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PAYING IT FORWARD

Yokota spouse steps up for families of deployed troops

BY JEREMY STILLWAGNER, STARS AND STRIPES
Published: January 19, 2023

Dec. 30. When her husband, Master Sgt. Max Gomez, deployed in 2019 she was disappointed to find that no one from his unit checked on her or their children while he was away. “My neighbor was the one who was there 100%, and we didn’t even really know her,” said Gomez, 35, of Los Angeles. “She would cook food for us, offer to watch my kids, invite us on trips, and it made all the difference. Her impact on how I felt I could better serve the community was the driving force behind this.”

Since October, Gomez says she’s cleaned seven homes on base for free, in residential towers and garden duplexes. She posted her

SEE DEPLOYED ON PAGE 2

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DEPLOYED: Helping families stay positive

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

offer in the Yokota Community Facebook group and asks nothing in return. She said she provides all the cleaning materials and equipment and can return on another day, if asked.

Desiree Thompson, 33, took Gomez up on her offer in October while her husband, Senior Airman Christopher Thompson, was deployed. Thompson took a day to spend time with her kids and not worry about the house, she said Jan. 6.

“It was an incredibly relieving feeling,” Thompson said. “As a spouse, you want to be strong and it’s difficult sometimes to ask for help, but seeing her post about it and knowing she wants to help makes it a little easier to make that step and ask for help.”

Thompson had trouble accepting that Gomez expects nothing in return, but Gomez refused any compensation.

Gomez said she and her family,

including their three children, have always looked for ways to help their military neighbors whenever they’re stationed. She started looking for ways to make a difference at Yokota soon after arriving in November 2018.

Many spouses at Yokota also work, and a deployed partner means juggling child care, their jobs and their social lives. Gomez wanted to make sure the stay-behind spouses know they don’t have to take on all those responsibilities themselves. She also wants to help them maintain a positive mindset while their spouse is deployed.

“I’ve not been in the workforce for 10 years, so I felt like I have the time, I have the energy, and I have the means, so I felt like it could be a resource that maybe some people would be willing to take my offer on.”



“It doesn’t have to be cleaning. It could be as simple as going out for a coffee date.”

- Danielle Gomez



An act of kindness from a stranger inspired an Air Force spouse Danielle Gomez to offer free housecleaning services to the families of deployed service members at Yokota Air Base. Photo by Jarrett Smith, U.S. Air Force

Gomez has since extended her cleaning services to single parents on active duty and encourages others to find ways to give back to the community and help each other through difficult times.

“It doesn’t have to be cleaning,” she said. “It could be as simple as going out for a coffee date. People can come up with so many ideas if they wanted to.”

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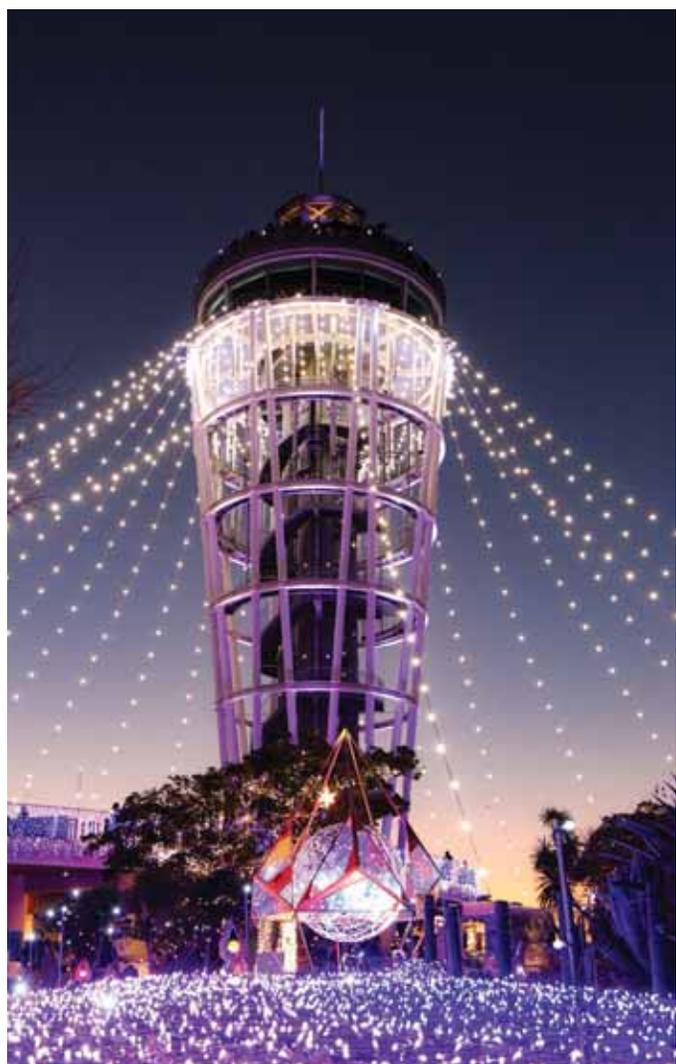
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Enoshima



An Island Getaway with Mount Fuji Views and Winter Illuminations

Written by: Ariel Lee



Within an hour's train ride from Tokyo, you'll find yourself at the beautiful island of Enoshima (江の島), Fujisawa city. It's a tourist-friendly destination with a variety of sights such as shrines, gardens, an aquarium, and most importantly, The Jewel of Shonan (Shonan no Hoseki, 湘南の宝石) illumination.

During the winter months from the end of November to February, the Jewel of Shonan Illumination lights up the island of Enoshima with thousands of lights. This iconic event has been held since 1999 and is considered one of the three greatest illuminations in the Kanto region. In the center of all the glistening lights is a 60m tall landmark called the Enoshima Sea Candle (lighthouse observation tower). It's an observation deck that gives you a panoramic view of the beautiful Sagami Bay below as well as Mount Fuji in the distance. Rows of glistening lights connect from the ground up to the Sea Candle to highlight its presence. And just below, there is a sea of lights in the garden below.

The most popular attraction consisting of gem-like lights is the "Tunnel of Crystals". It is an incredible tunnel made from Swarovski® crystals and blue-purple lights that creates a mystical feeling. On display inside of the tunnel is a large chandelier, making an evening here extra romantic and special.

The Jewel of Shonan Illumination is held inside the Enoshima Samuel Cocking Garden, which has a collection of tropical plants of all sorts and cute succulent plants. During the illumination period, you can explore the garden's winter tulips from December to late January and the park's next garden, the early blooming Kawazu Cherry Blossoms in February. The flowers are also lined with lights so you can enjoy them at night.

If you are planning to sit and admire the illumination, there are a few cafes and lots of chairs and tables around. There are even hammocks here and there so you can have a lie down and look at the starry night sky. A personal favorite is the outdoor seating area just outside the exit of the Tunnel of Crystals.

The seats are surrounded by clear glass boxes of succulent plants on display. Initially during the daytime I hadn't noticed them at all, but they were lit up at night, and looked as if little forest elves lived inside. If you visit during the Christmas season, the boxes will also feature some Christmas decorations.

Outside of the Enoshima Samuel Cocking Garden area, there are a few other places on the island that are decorated with lights during the illumination period. Enoshima Nakatsumiya square is next to the wood deck where you can see the Enoshima Yacht Harbor. The little garden also has beautiful night lights illuminating the pathway for you to enjoy the ocean view below. If you venture all the way to the south of the island, you'll find yourself at Enoshima Iwaya Caves, where the second set of caves is lined with color changing illuminations both day and night and features an impressive dragon statue at the end.

To get up to the Enoshima Samuel Cocking Garden, you can either walk up lots of stairs, or take Japan's first outdoor escalator — Escar. It has 3 sections of ascending escalators that take you up the island starting from the entrance of Enoshima Shrine. LUMINOUS WAY, newly renovated on November 16, 2022, is a video art inside the walls of Escar's first sections of escalators. The escalator walls are lined with a display of marine life such as whales which both adults and children can enjoy.

In addition to the Enoshima Sea Candle, there are many other attractions on the island including streets lined with unique restaurants and souvenir shops and several other spots where you can admire Mount Fuji such as Chigogafuchi Abyss and Enoshima Benten Bridge.

If you're looking for an island getaway with a stunning view of Mount Fuji and one of the most beautiful illuminations in Japan, head to Enoshima this winter.





File photos

Exam cram

'Tis the season in Japan to study like crazy to 'make the cut'

BY TAKAHIRO TAKIGUCHI,
STRIPES JAPAN

On any given February morning, you might see hundreds of young students – some with parents, or even teachers, in tow – flocking to a nearby high school or university. Chances are they are on their way to take their entrance examinations.

Entrance exams – along with hours upon hours of cram-school study – are an annual rite of passage that takes place nationwide in Japan every year. Most people take these rigorous exams at least twice in a lifetime – for high school as well as college, but

those trying for private schools might try three or more times.

It seems COVID-19 has had a minor effect on the time-honored tradition of entrance exams as this year 530,367 (4,878 less) students signed up for the Common Test for University Admission, according to officials. Furthermore, schools where the examinations are taking place are making some adjustments to how the tests were taken in the past including shortening testing hours, canceling lengthy portions of the exams

like interviews or essays and limiting the number of parents who can sit outside and wait for their student to take the examination. However, one cram school poll found that nearly half of the parents whose children were slated to take the exam this year said they will still go to the exam sites to cheer them on because it is an important milestone that not even a global pandemic will stop them from being a part of.

Taking exams

Some take more than one exam a year just to hedge their bets.

Unlike the United States, free

compulsory education in Japan extends only through junior high or middle school. Families typically pay the equivalent of around \$4,500 in tuition and fees per student annually for public high school. Private schools cost twice or more. And students vie to get into the best high schools just as they do colleges.

High school and college exams typically cover three to five subjects, such as Japanese, English or another foreign language, math, science and social studies. They usually take the entire day

with a break for lunch.

It is widely believed that graduation from a prestigious high school and university virtually guarantees preferential treatment from prospective universities or employers after graduation. And since major universities receive four to eight times as many applicants as available slots, competition is stiff.

As a result, students study ... and study ... and study.





through Japan's school system in 2016.

Alternative attitudes

But things are changing and according to a Japan Juku Association official, so is the level of students' ambitions. Gone are the days when most students viewed Japan's entrance exam system as if it were a life-or-death matter.

"Many are not setting their goals very high for prestigious schools; instead they tend to be content with schools they can easily get accepted by," the official said.

To avoid of the competition altogether, some students turn to using recommendations from their existing schools to gain admittance.

So, for those who do opt for the traditional cram-and-exam method – with, perhaps, less fervor than their forefathers – how sweet is the taste of success?

Not very, according to a student who entered a private prestigious Tokyo university after cramming like crazy to make the cut.

"Once it's over, the pressure and motivation to study are gone," he says. "After having spent so many years studying just for exams, many of us have little sense of what comes next – or how to shape our futures." takiguchi.takahiro@stripes.com

The Japan Juku Association estimates that there are 55,037 juku in Japan (2016) and that 50-70 percent of students who plan to take entrance exams use them.

These exams tend to focus on the quantity of knowledge rather than deeper comprehension or mastery. To put it simply, the more information from textbooks students can memorize, the better their test scores.

After regular school hours, students go to these cram schools two to five times a week to study for a couple of hours.

Tuition ranges between 10,000 to 50,000 yen (\$90-\$450) a month or more. This is part of the nearly \$75K for public or nearly \$220K for private school the Ministry of Education estimates the average family pays to put one child

Cram school craze

Many students don't make the cut and must decide whether to enter their second or third school of choice. The other option, primarily for university candidates, is to wait until the next year and try again.

Those who do opt to wait are called "ronin," literally masterless samurai.

To give their children an edge over the competition, many parents turn to "juku," or cram schools, which have been doing brisk business in Japan for decades. (Industry profits were at one time in the \$8.8 billion range according to Bloomberg Business Weekly.)



A little luck of the 'ema' for exams

You may be familiar with bunches of small wooden plaques with drawings of horses and Japanese characters written on them that can be found hanging in Shinto Shrines. These "ema," or horse icons, are used as prayers or wishes for good luck in certain endeavors.



Japanese believe that their wish and prayers will come true if they write them on these plaques and hang them as offerings to the Shinto gods. Some of the common wishes for success include work, family peace, health and (yes, you guessed it) school entrance examinations.

As each shrine is dedicated to certain deities, different shrines are frequented for different types of fortune. Tenjin is the Shinto god of scholars, and his shrines are called "tenmangu."

Many students who are going to take entrance exams visit Futenmangu in Futenma, Okinawa; Dazaifu Tenmangu in Fukuoka Prefecture; and Yushima Tenjin in Tokyo to offer ema for success. There are many others elsewhere throughout the nation.

Ema are sold at these shrines for about 200 to 1,000 yen (\$1.80-\$9). Students write their name and wish on the blank side and hang it with all the others.

In February, you will likely see many students offering these ema at shrines near you.

- Takahiro Takiguchi, Stripes Japan





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Setsubun celebrates 'change of seasons'

STRIPES JAPAN

For those of you venturing out in town on Feb. 3, be sure to watch out for flying beans and fleeing ogres. The Japanese celebrate Setsubun, which literally means “change of seasons,” on this day to kick off the preparation for the upcoming planting season.

The ceremonies across the nation recognize “risshun,” or birth of spring. The purification ritual “mame-maki,” or bean throwing, will be performed at homes, office buildings, schools and shrines across the country. The goal is to drive out demons and ogres, “oni” in Japanese, that bring bad fortune to the local community.

Participants fill wooden “masu,” or cups, with roasted soybeans and then proceed to throw the beans in and around their homes while shouting “Oni wa soto! Fuku wa uchi!” or “Out with demons! In with happiness!”

This ritual is performed to bring in good fortune and drive out the evil spirits that have been lurking during the dark and cold winter months. It is also customary for the devout to pick and eat the number of beans which corresponds to their age.

What started out as a cleansing ritual for superstitious country farmers hundreds of years ago, has grown into a national pastime. People can attend ceremonies at thousands of Shin-to shrines throughout Japan on Feb. 3. Well-known politicians, sumo wrestlers and actors are often invited to the festivals at some of the

major shrines to throw out beans for good luck for all those present.

Mame-maki originally began as a palace event on New Year’s Eve to get rid of demons and welcome in the new year.

Since the Edo period (1603 - 1867), the rite of throwing roasted soybeans inside private homes has been performed on Setsubun.

A popular myth states that if a person silently consumes an entire sushi roll on Setsubun while facing that year’s lucky direction (yes, there is a lucky direction), their dreams will come true. Commonly called “Ehoumaki,” the sushi roll is eaten to symbolize good fortune being rolled into one. The roll is not cut in order to symbolize good relations not being cut off during the upcoming year.

For those of you who are not so sure about eating a very long piece of sushi, you can buy relatively short ones at local convenience stores or supermarket Feb. 3. Please remember that this year’s lucky direction is south-south-east.

Grab a compass if you need one. If you would like to purchase some roasted soybeans for your house, you can easily find them in Japanese grocery markets. It usually comes with paper ogre mask, which may be good to keep as a memory of Japan. Why don’t you use the tradition as an excuse to bring some beans to the office, in case your boss or supervisor happens to be an ogre and needs casting out?

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6 reasons traditional Japanese hotels ryokan rock!

LIVE JAPAN

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

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

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

Guest rooms

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

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

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

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

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



'Authentic' Japan experience

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

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



Meals

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



Nakai-san

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

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

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

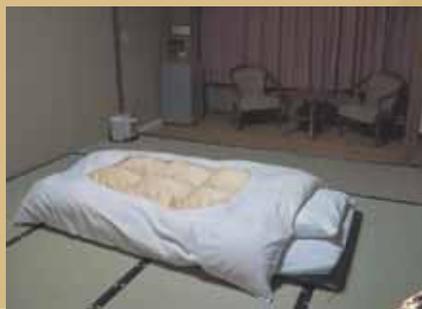


Sleeping on a futon

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

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

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



Public baths

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



Photos courtesy of Live Japan

File photo

Things to know be

STORY AND PHOTOS BY ERICA EARL,
STARS AND STRIPES

It's that time of year that is held sacred to fans of outdoor sports—ski and snowboard season. Japan is so well known for its favorable slope conditions that the snow here has earned an international nickname among enthusiasts, JaPOW, a portmanteau of “Japan” and “powder.”

Whether you are a novice or a veteran to winter sports, Japan has something to offer you. I have been skiing for over a decade, and between the months of December and March, carving down the mountain is pretty much all I can think about. Each corner of the world has something special that makes snow sports unique to that region, and here is no exception. If hitting the slopes is on your agenda while stationed in the Land of the Rising Sun, take some of my must-know tips and tricks for enjoying Japan's pristine powder.

In the West, most resort areas use green circles, blue squares and black diamonds as indicators of the difficulty of the run. In Japan, there are a variety of different markers. Some are marked this way that most Americans are familiar with, but other places replace blue with red to mark intermediate trails. Also, there is no national standard in Japan for these markings, so a red in one resort might be a black in another. Chairlifts tend not to be marked, so consult the area's maps before heading up a lift, because once you're up the mountain, there is only one way down, as taking lifts back down is not permitted!

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I recommend beginner and intermediate levels try a simple run to test the conditions before heading up higher. Japanese trails tend not to be as heavily marked as in the States. For example, you may encounter a fork in the trail with no indicator of which is the more advanced way down. Make sure to consult the area map first to avoid getting yourself in a situation where you are accidentally on a more advanced slope than you intended (it has happened to me) or consider going with a guide or a friend who is familiar with the course. The most important safety factor is being aware of your own ability.

Learn the trail markers

Best places to ski

Niseko

This is the only place on this list where I haven't actually skied, but as it is in Hokkaido and famed for its deep powder and high-quality winding runs. It is a holy grail for me, and if you go here, I will be instantly jealous.

Naeba and Kagura

These two resorts are connected by a gondola called the DragonDola, a beautiful 25-min ride that takes you past some beautiful winterscapes. I recommend taking two days here, one to just do Naeba, home of a fun four-kilometer dynamic downhill run that is great for intermediate skiers, and one day for Kagura, which offers some exciting backcountry trails. Note that Kagura can be confusing to navigate, so make sure to have a course map on you! Naeba also offers childcare.

Myoko Suginohara

Myoko Suginohara, located in the larger Myoko Kogen area, is home of the longest run in Japan at 8.5 kilometers. The wide, meandering paths makes this place a good choice for beginner and intermediate skiers.

Hakuba Valley

Located in Nagano, the location of the 1998 Winter Olympics, this area has a lot of renowned, interconnecting resorts that you can access by purchasing an all-mountain pass. It is also one of the most foreigner-friendly resorts, with many English speakers and Australian transplants. This area has exciting courses for all levels, some thrilling terrain parks, and bragging rights to say you've skied where the Olympian greats did.

Niseko

Naeba and Kagura

Myoko Suginohara

Hakuba Valley



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Before Skiing in Japan

Learn some simple Japanese

I always say that the most dangerous part of skiing is other skiers. When you are flying down the mountain, you must remember that you are not the only one there. I always wear brightly colored snowsuits, and it isn't just for fashion, but also to stand out against the white snow and oft-inevitable fog at higher elevations. In addition to visibility, learning some Japanese words can help keep you safe on the slopes. You may hear people saying "migi!" or "hidari!" to let you know which side of you they will pass on to avoid collisions. Migu means right, and hidari means left. It is not enough to say "sumimasen" (excuse me) because downhill skiers are not responsible for getting out of your way or knowing which direction you are coming from. Being aware of others giving these cues, and using them yourself, can avoid an accident. Beyond this, always remember that it is your responsibility to be aware of the downhill skier and snowboarder and avoid hitting them. Also, never enter a connecting course without glancing up the mountain first. It's just like merging onto a freeway, the people already on the path you are entering have the right of way.

Know the backcountry rules

As mentioned, Japan is famous for its powdery snow, and it can be a paradise for pow hounds looking to ride steep and deep. However, going off-piste, or off-trail, is not allowed at all resorts. You risk getting your ski pass confiscated if you go off the designated and defined runs at places that do not allow it. It is indicated on maps and lifts if this is allowed or not. Even if it is permitted, be aware that if you need to be rescued from any backcountry or off-piste areas, you will be charged for it, as those areas are not patrolled. An off-trail rescue can cost around 140,000-230,000 Yen (\$1200-\$2000). Do your research and know your limits before making any plans to ski off-boundary. To get the similar thrill with less risk, many resorts have marked un-groomed slopes.

Take advantage of the trips

The outdoor recreation centers at U.S. military bases in Japan offer skiing and snowboarding trips nearly every weekend this time of year, to include day trips and overnight ones. I highly recommend taking advantage of these trips if you are eligible. Transport is included, so you don't have to worry about the drive or having snow chains. You can also rent gear from base outdoor rec centers at a cheaper price than most of the resorts. A few times at Yokota Air Base, the outdoor rec staff were also able to score a deal for discounted lift tickets for people who signed up through the base. And finally, it is a great way to meet people with similar interests, especially if you are stationed here solo like I am. Check with your installation's Force Support Squadron or Morale, Welfare and Recreation office for schedules and rates.



Speakin' Japanese Winter season greetings

Here are some useful Japanese phrases for the winter season.

- "Samui desu, ne?" = It is cold, isn't it?
- "Atataakai desu, ne?" = It is warm, isn't it?
- "Atsui desu, ne?" = It is hot, isn't it?

These expressions are often used with "Ohayo Gozaimasu" (good morning), "Konnichiwa" (good afternoon) or "Konbanwa" (good evening). "Desu, ne?" = it is, isn't it?

- "Yuki ga furisou desu." = It looks like it is going to snow.
 - "... sou desu" = looks like going to be ...
- These phrases are also used in daily conversations:
- "Ame ga furisou desu." = It looks like it is going to rain.
 - "Hare sou desu." = It looks like going to be fine.
 - "Yoi otenki desu." = It is a beautiful day.

When you have to see a doctor, you can use some of the following phrases:

- "Atama ga itai desu." = I have a headache.
- "... ga itai desu" = "I have an ache/pain in ..."
- "Nodo ga itai desu." = My throat hurts.
- "Onaka ga itai desu." = I have a stomachache.
- "Netsu ga arimasu." = I have a fever.
- "Seki ga demasu." = I have a cough.
- "Kaze wo hikimashita." = I caught a cold.

Pronunciation key: "A" is short (like "ah"); "E" is short (like "get"); "I" is short (like "it"); "O" is long (like "old"); "U" is long (like "tube"); and "AI" is a long "I" (like "hike"). Most words are pronounced with equal emphasis on each syllable, but "OU" is a long "O" with emphasis on that syllable.

- Takahiro Takiguchi,
Stripes Japan





Enjoy the snow, ice near you

Fujiq Highlands Ice Skating

1 Tokyo Midtown Mitsui Fudosan Skate Rink near Yokota, Yokosuka, Zama, Atsugi

Being one of the largest outdoor ice rinks with in Tokyo, the rink can accommodate 210 skaters. You can access the food facilities next to the rink with your skates on. Coin lockers are available and you can rent skates. To prevent accidents, all skaters are required to wear helmets and gloves in the rink. Helmets are provided for free by the rink, but you must bring your gloves. The rink is beautifully lit up from 5 p.m.-9 p.m. every day.

LOCATION: 9-7-1 Akasaka, Minato-ku, Tokyo
PERIOD: Nov. 17 - Feb. 26
HOURS: 11 a.m. - 9 p.m.

ADMISSION:

Mon.-Fri.: Adults; 2,100 yen, Junior high schoolers or younger; 1,600 yen.
Sat., Sun. and holidays: Adults; 2,500 yen, Junior high schoolers or younger; 2,000 yen
* Admission includes rental skates and a coffee ticket.

URL: www.tokyo-midtown.com
TEL: 03-3475-3100



WEBSITE

2 Art Rink in Yokohama Red Brick Warehouse near Yokosuka, Yokota, Zama, Atsugi

As the name indicates, this outdoor ice rink is decorated with drawings, illustrations and illuminations by Japanese artists Yuya Saito. Besides the art, you can enjoy beautiful night views and illumination of Yokohama Port and the Red Brick Warehouse while skating.

LOCATION: 1-1-2 Shinko, Naka-ku, Yokohama City, Kanagawa Prefecture
PERIOD: Dec.3 - Feb. 19
HOURS: Mon. - Fri.: 1 p.m. - 9 p.m.,
Sat., Sun. and holidays: 11 a.m. - 8 p.m.

ADMISSION:

Adults: 700 yen
Kindergarteners through High schoolers: 500 yen
Rental skates: 500 yen

URL: <http://akarenga-artrink.yafjp.org/>
TEL: 045-211-1515



WEBSITE

3 Hakone-en Sledding Square near Zama, Atsugi and Fuji

This location has the latest model snow

BY TAKAHIRO TAKIGUCHI,
STRIPES JAPAN

Besides the ski resorts, there are many places in Japan where you, your family and friends can skate, sled or just play in the snow.

Since ice skating was the first winter sport introduced to Japan about 150 years ago, today numerous climate-controlled indoor ice rinks are located throughout the nation, including one in the southernmost island of Okinawa. Various outdoor ice rinks are available during wintertime, as well.

You can enjoy ice skating in the center of Tokyo at the beautifully illuminated Tokyo Midtown Outdoor Skate Rink. You may want to take your children to Hakone-en Sledding Square in Kanagawa Prefecture where they can sleigh, make snowmen or toss snowballs at one another.

Winter is here, so get off base and enjoy all the great activities Japan has to offer.
takiguchi.takahiro@stripes.com

machine, which provides quality artificial powder snow. You can sled, make snowman or toss snowballs in the square while enjoying a majestic view of Mount Fuji. Rental wears and shoes are available. On Saturdays, Sundays and holidays, penguins from the Hakone-en Aquarium visit the square to play with children.

LOCATION: 139 Motohakone, Hakone Town, Kanagawa Prefecture
PERIOD: Jan. 10 - Mar. 5
HOURS: 9 a.m. - 4 p.m.
ADMISSION: 800 yen for 2 hours (including a rental sled)
URL: www.princehotels.co.jp/amuse/hakone-en/
TEL: 0460-83-1151



WEBSITE

Wonder Rink near Iwakuni

Housed in The Outlets Hiroshima, the largest shopping mall and amusement facility in the region, Wonder Rink offers a magical skating experience under colorful illuminations. The bright modern rink is housed in a sports complex that also includes an indoor field with a large

trampoline. The skate rink is divided by various activities, such as bumper-car, curling and ice bike, so both adults and children can enjoy the attractions.

LOCATION: 4-1-1 Ishiuchi Higashi, Saeki-ku, Hirashima City, Hiroshima Prefecture (50-minute drive from MCAS Iwakuni)
HOURS: 10 a.m. - 10 p.m.
URL: <https://www.wonder-hiroshima.jp/>
TEL: 082-208-4015



WEBSITE

5 Spoga Kurume near Sasebo

Enjoy ice skating year-round, rain or shine at this large sports-amusement complex. Spoga Kurume has sledding for children, helmets and various safety gear is available for rental, so even a family with small children or beginners can enjoy the ice rink safely.

LOCATION: 2125 Aikawa Town, Kurume City, Fukuoka Prefecture
HOURS: Mon - Fri: noon - 7 p.m.
Sat, Sun and holidays: 10 a.m. - 7 p.m.
ADMISSION: Adults: 1,400 yen
Middle and High schoolers: 1,100 yen
Elementary schoolers or younger: 900 yen
URL: <https://spogakurume.com/iceskate/>
TEL: 0942-34-7008



WEBSITE

6 Sports World Southern Hill Okinawa

Sports World Southern Hill is the only ice rink located on Okinawa. The rink is open throughout the year. The full-size rink (28 meter by 58 meter) enables you to enjoy any type of skating, from figure skating to ice hockey. Various skating lessons are available. The rink is beautifully lit up during nighttime.

LOCATION: 460-1 Miyadaira, Minamikazehara Town, Okinawa
HOURS: Mon. - Fri.: 11 a.m. - 8 p.m.
Sat., Sun.: 10 a.m. - 9 p.m.
Holidays: 10 a.m. - 8 p.m.
ADMISSION: Adults: 1,800 yen
High schoolers: 1,600 yen
Elementary schoolers: 1,400 yen
5 or younger: 1,100 yen
URL: http://southern-hill.com/iceskating_j/
TEL: 098-888-5858



WEBSITE



Maruyamagawa Park Ice Skating Rink



Stay warm in Japan with these nifty items



Kairo heat packs



Steteco



Haramki



HEATTECH



Shogayu

STORY AND PHOTOS BY SHOJI KUDAKA, STRIPES JAPAN

You may be from the North and have no problem with dealing with the winter chill of Japan. But the temperature can get low enough to make some of you shiver!

For those who can't wait for the spring, here are some Japanese items to help keep you warm and toasty. Ranging from underwear to food, there are plenty of ways to cope with the low temps without breaking your wallet. Plus, they are portable, which means you can stay active without freezing out there.

Next time you find yourself out cold, give one or all of these a try!

Kairo heat packs

Tsukaisute Kairo (disposable heat packs) are one of the cheapest ways to warm up quickly. You'll find a range of sizes and quantities at drug stores, convenience stores and even the 100-yen shops while you're out and about.

According to Japan Weather Association (JWA), Kairo has its roots in "Onjaku," which referred to heated stones which people used to carry in their clothes during Edo Period (1603 – 1868). There was also "Kai-rohai" in Meiji period (1868 – 1912), a portable container for fragments of hemp and powdered charcoal. Starting in the Taisho (1912 – 1926) through Showa Eras (1926 – 1989), "Benjin (Benzine) Kairo," using vaporized benzene, were a popular way to keep warm.

Kairo, as we know it today, was first introduced in 1975 by Asahi Kasei, a Japanese chemical company. The company was inspired by the U.S. Army's foot warmers, noted JWA.

Although there may be some difference in what's inside the pack depending on the manufacturers, Kairo commonly utilizes the heat caused by iron's reaction to oxygen. Included in each pack are powdered iron, active carbon, salt, and water-retaining materials. If you open a bag, which contains a pack, air will

go inside the pack and initiate oxidation, thus causing heat.

You may be inclined to let the pack touch your skin directly to make the most of the heat. But that should be avoided because doing so can inflict low-temperature burns. Applying the pack to a spot for a long period can cause the same problem. Some Kairo comes with adhesives to be stuck to cloth, while others come in the shape of soles to be used in shoes.

Steteco (long johns)

Roughly the length of Bermuda shorts, steteco are Japanese long johns. Their funny name came from Sanyuutei Enyuu, a hanashika (comic chat artist), who became popular by dancing in the underwear in 1880. It was shortly after a cholera outbreak left 100,000 dead, steering the audience from vaudeville. Enyuu's "steteco odori (long johns dance)" drew a lot of attention and succeeded in attracting the audience again, recounted Hayashiya Hikoroku (1895 – 1982), another prominent hanashika.

Before that, Japanese long johns were commonly called "momohiki." But because of this event, the name "steteco" came to be commonly used, noted Kotobank, an online dictionary.

Steteco was and still is commonly regarded as men's underwear, especially for ojisan (middle-aged men). But recently those with stylish designs have also been introduced targeting young men and women.

Haramki (bellyband)

The Japanese bellyband is another wear associated with ojisan. That's partly because of Tora-san, the protagonist of the movie series "Otoko wa Tsuraiyo (It's Tough Being a Man)." Portrayed by the legendary actor Kiyoshi Atsumi, Tora-san is a middle-aged drifter in a beige suit and bellyband, who becomes the center of screwball comedies unfolded in each episode.

Another famous ojisan in a bellyband is "Henna Ojisan (weird pop)," an oddball played by late Ken Shimura, who caused nuisance to

other characters in sketch comedies. Both Tora-san and Henna Ojisan wore steteco as well.

Although haramaki was commonly considered an item for middle-aged men, the Japanese bellyband has come to be used by women as well since it is very functional and effective in keeping the midsection warm.

While some haranakis in fancy colors are available for expecting mothers, others have cute designs and colors for young ladies.

HEATTECH and others

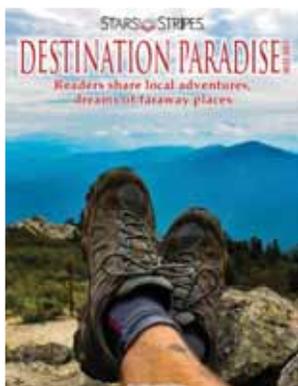
Thermal underwear is not a rarity anymore so you must have tried one. Here in Japan, underwear with heating functions continue to be very popular. It all started when UNIQ-LO, a Japanese clothing company, introduced its HEATTECH product line in 2003. This line of products drew attention thanks to its functions to generate heat from body moisture. It became an instant hit and now a seasonal tradition. Other brands followed the trend, contributing to its evolution. In addition to shirts and leggings, there are also steteco and haramaki which are made from such thermal fabrics.

Shogayu (ginger tea)

Shogayu means "ginger hot water" and it is literally a tea brewed with ginger. There are many ways to brew a cup of shogayu, but one of the simplest ways is to pour hot water on a few slices of ginger with honey. Since ginger contains elements that help warm up your body by extending blood vessels and facilitating blood circulation, shogayu will be a big help in staying warm during winter.

During Heian period (794-1192), ginger was highly valued by aristocrats. During Meiji-era, shogayu was recommended as a go-to drink for those who caught a cold. Now, convenience stores and supermarkets sell small packets with ingredients of shogayu inside, which allows customers to prepare a cup of ginger tea very easily and quickly.

kudaka.shoji@stripes.com



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STARS AND STRIPES

My go-to get well soon food

Feel better with some delicious Japanese dishes

STORY AND PHOTOS BY
SHOJI KUDAKA, STRIPES JAPAN

Winter is the time where there are more chances of getting sick than in any other seasons.

Though the winter weather hits Japan's mainland, Okinawa, where I live, isn't exempt from seasonal troubles. Though the island's residents enjoy a year-round subtropical climate, sensitivities to lower temperatures and catching a cold or flu are still possible during the winter season.

If you do get sick in Japan, the good news is that there are many delicious foods to help you feel better in no time.

You may have your own list of comfort foods for when you feel under the weather, but below I've shared some of my favorite Okinawan dishes I choose when I feel sick. Some of them are traditional, while others are rather what you might call "convenience food." Either way, these are not difficult to cook or prepare.

They can help supply nutrition and make you feel better without too much cost or effort.

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Shinjimun

Shinjimun, or decocted soup, is a nourishing Okinawan dish. According to Hiroko Shou, a professor emerita of the University of the Ryukyus, this local food represents the idea of "Yakushoku Dougen (medicine and food have the same origin)", which is based on Chinese medicine. Common ingredients for Shinjimun are pork, fish, and vegetables. In particular, a decocted soup with pork liver known as "Chimushinji" is valued as a strong revitalizer.

Shinjimun is at the top of my list when it comes to what to eat to fight off a cold. I usually top it with a lot of grated garlic, which naturally adds a strong spiciness.



Kachu-yu

This is another very nutritious Okinawan soup, but much easier to prepare than Shinjimun. To prepare this broth, all you need is a handful of dried bonito flakes and a spoonful of miso paste in a bowl. Pour boiled water on top and you have an instant soup ready to boost your energy. "Kachuu" means bonito in Okinawan dialect.

Given the small amount of effort it takes to cook this soup, its taste can be a big surprise.

It is worth mentioning that this soup is arguably one of the best ways to taste the "umami" of bonito flakes and enjoy their aroma.



Okayu (rice porridge)

Just like folks in other Asian countries, Okinawans (and Japanese) eat rice porridges, especially when they are down with a cold. It makes perfect sense because this food is easy to digest and can let you replenish nutrition quickly. I often have it with umeboshi (pickled plums).



Cup Ramen

Instant noodles may not be a big help in supplying nutrition, but this guilty pleasure can at least make me feel better. In fact, this is one of a few things I look forward to when I am down with a cold. Although I would normally go for spicy noodles, I go easy on my stomach when I'm sick by choosing those with mild flavors such as "Nissin Chicken Ramen Noodle" or the original "Cup Noodle."



Energy drink

"Eiyu dorinku," or energy drinks, are pretty popular for those seeking quick recovery after a long day at work or a long night of partying. However, eiyu dorinku are also handy for when you're down with a cold or flu. Among the plethora of energy drinks available at the convenience or grocery store, my favorite is "Lipovitan D." It is all because of its TV ad with the slogan "Fight Ippatsu (one-shot)!" which was frequently on air when I was a kid. I still feel like chanting the catchline when I have a shot of this time-honored drink.





Make Shinjimun, kachu-yu and okayu at home

Kachu-yu

- INGREDIENTS** (for 1 person)
- Dried bonito flakes (a handful)
 - Miso paste (a spoonful)

RECIPE

1 Put dried bonito flakes and miso paste in a bowl.



2 Pour boiled water on top.



3 Cover the bowl with a plate.



Shinjimun

- INGREDIENTS** (for 2 persons)
- Pork (lean meat, 460g)
 - Carrot (one)
 - Potato (two)
 - Garlic (one cluster)
 - Garlic chives (appropriate amount)
 - Miso paste (two spoonfuls)
 - Water (1,400cc)

RECIPE

1 Shave fat off pork and slice it into small pieces.



2 Heat water (1,400ml) in a pot over medium flame. Put sliced pork in the pot.



3 Scoop and remove foam.



4 Loosely cover the pot with a lid, leaving a little gap to let the steam escape.



5 Slice a carrot into small pieces and add to the pork in the pot.



6 Slice potatoes into small pieces and rinse them with water. Add them to the mixture in the pot. Loosely cover the pot with a lid.



7 Separate head of garlic and peel cloves. Add half of them to the mixture in the pot. Grate the rest of the garlic cloves and set aside.



8 Slice garlic chives into small pieces.



9 Once the pork and potatoes in the pot are cooked through, add in miso paste, grated garlic, and sliced garlic chives.



10 Stir the soup and ingredients over low flame. Kill the flame before you serve up the soup in a bowl.



(It took roughly 45 minutes to cook through)

Okayu (rice porridge)

- INGREDIENTS** (for 2 persons)
- Rice (200cc)
 - Water (1,200cc)

RECIPE

1 Heat up rice and water in a pot over high flame. Cover the pot with a lid.



2 Take off the lid and see if the water has come to a boil.



3 Put the lid back on leaving a little gap. Adjust the heat to medium flame.



4 Stir the rice at times to prevent it from sticking to each other. Put the lid back on.



5 It is ready when the rice softens to the core.



* Customize the flavor with various ingredients like umeboshi, azuki beans or seasoned cod roe.

Mark your calendars!

Cherry blossom forecast dates

- Sasebo Mar. 23
- Iwakuni Mar. 22
- Tokyo Mar. 20
- Kanto Plain Mar. 21 - 29
- Misawa Apr. 17



Weathernews

Cherry blossom forecast is here

STORY AND PHOTOS BY TAKAHIRO TAKIGUCHI, STRIPES JAPAN

We are in the coldest times of year, and one might not believe that there are flowers blooming even if the weather is freezing. But the warmer season is just around corner, as Japan's Weathernews meteorological agency has released the cherry blossom bloom predictions for 2023.

Every year, Japan's first cherry blossoms appear in Okinawa in late January then spread northbound up the mainland. According to the report, Tokyo will have the earliest blooms on the mainland on March 20, followed by Hiroshima (near MCAS Iwakuni) on Mar. 22 and Nagasaki (near Sasebo Naval Base) on Mar. 23. The Misawa area is expected to see sakura blossoms later on April 17. Kushiro City in Hokkaido will get cherry blossoms last around May 10, the agency predicted.

This year's blossoms are arriving a bit earlier than usual, according to the agency. So, make plans to visit some of Japan's favorite cherry blossom viewing spots and enjoy hanami this season!



cherry blossom viewing spots



enjoy hanami

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Sid Frazier

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Stripes Sports Trivia

In 2006 and 2007, Billy Donovan led Florida to back-to-back Men's Basketball National Championships. The pair of titles were the first ever for the Gators, who had fallen short in their only other title appearance (2000). With the wins, Florida became the first to go back-to-back since which school?

Answer

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DID YOU KNOW?

Heejaa (or Hiijaa) goats are valued as livestock in Okinawa. Locals commonly cook soup with heejaa bones and meat or eat it raw as (sashimi) as it is thought that the rich nutrition is an energy boost. Some eateries even serve up heejaa burger or goat pizza, making the healthy treat easy to get your hands on.

Kanji of the week

百

Hyaku (hundred)

Language Lesson

Good evening.

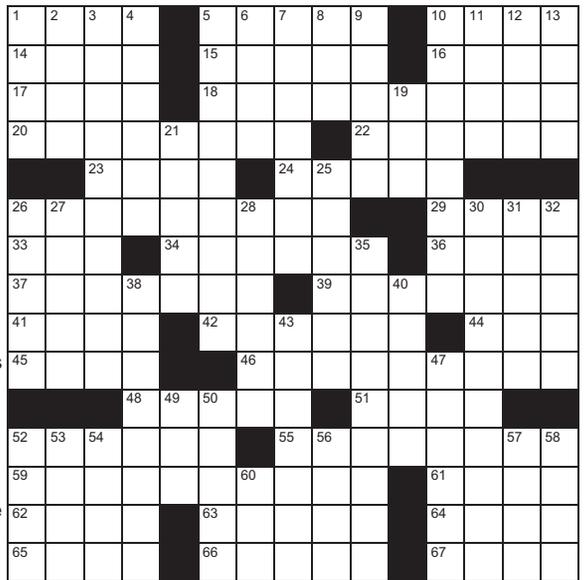
Konbanwa.

The Weekly Crossword

by Margie E. Burke

ACROSS

- Docket entry
- Twin crystal
- Chaplin prop
- Bank offering
- Hankered (for)
- Forest ox
- Cross to bear
- Complimentary
- Fashion bigwig
- Small opening
- Fit of fever
- ___ of roses
- Enormity
- Cartoon coyote's supplier
- Poetic homage
- Straight
- Plumber's job
- Compensation
- Parish residence
- Medicinal herb
- Type of funds
- Tree trickling
- Tripod trio
- Speak for
- Consumed
- Charles and Bradbury
- Overdo the diet
- "Sara" singers
- Las Vegas event
- Scene attempt
- Beheaded Boleyn
- Minimal bottom
- ___ and anon
- Abacus piece
- Have a hunch
- Butcher's stock



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DOWN

- Knucklehead
- Top-notch
- Dachshund, slangily
- Naval officer rank
- Personal charm
- "Care" anagram
- Hepburn/Grant film of 1963
- Book end?
- Something drawn out
- Eye affliction
- Soon, to a poet
- Part of speech
- Word before chair or street
- Lyrical Gershwin
- Cunning
- Destroy
- Fable finale
- "Easy on Me" singer
- Hesitant
- Narrow escape
- Baio co-star
- Pharaoh's land
- Set up differently
- Sign on a table
- Weather word
- Headache cause
- Part of DOS
- Envelope abbr.
- Scout shelters
- Wound remnant
- Voice mail prompt
- Palindromic name
- Heaps
- Furniture giant
- Flippant
- Bite-bullet link

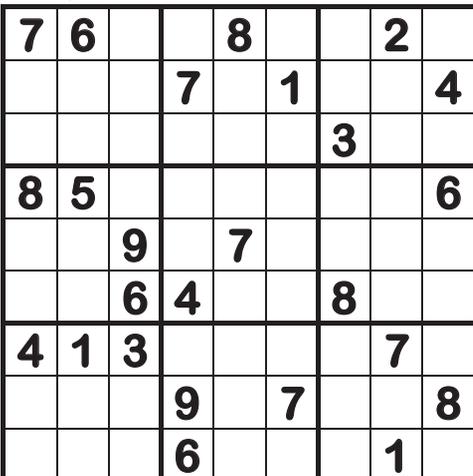
Answers to Previous Crossword:



SUDOKU

Edited by Margie E. Burke

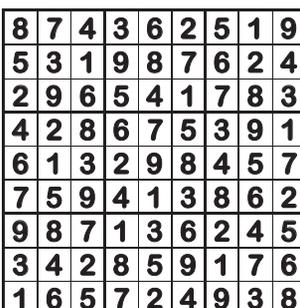
Difficulty: Medium



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:



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Oarai story

A shark and a stingray swim among a school of hundreds of fish in one of the many massive exhibits at Oarai's Aqua World.



Plan a personal 'shark day' at Oarai's Aqua World

STORY AND PHOTOS BY ALEX WILSON,
STARS AND STRIPES
Published: November 3, 2022

Aqua World, the centerpiece of any visit to Oarai in Ibaraki prefecture just north of Tokyo, boasts the largest variety of shark species of any aquarium in Japan.

The five-story, 213,000-square-foot aquarium doubles as one of Oarai's main attractions and the prefectural aquarium. The aquarium celebrated its 20th anniversary in March.

Inside, visitors may find more than 68,000 different sea creatures for a total of approximately 580 different species. Nearly every manner of marine life is represented, including penguins, sea otters, seals, sunfish, crabs and eels.

The biggest draw, however, is the aquarium's vast array of sharks. As of August, Oarai had 59 different species of sharks on display, including well-known species such as hammerheads and nurse sharks and lesser-known species such as the minuscule saddle carpetshark or the colorful Indonesian speckled catshark.

The aquarium is divided into a series of themed zones. In the "Deep Sea" zone, visitors may see the massive Japanese spider crab or an array of colorful jellyfish; the "Rivers and Streams" zone has playful otters and freshwater fish swimming in simulated waterways.

Outside in the "Oceanfront" zone, Humboldt penguins swim in their enclosure and fur seals relax next to the water.

Inside the Ocean Theater, California sea lions

and dolphins perform myriad tricks alongside their trainers.

A family-friendly venue, Aqua World is also completely wheelchair accessible. Admission is 2,000 yen (\$13.51) for adults, 900 yen for elementary or middle school students, 300 yen for infants and free for children under age 3.

Oarai is just a 1 1/2-hour drive from Tokyo or a 2 1/2-hours from Yokosuka, making it the perfect destination for a daytrip or weekend getaway. Oarai is also accessible via rail by taking the JR East Line from Shinagawa Station in Tokyo to Mito Station, and then transferring to the Kashima Rinkai Tetsudo Oarai-Kashima line.

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Aqua World



Humboldt penguins make their signature calls at one of Aqua World's various outdoor exhibits.

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