true if you really desire them to come true. In my dream lies my direction. I knew that I daydreamed about. Dreams can come true if you really desire them to come true. In my dream lies my direction. I knew that I daydreamed about. Dreams can come true if you really desire them to come true. In my dream lies my direction. I knew that I daydreamed about. Dreams can come true if you really desire them to come true. In my dream lies my direction. I knew that I daydreamed about. Dreams can come true if you really desire them to come true. In my dream lies my direction. I knew that I daydreamed about. Dreams can come true if you really desire them to come true. In my dream lies my direction. I knew that I daydreamed about. Dreams can come true if you really desire them to come true. In my dream lies my direction. I knew that I daydreamed about. Dreams can come true if you really desire them to come true. In my dream lies my direction. I knew that I daydreamed about. Dreams can come true if you really desire them to come true. In my dream lies my direction. I knew that I daydreamed about. Dreams can come true if you really desire them to come true. In my dream lies my direction. I knew that I daydreamed about. Dreams can come true if you really desire them to come true. In my dream lies my direction. I knew that I daydreamed about. Dreams can come true if you really desire them to come true. In my dream lies my direction. I knew that I daydreamed about. Dreams can come true if you really desire them to come true. In my dream lies my direction. I knew that I daydreamed about. Dreams can come true if you really desire them to come true. In my dream lies my direction. I knew that I daydreamed about. Dreams can come true if you really desire them to come true. In my dream lies my direction. I knew that I daydreamed about. Dreams can come true if you really desire them to come true. In my dream lies my direction. I knew that I daydreamed about. Dreams can come true if you really desire them to come true. In my dream lies my direction. I knew that I daydreamed about. Dreams can come true if you really desire them to come true. In my dream lies my direction. I knew that I daydreamed about. Dreams can come true if you really desire them to come true. In my dream lies my direction. I knew that I daydreamed about. Dreams can come true if you really desire them to come true. In my dream lies my direction. I knew that I daydreamed about. Dreams can come true if you really desire them to come true. In my dream lies my direction. I knew that I daydreamed about. Dreams can come true if you really desire them to come true. In my dream lies my direction. I knew that I daydreamed about. Dreams can come true if you really desire them to come true. In my dream lies my direction. I knew that I daydreamed about. Dreams can come true if you really desire them to come true. In my dream lies my direction. I knew that I daydreamed about. Dreams can come true if you really desire them to come true. In my dream lies my direction. I knew that I daydreamed about. Dreams can come true if you really desire them to come true. In my dream lies my direction. I knew that I daydreamed about. Dreams can come true if you really desire them to come true. In my dream lies my direction. I knew that I daydreamed about. Dreams can come true if you really desire them to come true. In my dream lies my direction. I knew that I daydreamed about. Dreams can come true if you really desire them to come true. In my dream lies my direction. I knew that I daydreamed about. Dreams can come true if you really desire them to come true. In my dream lies my direction. I knew that I daydreamed about. Dreams can come true if you really desire them to come true. In my dream lies my direction. I knew that I daydreamed about. Dreams can come true if you really desire them to come true. In my dream lies my direction. I knew that I daydreamed about. Dreams can come true if you really desire them to come true. In my dream lies my direction. I knew that I daydreamed about. Dreams can come true if you really desire them to come true. In my dream lies my direction. I knew that I daydreamed about. Dreams can come true if you really desire them to come true. In my dream lies my direction. I knew that I daydreamed about. Dreams can come true if you really desire them to come true. In my dream lies my direction. I knew that I daydreamed about. Dreams can come true if you really desire them to come true. In my dream lies my direction. I knew that I daydreamed about. Dreams can come true if you really desire them to come true. In my dream lies my direction. I knew that I daydreamed about. Dreams can come true if you really desire them to come true. In my dream lies my direction. I knew that I daydreamed about. Dreams can come true if you really desire them to come true. In my dream lies my direction. I knew that I daydreamed about. Dreams can come true if you really desire them to come true. In my dream lies my direction. I knew that I daydreamed about. Dreams can come true if you really desire them to come true. In my dream lies my direction. I knew that I daydreamed about. Dreams can come true if you really desire them to come true. In my dream lies my direction. I knew that I daydreamed about. Dreams can come true if you really desire them to come true. In my dream lies my direction. I knew that I daydreamed about. Dreams can come true if you really desire them to come true. In my dream lies my direction. I knew that I daydreamed about. Dreams can come true if you really desire them to come true. In my dream lies my direction. I knew that I daydreamed about. Dreams can come true if you really desire them to come true. In my dream lies my direction. I knew that I daydreamed about. Dreams can come true if you really desire them to come true. In my dream lies my direction. I knew that I daydreamed about. Dreams can come true if you really desire them to come true. In my dream lies my direction. I knew that I daydreamed about. Dreams can come true if you really desire them to come true. In my dream lies my direction. I knew that I daydreamed about. Dreams can come true if you really desire them to come true. In my dream lies my direction. I knew that I daydreamed about. Dreams can come true if you really desire them to come true. In my dream lies my direction. I knew that I daydreamed about. Dreams can come true if you really desire them to come true. In my dream lies my direction. I knew that I daydreamed about. Dreams can come true if you really desire them to come true. In my dream lies my direction. I knew that I daydreamed about. Dreams can come true if you really desire them to come true. In my dream lies my direction. I knew that I daydreamed about. Dreams can come true if you really desire them to come true. In my dream lies my direction. I knew that I daydreamed about. Dreams can come true if you really desire them to come true. In my dream lies my direction. I knew that I daydreamed about. Dreams can come true if you really desire them to come true. In my dream lies my direction. I knew that I daydreamed about. Dreams can come true if you really desire them to come true. In my dream lies my direction. I knew that I daydreamed about. Dreams can come true if you really desire them to come true. In my dream lies my direction. I knew that I daydreamed about. Dreams can come true if you really desire them to come true. In my dream lies my direction. I knew that I daydreamed about. Dreams can come true if you really desire them to come true. In my dream lies my direction. I knew that I daydreamed about. Dreams can come true if you really desir...
FUSSA — A small, church-run organization is trying to help a seemingly invisible population in the Little America neighborhood outside the gates of Yokota Air Base in western Tokyo.

Marcel Gadsden, pastor of the Japan Kingdom Builders Church in Fussa, said the local homeless population is often overlooked by programs founded by churches and community members at Yokota to assist service members and their families.

He said he wants to change that.

A resident of Japan more than 20 years, Gadsden and Yokota community members founded the church and homeless program in 2018. He named the program Akiramenai, which translates to “don’t give up.”

In the meantime, Gadsden said his wife, Chiaka, helps him run the program and navigate Japanese culture so they can best serve in a way that is sensitive to people who are at a low point in their lives.

“I want to permanently end the cycle of homelessness for our participants and friends, not just give them temporary fixes,” he said.

The church purchased an apartment in the nearby city of Ome for three people, providing them a permanent address for welfare screenings and potential job placement, Gadsden said.

He checks in on the occupants twice a month and helps them host game nights and social activities.

“People who get into unfortunate situations, like losing their jobs after becoming older and no longer being seen as valuable to their companies,” Japan has a homeless population of 3,992 people, according to a 2020 survey by the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare.

The majority are men, and their highest numbers are in Osaka and Tokyo, according to the ministry website. The group Akiramenai is trying to help a seemingly invisible population that was once a bar and club, and Tokyo, according to the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare.

In April, Eleanor Pierson, a military spouse at Yokota, and her daughter, 9, heard of Akiramenai through their Catholic community at the base chapel. Eleanor has organized canned good drives at her Girl Scout Troop, her church and at Yokota West Elementary, where she is a third-grader.

In the Little America neighborhood, the majority are men, and their highest numbers are in Osaka and Tokyo, according to the ministry website. The group Akiramenai is trying to help a seemingly invisible population that was once a bar and club, and Tokyo, according to the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare.

In the meantime, Gadsden said his wife, Chiaka, helps him run the program and navigate Japanese culture so they can best serve in a way that is sensitive to people who are at a low point in their lives.

“When she has an idea, it’s not a fleeting thought,” Danielle Pierson said in an email to Stars and Stripes. “She gives it wings and allows it to grow.”

Gadsden said he has big goals. “I want to permanently end the cycle of homelessness for our participants and friends, not just give them temporary fixes,” he said.

The church purchased an apartment in the nearby city of Ome for three people, providing them a permanent address for welfare screenings and potential job placement, Gadsden said.

He checks in on the occupants twice a month and helps them host game nights and social activities.

In the meantime, Gadsden said his wife, Chiaka, helps him run the program and navigate Japanese culture so they can best serve in a way that is sensitive to people who are at a low point in their lives.

“I want to permanently end the cycle of homelessness for our participants and friends, not just give them temporary fixes,” he said.
Yokota seniors announce post-graduation plans in parade

YOKOTA AIR BASE – About 60 high school seniors paraded across this U.S. air base in western Tokyo in cars decorated with flags, banners and signs trumpeting their post-graduation plans.

Established as the day seniors chose the college they would attend, Decision Day has grown into an opportunity to celebrate life choices beyond college, be they technical, University of Tennessee, Texas Tech or other organizations.

At the high school, students wore masks while decorating their cars, then lined them up in a bus lane for a brief on-parade safety from a security airman.

Yokota High School senior and future Coast Guard cadet Hannah Williams decorates her car for a Decision Day parade April 30.

High school seniors decorate their cars to show off their post-graduation plans.

Yokota seniors announce post-graduation plans in parade

One car was decorated with the words “Future USAF pilot” and another said “Just Married ... Happy Wife Happy Life.”

Hannah Williams, who said she’ll depart for Coast Guard recruit training in New Jersey four days after Yokota’s graduation, was excited to be participating in the parade. She said she wanted students coming after her to take advantage of being with friends and to push for good grades because “it will help in the future.”

At the high school, students wore masks while decorating their cars, then lined them up in a bus lane for a brief on-parade safety from a security airman.

Led by a base police car, the parade wound its way from the high school, past the middle school and over the runway’s south overrun to the east side and a route through base housing.

The half-hour parade ended at the Joan K. Mendel Elementary School.

Rene Kelley, a counselor at Yokota High School, was the driving force that set up this year’s parade on base.

“An event like this is very important, especially with the pandemic,” Kelley said. “Students have been isolated, it gives them a chance to come together, celebrate each other and have that connection we all need.”

godbold.theron@stripes.com

BY SP. COLENE COPELAND, STRIPES JAPAN

In 1951, an incredible discovery was made when cancerous cells were taken from a woman named Henrietta Lacks. Despite the medical breakthroughs and research these cells have been key in, they are controversial because they were obtained without Lacks’ consent.

This was common practice in the early to mid-20th century as a means to have cells and tissue to study and further aid patients.

Later, laws protecting patients’ rights would be passed in the U.S. and in 1996, the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA) was enacted. HIPAA protects the disclosure of private patient information from being given freely to others in the public sector.

Lacks would later die from cervical cancer, but her legacy lives on in HeLa cells, the samples removed from her and named after her. The life of Henrietta Lacks and the controversy surrounding HeLa cells are at the center of “The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks,” a book published in 2010 by the author Rebecca Skloot.

According to the book, HeLa cells are used to study cancer in almost every major laboratory in the world, in universities and other organizations. HeLa cells are classified as immortal, one of the only immortal cell lines in existence.

HeLa cells have been a crucial piece in the study of HIV/AIDS and in the development and implementation of Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) vaccines, which can protect against cells that lead to cervical cancer.

There is no denying Lacks’ controversial contribution to medicine, however the ethical violations to obtain these cells is not without debate.

Henrietta Lacks’ unconsented contribution has effectively saved many lives. Without HeLa cells, who knows where oncology research would be today.

“Henrietta Lacks’ unconsented contribution has effectively saved many lives. Without HeLa cells, who knows where oncology research would be today.”

Thanks to HeLa cells, medical researchers have made many advances and breakthroughs in medical research.

Oncology and HeLa Cells

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 Spc. Colene Copeland from U.S. Army Garrison Bavaria. If you have a story or photos to share, let us know at japan@stripes.com.

BY SP. COLENE COPELAND, STRIPES JAPAN

Spc. Colene Copeland with U.S. Army Garrison Bavaria. She is pursuing studies in Forensic Medicine, Space and Aviation and Engineering.

Spc. Copeland is working towards becoming an orthopedic trauma surgeon focused on the musculoskeletal and joint system. Follow along as she writes about interesting bones in both humans and animals, dives into space medicine, forensic science, engineering, healthcare and medical topics.
The Gundam Cafe inside the dock area serves a variety of burgers, pasta dishes and beverages. Prices range from more than $3 for soda and tea, nearly $7 for lattes and more than $12 for a unique collector’s bottle filled with your choice of two different sodas or lemonade.

If you’re not hungry, you could always spend that money at The Gundam Base store, which has a large selection of model kits, gifts and souvenirs.

The closest parking is the Yamashita Koen Parking lot. Prices vary from the weekday and weekend; expect to spend about $11 for two hours on the weekend.

You can also take a train to Motomachi-Chukagai Station. From there, it’s an easy eight-minute walk to the Gundam Factory.

For those stationed in the Tokyo area, this attraction is an easy day trip worth checking out. The Gundam is easily seen from the pier if you choose not to pay the admission for a closer look.

The Gundam pilot view experience at Gundam Factory Yokohama is linked to the full-size robot outside and shows you what it would be like to be at the controls inside the cockpit of a real Gundam.

When it debuted in 1979, the anime show “Mobile Suit Gundam” captured the world’s imagination with its giant, weaponized, mechanical robots fighting in a space opera. With the show’s popularity came the sale of model kits, of which toymaker Bandai Co. has produced more than 700 million as of May, the 40th anniversary of the kit launch.

Now it’s possible to experience the Gundam phenomenon in life size. Gundam Factory Yokohama, an entertainment complex at Yamashita Pier, opened its doors in December. Its centerpiece, a Mobile Suit Gundam, stands nearly 60 feet tall and comes to mechanical life several times a day with various poses, smoke, lighting and sound effects.

The giant robot moves for several minutes every half-hour. While you’re waiting for the next show to start, check out the Academy Room, where you’ll find displays — some of them interactive — that detail the Gundam’s construction.

Here’s where you’ll find the Gundam pilot view experience, which is linked to the full-size robot outside and shows you what it would be like to be a pilot in the cockpit of a real Gundam. Augmented reality technology adds some enemy Gundams for more excitement.

The price of admission is 1,650 yen (about $15.14) for adults and 1,100 yen for children, when purchased together. For an additional 3,300 yen per person, you’ll be able to enter the Gundam dock tower for a much closer look.

I suggest saving that 3,300 yen for the Gundam Cafe inside the dock area. The cafe serves a variety of burgers, pasta dishes and beverages. Food prices range from about $5 for snacks to more than $16 for entrees. The drink
Cultures differ in how they deal with the passing of friends and family, certainly in the manner of burial and the aesthetic of cemeteries. Japan’s method is certainly very different from my own country in many ways.

In Japan, the deceased are cremated and their ashes are placed inside stone gravestones dedicated to the family. Modern gravestones feature vertical columns made from black or grey stone with only names written on them.

At the base of a gravestone you will find vases for flowers and an incense stand. People who visit graves will bring fresh flowers and water to pour on a gravestone as part of a religious ritual. Some food items are left that were favourites of the deceased. You may find that some graves are decorated with a Buddhist statue or, more sadly, a jizo statue if the grave belongs to that of a child.

Cemeteries are usually located near a temple or a shrine. I was told that Japanese people don’t hold to a single religion and will attend both Buddhist temples and Shinto shrines depending on the occasion. In this case, cemeteries are conducted as Buddhist ceremonies.

Old gravestones look like a vase or a lantern, but the wealthy and those of the higher social classes would often build
Cemeteries are often surrounded by forests. Old graves.

Yamadera.

Cemeteries are often surrounded by forests. Old graves.

Yamadera.

Cemeteries are often surrounded by forests. Old graves.

Yamadera.

Cemeteries are often surrounded by forests. Old graves.

Yamadera.

Cemeteries are often surrounded by forests. Old graves.

Yamadera.

Cemeteries are often surrounded by forests. Old graves.

Yamadera.

Cemeteries are often surrounded by forests. Old graves.

Yamadera.

Cemeteries are often surrounded by forests. Old graves.

Yamadera.

Cemeteries are often surrounded by forests. Old graves.

Yamadera.

Cemeteries are often surrounded by forests. Old graves.

Yamadera.

Cemeteries are often surrounded by forests. Old graves.

Yamadera.

Cemeteries are often surrounded by forests. Old graves.

Yamadera.

Cemeteries are often surrounded by forests. Old graves.

Yamadera.

Cemeteries are often surrounded by forests. Old graves.

Yamadera.

Cemeteries are often surrounded by forests. Old graves.

Yamadera.

Cemeteries are often surrounded by forests. Old graves.

Yamadera.

Cemeteries are often surrounded by forests. Old graves.

Yamadera.

Cemeteries are often surrounded by forests. Old graves.

Yamadera.

Cemeteries are often surrounded by forests. Old graves.

Yamadera.

Cemeteries are often surrounded by forests. Old graves.

Yamadera.

Cemeteries are often surrounded by forests. Old graves.

Yamadera.

Cemeteries are often surrounded by forests. Old graves.

Yamadera.

Cemeteries are often surrounded by forests. Old graves.

Yamadera.

Cemeteries are often surrounded by forests. Old graves.

Yamadera.

Cemeteries are often surrounded by forests. Old graves.

Yamadera.
In Northern Japan, let nature give way to Akita, a beautiful castle town packed full of attractions great for a fun day-trip or overnight stay.

Located in the northern part of mainland Japan and facing the Sea of Japan, Akita City is a four-hour drive from Misawa Air Base. The city is surrounded by rice fields and mountains and is known as one of the nation’s most important granary regions.

Recently my wife and I drove in the area to check out the natural and cultural attractions. Our first stop: a visit to the “Weeping Virgin Mary of Akita.”

Located on a hill, the Institute of the Handmaids of the Holy Eucharist is a place that attracts both religious-minded people and curious tourists. From the outside, the wooden building with gray stone tile roof looks just like a traditional Buddhist temple, rather than a Catholic hall.

As soon as we slid open a wooden door of the building to enter into the chapel hall, we were welcomed by a crispy smell of freshly harvested rice and wooden furniture. The wooden statue of the “Weeping Virgin Mary of Akita,” also known as “Our Lady of Akita,” is enshrined in an altar in the hall.

The wooden statue has gained global fame when it seemed to weep in 1975. Up until 1981, the statue, carved by a Japanese sculptor 55 years ago, it was observed to weep a total of 101 times. When the statue started weeping, many stepped their daily work and gathered to pray the Rosary. Medical experts at the time determined the tears were those of a human, the institute brochure said. The statue has not “wept” since 1981, but it has still not stopped tens of thousands of yearly visitors seeking to catch a glimpse of this mysterious Virgin Mary.

The grounds of the chapel are home to a peaceful garden and an inn open to the public for stays. Although it was raining, we stayed in the midst of the garden with an umbrella in hand for a while, enjoying some deep breaths of extremely fresh, cool air.

After our serene visit we headed to the 469-feet high Akita City Port Tower Selion located on the Akita Port. The futuristic tower is made of steel frames and 6,272 pieces of enforced glass reminiscent of a space craft. From high up on the observatory deck, we looked down the entire city with port and factory facilities in the foggy air. On a fine day, there is a view of blue sea against the backdrop of the Oga Peninsula and Mount Chokai.

Down below on the first floor of the tower, Selion Garden is a large market where you can get all your Akita souvenirs and local products.
The museum featuring local products, artwork and other exhibits on the city's history and culture is on the second floor.

We learned a lot about the city at the museum and the 93-year-old red brick building it's housed in originally built as the head branch of Akita Bank, was an impressive sample of the unique architectural style of Meiji Restoration period in early 20th century.

stopped, our next town for a stroll to check out museums, restaurants, kita has to offer. to one of the city's Kiyomizu Park, site of a castle town packed with natural and cultural attractions

Akita City Port Tower Selion
LOCATION: 1-9-1 Tsuchisakiko-nishi, Akita City, Akita Pref. HOURS: 9 a.m. - 9 p.m. ADMISSION: free EMAIL: info@selion-akita.com

While the majestic façade and exterior have the interesting color combination of white ceramic tiles and red bricks, the interior is gorgeously decorated with reliefs curbed on marble, plaster and wooden objects. Along with classical furniture, that made us feel as if we were walking in a residence of aristocrat.

After some history and architecture, we took a five-minute walk to the Akita City Folk Arts Center, also known as “Kanto” Center. Akita is famous for its traditional “Kanto Matsuri” festival where people hold 15 to 50-feet long bamboo poles bearing 24 through 46 lanterns in hopes of a good harvest season. At the center, you can see the bamboo poles and even hold some year-round. We tried our hand at holding the poles with assistance from an employee who also gave us an explanation of the festival.

Next door to the folk arts center, the former home of the Kaneko Family, traditional kimono dealers, is another point of interest. The family was one of the richest merchant families in the city during the early 20th century and the home was preserved and turned into the city's cultural asset and opened to the public in 1996. Inside, visitors can check out the chic, black wooden interior made up of shop space, storage, owner's residence and staff rooms, that would still be considered pretty fancy by today's standards.

When we wrapped up our town walk at this beautiful traditional shop house, we felt Akita is very fascinating, as it accommodates both natural and cultural, and old and new attractions packed in the center city.

takiguchi.takahiro@stripes.com

SEE MORE AKITA ATTRACTIONS ON PAGE 10
Learn more about samurais right outside of Akita at Kakunodate, a samurai housing district. The cherry tree-lined streets with traditional samurai houses will transport you to feudal Japan.

The town is also famous for its local cherry-bark crafts, called “Kabazaiku.” On our stroll along the street, we dropped by the Kakunodate Kabazaiku Center and checked out the unusual artworks in display. Here, we watched a cherry-bark artist working on his craft while he explained his work and how it is made.

Our last stop was Lake Tazawa a 30-minute drive from Kakunodate. This lake is known as a “caldera lake,” meaning it was formed inside a volcanic crater. With a depth of 1,388 feet, the lake with its crystal-clear deep blue water is the deepest in Japan. A statue of “Tatsuko” located on the lakeside reminds us of a legend, saying that a beautiful girl who wished to retain her beauty was cursed instead, and turned into a dragon. The deep blue water and the golden statue give an otherworldly feeling to the beautiful landscape.
The pigs are in your lap and not on your plate at Mipig Café in Tokyo, one of Japan’s several animal cafés. Mipig Café is home to a variety of piglets and micropigs, a term for small breeds of domestic pigs, that guests can pet, cuddle and watch play while enjoying coffee and dessert.

The pigs range between 2 months and 2 years old, and, despite the term micropig, can get as big as around 90 pounds when fully grown. Most of the pigs are babies, but a few adult pigs roam the cafe.

Once guests arrive at Mipig Café, they are seated in one of three rooms and allowed to settle in before staff brings in the pigs. To ensure that guests get to interact with various breeds and ages of pigs and piglets, the animals are rotated from room to room.

At the Meguro location, I thought it was adorable how staff brought each pig to me individually, introduced them by name and gave me a backstory on each one.

Mipig Café started as an idea to show visitors that pigs are not dirty, as often stereotyped, and can make cute and friendly pets, according to the café’s website. The pigs are clean and impressively potty trained, but they are noisy with their grunts and squeals.

The pigs are also curious about jewelry, beads, loose threads or embellishments on clothing and will try to nibble. The café offers blankets to keep your clothing protected and to keep the piglets cozy.

Mipig Café is more of an entertainment destination than a culinary experience, but it does sell cute swine-themed sweets. My friend and I ordered donuts for the first 30 minutes and an additional 500 yen for each additional half hour.

If you plan to go to the café with a large party or are hoping to get a lot of good pictures with the pigs, I recommend staying one hour to have ample time to enjoy a dessert and share the attention of the curious and slightly hyper piglets with other guests in the room. The pig donuts and mini cakes cost 750 yen each. You can also purchase food to hand-feed the piglets. This option is available from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. and 2 p.m. to 5:30 p.m. and costs 300 yen.

Mipig Café does not allow children under age 5. Reservations are required and can be made on the café’s website. In addition to Meguro, Mipig Café also has a shop in Harajuku and one in Osaka. Customers can adopt pigs from Mipig Café for about 300,000 yen — about $2,750 — so it may be best to avoid the temptation to bring them home and just enjoy their company at the café.

earl.earl@stripes.com
Twitter: @ThisEarlGirl

with pig faces drawn in icing. Entry to the café includes one coffee, tea or juice. Visits to Mipig Café cost 800 yen, or about $7, for the first 30 minutes and an additional 500 yen for each additional half hour. If you plan to go to the café with a large party or are hoping to get a lot of good pictures with the pigs, I recommend staying one hour to have ample time to enjoy a dessert and share the attention of the curious and slightly hyper piglets with other guests in the room. The pig donuts and mini cakes cost 750 yen each. You can also purchase food to hand-feed the piglets. This option is available from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. and 2 p.m. to 5:30 p.m. and costs 300 yen. Mipig Café does not allow children under age 5. Reservations are required and can be made on the café’s website. In addition to Meguro, Mipig Café also has a shop in Harajuku and one in Osaka. Customers can adopt pigs from Mipig Café for about 300,000 yen — about $2,750 — so it may be best to avoid the temptation to bring them home and just enjoy their company at the café.

earl.earl@stripes.com
Twitter: @ThisEarlGirl

EXCLUSIVE NEWS FROM:
STARS AND STRIPES
www.stripes.com

LOCATION: 4-11-3 Meguro, Meguro-ku, Tokyo, 03-6712-2011; Google + code JPJ3+GC
DIRECTIONS: About a 20-minute walk from Meguro Station in central Tokyo.
HOURS: Open daily, 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. Last reservation at 7:30 p.m.
PRICES: About $7 for first 30 minutes, $4.50 for each subsequent 30 minutes
DRESS: Casual. Pants and long-sleeved shirts are recommended.
INFORMATION: Phone: 03-6712-2011; Online: mipig.cafe

Guests at Mipig Café, which has locations in Tokyo and Osaka, can enjoy coffee and sweets while playing with pigs and piglets.

Guests get cozy with drinks and blankets as pigs and piglets roam Mipig Café in Tokyo.
These days popcorn comes in a variety of flavors. When you have options such as “Gin and Tonic” popcorn or “Eggnog” popcorn, “honey” popcorn may not sound that unique. However, the taste of this snack available around Pooh’s Honey Hunt, a popular attraction of Tokyo Disneyland, can be a big surprise.

I stumbled upon a recipe for this popcorn on a YouTube channel. Although not the theme park’s official recipe, the video’s hot popcorn mixing with the yummy-looking honey sauce made up my mind — I had to give it a try!

The cost of materials was very reasonable. All I needed was a pack of popcorn kernels from the Daiso 100-yen store and butter. Everything else this recipe called for I had at home.

The recipe seemed pretty simple and straightforward, too. The first step was to fry the kernels, then heat the honey, sugar and butter before mixing with the popped corn kernels.

When I gave it a try, however, it turned out to be a lot more eventful than it was supposed to be. Kernels went flying in all directions when I foolishly, and out of curiosity, removed the lid during the first step. Later, when attempting to let the glazed popcorn cool, I made the mistake of placing them on a paper towel instead of parchment paper. Needless to say, it took a bit of effort to peel off the paper towel from the batch of popcorn.

Redemption came when I had my first taste of these delicious puffs. I could hardly stop eating the sweet popcorn, just like Winnie the Pooh can’t stop thinking of anything but honey.

My cooking was a bit too adventurous, but, just like the stories in the Hundred-Acre Wood, this too, you know, and OK, in the end!

STORY AND PHOTOS BY SHOJI KUDAKA, STRIPES JAPAN

Kudaka.shoji@stripes.com

= Based upon Kotori’s Kitchen on YouTube =

**Materials**

- Popcorn kernel ------ 35g  
- Oil ------------------ 15g  
- Honey --------------- 30g  
- Butter --------------- 30g  
- Salt ------- A pinch. This is unnecessary if your butter includes salt  
- Sugar -------------- 20g

**Recipe**

1. Put popcorn kernels and oil in a pan (or a pot) and mix them.
2. Put the pan over medium heat. Make sure you put a lid on the pot while heating.
3. When the popcorn starts bouncing, shake the pan.
4. Once the kernels are done with popping, put the popcorn on a plate and let them cool down.
5. In the pan, mix butter (30g), sugar (20g), and honey (30g) together. (Add a pinch of salt if your butter is unsalted)
6. Place the pan over medium heat and keep stirring the ingredients to avoid burning the sauce.
7. The sauce gets thick and its color changes gradually.
8. When the sauce turns brownish, turn off the stove.
9. Add the popcorn back in the pan and mix them with the sauce quickly.
10. Spread the popcorn out on a cookie sheet lined with parchment paper and let it cool. (Make sure to spread the popcorn as the sauce is sticky and this will ensure the popcorn is coated separately.)
11. Once the sauce has hardened on the popcorn, it’s time to enjoy! いただきます  (Bon appetit)
Eight is a humble eatery serving up variations of takoyaki from a small and homely shop.

Eight is a humble eatery in the Yokosuka neighborhood with flavors packed in little bites. The name is a wonderful play off of an octopus having eight limbs, but it's also the number of takoyaki variations available on the menu.

Takoyaki, or grilled octopus balls, are a popular street food in Japan made of deep-fried batter filled with chopped octopus.

The space at Eight is small enough for one family to dine in. Takeout is also an option. The owner is a friendly woman who manages it on her own. No English menu was available on my first visit, but the second time around, she handed me one completely translated.

Over both visits I sampled seven of the eight varieties: plain octopus, bacon and cabbage, ginger garlic poke, Chinese chive and dried shrimp, kimchi and cheese, corn and bacon, and lastly, tofu.

I highly recommend kimchi and cheese, corn and bacon, and ginger garlic poke as they were delightful bites. The tofu selection is not bad, but it can be a bit lumpy.

This shop was also my first experience with takoyaki in Japan, and I was not disappointed. The light crispy texture on the outside with the gooey center delighted all my taste buds. Depending on the type I was eating, I was getting added crunchy or creamy textures mixed in, so every bite was unique.

The octopus was just the right amount, and was chewy and fresh. The various sauces with a topping of either bonito flakes or sesame seeds further enhanced the basic flavors. Well-seasoned and elegantly presented, there was no better option for my first introduction to takoyaki.

The takoyaki is served three pieces to a stick and each order comes with two or three sticks. Prices range from 450 to 500 yen (about $4.15 to $4.60). Tea and drinks are available as well.

The shop provides hand sanitizer at the entrance with outside seating for those who wish to wait patiently while enjoying the weather or keeping their distance.

**LOCATION:** 3-13 Uwamachi, Yokosuka, Kanagawa 238-0017
**DIRECTIONS:** A 10-minute drive from Yokosuka Naval Base.
**HOURS:** Open daily, except Mondays, from noon to 6 p.m.
**PRICES:** 450 yen to 500 yen
**DRESS:** Casual
**INFORMATION:** 046-823-7190

**Try 8 different Takoyaki at Eight near Yokosuka**

**LOCATION:** 3-13 Uwamachi, Yokosuka, Kanagawa 238-0017
**DIRECTIONS:** A 10-minute drive from Yokosuka Naval Base.
**HOURS:** Open daily, except Mondays, from noon to 6 p.m.
**PRICES:** 450 yen to 500 yen
**DRESS:** Casual
**INFORMATION:** 046-823-7190

**Try 8 different Takoyaki at Eight near Yokosuka**

**LOCATION:** 3-13 Uwamachi, Yokosuka, Kanagawa 238-0017
**DIRECTIONS:** A 10-minute drive from Yokosuka Naval Base.
**HOURS:** Open daily, except Mondays, from noon to 6 p.m.
**PRICES:** 450 yen to 500 yen
**DRESS:** Casual
**INFORMATION:** 046-823-7190

**Try 8 different Takoyaki at Eight near Yokosuka**

**LOCATION:** 3-13 Uwamachi, Yokosuka, Kanagawa 238-0017
**DIRECTIONS:** A 10-minute drive from Yokosuka Naval Base.
**HOURS:** Open daily, except Mondays, from noon to 6 p.m.
**PRICES:** 450 yen to 500 yen
**DRESS:** Casual
**INFORMATION:** 046-823-7190

**Try 8 different Takoyaki at Eight near Yokosuka**

**LOCATION:** 3-13 Uwamachi, Yokosuka, Kanagawa 238-0017
**DIRECTIONS:** A 10-minute drive from Yokosuka Naval Base.
**HOURS:** Open daily, except Mondays, from noon to 6 p.m.
**PRICES:** 450 yen to 500 yen
**DRESS:** Casual
**INFORMATION:** 046-823-7190

**Try 8 different Takoyaki at Eight near Yokosuka**

**LOCATION:** 3-13 Uwamachi, Yokosuka, Kanagawa 238-0017
**DIRECTIONS:** A 10-minute drive from Yokosuka Naval Base.
**HOURS:** Open daily, except Mondays, from noon to 6 p.m.
**PRICES:** 450 yen to 500 yen
**DRESS:** Casual
**INFORMATION:** 046-823-7190

**Try 8 different Takoyaki at Eight near Yokosuka**

**LOCATION:** 3-13 Uwamachi, Yokosuka, Kanagawa 238-0017
**DIRECTIONS:** A 10-minute drive from Yokosuka Naval Base.
**HOURS:** Open daily, except Mondays, from noon to 6 p.m.
**PRICES:** 450 yen to 500 yen
**DRESS:** Casual
**INFORMATION:** 046-823-7190

**Try 8 different Takoyaki at Eight near Yokosuka**

**LOCATION:** 3-13 Uwamachi, Yokosuka, Kanagawa 238-0017
**DIRECTIONS:** A 10-minute drive from Yokosuka Naval Base.
**HOURS:** Open daily, except Mondays, from noon to 6 p.m.
**PRICES:** 450 yen to 500 yen
**DRESS:** Casual
**INFORMATION:** 046-823-7190

**Try 8 different Takoyaki at Eight near Yokosuka**

**LOCATION:** 3-13 Uwamachi, Yokosuka, Kanagawa 238-0017
**DIRECTIONS:** A 10-minute drive from Yokosuka Naval Base.
**HOURS:** Open daily, except Mondays, from noon to 6 p.m.
**PRICES:** 450 yen to 500 yen
**DRESS:** Casual
**INFORMATION:** 046-823-7190

**Try 8 different Takoyaki at Eight near Yokosuka**

**LOCATION:** 3-13 Uwamachi, Yokosuka, Kanagawa 238-0017
**DIRECTIONS:** A 10-minute drive from Yokosuka Naval Base.
**HOURS:** Open daily, except Mondays, from noon to 6 p.m.
**PRICES:** 450 yen to 500 yen
**DRESS:** Casual
**INFORMATION:** 046-823-7190

**Try 8 different Takoyaki at Eight near Yokosuka**

**LOCATION:** 3-13 Uwamachi, Yokosuka, Kanagawa 238-0017
**DIRECTIONS:** A 10-minute drive from Yokosuka Naval Base.
**HOURS:** Open daily, except Mondays, from noon to 6 p.m.
**PRICES:** 450 yen to 500 yen
**DRESS:** Casual
**INFORMATION:** 046-823-7190

**Try 8 different Takoyaki at Eight near Yokosuka**

**LOCATION:** 3-13 Uwamachi, Yokosuka, Kanagawa 238-0017
**DIRECTIONS:** A 10-minute drive from Yokosuka Naval Base.
**HOURS:** Open daily, except Mondays, from noon to 6 p.m.
**PRICES:** 450 yen to 500 yen
**DRESS:** Casual
**INFORMATION:** 046-823-7190

**Try 8 different Takoyaki at Eight near Yokosuka**

**LOCATION:** 3-13 Uwamachi, Yokosuka, Kanagawa 238-0017
**DIRECTIONS:** A 10-minute drive from Yokosuka Naval Base.
**HOURS:** Open daily, except Mondays, from noon to 6 p.m.
**PRICES:** 450 yen to 500 yen
**DRESS:** Casual
**INFORMATION:** 046-823-7190

**Try 8 different Takoyaki at Eight near Yokosuka**

**LOCATION:** 3-13 Uwamachi, Yokosuka, Kanagawa 238-0017
**DIRECTIONS:** A 10-minute drive from Yokosuka Naval Base.
**HOURS:** Open daily, except Mondays, from noon to 6 p.m.
**PRICES:** 450 yen to 500 yen
**DRESS:** Casual
**INFORMATION:** 046-823-7190

**Try 8 different Takoyaki at Eight near Yokosuka**

**LOCATION:** 3-13 Uwamachi, Yokosuka, Kanagawa 238-0017
**DIRECTIONS:** A 10-minute drive from Yokosuka Naval Base.
If you’re near Yokota Air Base in western Tokyo and looking for an easy place to drive or take the train to, as well as some good burgers, look no further than Under the Cascade in nearby Tachikawa.

This American-style restaurant is in Green Springs, a retail and recreation complex that features an event hall, shops, restaurants and a hotel. There’s plenty of green space like the name suggests. It’s a great place to walk around to get some fresh air, window-shop and people-watch.

The burgers at Under the Cascade are stacked high and served with the perfect bit of pink in the middle. The menu lists salads, a poke bowl, pancakes as well as a variety of alcoholic and nonalcoholic drinks, which makes it a decent weekend brunch spot.

So far, I have tried the baked apple burger (1,280 yen, or about $12) and the classic burger (88 yen for the single patty). I prefer the latter as the smoky caramelized onions combined with the perfect dollop of mustard on top of the patty were delicious.

Each burger comes with fries that are the right mix of crunchy on the outside and chewy in the middle, a little cup of onion soup and a tiny serving of coleslaw in a little ramekin.

On my most recent trip to Cascade, I dined al fresco with a friend, and we were determined to try the pancakes. We were provided blankets as it was a chilly day and we sipped on perfectly creamy coconut lattes while we waited. However, dining outside involves bistro tables that seem a bit too close to one another.

We were provided blankets as it was a chilly day and we sipped on perfectly creamy coconut lattes while we waited. However, dining outside involves bistro tables that seem a bit too close to one another.

The single-patty classic burger from Under the Cascade features smoky, caramelized onions and a perfect dollop of mustard.

The burgers at Under the Cascade are stacked high and served with the perfect bit of pink in the middle. The menu lists salads, a poke bowl, pancakes as well as a variety of alcoholic and nonalcoholic drinks, which makes it a decent weekend brunch spot.

So far, I have tried the baked apple burger (1,280 yen, or about $12) and the classic burger (88 yen for the single patty). I prefer the latter as the smoky caramelized onions combined with the perfect dollop of mustard on top of the patty were delicious.

Each burger comes with fries that are the right mix of crunchy on the outside and chewy in the middle, a little cup of onion soup and a tiny serving of coleslaw in a little ramekin.

Under the Cascade

LOCATION: 3-1 Midoricho, Tachikawa City, Tokyo
HOURS: Open daily, 11 a.m. to 8 p.m. (last order at 7 p.m.)
PRICES: Lunch will run you between $8.50 and $14, and between $23.50 and $28 for dinner
DRESS: Casual
DIRECTIONS: A 25-minute drive from Yokota Air Base or a 15-minute walk from JR Tachikawa Station
Phone: 042-518-3017

American fare, burger served medium rare in Tachikawa

DIY myself a mimosa.

DIY myself a mimosa.

EXCLUSIVE NEWS FROM: STARS AND STRIPES
www.stripes.com

Published: March 11, 2021

Tachikawa

Creme brulee pancakes

The creme brulee pancakes from Under the Cascade are not quite a pancake and not quite a crepe.

Single-patty classic burger

The single-patty classic burger from Under the Cascade features smoky, caramelized onions and a perfect dollop of mustard.

Baked apple burger

The baked apple burger from Under the Cascade features with fries, vinaigrette and a cup of onion soup.

DIRECTIONS:

LOCATION:

PRICE:

DRESS:

DIRECTIONS:

WEBSITE:
The rainy season in Japan is cheery referred to as “tsuyu,” or plum rain, as it coincides with the seasonal ripening of this luscious fruit. Constant gray skies and gloomy showers can only mean one thing. The rainy season starts to fall on Okinawa in late May followed by mainland Japan in early June.

SSID

The Weekly Crossword by Margie E. Burke

ACROSS

1 Football play 5 Resource from sleep 9 Robin, for one 14 Small wild ox 15 Heloise offering 16 “Calm down” 17 One way to stand by 18 Body of water 20 Pain in the neck 22 Tooth covering 23 Passover feast 24 Small Java program 26 Catch in a trap 28 “Froze” frozen queen 32 Like citrus fruit 35 Judge’s ruling 37 Gig 38 Atlantic catch 40 Prospector’s need 41 Frida’s forte 42 Restaurant freebie 45 Wall Street buys 47 Just Danch, e.g. 48 Knock down 50 Mineral used in paint 52 “Thieves’ Company” landlord 56 Big bother 59 Soldiers’ wake-up call 61 Unable to read 62 Restaurant freebie 63 Vegas light 64 “...of all art” 65 Top guns 66 Ticker follower 67 Like a designated driver 68 Roused from sleep 69 Heavy dish

DID YOU KNOW?

I’ll go home.

Ie ni kaerimasu.
During COVID-19 crisis, we are here for you.

Due to COVID-19, our offices in Japan will be temporarily closed throughout 2021. However, H&R Block tax pros can get your U.S. taxes done virtually. Get experience you can count on and your maximum refund, guaranteed:

Send a pic of your docs.

Touch base via video, phone or chat.

Your tax pro will take it from there – just review and approve your completed return online.

10% off
Virtual tax prep

Need tax help? Got tax questions?
Please contact us at
japan@hrblock.com