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Photos by Yoshihito Morita

Festival fun at Misawa Matsuri

BY TAKAHIRO TAKIGUCHI,

STRIPE

While the hot days of summer continue, Misawa City is preparing to celebrate a tradition that dates back to 1923, when Furugami District was prone to fire disasters.

According to the Misawa Tourism Association, locals sought the help of Shinto gods by attracting them to three shrines within the district with a parade of colorful dashi floats from each to the center of the district. The gods from Gongen Jinja and Yakushi Jinja visited the god of Fudo Jinja in the center of Misawa City for a three-god meeting and stayed for two nights before they were returned to their home shrines.

The dashi float's procession has become a Misawa tradition and has been celebrated as "Misawa Matsuri" in late August every year since then.

Throughout this year's festival running Aug. 20-23, there will also be costume parades, live performances, dancing and more.

Don't miss, but enjoy Misawa's summer in a traditional way, by joining the spectacular three-day festival!

takiguchi.takahiro@stripes.com

SHIBAMATA

A traditional downtown, home to a lovable vagabond

PAGES 6-7

Things to know

LOCATION: Center of Misawa City

PERIOD: Aug. 20 (festival eve), 21 – 23

PHONE: 0176-53-2175 (Misawa City Chamber of Commerce and Industry)

WEBSITE

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DID YOU KNOW ABOUT JAPAN'S VEGGIE CREATURES FOR OBON TRADITION?

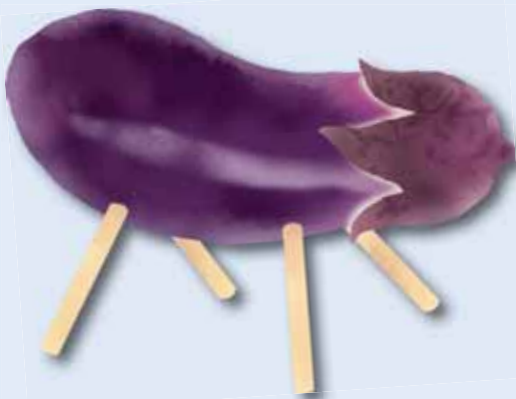
BY TAKAHIRO TAKIGUCHI,
STRIPES JAPAN

In August, families in Japan prepare for Obon, a special set of days to remember their ancestors and welcome their spirits back on July 13-15 of the lunar calendar.

During the period, locals set up elaborate altars, displays and even dance festivals called Bon Odori. Local grocery stores prepare many festive foods used for offerings as well as special decorations.

You may have wondered why there are a lot of cucumbers and eggplants in grocery stores and are highlighted as "veggies of Obon"?

Families make a small horse out of a cucumber and a small cow out of an eggplant to offer their ancestors' spirits. These are called Shoryo-uma (horse for souls).



File photos

What is Obon?

Also known as bon, Obon is a traditional festive period to honor and entertain ancestors' souls, which was observed centuries ago every July 13-15 under the lunar calendar. As the current solar calendar is about a month behind the lunar calendar, today Obon is observed Aug. 13-15 in most regions.

Japanese believe that ancestors' souls return to their families during this period, spending a few days with them before going back to their world.

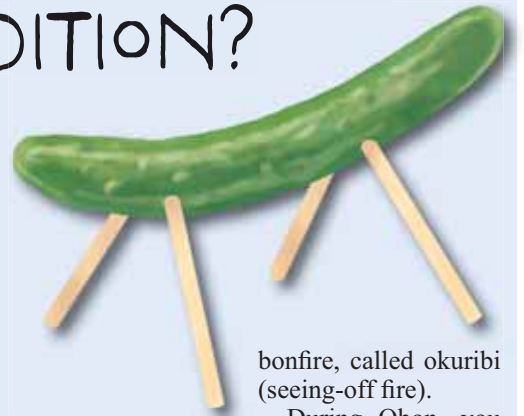
Mountain Day on Aug. 11 is a national holiday, so it creates a longer set of days for people to take off from work and for public offices to close for Obon.

Altar, veggies, bonfires and dances for the ancestors' souls

Japanese usually set up shoryo-dana (festival altar for souls) and clean up family tombs to prepare for Obon. When the Obon period begins on Aug. 13, families light up their lanterns or make a small bonfire, called mukae-bi (welcoming fire) at the entrance of their homes to guide and welcome ancestors' souls. The period is a family-oriented time where many return to their hometowns to celebrate.

Bon Odori festivals are held in town to entertain ancestors' souls which were believed to be staying with their family for the Obon period.

On Aug. 16 or couple of days later, people send off their ancestors' souls with another



bonfire, called okuribi (seeing-off fire).

During Obon, you may see a square altar displayed in Japanese homes. This is Shoryo-dana (festival altar for souls), also known as Bon-dana and is used to place pictures and other items of the deceased, as well as an incense burner.

Also, some families make a small horse out of a cucumber and a small cow out of an eggplant. The legs are made of chopsticks or matchsticks. These are called Shoryo-uma (horse for souls).

Usually they are placed with an incense burner outside of the entrance of a home on the first day of Bon to welcome that ancestors' souls. It is believed that the souls come back home quickly on a cucumber horse, tracing the trail of incense, and leave later slowly on an eggplant cow.

The horse and cow are placed on altar on the second day. People will display lanterns, flowers and food items around the altar.

Now you find cucumbers and eggplants are the symbol of the Obon tradition, don't you? Enjoy rich summer tradition of Obon while you are in Japan!

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Mt. Fuji Tourism Promotion Group



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Mikoshi parades summertime Shinto tradition in Japan

STORY AND PHOTOS BY TAKAHIRO TAKIGUCHI, STRIPES JAPAN

Across Japan in August, traffic will continually stop as people in traditional festive attire energetically shouting “wasshoi,” will parade through the streets carrying portable Shinto shrines – called mikoshi – on their shoulders. These mikoshi parades are an indispensable element of Japanese culture.

A mikoshi is used as a vehicle for Shinto gods during the parades. People believe that their local god leaves his shrine on the mikoshi and tours the community to bless the residents.

Although mikoshi parades are less often observed in Okinawa because there are only a few Shinto shrines, each shrine hosts at least one mikoshi parade throughout the year, many hosting more than one. Not to confuse you anymore, but Bon Odori festivals and mikoshi parades are not related. While Bon Odori is mainly influenced by Buddhism and was established about 500 years ago, mikoshi parades are a tradition of Shinto dating back 1,300 years.

For a mikoshi parade, a Shinto ritual is inevitable. A Shinto priest will perform a ritual to move the sacred soul of a local god into the mikoshi. After the parade, the priest will perform another ritual to move the soul back to the shrine before putting the mikoshi into storage.



Mikoshi shrines are beautifully handcrafted and are generally gold-plated or have a vermillion lacquered body mounted on poles to make them easy to carry. The roof of a mikoshi will feature a carving of a “houou” (phoenix) to symbolize the deity of a Shinto god.

During a mikoshi parade, members of the local shrine or town association dressed in a happi (a festive short coat) will carry the portable shrine throughout the streets of the community, wishing for the safety and prosperity of the residents. A mikoshi is sacred and should never touch the ground. It is carried on the shoulders of participants so the god can look down at the people. When participants want to put the mikoshi down, they always rest it on blocks, called “uma” (horse).

The procession is organized by the local shrine or town association and is carried out according to their own traditions. Since each community has its own style and rules in carrying and parading a mikoshi and each member is required to wear a happi, onlookers usually do not join in. However, there are some new towns that allow or even encourage guests to join and carry their mikoshi as a way to promote friendship within the community.

Get out and enjoy a summer mikoshi parade before the season is over!

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Japan's summer fun continues with Bon Odori festivals!

STORY AND PHOTOS BY
TAKAHIRO TAKIGUCHI,
STRIPE JAPAN

As the hot and humid summer continues, you may notice more people donning their yukata summer kimonos and heading to local parks, shrines and temples to celebrate the season with Bon Odori.

This summer tradition features strings of colorful lanterns, food and game booths, Japanese folk music and traditional dances. Bon Odori festivals are important events that bring communities together.

If you live out in town, you might have the opportunity to help set one up or work at a food booth, as each town or community association organizes its festival.

In the morning of the festival day, townspeople are busy setting up a yagura (a stage for performers) and food and game booths. They also decorate the parks with chochin lanterns with the names



of people who contributed to the event.

As the sun sets, the lanterns are lit and residents and visitors gather. Everyone is welcome at these festivals, so don't be shy.

Taiko drummers and well-trained dancers in summer kimonos perform on stage. You'll notice that people will start dancing around the stage. You should join in, even if you don't know how!

Dancers on stage and around you will show you how to perform the traditional moves.

There is lots of great food at these festivals like yakisoba, yakitori, kakigori shaved ice, cold beer

and soft drinks. You will have to pay for your food and drink, but it's not expensive and the money is used to help pay for the festival.

And for the kids (old and young), there are game booths where you can enjoy kingyo-sukui (goldfish scooping) and shateki (a shooting game). If you have kids, they'll have a blast.

Although today's Bon Odori festivals only last a few hours, when they first started hundreds of years ago, they were overnight events held to entertain ancestors' souls, which were believed to be staying with their family for the Bon period (around July 15 following the lunar calendar). According to the lunar calendar, the 15th of each month, there is a full moon, which allows people to dance overnight under the bright moonlight.

Nowadays, the festivals are held throughout July and August, depending on each community's schedule.

Why not enjoy the summer of Japan in your town with a traditional Bon Odori festival?

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SHIBAMATA

A traditional downtown, home to a lovable vagabond

STORY AND PHOTOS BY TAKAHIRO TAKIGUCHI,
STRIPES JAPAN

In Tokyo, you don't have to travel far if you want a taste of old Japan. Shibamata, on the east end of Tokyo, is a 50-minute train ride from Hardy Barracks and is well-known for its old school feel.

Locals recognize it as the setting of a popular Japanese 48-film series "Otoko wa Tsurai yo," or "It's Tough Being a Man" in English. In the series, Shibamata is described as the home of the main character, a lovable vagabond named Tora-san.

This typical downtown district is a great stroll with various shops and eateries in classic Japanese buildings, inciting memories of the comical and sometimes-heartwarming scenes in the films.

My wife and I visited the area recently to take in the sights and sounds Shibamata has to offer.

Our trip there started with a walk to Daikyoji, a Buddhist temple, which is also known as Taishakuten. This temple is in the center of it all and has been around since 1629.

The temple's large "Nitenmon" gate, a dark-brown wooden structure with gray tiles and bronze roof, welcomed us. The main gate's façade was covered in small, yet intricate carvings throughout. These beautiful carvings describe the world of Lotus Sutra, according to the temple signboard.

Once inside the complex, we saw the majestic and large main temple hall framed by 66-foot long pine branches. The 500-year-old pine that sits in front of the temple looks to many visitors like a dragon about to fly out into the sky.

The enshrined Buddha of this temple, Taishakuten, is a war Buddha who wards off evil fortune and disease. Many visit here to offer good faith for protection from disease, fires or other disasters in return. So, we put our palms together and wished the Buddha for our better health and luck.

We left the temple and through the gate we could see the shopping street leading up to the temple bursting with activity.

The street, lined up with classical shops and restaurants, reminded us of the famous shopping streets of Asakusa, though not as busy. Still, there

were plenty of crowds here shopping and perusing the merchandise the vendors had out.

On our shopping stroll, we saw vendors selling local specialties like dango, skewered rice flour balls; senbei, toasted rice crackers; and many different types of dried river fish.

The smell of the rice crackers led us to Kanekoya, a senbei shop. An employee stood over the customary charcoal stove and roasted each cracker by hand. We sampled a few different flavors, and all were light, extremely crispy and had a deliciously gentle soy-sauce taste. The samples convinced us to buy a few for gifts.

After we finished up our shopping and headed back to Shibamata Station, we saw a few bronze statues dedicated to Tora-san and his sister, Sakura. Our departure from the area was reminiscent of how all the films in the series end, with him saying good-bye to his kind-hearted sister at the station.

Our short day trip in Shibamata gave us an escape from the hustle and bustle of our city life, and reminded us of the good, old times of the past.

takiguchi.takahiro@stripes.com

Check it out



Kanekoya

HOURS: 10 a.m. – 6 p.m.

ADDRESS: 7-7-5 Shibamata,
Katsushika-ku, Tokyo

PHONE: 03-3657-6682



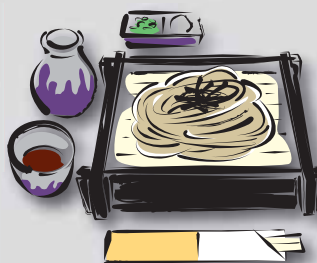
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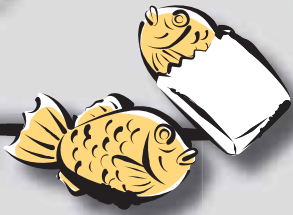
Yabuchi

Kameya honp



Shibamata Station

Mikawaya



Tora-san

Popular movie series of lovable vagabond

Filmed from 1969 to 1995, “Otoko wa Tsurai yo” made Shibamata famous, and made its leading man “Tora-san” one of the most popular film characters in Japan’s cinematic history.

Actor Kiyoshi Atsumi performed Tora-san throughout the 49-film series until his death in 1995. In 2019, the 50th film was produced posthumously using footage from the previous films.

Atsumi’s portrayal of Tora-san was so impressive and memorable, he is still remembered as the lovable vagabond. In fact, the film series won the Guinness World Record for the longest-running movie series starring a single actor.

All of the stories of film series have basically the same plot with some minor variations. Tora-san wanders from town to town peddling his wares. He always encounters a beautiful woman who is suffering from some troubles on his trip. When Tora-san returns home to Shibamata where his sister, Sakura, and aunt and uncle run a dango (sweets) shop, the woman seeks him out for help.

During his struggle to help the damsel in distress, it never fails that Tora-san always falls in love. However, Tora-san never gets the girl, even after he solves her problem. Tora-san is always left behind heartbroken, but he always puts on a brave face and wanders off again for a new journey to heal his broken heart.



Otsukemono Marujin



Kawachiya Eel and carp restaurant



Film Series “Otoko wa Tsurai yo”

SHOCHIKU FILM COMPANY OFFICIAL SITE
(JAPANESE)



Daikyoji

Shibamata Taishakuten



Shibamata Taishakuten Daikyoji Temple

HOURS: 5 a.m. – 8 p.m.

ADDRESS: 7-10-3 Shibamata, Katsushika-ku,
Tokyo

PHONE: 03-3657-2886



WEBSITE

Hit the beach near Yokosuka NB

STORY AND PHOTOS BY
TAKAHIRO TAKIGUCHI,
STRIPES JAPAN

Japan is having a record-breaking hot summer. The scorching temperatures are hovering over 35 degrees Celsius (95 degrees Fahrenheit) and every day authorities are issuing heat stroke warnings.

Amid the unbearable heat, nothing beats a trip to the beach for some relief.

Just south of the Kanto Plain, near Yokosuka Naval Base, the Miura Peninsula is home to dozens of scenic beaches with a casual, residential vibe perfect for a laid-back day.

The peninsula is home to Zushi and Hayama beaches

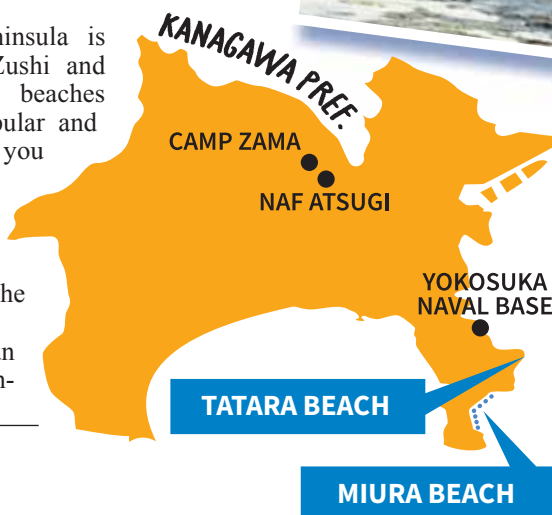
which are some of the most popular and busy spots during the season. If you want to avoid the crowds, catch some cool waves and a nice sea breeze, the region is home to many other beaches like Miura Beach and Tatarahama Beach to spend the day relaxing.

Check out these beaches and plan your escape from the steamy summer!

takiguchi.takahiro@stripes.com



VIEW VIDEO!



Tatarahama Beach



Tatarahama Beach famous cinematic, literary setting

Tatarahama, or Tatarahama Beach, in Cape Kannonzaki is on the eastern end of the peninsula. This tiny but beautiful crescent-shaped beach boasts crystal-blue water and pristine white sand. The dark rocks create rock pooling, so you can enjoy observing the sea life up close.

Taking a dip in the sea and splashing in crystal-clear water lets you enjoy the panoramic view of the breathtaking deep blue ocean against the backdrop of the black mountains of Boso (Chiba) Peninsula.

Tatarahama Beach and Cape Kannonzaki are also famous as these are where both Gulliver and Godzilla first landed in Japan.

In "Gulliver's Travels" written by Jonathan Swift, the title character steps at "Xamoschi," a port in Japan. Today, the port is thought to be modeled after Kannonzaki (you can see how close the two names are!). This reference is also why every year in November the city of Yokosuka hosts a Gulliver-Kannonzaki Festa. During the

event, American sailors from Yokosuka Naval Base dress up as Gulliver and parade around the district.

In the first Toho "Godzilla" movie released in 1954, the monster landed on this very beach and then led a path of destruction towards Tokyo. To commemorate the monster's landing, there was a large Godzilla-shaped waterfront slide on the beach but was demolished in 1973. Don't worry, you can still take a ride down Godzilla's back at Kurihama Flower Park where the slide was relocated and reconstructed in 1999. Tatarahama does still pay homage to its Godzilla lore with a stone monument of the giant's footprint at the beach entrance.

Godzilla enjoyed the beach, so why not you?

LOCATION: 4 Kamoi, Yokosuka City, Kanagawa Prefecture (about a 15-minute drive from Yokosuka Naval Base)
PHONE: 046-822-8294



WEBSITE

Speakin' Japanese

Beach banter

Try using some of these words or phrases when going to the beach – or the next time you're at a sushi restaurant.

"Umi ni ikimashou!" = Let's go to sea (beach).

"Kurage wa imasuka?" = Are there any jellyfish?
("kurage" = jellyfish, "same" = shark, "sakana" = fish, "kame" = turtle, "kujira" = whale)

"Kirei na kaigara wo mitsuke mashita." = I found a beautiful seashell.
("Kaigara" = seashell)

"Kono sakana no namae wa nan desuka?" = What is the name of this fish?

"Yasei no iruka wo mita koto ga arimasuka?" = Have you seen wild dolphins?
("yasei" = wild, "iruka" = dolphins)

"Uni ni ki wo tsukete kudasai." = Please watch out (be careful) for sea urchins.

"Shii fuudo no oishii omise wa dokodesuka?" = Where is a good seafood restaurant?
("shii fuudo" = seafood)

"Maguro wo onegaishimasu." = Please have some tuna.
("maguro" = tuna, "ebi" = shrimp, "hamachi" = yellowtail, "Saa mon" = salmon, "uni" = sea urchin, "unagi" = freshwater eel, "anago" = sea eel, "nigiri" = raw fish atop rice-style sushi, "maki" = sushi roll, "temaki" = hand roll)

- 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.

Miura Beach



Big fun at Miura Beach

Miura Kaigan or Miura Beach is the largest and widest beach of Miura Peninsula. The shore spreads over a kilometer and offers beachgoers a panoramic view of Tokyo Bay and Miura and Boso Mountains.

The waters off the beach are relatively calm during the summer season and the spacious area easily accessible by train or car makes it a great spot for families. There is a big parking lot and shower and dining facilities available, too.

Throughout the year, there are various sports and art events held at this sprawling beach. Lifeguards are on duty throughout the summer swimming season

(until Aug. 30).

You can rent a frescoball or beach volleyball court for 2000 yen (\$13) per day (per person) on the beach. And Fresh Miura fish and vegetables can be sampled at the beach houses, such as Mozu and Rokks.

Enjoy a whole day on this spacious, family-friendly beach with a splendid view of Tokyo Bay!

LOCATION: Kamimiyata, Minamishitaura Town, Miura City, Kanagawa Prefecture (about a 30-minute drive from Yokosuka Naval Base)
PHONE: 046-888-0588



WEBSITE

TAKAKURA MACHI COFFEE NEAR YOKOTA AB

STORY AND PHOTOS BY LUIS SAMAYOA,
STRIPES JAPAN

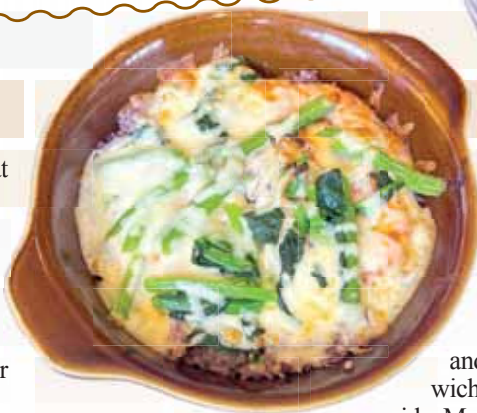
Grab brunch and listen to some music from the Beatles at a hidden gem near Yokota Air Base.

From the outside, Takakura Machi Coffee looks like a standard restaurant on a busy street outside Yokota's East Gate. Inside, however, this café is serving up delicious brunch favorites like french toast and eggs benedict with a side of psychedelic rock n' roll.

The small café was full when I visited with my wife recently for a weekday lunch, but the wait time wasn't too long.

When we got our seats, I checked out the menu and noticed everything was in Japanese, so I used my handy translator app. The menu at first looked interesting since it mainly consisted of late afternoon brunch items. They offer pancakes, eggs benedict, sandwiches, pizza and doria. For drinks, they have coffee and juice and complimentary water.

I went with the fluffy ricotta
cheese pancakes



and a ginger chicken sandwich with an iced coffee on the side. My wife chose shrimp and root vegetable gratin just to test the waters. Our meal took a while to arrive, but the entire restaurant is so relaxing, I personally didn't mind. If you are in a time crunch, they do offer takeout orders which can be placed online or over the phone.

When our meals finally arrived, I tried the pancakes first. They had a moist, creamy texture and were completely different than the pancakes we see back home. Though they were tasty, they were not as good as the pancakes I've had in Okinawa. But still worth a try.

The best part of my meal was the ginger chicken sandwich. The fried chicken was flavorful and tender, and the vegetables and pickled cabbage added tanginess to the ginger sauce. My coffee was a bit bitter but delicious, giving me a boost of energy needed to complete the day of work I had ahead of me.

I stole a bite of my wife's shrimp gratin, and it seemed like a good choice for a warm light lunch.

In total, we spent 4,280 yen (around \$26.30) for this relaxing lunch at Takakura Machi. I will definitely be returning to try some more of their inexpensive offerings. It is a great place to enjoy some Beatles music and

a nice meal.
samayoa.luis@stripes.com

Things to know

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STORY AND PHOTOS BY LUIS SAMAYOA,
STRIPES JAPAN

Near Harajuku Station, just past the crowds and tucked away on the second floor of a busy shopping complex, you'll find a small escape serving delicious food at Eataly.

From the outside, the chain's Harajuku branch looks like a mini supermarket, but if

you push past the expensive chocolates, pasta and sauces up front, you'll find two restaurants perfect for a quick meal. La Pasta e La Pizza is a more formal sit-down with a full menu including pizza and pasta, while La Gastronomia is a deli-style casual dine-in for sandwiches and gelato. Both are inside Eataly, so the variety they offer is nice to have.

My wife and I were looking for a light meal so we went with La Gastronomia and ordered the Panini Caprese sandwich, a focaccia bread loaded with mozzarella cheese, juicy tomato and basil. We also couldn't resist sharing a small cup of gelato and selected chocolate and milk flavors. The total for our meal was only 2,658 yen (around \$16) which felt like a total steal in this touristy Tokyo area.

The restaurant was empty and it was a relaxing departure from the busy street below.

Although we had the restaurant to ourselves, we waited a while to receive our meal, but we enjoyed the people watching until it was time to eat.

When our order arrived, the first thing I dug into was this simple yet tasty sandwich. The cheese and tomato had a nice subtle blend each bite with a slightly salty bread to balance things out. It was served cold, so it was a refreshing snack for the summer heat. The gelato was delicious with a dark and bitter yet slightly sweet serve, and the milk paired great with it.

If you are interested in some Italian products, Eataly's grocery has many to choose from including wine, pasta and sweets. Though the prices were a bit expensive, if you're looking for something specific, it's worth a browse.

If you're looking for a mini escape from the Tokyo crowds and summer heat, then a trip to Eataly might be what you need!

samayoa.luis@stripes.com



Things to know

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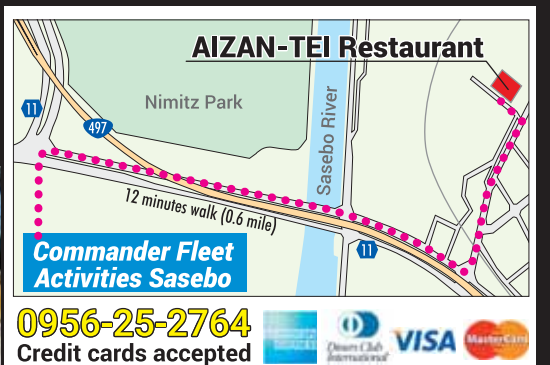
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Kanji of the week

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i(-ku)/gyo/koo [go]

Language Lesson

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The Weekly Crossword

by Margie E. Burke

ACROSS

1 Wrangler's rope

6 Normal beginning?

10 Spew forth

14 Poe's middle name

15 Grandson of Adam

16 Pot starter

17 Monthly bank mailings

19 Familiar with

20 Kachina doll carver

21 Withdrawal to a safe place

23 Proverbial waste-maker

25 Neighbor of Uganda

26 Straw hat

28 Teakettle emission

30 Blue whales have big ones

32 Sorority letter

36 Small drink

37 Big plot of land

39 50 Cent piece?

40 "Flowers for Algernon" author Daniel

42 Mistaken

44 Carnival attractions

46 Kitchen whistler

47 Pre-euro Portuguese money

50 Close-knit group

51 Collaborator

54 SOS responder

57 Quite often

58 Kitchen surface

60 Yard tool

61 Baxter or Bancroft

62 Historic Tuscan city

63 Historic Scott

64 Arabian and Caspian

65 Brings home

DOWN

1 Eyelid fringe

2 Voice below soprano

3 Foolishly giddy

4 Fill to excess

5 Start for step or stop

6 Annoyance

7 Writer Quindlen

8 Drilling grp.

9 Guarantee

10 Siddhartha ____ the Buddha

11 Remove fasteners

12 Ceded a seat

13 Cosmetic dye

18 Like grams and liters

22 Roused from sleep

24 Save for later

26 Luxuriate

27 Sheriff Taylor's son

28 Prophets

29 Russian emperor

31 Locust or larch

33 Sit-in participant

34 Reiser or Rudd

35 Cathedral recess

38 Racing vehicle

41 Blew, as a volcano

43 Tuscany, once

45 Biblical seamstress

47 Digital greeting

48 Kind of panel

49 "You Send Me" singer Sam

50 Road markers

52 Blue-ribbon

53 Sushi selection

55 Mass. neighbor

56 Transcript stats

59 Opposite of WNW

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Answers to Previous Crossword:

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

SUDOKU

Difficulty: Medium

Edited by Margie E. Burke

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

Answer to Previous Sudoku:

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

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

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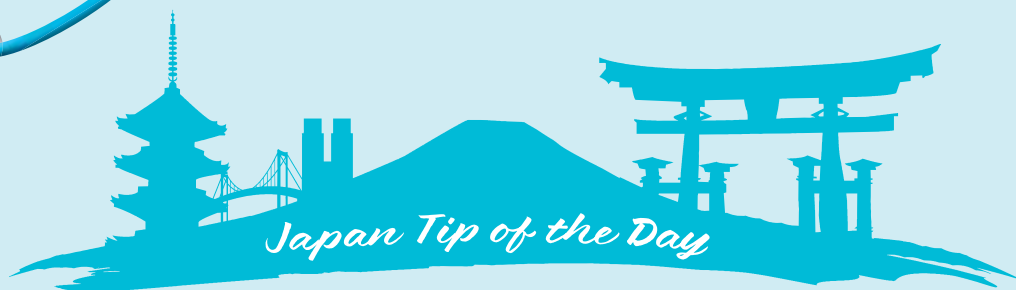
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Japan Tip of the Day



Don't miss Meat Day discounts at supermarket chain

BY LUIS SAMAYOA,
STRIPES JAPAN

When you move to Japan, one of the most common activities you'll encounter is shopping at a local grocery store.

I've been here long enough and visited many grocery stores to know the tricks of the trade, particularly when it comes to sales. Beyond the normal weekly sales, you'll discover there are nightly discounts on prepared foods and meat to get them off the shelves

and even special day sales.

At my local Lopia supermarket, for instance, Niko no hi (Meat Day) falls on the 29th of every month (except February).

When my wife first told me about it, we went for some early shopping in December.

When we walked in, we made a beeline for the meat and seafood section. The pork, beef and chicken were marked down few hundred yen compared to normal days, which was nice.

After a few minutes of shopping, our basket was

filled with steak, a lot of Japanese domestic chicken, pork and some seasonings. Meat and poultry can get a bit expensive in Japan, but on Meat Day we splurged and still stayed within the limit of our budget. A cool way to save some yen!

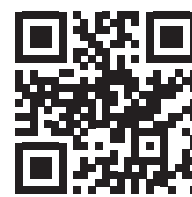
Lopia is a supermarket chain with locations all over the mainland but check your local supermarket or butcher shop to see if they participate in Niko no hi!

samayoa.luis@stripes.com

Things to know

- The sale is on the 29th of each month, only February is excluded.
- Some Lopia stores are cash only. Check ahead or make sure to have yen.

WEBSITE: <https://lopia.jp/> (Japanese only)



WEBSITE



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Back to School!

‘Military-connected students are at the heart of all we do’



Lois Rapp

Welcome back to school, Pacific family!
It is my pleasure to welcome DoWEA Pacific students and families to the 2026–27 school year.

We are proud to serve military-connected students from prekindergarten through 12th Grade across our schools in Guam, Korea, mainland Japan, and Okinawa.

At DoWEA, military-connected students are at the heart of all we do. Wherever military life takes your family, our schools are committed to helping every student feel welcome and supported. Whether your child is entering a DoWEA classroom for the first time or preparing for graduation, they will find a school community ready to educate and empower them to succeed in a dynamic world.

This year, DoWEA will continue celebrating our nation’s 250th anniversary. Students will have opportunities to explore the people, events, innovations, and ideals that have shaped our nation while developing the knowledge, curiosity, and love of learning that will serve them throughout their lives.

DoWEA’s Blueprint for Continuous Improvement continues to guide our work in providing a high-quality educational experience for every student, every day. Families can learn more about our Blueprint and focus on Student Excellence, Instructional Excellence, Service Excellence, and Organizational Excellence at dodea.edu/blueprint.

We value the important role parents play as their child’s first educators and are proud to partner with you in your child’s academic journey.

Here’s to another fantastic school year!

– Lois Rapp, DoWEA Pacific Director for Student Excellence



School Year 2026–2027

(175 Instructional Days and 190 Teacher Workdays)

First Semester (79 Instructional Days)

Monday, August 17	First Day of School
Monday, September 7	Labor Day: Federal Holiday
Monday, October 12	Columbus Day: Federal Holiday
Thursday, October 15	End of First Quarter (40 Instructional Days)
Friday, October 16	No School for Students – Teacher Workday
Wednesday, November 11	Veterans Day: Federal Holiday
Wednesday, November 25	School Holiday
Thursday, November 26	Thanksgiving Day: Federal Holiday
Friday, November 27	School Holiday
Thursday, December 17	End of Second Quarter and First Semester (39 Instructional Days)
Friday, December 18	No School for Students – Teacher Workday
Monday, December 21	Begin Winter Recess (21 December – 2 January)
Friday, December 25	Christmas: Federal Holiday

Second Semester (96 Instructional Days)

Friday, January 1	New Year’s Day: Federal Holiday
Monday, January 4	Begin Second semester and Third Quarter
Monday, January 18	Martin Luther King Day: Federal Holiday
Monday, February 15	Presidents’ Day: Federal Holiday
Thursday, March 25	End of Third Quarter (56 Instructional Days)
Friday, March 26	No School for Students – Teacher Workday
Monday, March 29	Begin Spring Recess (29 March – 2 April)
Monday, May 31	Memorial Day: Federal Holiday
Wednesday, June 2	End of Fourth Quarter and Second Semester (40 Instructional Days)
Thursday, June 3	No School for Students – Teacher Workday

What’s Inside

- Residential Fitness Test mandatory in schools
- Mobile device ban to take effect this year
- Families welcome decision to add middle school sports

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STUDENT
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2026

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Students at the Joint Base Andrews Youth Programs take on the renewed Presidential Fitness Test in June. Photo by Senior Airman Daniel Walderbach, 316th Wing



Photo by Brian McElhiney, Stars and Stripes

Presidential Fitness Test mandatory in schools

BY JENNIFER H. SVAN,
STARS AND STRIPES

Schoolchildren of U.S. service members will be vying for an award in gym class that many of their parents and grandparents likely remember well. In May, the Pentagon reinstated the Presidential Fitness Test at its schools as part of a broader push by the White House to reverse a decline in health and physical fitness across America.

EXCLUSIVE NEWS FROM:
STARS AND STRIPES
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Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth said the fitness program will be mandatory at 161 Department of Defense Education Activity (DODEA) schools across 30 installations worldwide. He hopes the rest of the nation's schools will follow DODEA's lead, he said.

"It's going to be mandatory for the young kids of those service members who use those schools," he said while speaking alongside President Donald Trump, schoolchildren, professional athletes and others at an Oval Office ceremony.

"We need young, strong, healthy Americans, whether you serve in the military or any other aspect of your life," Hegseth said. "The idea that competition is bad is the beginning of a decline of a nation."

The Presidential Fitness Test was an annual ritual for generations of American schoolchildren, from the late 1950s, when the first tests were administered, to 2013. Students were scored on a variety of drills, including a 1-mile run, broad jump and pullups. President Barack Obama replaced the test with the Presidential Youth Fitness Program, with a focus on minimizing comparisons between children and supporting students in their pursuit of personal fitness goals and overall health. Advocates of the Obama-era program said children were more likely to stay active long term if fitness was framed around improvement rather than competition.

In July 2025, Trump signed an executive order restoring the test in public schools. At May's ceremony, he signed a proclamation to reestablish the Presidential Physical Fitness Award, which recognizes the top test takers across all categories in the fitness test.

A Centers for Disease Control and Prevention report published in April said Trump's directive restoring the test included no mandates, timelines or enforcement mechanisms, leaving implementation dependent on existing state education policies. The report found many states lack the infrastructure needed for large-scale standardized fitness testing. Despite those challenges, Trump framed the effort as part of a broader push to revive competition and athletic culture in schools.

"We're bringing it back," he said. "My administration is working very hard to defend America's cherished athletic traditions and pass our values of excellence and competitiveness to the next generation."

The awards are certificates signed by the president, which are available for download on the White House's website. "Hit at least one target from every category and you'll earn the Presidential Physical Fitness Award. Train hard — you've got this!" it says on the page.

The new fitness categories for the test are divided into core strength, cardio and upper body, with a choice of two different exercises for each one: curl-ups or planks; 1-mile run or 20-meter beep test, also known as a shuttle run; and right-angle pushups or pullups.

A 13-year-old boy, for example, could earn the presidential fitness award by holding a plank for at least 134 seconds, running the mile in 6 minutes, 50 seconds or faster and completing seven pullups, according to a fitness benchmark chart posted by the White House. Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr., who is leading the administration's "Make America Healthy Again" initiative, lamented the growing obesity rate among American youth, maintaining that nearly 80% of young people cannot meet the standards for military service.

"That should be an eye-opener for all of us," he said, adding that competition is good for kids. "We need to teach people how to win and how to lose and how to process victory and defeat," he said.

svan.jennifer@strips.com
@stripskstown



WEBSITE



Photo by Eric Mendiola, Stars and Stripes

Mobile devices not allowed in classrooms this year

BY JENNIFER H. SVAN,
STARS AND STRIPES

Students attending the Pentagon's schools this year will no longer be allowed to keep personal electronic devices on them during the school day, according to new guidance.

Smartphones, smartwatches, tablets, Bluetooth-enabled devices and gaming systems with internet-connected capability must be silenced or turned off and securely stored from the start of the school day until dismissal, according to a form letter emailed to parents and guardians in May from some Department of Defense Education Activity principals.

"This change will remove distractions and keep the focus of our

classrooms on education," was viewed by Stars and Stripes as the Department of Education.

The implementation gives exceptions to the school-day rule for medical purposes, special education instructional activities, safety or curriculum-based activities that require a student to be able to do so using a designated location with staff or parents says.

"We are sharing this information so families have time to prepare before the start of school," an email says. "We appreciate your understanding and enforcing these expectations, which are crucial for a safe, and productive learning environment."

Get involved this school year!

Parent Teacher Organizations (PTO) strengthen school communities through family involvement, volunteer support, events and activities.

School Advisory Committees (SAC) provide parents, students, staff and military community representatives with a forum to share feedback and advise school leadership directly on matters affecting students and families.

Families interested in participating are encouraged to contact their school for more information.



WEBSITE





Photo by Colin Cruickshank, DODEA Europe



Photo by Cynthia Abel, Special to Stripes



Photo by Michael O'Day, DODEA

Howed ear

said the memo, which
stripes. DODEA is also
of War Education Ac-

guidance notes that ex-
ban on devices will be
oses, certain accommo-
services and approved
such as digital photogra-
projects. Students who
ring the school day will
school telephone in a de-
ff approval, the note to

information now so fami-
for these updated expec-
of next school year," the
ate your partnership in re-
ions and supporting a fo-
ive learning environment
all students."

The letter did not say
ether schools would

provide a secure place for students to store their devices during instructional time, such as lockers. Prior to the DODEA-wide ban, smartphone use in the Pentagon's school system, which serves more than 65,000 children of American service members and DOD personnel stationed in the United States and overseas, varied by school. Some schools already limited use of devices, while others had no restrictions.

In the U.S., at least nine states have laws in place to curtail students' use of cellphones during school hours. The restrictions reflect a broader push by educators and policymakers who say smartphones have become a major classroom distraction and may contribute to student mental health and behavioral problems.

svan.jennifer@stripes.com
@stripesktown



Middle schoolers play flag football at Yokota Air Base, Japan, on April 20, 2024. Photo by Alexandra Gracey, U.S. Air Force

Families welcome decision to add middle school sports

BY JENNIFER H. SVAN,
STARS AND STRIPES

Military families that have spent years pushing for middle school sports at Defense Department schools welcomed a Pentagon decision to launch athletic programs for students in grades six through eight worldwide.

The Pentagon's middle schools will begin offering sports this year, defense officials announced this week, marking the first time a school-sponsored athletic program will be available for children in those grades.

The Department of Defense Education Activity "this winter is expanding athletic opportunities to every DODEA middle schooler worldwide," Anthony Tata, the defense secretary for personnel and readiness, said on X on July 17.

"Parents & students asked - @SecWar answered," he added, referring to Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth, whose department oversees the Pentagon's network of 161 schools in Europe, Asia and the United States.

Military and civilian families, especially those stationed overseas, have long called for more sports at DODEA middle schools, where extracurricular athletic opportunities have ranged from sparse to nonexistent and fall far short of those at comparable U.S. public schools.

Maribel Jarzabek, an Air Force spouse in Belgium, called the announcement a "phenomenal opportunity."

"It looks like they took to heart a lot of the parents' comments on this issue," she said.

While stationed at Camp Humphreys in South Korea, Jarzabek started a middle school running club after learning that students had no organized school sports. Nearly 90 students joined, she said.

"We had all of these kids who wanted to run, who needed something to do (after school)," Jarzabek said. "And they loved it."

Her older daughter, Cassie, had participated in a middle school running club while the family lived in Japan, allowing her to continue competing before high school.

"She was able to keep practicing, be in competition with other kids and enhance her skills," Jarzabek said. Without the running club, Cassie "would not have started until her freshman year" and "would be a few years behind," she added.

Overseas families often lack access to gym space, YMCA programs and other recreational opportunities available in the United States, said Army spouse Kim Haith, who also advocated for middle school sports while stationed at

Camp Humphreys.

"Sports have been shown to improve mental health, provide critical team building skills and allow for students to obtain scholarships to attend colleges they may not have been otherwise able to afford," said Haith, a mother of three school-age children.

At some bases overseas, DODEA middle schools have allowed students to practice with high school teams in sports such as tennis and cross-country, but often not in competitions.

Other installations have relied on command-sponsored recreational and developmental leagues to fill the gap, such as the Army's Morale, Welfare and Recreation and the Air Force's Child and Youth Program.

Those programs, however, often limit the number of participants because of funding constraints and lack of volunteer coaches.

DODEA, which also goes by the Department of Defense Education Activity, did not provide details on which sports will be available at its middle schools and whether programs will be competitive, recreational or a mix of both.

"Schools will receive dedicated funding to successfully launch and sustain these middle school athletic opportunities," DODEA spokeswoman Jessica Tackaberry said in a statement.

The agency plans to coordinate with middle and middle/high schools throughout the fall to support the rollout, she said. The goal is to provide families starting this fall with more information about participation, schedules and other program details, Tackaberry added.

Expanding middle school sports is consistent with a focus by President Donald Trump and Hegseth on physical fitness, she said.

Starting this past spring, DODEA made the Presidential Fitness Test mandatory after Trump signed an executive order to restore it.

The test, which consists of events to gauge core strength, upper body strength and cardiovascular fitness, dates to the 1950s in public schools.

The sports offering for middle schoolers could affect nearly 14,000 students, a number that reflects enrollment in grades six through eight at DODEA schools worldwide as of June, according to agency data.

Some parents of DODEA middle schoolers are already dreaming big.

"We are stationed in Japan with a middle schooler who is obsessed with baseball, as are so many other kids at his school," said Kara Misiak, in response to Tata's X post. "Please make sure it is included. It would make them so happy!"

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