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TOP 10 DODEA-PACIFIC SPORTS STORIES OF 2024
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Special 8-page pullout inside!

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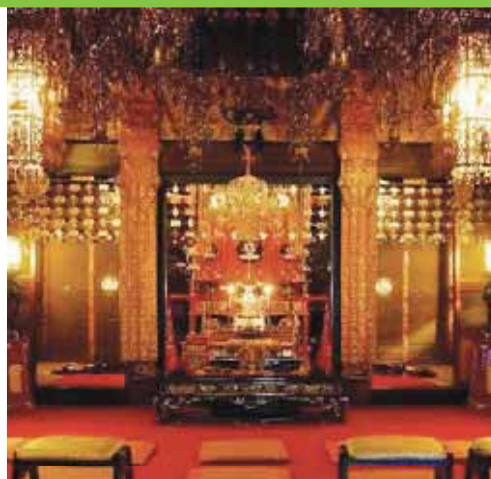
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A new year is upon us, and it's time once again to turn your attention to the yearly tradition unlike any other – Best of the Pacific voting season!

For the past 24 years, our annual Best of the Pacific magazine has been the authority on the best places YOU need to go to in the Pacific. How do we know? Because you told us so!

You've made your voices heard over the years, and in turn, informed fellow members of the military community like yourselves of the Pacific's best attractions, restaurants, festivals, Sunday brunch, getaways and more. Whether you're in Guam, South Korea, Japan or Okinawa, you can place your vote for all your favorites.

Know where you can get a great phone plan with friendly service? Or is there an off-base dentist you tell all your friends about? We want to know, and we definitely want to know why you like it so much.

Voting is quick, easy and you just might get your name in the magazine! Take a few minutes and vote for all your favorites online. And if you do, you may qualify to win up to \$300.

Thanks to your input, every year we're able to make Stars and Stripes community products to help you enjoy your stay in the Pacific. That's what we're all about. As we are fond of saying, our papers, websites and magazines "are about you, for you, and in some cases, by you."

The votes keep rolling in year after year and it's all thanks to you! We had a great turnout in 2024, and we expect nothing short of a record number of votes in 2025.

Vote and share so even more of you can experience the best the Pacific has to offer!

– Stars and Stripes staff



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TOP 10 stories of 2024 for DODEA-Pacific sports

BY DAVE ORNAUER,
STARS AND STRIPES
Published: January 4, 2025

Athletics involving DODEA-Pacific schools from Misawa to Guam provided thrilling finishes and games of can-you-top-this from one end of the calendar to the other. And a new sport was added to the calendar: Girls wrestling.

Here's a look back at the year's Top 10 stories involving DODEA-Pacific teams and athletes:

2 2024 was a year for breaking records on tracks and cross country courses, for last-second thrillers on the basketball courts and a football team doing something not done in 12 years.

10 Kadena boys soccer undefeated, captures Far East Division I title

In a chilly, driving rain the previous season, Kadena watched a 2-0 halftime lead evaporate as host Nile C. Kinnick rallied to capture the Far East Division I Tournament title.

The weather couldn't have been nicer on April 30 at Humphreys as senior Tyler Smith and brothers Yoshua and Elijah Whipp led the way for the Panthers to win 5-2 and snatch the D-I title away from Kinnick in a rematch of the 2023 final.

"We had to experience that last year," Panthers coach Abe Summers said. "Sometimes, it's painful, but it's an experience you have to have and you learn to close out games."

The victory capped a 21-0 season for Kadena, in which Smith scored 28 goals, sophomore Elijah Whipp added 15 assists and 14 goals and senior Yoshua Whipp had 25 goals and seven assists.

Kadena also got a boost from Jelani McGhee, a freshman who was by no means new to the sport. The defensive midfielder pitched in with five goals and 11 assists.

Kadena's Tyler Smith boots the ball upfield against Okinawa Christian's Yu Sakane
Photos by Dave Ornauer, Stars and Stripes



Humphreys' Chloe Lee won the Far East girls singles title and then followed it up with a Korean-American Interscholastic Activities Conference crown in South Korea.

8 Lee rides tide of motivation to Korea, Far East tennis titles

It took a year of waiting, but Chloe Lee finally achieved all she could on the tennis courts.

The Humphreys sophomore captured the Far East Division I and overall girls singles tennis titles on Oct. 18 at Iwakuni. Then, a week later, Lee also grabbed the Korean-American Interscholastic Activities Conference singles crown.

"I couldn't believe I had done that," Lee said. "I feel like all the hard work paid off."

She had gone unbeaten the year before as a freshman but was left off the team traveling to Far East on Okinawa. There were older players who had paid their dues and were in line ahead of Lee, but she said, "that kind

of motivated me."

That motivation carried her past Kubasaki's Lan Legros 4-0, 2-4, 7-3 in the Far East D-I singles final.

In the new Far East format, the D-I champion also got to play the D-II winner, which in this case was Moa Best of E.J. King, who had won the Far East the year before. Lee downed Best 4-2, 4-2 for the overall title just hours after topping Legros.

And the following week at Chadwick International School in Incheon, Lee beat top-seeded Skylar Cho of the host Dolphins for the KAIAC crown.

"This was kind of a one-plus-one deal," Lee said of her title sweep.

EXCLUSIVE NEWS FROM:
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9 Overcoming injuries, Kadena softball makes it back-to-back D1 titles



Kadena right-hander Nao Grove kicks and delivers against Kubasaki.

Things couldn't have looked worse for Kadena at the start of the softball season: The Panthers' starting pitcher and leadoff batter, Julia Petruff (elbow), and her twin sister Jessica (knee) were sidelined by injuries.

Next man up, coach Joy Sims said. That meant inserting junior right-hander Nao Grove onto the mound, where she proved more than up to the task.

Grove started eight games, getting seven wins, before Petruff returned to the mound for three victories and a save in relief of Grove in the D-1 final, a

10-5 win April 30 over Kubasaki.

"I had 100 percent confidence in her," Sims said of Petruff, who gave up seven hits and six walks and struck out 18 in 12 innings. "She capitalized on the opportunity and proved exactly who she was."

It was Kadena's second straight D-I title and Pacific-record seventh overall.

The Panthers also got huge contributions from veteran catcher Emaleigh Appleton (.654 batting average, 15 RBIs), infielder Lia Connolly (.576, 19) and rookie shortstop Jada Wolfgang (.649, 21) during the season.

7 Yokota softball, boys basketball make it back-to-back title

Neither team was considered odds-on to win their respective Far East titles. But when the chips were down, Yokota's softball and boys basketball teams were up to the task.

They each won their second straight Division II titles – the second time each of the teams had won back-to-back Far Easts in a span of nine years, twice each in 2015-16 and 2023-24.

Led by senior Braedan Raybon and coached by Dan Galvin – who had said he was retiring the year before but came back anyway – the Panthers routed Matthew C. Perry 70-47 in the D-I basketball final last Jan. 31.

Raybon scored eight of his 15 points in the third quarter to help the Panthers pull away. "I went from being a swing player with bad knees onto the varsity. ... I saw the opportunity and I took it," Raybon said.

Yokota went 18-12 overall, but caught fire in the three-day Far East tournament, going 3-1 in round-robin play, then 3-0 in the playoffs.

On the diamond, the Panthers (19-3) were thought to be on a par with E.J. King (21-6) and the team that finished second behind Yokota in 2023, Matthew C. Perry.

And deep into the final last May 2, it looked like the Cobras were a shoo-in to capture their first D-II crown until freshman infielder Cocoro Jones came to Yokota's rescue.

She doubled in the tying run and scored on Zaylee Gubler's infield single as the Panthers rallied from three runs down to beat the Cobras 7-6 in the final.

"She's an athlete," coach Steven Cruz said of Jones. "She goes up there, she's determined, she puts the ball in play, she's just great all around."

Gubler and Erica Haas each took turns getting victories for Yokota in the semifinal and the title game and combined to go 4-for-7 in the final, with Gubler driving in two runs.

Yokota's Braedan Raybon shoots against Perry's Kameron Ramos.



6 Late scores by Hamilton, Best help Cobras, Devils end droughts

It only matters which team is on top at the final buzzer, no matter when the winning points are scored.

Seniors Kennedy Hamilton and Moa Best provided proof positive of that adage and helped their respective teams end lengthy Far East basketball tournament title droughts.



Kinnick's Kennedy Hamilton skies for the ball against St. Mary's. Photo by Adrienne Barawid, Special to Stripes

Hamilton hit a bank shot with two seconds left to boost Nile C. Kinnick to an 83-82 win over Kadena on the Panthers' home court, giving the Red Devils their first D-I title in six years.

"We had just put him back in the game," coach Robert Stovall said. "Somehow, he got the ball and put it up."

The Red Devils finished the season 20-4 and beat every team they had lost to earlier on, including a heartbreaking defeat against St. Mary's in the American School In Japan Kanto Classic earlier in January.

"We avenged every loss we had, but the thing is, we were so evenly matched, St. Mary's, Kadena and us,"

Stovall said.

On the girls D-II side, E.J. King went 20-0, but the last victory was a squeaker, coming on a foul shot by Best with 10 seconds left, giving the Cobras a 29-28 over Zama on Jan. 31 at Yokota.

The victory gave the Cobras their fourth Far East D-II title, but their first since 1997.

"That clutch one. It only takes one and she did it," said Best's father and coach, McKinzy, of the title-clinching foul shot.

Like the Red Devils boys, King's girls had come up short in a series of close contests, losing in the D-II basketball final the year before against Christian Academy Japan.

3 Jarzabek takes cue from record holder, writes her own narrative

Cassandra Jarzabek must have been listening when Perry coach Cramer said "everybody wanted to be like Jane," in reference to Samurai record-breaking distance runner Jane Williams.

The Humphreys sophomore wrote a narrative of her own in the cross country season, breaking the region's 5-kilometer (3.12-mile) record and becoming the first Pacific runner ever to go under 18 minutes.

She also became the first DODEA-Pacific girls runner to capture both the Far East Division I and Asia-Pacific Invitational meet titles.

Her success might have taken root in the 2023 Far East meet at Misawa Air Base, where she suffered an injury and finished 12th overall, watching Williams win the D-II and overall championships.

"I didn't want to feel that way again," Jarzabek said. "I wanted to win. I wanted to beat her records."

Jarzabek followed a carefully sculpted fitness, diet and distance program put together by her diet coach Madeline Riley of Yokota and Jeff Boele of Colorado's Elevated Performance.

And with the exception of one race, the season-ending Korea league championship meet, Jarzabek was good to her word.

That was especially the case on Oct. 12, on her home course at Humphreys, where she ran 17 minutes, 58.0 seconds.

At the Far East-API meet, Jarzabek won the girls 5K despite making a wrong turn at race's beginning, clocking 20:09.6. She then teamed with fellow sophomore Joey Brown to win the Far East-API team relay.

"They took it more seriously than most teen-agers and it paid off for them," Humphreys coach Amy Gleason said.



Humphreys' Cassandra Jarzabek set a record in girls cross country and teamed with Blackhawks' senior Joey Brown to become overall API and Far East Division I relay race winner.

5 Guam High achieves school first on cross country courses

As dominant as Guam High has been on the island's cross country courses, the Panthers had never won a team title off island until Oct. 22 in Japan.

With junior Caleb Steele and sophomore Eldon Egbert posting Top 10 finishes on the boys side and freshman Naomi Spuler taking fifth on the girls side, the Panthers achieved a school first in the combined DODEA-Pacific Far East and Asia-Pacific Invitational meet.

The Panthers edged out Nile C. Kinnick 6 to 7 in the API

4 Records tumble during spring track season



Matthew C. Perry senior Jane Williams left high school career holding the Pacific region records in track and field's 800-, 1,600- and 3,200-meter runs, along with the Pacific and DODEA-Pacific Far East meet records in cross country.

Apparently, Jane Williams and William Beardsley decided they didn't do enough record-breaking as Matthew C. Perry and St. Mary's track and cross country runners in 2023.

So the two seniors picked up where they left off. Williams broke the Pacific records in the girls 800-, 1,600- and 3,200-meter races, while Beardsley did the same in the boys 1,600 and 3,200.

Williams – now running cross country at Division I Utah State – took down the girls Pacific and Far East meet record in the 800, clocking 2:17.98. That beat the old Pacific record of 2:19.4 set in 1996 by Cathleen Nylin of Yokohama International.

She also beat her own Pacific record and bested the Far East 1,600 records, running 5:05.97. That topped her own Pacific mark of 5:06.99 set two weeks earlier and the Far East mark of 5:07.45 set in 2015 by Brittani Shappell of Seisen.

"It's a passion for her," Samurai cross country

coach Brad Cramer said. "Her work ethic was inspirational to the team. Everybody wanted to be like Jane."

Williams also beat the nine-year-old Pacific mark in the 3,200, clocking 11:00.89 on March 9.

She won the Far East cross country meet in October 2023, as did Beardsley, who's now running for Michigan.

Beardsley spent most of last spring shaving seconds off his own 1,600-meter record, finishing with a 4:11.61 in the Far East meet on May 2. The next day, he took more than 1.5 seconds off his own 3,200-meter mark, clocking 9:10.67.

All told in two seasons, Beardsley took 21 seconds off the 3,200 record and 7.5 off the 1,600 compared to those who held it before him. Despite that, "I don't really think there's a 'perfect race' that I would run," Beardsley said.

2 Girls take to the mat in DODEA-Pacific wrestling pilot program

For decades, DODEA-Pacific teams, coaches and schools have lobbied for girls to get their own wrestling division so they wouldn't continually go up against – and get beaten by – boys on a regular basis.

Finally in October, DODEA-Pacific gave the go-ahead for Kadena and Kubasaki, two of the largest schools in the region by enrollment, to begin girls wrestling teams under what officials call a pilot program.

"I've always seen girls in the sport, but they've always been at a disadvantage," said Panthers coach Joey Wood, who wrestled for Kinnick in the mid-2000s. "It's good to see the sport moving in the right direction."

That direction includes DODEA-Europe, which began a full-fledged girls season this winter.

Girls wrestling is the fastest-growing sport in the States, with the number of states up to 45, according to TheMat.com.

And it's not just the two DODEA schools on Okinawa that have girls teams; Kinnick debuted its girls team in a dual meet in December at Seisen and also sent a team to the 10th Rumble on the Rock tournament last month at Kadena.

There won't be a girls division at Far East this season; as far as the 2025-26 school year, "it depends," said DODEA-Pacific athletics coordinator Tom McKinney.



Kadena's Jasmine Kinney pins Kubasaki's Isabella Sangiorgi in 36 seconds at 180 pounds during a historic first dual meet between DODEA-Pacific girls wrestling teams.

team points standings and 5 to 6 in the DODEA-Pacific Division I standings.

"I'm at a loss for words," longtime Panthers coach Joe Taitano said. "The kids did the work. I'm blessed with the kids we have this year. They listened, learned, persevered and performed. That helped make my job easier as a coach."

Taitano had coached John F. Kennedy to a Far East cross country team title in 2000 but had never done the same with the Panthers.

Guam High's title came on the heels of capturing the All-Island boys and girls team titles, the boys for the fifth straight year and the girls for the third time in four years.



Kubasaki QB Carlos Cadet shrugs off ASIJ's Michael Piscopo.

1 Dragons become first unbeaten D-I football team in 12 years

Graduation and transfers stole most of Kubasaki's size and skills-positions stars, leaving the Dragons football team in what most observers called a hefty rebuilding task.

Yet what ended up happening was something that had not occurred in 12 years.

Led by what was called the "three-headed Dragon" of senior backs Carlos Cadet, Lukas Gaines and Hausty Lunsford, Kubasaki went 7-0, won its first Far East Division I title in 11 seasons and became the first D-I team to finish a season unbeaten since Yokota in 2012.

Two key factors boosted the Dragons to their championship.

Cadet was tasked with filling the shoes vacated by Kubasaki's starting quarterback in 2023, Trajon Weaver, who transferred to California. It wasn't easy, but Cadet said he did what had to be done.

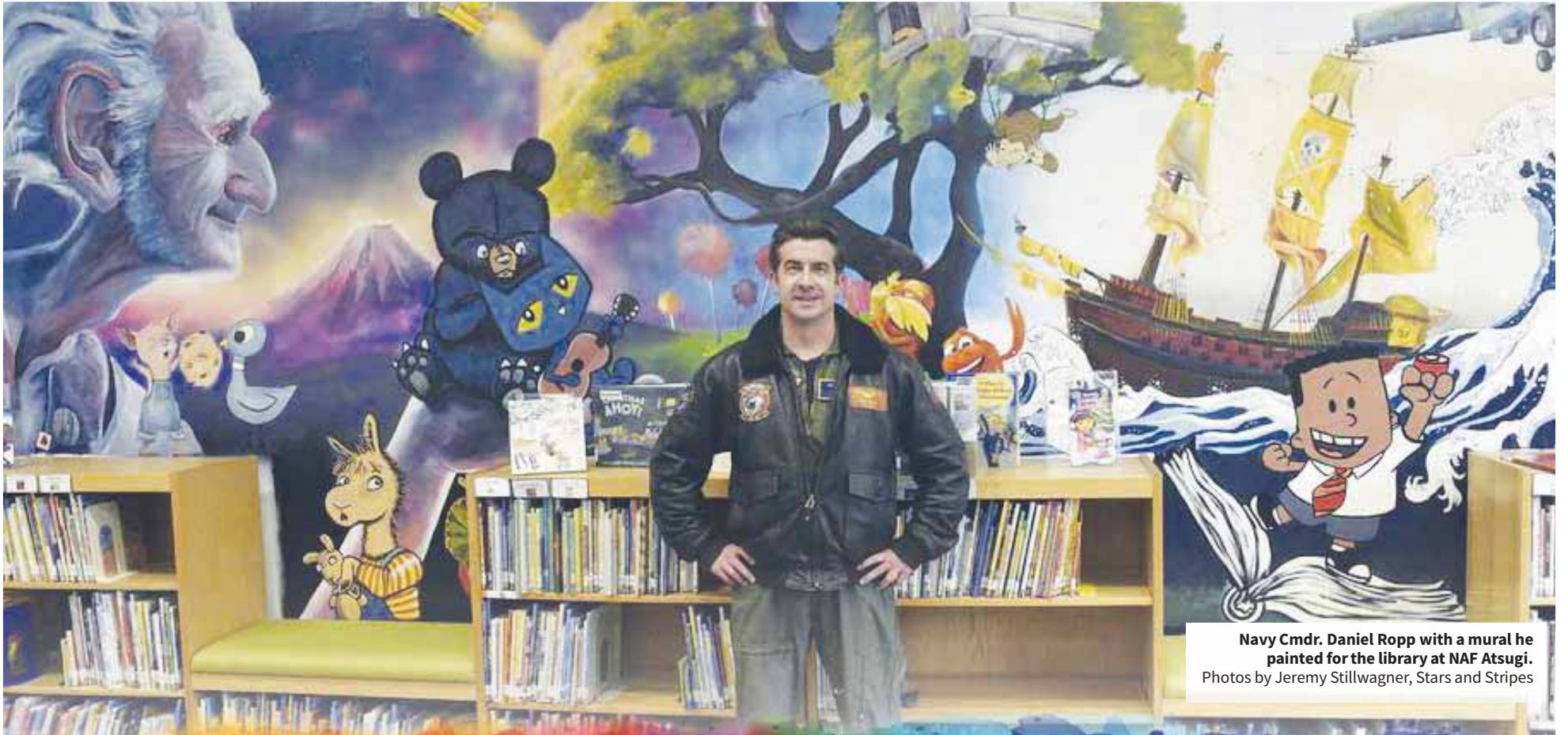
"There was a lot of pressure, a vast amount," he said. "Day in and day out, training hard to play a new position."

He was more than up to the task, accounting for nearly 1,500 yards and 22 touchdowns for a Dragons team that led DODEA-Pacific in scoring offense at 27 points per game.

But Kubasaki also sported DODEA-Pacific's best scoring defense, 7.1 points allowed per game, and scored shutouts in its last four games.

"They told me all week long, defense wins championships," coach Tony Alvarado said of the Dragons' 13-0 shutout of Kadena in the D-I final, in which they allowed 77 yards of offense and forced two turnovers. "Watch what we do, they said. And they did."

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Navy Cmdr. Daniel Ropp with a mural he painted for the library at NAF Atsugi.
Photos by Jeremy Stillwagner, Stars and Stripes

Navy officer using art to leave mark on Atsugi

BY JUAN KING,
STARS AND STRIPES
Published: December 20, 2024

NAVAL AIR FACILITY ATSUGI — An officer on this installation southwest of Tokyo is exercising his artistic side with contributions to the Navy and local Japanese communities.

Cmdr. Daniel Ropp, assigned to Fleet Readiness Center Western Pacific, has been creating art throughout his 20-year military career, finding joy in the impact his work has on others.

“When I make art or any creative process, it is genuinely rewarding,” the native of York, Pa., told Stars and Stripes in a recent email interview.

Ropp said he has never really settled on a particular subject, though he experiments with portraiture, reflective items and aviation-related art.

Now in his third tour at NAF Atsugi, Ropp was recognized on Dec. 3 by Ayase Mayor Yoshihiko Katsukawa for a painting he submitted for the Ayase BaseSide Festival.

That Halloween painting depicts two Japanese-American children dressed in traditional American scary costumes with a glowing jack-o’-lantern under a full moon. It is scheduled to be on display at Ayase City Hall for the remainder of the year.

Although naturally talented, Ropp said he never attended art school but honed his skills in sketching and painting over the years. Throughout his Navy career, he has designed unit

shirts and morale patches but has expanded his focus in recent years.

“I genuinely enjoy experimenting with all mediums and have experimented with drawing, acrylic and oil painting, large-scale spray paint murals, sculpture, and carving,” he said.

Using spray paint, he has

performed live speed painting at NAF Atsugi open-base events, supporting the Morale, Welfare and Recreation department.

Ropp said he is scheduled to complete a large mural early next year in nearby Yamato and has a goal of getting more public art into the community.

He said his artistic objectives are twofold.

“Sometimes I want to create

something from my imagination that plays with different elements, and on some other pieces I genuinely want to create a piece to help build community and tell a story of that organization or group,” he said.

After becoming more comfortable with public art exhibitions in 2021, Ropp said he pushed his works out to social media. About three years ago, he established a

dedicated Instagram page, @fly-surrealart, and a webpage, www.flysurreal.com, to show off his creations.

Each piece requires significant time and effort, Ropp explained. Paintings like the one displayed at Ayase City Hall vary in complexity, depending on materials, size and detail. “For some complex oil paintings, it can take months because of the curing required,” he wrote.

“For some acrylic paintings, it can take about 12 to 24 work hours, and for live paintings, I strive to complete them between 4 to 7 hours so they can be completed in a single sitting.”

A large-scale mural, like one he created for NAF Atsugi’s library, could take months. It shows a compilation of children’s story book characters, such as from the 1982 book, “The Big Friendly Giant,” by Roald Dahl. Ropp used his personal leave time to complete that project.

“I wanted to put as many different elements and Easter eggs throughout the mural so that when people view it, they are always looking and discovering new parts of it,” he said.

Ropp was deeply moved by the recognition he recently received from Ayase city.

“I was completely surprised, humbled and grateful,” he said. “I am glad that something like art can be used to connect communities and find common ground in our humanity.”

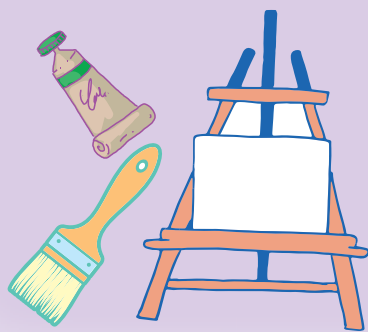
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Ropp's painting on display at Ayase City Hall.



Ropp has been creating art throughout his 20-year military career, finding joy in the impact his work has on others. Photo courtesy of Daniel Ropp



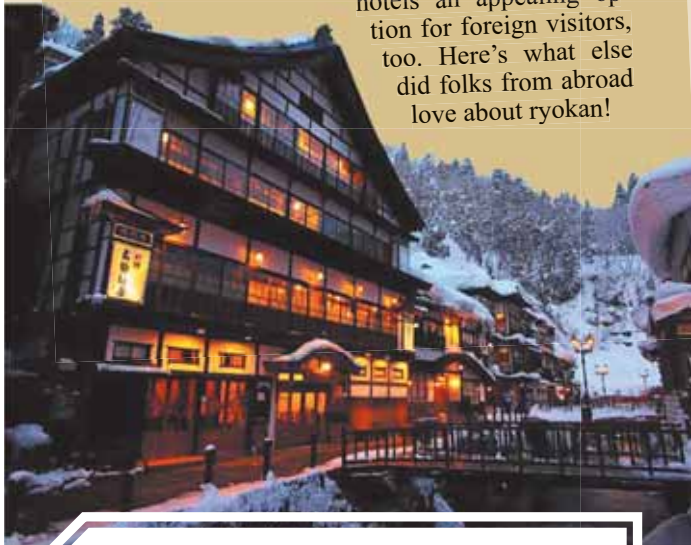
5 reasons traditional Japanese hotels ryokan rock!

LIVE JAPAN

Ryokan, as traditional Japanese hotels are known, can be called old-fashioned Japanese inns, and are found all over Japan, especially in hot springs resorts.

These traditional Japanese hotels are more than just a place to sleep. Ryokan tend to provide luxurious meals in tranquil surroundings and may offer a private onsen hot spring bath of your own to enjoy as well. Rooms tend to be designed in a traditional manner, often with spacious Japanese-style rooms complete with tatami flooring, futon bedding, and feature local cuisine. Traditional Japanese hotels also tend to incorporate many elements of Japanese hospitality, with friendly staff attentive to guests' needs.

All of these points make traditional Japanese hotels an appealing option for foreign visitors, too. Here's what else did folks from abroad love about ryokan!



Nakai-san

One of the features of a ryokan are female staff called 'nakai-san,' who are attendants who take care of guests. They will be in charge of all the services for guests and their rooms until checkout.

Ryokan are a great way to experience the concept of 'omotenashi,' the famous Japanese way of hospitality. As a foreigner, you may find it somehow incredible just how naturally and unobtrusively nakai-san will anticipate guests' behavior.

A few examples: when you check in, staff will probably ask when you wish to take your meals, so they can ensure things are cooked and served to you at the ideal timing. When entering your room, you will likely see a low table and perhaps a pot of tea and snacks waiting for you. You might then go down to the dining hall for dinner. And when you return, the staff will likely have prepared your room for bedtime, laying out the futons out for you and even perhaps closing the curtains.



Guest rooms

As opposed to their Western counterparts, ryokan are almost like a small apartment and tend to be more spacious.

At the entrance is a genkan where you would take your shoes off before entering the room. Here, slippers will be found either waiting for you or in a small closet nearby; these can be used when you walk around the ryokan - just take care only to wear socks on tatami mats!

One of the nakai-san or another attendant will likely take you to your room when you arrive, and introduce the various features of the room at that time. (Despite this being a lovely service, keep in mind that tips are not necessary - this service is standard!)

After this introduction, feel free to relax with a cup of green tea and snacks that have been prepared for you on the table. The exceptional seasonal scenery right outside the ryokan's windows is one of the real pleasure of these authentic Japanese inns.

In one of the room's closets, you will find a yukata - a kind of kimono - which you are free to put on and wear around the ryokan. You will also likely find a small towel and bag for the public bath.



'Authentic' Japan experience

Ryokan are rarely seen in the inner city of Tokyo. If you want to stay at a ryokan, the closest ones to Tokyo are generally at hot spring resorts in areas such as Hakone or Izu.

Ryokan come in a variety of different forms. Still, they all tend to follow a similar kind of style: they offer authentic Japanese-style architecture, a Japanese garden, fantastic cuisine, and often have guest rooms with tatami mats. Depending on location, they may also provide tranquil views of mountains, forest, or ocean. Ryokan are where the Japanese tend to go to escape the stress of urban life and recharge their spirits.



Meals

Many ryokan prepare dinner in the guest rooms, however, some will have a dining hall where they will serve guests. In all cases, the delicious meals will be made using local specialty products and savory seasonal ingredients. Breakfast is provided at a certain restaurant or dining hall in most cases, which is available during specific hours for guests to use.



Sleeping on a futon

Ryokan usually have futon mattresses (Japanese-style bedding) instead of conventional beds. When dinner is served inside the room, the nakai-san will come after the meal to prepare the futon. If the ryokan has its own restaurant, the futon will be put out during dinner time.

Also, remember that the yukata (casual kimono) may be used as nightwear in the guest rooms. Wearing the yukata with slippers is perfectly fine even for walking around the ryokan itself, for example, on your way to the inn's bath.

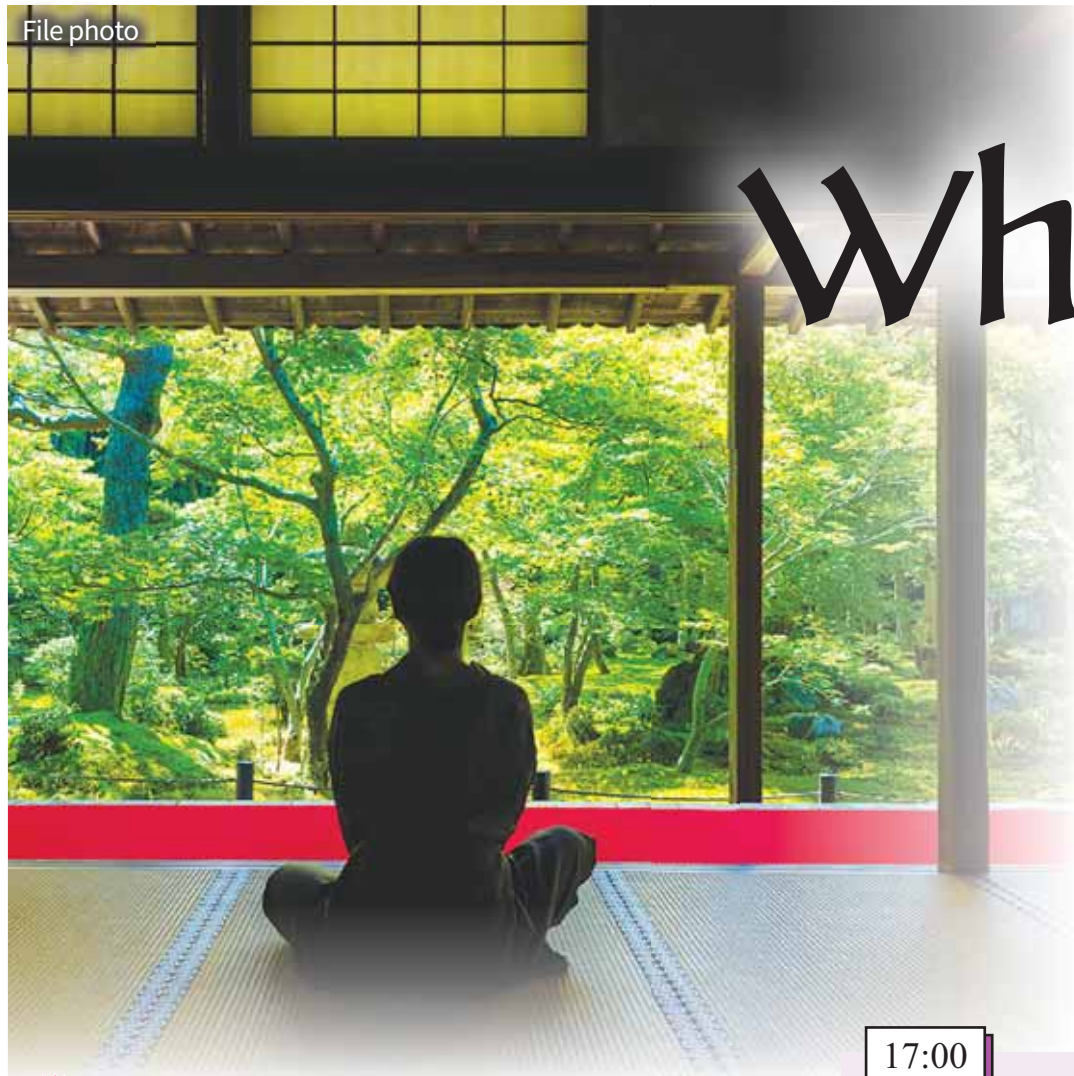
Sleeping on a futon is a very unique experience indeed, and a fantastic way to cap off a wonderful time! One hint from a Western perspective: even if you are accustomed to sleeping on your side, you may wish to try sleeping on your back, as there is less padding between you and the tatami mat than with a mattress.



Public baths

Many ryokan have a large bath as well as an open-air bath with a beautiful view of the outside scenery. In these ryokan hot springs, tattoos are generally not an issue since it's not a public bath but rather a private one, owned by the inn and exclusive to the guests. Some ryokan do have rules regarding body art, however, so make sure to ask beforehand. Wearing a swimsuit is, however, always forbidden.





File photo

Temple stay

What to expect

STORY AND PHOTOS BY CASSANDRA LORD, LIVE JAPAN

If you've ever wondered what it's like to stay in a temple, a shukubo experience offers a unique glimpse into Japan's spiritual traditions. Combining peaceful surroundings, unique cuisine, and

a chance to connect with centuries-old practices, temple stays provide more than just accommodation—they offer a deeper understanding of monastic life.

Here, we'll share what shukubo is all about, using an actual stay at Rengejo-in Temple in the historic Koyasan area of western Wakayama.

What is a shukubo?

A temple stay is typically called a "shukubo (宿坊)" in Japanese. It directly translates to "priest residence lodging", and in the past they offered a place to rest to anyone on a pilgrimage route.

However, that doesn't mean you need to be religious to stay in one, or even to be welcomed. Shukubo have always been places for all sorts of travelers, a sentiment that is still alive today. Most shukubo are very happy to welcome international visitors, and expect and encourage anyone to visit.

A Koyasan temple stay: My experience

To see what it was like first-hand, I visited Rengejo-in. While every temple will have slightly different rules and schedules, this is a good representation of what you can expect from a temple stay in Koyasan!

DAY 1

15:00

Check-in

At Rengejo-in, you can check in from 3 PM. On my visit, after walking through the main gate, I was greeted by a design that had been raked into the rock garden. These patterns are called "samon," and change depending on things like the weather or seasons.

After taking my shoes off at the entrance and checking in, I'm shown to my room. There are a variety of different rooms at Rengejo-in, ranging from very simple to very luxurious.

This time, I'm in the Moonlight room, which has a thick mattress-like futon, a pristine private bath, extravagant artwork, and a view onto the central garden.

17:00

Meditation

At 4:55 PM, a bell rings calling everyone to the meditation session, which starts at 5 PM. During my session, chief priest Ryusho Soeda guides us through the process, explaining in both Japanese and English. The type of meditation at Rengejo-in is Susokukan and Ajikan, both forms of mindfulness through breathing. Ryusho tells us to concentrate on our breath, counting to 10 over and over, and we begin our 40-minute session.

When I asked what we should think about during meditation, Ryusho said: "Concentrate on your breathing. In Japanese, there is something called 'mushin' (free from obstructive thoughts) which we sometimes use to describe children playing. They are completely focused on playing, not concerned with anything else. When you meditate, you should emulate this idea of mushin."

We are brought out of the session with a gentle but clear gong sound, and Ryusho tells us a story to help us reflect.



18:00

Sh

From signed small dishes to lids to kitchen for to from to There is

DAY 2

6:00

Morning service

Just as with the evening service, at 5:55 AM, the bell is rung to call us to the morning service, which starts at 6 AM.

This is different from the evening meditation, as it is an extended sutra reading in honor of the deceased. Before the ceremony, you can request for the name of a deceased loved one to be read in the service.

The monks chant the sutras in a rhythmic way, and you can participate by adding incense during a dedicated part of the ceremony. Afterward, I headed to bed, warmly wrapped in the futon.



7:00

Shojin ryori breakfast

Immediately after the morning service, we are once again shown to our same seats in the tatami area where our vegetarian Shojin Ryori breakfast awaits.

This is a much simpler meal than dinner, with only a few plates rather than an elaborate variety, but is still elegantly presented. Nori seaweed is in a small packet, so I wrap some rice in the nori and dip it in the small dish of soy sauce, and make my way through the other dishes.



9:00

Check out



Unlike a hotel, check out is quite early a temple stay. But the 9 AM check-out time gave me a good buffer between breakfast and time to gather my things and enjoy the temple atmosphere one last time before going out. I dip it in the small dish of soy sauce, and make my way through the other dishes.

Days in Japan

Stay at a 'shukubo'

How is shukubo different from a hotel or other lodgings?

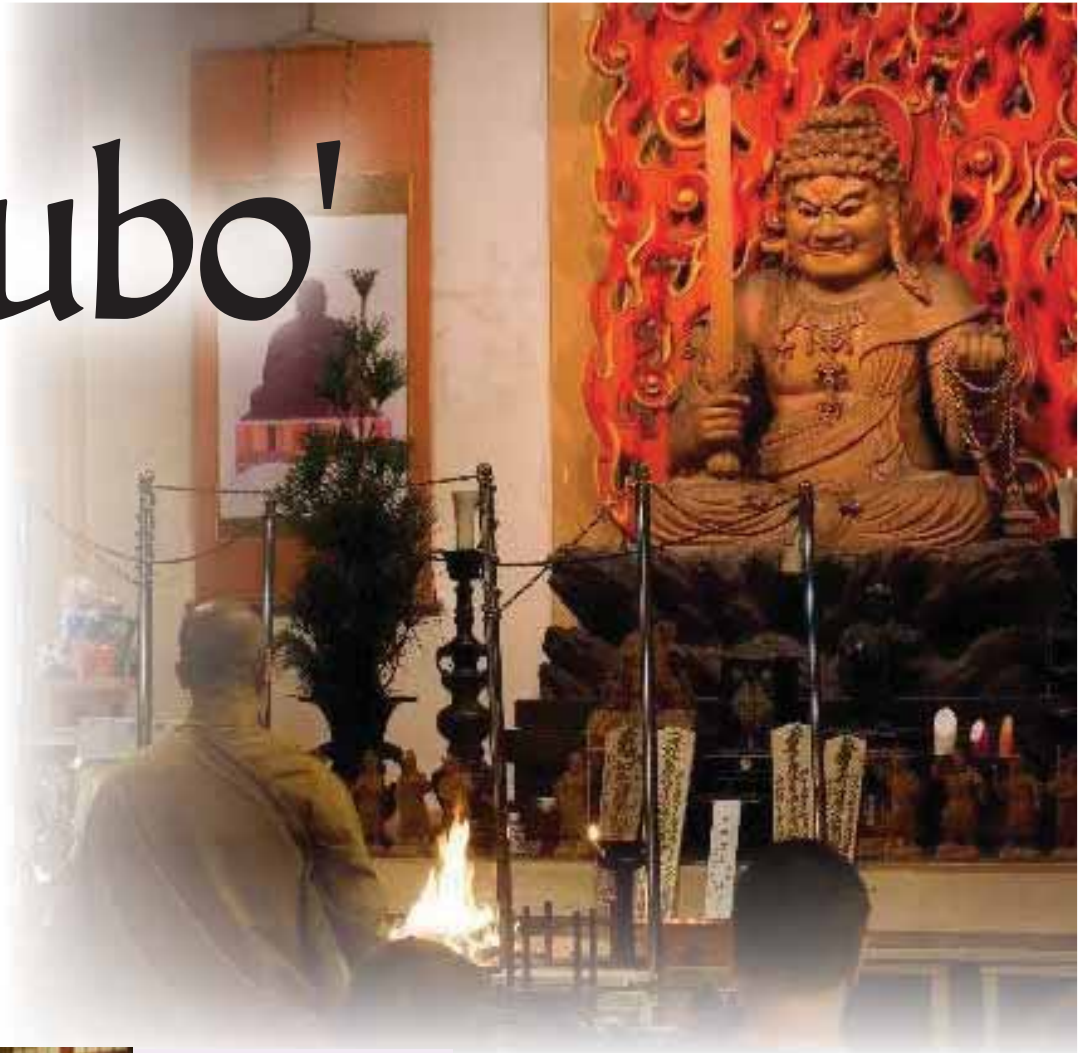
There are some notable differences between a temple stay and a stay at a hotel. A shukubo stay is much more like a minshuku or ryokan stay, which means there are set times for meals, you typically sleep on futons in tatami rooms, and there may be shared baths.

What makes a shukubo experience truly unique is the opportunity to participate in meditation and ceremonies with the monks themselves. You can also engage in other Buddhist activities, such as sutra writing (shakyo) and a fire ritual (goma taki).

Another difference between hotels and shukubo is the food. In line with Buddhist teachings, a vegetarian cuisine known as Shojin Ryori is served. This cuisine, prepared for guests, features elaborate kaiseki-style small plates.

The dishes are often quite creative, making good use of seasonal vegetables. If you have any allergies or dietary requirements, be sure to inform your accommodation in advance, as meals are typically prepared in large quantities with the same dishes for everyone.

Part of the appeal of staying at a shukubo is experiencing a taste of life as a monk, so the day starts and ends early. While participation in every ceremony or activity is not mandatory, it is highly recommended to make the most of your stay!



19:00 Shojin ryori dinner



19:00 Free time, bath, and bed



After dinner, you are free to do as you please. I took a trip to Danjo Garan Pagoda, which is beautifully lit up at night, and then returned for a bath.

Since I had passed curfew, I had to enter through the side door. Back in my room, I filled up the bathtub. Everything I needed was provided, including moisturizer, shampoo, and other bath items, as well as a comfy yukata robe and a hair dryer.

Afterward, I headed to bed, warmly wrapped in the futon.

12 Shukubo Temples



5 Kyoto Shukubo



A Guide to Koyasan



In the meditation room, we are directed to our after-dinner seats in tatami rooms, where a number of dishes are laid out on our tables. Many of them have chopsticks to keep them warm, and there is rice and tea in the center. My small plates are filled with everything from tempura and pickles to vegetable tempura and noodles. I even had a highly seasonal persimmon for dessert.

Tips for the perfect Koyasan temple stay

At a Koyasan temple stay, the monks will be very welcoming, and particularly at Rengejo-in, have made sure that the facilities are easy to understand and use even for English speakers.

However, it is important to remember that this is primarily a temple, not a hotel, so there are a few things to keep in mind for the most comfortable and respectful stay.

Luggage

In the temples, you are not allowed to pull the wheels of your suitcase along the floor, and must pick up and carry your own baggage.

If you know that your luggage is too heavy for this, it is best to either leave it in a locker in the town you came from, or to send it to your next destination by a courier service like Yamato Transport.

Clothing

Generally speaking, Koyasan will be colder than surrounding cities in nearby prefectures, as it is a higher altitude – this is the only place in Wakayama Prefecture that regularly sees snow! Make sure to bring warm and comfortable clothing, and to check the weather forecast.

To be respectful, it is best not to show a lot of skin, but regular casual clothing like jeans and a T-shirt is perfectly fine. Also, note that you will not be wearing your shoes during your stay, so nice socks are a good idea!

Dietary restrictions

If you have any allergies or dietary restrictions, make sure to let the shukubo know as far in advance as possible, so that they are able to prepare special dishes for you. Note that Shojin Ryori is typically vegetarian, and the meals at shukubo in Koyasan do not use milk, eggs, cheese, or other animal products.

Other points to note

The walls of the shukubo are typically quite thin, so try not to make too much loud noise late into the night.

During meditation, refrain from leaving partway through.

If you are not Buddhist, you don't need to worry. The monks are very welcoming of everyone who walks through the temple doors.

The fire ceremony known as "gomataki" is only held once a month at Rengejo-in. A few other temples offer the ceremony every day, but if you cannot see it during your temple stay, you can see it for free at Shojoshin-in between 1-2 PM every day.

Booking can be done through reservation websites like Booking.com, or through the official website of the shukubo you would like to visit.



A list of Koyasan temple stays



during the stay, the monks give a special departure ceremony to see you off. The ceremony features a special dish of soybeans.



Watch video of this experience!

5 Did you say drinkable mayonnaise?! Quirky and fun drinks to try in Japan this winter

LIVE JAPAN

Winter has come to Japan, and so has a new line-up of exciting time-limited products! Every year, Japan greets winter with a selection of warm, seasonally flavored beverages like yuzu tea and hot chocolate, perfect for grabbing from a convenience store, vending machine, or supermarket for a day out and about.

This year, however, I (Johanna, English editor at LIVE JAPAN) have been collecting a couple of quite quirky drinks, all released at the beginning of the 2024/2025 winter season. Whether you are curious about trying out one yourself or just want to know what kind of crazy business we're on about today - let's go through them together!



Beer for kids?

Kodomo no Nomimono (Not the real thing!)

Kodomo No Nomimono (meaning "Children's Drink") can be found on shelves in supermarkets around the country come holiday season. This is not a new product for this season; it has been around for a couple of years, delighting children and stirring interesting conversations in households around Japan. A non-alcoholic beverage, Kodomo No Nomimono is a "beer" designed so kids can join in on celebrations without feeling left out when the grownups start pouring alcohol.

The bottle is designed similarly to your typical beer bottle, and pouring the drink in a glass has a similar effect to the real deal, with a beautiful white foam forming at the top. Perfect for toasts at year-end gatherings or family parties. Can adults enjoy it, too?

It says on the back of the bottle to "properly cool down" the beverage, pour it into a glass, and join the cheer! Kanpai!

Looks real enough to me! The similarities to real beer stop there, however, as this is a completely non-alcoholic drink.

In fact, it's a lightly carbonated apple-flavored soda! I found it quite pleasant, as apple happens to be one of my personal favorite flavors in beverages. However, the best part of the experience has to be the pouring of the drink into a glass. It looked so real! I don't particularly enjoy the flavor of beer, so while I might not be the age target, I have to say I would consider grabbing one of these again as the holidays come around!

As much surprise and confusion I felt when I first found this drink in a supermarket, I'm convinced it invites some interesting conversations among families as they gather to celebrate the end of the year.

- **PRICE:** Varies by store, around 100 yen
- **SOLD AT:** Various supermarkets, Don Quijote and more



Love it or hate it?!

Nomu Mayo (Drinkable Mayo)

Now, here is a recent talk of the town! Drinkable mayonnaise, a bold creation that turns a staple condiment into a beverage. Japanese mayonnaise is loved internationally as well as by locals and can be found mixed in with - or topped on - some of the most iconic dishes in the country. This time, however, company Toyobeverage has released a, you heard it right, drinkable mayonnaise! To make things clear, this drink does not contain any mayonnaise, despite its strong appeal. This is rather a "mayonnaise-inspired" drink, aiming to resemble the flavor of the real thing.

On their official website, the developer states that they "created a mayonnaise-flavored drink that maintains the delicate balance of mayonnaise's unique tanginess, saltiness, and umami." They continue, explaining that their focus was on "how closely we could replicate the taste of mayonnaise, ensuring it would be appreciated even by devoted mayonnaise enthusiasts."

Furthermore, regarding the package design, they state that "since this is a test release, we've kept the design simple by stripping away elaborate elements. Even with its simplicity, we believe the illustrations and product name are enough to convey what's inside." If this is a test release, we might have to keep our eyes open for further updates or developments!

Alright, straight to taste testing! This drink comes in a sealed cup with a straw, and you are not able to see the color while drinking. Pouring it

into a glass, it doesn't have that yellowish tint that Japanese mayonnaise tends to have, but rather a darkish cream-white color. Well, since it's technically supposed to be had without opening the cup, they might not have focused all too much on getting the color right!

I have to admit my heart was beating ever so slightly the moments before I went in for the first sip. I bet you've never thought of "drinking" mayonnaise, however much you like it. I know I haven't! Well, my nerves could not stop my curiosity, I had a sip. Verdict? Yeah, it did indeed taste like mayonnaise, a slightly sour, silky, liquid mayonnaise! Feel tempted? This drink comes across as a novelty rather than a source of refreshment and has been all over social media, even weeks after its release. If you are a mayonnaise lover or seeking a daring new challenge on your travels in Japan, look no further than your closest Lawson convenience store!

- **PRICE:** 198 yen (tax incl.)
- **SOLD AT:** Lawson



A collaboration of sweetness and refreshment!

Fresh Cream Cheesecake x Calpis

Calpis lovers assemble! If you didn't know, Calpis is a milky drink made by lactic acid fermentation, widely popular both in the country and internationally.

Calpis regularly releases time-limited flavors such as grape, muscat, and melon. This winter, Calpis has collaborated with a fresh cream specialty store, releasing their second product together after seeing success with the 2023 release "Hokkaido Fresh Cream & Calpis." This winter's release is inspired by the collaborator's popular dessert, "Ultimate Fresh Cream Cheesecake," combining the creamy richness of cheesecake with the sweet and tangy taste of Calpis.

The packaging similarly has a collaboration design, including images of cheesecake, the collaborator's iconic cow logo, and both brands' signature colors.

So, how well does a delicious drink pair with a delicious dessert? Rather well, if you ask me! If you are not familiar with the flavor of Calpis, you might get slightly confused while trying to figure out which flavor belongs to which collaborator.

But as a professed Calpis-junkie, I definitely could pick up on the different flavors mixed together. The sweetness of the cream naturally took away some of the freshness of a standard Calpis drink and provided instead a

nice sugary kick similar to a milk tea. I must say that I tasted the cream more than the cheesecake, had I not known what flavors were mixed, I might have guessed cream alone.

This would be a nice drink to keep in your bag and sip on throughout your day exploring the streets of Japan this winter!

- **PRICE:** 205 yen (tax incl.)
- **SOLD AT:** Various convenience stores and supermarkets



Enjoy dessert in a bottle!

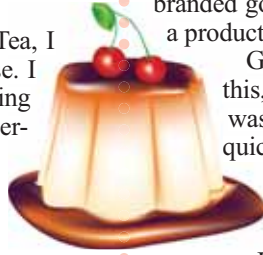
Kōcha Kaden Drinkable Milk Tea Pudding

Whoa, now here is a hefty drink dessert! Kōcha Kaden Nomu Milk Tea Purin is a dessert beverage from Coca-Cola Japan's Kōcha Kaden series, which you might know from their Royal Milk Tea or other fruit-flavored teas. This product was released on December 3, 2024, a winter-perfect drink that combines milk tea and pudding in a fabulous way! While the packaging shows a bin of pudding being scooped with a spoon, this drink comes with a thick straw that you poke through the plastic film cover to enjoy the drink wherever you are.



A heartwarming treat for dessert lovers!

As I am familiar with the brand's Royal Milk Tea, I thought I had an idea of what to expect flavor-wise. I was all the more curious about the texture, wondering if this would end up just being a thicker, creamier version of the classic milk tea. Well, after trying it out, I was left with only a few words. Fantastic. Delicious. Creamy. Rich. Drinkable pudding! What a genius way to combine two delicious products!



The texture is very similar to your typical chocolate pudding, slightly softer for easier consumption with a straw. The flavor is, as expected, very similar to their Royal Milk Tea, a comforting sugar kick! These components go perfectly hand in hand. If you see someone frantically scanning the beverage corner of a convenience store somewhere south of Tokyo, it might be me out to get seconds!

■ PRICE: 288 yen (tax incl.)
■ SOLD AT: Family Mart

Can you guess the secret ingredient?

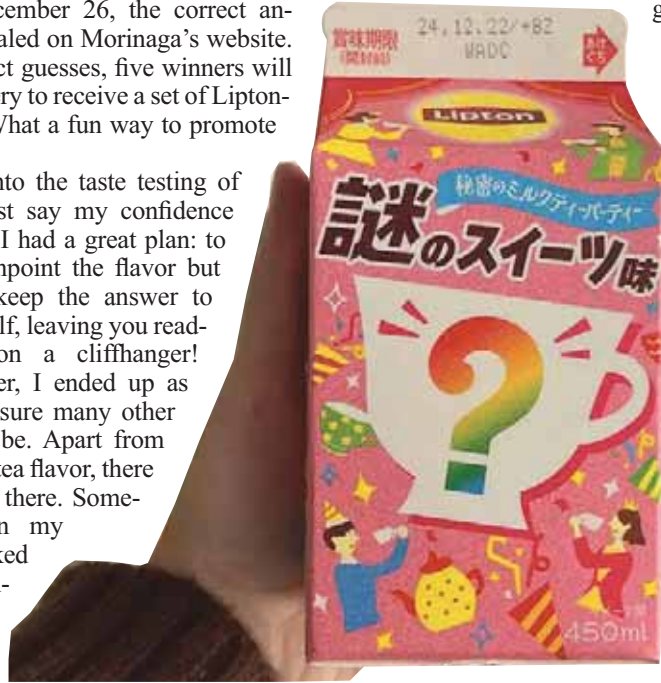
Lipton Secret Milk Tea Party: Mysterious Sweets Flavor

The last drink on today's agenda is somewhat of a mystery. Morinaga Milk has released "Lipton Secret Milk Tea Party: Mysterious Sweets Flavor" starting December 10, 2024. This is a milk tea infused with the flavor of a "popular dessert," which seems to be a common theme for time-limited products this winter. The trick is they have not yet officially revealed the flavor (as of writing this article), leaving consumers guessing away!

Funnily, to coincide with the launch, a campaign called "Guess the Mysterious Sweets Flavor" is running on X (formerly Twitter) from December 10 to December 25, where participants can guess the flavor by quoting the campaign post with a hashtag and submitting their predictions. On December 26, the correct answer will be revealed on Morinaga's website. Among the correct guesses, five winners will be chosen by lottery to receive a set of Lipton-branded goods. What a fun way to promote a product!

Going into the taste testing of this, I must say my confidence was high. I had a great plan: to quickly pinpoint the flavor but then keep the answer to myself, leaving you readers on a cliffhanger!

However, I ended up as confused as I'm sure many other consumers must be. Apart from the obvious milk tea flavor, there is SOMETHING there. Something sweet... In my confusion, I asked a trusted acquaintance for their take on it, and they were left



just as wondering as I was.

A quick look at the Japanese side of X lets me know that others are feeling as lost as we are, with comments like "It's sweet, I recognize the flavor, but I can't pinpoint it, urgh!" while others are taking straight guesses. Strawberry milk, condensed milk, and almond jelly are some of the recurring comments that pop up while scrolling through the feed.

I will have to come back with an update after the official reveal has been made. Until then, let's keep guessing!



■ PRICE: 194 yen (tax incl.)
■ SOLD AT: Various convenience stores and supermarkets (not sold in Okinawa)

If you are visiting Japan this winter and want to enjoy something out of the ordinary, consider heading out to find one or all of these quirky time-limited items!

* All prices include tax
* This article is written in December 2024, covering time-limited products.



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GSA in Japan



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Check Out GSA's Japan Catalog!



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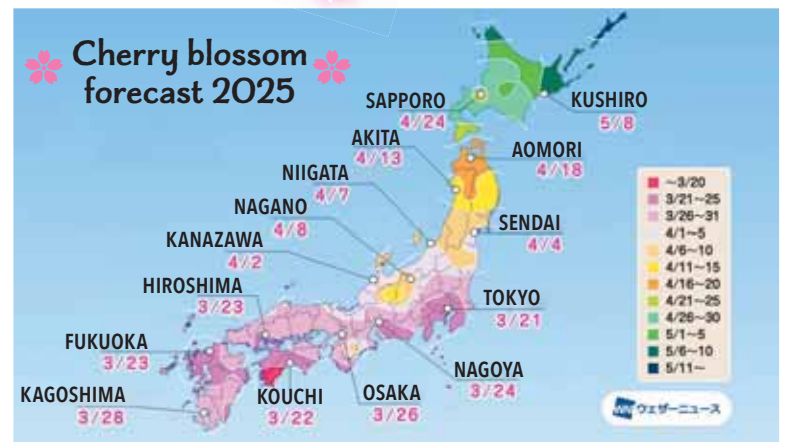
BY TAKAHIRO TAKIGUCHI, STRIPES JAPAN

The chilly months continue and though it may be hard to believe, spring is right around the corner.

To cheer us up a little and give us something warm to look forward to, Japan's Weathernews meteorological agency has released the cherry blossom bloom predictions for 2025.

Every year, Japan's first cherry blossoms appear in Okinawa in late January then spread northbound up the mainland. According to the report, Tokyo will have the earliest blooms on the mainland on March 21, followed by Hiroshima (near MCAS Iwakuni) on Mar. 23 and Nagasaki (near Sasebo Naval Base) on Mar. 24. The Misawa area is expected to see sakura blossoms later around April 18. Kushiro City in Hokkaido will get cherry blossoms last around May 9, the agency predicted.

This year's blossoms are expected to arrive at the normal time in most parts of Japan but



Forecast dates

- 🌸 Tokyo: March 21
- 🌸 Yokohama (near Yokosuka NB): March 22
- 🌸 Kanto Plain (NAF Atsugi, Camp Fuji, Yokota AB, Camp Zama): March 21 - 29
- 🌸 Hiroshima (near MCAS Iwakuni): March 23
- 🌸 Nagasaki (home of Sasebo NB): March 24
- 🌸 Aomori (near Misawa AB): Apr. 18



Weather news

slightly earlier in the north and Hokkaido, according to the agency. It's the perfect time to make plans to get out and enjoy the

stunning landscapes at the best cherry blossom viewing spots and partake in hanami celebrations! takiguchi.takahiro@stripes.com

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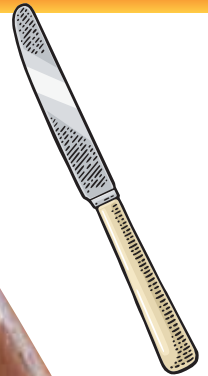
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New Sanno's BZQ barbecue joint will take you on a trip home

STORY AND PHOTOS BY TAKAHIRO TAKIGUCHI, STRIPES JAPAN

In Japan, there are countless yakiniku or Korean-style barbecue joints. You may have already sampled high-end wagyu beef yakiniku with a spicy garlic flavor. The fatty karubi (short rib) or roosu (sirloin) with hot garlic sauce are very satisfying, but that doesn't mean you aren't missing full-flavored, smoky American-style barbecued meats with sweet and sour sauces.

If you are in Tokyo and craving American-style barbecue, head to BZQ at the New Sanno Hotel. The new restaurant on the hotel's second floor will not disappoint with its hearty servings of authentic smoked meats and classic sides like potato salad and mac n' cheese.

Things to know
ADDRESS: 4-12-20, Minami-Azabu, Minato-ku, Tokyo; : 2F New Sanno Hotel
HOURS: Open daily, 11 a.m. - 10 p.m. (L.O. 9:30 p.m.)
TEL: (DSN)229-8003 or (CML) 03-6868-2333



WEBSITE

When my coworker and I visited BZQ recently, the spacious joint big enough to accommodate over 30 guests, was abuzz with others seeking a taste of the many smoked meats on the menu. The interior offered a variety of seating options, from booths and tables to

a standard wooden high-top share table like you'd find at a barbecue spot in Texas or Nashville.

The decor had a touch of Americana, including old license plates from the States, making us feel at home and reminding us of a typical KC country house with a backyard pit.

After we placed our orders at the counter, two pit masters skillfully went to work on the line of trays they piled high with juicy meats, sides and bread. I had plenty of options from brisket, ribs, chicken, lamb shoulder, pulled pork or sausage to choose from, but I decided to go with a two-meat and two-side



combo for \$16.

I selected brisket, ribs, jalapeno potato salad, baked beans and corn bread. Hot dogs and burgers are also on the menu, so my coworker chose the Smokehouse Burger and BZQ Wedge Salad for \$12, making it a slightly lighter lunch than mine.

After a short wait, our order was ready. My metal tray lined with a butcher brown paper was loaded. The healthy serving of brisket was tender and smoky. The thick rack of ribs had a nice crust of rub on the surface and the meat easily came off the bone. I sampled the meat without sauces first and the flavors were good but slightly less seasoned so BZQ's six signature sauces can really shine.

Each table had its own set of six sauces named after famous barbecue sanctuaries across Texas, Missouri, Tennessee, the Carolinas and a surprise Tokyo Miso sauce. I sampled each first alone, then dipped small bites into each to see the variances on how each would change the flavors of the meat. I enjoyed this because I felt like I was traveling along with my taste buds to

all the famous BBQ spots in the States.

My favorites were the sweet, mustard-based "Carolina Gold" and hot and sour "Tennessee Red" sauces, as they added a nice kick and charm to my full-bodied smoky meat.

The "Tokyo Miso" sauce is a New Sanno original and features a deep soy and sweet flavor. It was a great addition to the sauce lineup.


The portion sizes of my platter weren't too much of a surprise if you're used to BBQ restaurants in the States, but my coworker's Smokehouse Burger was also large by Tokyo standards. It was loaded with a juicy patty, coleslaw, pimento cheese and slathered with miso sauce. The wedge salad was also an impressive size with dressing, plenty of bacon bits and tomatoes. She said the burger was as tasty as it looked, but she called it quits after finishing her salad and half of her burger. She took the rest home to enjoy later.

Don't skip this taste of home in the center of Tokyo. You'll leave with your stomach full and your taste buds well-traveled thanks to the careful preparation of tender meat and flavorful sauces.

takiguchi.takahiro@stripes.com




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BIIDAMA



Photo courtesy of photoAC

STORY AND PHOTOS BY SHOJI KUDAKA,
STRIPES JAPAN

Growing up in the 70s and 80s, I had a lot of fun playing with traditional Japanese/Okinawan toys, including kites and spinning tops. Stashing some toys in my schoolbag, I could not wait for a fun time with friends in the schoolyard.

However, once Nintendo's takeover took place in the mid-80s, the age of analog faded away.

By the time the 90s were approaching, we would rather meet at a friend's house to spend hours on the video game console than play outside.

Now, those old toys are almost always talked about in the past tense. But they are not completely gone. Some of them are still available at toy shops and 100-yen stores, while others continue to be sold online.

Why not give them a try and get the taste of Japan's or Okinawa's nostalgia?

■ Menko/Patch

These are cards with illustrations (often characters of kids' TV shows) drawn on their front and back. There are round ones and square ones. There are several variations as to how you play with them, but the one I was familiar with goes like this. First, you lay several of them on the ground. Your opponent will do the same with his or her cards. Then you pick one of your cards from the ground and slam it against the ground, aiming at a spot close to some of your opponent's cards. If opponent's card flips due to the impact of the card you throw, you get to keep it.

■ Koma (spinning top)

Although spinning tops are associated with New Year celebrations, we used to play with them all year.

The most common ways of playing with tops are so-called "battles" and trick shots. In the "battles," we would spin our tops in a close area and let them collide with each other to see which one would be the last one standing. As for tricks, me and my friends used to let a spinning top land on our hands once unleashing it from a cord.

■ Kite

Flying kites are associated with the New Year celebrations. Once January came around, I would purchase one at a bunbouguya (local stationary store) and fly it in a park. In Okinawa, there is also a hand-made kite called "Kaabuyaa", which means "bat" in Okinawan dialect. My fun almost always ended with my kite hanging from electric wire or stuck in a tree. (Now flying kites is prohibited at some locations including those around flight routes for safety reasons.)

■ Biidama (glass beads)

According to Japanese newspaper Asahi Shimbun, the history of the glass bead game in Japan can be traced back to as far as the Heian era (794-1185), when a type gambling called "zeniuchi" was played with coins. In the late Edo era, an illustration of foreign kids playing with glass beads was drawn in Yokohama.

Back then, according to Asahi, glass beads were expensive imports. So, they were substituted by tree fruits and balls of clay for local Japanese. But glass beads became commonly available when bottled ramune (soda) came to be domestically produced in Meiji era (1868 – 1912). A glass bead was contained in each bottle of the beverage, which was reused as a toy for kids.

There are several ways to play with the beads, but the one I often played was to aim at a bead on the ground with another one. If you can hit your target bead, it becomes yours.

■ (Coca Cola) Yo-yo

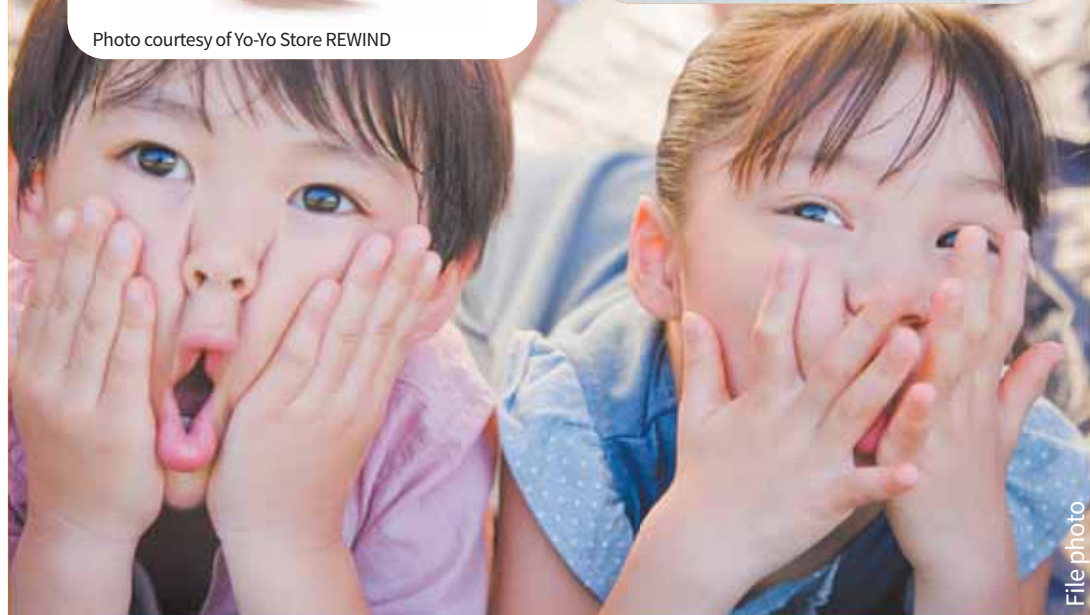
Of course, the yo-yo is not a Japanese toy. But my list would not be complete without mentioning it, for several reasons, starting with "Coca-Cola yo-yo." Introduced as a promotional item of the beverage company, this yo-yo was one of the most sought-after items when I was a kid. Once I obtained one, I spent hours just trying to complete tricks like "Walk the Dog" and "Around the World." Of course, I ended up breaking it. Replica Coca-Cola yo-yos are now available online and at select stores.

According to the Japan Yo-Yo Federation, the yo-yo boom has taken place several times in Japan, the first of which came with the Coca-Cola yo-yo. The second wave was introduced by "Sukeban Deka," a TV show based on a manga of the same title where a high school girl fought villains by utilizing a red-colored yo-yo. "Sukeban" means "delinquent girl" in slang. This word is outdated and hardly used now, but every time it is mentioned, I remember the time I recklessly swung my yo-yo like Saki Asamiya, the heroine of the show.

The third boom came around 1997 with "hyper yo-yo", a new brand of yo-yo launched by the Japanese toy company Bandai. About 27 million hyper yo-yos were sold worldwide.

The federation notes that the yo-yo continues to be popular in Japan. There have even been more than 30 world champions of competitive yo-yo from this country. Thanks to improvements in materials and designs, high-performance products are being introduced into the yo-yo world, helping the toy stay up-to-date, according to the federation.

kudaka.shoji@stripes.com



File photo

Stripes Sports Trivia

Wide and right. When paired, the two words can inflict the kind of pain Bartman and Buckner used to represent. For Buffalo Bills fans, the pain of losing four straight Super Bowls in the early 1990s is a tough one to get over. But, in Super Bowl 25, the Bills came ever-so-close, missing a game-winning field goal with eight seconds to play. Who missed the infamous kick for the Bills?

Answer

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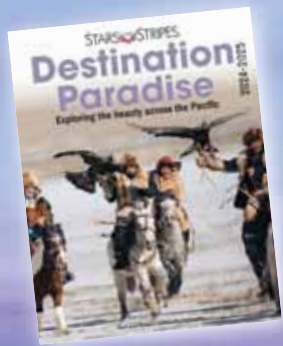
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STARS AND STRIPES



DID YOU KNOW?

It is a no-no in Japan to pick up food with your chopsticks when it was already held by someone else's chopsticks. There are many dos and don'ts in Japan, and this one in particular seems innocent, but not so much to Japanese. This reminds Japanese people of an old tradition – one that involves a dead relative, bones and a crematorium. Google it!

Kanji of the week



Fukai/shin (deep)

Language Lesson

I'll get there a little late.

Chotto okuremasu.

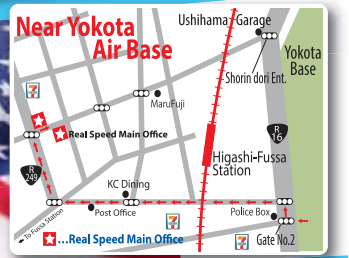
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The Weekly Crossword

by Margie E. Burke

ACROSS

- Like Hubbard's cupboard
- World record?
- Loud door sound
- System for servers
- Shipping container
- Roman robe
- Breathing apparatus
- Screen symbol
- Jacket fabric
- Family-tree study
- Library section
- Sneaky coward
- Catch in a sting
- Stately tree
- Potting mixtures
- Chopin piece
- H.S. lab class
- Track events
- Till fill
- Revs
- Digs for pigs
- Top anagram
- Request
- Token
- Valued highly
- Notre Dame, for one
- Shopping aids
- Workers' protection org.
- Glassmaking color
- Subsequently
- Edit
- Songstress Home
- Ogled
- Labor's partner
- Washstand vessel

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14				15						16		
17				18						19		
20					21				22			
23				24								
25	26	27						28		29	30	31
32				33			34	35		36		
37			38		39			40		41		
42				43		44			45		46	
47					48			49		50		
51					52	53						
54	55	56							57	58	59	60
61					62				63			
64					65					66		
67					68					69		

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- Skyrocket
- Master hand
- Puzzler's dir.
- Shakespeare works
- "See ya!"
- Perform penance
- Peaceful
- Thin-heeled shoe
- Off one's rocker
- Highly excited
- Countless
- "Any ___?"
- Skin blemishes
- Gift-tag word
- Actress Winger
- Fake name
- Artist's garment
- Kind of sentence
- Skilled
- Linguine sauce
- Permit
- Pick-me-up
- Ring finger's place
- Psychic
- Kind of loser
- Refine metal
- Railroad porter
- Fit to be tried?
- Mealtime lure
- Cavalry sword
- Shelter for doves
- White as a ghost
- What you used to be
- Great deal
- It may be carried
- Barely burn
- Mormons, for short

Answers to Previous Crossword:

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

SUDOKU

Difficulty: Medium

Edited by Margie E. Burke

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

HOW TO SOLVE:

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

Answer to Previous Sudoku:

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

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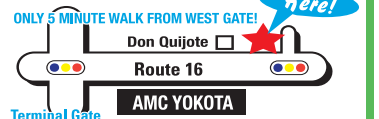


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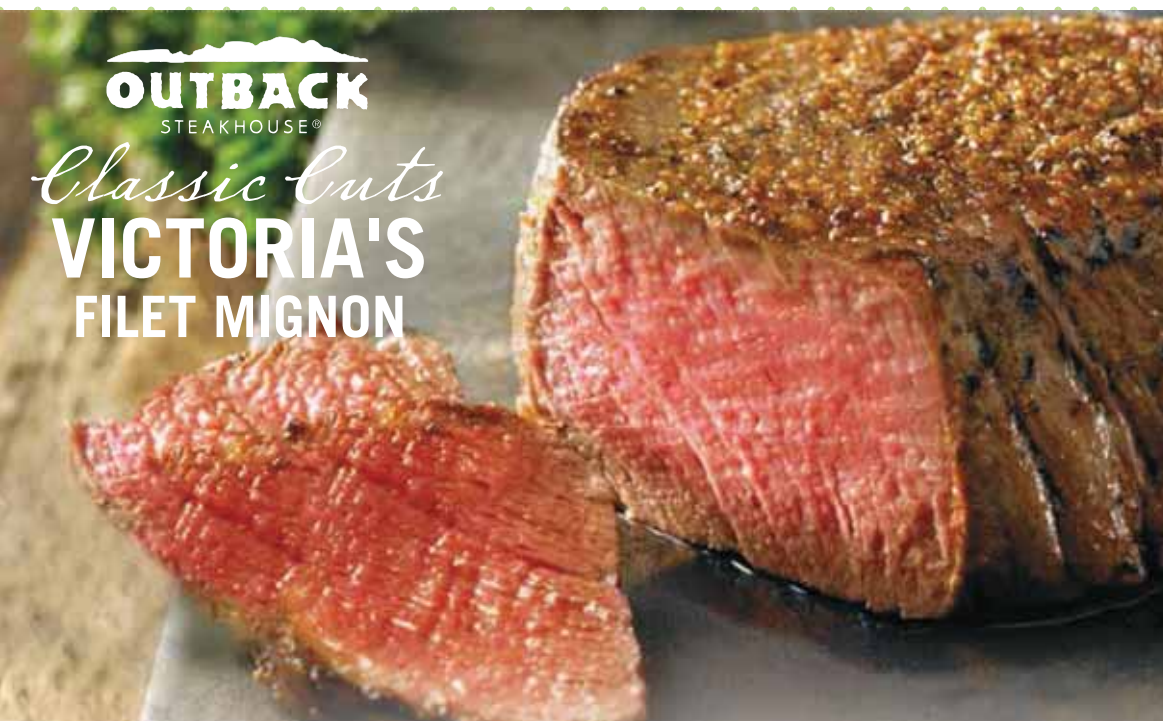
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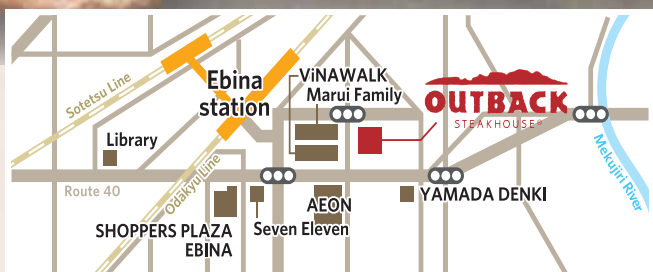


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What is mugicha?

Get to know Japan

BY LESLIE BETZ,
BYFOOD

Known for its diverse and unique tea culture, whether it's the standard sencha green tea, the rich and luxurious matcha from Kyoto, or the more subtle hojicha (roasted green tea) being modernized into tea lattes today, the Japanese appreciation of tea goes back centuries.

Being such an omnipresent and intrinsic part of Japanese culture, from imperial ceremonies to the home, each Japanese tea has its own distinct flavor, preparation, customs and cultural significance.

Outside of Japan, many herbal teas don't get as much attention as they should and one of the most refreshing is the humble mugicha, or Japanese barley tea. It's a traditional drink that goes back to the Jomon period which ended in 300 BCE, making it most likely older than green tea itself!

It's a symbol of simplicity and frugality with great health benefits and even has its own Mugicha Day, which is celebrated across Japan when the farmers reap barley, kicking off the rainy season.



What is mugicha?

Mugicha (also called mugiyu), is an herbal tea made of unhulled, roasted barley kernels. While popular across East Asia, it is especially popular in Japan during the summer. It is carefully roasted by skilled artisans in traditional sand ovens to bring out just the right balance of the toasty, slightly sweet and bitter flavors.

It's a beloved household tea and is often offered in place of water in locally owned family restaurants. If you have the chance to ask a Japanese adult about their childhood summer memories, this unassuming tea will often come up.

It's definitely something you'll find in mom's kitchen during the summer, and you'll often see children carrying it with them to school in large bottles. Tracing its roots back to ancient Japan, mugicha's enduring popularity offers a peek into its unique position today.



History of mugicha in Japan

Since barley was one of the original staple foods of the first settlers in Japan, it didn't take long for mugicha to be born. However, during the Heian Court period, only the imperial family and those close to them were allowed to enjoy mugicha.

As warlords increased in power and Japan fell into the Warring States Period, the samurai worked more closely with the imperial family, trying to gain supremacy, and began to enjoy mugicha as well. It was even featured in some of the highest level samurai's tea ceremonies.

Finally, after the country was unified during the peaceful and closed-off Edo period, peasants were granted more mobility, and fashionable young women began selling mugicha in street stalls along the roads, offering travelers a drink to refresh themselves. During the following Meiji Period where Japan was abruptly forced to open its borders, locals remained steadfast in their adoration of traditional barley tea, offering it to children and elderly as a source of purified water throughout the country's modernization.

During WW2, with everything being rationed, mugicha was a nice alternative to coffee, and after the war, the addition of the refrigerator in homes made chilled mugicha the household staple it is today.

How to make mugicha?

For you to enjoy a classic cup of mugicha yourself, you're going to need:

- Mugicha (packet or loose)
- Hot water
- Kyusu (Japanese teapot) or kettle
- Yunomi (Japanese tea cups)
- A pitcher for chilling (if preferred cold)

Most families use a packet form of barley tea, but you're welcome to use the loose barley kernels as well. Since the barley grains are physically a bit stronger than Japanese green tea, you'll need hot water at around 203°F. Pour one quart of hot water over your mugicha tea bags or loose kernels and wait.

Generally, Japanese barley tea should be steeped from 3-5 minutes, and at most up to 10 minutes if you prefer a stronger flavor. The tea packet can be steeped twice, so you are welcome to set it aside, or leave it in the steeped tea. If you're drinking it hot, you're good to go.

If you'd prefer your mugicha chilled, let it cool for about 30 minutes, pour the tea into a pitcher and store it in the fridge for up to two days. Since it does not have the antibacterial properties of green tea, do not store any longer than two days. Finally, serve in a yunomi as is or over ice.

If you want to try a cold brew, pour one liter of cold water over the tea packet into your pitcher, and steep for 2 hours. This method takes longer, but is said to bring out more subtle flavors, and definitely works if you're in a bit of a rush.



Can I sweeten mugicha?

Yes, you can sweeten mugicha with sugar, honey or other sweeteners to suit your taste preferences. However, it is uncommon to find ready-to-go sweetened teas as the culture values the natural varieties of tea flavors as well as their health benefits. While up to personal preference, sweeteners can dull the aromas of the tea as well as negate some of their health benefits.



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Mugicha? Japanese barley tea



How to roast barley grains for tea?

To take on a challenge and appreciate mugicha further, you can try roasting some on your own.

1. Spread raw barley grains out on a foil or parchment paper-covered baking sheet.
2. Roast at 450°F, tossing the grains every 5 minutes to get an even roast.
3. Roast the grains for about 20 minutes total.

According to the artisanal roasters in Japan, the grains are best right before they burn, so the 20 minutes is not exact. Keep an eye on your barley!

Does Japanese barley tea have caffeine?

Being an herbal tea, barley tea contains no actual tea leaves, meaning it has zero caffeine. It is also packed with vitamins, making it just right for keeping hydrated in the summer heat, and is great for those with caffeine sensitivities — such as children, the elderly or those who prefer not to drink any caffeine before bed.



Are there any mugicha health benefits?

Mugicha offers many digestive benefits as it acts as a natural antacid. This means it's great for soothing your stomach especially before, during and after a meal, and for those with GERD or other stomach sensitivities.

It also contains potassium which depletes quickly during the humid rainy season and hot summers of Japan. In addition, it contains Alka Pyrazines which help blood flow — these are also found in natto — as well as biotin and antioxidants that help keep skin and teeth healthy, while reducing inflammation.

Because it is naturally caffeine-free, it is a great addition to any kind of healthy routine and is a handy alternative for caffeinated or sugary drinks.

Where to try mugicha in Japan?

Cold mugicha can be found anywhere in Japan, from restaurants and family homes to grocery and convenience stores. You'll also likely find it in almost any vending machine, even in the most rural parts of Japan.

If you're looking to see how barley is harvested, visit Fukui Prefecture on the Coast of the Japan sea. Or, if you're lucky, make friends with a local Japanese person and they may invite you over for a home cooked meal and, of course, some barley tea.

Is mugicha gluten-free?

Mugicha is not gluten-free, so it should be avoided for those with allergies to cereal grains, celiac disease or gluten sensitivities. Traditional Japanese foods often include gluten, so knowing what to avoid — whether it's in drinks, sauces, soup bases or noodles — will make your food experience in Japan all that much better.

If you're not sure how to read labels or ask for gluten-free options, check out our list of gluten-free restaurants in Tokyo. And if you're looking to enjoy a traditional Japanese tea while avoiding gluten, the toasty, slightly caffeinated hojicha is an excellent alternative.



Mugicha FAQs

How is mugicha different from regular tea?

Mugicha has a unique nutty flavor and is caffeine-free, making it a great alternative for those looking to reduce their caffeine intake.

How do you prepare mugicha?

To prepare mugicha, simply steep the roasted barley in hot water for a few minutes, then strain and enjoy either hot or cold.

Is mugicha good for your health?

Mugicha is rich in antioxidants and has been linked to various health benefits, including improved digestion and weight management.

How long can I store mugicha?

Mugicha can be stored in an airtight container in a cool, dry place for up to six months, ensuring it stays fresh for longer.





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Map

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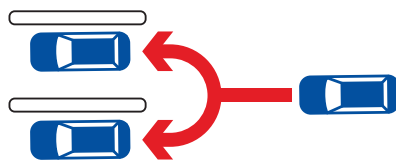
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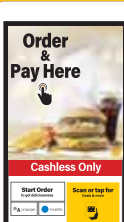
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You can easily place an order from the self-order kiosk.

Pay by credit/debit cards, QR code and electronic money (IC Card)



Coupons from the official app can be used.



Go to app store and search "McDonald's Mobile Order"



Order McD's in advance!

New mobile app keeps you from waiting in line!

- 1 Choose the location.
- 2 Make your order.
- 3 Pick 'for here' or 'to go' (Drive thru is not an option).
- 4 Choose how to pay.



Lots of tasty options at Sky Plaza Misawa

Pizzeria Massimo, a restaurant specializing in Neapolitan pizza and located on the 1st floor of Sky Plaza Misawa, offers a wide variety of delicious pizzas, as well as Hawaiian Huli Huli Chicken and Lani Chicken. At Dem's Café, also located at the Sky Plaza, you can enjoy snacks and desserts, including churros, pretzels and tapioca drinks. Inside the Aomori Prefectural Misawa Aviation Science Museum, stop by Jack & Betty II for tasty hot dogs and hamburgers. And during special events, there is a food truck outside that serves up some tasty treats.

★ DEMZU CAFE ★

(Open Hour)
Open weekdays
11:00 - 19:00
(Closed)
Every Wednesday

(Open Hour)
Open weekdays & Sundays
11:00 - 19:30
Fridays & Saturdays
11:00 - 20:00
(Closed)
Every Tuesday

Jack & Betty II

(Open Hour)
Weekday 11:00 - 16:00
Sat, Sun & Holiday 11:00-16:30
158 Kitayama, Misawa-shi,
Aomori-ken, 033-0022

Festival Food Truck at Sky Plaza

Jack & Betty

RESTAURANT INFO

A Taste of Japan

GORKHA PALACE

Nepali / Indian Restaurant
OPEN 11:00-22:00
046-874-8528
(090) 9137-5244 Viber/ Whatsapp also OK

NEW VEGAN CURRY now available with healthy herbs and greenery for the spice lover in you!

A taste of Yokosuka you'll never forget

We ensure that in every dish we prepare, we add the best herbs and spices specially handpicked from Nepal and India. With our belief deeply rooted in the Eastern philosophy, we regard every customer as a god, and make sure in every way that we treat them as one. Our 5-star experienced cooks and chefs ensure the food looks as good as it is healthy. Once you come and visit us, we are confident that you will make plans to come again. We eagerly await the opportunity to serve you our delicacies!!

RESTAURANT INFO



PIZZA HUT

Atsugi

1000-1900 (Delivery 1600-1830)
Offering: Pizza, Personal Pan Pizza, Wings, Pasta, Breadsticks, Dessert and multiple drinks

Yokosuka

Main Street Food Court

1000-2100 (No Delivery)

Offering: Personal Pan Pizza, Wings, Pasta, Breadsticks, Cheese sticks and multiple drinks
(No Large Pizza nor dessert served)

Bayside

1000-2100 (Delivery 1130-2030)

Offering: Pizza, Personal Pan Pizza, Wings, Pasta, Breadsticks, Dessert and multiple drinks



WingStreet



TACO BELL

Yokosuka

1000-2100 (Drive thru and Dine in)
Offering: Tacos, Burritos, Quesadillas, Salads, Desserts, Tostadas and many other TB promotional items



LIVE MÁS

Atsugi

1000-1900

Offering: Tacos, Burritos, Quesadillas, Salads, Desserts, Tostadas and many other TB promotional items

Sasebo

1000-1900

Offering: Tacos, Burritos, Quesadillas, Salads, Desserts, Tostadas and many other TB promotional items

