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INSIDE INFO



**UNOFFICIAL COINS,
PATCHES SHOW
PANDEMIC'S IMPACT**
PAGE 5



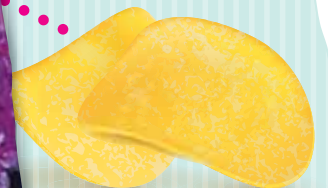
**Special 8-page
pullout inside!**



File photo

**Gotta have these
Japanese snacks!**

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Psychological benefits of running

Editor's note: At Stripes Japan, we love to share your stories and share this space with our community members. Here is an article written by Jennifer Brown, a hospital corpsman at U.S. Naval Hospital Okinawa. If you have a story or photos to share, let us know at japan@stripes.com.

BY JENNIFER BROWN,
STRIPES JAPAN



File photo

Exercise has many health benefits. In particular, running for me has been a great stress relief and a way to cope with life's challenges. When I go for a run, I take my mind off of my problems and literally focus on the road in front of me. When I was training for my first marathon, I had to sometimes go on runs when I did not feel like it. However, my perspective is that you always feel better having gone on run than if you had not gone on one. Running has also been beneficial to my well-being and mental health.

Though not every run is done in a group format, I have found that joining a running group helps promote feelings of togetherness and connectedness. One of my favorite stories about running is when I joined a running group on a whim. Though the group was already established, they let me join last minute and run a race with them across a portion of Okinawa's main island. Despite being unsure about my own running ability, joining the group on this endeavor was a once in a lifetime opportunity for me. The last time I had been running in a group was back in high school cross country, so running in a group across an island in Japan was a major accomplishment.

Whether you decide to run in a race or just go on a solo run for some fresh air exercise, there is no correct way to try this physical activity. Running is all about your pace and your miles, not about doing it perfectly. Joining the race felt uncomfortable at first, but eventually led to making great memories. What I enjoyed most about running in a team was that everyone was there with you in your struggle and were there to back you up.

Running is also a great way to get out of your dorm or barracks and off your electronic devices. This activity helped create a sense of self and community for me and it was also a good way to take a break from the computer, watching movies, or the like. On Okinawa, running allowed me to explore my surroundings and took me to so many places including nearby castles and areas around them.

Besides gaining some new running buddies and exploring new places I might not have if I'd only stuck to driving or staying indoors, this activity also had an effect on my general well-being. For instance, I developed a greater sense of self-worth and confidence as I became a seasoned runner. This was especially true when I was training for my first marathon. I did not believe I could ever run a half marathon, needless to say a full one, but once I gradually increased my mileage, I found that I was breaking down walls that I used to have in front of me.

Running is beneficial no matter whether you are a runner, want to get into running, or have many years of running under your belt. It is an inexpensive hobby that will get you out of your house and your heart rate pumping while also allowing you to push your physical and mental boundaries. It's a great hobby that has helped me on so many levels. Give it a try!

.....

Jennifer Brown is a hospital corpsman at U.S. Naval Hospital Okinawa. Originally from Florida, she joined the Navy in 2018 and has been on island for over a year. During her free time, Brown enjoys spending time with animals, running, rock climbing, and hiking. She is a graduate of the University of Central Florida and holds a Bachelor of Science in Psychology. Her professional interests include social work, animal welfare, and children.



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Uncertainty to confidence: One airman's voyage to success

STORY AND PHOTO BY
STAFF SGT MIQUEL JORDAN,
374 AIRLIFT WING

YOKOTA AIR BASE — Everyone deals with trials and tribulations, but what matters most is how a person takes those obstacles and turns them into victories.

Senior Airman Kembria Mims, 374th Operation Support Squadron host aviation resources manager, dealt with her fair share of let downs growing up, but her story is a reflection of what it means when you leave your troubles in the past and come out triumphant.

"When I was three years old, my father walked out of my and my mother's lives, and he never looked back," said Mims, who at the age of 12, was made aware the same man who left her remained in her siblings' lives. "I felt inferior, hurt – I couldn't help but wonder what could possibly be wrong with me? My self-esteem was affected greatly, but most of all my confidence."

This became a driving factor of the uncertainty she would face for years to come. The fear of failure crippled her will to participate in typical school activities like sports or academic clubs. Higher education never carried a thought in her mind, she admitted.

"Then one day everything changed. My aunt, who worked at our home military base, handed

me a U.S. Air Force brochure," Mims expressed as a simple smile came across her face and the octave in her voice slightly rose. "In that moment, I decided to start living for myself."

That is exactly what she did when she decided to join the ranks like so many before her to become a U.S. Airman. "I found that there was purpose in my pain and I wouldn't allow my father's absence to affect me anymore."

"When I arrived to Yokota in 2018, I informed my leadership that I wanted [Senior Airman] Below the Zone (BTZ). From that point on, they advised, mentored and provided me with opportunities to achieve my goal." She went on, "I've been blessed and fortunate with so many leaders, great mentors and peers that have helped me along the way, and have helped me rebuild my confidence."

Being given the opportunity to participate in activities with our sister branches, like U.S. Marine Corps Professional Military Enhancement courses, assisting the base First Four organization and being the president for her dorm council are a few contributions she's made during her time in the service. Not to mention, she also took on the task of news editor for her squadron's newsletter – quite a contrast to the young lady who avoided being a part of her school's extracurricular activities because she didn't



"I've been blessed and fortunate with so many leaders, great mentors and peers that have helped me along the way, and have helped me rebuild my confidence." Senior Airman Kembria Mims.

feel she was capable.

Mims' diligence and resilience eventually earned her an early promotion through the BTZ program. Her story is a precursor to what she hopes is a prosperous career and encouragement to whoever might be dealing with similar setbacks.

Mims' wingmen across the ranks, along with her hard work, motivation and dedication, helped her reach her BTZ goal and she's showing no signs of slowing down. In the words of the late rapper Nipsey Hussle, Mims "reached every goal [she] actually set, had to sit back down and rearrange that list," and

that's exactly what she's done.

As for those new ambitions, "For the short term, I want to get my Community College of the Air Force degree by summer. Long term, my bachelor's degree," she said. "My plan right now is to retire from the Air Force."

"I came in as a four-year enlistee and wasn't sure what I wanted to do, but now I'm sold on a career in the Air Force – I love the structure that the military provides."

When asked if there were any people, in particular, she attributed to her current success, Mims listed two individuals:

Tech Sgt. Michaelangelo Mesina and Master Sgt. April Martinez, both of the 374 OSS.

"Tech Sgt. Mesina specifically, helped me a lot, stepping out of the supervisory role with things in life I didn't know, coming into the Air Force," she continued, "with Master Sgt. Martinez being a female in the male-dominated military, her mentorship has helped me as well."

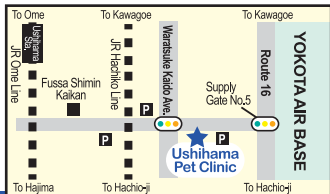
A rule of thumb Mims lives by is putting in the work for the best results, not the recognition. "I'm not a stripe chaser," she explained, "I believe in getting your role down pat and learning all that needs to be learned as far as your career field and rank goes, verses me just putting a stripe on just to say I have it."

For future hopefuls looking to be the next BTZ recipient for their squadron, or just someone considering a career in the Air Force, Mims left these words. "Step outside your comfort zone. I didn't have the push or the drive to do most things because of my lack of confidence, but I feel that if I would've stepped outside of my comfort zone and not backed away from things when they got tough, it would've been easier for me to transition into what I wanted to do in life."

"For me, the leap jumping into the Air Force – that's the biggest confidence move I've ever made."

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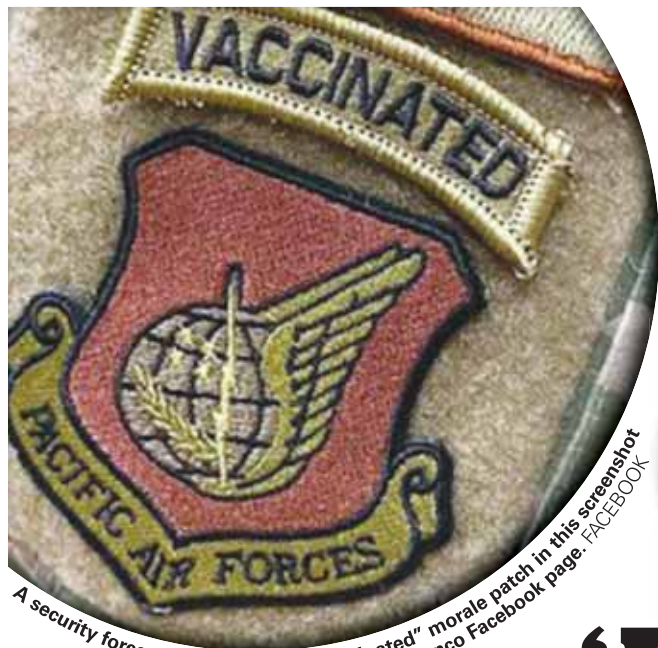


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The coronavirus pandemic is being immortalized in a colorful array of unofficial military patches and challenge coins.
Photo by Seth Robson, Stars and Stripes



‘I survived COVID-19’

Unofficial patches and coins show pandemic’s impact on troops overseas

BY SETH ROBSON,
STARS AND STRIPES
Published: February 9, 2021

The coronavirus pandemic is being immortalized in a colorful array of unofficial military patches and challenge coins sold near U.S. bases in South Korea.

Some patches display biohazard symbols or virus clusters, one shows a bottle of beer named “Covid 19 Extra” and many feature logos for military units stationed on the peninsula.

One challenge coin – tokens often handed out by commanders to recognize troops’ good work – features the U.S. and South Korean flags, along with the phrases “Katshi Kapshida” (Go Together) and “I Survived COVID-19.”

Over the past year in South

Korea, 500 U.S. service members contracted COVID-19, the potentially fatal respiratory disease caused by the coronavirus. Most tested positive after they stepped off an airplane from the United States.

Other virus-related morale patches are relatively simple. A photograph, apparently of a Pacific Air Forces airman posted on Facebook last week, shows a patch that reads “Vaccinated.”

Air Force rules about dress and appearance provided by public affairs officials Friday state that morale patches are not authorized on uniforms.

However, unofficial patches have been sold at bazaars on bases in Iraq and Afghanistan in recent decades and deployed troops have been known to wear them on the battlefield. For example, a U.S.

soldier supporting Iraqi troops during the Battle of Mosul in November 2016 was spotted wearing a “Hippie Killer” patch on his helmet.

The Velcro era means it’s easy to swap out patches, said Cord Scott, a professor of history, government and film for the University of Maryland Global Campus – Asia, who is based in South Korea.

“I know that some units are trying to get away from things like the Punisher patches (which depict a skull) but for the COVID patches these are things you might see on a backpack rather than on uniforms,” he said in a telephone interview Thursday.

The pandemic patches are a time marker, Cord added.

“You’re showing you were in a specific unit at a specific time and went through something,” he said.

In Japan, for example,



This challenge coin features the U.S. and South Korean flags, along with the phrases “Katshi Kapshida” (Go Together) and “I Survived COVID-19.”
Photo by Seth Robson, Stars and Stripes

challenge coins were used to commemorate Operation Tomodachi, the U.S. military relief effort following the 2011 Tohoku earthquake and tsunami. Coins featuring images of President

Donald Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un were minted in South Korea in 2018 in anticipation of one of their meetings.

Unit emblems and symbols make collector’s items of military patches and coins.

“Then you throw the coronavirus pandemic on top of it,” said Cord, who said he has his own stash of patches and recently sent some to the Pritzker Military Museum & Library in Chicago.

The coronavirus patches will likely be displayed in museums years from now, he said.

“The patches and coins are also significant as they reflect a time which 100 years from now may not be politically correct or understood without context,” he said.

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Sagami Depot’s new rec center features arcade, lounge area

STORY AND PHOTO BY NORIKO KUDO,
U.S. ARMY GARRISON JAPAN

CAMP ZAMA — A new recreation room featuring billiards, table tennis, darts and even classic arcade cabinets was officially opened to the public following a ribbon-cutting ceremony Feb. 5 at Sagami General Depot.

Dubbed the “Gauntlet Room,” the Directorate of Family and Morale, Welfare and Recreation-run facility also includes an air hockey table and a lounge area with leather couches and TVs, and is free to use for soldiers, family members and community members with Department of Defense ID cards.

The Gauntlet Room is located next to the Depot’s Sagami Lounge. Leadership from the installation’s 38th Air Defense Artillery Brigade, for whom the facility is named, and the Sagami Lounge business manager cut the ribbon in front of a small crowd of 38th ADA soldiers and

visitors.

Manager Scotty Reed said the space was originally home to Sagami Bowl, a bowling center that had been there since opening after World War II. But the machinery had begun to not work properly in recent years, so Reed went to soldiers from the 38th ADA — the only brigade currently headquartered in Sagami Depot—and asked them what kind of new facility they’d like to have there.

“This was our opportunity to utilize the space for [something] the soldiers wanted,” Reed said.

Reed spoke after the ribbon-cutting, saying he looks forward to the Gauntlet Room attracting many visitors to enjoy its many recreational amenities.

“I hope to see not only the soldiers, but also community members, visit ... and enjoy themselves,” Reed said.

Sagami Depot is located about a 40-minute drive from Camp Zama and Sagami Family



Capt. Ashley Patrick plays on a classic arcade game in the Gauntlet Room, a new recreation facility located on Sagami General Depot.

Housing Area, the two installations where soldiers assigned to the 38th ADA and their families live. For those who commute to and from the Depot every day for work, having a recreation facility nearby is beneficial, said Capt. Ashley Patrick.

“It is great for the soldiers to have a place like the Gauntlet Room right next to the chow hall to relax and have fun at before PT hours, during our lunch break, and after work hours,” Patrick said. “Since we spend a lot of time out here, [it’s] a morale

booster for the soldiers.”

First Sgt. Joey Salas, assigned to the 38th ADA, said the Gauntlet Room was something he and the soldiers in his unit had been looking forward to, and was “a long time coming.”

“Everything in here was all solicited ideas from the soldiers themselves,” Salas said. “The primary purpose of this facility is to give [them] the means to decompress and to have a little fun outside of the work area.”

Salas said he predicts many of the soldiers in his unit will use the facility regularly, particularly during their lunch break.

“It’s definitely truly an honor for this room to be named after our brigade — our soldiers, most importantly,” Salas said. “It’s going to be our legacy for all the future ‘Pacific Guardians’ who come and use this room.”

The facility is open Monday through Friday, from 6 a.m. to 3 p.m.

READ THE SIGNS

Learning Japan's most common hand gestures, body language cues

LIVE JAPAN

Japanese hand gestures and body language, as with each country's mannerisms, are often unique to the culture of Japan.

Keep reading below to learn more about common gestures you may encounter while in Japan such as bowing, beckoning, and conversation cues.

Japanese gestures: pointing to yourself

Some people from abroad may find it strange, but in Japan, people point to their faces when talking about themselves. In other countries, it is normal to place your hand on your chest, but in Japan, it is common to use your index finger to point at your face, near your nose.



Bowing in Japan: the ultimate in Japanese body language

The most common Japanese body language you will encounter while in Japan is bowing. Not only is it a sign of respect, but it is also the primary way to greet someone you meet face-to-face, whether they are friends or strangers.

Failing to bow in Japan may imply that you have bad manners while doing so will give the impression that you are humble and polite, especially when bowing to a stranger.

The proper way to bow

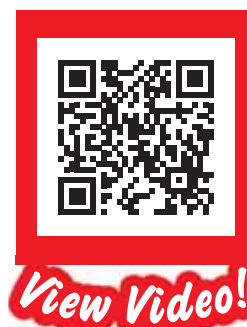
So, how to bow in Japan? The standard Japanese bow starts with a straight posture. Move your upper body downwards, and bow to a 45-degree angle. Men should keep their hands down and straight at their sides, while women usually keep their hands folded in front of them.

45°

The "come here" Japanese hand gesture

The "come here" hand gesture in Japan is unique. Raising your hand with the palm toward the person you are calling, move your fingers quickly up and down in unison.

In other countries, the gesture is the other way around, with the palm facing toward you and often with only the index finger moving to beckon someone to you. While this hand gesture is also used in Japan, it is hardly ever used to call someone over and would not be recognized as such by a Japanese person.



View Video!

Making an "X" with your fingers - check please!

Also in a restaurant or cafe context, it can be a little confusing at times when using Western hand signals indicating that you want the check. The easiest approach in Japan: simply make eye contact with your server and make a small "X" with your fingers - the check will come along soon!

Waving your hand in front of your face

The Japanese hand gesture of waving it back and forth in front of your face, with the thumb facing you and pinky away from you, means "no." When you're accused of something, it implies "Not me." or "No way!"

When you make this gesture after someone asks if you can do something, it means "No, I can't." It can also be used to say "No, thank you." when someone tries to give you something you don't need.



Crossed arms - the negative

When walking into a full restaurant, you may occasionally encounter an attendant who forms an X with their arms. Likewise, in other situations, such as if someone mistakenly enters the exit of a venue instead of the entrance, or if there is some kind of prohibition in place - such as in a non-smoking area - against a particular action, you may see a person in charge making the same gesture.

Simply put, it indicates a negative, refusal or decline of some sort.





Conversation cues

Japanese people use body language as conversation cues to let others know that they are listening. What may be surprising to you is the frequency of which they are used. When speaking to people who are not familiar with the Japanese language, these cues are used to check that the meaning of what is being said is fully understood.



Counting on your fingers

When counting on your fingers, Japanese people start with the fingers and thumb extended upward and then bend them down one by one with each sequential number. The order starts with the thumb, followed by the index finger, middle finger, ring finger, and pinky; each placed on top of the thumb.



Top spots to experience Japanese culture and traditions

There are so many incredible spots to experience Japanese culture! Here are a few of our top recommendations to do just that. Keep these in mind when travel to Tokyo is safe again.

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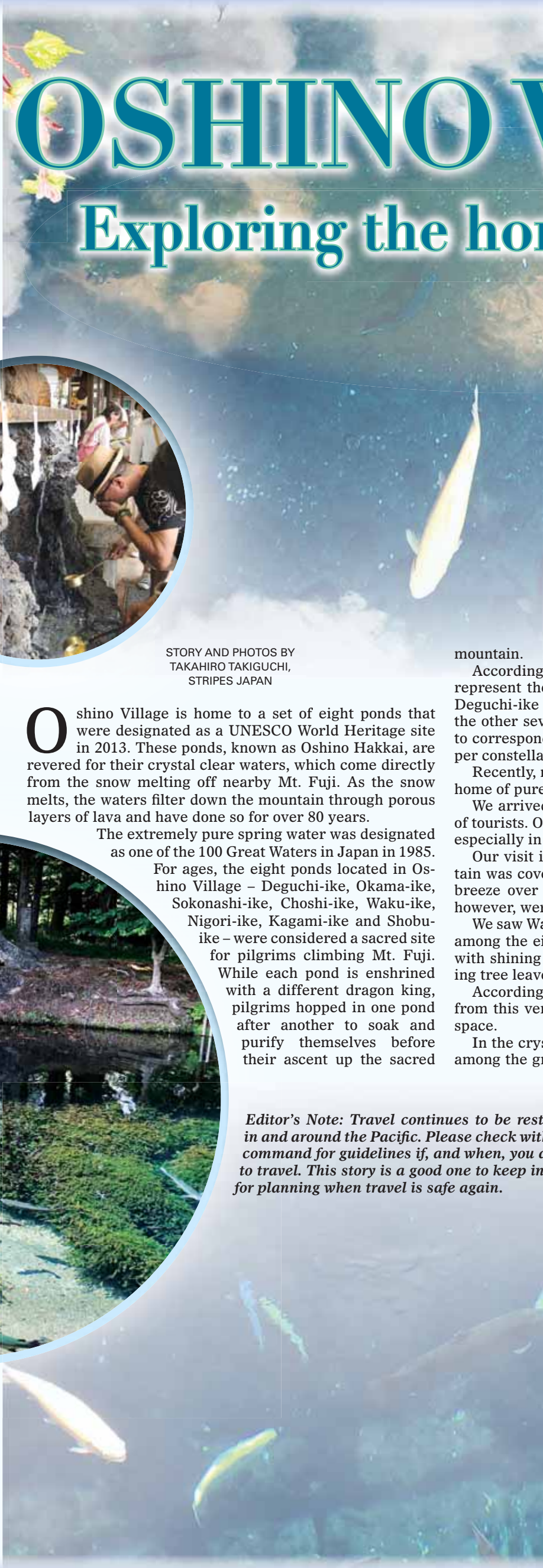
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OSHINO V

Exploring the ho

STORY AND PHOTOS BY
TAKAHIRO TAKIGUCHI,
STRIPES JAPAN

Oshino Village is home to a set of eight ponds that were designated as a UNESCO World Heritage site in 2013. These ponds, known as Oshino Hakkai, are revered for their crystal clear waters, which come directly from the snow melting off nearby Mt. Fuji. As the snow melts, the waters filter down the mountain through porous layers of lava and have done so for over 80 years.

The extremely pure spring water was designated as one of the 100 Great Waters in Japan in 1985. For ages, the eight ponds located in Oshino Village – Deguchi-ike, Okama-ike, Sokonashi-ike, Choshi-ike, Waku-ike, Nigori-ike, Kagami-ike and Shobu-ike – were considered a sacred site for pilgrims climbing Mt. Fuji. While each pond is enshrined with a different dragon king, pilgrims hopped in one pond after another to soak and purify themselves before their ascent up the sacred

mountain.

According to legend, the eight ponds represent the eight directions of the compass. The Deguchi-ike, the first pond, is the home of the dragon king who corresponds to the constellation of the Great Bear. Recently, the ponds have become a home of pure water for many tourists. We arrived in Oshino Village on a tour of tourists. Oshino is especially in the heart of the mountains. Our visit in Oshino was covered by a gentle breeze over the mountains, however, we saw the water among the trees with shining tree leaves. According to the legend, from this very space, the water flows among the green

Editor's Note: Travel continues to be restricted in and around the Pacific. Please check with your command for guidelines if, and when, you are able to travel. This story is a good one to keep in mind for planning when travel is safe again.

VILLAGE

me of pure water

to local legend, the eight ponds
e Polar Star and the Big Dipper.
represents the Polar Star, while
ven ponds are positioned in points
ding stars which form the Big Dip-
per.
my family and I took a trip to visit this
e water.
d at Waku-ike pond to a crowded area full
shino is known for the great views of Mt. Fuji,
the winter.
n the late summer, meant the majestic moun-
tained in clouds. The extremely fresh mountain
the ponds and cool, refreshing highland air,
re a reminder of our proximity to Fuji.
aku-ike pond, the largest and the most majestic
ight ponds, which looked like a giant emerald
green water reflecting the sky and surround-
es on its surface.
to signboard on the pond, NASA used water
ry pond for an experiment in making snow in
stal clear water, we saw many carp swimming
reen freshwater plants just below the surface.

stricted
h your
decide
mind



Oshino Village

LOCATION: 1514 Shinobugusa,
Oshino-mura, Minamitsuru-
gun, Yamanashi Pref.
(Village Hall)
URL: <http://www.vill.oshino.lg.jp/docs/2013091900041/>
TEL: 0555-84-3111



We were able to
sample a taste of
the spring water
from a dragon-
shaped faucet near
the pond. A surprise
to us, the water was
not too cold, though it
was smooth and sweet.

Afterward, we headed
toward the small open-air mu-
seum “Hannoki Bayashi Shiryo-
kan,” located near Waku-ike pond. The

admission is 300 yen (\$2.50) for middle schoolers or older.

From the observatory platform at the entrance gate, we
had a great view of the museum grounds, including a flower
garden, traditional farmhouses and watermill with classic
thatched roofs. We noticed one of the old farmhouses was
open for visitors, so we made our way over there to check
it out.

The 150-year old farmhouse exhibits various farming
tools, household items, swords and armor. We checked out
the displayed items in glass case, while walking around the
three-story wooden building.

Oshino is also known for tasty vegetables, soba, tofu and

Hannoki Bayashi Shiryokan

HOURS: 9 a.m. – 5 p.m.
LOCATION: 265 Oshigusa, Oshino-mura,
Tsuru-gun, Yamanashi Pref.
ADMISSION: middle schoolers or older -
300 yen, elementary schoolers - 150 yen,
ages 1-5 - 100 yen
URL: <http://hannoki.com/museum.html>
TEL: 0555-84-2587



eggs. We were approached by a vendor on our walk in the
area and were offered a sample of grilled corn. This corn
was fresh, crisp and sweet, unlike any ear of corn I could
get in the city. This flavor, the vendor said, is due to the
highland climate and extremely pure water from Fuji used
to water the crop.

Tofu made in the village boasts a rich and full-bodied
flavor. You can buy some at either Hakkai Tofu shop or
Sumiya Tofuten in the village.

There are a lot of noodle shops in the village offer-
ing their own taste, too. We dropped by the noodle joint
“Meisen Soba,” located in the parking lot. Various soba noo-
dles, available hot or cold, will set you back between 600 to
900 yen. We sampled soba with mountain vegetables and
ground potatoes. The soba noodle had a chewy yet smooth
texture with a refreshing sweet aroma, which went along
with the semi-bitter mountain vegetables. It was delicious!

We wrapped up our tour by filling up our pet bottles with
clean and tasty spring water at the noodle shop.

This short trip to Oshino left us refreshed, hydrated, and
gave us a taste of how the pilgrims of yesteryear transited
through the area in search of purification.

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Check out the
video!



Japan to celebrate emperor's birthday Feb. 23

BY TAKAHIRO TAKIGUCHI,
STRIPES JAPAN

While Americans celebrate the first President's birthday on Feb. 17, a few days later Japan will also be celebrating their own emperor's birthday on Feb. 23 as one of the 16 Japanese national holidays. Employees in Japan will have the day off and government offices will be closed on this day so plan ahead if you have official business.

Since former Emperor Akihito renounced on April 30 and the crown prince Naruhito was enthroned as the 126th Emperor of Japan in 2019, this will be the second time to celebrate the newly enthroned emperor.

Called "Tenno Tanjobi," the people of Japan celebrate the birthday of reigning emperor every year. Emperor Naruhito was born in 1960, and 2020 marked the first year where Feb. 23 will be a holiday for years to come.

Although the current designations of emperor's birthdays as national holidays was only legislated in 1948, the celebrating their emperor has been a custom since the ancient ages.

Birthdays of former emperors are no longer celebrated today except for the birthdays of the Meiji Emperor and the Showa Emperor. Today, the country observes Bunka-no-hi (Culture Day) on Nov. 3, the Meiji Emperor's birthday, and Showa Day on Apr. 29, the

Photo courtesy of the Prime Minister's Official Residence

Japan's national holidays associated with Emperor's Birthday

Feb. 23 - Emperor's Birthday - Emperor Naruhito (current emperor's Birthday)
Apr. 29 - Showa Day - Showa Emperor (Emperor Hirohito 1901- 89)'s Birthday
Nov. 3 - Culture Day - Meiji Emperor (Emperor Mutsuhito 1852-1912)'s Birthday

Showa Emperor's birthday.

Rare opportunity again to cancel

To celebrate the birthday of the reigning emperor, the public is invited to partake in the rare opportunity to see the emperor and inner garden of the Imperial Palace.

For the occasion, around 30,000 gather to greet the

Emperor, Empress and other members of the Imperial Family as they take their place on a balcony to receive the congratulations. This is one of only two chances each year where citizens are allowed to enter the inner garden; the other is Jan. 2.

During the appearance, the Emperor will often say a few words of gratitude while the visitors wave miniature

Japanese flags and shout out birthday salutations.

This is the second time Emperor Naruhito's birthday appearance at the Imperial Palace has been canceled due to the ongoing pandemic. In addition, both the Emperor Naruhito and Empress Masako opted for video messages instead of the usual New Year's appearances this year.

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Ex-emperor's birthday still celebrated

Like the birthday of Japan's current Emperor Naruhito (Feb. 23), April 29 was originally celebrated as the birthday of his grandfather, Emperor Hirohito. He reigned before, after and – most notably – during World War II. After his death in 1989, he was renamed Emperor Showa, and Japan's parliament kept his birthday as a national holiday.

His birthday, along with Constitution Memorial Day (May 3), Greenery Day (May 4) and Children's Day (May 5), form the string of holidays that comprise Golden Week.

The Showa Era is the longest and most dramatic reign of an emperor in Japan's history. Emperor Showa was the longest living emperor. He died at age 87 after reigning for 63 years. In fact, the Showa Era literally covers some of modern Japan's brightest and darkest hours.

– Takahiro Takiguchi

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Speakin' Japanese

Emperor talk

The Emperor's Birthday is a national holiday in Japan. Try the useful phrases for the Emperor's special day or your own!

"Otanjobi omedeto!" = Happy birthday!

("otanjobi" = birthday, "omedeto" = congratulations)

"Kokyo wa doko desuka?" = Where is the Imperial Palace?

("kokyo" = Imperial Palace, ".. wa doko desuka?" = where is ...?)

"Kokyo wa Tokyo ni arimasu." = The palace is in Tokyo.

(".. wa .. ni arimasu" = .. is in/at ..)

"Kyo wa Tenno-Tanjobi desu." = Today is the Emperor's Birthday.

("kyo" = today, ".. wa .. desu" = .. is, "Tenno" = Emperor)

"Nihon no shukujitsu no hitotsu desu." = It is also a national holiday in Japan.

("nihon no shukujitsu" = Japan's national holiday, "wa .. no hitotsu desu" = it is one of the ..)

"Anatano tanjobi wa itsu desuka?" = When is your birthday?

("anatano" = your, ".. wa itsu desuka?" = when is ..?)

"Watashino tanjobi wa ____ desu." = My birthday is ____.

("watashino" = my)

"Tenno" = Emperor
"Kogo" = Empress

"Syukujitsu" = Holiday

– 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 "Al" 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.



Explore Japan Open-Air Folk House Museum virtually

STORY AND PHOTOS BY TAKAHIRO TAKIGUCHI,
STRIPES JAPAN

While COVID-19 restrictions may be keeping you indoors and away from big crowds, join us for a virtual tour at the Japan Open-Air Folk House Museum in Kawasaki.

This vast open-air museum has a 25 authentic traditional houses and structures, which range from wealthy merchant homes to rustic farmhouses.

Travel back in time as you visit each of the museum's buildings set in a typical Japanese rural landscape. Each home or structure is set up with furniture and various tools from the each represents,

Japan Open-air Folk House Museum

LOCATION: 7-7-11 Masugata, Tama-ku,
Kawasaki City, Kanagawa Pref.

URL: https://www.nihonminkaen.jp/facilities_english.html

completing the vintage feel.

Try a taste of Japan on site at the soba noodle shop housed inside a folk house. And after that, try one of the many activities like indigo-dyeing or handloom-weaving workshops offered in the museum

throughout the year.

Nearby you'll find a few of Kawasaki's other attractions like the Fujiko Fujio Museum dedicated to the cartoonist who created "Doraemon" and Kawasaki Science Museum furnished with the world's newest planetarium.

So enjoy this tour from the safety of your home first, then, add this area to your list when travel is safe again.

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View Video!



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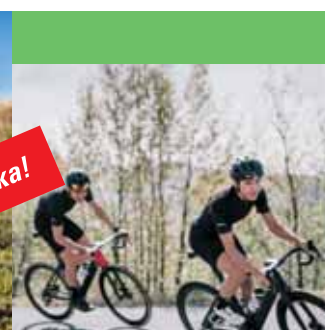
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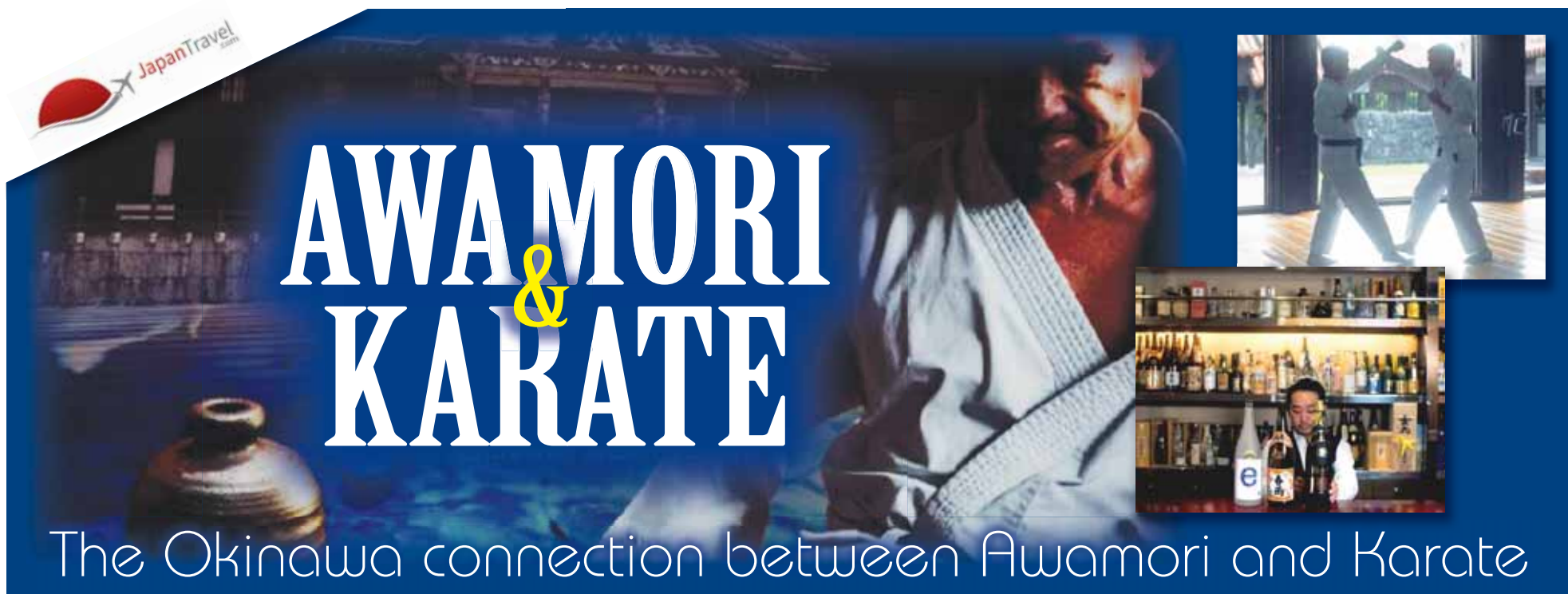
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BY GEOFF DAY,
JAPAN TRAVEL

Okinawa is well-known as the birthplace of karate, but Japan's southern islands are also home to the creation of a unique distilled liquor known as awamori. Karate and awamori share an interesting and interconnected history; we have prepared a nine-part video series that will take you through both the origins and modern-day state of each.

We highly recommend this official website where you can watch videos and discover more info on Awamori and Karate.

During the Ryukyu era (1429-1879), Okinawa's subtropical climate gave rise to its own island culture, regional cuisine, and a unique brand of liquor known as awamori. Awamori became a prized commodity when it was approved for production to supply the Satsuma region (modern-day Kagoshima) on mainland

Japan. Exclusively produced in Okinawa's Shuri district under strict control, both the creation process and supply routes were fiercely protected. The warriors hired to protect the secrets of Awamori were highly trained in the local martial arts of Chinese influence and Ryukyu refinement. These martial art practitioners were widely revered and respected for protecting Okinawa's land and local products such as awamori. This was the origin of karate.

Okinawa attracts people from around the world to train and learn about karate's origin. Karate has over 100 million enthusiasts in more than 190 countries around the world. As a form of exercise, karate is regarded for strengthening both mind and body — one of several factors that may have helped make Okinawa home to one of the longest life expectancies in the world!

Awamori has been a



Photos by Zaid Izzuddin

valuable commodity to Okinawa since the Ryukyu Kingdom era. The local liquor brings the people of Okinawa together — even those who practice the local martial arts.

The relationship between awamori and karate

As mentioned above, awamori is the liquor of Okinawa: a distilled, rice-based spirit native to the region. It shares a history with karate, whose early practitioners helped protect the thriving awamori business centered around Okinawa's Shuri district.

Karate was formed, in part, as a way to protect the secrets and supply routes of Okinawa's awamori from the dangers of intruders and thieves, and, to this day, remains a form of protection and self-defense. The deep connection between karate and awamori has survived the test of time and when it's time to unwind, awamori is the drink of choice.



When in Okinawa, discover awamori

Visitors can gain a deeper understanding of Okinawan culture by getting to know awamori — the rice spirit closely connected to the local way of life. The locally distilled rice spirit is loved for its mellow flavor and aroma representing the soul of Okinawa.

Awamori is integrated into almost every facet of food, from chili-based condiments to cocktails, and is the drink of choice during mealtime. Known for local offerings like soki soba or rafute pork belly, Okinawan

cuisine truly comes alive when paired with awamori.

While in Okinawa, it's recommended that you experience and taste awamori in a variety of ways. Have a look at the video to learn how Okinawans enjoy this drink in their daily lives.



The ways to drink awamori

The taste of awamori varies greatly and tends to taste even better as time passes. There are also differences in the storage process that create interesting taste variations, such as the type of container or location of the storage (some awamori are even stored in caves!). Awamori's flavor changes over time as it matures to produce a deeper, more mellow taste.

Each regional distillery has their own take on how best to enhance flavors and aromas through distillation and storage. Awamori that has been stored for more than three years is called 古酒 (kusu). The longer it is stored, the more mellow the taste and the deeper it becomes.

There are many ways the locals drink awamori and each presents a different taste profile. For purists, the best way to explore the tastes is to try a neat version of the drink, though no one will fault you for cutting it with water, soda, or ice. Many locals also love awamori when mixed as a cocktail. Regardless of your preferred style, you will likely enjoy Japan's oldest distilled spirit.



Cocktail drinks made with awamori

Awamori is used in various ways to mix cocktails that accentuate the flavor profile. In Okinawa, there are a variety of specialty cocktails taking advantage of local fruits and mixtures that can only be found on the island.

The tropical fruits of Okinawa such as shikuwasa, passion fruit, and mango all create sweet and easy-to-drink flavors. There are also mixes with teas and coffees for a more subdued flavor. For those who are a bit adventurous, you might even try the local goya (bitter melon) cocktail!

Awamori cocktails offer a whole new way to experience Okinawa's local spirit and can be enjoyed by anyone (of drinking age).



The awamori distillery tour

There are nearly 50 awamori distilleries in Okinawa, each with its own unique atmosphere, experience, and preferred method of distillation.

The process of making awamori is one that is as complicated as it is time-consuming. After centuries of refining the process, the locals have turned refining awamori into an art form. People from all over Japan come to Okinawa to taste and purchase awamori.

Each distillery is filled with the machines and materials used to create the local liquor. Many will offer a factory tour, though the most secretive areas and ingredients are not available to the public. Take the tour to learn about how awamori is made and see the steps involved from creation to maturation to storage. Try before you buy with a tasting session, then take your souvenir bottle home.



View Website!





When in Okinawa, discover Karate

→ Okinawa is known for its endless and beautiful beaches but it is also the birthplace of karate. As such, there are many places in Okinawa that are dedicated to informing tourists about the rich karate culture that has worked its way into the lives of the Okinawan people.

One great way to get to know Okinawa karate is to visit the historical monuments and facilities dedicated to karate. Some of these facilities allow tourists to experience karate directly through demonstrations. There are also world-renowned facilities for the sale of karate clothing and related supplies.

Experiencing real Okinawan karate

Okinawa is the birthplace of karate and many people from all over the world travel here to practice and learn this sacred and enriching martial art.

Around Okinawa, you can find traditional dojos that invite foreign visitors to train. Welcoming beginners and experts alike, you can find programs tailored to learning karate, as well as the more health-and-wellbeing aspects associated with the training ritual.

Training is conducted according to individual purposes such as learning traditional martial arts, improving one's

mind and breathing, or maintaining health and diet.

Visitors who have never experienced karate can feel free to try by observing the practical skills of karate experts. By doing so they will come to understand and feel the power of karate.

The different schools of Okinawan karate

Since karate plays an important role in the lives of the locals, many dojos across Okinawa practice the martial art. As such, communities and groups formed, each with slight variations, though all forms of karate coexist harmoniously.

As the birthplace of karate, Okinawa is home to three of its original forms — Naha-dii, Shur/Tomari-dii, and Uechi-ryu — which evolved into Okinawa's modern-day karate schools.

Goju-ryu uses power and upper-body strikes contrasting with Shorin-ryu's agility and lower-body kicks, while Uechi-ryu combines elements of both styles.

Exploring health and lifestyle with karate

Okinawa is home to one of the longest life expectancies in the world thanks to a healthy lifestyle with a focus on diet and exercise. Not only a martial art, karate also plays an integral part

in the way of life and daily exercise for the people of Okinawa.

Karate's influence in Okinawa has helped inspire new ways to exercise based on martial art forms, movements, and breathing techniques. Karate is used

for its health benefits as a form of exercise that trains both mind and body. The exercises are heavily derived from karate movements and forms that are practiced in dojos all over Okinawa.

Giving rise to health benefits for both mind and body, it's easy to see why awamori and karate are firmly rooted in the local culture and community. Check out the official website to view all of the videos.

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10 Popular Japanese snacks

STORY AND PHOTOS BY DARA ROBINSON,
LIVE JAPAN



Photos courtesy of Sugoi Mart

This has been a trying year in many ways, but one bright spot has been all the specialty tastes that have been released for our favorite Japanese snacks and treats! We underwent a taste test of them all to give you an idea of what they taste like!

1 Chicago Pizza Flavor Cheetos

We know that Cheetos are originally an American snack, but Japan has made them their own. They regularly release special, Japan-specific flavors that you can't find anywhere else. Currently, you can find Chicago Pizza, Prosciutto and Cream Cheese, and Spicy Chicken Wings Cheetos sitting on the shelves of the supermarket.

Over the past few years, Chicago-style pizza has been seeing more and more popularity in Japan, so it's not surprising that snack manufacturers picked it up too! The Chicago Pizza flavor has a pleasantly mild cheesy flavor and a cheesy, slightly spicy aroma to it. The overpowering taste however comes from the pizza base – tomato. There is also a definite hint of pepperoni. Certainly makes a yummy snack. We have our eye on the Spicy Chicken Wings variety to try next time!



2

Demon Slayer Kororo

Kororo gummies are made with real fruit juice and are said to have a very unique texture. According to Japan Crate, they are very divisive, with people either loving them or not for the texture alone! Right now, Demon Slayer (Kimetsu no Yaiba) is one of the biggest hit movies of 2020, and so we thought it was only right to try the limited edition Demon Slayer Hinokami Cola flavor.

Immediately upon touching the candy, it's easy to see how the texture baffles people. It is soft on the outside but seems to have a firm inside. Then when you bite into it, it's actually soft, with a sort of waxy layer on the outside. The taste itself is a nice and tasty cola flavor, but what makes these unique is definitely the texture – if you try it, you'll understand!



3 Doritos (Taco flavor)

Like the Cheetos, Doritos are another American snack that made our list. Doritos came to Japan in 1987, over 20 years after the U.S., but they quickly made the chip their own, producing some exciting flavors that we're surprised haven't become a thing abroad too. 2020 has given us Wasabi, Avocado and Cheese, and Taco flavors to enjoy.

We tried the Taco flavor and we have to say, we come across people all the time who are looking for good Mexican food in Japan – we should simply refer them to these chips! They are both delicious and authentically “taco” tasting. It might not be quite actual Mexican food, but these Doritos are pretty good all the same. If you're after a mouthwatering snack packed full of flavor, we recommend these Taco Doritos.



4 Giant Pocky

Pocky is a ubiquitous Japanese snack, first introduced in 1966. People like them as they are both sweet and savory and not too much of either. Like other snacks, their flavors are numerous, such as the unique Almond Crush, Creamy Vanilla, and Heart-Shaped Strawberry. Did you know that you can also buy GIANT Pocky? It's like a regular Pocky, only much bigger – double the taste bud pleasure! They come in Sweet Potato, Chocolate, and Strawberry flavors.

After giving these a taste, we can tell you that they taste just like regular Pocky, only significantly thicker. This makes them much more satisfying and you really get a decent helping of chocolate along with the pretzel.



5 KitKat (Apple pie flavor)

Despite originally being a British invention, KitKat is probably most famous in Japan, where their hundreds of special flavors serve as the perfect souvenir for those completing their Japan voyage. This year, they released an Apple Pie flavor, which we just had to try, being lovers of all things apple (and chocolate for that matter).

Surprisingly, the chocolate was purple – not what you would expect for something that's supposed to taste like apple pie. The aroma, however, really did smell like a mouthwateringly sweet baked apple. It tastes like apple pie indeed, with strong undertones of cinnamon. We highly recommend these Apple Pie KitKat; they're definitely a “hit.”



6 Mystery Pringles

Another American chip brand, Pringles are famous all over the world. Although partial to the sour cream and onion flavor, we couldn't resist trying the latest taste released in Japan, the “Mystery Pringles.” The flavor is not specified on the tube, so we had no idea what to expect – which is half the fun!

With trepidation, praying we weren't going to be eating “natto” flavored chips, we slowly took a chip. Appearance-wise they look to be covered in pepper, however the taste was nothing of the sort. We'll say no more as we don't want to spoil the surprise, but rest assured that they are quite appetizing!



7 Oreos (Matcha roll cake flavor)

If there is any flavor that simply screams “Japan,” it is matcha, or green tea. Therefore it is no surprise that a special edition version of the classic Oreo has been released, featuring “matcha roll cake” on a thin crispy cookie. Made with real green tea powder, the taste is said to be authentic to the real Japanese matcha.

Upon tasting these cookies, we were surprised at just how strong the green tea taste is. They're definitely much less sweet than regular Oreos, and both the biscuit and the cream are thinner. If you are a fan of matcha, you'll definitely love these, even if you don't usually go for Oreos.



8 Pikachu PURE Gummies

Gummy candy seems to be very popular in Japan. In any convenience store or supermarket, you can find many different tastes and brands. Of course, like everything else in Japan, they have limited edition seasonal varieties. These special Pokemon inspired Pikachu gummies caught our eye, because who doesn't love Pikachu?

The candy inside is shaped like Pikachu and is covered in a tangy sugar coating. It tastes strongly like lemon, with that nice sour kick to it. Basically these are regular lemon sour gummy candies that happen to be shaped like Pikachu, making them that much cooler than the average gummy. If you like Pokemon and lemon, definitely give these a go.



9 Puku Puku Taiyaki (Watermelon, bouble berry chocolate & strawberry flavor)

Puku Puku Taiyaki are retro, fish-shaped sweets with an outside biscuit similar to an ice cream cone and a crispy flavored inside. They are said to be a nice and light snack which aren't too sweet. This year, we found Watermelon, Double Berry Chocolate, and Strawberry tastes.

We tried the Strawberry flavor and were pleasantly surprised by how nice it was! Really light while still being sweet. The wafer on the outside is crisp and simple but tasty. The strawberry-flavored inside almost dissolves the second it enters your mouth, giving true meaning to the phrase “melt in your mouth.” Together, they make an amazing combination!



10 Chocolate Eggs by Furuta

Furuta produces a range of chocolate eggs made with rich and creamy Hokkaido milk. Each egg has a small toy inside, similar to a Kinder Surprise. Japan Crate recommended the Animal Crossing and Pokemon editions to us, promising they are all the rage right now.

Inside the Animal Crossing box was a chocolate the size of an egg, with milk chocolate on the outside and white chocolate on the inside. The shell was nice and crisp, and the chocolate was sufficiently milky. One could see themselves getting addicted to these easily. The toy was an added bonus, in our case,

a dog named Caramel. Definitely not for small kids as it is quite a choking hazard.

While some of these snacks are seasonally or promotionally limited, if you wish to try them for yourself, you can most likely find them at most supermarkets, convenience stores, and snack shops. Japan Crate also offers them all. Past crates have included the Apple Pie KitKat flavors, the Pikachu gummies, the Puku Puku Taiyaki, the Wasabi Doritos, and the Demon Slayer Kororo. We wonder what will be inside the next crate!



Stripes Sports Trivia

Soccer, football - whatever you call it - the game is massively popular around the world. There are countless leagues across the globe, but right at the top of them all is the English Premier League. With 13 overall titles, including a pair of three-peats, which club stands above all others in the EPL?

Answer

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Kanji of the week

顔

Kao (face)

Language Lesson

What time is it?

Ima nanji desuka?

SUDOKU

Difficulty: Easy

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

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Edited by Margie E. Burke

HOW TO SOLVE:

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

Answers to Last Week's Sudoku:

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

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The Weekly Crossword

by Margie E. Burke

ACROSS

- In this way
- Bailey of "Hello, Dolly!"
- Bubbly drink
- Second to none
- Sharpshooter Oakley
- German automaker
- Fountain fare
- Plum or apricot, e.g.
- TV show opener, often
- Cattle catcher
- Something to lend
- Vigor's partner
- Lament loudly
- Descend
- 1942 flick "My ___ Sal"
- Go bad
- Handel specialty
- Kilauea flow
- Small variety (var.)
- Seductress
- Roof projection
- Not too bright
- Pricing word
- Uncontrollable
- Cry softly
- Very long time
- Suds source
- Met highlights
- Roy Rogers ingredient
- Shrewd bargain
- Flat floater
- Cut, maybe
- Hardens, as clay
- Troop group
- Flat-topped hill
- On one's toes
- Small particle

DOWN

- Small sample
- Big to-do
- 1977 Alan O'Day hit, "___ Angel"
- Clothing line?
- Footnote word
- Place in a crypt
- Soon, to a poet
- Skin infection
- "School Daze" director
- Word before reef or snake
- Composer's creation
- Kauai keepsakes
- Type of sax
- GM's birthplace
- Like some grins or twins
- On a trip, maybe
- Make-up artist?
- Furry one, in internet slang
- Concert keyboard
- Intentions
- Easy run
- Sow's chow
- Finish a drive?
- Chef's need
- Left-handed Beatle
- Essential
- Hugh Laurie series
- Comedian
- Carvey
- Birdwatcher's lure
- "I swear!"
- Rigatoni, et. al.
- Ill-suited
- Midler of music
- "Excuse me ..."
- Went on horse-back
- Van Gogh flower
- Garden tool
- Part of Ringo's kit
- Schedule abbr.

Answers to Last Week's Crossword:

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

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The background is a rich, textured collage of Japanese culinary elements. In the top left, there are two small dark bowls filled with a light-colored liquid, possibly soy sauce or miso, next to a small dark teapot. To the right, a cluster of bright orange citrus fruits, likely daidai (citrus), is shown. Below the citrus, a black plate holds a piece of salmon topped with a green garnish. In the center-right, a wooden bowl is filled with white rice, with a pair of wooden chopsticks resting on top. The bottom of the image is dominated by a variety of fresh ingredients: several pieces of nigiri sushi (salmon and tuna) are in the bottom left; a basket of fresh mushrooms, including shiitake and enoki, is in the bottom center; and a large piece of cooked crab is in the bottom right. A bundle of green scallions and a sheaf of straw are on the left side.

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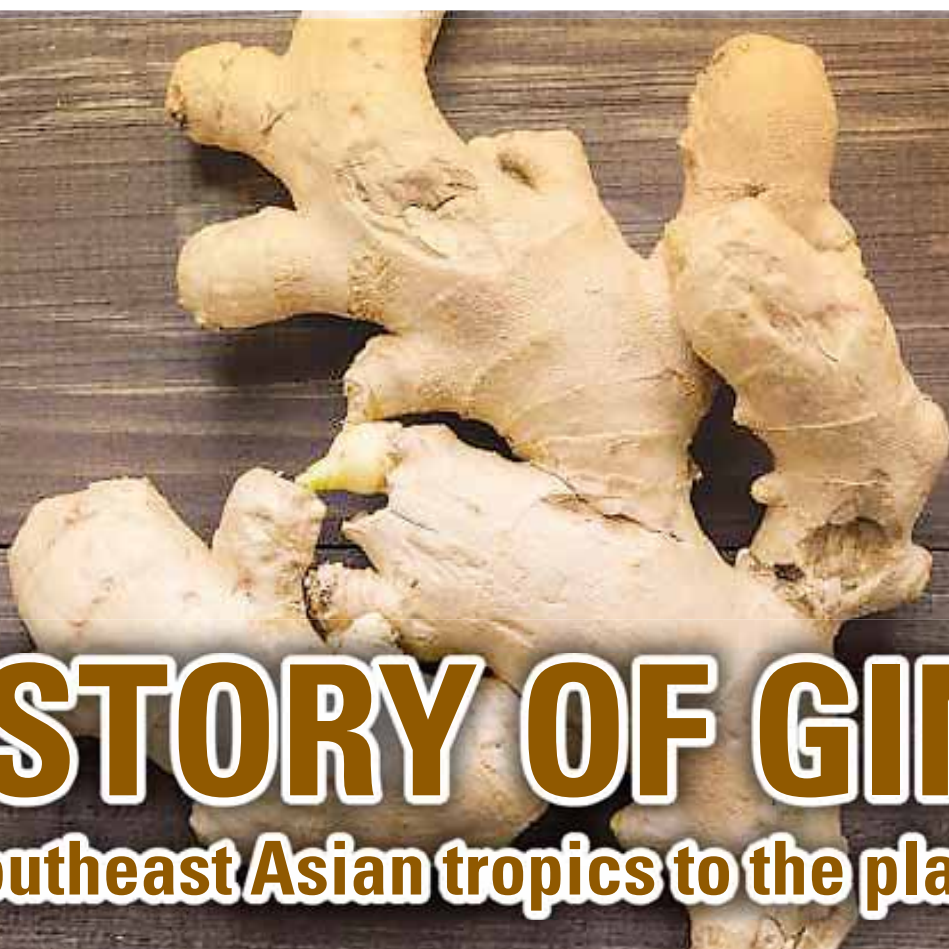
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RESTAURANT INFO



THE STORY OF GINGER

From the Southeast Asian tropics to the plates of Japan

STORY AND PHOTOS BY
LIISA WIHMAN,
METROPOLIS MAGAZINE

A soft pink hill of pickled ginger, often nestled beside a green plastic leaf, is as signature to traditional Japanese cuisine as are the small seafood-topped pillows of rice it accompanies—sushi.

Both the mature, brown-skinned ginger root shoga and the tender, pink-skinned young root shin-shoga are common in Japanese cuisine, chopped and grated into a wide variety of marinades and dishes from pork shogayaki to chicken meatballs. Ginger is also an important ingredient in many types of tsukemono (Japanese pickles), from the pink, vinegar-pickled ginger gari eaten to cleanse the palate between different types of sushi, to beni shoga, a bright red ginger pickle that often sits on top of everyday dishes like yakisoba, okonomiyaki and curry rice.

Not many would guess that this knobbly, aromatic root had to cross continents and take help from monks to become such an indispensable part of the Japanese food landscape.

While the history of sushi reaches over a millennium backwards, the cultivation and

use of ginger is even more ancient. As a species, it is thought to originate from the tropics of Southeast Asia, where the lantern-like flowers of its wild relatives brighten up the steamy forests. Botanically, it belongs to the vast family of Zingiberales, to which cardamom, galangal, turmeric and other familiar culinary species also belong. Even bananas and plantains are distant relatives to ginger. Ginger also has a botanical cousin called myoga with mildly ginger-flavored, soft purple flower buds that are used in cooking. The buds can be barbecued on skewers, or sliced thinly and served as a fragrant garnish in foods.

But of all these, the humble ginger may have the longest history in human cultivation. Not only is it unknown in the wild, ginger can also—unlike its relatives—only be cultivated by dividing the root and not by growing it from seeds. Archaeological finds from settlements of the early inhabitants of India and China indicate that they cultivated and used ginger as long as 7,000 years ago.

The first written records of ginger appear in China some two and a half millennia ago. These early texts are said to be written by Shennong, “Divine Farmer”, who is recognized as the father of traditional Chinese

medicine. In order to evaluate herbs and describe their suitability as remedies, he is said to have tasted tens of different herbs daily. He miraculously survived the process to author the legendary Shennong Bencao Jing, the first book about herbal medicine in China. In it, ginger is noted for its healing properties—a strengthening herb that is capable of maintaining health and wellbeing.

One Chinese proverb goes, “food and medicine share the same roots.” Ginger’s medicinal qualities added another advantage to using the spicy and aromatic root. It became a staple in Chinese cuisine, prepared and consumed in a remarkable number of ways: ginger wine and ginger-flavored tea; honeyed ginger, chopped or grated in sauces and marinades; and even as pickled condiment. The great Chinese philosopher and teacher Confucius himself demanded that ginger was never to be removed from the table during his every meal.

Ginger arrived on the shores of Japan from China and Korea during the early first millennium, when cultural contacts between the countries brought knowledge of Chinese traditional medicine and use of herbs for healing. Later, during the Nara Period (710-794 CE), as Buddhism spread throughout the islands, Chinese traditional medicine went hand-in-hand with its teachings. Buddhist monks used herbal medicine to treat locals while teaching them about Buddha—an excellent way to create respect, spread knowledge and gather followers for both fields.

When ginger found its way to Japanese food plates is uncertain, but its connection to medicine prevailed. To this day, herbs and vegetables that are used to garnish Japanese



foods are called yakumi, which means “condiment” but also “medicinal flavor.” The word is thought to have derived from the herb-filled mixtures used since ancient times by practitioners of Chinese medicine. An ideal yakumi garnish is not just pretty to look at but also good for the health, a combination for which ginger may be the poster child.

Nowadays, ginger drinks are common home remedies used year-round. Shogayu is a ginger tea with a soothingly soupy consistency used as a home remedy to treat the common cold, as the spicy root is believed to warm up the body in chilly weather. During the humid summers, a sweet, cold ginger drink called hiyashime is thought to help with tiredness caused by the heat. Another sweet treat is candied ginger, shoga no sato zuke that is sometimes taken against travel and morning sickness—or just as a fast pick-me-up on the road.

With such a significant role to play on the culinary and home remedy scene, it is no surprise that ginger features even in other areas of Japanese culture. Anime fans can follow the long-published Inuyasha manga series by Rumiko Takahashi, where the prickly Shoga

has a side role as an old female insect demon who is engaged to the aptly named Myoga. Shoga chases her unwilling fiancé across the country, trying to make him settle down and marry her.

The spiritually inclined may also be interested in Shoga Matsuri, or Ginger Root Festivals, that are held every September—for example, at the Shiba Daijingu Shrine in central Tokyo, and at Ninomiya Shrine in Akiruno. During the festivals, portable mikoshi shrines are carried around in order to honor Shinto gods, and open-air stalls are filled with fresh ginger roots, with stallholders shouting “protects against evils” or “if you eat ginger, you’ll be free from colds” to festival-goers and potential customers—a perfect combination of religious devotion and herbal medicine merged together.

So next time, while picking at the tiny pink hill of pickled ginger beside your sushi, spare a thought for the long journey the humble root took, from the steamy tropics of Southeast Asia across the continent, over the sea in the medicine trunks of Buddhist monks, to becoming an indispensable part of both Japanese cuisine and culture.



JAPANESE MUSHROOMS

An umamitastic world of endless flavor

TOFUGU.COM

Mushrooms are an essential ingredient in Japanese cuisine, and there are so many varieties to choose from. Hopefully this guide will make things a bit easier on you. It will tell you what a mushroom is, their types and uses, as well as what makes them so darn delicious. I couldn't cover every mushroom that grows in Japan, but I tried to cover the types you can usually find for sale. But before we start:

WARNING: Do not go foraging for mushrooms unless you know what you're doing. That means you have lots of experience learning first-hand from another expert. There are lots of tasty mushrooms out there, but there are also many that could give you a stomach ache or worse. The vast majority of us should content ourselves with what's available in stores.

What are mushrooms and why are they so yummy?

A mushroom is, of course, a fungus. More specifically, it is the fleshy, fruiting body of a fungus. All mushroom are fungi, but not all fungi are mushrooms. Mushrooms sometimes usually have stems and caps, and typically have gills. Those are the little frills you see on the underside of a mushroom's cap. Those gills produce spores that, in turn, produce more fungi. The mushroom is connected to more fungal structure embedded in its food source, whether that be the soil, a tree, or something else.

A big factor in the flavor of many mushrooms is their umami. Umami basically means "deliciousness," but was applied by scientist, Ikeda Kikunae, to mean a sort of rich, savory flavor. Ikeda was studying the science behind the flavor, and discovered that glutamate was the cause. Ikeda mainly used kombu dashi for his studies, and subsequent studies also looked at dried bonito flakes. However, in 1957, Kuninaka Akira discovered that the ribonucleotide GMP found in shiitake mushrooms also gave an umami flavor. Based on that research he later discovered that when ingredients rich in glutamate are combined with those with ribonucleotides, the resulting umami is stronger than each individual part.

Buna-shimeji (Hypsizygus tessellatus)

Buna-shimeji are fairly small mushrooms with white, long, often-curved stems and tan caps. They taste bitter when raw, but this is replaced with a nutty flavor when cooked. They have a firm, slightly crunchy texture. They are good for most recipes.



Source: Andy

Eringi (Pleurotus eryngii)

Eringi have many names in the West, perhaps most common being the King Oyster Mushroom. Unlike most of the fungi in this article, it is not native to Japan. It was mass cultivated there in the early 1990s and has become quite popular since. Eringi are rather large, with long, thick, meaty white stems, and relatively small tan caps. They don't have a lot of flavor raw, but when cooked the umami comes forward. I find them particularly good when grilled. Keep it simple and cook them over flame or in a pan with a bit of salt and pepper.



Source: David Loong

Enokitake (Flammulina velutipes)

Enoki mushrooms are named after the tree on which they grow, which is known as the Chinese hackberry in English. However, they also grow on other trees, like mulberry and persimmon trees. In the supermarket, they are easily recognizable as dense clumps of small, white mushrooms with long, slender stems. Cultivated enoki are grown in a dark, carbon dioxide-rich environment to keep them white and encourage long stem growth, respectively. Wild enoki tend to be dark brown, with shorter, thicker stems.



Source: Wendell Smith

Nameko (Pholiota nameko)

Nameko are small and amber-brown. They have a nutty flavor and a thin layer of gelatin on their caps, which forms a sort of glaze when cooking with them. They are often used in miso soup, nabemono, and stir-fries.

Long popular in Japanese cuisine, nameko have recently gained notoriety in another



Source: ferrie=differentieel & Jöran Maaswinkel DailyM.net

field. A trilogy of smart phone games called "Nameko Saibai Kit," has become quite popular. The goal of the game is to raise various types of anthropomorphic cartoon nameko. Of course, with popularity comes merchandise, and you can find plenty of stuff featuring these cute little mushrooms.

Maitake (Grifola frondosa)

Maitake translates to "dancing mushroom." They don't look like your stereotypical mushrooms. They grow in a dense cluster and the stems flow into the frond-like caps, giving the whole cluster an appearance something like a head of cabbage. The clusters can get quite large: over 40 kilograms (100 pounds)! They have a woody, smoky flavor, but it isn't as meaty as some other mushrooms. They can be used in stir frying, simmering, roasting and other applications.



Source: Brain Lioila



Matsutake (Tricholoma mastutake)

Matsutake form a symbiotic relationship with the roots of certain tree species, most notably the Japanese Red Pine, hence the name matsutake (“pine mushroom”). Matsutake have long, thick stems and knob-like brown caps. Due to the difficulty in finding them, they are quite expensive. The average price is about \$90 per kilogram, but matsutake found in Japan at the beginning of the season can go for up to \$2,000 per kilogram! Matsutake grown in the U.S. can be had for a much lower price sometimes. If you get the chance to try them, one of the best ways to show off their flavor is in a simple rice bowl dish (matsutake gohan).



Source: 挪威 企鵝



Source: dbaronoss



Shiitake (Lentinula edodes)

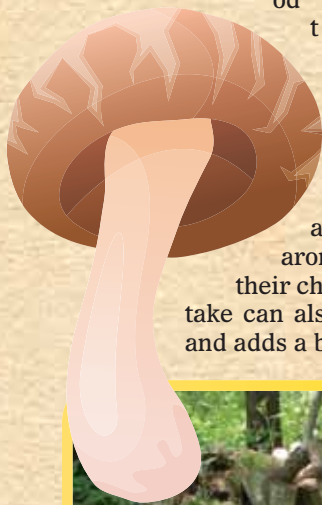
Shiitake are named after the tree on whose dead logs they commonly grow, the *Castanopsis cuspidate*. Shiitake is probably the most popular Japanese mushroom, both at home and abroad. Who knows how long people have been collecting them in Japan, but somewhere along the line they discovered a method for cultivating them. A



Source: tup wanders

shiitake bearing log would be placed next to freshly cut logs, allowing the fungus to spread to all of them. They even found that damaging the bark of the new logs would improve the efficiency of mushroom multiplication.

It's easy to see why shiitake are so popular, as they are both flavorful and versatile. When cooked, they are aromatic and have a nice rich, woody flavor. Due to this and their chewy, dense texture they make a great meat substitute. Shiitake can also be bought dried, which actually intensifies their flavor and adds a bit of smokiness. The applications of shiitake are many and varied, from stir fries to grilling, from simmering to soups and nabemono (and that's just in Japanese cuisine). I love making a shiitake nimono: simmering the mushrooms in dashi and soy sauce until the liquid reduces to almost nothing. You'll have a bowl full of concentrated umami.



Source: Brian Liloia

Magic mushrooms

Some mushrooms can have psychedelic effects on those who consume them. There are a number of such mushrooms, but the most popular by far are from the genus *Psilocybe*. They cause hallucinations due to two different chemicals: psilocybin and psilocin.

Japan is a country that tends to take drugs quite seriously (apart from alcohol and tobacco), so it's surprising that before 2002 magic mushrooms were legal. You could buy them in head shops, and apparently even in vending machines. In 2002 they were made illegal, perhaps because of the World Cup that was played in Japan that year. It's thought that Japanese leaders changed the law in anticipation of an influx of foreign fans getting high and causing trouble.



Source: Scott Darbey

Mushroom medicine

Some mushrooms have been used in traditional medicine for centuries. For example, the fungus from maitake has long been used in China and Japan for enhancing the immune system. Modern research has indicated that the entire maitake may be useful in this regard. In addition, a 2009 study by Sloan-Kettering showed it to have anti-tumor effects. It may also have hypoglycemic effects.

Shiitake mushrooms have also shown some promise in the fighting both cancer and viruses, but studies have not been conclusive. Still, as long as you're enjoying some mushroom cooking, it's nice to think they might be helping you too.

Kinoko no yama

Okay, so obviously these aren't real mushrooms. However, they have been a popular snack ever since Meiji launched them in 1975. Their part milk, part dark chocolate caps sit atop crunchy biscuit stems, and make for an excellent combo. No list of Japanese mushrooms is complete without them.



Source: Robyn Lee

How to choose and store your mushrooms

When selecting mushrooms at the store they should be dry, but not withered. If they come plastic-wrapped, look out for condensation. When storing them, sealing them in a paper bag is a good way to keep them from getting too wet or dry. If you keep them in a plastic-wrapped tub, poking a



Source: Chiot's Run

few holes in the plastic is a good idea. At any rate, you should use them within a few days.

You shouldn't wash them until you're about to use them. Some say they shouldn't be washed at all for fear of waterlogging them. Brush them instead. A brush is fine, but time consuming, so a light wash should be fine. If you don't see any dirt on them, there shouldn't be a need for either.

Let's put a cap on this

What more is there to say? Mushrooms are some tasty and versatile fungi. Go forth and try as many kinds, in as many ways as possible!

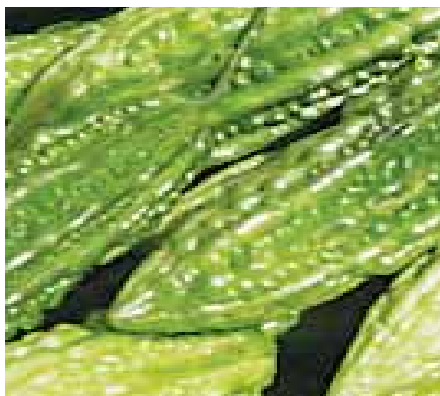


Source: Wendell Smith

Photo courtesy of Alpha



Japanese umami taste, ingredients of dashi (japanese soup stock)



WHY JAPANESE FOOD TASTES SO GOOD

TOFUGU.COM

UMAMI: THE FIFTH OF THE FOUR BASIC TASTES

BY HASHI,
TOFUGU.COM

Ever wonder what makes Japanese food taste the way it does? It absolutely has a very distinct flavor, but how would you describe it?

A hundred years ago, the distinct flavor of Japanese food led to the discovery of a brand new flavor: umami.

THE FOUR BASIC TASTES

If you want to describe the taste of your food, then you probably use a combination of a few different words: sour, bitter, salty, and sweet.

And in fact, for thousands of years people have used those four concepts to describe their food. Sure, you might branch out a little bit more by describing the textures (e.g. crunchy, tender) or compare it to another food, but at the very core, there wasn't any other way to describe taste.

WHY? MAINLY BECAUSE OF THIS GUY

This guy's name was Democritus. Democritus, along with a bunch of other Greek thinkers like Socrates and Euclid, were pretty much the founders of western scientific and philosophical thought.

And Democritus theorized that foods tasted like one of the four basic categories because of the shapes of the food's atoms.

To be fair, Greek thinkers got a lot of things

right (like geometry!). On the other hand, they were wrong about a lot of other things (like leeches!).

And Democritus couldn't be more wrong about the number of basic tastes. But nobody would challenge the scientific basis of this claim until thousands of years later, when an unknown Japanese scientist started questioning the status quo.

THE FIFTH BASIC TASTE

In the early 1900s, a Japanese chemist named Kikunae Ikeda began to wonder if there might be a fifth basic taste. After examining lots of different foods that didn't quite fit into the four other categories, Ikeda found it: the fifth taste.

He called it umami うま味.

Some cultures call it savoriness, but the term umami is used all across the world today.

What is umami exactly? It's a little hard to describe. Umami is the kind of flavor that's found in meat, cheese, and mushrooms. Again, think "savory."

And not only did Ikeda discover umami, but he also created monosodium glutamate, or MSG. So whenever you're in a cheap Chinese restaurant that heaps on the MSG, thank Ikeda.

THE SCIENCE OF TASTE

Why do things taste the way they do? How did Ikeda discover umami? It's all in the science of food. (And no, I'm not talking about molecular gastronomy.)

There's actually a scientific explanation behind each type of taste. Sourness, bitterness, saltiness, sweetness, and umami all have a chemical linked to them that make them taste the way they do.

For umami, that chemical is glutamate. Ikeda was able to figure out that all of the foods that had the umami flavor all had high levels of glutamate.

WHY JAPAN?

How was umami discovered in Japan, of all places? Look into Japan's history and it seems almost obvious.

Buddhism values all life, which is why Buddhist practitioners are sometimes vegetarian. So when Buddhism was first introduced in Japan way back in the day, meat was formally banned for a time.

Obviously, this ban wasn't too long-lasting or always observed, but it did have some impact on Japanese food. To compensate for the lack of meat, Japanese developed a cuisine with lots of food rich in umami. Most of the foods that are the foundation of Japanese cuisine, like dashi and soy sauce, are very umami-heavy.

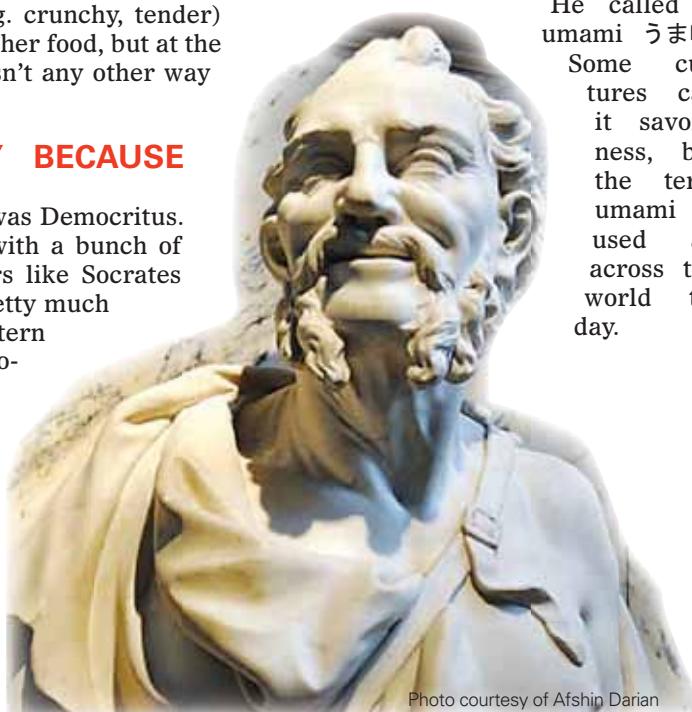


Photo courtesy of Afshin Darian



It tastes as **good** as it sounds

Beginning with an Eric Clapton guitar, Hard Rock Cafe owns the world's greatest collection of music memorabilia, which is displayed at its locations around the globe. For fans of music, great food and good times, Hard Rock is the go-to restaurant to get that authentic American diner-inspired cuisine wrapped in a unique musical experience. So, it's time to strike up the band! Events, like great music, are born to inspire others. At Hard Rock Cafe, we pride ourselves on delivering an exceptional experience with a rock 'n' roll twist for each and every one of our guests.

RESTAURANT INFO

REAL GOLD. REAL *Burger.*

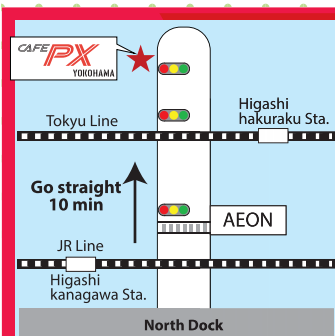
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*Alcoholic Beverages Excluded.

Hard Rock
CAFE
JAPAN



A Taste of Japan



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CAFE PX's Popular Delivery Menu

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- 4 Bacon cheddar muffin ¥800
- 5 Oreo milkshake ¥800

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*Please note, campaign specials quickly end.



20% off
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Café offers a taste of **American** diner

TAK the owner of CAFE PX wants military members to have fun and remember their lifestyle in the United States, enjoy their lives and meals by coming to CAFE PX while they are stationed in Japan. He was also a cook at the old Negishi housing "All Hands Club" so he knows how to make great American-style food like B.L.T, omelets, pizza, burgers, hotdogs, milk shakes and more. He wants to create an American hometown neighborhood diner, style and feel so his customers can relax, eat and enjoy his hospitality.

RESTAURANT INFO



WingStreet



PIZZA HUT LOCATIONS:

Yokosuka 1000-2100

DELIVERY IS AVAILABLE

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

Atsugi 1030-2000

DELIVERY IS AVAILABLE

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

*We extended Pizza Hut Delivery hours on Friday and Saturday until 2200.



LIVE MÁS



TACO BELL LOCATIONS:

Yokosuka 1000-2100

DRIVE-UP WINDOW AVAILABLE

Offering: Tacos, Burritos, Quesadillas, Salads, Desserts
Tostadas, and Many other TB Promotional items.

*We extended Yokosuka Taco Bells Drive thru hours on Friday and Saturday until 2200.

Atsugi 1000-2000

Offering: Tacos, Burritos, Quesadillas, Salads, Desserts
Tostadas, and Many other TB Promotional items.

Sasebo 1030-2000

Offering: Tacos, Burritos, Quesadillas, Salads, Desserts
Tostadas, and Many other TB Promotional items.