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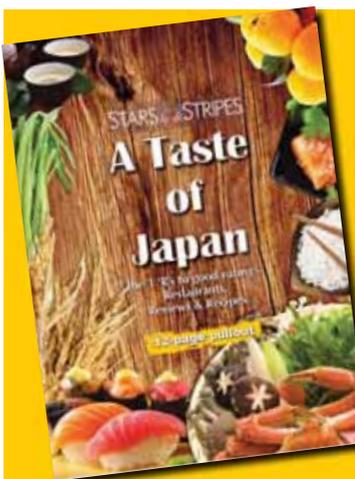
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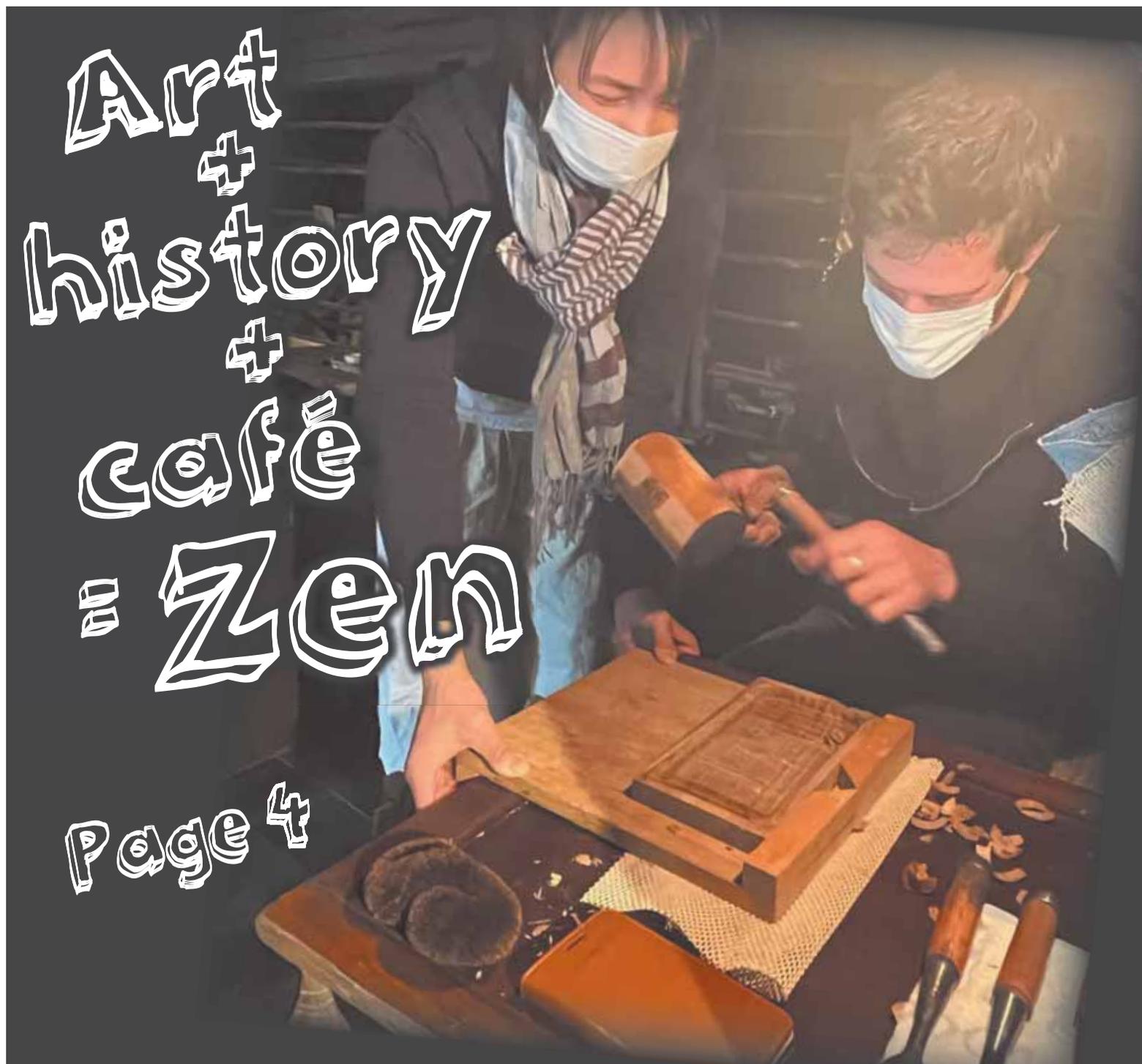


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Zama reservist 'strives for excellence' in medical field

STORY AND PHOTOS BY NORIKO KUDO,
 U.S. ARMY GARRISON

CAMP ZAMA – “I have been to war in Iraq ... but this was a different war, the enemy was COVID-19.”

Lt. Col. Natalie Johnson still clearly remembers the dispirited atmosphere and how overwhelmed the health care team seemed when she joined them at Jacobi Medical Center in New York. They had been dedicating hundreds of restless hours to provide life-sustaining care to their patients.

It was right at the beginning of the pandemic in March 2020 when Johnson, then assigned to the 7456th Medical Operations Readiness Unit in Iowa, was called to New York to support the COVID-19 health care efforts there.

Today, Johnson continues that fight for the Army after moving nearly 7,000 miles away to Camp Zama, Japan, following her husband who was stationed here. She currently assists U.S. Army Medical Department Activity – Japan

Lt. Col. Natalie Johnson administers the COVID-19 vaccine to a local-national employee at Camp Zama.



SEE MEDICAL ON PAGE 2



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MEDICAL: Army experience a motivation

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

with providing COVID vaccines to the Soldiers and the community members on the installation. She also serves as a backfill at the nearby Yokota Air Base and at the Naval Hospital at U.S. Fleet Activities Yokosuka as an anesthesia provider.

Johnson, a native of Minnesota, said she was always fascinated by science, which led to her obtaining, as a junior in high school, her certification as a nurse aide and a medical assistant, and working to provide care to residents at a local nursing home.

Johnson was determined to go to college for nursing and said she knew in her heart the Army was the way to go in order for her to reach her next goal of becoming an advanced practice registered nurse and a certified registered nurse anesthetist. She enlisted in National Guard in 1997 at age of 17.

“I joined the Army out of a sense of duty to my country, the desire to do something meaningful, and to have pride in my accomplishments,” Johnson said.

After completing basic combat training and advanced individual training, she worked as an Army medic, teaching medical field care and combat lifesaving to Soldiers. She also served as the medical provider during other training events.

Johnson said the military has been a special place to grow and learn, both personally and professionally. Being given such responsibility at a young age, immediately after receiving her training, helped motivate her to continuously want to provide her fellow Soldiers with the utmost care at all times.

“Starting as an Army medic, [and] being the only medical provider readily available to the Soldiers, I was ‘Doc’ to them.” Johnson said. “This early experience, with such a high level of independence and responsibility, has

motivated me through every career decision phase [since then].”

Johnson continued to learn and expand her education throughout her Army career. She graduated from Minnesota State University with a bachelor’s in Nursing in 2002, received her direct commission into the Army Nurse Corps in 2003, and attended the Officer Basic Course in 2004.

Johnson said her professional nursing goals are inseparable from her personal goals. She is currently enrolled in the University of Alabama’s Doctor of Nursing Practice program to progress her clinical aptitude and to better prepare herself for opportunities to lead, mentor, and educate others.

“Becoming a doctoral-prepared anesthesia provider will allow me the means to make changes through evidence-based practice for the best care to our patients and assure our health care workers are receiving the most advanced practice guidelines,” Johnson said.

Her family instilled in her at a young age the importance of motivation, drive, and giving 100 percent, which she tries to live up to in all aspects of her life.

“I strive for excellence and welcome challenges,” Johnson said.

She eventually left active duty to

Johnson administers immunizations and medical care to patients of all ages on Camp Zama.



act as the “stability” of her dual-Army household and to care for their three elementary-aged children. She said “juggling” is a great word to describe her many roles: Being a mother, a wife, a Soldier, a doctoral student, and a medical professional.

Practicing good time management is key when trying to balance her career, her education, and her parental duties, she said. Her children rely on her to be a great mentor, role model and mom, and that is the most important job to her.

“I have never regretted putting my family before my career,” Johnson said. “I love every hat that I wear.”

The Army has been Johnson’s other family for 24 years and counting, and she said one of the most important lessons she has learned from her experiences is that by working for something beyond herself, she has been able to better her nation, her self-worth, and her resiliency beyond anything she would have believed.

She said she’ll need to take with her everything she has learned when she returns to the U.S. to take command, which she is scheduled to do this summer.

“I have learned many lessons throughout my nursing career, but the most important lesson is that by serving others and putting their needs before my own, I can make a difference.”

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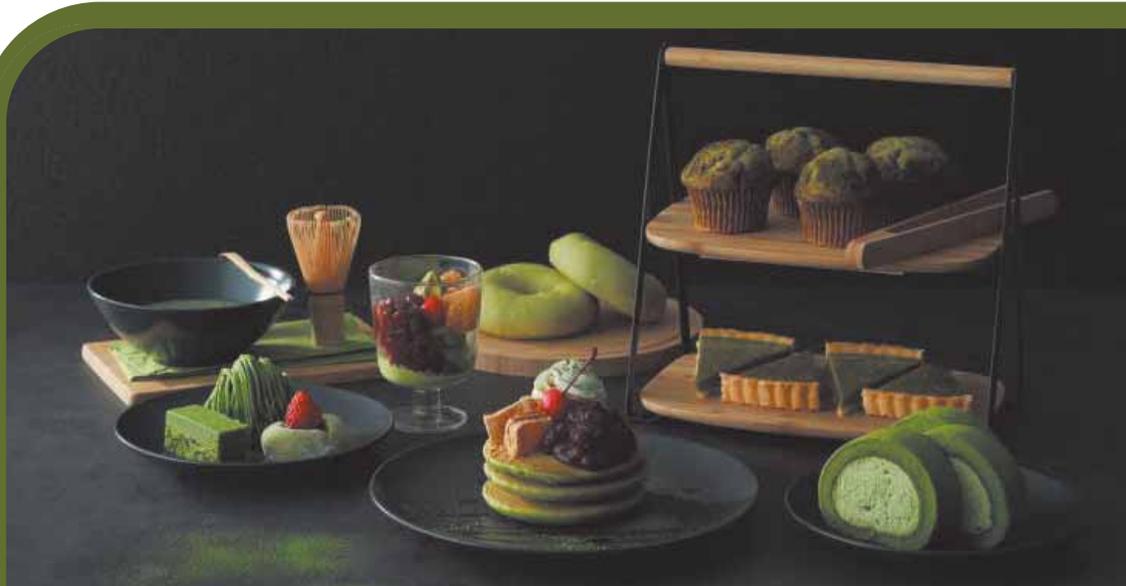
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Photos Courtesy of IKEA

Enjoy all things green tea at IKEA's Matcha Fair

BY TAKAHIRO TAKIGUCHI,
STRIPES JAPAN

Green tea has been an indispensable drink in Japan that you'll find it virtually everywhere from drinks to dessert. Today, however, it wouldn't be surprising if you've tried a few varieties already, as matcha is loved by a lot of people not only in Japan but throughout the world.

These days you'll find matcha in many different foods and treats like cakes, pudding, lattes and other drinks. But, did you know that green tea is harvested in Japan from May to June?

To celebrate the harvest of these fragrant leaves, Sweden-based home furnishing chain IKEA is serving up matcha treats at its 13 affiliate shops throughout Japan until June 26.

Though IKEA is famous for the Swedish meatballs served at its cafeteria, you'll want to make plans to try the 11 sweets at great prices available for the Matcha Fair.

Sample their matcha sundae, soft serve topped with sweet beans, warabi mochi and dark molasses for 250 yen (\$2). At select stores, try the matcha afternoon tea set for 590 yen, and you can choose from three options including matcha gâteau au chocolat, matcha strawberry daifuku rice cake or matcha mont blanc cake. The set includes all-you-can-drink coffee and tea.

Options vary between IKEA stores and IKEA City Stores, so visit their website for more information on what matcha treats are available near you!

takiguchi.takahiro@stripes.com

IKEA Matcha Fair

Period: Through June 26

Location: Restaurants and Bistros in IKEA shops throughout Japan (13 shops)

IKEA Tachikawa

(a 30-minute drive from Yokota Air Base)

Hours: Mon-Fri, 11 a.m. – 7 p.m.,
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Matcha Fair



IKEA Tachikawa

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Sid Frazier

The new program does not replace existing retail stores managed by GSA in Japan. For more information, please contact your local Customer Service Director Sid Frazier at sidney.frazier@gsa.gov.

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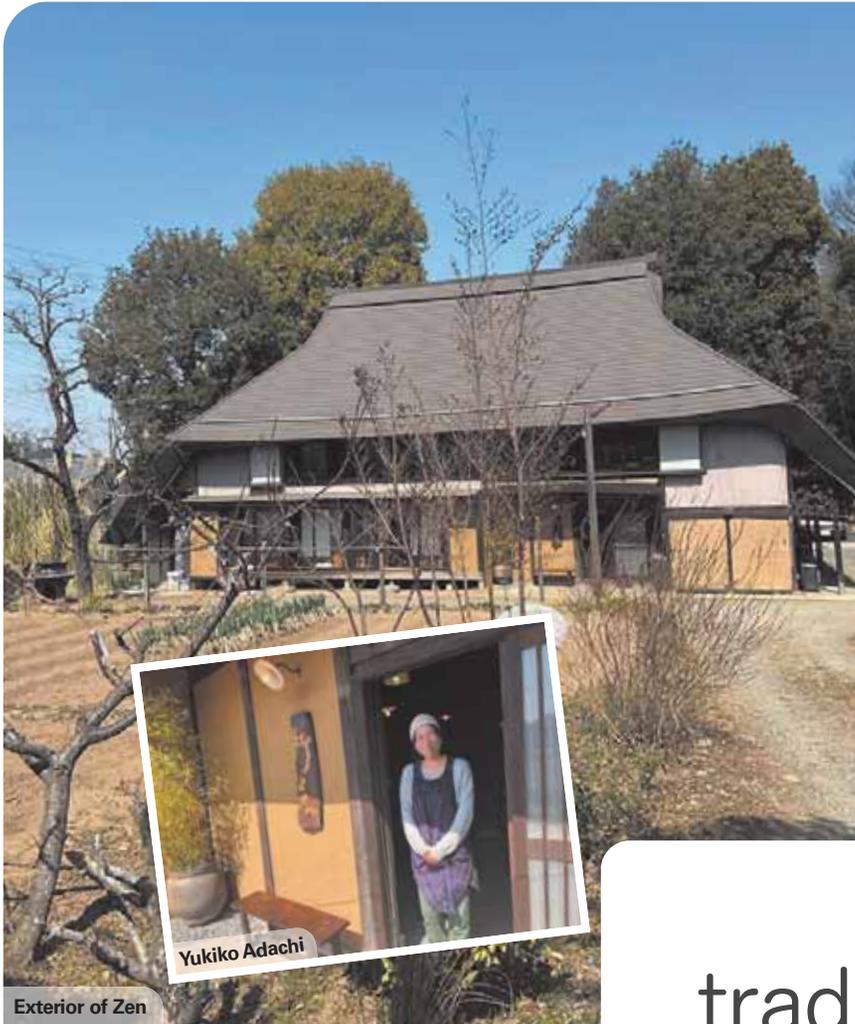
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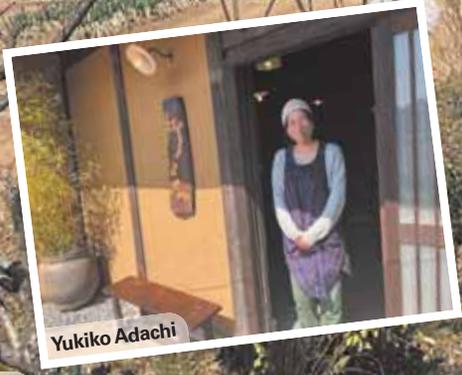
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Yukiko Adachi

Exterior of Zen

Saitama gallery offers traditional crafts, friendly community

STORY AND PHOTOS BY BY ERICA EARL, STARS AND STRIPES

Tucked in the mountains near scenic Nagatoro, a traditional-style Japanese home that is almost two centuries old hosts artists, craftsmen, and an incredibly kind woman with a penchant for helping lost gaijin.

This is Chikuzen, a newly opened art gallery and café in Misato, Saitama, owned and operated by Yukiko Adachi. Run out of her aunt's 177-year-old home, Chikuzen, also known just as Zen, keeps ancient Japanese crafts and folk art alive and relevant for the community and its foreign visitors.

The gallery opened on March 12 and features a rotating selection of works from guest artists and workshops for aspiring creators with heavy emphasis on using old techniques. Most of the art pieces are wood carvings, a traditional form that Adachi says she doesn't want to see get lost in the age of modern paintings, NFTs and digital art.

"I have a desire to preserve old Japanese things," Adachi, 35, who works during the week as a home healthcare aid for the elderly, told me at her gallery opening. "It's a strong desire to reminisce and to remember traditional craft and culture."

In a twist of modern-day-meets-traditional, it was social media that inspired Adachi. She first conceived her idea of opening an art gallery six years ago when she became connected with other craftsmen on Instagram. She spent the last three years renovating the home, making sure to preserve its traditional integrity with the help of some carpenters who are also featured in her gallery.

Zen is an apt name for the place, as its rich wood and stone interior is inviting, calming and otherworldly. The gallery is earthy and intimate, and one of the artists even let me pick up a chisel and try my own hand at wood carving (I had fun, but I do not have the gift).

Ido Ferber, a ceramic artist and guest at the gallery from Tokyo, said the homey feel of Zen appealed to him and his wife. Originally from Israel, Ferber said he is drawn to events centered around preserving culture.

"It is possible here to center art around history and revive something that could potentially be lost," he said.

The environment at Zen is starkly different from snobbish and elitist modern art galleries, where everything feels ultra-sanitized and like you can't touch anything. Adachi and her craftsmen friends make everyone

feel like they can connect to the art, even if they are not creators themselves. It felt special not for its exclusiveness, but because of its inclusivity and warmth.

In fact, Adachi's incredible friendliness is how I found out about the place. Last month, I got lost on the way to a friend's birthday party at a strawberry farm in Urawa. I had taken the wrong bus. It was raining, my phone had died, and I have poor command of Japanese, so it was a textbook disaster for me. I stopped in a museum in hopes of getting directions when I met Adachi, who offered me a phone charger and a ride.

I typically don't advocate for getting in

cars with strangers, and pe against my best judgment to friends now jokingly refer to in the Japanese countryside. something so genuinely pure and I'm so grateful she went to help me and that I found ab This first encounter with her nature and vibe that guests c at Zen.

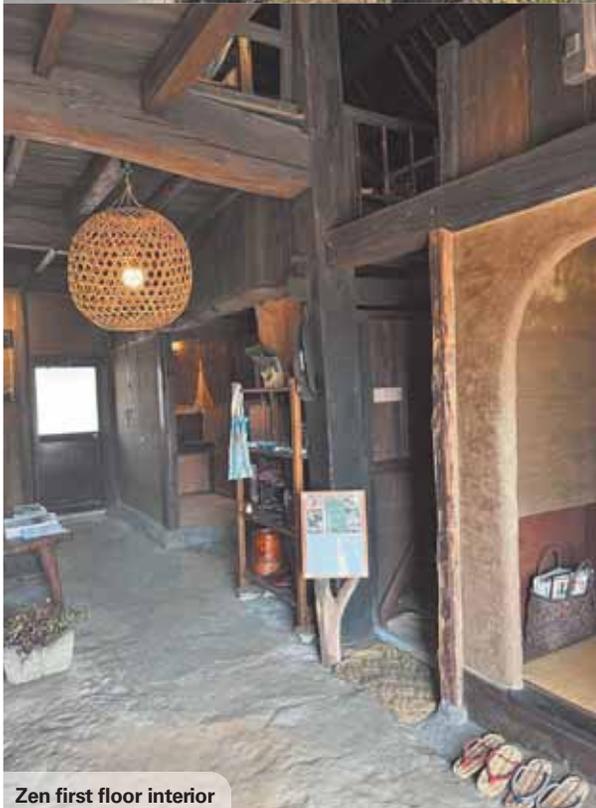
Adachi opened a café insid with ingredients from local ing a small patch of farmland property. The region is know berries, so she plans to inc in her dishes when in season many talents, Adachi will be at the café and serve recipes s

While in the area, I sugg cuisine such as nabeyaki udo soba, an egg-topped noodle so have had my two visits to the have had a zesty lemony taste also known for miso potato, a isfying appetizer or side dish and sweet.

If checking out Zen, it is w the travel a day trip by explor Nagatoro and Hodosan Shrin top shrine with a cable car views that will soon be dotted

Zen is only open on Satur days. The easiest way to get t as it is quite secluded.

"I want you to be healed i rounded by natural materials boo, wood and soil," Adachi s earl.eric@stripes.com Twitter: @ThisEarlGirl



Zen first floor interior



Chikuzen Art Gallery and Cafe
Address: 807 Amagasu, Misato, Kodama District, Saitama 367-0113
Hours: 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday and Sunday
Nearby attractions: Hodosan Temple and downtown Nagatoro, about 30 minutes away by car.
For reservations, call or contact the Instagram page.

One of Zen cafe tables



Nabeyaki udon



Hodosan view



Hodosan Shrine



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Zen first floor interior

ity

Perhaps I went to do what my... as hitchhiking... But, there was... about Adachi... out of her way... out her gallery... r speaks to the... can experience

le Zen in April... farms, includ-... d on her aunt's... n for its blue-... orporate them... n. A woman of... the head chef... such as galette... est trying local... on or nabeyaki... up. The ones I... Nagatoro area... e. The region is... simple but sat-... that is savory

orth it to make... rring downtown... e, a mountain-... to the top for... with Sakura... days and Sun-... there is by car,

in a space sur-... s such as bam-... aid.



Hodosan cable car



Workshops for visitors at Zen



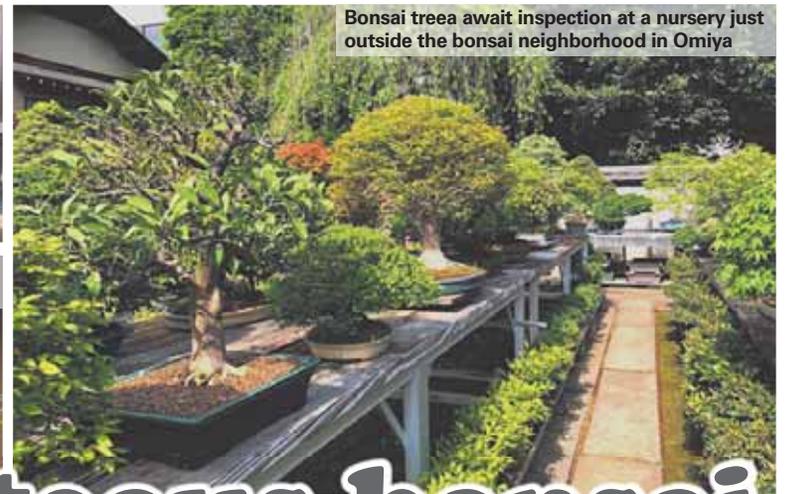
Zen art display tables



A centuries-old bonsai tree at the museum.



Anthropomorphic bonsai cherry tree stands



Bonsai trees await inspection at a nursery just outside the bonsai neighborhood in Omiya

Bounteous bonsai

Neighborhood a center for Japan's ornamental tree art

STORY AND PHOTOS BY JOSEPH DITZLER, STARS AND STRIPES
Published: May 12, 2022

Bonsai trees are a wonder of nature bent by the hand of man.

But before your love for these works of living art prompt you to plunk down some yen and take one or three home, take note. This small living thing is more like a pet than a plant; kept correctly it will become a big living thing and outlive you. By a longshot.

For a crash course on the history, nomenclature and sheer beauty of bonsai, a trip to the Omiya Bonsai Village in Saitama prefecture, just north of central Tokyo, should be first on the to-do list.

The village is the historic remnant of what was once about 30 bonsai gardeners who moved their nurseries from crowded Tokyo into a neighborhood in Omiya after the 1923 earthquake leveled much of the capital city.

Today, only six of the many original gardens remain, along with the Omiya Bonsai Art Museum in the same neighborhood. The museum is a handy starting point for a stroll to the remaining gardens and nurseries.

Admission is just \$2.40 and includes explanatory pamphlets in English. The exhibits are also signed in English, too. The tour starts with a short stroll through a gallery that explains the two basic types and many styles of bonsai and the terminology that goes along with creating them.

By the end of your tour, you'll know a shohaku from a zoki and a moyo-gi from a yose-ue.

Next, a short hallway deconstructs the specific manner in which bonsai are properly displayed, according to Japanese custom. A third gallery has exhibits on the history of bonsai and how their styles and displays have changed from their origins centuries ago.

That all leads to the courtyard, where about 70 pots are displayed. Some of Japan's best examples of bonsai, and some of the most awe-inspiring, are found here.

The display changes according to the seasons. A visit in April found an 800-year-old juniper; another old-timer, the Blue Dragon, a coniferous giant whose twisted trunk and mane-like needles suggest its namesake; and the 500-year-old pride of the garden, a glorious pine that epitomizes the craft. Plants are available in the nursery in the lot behind the museum.

The trip is not complete without a walking tour of the remaining private gardens nearby. Placarded maps are erected along the street in the village area, and guides are available at the museum. Most of these charge an admission and have their own displays, along with a nursery with plants for sale. One site is an old Japanese-style home turned to use as a place to rest and have a drink.

I wound up my tour at Fuyoen, a nursery near the Omiya-koen Station, where row after

row of plants are lined up for inspection. Many were mature trees, but one section was filled with "starter kits," smaller trees that retailed for as little as 20,000 yen, cash only, the keeper explained. It's no small investment and I'm not talking about yen.

Bonsai trees require repotting as their roots outgrow their pots. Trimming the roots and branches in a careful but aesthetically pleasing manner are part of the responsibilities. A host of paraphernalia is also required, from pruning shears to peculiarly designed watering cans.

Bear in mind, too, that the bonsai tree you purchase in Japan is probably not going back with you to the United States. U.S. Agriculture Department regulations generally prohibit importation of bonsai because of the risk of unwanted organisms in their soil.

So go forth to Omiya, enjoy the tour and take plenty of photographs.

ditzler.joseph@stripes.com
Twitter: @JosephDitzler

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This 500-year-old pine is the pride of the Omiya Bonsai Art Museum courtyard

Browse the bonsai

Location: Omiya Bonsai Art Museum, 2-24-3 Toro-cho, Kita Ward, Saitama City
Directions: By rail on the Shonan-Shinjuku Line from Shinjuku to Toro Station and a 10-minute walk from there. The bonsai village nurseries begin less than 10 minutes from the museum. For motorists, set your directional devices to the Independent Human Resources Development Center, 2-24-1 Toro-chou, Kita Ward, Saitama City, which will guide you to the building next to the museum. Parking is available behind the museum.
Hours: 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., March to October; 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., November to February. Last admission is 30 minutes before closing. Closed Thursday.
Costs: 310 yen admission; receptionists may speak English
Food: Plenty of restaurants to choose from along the street near the Omiya-koen Station, where the walk will lead.
Tel: 048-780-2091 **Website**





Cute cups of cappuccino at café near Iwakuni

STORY AND PHOTOS BY
LINDA CORDES,
IWAKUNIFOODIE.COM

I was watching a local Japanese show with my parents one evening when I saw a piece on this cute place called Yucafe in Waki Town that made the most adorable cappuccinos. I wrote down the name and added it to my list of places to check out. Yucafe popped up on Google Maps right away, which made me super happy. I go to Waki every now and then, but I'm not familiar with the whole area. I saved the pin and tried to figure out when I would be able to go. I finally found the time, and after an issue finding the place

with Google Maps, I finally arrived with my friend Tani. I was definitely ready for a kawaii cappuccino! It is a really cute cafe! There's not a whole lot of parking in front. Maybe just enough room for two or three cars. I knew I was getting a design cappuccino before I even walked in. What I didn't know however, was that there is French toast on the menu here! Chocolate banana French toast?? Um. Yes, please! I had already eaten lunch so this was going to be my afternoon "snack." Tani had not had

lunch yet though so she ordered the Baked Curry Doria lunch and a design cappuccino. After we placed our orders, we looked around the inside of the cafe. It is just as cute as the outside! After a short wait, she brought out Tani's curry doria. It smelled amazing! This has rice on the bottom with curry and cheese on top. I tried some and it was very good! If curry is not your thing, there is also a daily lunch special on the menu. Or...you can order French

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It wasn't super mushy in the center and the bread is nice and thick. She also offers plain French toast and a berry French toast. Then she brought out our cappuccinos. Oh. My. Gosh. They were so cute! I haven't had a cute cappuccino in a while and I am so happy I can get my fix whenever I want again. The prices were also very reasonable. For the two of us, our total was less than ¥2,000 (less than \$20 at the current exchange rate). Yucafe is open from 9 a.m.-5 p.m. every day, except for Tuesdays. Most of the drinks can be ordered for take-out also.



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Stripes Sports Trivia

Growing up in the 1990s, LeBron James, like most young hoopsters, idolized Michael Jordan. Now, LBJ finds himself in the conversation of whether or not he's even better than his favorite player. James wore the No. 23 when he played for which high school?

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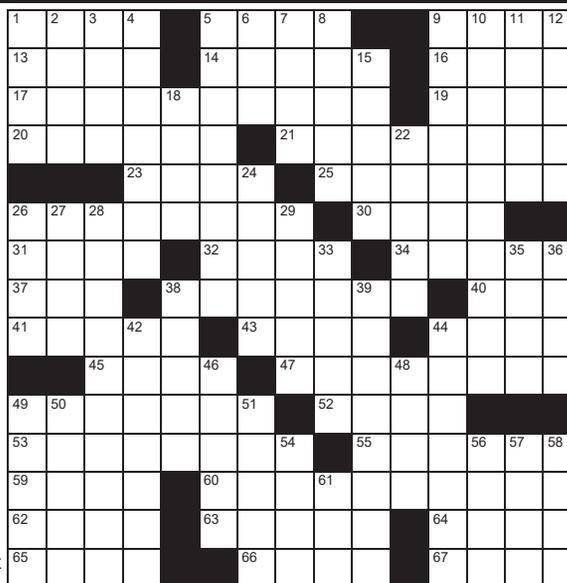
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The Weekly Crossword

by Margie E. Burke

ACROSS

- 1 Tropical root
- 5 Poison ivy woe
- 9 Deep cut
- 13 Basketball goal
- 14 Bruce Lee flick, "___ the Dragon"
- 16 Graph or mobile starter
- 17 Trucker's turf
- 19 "That's enough!"
- 20 Hush-hush
- 21 James Arness series
- 23 Pale as a ghost
- 25 Royal residences
- 26 Setting for Sinclair's "The Jungle"
- 30 Animal dwelling
- 31 Connecting point
- 32 Get together
- 34 Clothing closures
- 37 Afternoon hour
- 38 Unlikely to share
- 40 Kind of party
- 41 Archipelago part
- 43 Showroom model
- 44 Spacious
- 45 Rabbit ___
- 47 Ponders
- 49 Winery event
- 52 Ruckus
- 53 Con's plan
- 55 Witches' rides
- 59 Hearty dish
- 60 Former "American Idol" judge
- 62 Musical Horne
- 63 Swashbuckling Flynn
- 64 Speck
- 65 Culturally showy
- 66 Calm period
- 67 Type of sock



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- 2 First-rate
- 3 Campus mil. group
- 4 Run, as a business
- 5 Setting in part of "The Notebook"
- 6 Aardvark's tidbit
- 7 For men only
- 8 In a lather
- 9 Major pipeline
- 10 Dictatorial
- 11 Feed, as a fire
- 12 Aspirations
- 15 Concerning kidneys
- 18 Breather
- 22 URL character
- 24 Traffic sign
- 26 Pro's foe
- 27 Gift toppers
- 28 Young person
- 29 Send to a specialist
- 33 What "x" may mean
- 35 Flippant
- 36 "___ who?"
- 38 Comics page offering
- 39 "Slow-pitch" sport
- 42 Corrode
- 44 Type of exercise
- 46 Shoot from cover
- 48 Italian bread
- 49 Car named for a physicist
- 50 Fall flower
- 51 Tree knot
- 54 Wise one
- 56 Something in the air
- 57 Remote button
- 58 Picnic dish
- 61 ROFL alternative

Answers to Previous Crossword:

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

DID YOU KNOW?

There are countless vending machines throughout Japan. Items available range from canned coffee, hamburger, yakisoba and rice bowls (served hot!), beer and sake (served freezing cold), to cigarettes, tissue, underwear and condoms. Most are available 24/7, 365, but those serving adult beverages usually stop running between 11 p.m. – 5 a.m. How convenient!

Kanji of the week



Kimi/kun (you)

Language Lesson

Where are the [eggs]?

Tamago wa doko desuka?

SUDOKU

Difficulty: Easy

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

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

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Edited by Margie E. Burke

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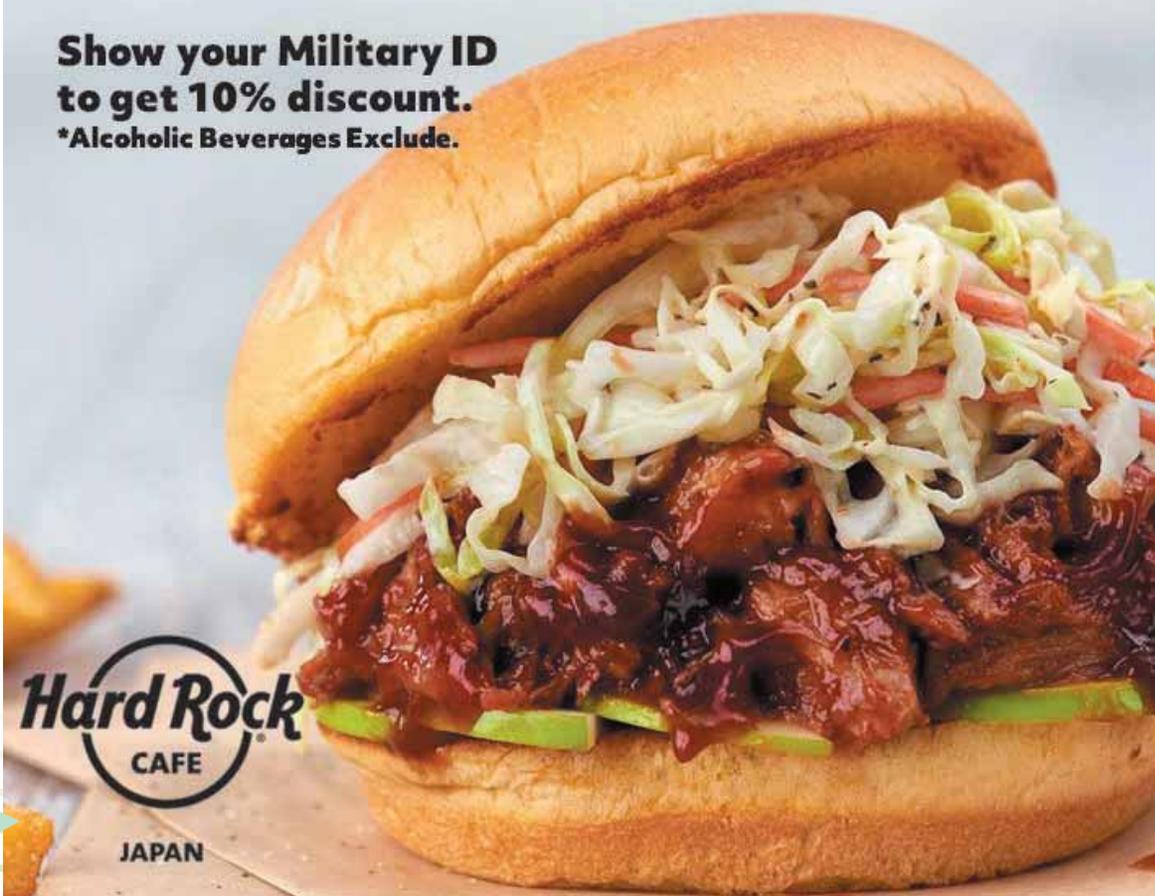
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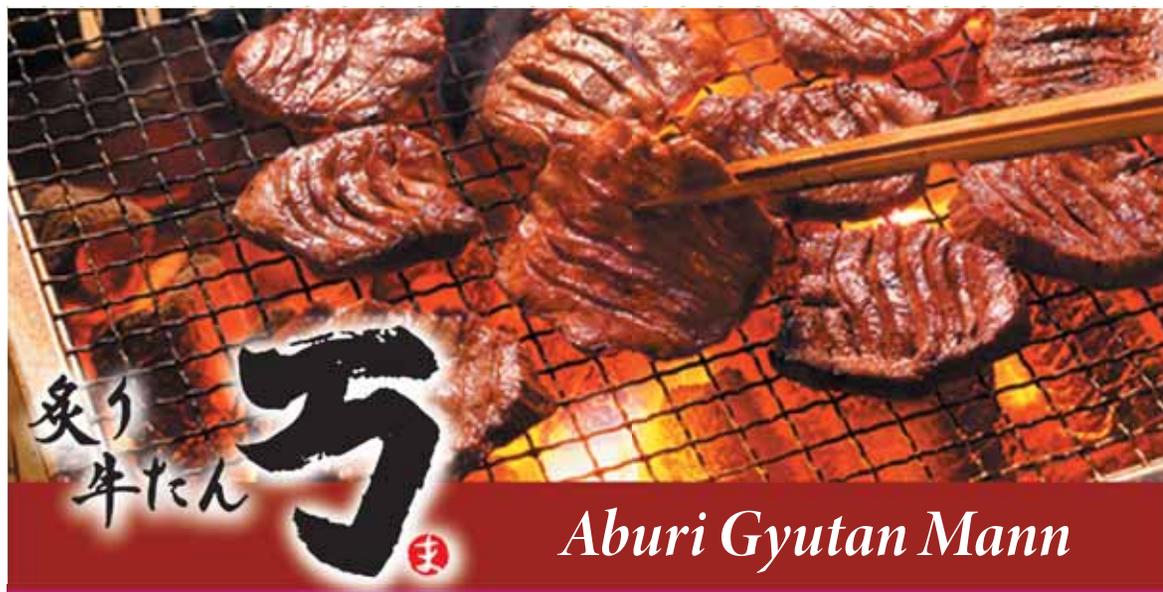
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The essence of green tea in Japan culture

BY TAKAHIRO TAKIGUCHI,
STRIPES JAPAN

As much as sushi and ramen may dominate the chatter about Japanese food, green tea cannot be ignored.

Teas from Asia, especially matcha green tea, are experiencing their moment abroad, so it wouldn't be surprising if you've tried a few varieties already.

A common misconception is that green tea, also cha or ocha, is only meant to be paired with sushi or Japanese sweets, known as wagashi. However, drop by any local Japanese restaurant, and you will find, more often than not, besides handing you the standard oshibori (wet towel), the server will also bring green tea for the table.

Inside Japanese homes, green tea also serves as an important tool to welcome guests and create a cozy atmosphere. Japan's tea ceremony is a recognized cultural symbol which revolves around the formal act of welcoming guests with green tea. But today, even casual visits with Japanese friends will often include refreshing hot or cold green tea, depending on the season.

While there has been a slight decline in green tea consumption (due to the bubble tea trend and introduction of new soft drinks), it still holds strong. In 2020, Japan produced 69,800 tons of tea, 97 percent of that being green tea.

What makes green tea stand out among countless beverages available in Japan? Green tea has three special characteristics, according to Hitomi Nakajima,

managing director of Japan Tea Central Public Interest Incorporated Association.

UMAMI

"First, green tea has 'umami' or savory and rich flavor in itself, not like other teas and beverages," Nakajima said. "The unique flavor is made from amid acid, and it gives a complicated, profound taste without applying sugar, salt or any other seasonings."

So, while British black tea is often enjoyed sweetened and with cream, green tea is usually enjoyed as is.

In addition, brewing the same tea leaves two or three times enables you to enjoy the changing umami flavor.

On a trip to Kamakura once, I stopped in at a traditional tea house for some green tea and sweets. The employee recommended brewing the tea leaves again after enjoying the initial brew. "The first service of tea and the second have a completely different flavor and aroma," I remember her saying.

When I tried as she suggested, the second pour was smoother with a milder aroma compared to the sweet and sour richness of the first brew. Without realizing, she had introduced me to green tea's evolving umami.

HEALTH BENEFITS

The second characteristic of green tea, according to Nakajima, is its many health benefits. "Since green tea has not been fermented and contains the original nutrition of the unchanged tea leaves, it works on your health in various ways," Nakajima said.

During the 9th century, green tea was first introduced from China for medicinal use in Japan. Green tea contains caffeine, catechin and other vitamins and antioxidants which helped Buddhist monks stay alert during Zen meditation and sutra study, Nakajima said.

A drink for monks and aristocrats became a staple in Japanese homes in the 18th century when Nagatani Souen, a tea farmer in Kyoto, created sencha, green tea processed and dried which allowed for it to be inexpensive and accessible to all. Today, more than 60 percent of whole tea product of Japan is sencha.

ART FORM

The third characteristic of green tea is the consumption of it in powdered form. Today, matcha is used in drinks, lattes and desserts, including ice cream. It is also at the center of a prized custom in Japan – the tea ceremony. This ritual involves matcha tea, Japanese sweets and participants often wear kimonos. More on this ceremony later.

"Matcha enabled us to develop an art of traditional tea ceremony, while it offers a particular wonderful flavor to various drinks and sweets these days," Nakajima added.

takiguchi.takahiro@stripes.com



Green tea is a superfood

Aside from being a refreshing drink to have while relaxing with friends or enjoying some quiet time, green tea is considered a superfood by many health experts.

According to the Japan Tea Central Public Interest Incorporated Association, one cup of tea (about 4 ounces) contains about 30 – 50 milligrams of caffeine, 70-120 milligram of catechin and 10-milligram vitamin C, along with other nutrients, such as theanine, calcium, magnesium, iron, beta carotene, vitamin E, chlorophyll, protein and dietary fiber.

Just like coffee and black tea, caffeine in green tea has an awakening effect that helps us stay alert

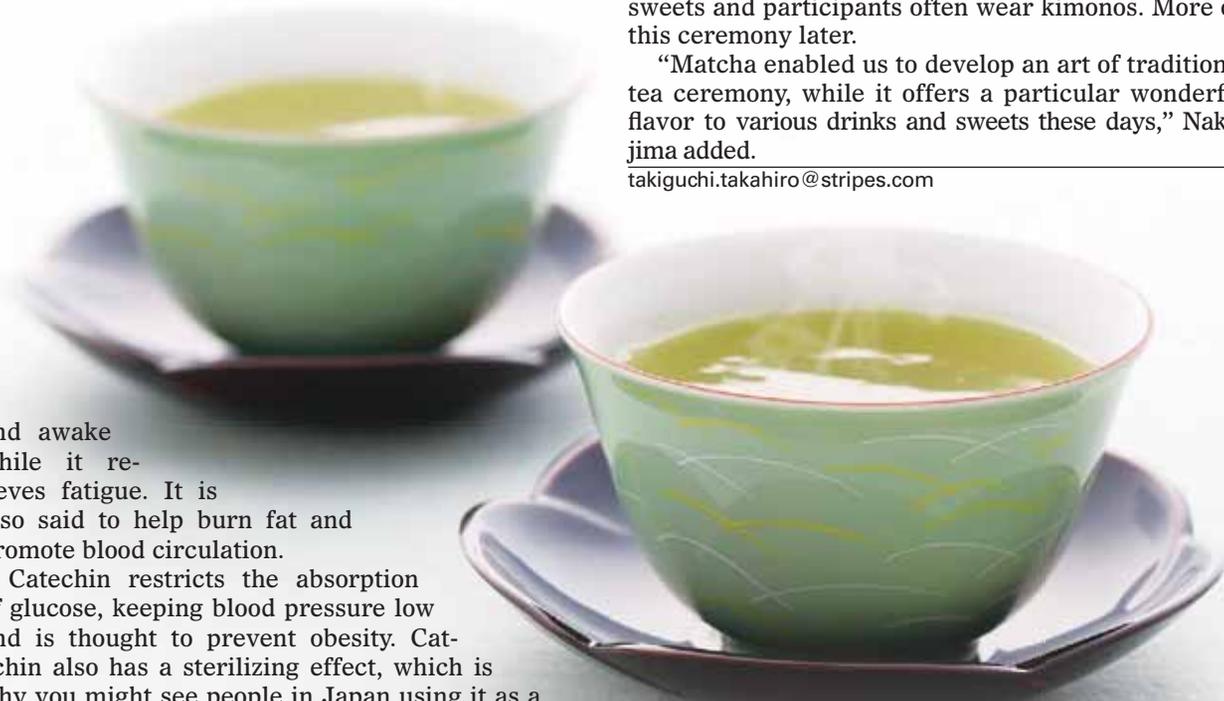
and awake while it relieves fatigue. It is also said to help burn fat and promote blood circulation.

Catechin restricts the absorption of glucose, keeping blood pressure low and is thought to prevent obesity. Catechin also has a sterilizing effect, which is why you might see people in Japan using it as a mouth rinse after meals to kill bacteria and prevent cavities.

Theanine is a substance unique to green tea. It affects the brain cells and gives a relaxing and healing effect. Another added benefit is the amount of Vitamin C in green tea, which gives it the antioxidant effect

we want to help prevent colds and improve immunity.

Fair enough. You now know why green tea is called a superfood, don't you? Let's drink it daily and improve our health!



Where to get your hands on it

Today, green tea is available throughout the nation. You can buy green tea leaves at virtually any supermarket, department and convenience stores for around 1,000 – 1,500 yen (\$8-12) per 100 gram or 3.5 ounces.

Although you can buy green tea anywhere, Nakajima recommends seeking out a specialty tea shop as these usually have employees well-versed in tea facts and can help you find your perfect cup.

Since tea leaves are a fresh product, it's best to purchase small batches and refrigerate them at home. Green tea should be consumed within a month after purchase.

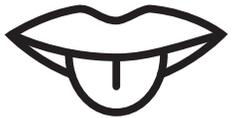


Why tea is bitter

Green tea might seem too bitter to appreciate. It is the tea's catechin and caffeine which might give you that impression. However, both of these are known for their health benefits, including disease prevention.

So, how do we soften the bitterness?

Adding cool, non-boiled water helps brew sweet, tasty tea. Both caffeine and catechin dissolve easier in hot water, so hotter tea is bitter since it contains more of these substances. If you want to soften the bitterness, be sure to steep tea in lower temperature, so that you can reduce the extraction of them while keeping the umami flavor and aroma.



Difference between teas

Green, black and oolong teas all taste very different, but did you know they come from the same tea bush? The only difference is the way the harvested leaves are processed, whether they are fermented and for how long. Green tea is not fermented but steamed instead. Black tea is deeply fermented, while oolong is lightly fermented during production.

Further adding to the complexity, green tea is available in many different varieties:

- **Sencha (steamed tea)** – This is the most popular and most common form of green tea. After the steaming and cooling process, the tea leaves are crumpled and dried before packing.
- **Bancha (low-quality steamed tea)** – Although it has the same steaming and drying process as sencha, bancha is a coarser tea because it consists of leaves harvested after the sencha harvest. Despite bancha being considered a lower quality tea, many regional variations and different manufacturing methods make the tea popular among tea lovers.
- **Gyokuro** – This variety is made of leaves from plants grown under sunshades for three weeks prior to harvest. Gyokuro has a sweet, profound taste and considered a high-end tea.
- **Hojicha (roasted tea)** – For this cup, green tea leaves are roasted in high heat and traditionally in a special pan called a houroku. Thanks to this roasting, the color of the tea changes to a beautiful golden brown and has a crisp aroma and a flavor.
- **Tencha** – Like gyokuro, tencha tea is made from leaves of plants grown in shade of reed screens for four weeks before harvest. Unlike gyokuro, however, tencha is steamed without crumpling the leaves.
- **Matcha (powdered tea)** – A famous and popular form of green tea, matcha is made of tencha leaves which are steamed, dried, and then, ground with a stone mill to a fine powder. This tea is used during traditional tea ceremony and also offers unique flavor to various sweets and drinks.
- **Genmaicha** – This tea is made by mixing roasted rice with sencha or bancha green tea. Because of its pleasant roasted aroma and buttery taste, the tea is popular worldwide.

- Source: Nihoncha Instructors Association



Mixing in matcha

As Nakajima mentioned, matcha is loved by a lot of people throughout the world and has been applied to various food and sweets.

Sweets and drinks made with matcha

- Matcha rollcake
- Matcha cookies
- Matcha popcorn
- Macha Pokkie
- Matcha cheesecake
- Matcha chocolate
- Matcha nuts
- Matcha pudding
- Matcha latte
- Matcha milk



Photos by Takahiro Takiguchi, Stripes Japan

Elegant tea ceremony "Chanoyu"

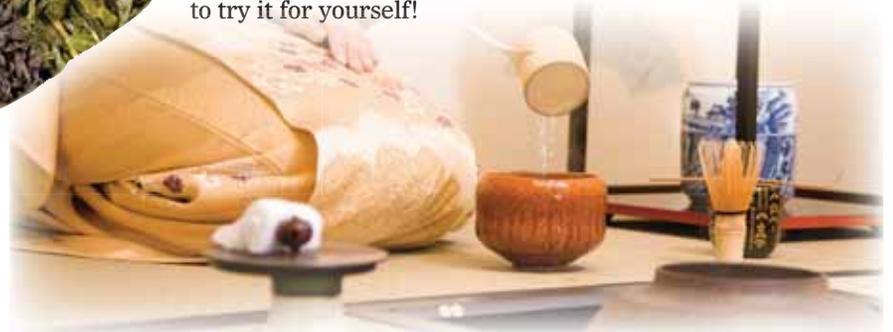
While being a popular flavor, matcha is the centerpiece of the traditional tea ceremony.

The tea ceremony known as chanoyu, originated in China, but was developed and refined in 16th century Japan. The ceremony incorporates Zen philosophy and unique aesthetics of "wabi," where art is harmony, simplicity and tranquility.

According to Nakajima, "Wa-kei-sei-jaku" are four words that represent the art of the tea ceremony. ("Wa" stands for peace of mind, "kei" means respectfulness for guest, "sei" is purity and clean and "jaku" stands for calmness).

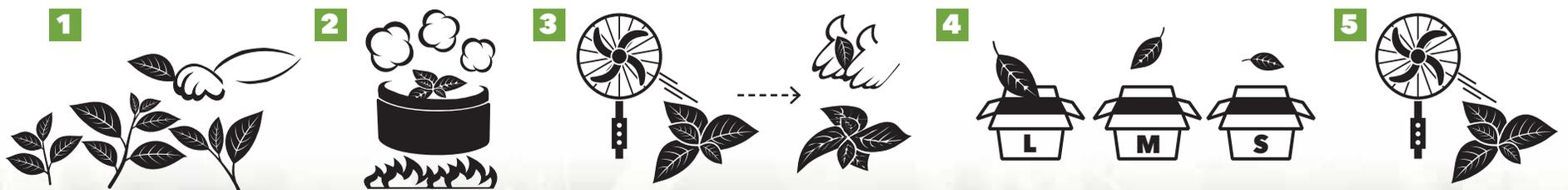
"In brief, the ritual art of the tea ceremony shows the mind how you welcome guests through brewing and serving a cup of matcha tea," he said.

There are many opportunities at museums and events to participate in a traditional tea ceremony, so keep an eye out to try it for yourself!



How to produce green tea

- 1 Picking tea leaves in the field
- 2 Steaming the leaves
- 3 Drying the tea leaves and crumpling them
- 4 Arrange the size of leaves
- 5 Dry leaves completely



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5

TEA: Try it at home



How to brew tasty tea

Brewing your own cup may seem intimidating, especially if you think you need to be an expert after reading Nakajima's description. Don't worry, it's easy!

Keep in mind while brewing that the richness and sweetness can be adjusted depending on the ration of tea to water and how long you steep.

- For sweeter and richer tea, use more tea leaves and brewing in warm water that did not reach a boil.
- For a milder, more balanced cup, uses less tea and brew in warm water.
- If you don't mind bitterness but you want to make it mild, then apply boiled water and steep the tea leaves for just a few seconds.
- Remember: Longer steep time makes the tea stronger.

The following is a brewing way recommended by Nihoncha Instructors Association. Try it first, then you can adjust the water temperature and steeping time to make it your favorite taste.

- 1 Prepare teacups and teapot.
- 2 Pour boiled water into all the teacups. (4 ounces per cup)
- 3 Put the tea leaves in the teapot. (For three people: about 9-10 grams)
- 4 When the boiled water has cooled down to around 70 to 80 degrees Celsius in yusamashi(bowl for cooling boiled water) or the tea cups, pour the water into the pot over the tea leaves.
- 5 Wait for one or two minutes to steep the tea leaves. While the first brew takes one or two minutes, the second brew takes only around 30 seconds.
- 6 Pour the tea into the teacups. Avoid filling the cups with tea in a single pour. Instead, pour a small amount in each cup and then continue to add more until all cups are filled because this will ensure to distribute the richness and sweetness amongst all the cups.



Tea tools



- A** (Yunomi) Chawan – teacup
- B** Kyuusuu – tea pot
- C** Chazutsu – tea canister
- D** Yusamashi – bowl for cooling boiled water
- E** Chasaji – tea spoon
- F** Chataku – teacup saucer

Traditional sweets and green tea

Try these traditional wagashi (traditional Japanese sweets) and Ryukyukashi (traditional Okinawan sweets), which pair well with green tea.

Wagashi (mainland of Japan)

- **Dango** - A sweet dumpling that comes in an assortment of colors and is made from cereal and rice. Soy sauce and sweet bean paste are often used to flavor it. Applying sugar to a well-pounded dango can preserve it for long time.
- **Monaka** - A wafer filled with adzuki bean paste. The paste can be made from sesame seed, chestnuts or rice. Most wafers are square-shaped.
- **Senbei** - A Japanese rice cracker in various shapes, sizes and flavors that are usually baked or grilled over charcoal. A typical senbei is flavored with soy sauce, mirin, and wrapped with a layer of seaweed. There also are salt- and sugar-flavored senbei.



Dango



Monaka



Senbei

Ryukyukashi (Okinawa)

- **Chinsuko** - An Okinawan cookie that originated during the Ryukyu Dynasty. It is made from wheat flour, sugar and lard. Chinsuko is one of the most important traditional sweets on Okinawa.
- **Chilrunko** - Often called "Okinawan kasutera," Chilrunko is a brightly colored steamed cake topped with a smattering of peanuts that have been dyed red with citrus peels boiled in sugar syrup. The recipe includes plenty of eggs, which were scarce and thus highly-prized during the Ryukyu Dynasty era. It is said that this cake was eaten only by nobility.
- **Senjuko** - A pretty lotus-shaped cake with pastry on the outside filled with a mixture of sesame and peanut butter and refreshingly fragrant
- **Kippan** - A traditional Okinawan sweet made by boiling mixed local citrus fruits and sugar syrup down until it has become a chewy, mochi-like texture. Usually, white sugar powder is sprinkled over this sweet.



Chinsuko



Senjuko



Hanabo-ru

– Souce: Masae Arakaki of Arakaki Kashiten





Museums to check out

If you want to learn more about tea or would like to check out a tea ceremony, explore the museums below.

■ **Fujinokuni Chanomiyako Museum**

This museum has a plethora of tea information, hosts a tea ceremony, brewing and grinding tea leaf demonstrations.

LOCATION: 3053-2 Kanayafujimicho, Shimada City, Shizuoka Pref. (1-hour-and-40-minute drive from Camp Fuji)

HOURS: Wed – Mon, 9 a.m. – 5 p.m.

ADMISSION: 300 yen; College students or younger and age 70 and older: free

URL: <https://tea-museum.jp/>

TEL: 0547-46-5588

■ **Iruma City Museum ALIT (Tea Museum)**

Iruma City is famous for its local Sayama Tea. The museum displays several tea houses, tea cultivating gears, hundreds of panels explaining green tea.

LOCATION: 100 Nihongi, Iruma City, Saitama Pref. (20-minute drive from Yokota AB)

HOURS: Tue – Sun, 9 a.m. – 5 p.m.

ADMISSION: adult: 200 yen; high school and college students: 100 yen; middle and elementary school students: 50 yen

URL: <http://www.alit.city.irusa.saitama.jp/>

TEL: 04-2934-7711

For further information on Japanese tea and its culture:

■ **Japan Tea Central Public Interest Incorporated Association**

LOCATION: 2-8-5 (5F) Higashi Shimbashi, Minato-ku, Tokyo

URL: www.nihon-cha.or.jp/

FACEBOOK: @nihoncha.public

TEL: 03-3434-2001



Okinawans keep it cool with Sanpin cha

BY SHOJI KUDAKA, STRIPES JAPAN

While brewing your own green tea at home or indulging in a nice cup at a tea house in Japan, convenience stores and supermarkets do offer a much more convenient option in a bottled form.

A quick browse through the offerings at your local shop will show you just how many varieties of brands and flavors are readily available for consumers. On Okinawa, another variety is also dominating the beverage section – sanpin cha, or jasmine tea.

Sanpin Cha's history dates back to the Ryukyu Kingdom (1429 – 1879).

According to Tsutomu Suga, a columnist who authors several articles about the history of tea, the name "Sanpin" has its roots in the Chinese word "香片(xiāngpiàn)" for jasmine tea. Suga believes jasmine tea used to be recognized as a signature product of Fuzhou, China. Given the fact that the Ryukyu Kingdom had an outpost in this harbor city on China's east coast, Jasmine tea was most likely brought to Ryukyu from there, according to Suga. It had to wait until after the end of the kingdom to reach all the people of Ryukyu, not just nobility.

Today, you'll find it served in restaurants and alongside other tea varieties in stores. According to Suga, sanpin cha can either be fully fermented as it

was in Fuzhou, half-fermented like in Taiwan, or even as green tea scented with jasmine imported from China.

I enjoy the jasmine tea as a refreshing and re-energizing beverage. It tastes a bit milder than oolong tea with a delicate bitterness and distinct scent that both relaxes and reawakens your senses.

And this tea reminds me of the visits to my grandparents' homes as a child. Having it with Sata Andagee (Okinawan doughnut) or Kurozatou (black sugar) still brings back memories of the old days.

Enjoying the tea with local sweets is still quite popular but you'll also find new pairings like the sanpin-cha-wari cocktail, which mixes sanpin cha with Okinawan liquor, Awamori.

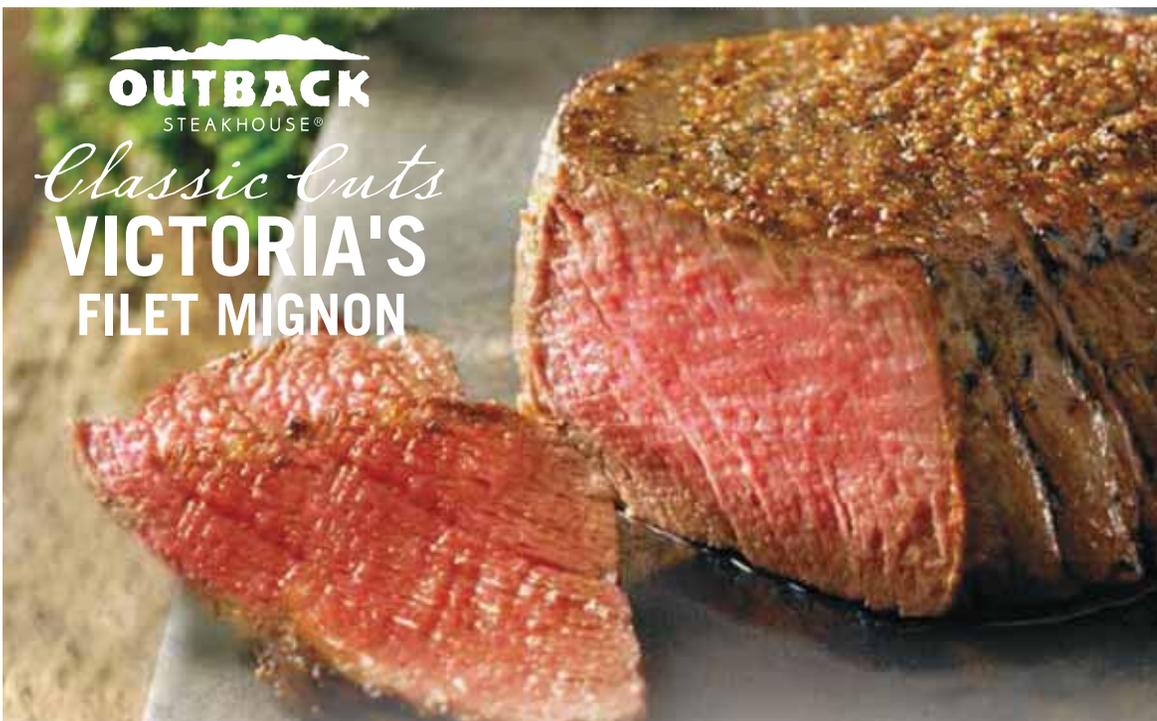
According to the book, "Cha to Ryukyu-jin (tea and people of Ryukyu)" by Koichi Takei, another popular tea during the Ryukyu Kingdom was Kuma cha, a green tea harvested in Kumamoto Prefecture (then known as Higo). The author draws similarities between Kuma cha's strong flavor and that of sanpin cha, including how the strong scent drew the people of Ryukyu to drink both as refreshments during the subtropical island's steamy summer.

Sanpin cha remains a part of that strategy for keeping cool in the hot Okinawan summer. As for me, the scent and flavor both refresh me and remind me of the past.

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