Ringing in the New Year with Osechi

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**A holiday season in Japan with COVID-19**

Much like in the States, the holiday season in Japan is usually the most cheerful and busiest time of year — under normal conditions, of course. We have parties, also known as bonenkai, which are informal year-end celebrations with coworkers and friends. And there are gifts, New Year’s greeting cards, winter illuminations, Christmas markets and more. This time of the year is hectic, but it is also one full of joy.

This year, this joyous season is another unfortunate victim of the COVID-19 pandemic. There will be no late-night parties with our coworkers or gathering with friends and family for many of us. Many of the holiday events my family and I look forward to are either drastically scaled back or canceled altogether.

Our schedules and plans have had to change completely. We won’t be visiting relatives in the New Year as officials encourage people to stay home in Japan. My family and I won’t
be attending Christmas Mass as we usually do, nor will we be heading to the big market like Ameyoko in Ueno to pick up fresh seafood for our New Year’s Oschi foods. This holiday season will be like no other we have experienced, but it also doesn’t mean we can’t look for joy in what we do have.

Winter illuminations around the country are still shining brightly, keeping some normalcy while allowing for social distancing. From Yokohama to Nagasaki and up to Misawa, there are plenty of places where you can still go out and enjoy a bit of holiday cheer safely.

And though we cannot spend time together this year, technology continues to connect us, allowing us to celebrate together but apart. My wife recently celebrated my mother-in-law’s 101st birthday in an online celebration, including my wife’s sister living in Guam and the other sister who lives in the States. Even if it was via computer, their long conversation and the meals they prepared to have while on the call made it feel like they were all in the same room.

This year also means that one of my favorite parts of the season, banenkai parties, are also going online. Even if online parties aren’t as fun as the ones we’d have in person, we have been working from home since April, so it will be nice to see my coworkers again, even if it is on a screen. But I will definitely miss tying my necktie around my forehead, a custom to signify how much fun we’re having.

Another change will be how many nengajo cards I will be sending. Like the holiday cards you send in the States, we send nengajo New Year’s greeting cards in Japan. I usually send about 100 cards, and they always are a good reminder of just how blessed I am. I will be writing more this year because it is important now more than ever to convey my love and thoughts to my loved ones.

We have indeed had to change how we celebrate many things this year, and unfortunately, the changes have continued to Christmas and New Year’s festivities. Despite all of this, I’m looking forward to what 2021 has in store. My wife, daughter, and I will be ringing in the New Year with lucky toshikoshi soba, catching up with relatives via video call, and being thankful to have each other no matter what the future has in store. Happy holidays and Happy New Year to you and your family!

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Archaeologists discovered four-thousand-year old clay images of people brewing, storing, and drinking beer in ruined cities and forgotten tombs scattered throughout the ancient world. The Babylonians made sixteen kinds of beer, using everything from white and black barley to wheat and honey. Beer was glorified in the Egyptian Book of the Dead, where it was referred to as the “beer of truth” and “beer of eternity.” Beer has been made from many different grains through the ages, yet, barley has proven the world’s most valued brewing ingredient.

Bavarian monks first brewed lager beer during the 14th Century, but it could only be brewed during the winter months. In 1620, the Puritans regulated, by law, daily beer consumption. They were allowed two quarts for breakfast alone. But back then, there was little choice of beverages and the unhealthy management of waste disposal contaminated many pure water sources. People were afraid to drink the water and drank beer instead, consuming beer as fast as we drink water or sodas today. In 1637, the legislature of the Massachusetts Bay Colony fixed the price of beer: “not more than one penny a quart.” By law, beer in Colonial America had to be served in standard half-pint, pint, or quart mugs. Today, drinking beer has gotten a bit out of control since colonial times.

In 1840, a wave of German migrants arrived in America, bringing with them the recipes of bottom-fermenting lagers. Migrants such as Frederick Pabst, Bernard Stroh, Joseph Schlitz, Adolph Coors, Henry Weinhard, Theodore Hamm and Eberhard Anheuser. In 1892, the modern bottle cap was invented. Before this date most beer was consumed on draught. After the invention of the bottle cap, beer sales would never be the same again. In 1935, Krueger Brewing Company and the American Can Company introduced canned beer. Today American pale lager is produced at a rate of 180 million barrels per year.

With all this drinking going on, it leads up to two kinds of alcohol-related problems: health problems and impairment problems. Alcohol related impairment problems develop quickly, since alcohol is a nervous system depressant slowing down bodily functions. Impairment problems include impaired driving, violence, falls, and general injuries. Alcohol-related health problems develop over time. Alcoholism is the best example of these health problems, and includes heart disease, liver disease, cancers, and other illnesses.

Binge drinking is the ingestion of too much beer, wine or hard liquor, too quickly and could lead to alcohol poisoning. When the body’s vital centers have been depressed enough by alcohol, unconsciousness or death can occur from acute intoxication. Due to differences in body chemistry, women can overdose after drinking lesser amounts than men. People who survive alcohol poisoning sometimes suffer irreversible brain damage. If the person is cold, clammy, pale, or have bluish skin, slow respiration, breaths of eight or less per minute, better call 911 pronto. Drinking and driving was not an issue back in 1620. BAC levels didn’t exist. Falling off your horse was a major problem, and folks died younger. The new view of drinking is that alcoholism is a lifestyle-related health problem and it can be divided into two categories: risks we can change and risks we cannot change. Everyone has some level of biological risk, or trigger level for developing lifestyle-related health problems. This is a risk we cannot change and is true for heart disease, cancer and alcoholism. Drink responsibly.

Hilary Valdez is a retiree living in Japan. He is an experienced Mental Health professional and Resiliency Trainer. Valdez is a former Marine and has worked with the military most of his career and most recently worked at Camp Zama as a Master Resiliency Trainer. Valdez now has a private practice and publishes books on social and psychological issues. His books are available on Amazon and for Kindle. Learn more about Valdez and contact him at www.hilaryvaldez.com or at InstantInsights@hotmail.com
Near Hotaka station in the farming countryside of Azumino, about half an hour by train from Matsumoto, Hotaka shrine is an impressive, spacious shinto shrine, with a number of interesting features to enjoy as you stroll around the grounds.

There seems to be a distinct nautical theme, even though the shrine is about as far from the ocean as it’s possible to be in Japan. There are statues of seafarers, one riding some mythical animal through the waves, and carvings in wood and stone of ocean scenes, boats and turtles being tossed around by unfriendly waves.

The shrine is surrounded by peaceful forest, and there are also a couple of imposing torii gates and impressive wooden halls for visitors to admire. You’ll also see elegant metal sculptures in the shape of origami cranes, these near a carp pond, where it’s very relaxing to watch the fish glide serenely through the milky water.

GETTING THERE
The shrine is just a couple of minutes’ walk down the main road, heading away from Hotaka station on the infrequent JR Oito line.

ADDRESS: Nagano-ken, Azumino-shi, Hotaka 6079
It's no coincidence that Okayama is a dedicated stop along the Tokaido bullet train line that speeds westward across Japan. Too often overlooked as the inconspicuous middle child situated halfway between Osaka and Hiroshima, the city of Okayama is renowned for its peaches, old-style sushi, mountain hot springs, and moon-viewing gardens.

If the pulse of Okayama lies in the lively neighborhood of high streets and shopping arcades that surround the central train station, its historical core is indisputably Korakuen Garden. The famous Edo-period garden was commissioned as a peaceful daimyo resort by Lord Ikeda Tsunmasa and completed in 1700. Since 1884, it's been open to the general public. Today, the garden buzzes with locals, tourists, and birdwatchers, strolling across and around the park.

Korakuen is popularly known as one of Japan's Three Great Gardens since it first appeared in a photo book for foreigners in 1904. Korakuen survived significant damage from a 1944 flood and 1945 war bombings and has been faithfully preserved over the years thanks to detailed plans and illustrations documented by the original Ikeda clan.

Meandering through the garden— which also includes the remains of an equestrian ground and an archery range— it's easy to imagine a feudal lord's leisure activities during more peaceful times. Every spring, Korakuen hosts tea picking and rice planting festivals. Every autumn, traditional Noh theater performances are held at the reconstructed open-air stage in honor of Lord Ikeda's affinity with the 14th-century art form.

Korakuen's various flora highlight the seasons, while the evergreen cypress grove is visited all year round by many wild birds. In another corner, endangered red-crowned cranes live inside a dedicated aviary. As Japanese symbols of luck and longevity, cranes roamed free at Korakuen from the Edo period until they faced after World War II. In 1956, they were reintroduced to the garden. A few times a year, these majestic birds are released on scheduled morning strolls within the garden grounds and during a ceremonial flight on New Year's Day.

Visitors can also walk along shaded paths outside the garden, especially around its south gate, before crossing the pedestrian Tsukimi Bridge to Okayama Castle. Like many black and white tenshu-tower (castle towers) in the region, its architectural style is characteristic of the late 16th century Azuchi-Momoyama period. The distinctive black weatherboards that protect its outer walls give it the nickname of Ujo, or "Black Crow" castle, in contrast to the neighboring Himeji's "White Egret" castle.

Okayama Castle was founded by Lord Ukita Hideie in 1597 and eventually expanded to include a salt warehouse, 35 turrets, and 21 gates. In 1869, the main buildings became the property of the Meiji government and had been preserved as national property until an air raid on June 23, 1945, burnt most of the castle complex. The only surviving building in the central area was the 1630 Tsukimi Yagura (Moon-viewing Turret) just inside the northwest walls.
Okayama Castle’s present six-story, 21-meter-tall tenshukaku was reconstructed in 1966, along with three of its main gates. The main building is now a museum with an elevator, café, shop in the basement, and even a studio to craft your own Bizenyaki (備前焼) pottery. It also exhibits a replica of a Lord’s chamber and period artifacts such as swords, calligraphy, lacquerware, ornate stitched armor, and preserved parched letters to the castle’s sitting lords. The regal lookout views are from the fifth and sixth floors.

Just west of Okayama station, near the Hokucho shopping arcade, the Japanese sushi restaurant Fukuzushi specializes in sawara (Spanish mackerel). According to the chef, sawara is the defining element of barazushi: a luxurious style of sushi made in homes around Bizen, Saidaiji, and Okayama from the early Meiji period to the 1930s. A scattering of raw fish and other ingredients laid on top of and mixed into vinegared rice is the Barazushi signature. Unlike chirashizushi, which features popular fish such as salmon and tuna, barazushi’s ingredients are much more varied and subtle — with no soy sauce in sight.

Chef Kubota makes Bizen Barazushi the old-fashioned way as a “faithful reproduction” of the historical dish, using only fresh, natural, and regionally sourced ingredients. It’s a luxurious juxtaposition of tastes and textures presented in the giant clay bowl: vinegary sawara (Spanish mackerel) and mamakari (Japanese sardine), lemony kotsu (small sea bream), salty anago (saltwater eel), wrinkled mogai (alge sea fish), crispy lotus root, chewy gobo, crunchy green beans, juicy gourd, spicy pink ginger, soft ginkgo nut, succulent shiitake mushrooms, tender taro stems, and one whole chestnut.

Vinegar is a fundamental flavor in the dish, and the chef advises to begin eating anywhere you like and to chew slowly to give each ingredient time to permeate your palate. Finish your meal by nibbling on a delicate fern leaf, which will leave tangy-sweet flavors on your tongue.

Southeast of the city center, past Saidaiji, from the sheltered harbor of Hoden, a small boat will take you to the nearby island of Inujima. Just 10 minutes away from the mainland, Inujima is one of the contemporary art-infused islands of the Seto Inland Sea. While it may be smaller than Naoshima and Teshima, Inujima’s striking reappraisal of its industrial history alone is worth the journey. You will immediately see the giant eroding chimneys of its early 20th-century copper refinery jutting up above the horizon as you approach the east side of the island.

Since 2008, the old refinery ruins have been converted into the Inujima Seirensha Art Museum: an art site that stores heat in its chimneys, leverages natural light with angles and mirrors, recycles human waste as fertilizer, and preserves the exposed Karami brick walls of its original structure.

On the mainland, less than an hour north of Okayama station by train, the rural village of Takebe straddles the Ashii river up in the mountains, where wildlife thrives, and you can soak in one of the natural hot springs. The intimate Takebe Yahata Onsen offers several different baths, including two rotenburo (open-air baths) and four indoor baths of varying temperatures. Recline in aneyu (shallow bath) with a view from the patio, or get your feet wet in the free ashiyu (foot bath) outside the building, with views across the river.

In the evening, take a refreshing walk across the many narrow bridges in the crisp mountain air. On a clear night, remember to gaze up at the sky — even if you can’t see the moon, you will undoubtedly see the galaxy of stars.
Due to challenges of COVID-19, this year was a story of hope,” said Tech. Sgt. Lou Splichal, Operation Christmas Drop 2020 senior enlisted leader. “To come here and show that we can still do this mission, which we are accustomed to doing, but moreover, ensure that it takes care of people, is at the heart of it all.”

Andersen Air Force Base, Guam united with Yokota Air Base, Japan and the Japan Self-Defense Force for the 69th annual OCD, delivering love from above for the people of the Republic of Palau. C-130 aircrews airdropped 64 bundles, totaling 3,200 lbs of cargo to the people living on some of the most remote islands in the world, Dec. 6th to the 10th.

Due to challenges of COVID-19, this year was a little different than years past; however, a lot of hard work was done to ensure the success of OCD.

Prior to arriving to Guam, all Yokota personnel involved in the operation had to complete a 14-day restriction of movement at their place of residence and receive a negative COVID test. Before bundles were assembled, all donated items were held in a sanitized location for a minimum of 24 hours.

During the bundle build, all participants were required to wear masks and gloves. Bundles were then disinfected and sat in a sanitary location for a minimum of 72 hours before being loaded onto a C-130 for delivery.

“There were a lot of measures we took to make sure that what we did was in line with the DOD and the [Centers of Disease Control] guidelines,” said Maj. Joseph Spitz, OCD mission commander. “This allowed us to mitigate the risk of spread and transmission of COVID-19 to the islanders of Palau.”

Getting these critical supplies of food, medicine...
and other items necessary for survival to the people in the South-Eastern Pacific region has always been at the root of the OCD mission. This year, as a historic first, the islands of Koror and Peleliu were able to also receive bundles of aid.

“The islands farther out may not see aid for an entire year, and OCD is the only opportunity for them to get that life-sustaining aide, specifically with some of the challenges associated with a global pandemic,” said Spitz. “Not to say they’re not being taken care of, but there’s a unique advantage that OCD has using that space available tactical airlift to deliver humanitarian aid to these islands that really can’t be replicated.”

OCD continues a tradition of not only helping those in need but working with our partner nations to better meet the ever-evolving needs of the region, and for the past six years the JASDF has participated as a vital part of the mission. The aircrews were able to accomplish vital training on the techniques used and shared between the nations to better respond to natural disasters in the Indo-Pacific region.

“[This operation] is not a single person, squadron or unit exercise,” said Spitz. “I don’t know that we could accomplish this mission without the support of Anderson, Yokota or the support of our JASDF partners, of whom we’ve come to rely on so heavily and enjoy their participation.”

Having the opportunity to work in a bilateral capacity with the JASDF during OCD, and in years past with the Royal Australian Air Force and Royal New Zealand Air Force, continues to strengthen our interoperability and response capabilities in deterring aggression, providing humanitarian and disaster relief and maintaining an open and free Indo-Pacific.

With the bundles dropped, experienced gained, relationships built and supplies delivered, it was the spirit of helping others that would prove to leave a lasting impression on all of the crews that took part.

“The impact that this operation has on the islanders, not just Micronesia and Palau, but the level of care and appreciation from the people of Guam is something you’re not going to see anywhere else,” said Spitz. “I don’t want to be in a world where Operation Christmas Drop doesn’t exist.”
For 69 years, the Operation Christmas Drop mission has demonstrated America’s goodwill to those with few material resources. On Dec. 7, Andersen Air Force Base, Guam, also known as Base Camp during OCD, kicked off OCD20 with a “Push Ceremony.”

Due to COVID-19, this year’s operation looks different than in years past. The Department of Foreign Affairs of the Federated States of Micronesia came to a decision to forego their portion of OCD20 due to health concerns. With FSM deciding to forego their drops this year, there is a unique opportunity to provide aid to the citizens of Palau at unprecedented levels. Seven islands in the Republic of Palau will receive 60 bundles dropped by C-130 aircrews from the Japan Air Self Defense Force and the 36th Airlift Squadron.

“This global pandemic has hindered many things, but it could not stop the spirit of this season and the joy of giving,” said Brig. Gen. Jeremy Sloane, 36th Wing commander. “This year, nearly 30 tons of toys, food, clothes, supplies and love being packed into more than 130 bundles had to be gathered in unique ways, then packaged in an extremely safe manner and distributed like never before.”

Months leading up to the drop dates, volunteers from Team Andersen created donation drop-off boxes for collecting lifesaving supplies, non-perishable food items, educational materials and toys that will be air dropped to participating islands between Dec. 7 and 10. Donated items were sanitized and stored in a controlled COVID-19 free environment for more than 24 hours before being packed into bundles. The bundles were then left in a sanitized location for a minimum of 72 hours after packing to ensure a safe and COVID-19 free delivery of critical supplies to Palau.

This long-standing tradition of goodwill is a partnership between the 374th AW, Yokota Air Base, Japan; the 36th WG, Andersen AFB, Guam; the 734th Air Mobility Squadron, Andersen AFB of the 518th Air Mobility Operations Wing, Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam, Hawaii; the University of Guam; and the ‘Operation Christmas Drop’ private organization which leads the fundraising and donations for the operation.

OCD is the Department of Defense’s longest-running humanitarian airlift operation. The tradition began during the Christmas season in 1952 when a B-29 Superfortress aircrew saw islanders waving at them from the island of Kapingamarangi, 3,500 miles southwest of Hawaii. In the spirit of Christmas, the aircrew dropped a bundle of supplies attached to a parachute to the islanders below, giving the operation its name.

Since then, more than a million pounds of supplies have been dropped throughout the region.

“As 2020 come to a close, ending a year of great uncertainty, doubt and social and physical distancing, Operation Christmas Drop, serves as a beacon of hope and humanity, highlighting our community, regional and global connectedness,” said Sloane. “And although some of the islands remain unable to receive bundles, due to the pandemic, those supplies are still packed and ready to be delivered at a moment’s notice. The men and women of OCD, much like Santa, remain ready.”
Yokota airman remembered

STORY AND PHOTOS BY
STAFF SGT. GABRIELLE SPALDING,
374TH AIRLIFT WING

“T”

his is for you, Jutba.” ““Go to the

ot forgotten.” “Here’s to

written messages like these and pictures of the late Senior Airman Jeremy Jutba-Hake, 36th Airlift Squadron, Yokota Air Base, Japan, instructor loadmaster, adorned bundles which were airdropped onto the remote island of Koror, Republic of Palau, during the last day of Operation Christmas Drop 2020, Dec. 10.

As the world’s longest running humanitarian airdrop mission operating for the last 69 years, OCD has continued its efforts of providing critical items to the people who live on the islands throughout the South-Eastern Pacific region; a mission that has remained a positive aspect for the families on those islands.

For Tech. Sgt. Lou Spichal, OCD 2020 senior enlisted leader, the foundation of OCD and who Jutba was as a person, the two have become synonymous.

“Jutba was the consummate gentleman of the Pacific,” said Spichal. “He would literally give you the shirt off his back; constantly thinking about the group as whole, and not just about himself. He was the embodiment of the Aloha spirit.”

Jutba unexpectedly passed away due to an unknown heart condition during OCD 2015. The following year, the 36th AS began this tradition of commemorating his legacy by holding a ceremony on a C-130 before air-dropping bundles in his name, which continues to this day.

“It’s important that we keep honoring him in this way, so that he is not forgotten,” said Spichal. “From day one he was a valuable member of the C-130 family. He worked so hard to get those wings and lost them doing something that we all love.”

Spichal, who began his career as a loadmaster with Jutba, reminisced about his devotion to helping others. It was at the core of who he was as a person.

“He remembered our families, Jutba and I were together at Little Rock [Air Force Base, Arkansas],” recollected Spichal. “When I first arrived there, Jutba, for no other reason than because he was a good guy, came up to me and introduced himself to me, because he understood what it was to be the new guy.”

While a part of the mobility section at Little Rock, Jutba made a name for himself as someone who could be relied on for more than just what was expected of him. “He was the go-to guy,” said Spichal. “People just knew he was the one who had the answers. And not because he was weaponizing his knowledge, he genuinely cared. People who care just for the sake of caring, they’re going to stand out, and he did.”

Taking care of his peers and being an essential part of the community was just who Jutba was as a person, said Spichal. His legacy, as not only an integral part of the Air Force, but also his positive and compassionate personality is why this important tradition remains a significant part of the OCD mission.

Honoring him in this way, Jutba’s spirit remains alive in the hearts and minds of those throughout the Air Force community who knew him and for those who will know him through stories and ceremonies held for him during Christmas Drops for years to come.

Airmen with the 374th Airlift Wing, led by Tech. Sgt. Lou Spichal, Operation Christmas Drop 2020 senior enlisted leader, talks about Senior Airman Jeremy Jutba-Hake during the 69th annual OCD at Andersen Air Force Base on Dec. 10.
**Greek tiropitakia:**
Feta cheese triangles recipe
By Karen Laedlein

**Ingredients:**
- 8-12 oz. Feta cheese, crumbled
- 8-12 oz. Cottage cheese, small curd
- 2-3 eggs, beaten
- Fresh parsley, minced
- 1 stick butter, melted
- 1 stick margarine, melted
- Filo sheets (thawed but protected from drying out) (1 section)

**Instructions:**
1. In a bowl, crumble the cheeses, add eggs, and parsley until the consistency of creamed eggs.
2. Melt the butter and margarine.
3. Cut the filo in 3” wide long strips.
4. Brush the melted butter onto one long strip of the filo, fold in half lengthwise. Butter again.
5. Add 1 1/2 tsp of cheese mix to a corner of the long strip and fold up (flag style) to form a triangle. Repeat.
6. Freeze on waxed sheet then store in a Ziplock bag. (Freeze up to 4 weeks)
7. Cook at 400° until golden.

*Don’t skimp or there will be leftovers.*

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**Thai chicken coconut soup**
*(Tom Kha Gai)*

By Karen Laedlein

This classic Thai chicken soup gets its rich flavor from quintessential Thai ingredients: coconut milk, lemongrass, ginger, turmeric, lime juice, chili, and cilantro. (30 minutes)

**Ingredients:**
- 1 can (14 oz.) coconut milk (low fat works well)
- 2-3 cups water
- 1/4 cup fresh lime juice
- 4-5 Tbsp. oyster sauce
- 1 tsp. ground turmeric
- 1 tsp. chili powder
- 2-3 tsp. ground ginger or 6 quarter-size slices fresh ginger
- 4 stalks fresh lemongrass, halved

**SAUTÉ:**
- 1 cup sliced mushrooms or 2 cans sliced mushrooms
- 1 pound boned, skinned chicken breast or thighs, cut into 1-in. chunks or use precooked rotisserie chicken
- 2 cans or packages baby corn sliced or frozen corn

**GARNISH OPTIONS:**
- 1/4 cup fresh basil leaves
- 1/4 cup fresh cilantro
- Diced avocado

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**Squash pull-apart dinner rolls**

By Karen Laedlein

(Makes 2 dozen)

**Ingredients:**
- 1 1/2 cups warm milk
- 2 1/4 teaspoons dry yeast
- 2 tablespoons sugar
- 2 tsp salt
- 1 egg, lightly beaten
- 3/4 cup puréed squash or canned pumpkin
- 1/4 cup vegetable shortening or butter
- 4 to 5 cups all-purpose flour
- 2 tablespoons butter, melted, plus more for pan
- 2 teaspoons poppy or sesame seeds

**Instructions:**
1. In a large bowl, combine warm milk with yeast, sugar, and salt. Let stand 5 minutes, then add egg and beat well to combine.
2. Add squash and shortening; mash with a fork until shortening is in small pieces. Add 1 1/2 cups (3C) flour and mix well with a wooden spoon. Gradually mix in more flour by the cupful until dough collects around spoon and pulls away from sides of bowl (you may not need all the flour).
3. Transfer to a lightly floured surface and knead until supple, about 7 minutes. Preheat oven to 375°F; cut each ball into halves
4. Grease a large baking sheet, turn out onto a light surface, and knead until dough is only soft enough to shape into small rounds. (Makes 2 dozen)
5. Roll each piece into a ball, flatten to disc, and place on a baking sheet so they fit snugly together (8 per pan). Preheat oven to 375°F.
6. Brush balls with melted butter, sprinkle with poppy seeds, and place on baking sheet so they fit snugly together (8 per pan).
7. Bake until golden brown, 15 to 20 minutes. Let cool, then place in a Ziploc bag.

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**Chicken Caesar Salad**

By Darlene Coffman

A crispy fresh salad is awesome at any time of the year!

**Ingredients:**
- 4 boneless/skinless chicken breasts
- 1 cup Dale’s Liquid Steak Seasoning
- 1 small sweet onion (~ 1/2 cup finely diced)
- 3 tablespoons minced garlic
- 1/2 cup EVOO
- 1/4 cup water
- 1 head romaine lettuce
- 2 cups freshly shredded parmesan cheese
- 1 cup Caesar croutons
- Your favorite Caesar dressing

**YOU WILL NEED:** 1 Gallon Ziploc Bag, a large mixing bowl and individual serving bowls.

**Instructions:**
1. If possible prepare the chicken to when you want to serve the salad. Place the chicken breasts with a meat thermometer inserted into the thickest part. Insert thermometer into the thickest part of chicken breast and rotate a little before cooking.

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Stars and Stripes recently asked folks for recipes. Here’s a sample of the many that were coming in. Going out to eat isn’t necessarily on the plate this year. Is the best way to serve up some family fun.
Salsa, pico de gallo, and guacamole
By Rosier Ortiz-Torres
Ready for an easy 3-in-1 Mexican dip? This recipe is great for snacks, BBQ, tortilla chips & dip, tacos, nachos, quesadillas, and so much more!

**Ingredients:**
- 2 avocados
- 2 limes (juice the limes)
- 4 medium tomatoes
- 1 Cilantro bunch
- 5-6 Garlic cloves or 2 tbsp garlic powder
- 4 Jalapenos
- 1 tbsp salt

**Instructions:**
1) Dice the onion, tomatoes, garlic, jalapenos, and cilantro (use some of the stems for added flavor burst). Combine in a container with salt and lime juice. Cover and set aside as flavors marry and create more juices.
2) Mash up the 2 avocados in a separate container. Add 1/2 cup of the pico de gallo into the avocado and juices for a smooth texture. Add more salt and garlic powder to taste.
3) For the salsa, a blender or puree can be used. Take 2 cups of the pico de gallo, place in blender and pulse until you get a desired consistency for salsa dip.
4) Place everything in its own section on a serving platter and enjoy!

Cheesy Chicken & Potato Casserole
By Marla Bautista
As a mom of three, Army wife, and entrepreneur, I am always on the go. From cheerleading practice to speech therapy and military ceremonies, my family doesn’t have much downtime. Preparing a delicious meal that my picky eaters will enjoy is no easy feat. Baking a Cheesy Chicken and Potato Casserole is always a win, win. It’s easy to make, and everyone loves it.

**Ingredients:**
(Serves 4 people)
- 1lb. Boneless Chicken Breast
- 4 Potatoes
- 1 Tsp. Black Pepper
- 1 Tsp. Salt
- 1Tbsp. Garlic Powder
- 1/2 Tbsp. Paprika
- 3 Tbsp. Olive Oil

*Green Onions and Shredded Cheese (Optional Garnish)*

**Instructions:**
1) Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Oil baking pan. Cut potatoes and set aside as flavors marry and create more juices.
2) Dice the onion, tomatoes, garlic, jalapenos, and cilantro, cut avocados, and set aside avocados
3) Begin with Pico de Gallo (set aside avocados)
4) Serve, and enjoy!

Puerto Rican Sancocho
By Kristy Maldonado
Sancocho is a one-pot stew with chunks of tender beef (meat of your choice or no meat at all) and root vegetables. It is typically served with a side of white rice and a piece of ripe avocado.

**Cook Time:** 1 hour 40 minutes (includes 20 minutes of prep time)

**SERVINGS:** approximately 8 servings

**Ingredients:**
- 2 tablespoons of olive oil
- VEGETABLES
  - 1 large cassava (yuca)
  - 1 cup of pumpkin (calabaza)
  - 2 yams (names)
  - 2 husks of corn (maiz)
  - 2 Taros (yautias)
  - 4 medium potatoes (papas)
  - 3 large carrots (zanahorias)
- MEAT
  - You can choose between cubed beef, pork, chicken breasts, sausages, chorizo or any kind of meat that can be cut in small pieces. Use approximately 2-3 pounds of meat.

**Instructions:**
1) Peel all the vegetables and cut them into 1-2 inches chunks.
2) Add the seasonings to a large bottom soup pot over medium-high heat. Cook for 2 minutes and stir it.
3) Add in vegetables and meat.
4) Add water to cover everything in the pot.
5) Cover the pot and wait until soup reaches a boil, then lower heat to medium-low and allow to cook for 1 hour, or until vegetables are fork tender.
6) Serve with your favorite side dish. ¡Buen provecho!
Homemade Cinnamon Rolls

By Najwa Fieger

Ingredients:
- DOUGH: 2 1/2 tsp active yeast, 1 cup warm milk, 1 tsp cup sugar, 1/3 cup of unsalted butter, 1 tsp salt, 2 eggs, 4 cups flour
- CENTER ROLL: 1 cup brown sugar, 3 tbsp cinnamon powder, 1/3 cup melted butter
- ICING: 1 cup powdered sugar, 3 tablespoons heavy cream, 1 tsp vanilla extract, 3 oz of cream cheese, Pinch of salt

Instructions:
1) Preheat oven to 350 degrees.
2) Mix yeast and sugar into the warm milk. Allow to froth for at least 5 minutes.
3) In another bowl, mix together 4 cups of flour, eggs, salt, and butter.
4) Slowly stir in the milk mixture until well blended.
5) Place the dough in an oiled bowl. Allow an hour to rise.
6) For the center, mix the cinnamon powder and brown sugar together.
7) Roll out the dough. A good measurement is to stretch it out thin to about 16” long and 12” wide.
8) Brush the melted butter on the dough.
9) Evenly distribute sugar/cinnamon mixture over the buttered dough.
10) Slice into 1 1/2 inch pieces onto a pan. Let them rise on the pan for 30 minutes.
11) Bake in the oven for 20 minutes.
12) To make the icing, combine powdered sugar, heavy cream, vanilla, cream cheese and a pinch of salt.
13) Drizzle the icing on the cinnamon rolls once they are done.

Ms. DD’s Sweet Southern Cornbread

By Darlene Coffman

YOU WILL NEED: 1 - 9 inch cast iron skillet and a large mixing bowl.

Instructions:
1) Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Put bacon grease in cast iron skillet and place in oven to heat. In a large mixing bowl, mix together the Corn Muffin Mix, sugar, eggs, and milk. Blend well. Batter will appear slightly watery and lumpy. Add any desired extras here.
2) Remove skillet from oven when bacon grease is completely melted and slightly smoking. Place skillet on stovetop. Poor batter mix into skillet. It should sizzle. Place back in oven and bake till knife inserted into the middle comes out clean (approx 20 minutes). It should appear like a cake with golden brown top and caramel brown edges.
3) Use the stick of butter to outline the inside edge of the skillet and place a few pats on top. Enjoy!!

Oreo Blueberry Cheesecake Cupcakes

By Najwa Fieger

Looking for a fantastic dessert? Try out this recipe for Oreo Blueberry Cheesecake Cupcakes! These sweet treats will be a favorite amongst friends and family.

Ingredients:
- BLUEBERRY SYRUP: 1 cup frozen blueberries, 1/4 cup sugar, 1/3 cup water, 1 tsp lemon juice
- CUPCAKE INGREDIENTS: Yellowcake mix, Vanilla instant pudding, 3 eggs, 1 cup sugar, 1/4 cup vegetable oil, Halves of Golden Oreos (one side of cookie per cupcake), Crushed Oreos (half of one sleeve with cream removed), Cheesecake Icing ingredients: 1 cup butter softened, 1 1/2 cup cream cheese, 1/2 cup powdered sugar, Color from blueberry syrup

Instructions:
1) To make the blueberry syrup: heat sugar, water, and lemon juice on stove until the sugar dissolves. 2) Add in frozen blueberries until they soften (about a minute). 3) Strain the blueberries, then bring back to a boil for 3 minutes.
4) Allow the blueberry syrup to cool.
5) Preheat oven to 365.
6) Remove the cream from the Oreos.
7) Line cupcake pan.
8) Place one side/half of Oreo on the bottom of each cupcake tin.
9) For cupcake batter: blend yellowcake mix, instant pudding pack, 3 eggs, cup of water, and vegetable oil on low speed, then high speed for about two minutes.
10) Fold in most of the blueberry syrup, saving some for the icing. Makes for pretty lavender icing.
11) Bake 20-25 minutes.
12) To make the icing, whisk 1 cup of butter + 1/2 cups of cream cheese until smooth.
13) Sift in powdered sugar.
14) Add about a tablespoon of blueberry mixture for desired purple color.
15) Pipe icing on the cupcakes.
16) Remove cream from about half the sleeve of golden Oreos. Crush the Oreos and use for garnish.
17) Top with fresh blueberries.

Mama LuLu’s famous garlic bread

By Laurie Kuhl

My children seem to forget every dish that I have made for them except for this recipe. It's one they ask for and it's fun to get them involved in making the garlic bread. It's a recipe that you can adjust to your taste — maybe sprinkle some red pepper for more zing or add some chives. It's easy to prep while you're cooking the rest of dinner and then pop it in the oven after everything else is ready! Enjoy!

Ingredients:
- Loaf of bread - French or Italian is good
- Melted butter - 4 tbsp
- Lawry’s Seasoned Salt - 1 1/2 tsp
- Mozzarella or Kraft Italian blend shreaded cheese - 1 cup
- Shredded Parmesan (Kraft or do your own; don’t use the granulated kind) - 1/2 cup or so
- Minced Onion - 1 tbsp
- Oregano - 1 tbsp
- Garlic Salt - 1 tsp

Instructions:
1) Cut bread into slices and arrange on a foil-lined pan.
2) Slices can touch, about an inch thick works well.
3) Spread melted butter over tops and let soak in.
4) Sprinkle lightly with Lawry’s Seasoned Salt.
5) Top each piece using shredded mozzarella and/or Kraft Italian blend shredded cheese.
6) Sprinkle with minced onion.
7) Top with shredded parmesan.
8) Sprinkle lightly with oregano and garlic salt.
9) Bake under broiler, about 2-3 inches away until cheese starts to barely brown on the edges.
10) Keep a close eye, it cooks fast!
Tuscan Tomato Soup
By Anna and Tom Bagiackas

SERVINGS: 4
START TO FINISH: 40 MINUTES

What we love about this recipe is that it is first, delicious. Secondly, it is easy to make and adaptable with items often found in our pantry. Lastly, it is very adaptable. Easy to cut in half for one and perfect for a light lunch, or make the full recipe in half for one

Instructions:
1) Combine oil, garlic and pepper flakes in large saucepan and cook over medium heat until garlic is lightly browned, about 4 minutes.
2) Stir in tomatoes, bread, broth, basil sprig, salt and pepper and bring to boil over high heat. Reduce heat to medium, cover and simmer vigorously until bread has softened completely and soup has thickened slightly, about 15 minutes, stirring occasionally.
3) Off heat, discard basil sprig. Whisk soup until bread has fully broken down and soup has thickened further, about 1 minute. Sprinkle with Parmesan and chopped basil, drizzle with extra oil and serve.

(This recipe was adapted from "Cook's Country magazine.

Zucchini apple bread with crumble topping
By Rosie Ortiz-Torres

Ingredients:
1) Egg
2) All-purpose flour
3) Sugar
4) Baking soda
5) Cinnamon
6) Butter
7) Zucchini
8) Baking powder
9) Oil

Instructions:
Preheat oven to 350, combine zucchini apple ingredients in a large bowl. Spray 2 standard loaf baking containers with non-stick grease and pour the mixture. Add crumble topping on top and bake for 45 minutes in the oven. Adjust heat and baking time depending on oven settings and loaf containers (foil, glass, etc.).

S'mores French Toast
By Nadj Fieger

Ingredients:
6 slices of bread (I used French Toast Wonder bread)
3 eggs
3 tbsp vanilla
2 tbsp cinnamon (or sprinkle per slice)
Nutella
Marshmallow Fluff
Optional toppings: syrup/bananas/strawberries

Instructions:
1) Whisk eggs.
2) Add in vanilla or cinnamon.
3) Dip the slices of bread in the egg mixture.
4) If the mixture runs out of cinnamon, you can always just sprinkle the bread with cinnamon after dipping in egg.
5) Fry the slices of bread on each side for 2-3 minutes.
6) Spread Nutella on 3 of the slices and marshmallow fluff on the other 3.
7) Sandwich together a Nutella slice with a marshmallow slice.
8) Sprinkle a little powdered sugar on top.
9) Taste great topped with syrup.

For more recipes on Page 16

Check out the video
Schnitzel-Casserole
By Katharina Bennett

Your taste buds will love this hearty and delicious recipe!

**Ingredients:**
- 4 Pork chops
- 1 red pepper
- 1-2 onions
- 3 mushrooms
- 1 glass of bell pepper sauce “Hungarian-style”
- 0.2-liter heavy cream
- salt & pepper

**Instructions:**
Season the pork chops with salt and pepper and fry until cooked through. Cut into small pieces and put with the chopped pepper and onions in a casserole dish. Add the mushrooms and the sauce “Hungarian-style”. Mix everything. Lastly, pour the heavy cream over the top (don’t mix anymore) and bake at 200°C for about 45 minutes. Serve with rice and a green salad.

Tom and Anna’s Breakfast Hash
By Anna and Tom Bagiacka

One of our go-to meals on the weekend is a breakfast hash, using whatever veggies are in our fridge or in season. While hashes are great for brunch, this is also a very easy weeknight dinner and a great way to use up any odds and ends! This is more of a guideline than a recipe so you can mix up what vegetables or meats you include. I highly recommend roasting the potatoes though, the seasoning adds great flavor to the final hash and roasting them in the oven ensures the potatoes are cooked all the way through and crispy. You can chop your vegetables once the potatoes are in the oven, as the remaining steps of the hash won’t take as long as the potatoes.

**START TO FINISH:** 1 hour

**SERVINGS:** 2-4

**Ingredients:**
- 1 recipe for Roasted Breakfast Potatoes
- 8 ounces breakfast sausage, optional
- Salt
- 1 large onion, cut into ½-inch pieces
- ½ red, orange or yellow bell pepper, cut into 1-inch pieces
- 1 cup chopped vegetables, such as zucchini, summer squash, corn or beets
- 3 handfuls of spinach, kale or other leafy green
- 4 eggs, fried or poached
- 1 avocado, diced

**Instructions:**
1) Prepare Roasted Breakfast Potatoes (they will take the longest to cook).
2) Heat 12-inch cast iron skillet and add sausage, breaking up with a wooden spoon and cook until no pink remains. Remove sausage from pan onto a paper towel-lined plate, using a slotted spoon. Wipe out skillet of excess oil.
3) Heat 1 tablespoon olive oil in now-empty cast iron skillet. Add onion and a pinch of salt, and cook until beginning to soften. Add bell pepper and any other vegetables you are using (not the greens yet). Cook until mostly soft, stirring frequently.
4) Prepare your eggs. Add spinach or other greens to the skillet and stir to wilt.
5) Once potatoes are finished, add them to skillet with the sausage and mix everything so hash is evenly combined.
6) To serve, spoon hash mixture into bowls, top with prepared egg and avocado pieces, and season with salt and pepper.
7) Roasted Breakfast Potatoes

Almond Cake recipe
By Jane H. Davis

I like this recipe because it is fast, easy and requires no special ingredients.

**SERVES:** 16

**Ingredients:**
- 1 cup white all-purpose flour
- 1 cup white granulated sugar
- 1/2 cup butter, softened (do NOT use margarine)
- 2 eggs, beaten
- 1 teaspoon almond extract
- 1/4 cup slivered almonds, more or less according to taste

**Instructions:**
1) Preheat oven to 350 F
2) in a large bowl, stir together sugar and flour. Add butter. The mixture will be crumbly.
3) Mix together the eggs and almond flavoring, stir into sugar, flour and butter mixture.
4) Spread evenly in lightly buttered pie pan. Sprinkle slivered almonds on top.
5) Bake at 350F for 25-35 minutes until edges are light golden brown.
6) Cut into 16 wedges while still slightly warm.

Lazy Käsekuchen
By Cindy Golman

We were a part of the military community for 20+ years. I was a DODDS teacher and my husband worked as a civilian for the Air Force. We were stationed in Guantanamo Cuba, Ramstein Germany and Okinawa Japan. This recipe was inspired by our tour in Germany. We enjoyed Käsekuchen for breakfast, afternoon snack, or as a dessert! My version of Käsekuchen is fast, easy and delicious!

**Ingredients:**

**FOR THE CAKE BATTER**
- 1 box Duncan Hines butter golden cake mix
- 3/4 cup milk
- 3 eggs
- 7 tablespoons softened butter

**FOR THE TOP LAYER**
- 2 - 8-ounce packages of softened cream cheese
- 1 1/2 - 2 cups powdered sugar
- 3 eggs
- 1 teaspoon vanilla

**Instructions:**
1) Bake at 350 degrees for 40-45 minutes or until a toothpick comes out dry.
2) Sprinkle the top with cinnamon sugar mixture while warm.

Käsekuchen is fast, easy and delicious! My version of Käsekuchen was inspired by our tour in Germany. We enjoyed Käsekuchen for breakfast, afternoon snack, or as a dessert! My version of Käsekuchen is fast, easy and delicious!
Enoshima

An Overnight Island Escape from Near Tokyo

Written by: Todd Pang

If you’re craving an island getaway but have a limited time and budget to spend, your solution may be close at hand. For centuries, Enoshima was historically an important destination for religious pilgrims, but has more recently become known as a place where the weary Kanto residents can take a break from the demands of daily life.

The island vibe is ever-present from the moment you arrive in the Enoshima area. “Ono-licious” Hawaiian restaurants like L&L Barbecue and Eggs ‘n Things have locations here, colorful murals greet you with “Aloha”, and signs playfully inform passersby that “Surfs Up.” While Enoshima is a popular place to people-watch during the summer, autumn and winter offer the opportunity to enjoy the sand and surf without the crowds. If you crave a romantic walk on the beach with your favorite person, the latter half of the year is the right time for love.

But wait, this isn’t Waikiki; Enoshima has its own special atmosphere as well. Enoshima’s history goes back nearly 1,300 years when legend has it that the island appeared in Sagami Bay accompanied by the goddess Benzaiten. “The Legend of the Goddess and the 5-Headed Dragon” is memorialized in many locations around the island, referring to the legend of the great five-headed dragon Gozuryu, who fell in love with Benzaiten, changing his ways from terrorizing to protecting Enoshima.

Most people come to Enoshima as a day trip, but a single day is not enough to enjoy all the area has to offer. By spending the night, you can take in the sights at a leisurely pace.

To get the best value for your money, purchase the one-day Enopass, which grants you unlimited free admisions to the Enoshima Sea Candle, Enoshima Samuel Cocking Garden, Enoshima Iwaya Caves and the various “Escar” escalators around the island that take you to the higher elevations (trust me, your feet will thank you for using them). You can purchase the Enopass at the Fujisawa City Tourist Center, in front of Kataze-Enoshima West Beach before crossing the bridge to the island. While you are there, “Like” the Discover Fujisawa Facebook page and they’ll present you with a free gift!

The Enoshima Shrine refers to three separate shrines located around the island: Hetsumiya, Nakatsumiya, Okutsumiya. The shrines were built on Enoshima Island between 800 and 1,200 years ago, though they have been rebuilt and renovated several times. As you make a circuit around the island, you can visit each shrine and other Buddhist and Shinto points of interest.

Be sure you head down to the ocean’s edge to Chigogafuchi, which on a clear day, boasts one of Kanagawa Prefecture’s best views of Mt. Fuji across Sagami Bay. From there, go deep into the Iwaya Caves, which once attracted thousands of curious pilgrims of the Benzaiten faith.

Atop the island, the Enoshima Samuel Cocking Garden surrounds the elegant Enoshima Sea Candle, a lighthouse observation tower with a panoramic view of the Sagami Bay area. Apart from the ever-changing variety of seasonal flowers in the gardens, special events like the Shonan Candle Festival (Oct–Nov) and Jewel of Shonan (Nov–Mar) create breathtaking night views of the garden.

Browse the shops along Benzaiten Nakamise Street, leading from the great bronze “Seido no Torii” gate at the foot of the street to the Zuishinmon gate leading up the stairway to Hetsumiya Shrine. You’ll find a mix of traditional and modern shops perfect for souvenir shopping. When you work up an appetite, you’ll find many quaint local restaurants on the island, many serving the fresh catch of the resident fishermen.

Just across the bridge from the island, the Enoshima Aquarium is an informative and entertaining place to spend part of your day. The aquarium displays a wide variety of sea life indigenous to Sagami Bay as well as special activities and shows (contents may change due to the COVID situation).

Your only options used to be Japanese style ryokan or minshuku if you wanted to spend the night on the island, but the island’s first hotel, the Enoshima Hotel, opened in May 2020. Conveniently located near the Enoshima Benten-bashi bridge, close to Nakamise Street, and adjacent to a variety of restaurants, each comfortable room has a view of Sagami Bay. This luxurious hotel is partnered with the Enoshima Island Spa, so guests receive access to the spa’s swimming pool and soothing hot springs baths during their stay.

An overnight escape to Enoshima is well within reach, particularly during the weekdays when there are fewer visitors on the island compared to busy weekends, and you’ll find an unushed, uncrowded atmosphere there. There are three convenient train lines to Enoshima, including the speedy Odakyu Romance Car, which delivers you in comfort from Shinjuku station in just over an hour.
In Japanese culture, soba (buckwheat) noodles have always been seen as a “happiness” food, served on special occasions. It is also tradition, when moving into a new house to greet your new neighbors with hikoshi soba (moving soba). This involves a play on words, as soba also means “close” or “near” – like neighbors.

Another soba custom is Toshikoshi Soba (year’s-passing soba), as it’s supposed to be the last food to touch your lips on New Year’s Eve. The tradition is so established nationwide that often reservations are needed even for buying the freshly made soba to cook up at home. One year I attempted to make my own and found working with fresh buckwheat flour proved extremely hard. The finished product did, however, earn nods of approval from my Japanese family, despite the fact that without the special chef’s knife used by soba cutters, the noodles were a trifle thick.

I have been thinking a lot about end of the year culinary rituals and traditions recently. I keep pondering why when I first experienced Osechi (Japanese New Year’s cooking) as a young bride (literally only married for 2 weeks) in Tokyo all those years ago, it so captivated me to this day? In a way, it was and remains a culinary bridge and celebration of the two cultures that I deeply love: Japan and the United States. I love preparing, enjoying and celebrating Osechi as a special year-end ritual and annual tradition with my daughter. We look forward to it every year, from planning the menus, to shopping together, to cooking and of course to the eating!

I really love the tradition of getting all your shopping and most of the cooking done in advance, so that this holiday can be enjoyed with your family in a relaxed and leisurely manner. Traditionally all the dishes that make up the osechi panoply are precooked and put into special four-tiered lacquerware boxes called jubako by New Year’s Eve. New Year’s festivities run from January 1 to 3. During that time no cooking is done – just more non-perishable food is added to the jubako as family or guests drop by. Instead of rice, mochi, or pounded rice cakes, are eaten. If you are lucky enough to find fresh mochi at the end of the year, by all means try it! Mochi can be an acquired taste, and the real trick is never to overcook it as it will disintegrate.

While my osechi of today is streamlined and much simplified here in the Bay area, it is no less significant and still filled with osechi classics that we love. I bring out the special over-sized ozoni soup bowls, and jubako that I have, and we will pick out new chopsticks to use during our celebration. Every year, I make something new for my daughter to try and enjoy.

Here are two of my favorite osechi recipes to try this season. They are both fun, easy to make and very delicious.

**Tokyo-style Toshikoshi Soba**

*Serves 4*

**Ingredients**

- 6 ¼ cups water
- A 3-inch by 3-inch piece of kombu kelp wiped with a damp cloth and lightly slashed to release the flavor
- 2 oz. katsuobushi (dried bonito flakes)
- 4 tablespoons soy sauce
- 1 tablespoon mirin (sweet sake)
- 1 teaspoon salt or to taste
- 1 lb. dried or 1 ¼ lbs. fresh soba noodles
- 4 dried or fresh shiitake mushrooms stemmed (reconstitute dried ones by soaking in warm water with a dash of sugar for 30 minutes – reserve 2 tablespoons of liquid to add to the broth)
- ½ lb. chicken breast cut into thin slices
- 2 large Negi (Japanese leeks) white part only, cut diagonally into thin slices
- 5 ¼ oz. spinach trimmed, parboiled, and drained
- Shichimi togarashi (Seven-spice pepper) to taste for garnish

**Instructions**

1. Heat the water with the kelp in a deep saucepan. Just before it boils, remove the kelp and pour in the dried bonito flakes. Boil, stirring, for about three minutes, then strain into a clean saucepan. Add the soy sauce, mirin, salt, and mushroom liquid. Bring to a boil again: taste, adjust seasoning if necessary and cook over medium heat for a few minutes.
2. Five minutes before serving, heat up the chicken and leeks in the broth. In another pan, cook the noodles according to instructions on the package, then drain and rinse to get rid of the starch.
3. To serve, place a mound of noodles in each deep soup bowl. Top with one mushroom and separate mounds of chicken, Japanese leeks, and spinach. Gently ladle on the broth and serve immediately. Pass the seven-spice pepper separately.
Zoni is a Japanese regional soup and can even differ house to house. The soup includes pounded toasted rice cakes (mochi), chicken or fish, and vegetables served separately after gorging on the many foods in the jubako. It is usually the only hot dish served and is an integral part of the meal. Matsumae Zoni is a specialty of Hokkaido, and one of my absolute favorites to make for Osechi. It will definitely be on our menu on Jan. 1.

Matsumae Zoni Soup: Salmon & salmon roe rice cake soup

Serves 4

Ingredients
• 4 pieces fresh salmon filet, 2" by 1"  
• 4 tbsps. red salmon roe  
• 4 fresh or dried rice cakes (mochi)  
• 1 tsp salt  
• 2 tbsps. sake  

Garnish
• A few sprigs of trefoil (mitsuba)  
• Grated yuzu peel or Meyer lemon peel

Instructions
1. Make fish stock according to the directions in the Notes section. Flavor stock with soy sauce, sake and salt. Add daikon radish, carrot, shiitake mushrooms and salmon. Boil until soft (rougly five minutes).
2. Meanwhile, toast rice cakes until they puff up and brown. It takes about six to seven minutes. They should look like oversized marshmallows.
3. In each deep soup bowl, lay one rice cake on the bottom and arrange other ingredients against it. Add stock and top with salmon roe and a few sprigs of trefoil and or yuzu peel. Serve immediately.

Recipe Notes
How to make Kombu Dashi Stock:  
Take a 6-inch piece of kelp (kombu), wipe lightly with a damp cloth and put into a pot with 6 cups water. Bring to a boil and remove kelp. Add a generous 3/4 cup of dried bonito shavings (katsuobushi) and boil for one minute. Turn off heat and after 2 minutes, strain.

Lucy’s long love affair with Japan started when she was 15, when she went up visiting Japan for the summer. It truly was love at first sight. She studied Japanese in Hiroshima, stayed in Tokyo’s Olympic village and lived with a Japanese family in Okayama. In college, Lucy returned to Japan and spent her junior year abroad in Tokyo, attending Waseda University, and living with the Mitsui family. She got her degree from USC in Japanese and Japanese culture. Lucy is married to a Japanese national and lived in Japan for over 13 years. Today, she lives in the Bay area. Lucy is an author and runs her food blog, Thanks for the Meal: Savoring Japan’s Culinary Treasures at www.thanksforthemeal.net. Her deep love of Japan has expanded and grown to incorporate not only nourishment for the body but nourishment for the mind and spirit through her Zen Coaching practice (www.lucyseligman.com), using energy tools and an exploratory process that empowers her clients to unlock the best version of themselves.

Thanks for the Meal: Savoring Japan’s Culinary Treasures

TRY OSECHI RECIPES ON PAGE 20

Holiday talk

During the holiday season in Japan, you will see KFCs filled with young couples on Christmas Day, while on New-Year’s Eve, you will hear bells from temples heralding the arrival of the new year. Here are some useful Japanese words and phrases you can use during the holiday season.

“Kurisumasu wa dō sugoshimasu ka?”  
= How are you planning to spend Christmas day?  
(“Kurisumasu” = Christmas day, “dō” = how, “sugoshimasu” = spend)

“Kanojo to Kentakkii ni ikimasu.”  
= I will go to Kentucky Fried Chicken with my girlfriend.  
(“kanojo” = girlfriend, “kareshi” = boyfriend, “kentakkii” = KFC, “ikimasu” = will go)

“Santakuroosu ga pizz a wo haitatsu shiteimasu.”  
= Santa Claus is delivering a pizza.  
(“santakuroosu” = Santa Claus, “haitatsu shiteimasu” = delivering)

“Yo’ otoshī wo.”  
= Have a happy new year. (Greetings in the yearend)

“Akemashite omedeto gozaimasu!”  
= A happy new year! (Greetings)

“Hatsumode wa dokoni ikimasu ka?”  
= What shrine/temple are you going to visit during the first of the year?  
(“hatsumode” = first visit to a shrine/temple for the year, “dokoni” = to where, “ikimasu” = will go)

WHEN ON OKINAWA –
You can also say it in “Uchinaaguchi” (island dialect) like this:

“Itosshi mukaikimi soori.” = Have a happy new year.

“Yoi otoshi wo.” = A happy new year! (Greetings)

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Golden kumquat dish symbol of money, good fortune

Try gobou-no-nikumaki for a lucky new year

INGREDIENTS

- Burdock 220g
- (Sliced) Pork loin 600g
- Carrot 450g
- Water 600cc
- Sugar 100 cc
- Liquor (cooking sake) 100 cc
- Soy sauce 67cc
- Salt (a little)
- Mirin/sweet cooking rice wine (a little)

RECIPES

1. Rinse and wash off kinkan with water.
2. Put kinkan in a deep pot with water and place over high heat. (Make sure there’s enough water to cover the kinkan. Stop heating just before the water is boiled.)
3. Drain water and take kinkan out of the pan. Let them cool.
4. Once cool enough to hold, remove the seeds. Do this by making about six vertical slits on each kinkan with a kitchen knife and using a toothpick to bring in the seeds up and out. Be sure to remove stem ends as well.
5. Heat 450cc of water, 135cc of sugar, 22.5cc of Mirin (sweet cooking rice wine) in a deep pan on a medium-high heat for a few minutes.
6. Add kinkan to the mixture and slowly heat it on a medium heat, until the tangerine starts to glisten and soften.
7. Serve on small plates cold (you can also enjoy this dish warm if you let it cool a little after cooking). Bon appetit and good luck in the New Year!
A small island off the coast of Japan's Kanagawa Prefecture, laden with historic shrines, expansive views and a landmark tower, makes for a great day trip at any time of year.

Enoshima is near Shonan beach, a trendy summer destination for surfers and vacationers from Kanagawa Prefecture, Tokyo and farther afield. The island itself is about 2 ½ miles around and studded with old shrines, an observation tower with a great view of Mount Fuji and beach walkways that face the setting sun.

The island's history reaches to the 9th century, when influential Buddhist monks Kukai and Nichiren trained there; through the 12th century, when Minamoto no Yoritomo, founder of the Kamakura Shogunate, prayed there; through the 12th century, when Minamoto no Yoritomo, founder of the Kamakura Shogunate, prayed there; and into the early 20th century, when Enoshima's shrines became popular with the devout, according to the Fujisawa city website.

Visitors may reach the island via the 425-yard-long Benten-bashi bridge, which was built when a harbor was developed in Enoshima for the 1964 Tokyo Olympics' yacht race, according to the Kanagawa Prefectural Office website.

Across the bridge, a bronze torii gate marks the opening to Benzaiten Nakamise, a street filled with souvenir shops, restaurants and traditional Japanese inns. Some visitors stop here for local specialties: grilled scallops, squid and Enoshima beer. This is the major shopping street but there are shops and restaurants scattered throughout the island.

The Enoshima escar, or escalator, takes visitors to an observation area atop a small hill, for a fee. Those inclined to fitness can walk the 200-some stone steps to the top, instead. Along the way, they'll find more shrines, shops and restaurants.

The escar carries visitors to the top in about four minutes, with stops along the way at various shrines. The ride costs 360 yen, about $3.50, for adults and 180 yen, about $1.75, for children.

Enoshima Shrine is one of the major shrines on the island. It was first built in 552 at Iwaya, also on Enoshima, by order of Emperor Kinmei, according to the Fujisawa city website. The current shrine is made up of three shrines called Hetsunomiya, Nakatsunomiya and Okutsunomiya.

Hetsunomiya has a pond with statue of dragon that is said to bestow luck on visitors who wash their coins in the water.

Nearby is the Enoshima Sea Candle, a lighthouse and observation tower, inside Samuel Cocking Garden, which was named after a Meiji-period British trader.

Entrance to the garden costs 200 yen for adults and 100 yen for children. The garden's highlights include 250 strains of around 500 camellia flowers from January to March. From May to October are crimson roses from Canada, according to the Kanagawa Prefecture website.

The Enoshima Sea Candle stands 380 feet above sea level, where it offers a panoramic view of Sagami Bay. Admission is 500 yen for adults and 250 yen for children.

On clear days, visitors may enjoy views of Mount Fuji, Yokohama Landmark Tower and Izu Oshima islands. The tower is illuminated between Nov. 11 and March 7 and is said to be one of the three major illuminations in the Kanto region.

After enjoying the great view, visitors can take steps down to the other side of the island to enjoy more beautiful views of the ocean and caves.

On the island's southwest side is Chigagufuchi, a marine plateau famous for rock fishing and views of the sun setting behind Mount Fuji. During low tide, visitors can find fish and crabs under the rocks.

A walk along the cliff from Chigagufuchi brings visitors to Iwaya Caves, created by eons of tidal erosion. There are two caves, one 500 feet deep and the other 183 feet deep, that were long considered sacred sites where worshippers gathered. Today, they hold exhibits on the history and culture of Enoshima and cost 500 yen for high school students and older and 200 yen for junior and elementary school children.

A popular site for couples is Ryuren no Kane, or The Bell of the Dragon's Love. It is said that couples enjoy eternal love if they ring the bell together and then attach a padlock bearing their names to the nearby fence.

Visiting all these tourist spots will take the whole day, but if you have more time, the Enoshima Aquarium near Enoshima Station is a great sightseeing spot as well. It offers dolphin shows and a jellyfish display, which is said to be one of the best displays of jellyfish in the world.

Some visitors stop at Enoshima in Japan's Kanagawa Prefecture for local specialties: grilled scallops, squid and Enoshima beer.

Whether you're a nature lover or a sightseeing enthusiast, Enoshima is sure to delight you with its unique history and beautiful scenery.
or 1,000 years, rice brewed and turned into booze has generally been referred to as sake, and for three of those years, Osaka-based author Brian Ashcraft has researched the mysteries of Japan’s national drink.

“The Japanese Sake Bible: Everything You Need to Know About Great Sake” is the culmination of that effort. This 256-page book, with tasting notes and a foreword by sake experts Takashi Eguchi and Richie Hawtin, blends the science, history and flavor of sake into a comprehensive reference for the beverage’s enthusiasts.

“There are quite a few good books for sake beginners that introduce concepts like how it’s made, the different classifications and the basic history,” wrote one reviewer on Goodreads.com. “There are also very technical books that go into the chemistry and technical details of brewing and flavor. This might be the only book that is both.”

Ashcraft moved to Osaka in 2001 and has been neck deep in the culture ever since. He has authored several deep dives into that culture, including “Japanese Tattoos: History, Culture, Design” and “Japanese Whisky: The Ultimate Guide to the World’s Most Desirable Spirit.”

“When I was a kid, we had a sake set,” he told Stars and Stripes during a recent phone interview. “It was in the bar next to my mom’s German beer stein; I thought it was a striking contrast and it put sake on my radar.”

In 2005, Ashcraft began to frequent sake breweries, where he noticed variations in each type of sake, fostering a curiosity about how brewers found many tastes and textures from a grain of rice.

“I’ve always been interested in the science and history of drinks,” he said. “More stuff has to go right with sake than with whisky.”

Ashcraft also dismisses comparisons of sake to beer or wine.

“Even though the comparisons have existed for centuries and continue today, sake is not rice wine (nor is it related to any distilled drink like whisky),” he writes in the book. “It’s not rice beer either. Sake is sake. There is nothing like it.”

Ashcraft discovered an aphorism among sake brewers that addressed the comparison of sake to wine: “Eighty percent of wine is the grapes, but 80 percent of sake is the brewer.”

“When you drink sake, you understand the intent of those making it,” he said.

Ashcraft recommends that sake aficionados visiting Japan should ask for a recommendation from servers when eating out, and if they discover a taste they like, to remember the brand.

Americans have a widespread literacy for beer, Europeans have the same for wine and spirits, but Westerners are at a loss, generally, in their knowledge of sake. Ashcraft hopes his book and others like it will expand palates of those unfamiliar with the drink.

“The Japanese Sake Bible” is available for $17.99 from Tuttle publishing, and can also be downloaded for about $14.

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**The Japanese Sake Bible: Everything You Need to Know About Great Sake** blends the science, history and flavor of sake into a comprehensive reference for the beverage’s enthusiasts. Photos courtesy of Tuttle Publishing

Sake brewers at the Kiku Masamune in Nada, make kimoto-style yeast starter used in making sake.
The 1984 NBA Draft was loaded with all-time greats. One-fourth of the 1992 Dream Team was in that 84 class. Highlighted by Michael Jordan (3rd), Charles Barkley followed at No. 5 and John Stockton at No. 16. Not on the Dream Team, but taken No. 1 overall, was Hakeem Olajuwon. Among all the stars, who was the bust taken at No. 2 overall?

DID YOU KNOW?

Christ’s birthday is December 25, but did you know when Buddha’s birthday is? In Japan, Buddha’s birthday is celebrated April 8. On this day, Buddhist temples placed the statue of baby Buddha in a small chapel beautifully decorated with flowers outside of the temple. The custom is to pour sweet tea over the statue with a ladle to honor the legend which says Buddha was born in Nepal surrounded by perfumed blossoms that had rained down from heaven, and two streams of sparkling water poured from the sky to bathe him.

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