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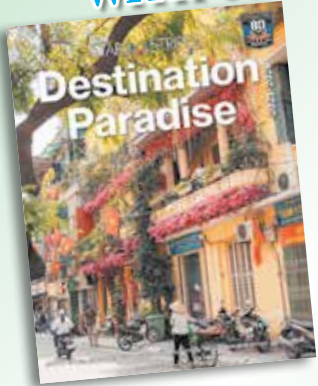
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**Fly like a superhero  
 at Moon Beach**

**PAGE 5**

**INSIDE INFO**



**OPERATION BALL GOWN  
 ACCEPTING SHOE  
 DONATIONS AT KADENA AB**  
 PAGE 2



**FEEL EARTH'S  
 HEARTBEAT AT  
 SAKURAJIMA VOLCANO**  
 PAGE 8



**7 ways  
 to soak in Japan's  
 rainy season traditions**

**PAGE 4**

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# Operation Ball Gown accepting shoe donations at Kadena Air Base

STORY AND PHOTO  
BY OPERATION BALL GOWN

Community members are encouraged to donate gently used formal shoes and gowns at the Okinawa Enlisted Spouses' Club Thrift Store and Uncle Sam's Attic at Kadena Air Base.

Operation Ball Gown was founded in 2022 and started as a small closet of donated dresses inside the Camp Foster USO. The program has grown and it now offers more than 400 formal gowns and cocktail dresses to SOFA-status service members and their families across the island — completely free of charge.

Operated entirely by volunteers from the Okinawa Enlisted Spouses Club board, Operation Ball Gown runs twice weekly by appointment and hosts public and private pop-up events throughout the year during military ball season, prom, homecoming, galas, and school dances.

The process is simple: eligible SOFA-status members may borrow a gown free of charge up to 30 days before an event. The only requirement is that the dress be professionally dry cleaned and returned within two weeks after the event date.

Beyond providing an affordable option for



formalwear, the program has become a place where lasting memories are made.

"Whether it's friends spending the evening trying on dresses together or a mother watching her daughter find the perfect gown for prom, these are special moments," Chavez explained. "With very few shops carrying American dress sizes on Okinawa, this program fills an important need for our community."

The success of the program relies heavily on community generosity. Operation Ball Gown receives most of its dresses through donations from the Kadena Thrift Store and Uncle Sam's Attic, whose staff members work closely with volunteers to help select gowns for the inventory. The program currently carries sizes 00–28

and continues to expand its collection.

"Our goal has always been bigger than dresses," Operation Ball Gown Coordinator Ashley Chavez said. "We want every person who walks through our doors to feel beautiful, confident, and supported by their community."

As the program prepares for another busy formal season, Operation Ball Gown hopes to continue spreading awareness across all military installations on Okinawa so that more families can benefit from the growing resource.

"We are always accepting donations and always looking for ways to grow," Chavez added. "We want everyone to know there is a place on this island where they can come feel celebrated for their special moments."

## Things to know

### DROP OFF LOCATION:

OESC Thrift Store  
and Uncle Sam's  
Attic at Kadena  
Air Base

ADDRESS: Kadena Air  
Base, Bldg. 859



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# 7 ways to soak in Japan's rainy season traditions

BY SHOJI KUDAKA AND TAKAHIRO TAKIGUCHI, STRIPES OKINAWA

Constant gray skies and gloomy showers can only mean one thing in the so-called Land of the Rising Sun: The rainy season.

It starts to fall on Okinawa in mid-May followed by mainland Japan and Kyushu Island in early June. Cold northerly and warm southerly air masses collide to create 45 to 50 days of a continuous dreary weather front of clouds dropping anything from drizzle to torrential downpours.

But there's no reason to let the bad weather get you down. Look on the bright side.

The rainy season is cheerily

referred to as "tsuyu," or plum rain, in Japan, as it coincides with the seasonal ripening of this luscious fruit. And with southern to central temperatures in the mid to high 70s (the high 60s farther north), Japan offers more seasonal outdoor activities than you can shake an umbrella at.

For starters, it's one of the best times of the year to visit the northern island of **Hokkaido**. Chances are you may not even need that umbrella. Since Hokkaido is barely affected by this weather front, many locals travel there during the rainy season to escape the stifling humidity often visited upon the rest of Japan.

If you can't make it that far north there's still no need to resort to long weekends indoors with video games or TV. It may be the rainy season but it actually does not rain every day. (For example, the average number of rainy days in June is only 12 on the Kanto Plain, according to Japan Meteorological Agency.)

Even if it does rain, it will add a certain ambiance to your strolls along the streets of **old towns** and quaint neighborhoods. The rain makes old temples, gardens and traditional houses seem all the more elegant.

While out, look for cute small white ghost-like dolls made from single piece of cloth or tissue hanging from the eaves or on the windows of houses. Often children, and even some adults, make these little "teruteru bozu," or sunshine monks, to ward off bad weather for the next day when a fieldtrip or other outdoor event is planned.

In fact, why not make your own **teruteru bozu**?

Also, don't miss the opportunity to take in the beauty of seasonal foliage.

With plenty of water falling amid the early summer warmth, several pretty **flowers** are also in bloom this time of year. Both hydrangeas ("ajisai") and irises ("shobu") are in full bloom in mainland Japan, while irises and shell ginger ("gettou") are in bloom on Okinawa. Flowering shell ginger heralds the rainy season on the southern islands; hydrangeas embody the season on the mainland.

The hydrangea's original colors can vary from white, pink, violet and blue, and they gradually shift to different colors. Some change from pink to purple, and others from blue to violet or fade in intensity throughout the course of the 4- to 6-week season.

Peak flower viewing season on Okinawa is mid-May to the end of June, while it runs from mid-June to early July on the mainland.

In Japan's central regions firefly viewing, or "**hotaru gari**," (literally firefly hunting) is another favorite rainy season pastime. Lightning bugs are active at riverside, ponds, bushes or rice fields in the humid evenings, right after

it rains on windless nights without moonlight.

Countless slowly moving tiny lights filling the air and drifting from one leaf to another make a spectacular sight. But don't catch them, as the endangered bug's life lasts only seven to 10 days. Like fireworks festivals in Japan, "yukata" (summer kimono) and an "uchiwa" (fan) are appropriate attire for this traditional pastime.

On Okinawa, rainy season usually begins just after the Golden Week holidays that take place around late April to the first week of May, and that means dragon boat races galore. **Dragon boat races** are held in fishing communities throughout Okinawa.

These "hari" are also known as "kaijin-sai" (unjami) or fishermen festivals; they are a way to give thanks to the sea god and pray for safe and prosperous fishing.

**Memorial services** on Okinawa Memorial Day (June 23) is another important event during the rainy season. Okinawans commemorate the end of the Battle of Okinawa during a big memorial service for the war dead at Itoman Peace Memorial Park every year.

So take up your umbrella and enjoy the rainy season outdoors. By walking in the rain, perhaps while singing, you just might discover attractions that are only available during this time of year.

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## Hydrangeas lighten up rainy season

If you would like to lighten up your rainy season, Yohena Ajisaien should be on the list of your next destinations. About a 90-minute drive from Camp Foster takes you to this flower garden with 300,000 hydrangea flowers and other beautiful and colorful plants and flowers. According to an Instagram post by Yohena Ajisaien, mid-to-late May is expected to be a good time to see the flowers. Although the flowers are expected to be enjoyed through the month of June, it depends on the weather.

**Yohena Ajisaien**  
(Hydrangea Flower Park)  
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WEBSITE

You can bring your pets. Just make sure that you pick up after them.

Photo by Aya Ichihashi



Iris



Hydrangea



Photos by Aya Ichihashi

## Speakin' Japanese

## "Tsuyu" Talk

June is the rainy season in Japan. While making your way around town, try using some of the following Japanese words and phrases to talk about it.

"**Tsuyu**" = Rainy season

"**Tenki**" = (Nice) weather

"**Ame**" = Rain

"**Mushimasu**" = Humid

"**Suberiyasui**" = Slippery

"**Nureteru**" or "**Bisha-bisha**" = Wet (object)

"**Zibunure**" = Dripping wet (person)

"**Kasa**" = Umbrella

"**Tsuyu wa itsu akemasuka?**"

= When will the rainy season end?

"**Tenki ga yokunai desu-ne?**"

= The weather is bad, isn't it?

"**Kyo wa mushimasu-ne?**"

= Today it is humid, isn't it?

- Stripes Okinawa

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.

# FLY LIKE A SUPERHERO AT MOON BEACH

BY SHOJI KUDAKA,  
STRIPES OKINAWA

## Things to know

**FEES:** • 9,000 yen (approx. \$57.23) for 30 minutes (includes 10 minute briefing)  
• 7,000 yen for 20 minutes (for repeat customers)

\* Customers need to be between the ages 12 and 64, and weigh 88 lbs. or more.

**WEBSITE:** <https://www.moonbeach.co.jp/en/>

\*Reservation required



WEBSITE

When instructor Keiko Sasamoto cued me by saying, “Start!” I straightened my body upright under the water, putting strength into my legs, ready to be launched by a big thrash coming from underneath. The moment I felt the impact on my soles, my body became tight, trying to stay on top of the great force. Lifting gradually, all I cared was not to be tossed off into the ocean. As the upper half of my body passed the surface of the water, the jitters crept up on me even more. When my feet left the surface, and I was completely airborne, my mind went blank. Next thing I knew, I fell solidly into the water, appreciating the fact that I wore a helmet and lifejacket.

This is what happened once I finally succeeded in hovering in the air on a Flyboard only for a few seconds.

Leading up to this point, I had embarrassed myself like a failed human cannon for nearly 20 minutes.

Flyboarding is supposed to be a cool sport that allows a regular guy like me to easily hover or fly in the air like a superhero. During a “preflight” briefing, the instructor described the appeal of the sport by saying, “Thrilling and exhilarating feelings that you cannot get from any other sports.” And my expectations were high after seeing Sasamoto cruise high in the air for her demonstration flight. But my initial experience was far from such thrill or exhilaration. To me, it was more like a rodeo; the water jet was hard to harness like a bronco. Almost every effort I made against the thrashing water was rejected, leaving me off balance in no time.

All the failure that preceded made it that much sweeter when I finally got a glimpse of what it would be like to fly like Ironman. I can say that the joy of floating in the air is worth the time I spent beating up myself in the water.

It was at Moon Beach, a resort just a 30-minute drive from Gate 1 of Kadena Air Base, that I gave my first shot at this unique marine sport. Known as one of the best beaches on Okinawa, this is a popular spot for many tourists and locals who enjoy jet skiing, sea kayaking, diving or just taking it easy on the sandy shore.

Flyboard is one of the newest additions that this place has to offer.

“You can enjoy a variety of marine sports here, but Flyboard is what I recommend the most,” Sasamoto said. “Recently, we had a group of Americans who came here for the sport as well. They were really

excited when they succeeded in hovering in the air.”

The popularity of the sport was clear. Before I set off for my first launch, I could see people having fun with the water jet. I saw some very skilled tourists flying through the air like the Silver Surfer in a freeze-frame.

When it was my turn, I put on a helmet and a life-jacket before going into the water to put on shoes fixed on a board. Attached on the other side of the board was a thick black hose at the center

with two nozzles at each end. The hose was connected to a jet ski driven by Sasamoto, who controlled the accelerator for the water jet.

Following her instructions, I floated face up, pointing my feet to the shore so the water jet could propel me away from land. From time to time, I bent either my left or right knee to make a turn following instructions. When I got far enough away from the shore, I rotated my body to float on my stomach, to prepare for being launched. As soon as the final cue “Start!” came, the 20 minutes of struggle began.

I don’t remember how many times I threw myself into the sea, but every time I failed spectacularly, I was looking for another shot. It was challenging but fun at the same time.

When I finally stayed on top of the water jet long enough and went above the water surface, the feeling was hard to describe. In part, it felt like skiing or snowboarding. I had my feet

locked by the shoes, which restrained my ankles from moving. I had to rely on my thighs and hamstrings to keep me in balance and tame the big force. And what I saw during a few seconds I had above the water, made me feel like a superhero. Having the same point of view as Ironman felt great, even if only for a few seconds.

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Photo courtesy of Hotel Moon Beach

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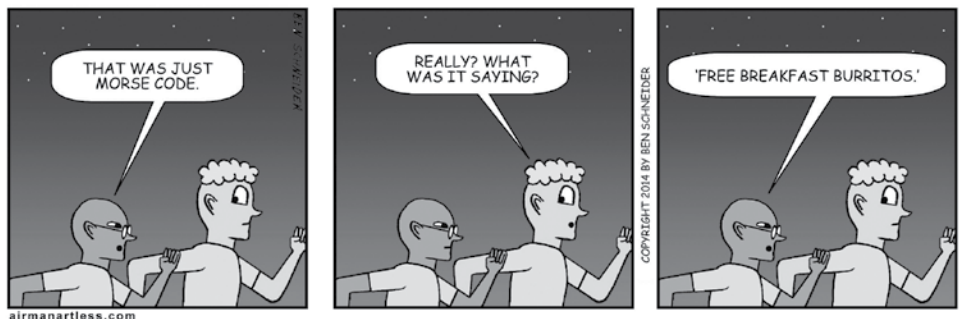
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STARS AND STRIPES ARCHIVES



## GET TO KNOW JAPAN

### Make a wish on wooden ornaments

STORY AND PHOTOS BY TAKAHIRO TAKIGUCHI, STRIPES OKINAWA

You may have seen these wooden plaques when visiting Shinto shrines around Japan. These are decorated with drawings of the year's zodiac sign or the temple's symbol along with special Kanji characters.

These are called ema, which also means horse in Japanese. Ema are used to write prayers and ask for good luck in certain endeavors. Followers believe that wishes and prayers will come true if we go to a temple and write our wish and hang them there as an offering to the Shinto gods. Some of the common wishes asked for include work, family peace, health and — yes, you guessed it — school entrance examinations. Now since exam season is over for the students of Japan, you might still catch many of the ema asking for good final grades.

These are called ema, which also means horse in Japanese. Ema are used to write prayers and ask for good luck in certain endeavors.

You can get your very own ema at Shinto shrines starting from about 200 to 1,000 yen (about \$1.40-\$7).

Followers believe that wishes and prayers will come true if we

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# Stripes Sports Trivia

The late Rashaan Salaam won the 1994 Heisman Trophy as the running back for which school?

**Answer**

Colorado

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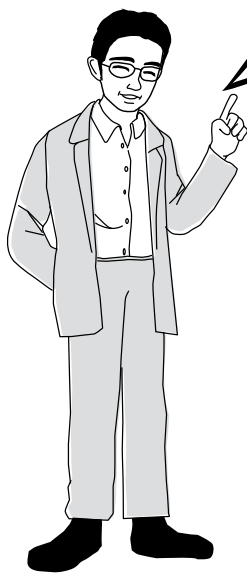
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### DID YOU KNOW?

**Y**asukuni Shrine has often been seen as a symbol of imperial Japan's war history. Although it is a Shinto shrine, Yasukuni Shrine doesn't enshrine Shinto gods, but is simply dedicated to more than 2,466,000 warriors and civilians who died in war. While some consider the shrine a sacred home to national heroes, just like Arlington National Cemetery, others see it as a symbol of Japanese militarism that led to war.

Kanji of the week



Tori/cho [Bird]

### Language Lesson

I'm leaving home.

**Ittekimasu!**  
(when you leave your home)

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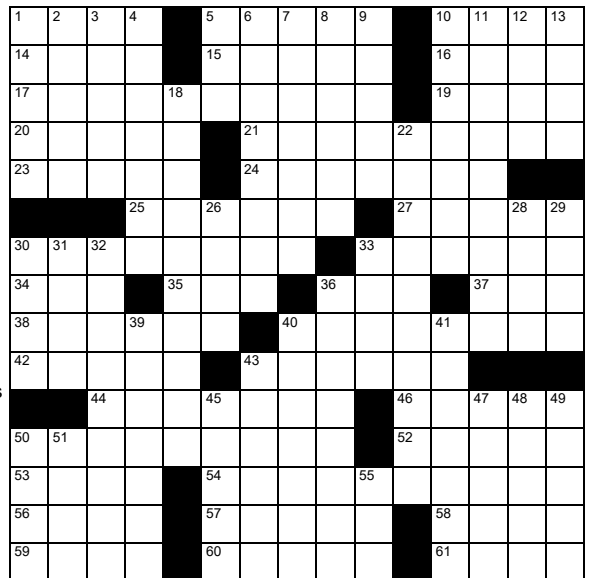


### Crossword

by Margie E. Burke

#### ACROSS

- 1 Church bell sound
- 5 Takes off
- 10 Tiny fraction of a min.
- 14 Start to bat?
- 15 Commercial creator
- 16 Wistful words
- 17 Thanksgiving centerpiece
- 19 "The Amateur" actor Malek
- 20 Set straight
- 21 Like some herbs
- 23 More popular song, usually
- 24 Soon, in old times
- 25 Declared
- 27 Missionary Junipero
- 30 Airport vehicles
- 33 Puzo and Cuomo
- 34 Mother
- 35 "Lent" body part
- 36 Washed out
- 37 Allow
- 38 Digitally endorses
- 40 Samoan seaport
- 42 Equally irate
- 43 Diocese division
- 44 Dappled, as a horse
- 46 Like a bricks
- 50 More thin
- 52 Use more WD-40 on
- 53 Lymph
- 54 Haughtily
- 56 Radio transmission
- 57 Jason of "The Wrecking Crew"
- 58 TV's "How Your Mother"
- 59 Makes one decisively
- 61 Prefix with -graphy



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#### DOWN

- 1 Rainforest rodents
- 2 Reason for a food recall
- 3 Right Guard rival
- 4 1974's and 2005's "The Yard"
- 5 Animal pouch
- 6 Dashboard gauge
- 7 Current units
- 8 Made a surprise attack
- 9 Slow mover
- 10 Seattle slugger
- 11 Place of bliss
- 12 Jane Austen heroine
- 13 Top off a room
- 18 Neglected
- 22 Sicilian Mafia
- 26 "Oh, woe!"
- 28 "The Witches" director Nicolas
- 29 Regarding, in a memo

- 30 Mets' old stadium
- 31 Name on toy fuel trucks
- 32 Unrestricted
- 33 Wise Men
- 36 Naval officers' hangout
- 39 Diving maneuvers
- 40 Sicilian seaport
- 41 Cardinals' home
- 43 Pirate's pet
- 45 Grins widely
- 47 "Who did this?" reply, maybe
- 48 Persian Gulf ship
- 49 Reach by plane
- 50 Old TV problem
- 51 Letter sign-off
- 55 Opening

#### Answers to Previous Crossword:

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

### SUDOKU

Edited by Margie E. Burke

Difficulty: Easy

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

#### 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:

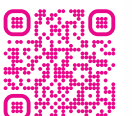
2	7	9	3	6	8	5	1	4
1	6	8	5	9	4	2	3	7
3	5	4	2	1	7	8	9	6
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7	8	1	4	5	3	9	6	2
6	3	5	9	2	1	7	4	8
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8	2	3	6	4	9	1	7	5
9	4	7	1	8	5	6	2	3

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# Feel Earth's heartbeat at Sakurajima volcano

STORY AND PHOTO BY KEISHI KOJA, STARS AND STRIPES  
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**S**akurajima is an active volcano on the Osumi peninsula in Kagoshima prefecture on the southern tip of Kyushu, the southernmost of Japan's four main islands.

The mountain rises to an elevation of 3,644 feet and spans roughly 32 miles in circumference.

It may sound like just another volcano in Japan — a country with more than a hundred of them. But Sakurajima is different. Here, people live side by side with one of the most active volcanoes in the country.

Sakurajima averages around 200 eruptions per year, with a record-breaking 996 eruptions in 2011, according to the volcano's website. Despite this intense activity, the relationship between the volcano and the surrounding community is remarkable.

About 3,500 people live in the foothills, where houses and even a school stand in the mountain's shadow. As you drive around the area, you'll notice numerous shelters designed to protect residents from falling ash.

Across the bay — just 2½ miles away

— around 600,000 people live in Kagoshima city, according to the city's website.

The volcano has two main peaks, north and south. The north peak was active from its formation about 26,000 years ago but ceased activity roughly 5,000 years ago. The south peak, however, became active around 4,500 years ago and remains active today, according to Sakurajima's website.

The word "jima" means "island" in Japanese. Sakurajima was once truly an island, but a massive eruption in 1914 connected it to the peninsula.

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I had the chance to speak with a local resident from Kagoshima city, who told me they are not afraid of the volcano at all. Seeing it emit smoke or even causing small shakes is completely normal. They are only worried about the ash that falls on their houses and cars.

There are two main ways to experience this living mountain. You can take a ferry from Kagoshima city for just 250 yen, a quick 15-minute ride. If you bring your car, that would be about 1,700 yen extra, or \$10.65, depending on the size of the vehicle.

Alternatively, you can drive through the peninsula, which takes about an hour from Kagoshima Airport in Kirishima city.

I enjoyed both driving from Kirishima



Sakurajima is an active volcano on the Osumi Peninsula in Kagoshima prefecture.

and later viewing the volcano from Kagoshima city after taking the ferry. The volcano stands with a commanding presence, revealing its different faces as you travel around it.

Due to its activity, access to the mountain is restricted. The closest point visitors can reach is the Yunohira observatory, at an elevation of 1,148 feet, offering a clear and impressive view.

I could understand a little bit why Sakurajima is a symbol for the locals. You can see it from almost anywhere in the city, and it becomes part of daily life. Also, it makes you talk to it, like, "Hey, how's your mood today?"

Sakurajima is truly a fascinating place to visit. And fingers crossed to be "lucky" to witness one of its eruptions.

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## Things to know

**DIRECTIONS:** Sakurajima is on the southern tip of Kyushu, the nearest city, Kagoshima, is a 1½ hour flight from Naha, Okinawa, or 14 hours by train from Tokyo.

**TIMES:** The volcano is best viewed in daylight.

**COST:** No cost to see the mountain, though a ferry from Kagoshima is 250 yen, \$1.57, or 1,700 yen with an automobile.

**FOOD:** Plenty of options in Kagoshima.



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