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in Taste of Okinawa Pullout

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Retired Marine continues mission to help Okinawans

STORY AND PHOTOS BY AYA ICHIHASHI,
STARS AND STRIPES
Published: Dec. 18, 2018

NAHA CITY — A group founded by a retired Marine and his wife collects thousands of pounds of food and hundreds of toys each year for Okinawans who would otherwise go without during the holidays.

Christopher and Yuko Nesbitt founded Help Oki in 2014. Christopher, a New Jersey native who retired as a sergeant that year from the 3rd Marine Division's Headquarters Battalion at Camp Courtney, made his home here with his wife, who's from the island.

He said a chance meeting with a homeless man at an apartment complex in Naha had a great impact on him. The Nesbitts spotted the man digging through some trash on a cold, rainy day.

Christopher Nesbitt choked back tears remembering what happened.

The man had only a flip-flop

on one foot and the other was bare, Nesbitt said. "I offered him my shoes I was wearing and the money I had with me. I had to do something for him."

The incident, Nesbitt said, changed his life and inspired him to help the

less fortunate.

Not many organizations worked directly with local communities in need at the time, he told Stars and Stripes. So he founded one of his own.

"I really wanted to help [those] who were less fortunate," he said, "like the homeless guy."

Help Oki donates anywhere between 1,100 pounds and a ton of food to local food banks each month, said Tiffany Tuckett, an Air Force spouse who serves as Help Oki's food-donation coordinator.

Donations come from U.S. servicemembers and Okinawans.

The Girl Scouts of Camp Courtney and Camp McTureous recently collected 1.2 tons of rice, canned goods, cereal and other nonperishable items that Help Oki forwarded to Food Bank Second Harvest, Tuckett said. Nesbitt drove to Naha on Dec. 6 in a rented



EXCLUSIVE NEWS FROM:
STARS AND STRIPES
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An encounter with a homeless man inspired Christopher and Yuko Nesbitt to found Help Oki in 2014 to provide food, clothing and other essentials for Okinawans in need.

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↙ a truck to donate the items.

Another pair of volunteers, Marine Staff Sgt. Austin DeMoney and his wife, Tiffany, last year collected more than 460 toys for Help Oki, a figure they more than matched this year with 650 toys. But they're leaving Okinawa this month for a new assignment.

"I am so happy that we finished collecting the toys ... before we leave the island," Tiffany DeMoney said.

"Hopefully someone will take on this great project."

Laura Stafford and Sabrina Cicchi from the Marine Officers Spouses Club Okinawa donated toys for a Help Oki-sponsored Christmas party this month for nearly 80 orphans ranging in



Help Oki, a group founded by Nesbitt and Yuko, threw a Christmas party for nearly 80 Okinawan orphans on Dec. 9.

age from 1 to 18 years old.

"I want to make the place better than it was when I leave," Cicchi said.

Help Oki threw another holiday party Sunday for single parents and their children. The group plans to host another

Saturday for disabled children.

Those interested in donating or helping can contact Help Oki via the organization's official Facebook page, www.facebook.com/helpingokinawa/

ichihashi.aya@stripes.com

RANDY BEHR'S



Healthy Matters

Have a realistic vision for the new year

BY RANDY BEHR, STRIPES OKINAWA

Vision. Probably not the word one is use to reading after New Year's, but let me explain why I prefer it over resolution. New Year's resolutions are common discussions amongst individuals during the holiday season. In fact, a lot of people come up with their resolutions of "I am going to drop 5, 10, 20 pounds, drop 3 dress sizes, lose 2 inches in my waist, run a 5 K, increase muscle size, not eat after 8 p.m., eat breakfast, decrease calories, save more money, take a vacation, cut-out sodas and desserts." The list goes on and on.

Unfortunately, the LIST means nothing without a "plan." Let's examine this in a literal sense. One definition of resolution is "a firm decision to do or not to do something" and a synonym of the word is intention. A "decision" and "intention" are not two words that are going to get you where you want to be without a "game plan."

First, let's create a vivid vision of what we want to accomplish. Do you have it yet? Next, create a short-term, mid- and long-term goals. Short, 1-7 days, mid-1-2 weeks and long 2-8 weeks. We will not spend too much time on writing and implementing goals today, but look for another article on this subject soon.

Once the above two steps are accomplished, the next step is to be consistent. Aim for 5 out of 7 days of the week at a low and moderate level. First, one must develop a lifestyle change and to begin to form a habit.

Listen to this as it is very important. You must illicit as many individuals in your resolution as possible, especially friends and family. This will increase your accountability

exponentially towards your goal.

Here is another "tip": don't be overzealous in the beginning; start small and work slowly towards your goal one day at a time. Too many people begin their resolutions with "I will never drink a soda again, I will work out 6 or 7 days a week for 2 hours per day or I am going to always eat healthy every day." These are just a few and I am sure you get the picture. Don't set yourself up for failure by saying these types of statements. Remember, many of these behaviors were and are culturally, environmentally and habits for a very long time.

Use "SMART" goals for increased success; Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic and Timely. An example of a SMART goal could be "I will walk five out of seven days for 10 minutes the first week or I will not eat after 8 p.m. six out of the seven days of the week."

Of course, the goals depend upon the individual's current state of health and fitness, but you get the picture right? Don't fret it if you're struggling as future articles will address how to develop "SMART" goals.

Once goals have been determined, one must eliminate the 'barriers' that stop us from reaching our potential. Whether it is eating breakfast to avoid late-night cravings, working out in the morning or lunch break or garnering new friends whom support the cause, it must be done!

To summarize, stick to what you're doing. Make short, mid and long-term goals, evoke a support 'inner circle' of individuals. Don't forget "SMART" goals and finally, minimize the things to keep one from achieving your goals.

Implement the plan and go forward and make 2019 a year to remember!

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Happo-One

Photos courtesy of Hakuba.com



HAKUBA VALLEY SKIER'S PASS

BY JOHN BLAGYS,
HAKUBA.COM

Interested in hitting the slopes in Japan this season? Before you do, check out this guide which has everything you need to know for planning your ski trip to the Hakuba Valley this winter.

The Hakuba Valley

The Hakuba Valley hosted the 1998 Winter Olympics and has since become an international destination for ski enthusiasts. Thanks to an incredible variety of terrain, 33 feet of annual powder snow, and the allure of Japan's unique culture, Hakuba has exploded in popularity. In fact, this year the Valley was added to the prestigious Epic Pass, a collection of 55 amazing resorts from around the world. Epic Pass holders can now ski the Hakuba Valley for five days for free.

How to access Hakuba

■ **CAR:** Hakuba sits 170 miles west of downtown Tokyo and can be reached within four hours by car. Many accommodations have car parking for guests and the resorts have accessible parking lots.

■ **SHINKANSEN & BUS:** From Tokyo Station take the Shinkansen to Nagano Station then take a bus to Hakuba Station. The journey takes about three hours and costs ¥9,800.

■ **JR AZUSA:** Departing from Shinjuku Station and Tachikawa Station, this train runs directly to Hakuba

Station and is slightly cheaper than the Shinkansen option at ¥7,900. The total journey takes about four hours.

Mountain Overview

There are 11 resorts in the Hakuba Valley providing incredible variety of terrain, runs, and experiences. Here are our suggestions for newbies, intermediates, families, and advanced skiers.

■ FIRST TIMER'S AND INTERMEDIATES: *Happo-One*

The largest resort in the Valley, Happo-One hosted several different events during the 1998 Olympics including the alpine skiing downhill, the super giant slalom, and the ski jumping. While the mountain is quite steep, 50% of the runs are suitable for intermediate riders and the views from Happo-One may be the best in the entire Valley. Beginners can find their balance on one of the more mellow green runs, such as Sakka. Many of the international ski schools operate out of this resort making it a good option for first timers. The main village also sits at the foot of Happo-One which opens your options nicely for drinks and dinner after skiing.

Insider Tips: On a clear sky day, head to the Corona Terrace

at the top of the Gondola; stop for a drink or snack with magical views right over the Hakuba Valley.

■ FAMILIES: *Iwatake*

A great option for families or groups, Iwatake has terrain for every skill level. Just a 10-minute walk from Hakuba Station, the resort is a short drive from Happo Village.

Once beginners build confidence, the top of the mountain all the way to the summit offers challenging intermediate routes that advanced skiers can stay busy as well. Enjoy powder skiing and a terrain park.

Insider tip: After you're done skiing, enjoy a delicious ramen at one of the best spots in the valley. From the gondola entrance and cross-country skis and snowboards out the front.

■ ADVANCED: *Cortina*

Cortina receives the highest snowfall in the valley, locally gets twice as much snow as other resorts. If you love backcountry skiing, perfectly groomed sidecountry skiing then visit Cortina. The resort has runs and terrain for every skill level.



Iwatake



Cortina

Snow Monkeys in Hakuba

THE VALLEY A PARADISE



...r a drink
...t up the

...groups with a mix of abili-
...ability level. Just 10 min-
...resort is easily accessible

...ce, they can take an easy run from
...y to the base; there are also more
...hat branch off from this run. Ad-
...vell as there are high speed runs,

...skiing, relax with a beer and some
...restaurants in the Valley. Come out
...ss the road to a wooden shack with
... You will not be disappointed.

...snow fall in the valley and typi-
...s the neighboring resorts. If you
...placed tree runs, and unmatched
...rtina! There are only 13 on-piste
...at Cortina, but the resort is in-
...erlinked with neighboring Nori-
...kura Resort and the Cortina lift
...pass gets you access to all 25
...combined runs. The iconic
...Green Plaza hotel sits at
...the base of Cortina and is
...a great place for drinks
...and dinner after skiing
...Cortina.

Insider Tip: Go here
on a powder day! You'll
be able to ski waste

deep in fresh powder snow. Make sure to arrive early as other powder enthusiasts will certainly be visiting Cortina as well.

- JACKET & PANTS: ¥1,500
- HELMET: ¥1,000

Lift Tickets / Gear

RESORT	FULL-DAY	HALF-DAY	NIGHT
Cortina	¥4,000	¥3,000	¥1,500
Norikura	¥3,500	¥2,700	N/A
Tsugaike Kogen	¥4,900	¥3,900	¥2,000
Iwatake	¥4,200	¥2,900	N/A
Happo-One	¥5,200	¥4,200	¥2,000
Hakuba 47	¥5,000	¥3,980	N/A
Hakuba Goryu	¥5,000	¥3,980	¥1,900

You can also purchase an "All Valley Pass" which allows pass holders access to every resort within the Valley. These passes cost ¥6,000 per day and can be purchased at hakuba.com/plan-your-trip/lift-passes/.

- RENTALS: There are a handful of English-speaking rental shops in Hakuba. Prices will vary slightly between shops, but the following prices are approximately what you will pay for rentals per day
- ADULT STANDARD SKI OR SNOWBOARD SET: ¥4,250
- BOOTS: ¥2,100

Where to Stay

The best places to stay are Happo-Village, Echoland, or Wadano as these areas boast plenty of nightlife options and are centrally located making every resort easily accessible. Hakuba has accommodations at every price point - from youth hostels to jaw dropping luxury. One great midrange hotel is the Hakuba Springs Hotel. Located five minutes from the gondola, the hotel houses probably the best sushi in all of Hakuba Valley as well as a great late-night sports bar.

Day Trips

There are loads of great day trips and off-mountain activities in the area, but the world-famous snow monkeys are by far the most popular option among visitors. You can access them by car in two hours, by public transit in three, or on a full day guided tour. Whichever option you choose, the monkeys are worth a visit!

For more information on The Hakuba Valley, including a 15% discount on all Hakuba.com accommodation for military personnel and your families, please visit www.Hakuba.com and enquire using promo code "military2019".



There's still time to catch a flight for Japan's ski & snowboard season

BY TAKAHIRO TAKIGUCHI,
STRIPES OKINAWA

It's peak skiing and snowboarding season, and if you are in Japan, you couldn't be in a better place!

With two Winter Olympic Games under its belt – Sapporo in 1972 and Nagano in 1998 – skiing and snowboarding are very popular activities in Japan. More than 800 resorts help make these pastimes both relatively affordable and easy to access.

Ski resorts from the northernmost island of Hokkaido to the south of the main island of Kyushu ensure that almost everyone in these regions can find a ski lift no more than a couple of hours away from where they reside.

Japan's resorts range from small facilities with one or two lifts and short runs to large popular haunts such as Niseko, in Hokkaido; Hakkoda, in Aomori Prefecture; and Hakuba and Nozawa in Nagano Prefecture.

Popular Ski Resorts

- 1 Niseko Annupuri International Ski Area (Hokkaido)**
URL: nnupuri.info/winter/english
TEL: 0136-58-2080
- 2 Hakkoda International Ski Area (near Misawa)**
URL: www.hakkouda-p.com/cn21/pg110.html
TEL: 017-738-8591
- 3 Hakuba Happo-One Winter Resort, Nagano (four hours from the Kanto Plain)**
URL: www.happo-one.jp/english
TEL: 0261-72-3066
- 4 Geihoku Kokusai Ski Area, Hiroshima (near Iwakuni)**
URL: geihokukokusai.jp
TEL: 0826-35-0250
- 5 Tenzan Resort, Saga (near Sasebo)**
URL: www.tenzan-resort.co.jp
TEL: 0952-58-2336

These major resorts have their own instructors for beginners and guides for adventurous skiers, boarders and snow trekkers. Hakkoda near Misawa Air Base, for example, is one of the most popular snow trekking

spots in Japan. Rental gear of every ilk is readily available at shops in or near most resorts, with knowledgeable staff on hand to offer advice and assistance. Nearby towns or villages usually offer

an abundance and variety of accommodations, including rooms at a fairly reasonable price for as long as a month.

Although large ski resorts are concentrated in Hokkaido and northern and central Honshu,

there are many that meet international standards in Western Japan – especially in Hiroshima and Tottori prefectures near Marine Corps Air Station Iwakuni.

Of southern Kyushu's three resorts, Tenzan in Saga Prefecture – near Sasebo Naval Base – is very popular for its well-equipped shop and restaurants, although smaller than its counterparts in Hakuba and Niseko.

Package tours to major resorts in Hokkaido and Honshu are available from anywhere throughout Japan. One major drawback, however, is the crowds, especially on weekends and holidays. The slopes, along with trains and highways leading to them, can be packed with more people than snow.

So now that it is peak skiing and snowboarding season in Japan, why not check out all the powder, pristine vistas and hot springs the Land of the Rising Sun has to offer?

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Stripes Sports Trivia

The last 5 NFL teams to lose one game or less in the regular season have all failed to win the Super Bowl. Most notably, of course, is the 2007 Patriots - the 2nd team to ever finish the regular season undefeated. Can you name the most recent team to finish with one loss that failed to win the Big Game?

Answer

Carolina Panthers (2015)

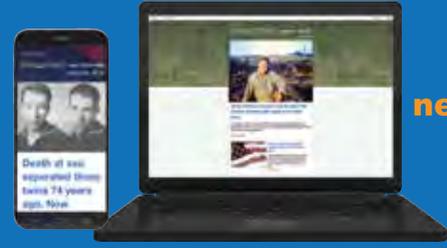
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The Weekly Crossword

by Margie E. Burke

ACROSS

- 1 Conn. neighbor
- 5 Herringlike fishes
- 10 Leave in, to an editor
- 14 Ancient Andean
- 15 "Water Lilies" painter
- 16 Fiesta fare
- 17 Go to great heights
- 18 Itsy-bitsy bits
- 19 How one might run
- 20 Spanish gentleman
- 22 Mac maker
- 23 Wife, jokingly
- 25 Hindu soul
- 28 Aspen aficionado
- 29 Word after pocket or loose
- 31 Deliberate destruction
- 36 They may be pulled
- 38 Dilbert's workspace
- 39 Erotic
- 41 Early English comedy, "_____ Gurton's Needle"
- 42 "Get lost!"
- 44 Minuscule
- 45 Accept responsibility
- 50 Unaccompanied
- 51 Weatherman offerings
- 55 Lose steam
- 56 Parlor piece
- 57 Beat badly
- 58 Clothing line
- 59 Certain exams
- 60 Frank Herbert sci-fi series
- 61 Nothing but
- 62 To the point
- 63 A whole bunch

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	
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58						59				60			
61						62				63			

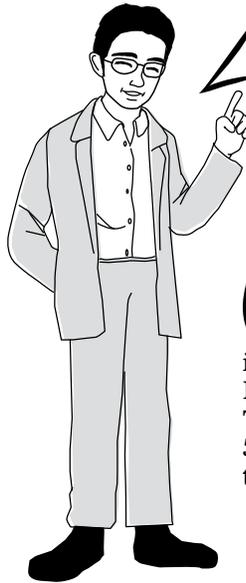
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- 2 Forest ox
- 3 Wound covering
- 4 Minuet-like dances
- 5 Clothing size
- 6 Monopoly purchases
- 7 Polar parkas
- 8 Possessed one
- 9 Ave. crossers
- 10 Kind of infection
- 11 Buccaneers' home
- 12 Reason for a food recall
- 13 Representative
- 21 Spiny lobster
- 22 Like Cirque du Soleil performers
- 24 Fix, in a way
- 25 Plays a part
- 26 Quaker's "you"
- 27 "Death in Venice" author
- 30 Son of Cain
- 32 They're punched at work
- 33 Top of the heap
- 34 Secluded valley
- 35 Mysterious: Var.
- 37 Guaranteed
- 40 Russian urn
- 43 Diego Rivera creations
- 45 Weighty put-down
- 46 1979 sci-fi classic
- 47 Snorkeling sight
- 48 Hostile force
- 49 Have a hunch
- 52 Music category
- 53 Spotify selection
- 54 Hearty dish
- 56 URL punctuator

Answers to Last Week's Crossword:

L	A	M	P	O	T	T	E	R	S	N	A	P
A	R	E	A	B	R	I	D	E	P	A	R	A
S	U	D	S	T	I	E	I	N	E	V	I	L
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DID YOU KNOW?



Okinawa and Hawaii have a strong tie. It dates back to a group of 27 immigrants that left Okinawa in 1899. The number of Okinawans in Hawaii continued growing from there. Today, there are thought to be 45,000 to 50,000 Okinawan descendants living in the state.

Kanji of the week

市
Ichi/Shi (City/Market)

Language Lesson

Can you hear me?

Kikoe masuka?



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STARS AND STRIPES

SUDOKU

Edited by Margie E. Burke

Difficulty: Easy

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7				1	6			
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HOW TO SOLVE:

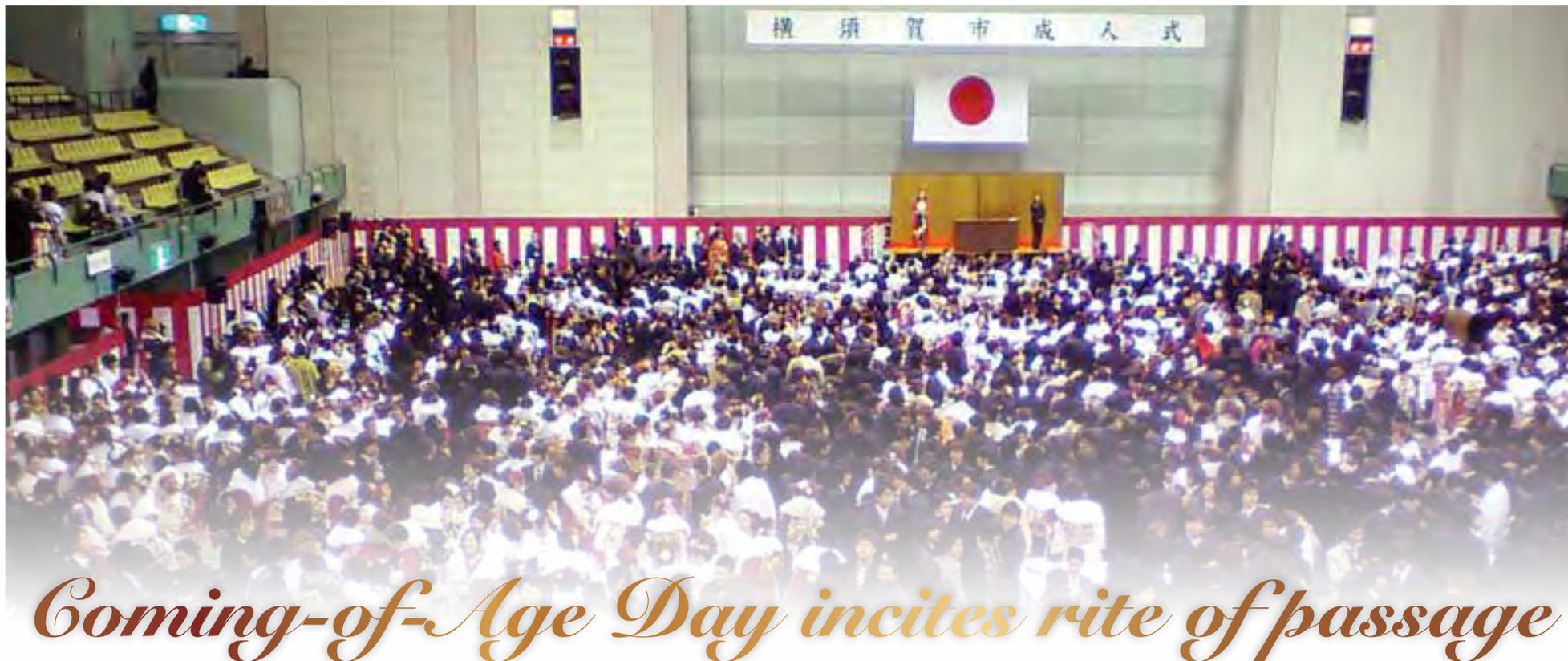
Each row must contain the numbers 1 to 9; each column must contain the numbers 1 to 9; and each set of 3 by 3 boxes must contain the numbers 1 to 9.

Answers to Last Week's Sudoku:

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

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Coming-of-Age Day incites rite of passage

STORY AND PHOTOS BY
TAKAHIRO TAKIGUCHI,
STRIPES OKINAWA

Becoming an adult is an important milestone in most cultures, and in Japan it is celebrated on Seijin-no-Hi, or Coming-of-Age Day, the second Monday of January (Jan. 14 this year).

“The purpose of this holiday is to congratulate and encourage young men and women who attain the legal age of adulthood to fulfill their new-found responsibilities and become self-reliant members of society,” said Masahiko Uchino, of the National Cabinet Office’s holiday section.

In Japan, age 20 is when someone becomes a legal adult.

At age 20, they can legally vote, drink, smoke and get married without parental consent. They also become subject to the laws and social responsibilities that bind adults. However, they need to wait a few more years to run for a public office. The minimum age for a congressman and mayor is 25; it is 30 for a senator and governor.

The number of new adults has been decreasing in recent years due to Japan’s shrinking birthrate. According the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communication, the number of new adults in 2019 is 1.21 million (620,000 men and 590,000 women) – less than half the 1976 peak of 2.76 million.

The number of new Okinawan

adults in 2018 was 16,647 (8,488 men and 8,159 women), increasing 165 from the previous year. The birthrate was 19.4 newborns per 1,000 people in 2017, the highest among all 47 prefectures in the nation. Nothing new for Okinawa, which has been the prefecture with the highest birthrate for the past 42 years.

The tradition of celebrating coming-of-age in the middle of January can be traced back to ancient times, although the national holiday was established for Jan. 15 in 1948. (In 1998, it was moved to the second Monday in January as part of Japan’s Happy Monday system, which moved several holidays to create three-day weekends.)

Originally, coming-of-age was

celebrated on or around Jan. 15 according to the old lunar calendar. Traditionally called “koshogatsu” (Small New Year’s), it was the day of the first full moon of the year. “It was considered right to celebrate coming-of-age in the beginning of year with festive atmosphere,” Uchino said.

Although there was no precise age that determined the onset of adulthood throughout Japan’s feudal era, it was usually celebrated when boys reached the age of around 15 and when girls reached about 13. The Meiji government set the legal age of adulthood for both sexes to 20 in 1876.

“Seijin-shiki,” or coming-of-age ceremonies, are generally held the morning of the

national holiday at local city offices throughout the country. Those who turn 20 during the current school year, which runs from April 2 to April 1 the next year, attend. During the ceremony, heads of local government and guest speakers from various backgrounds give speeches and small presents are handed out to the new adults.

On this day, young adults also often visit shrines or have parties with family and friends after the ceremony.

In some Okinawan villages, such as Shiraho, Ishigaki City, new adults perform a dance to thank the villagers for their support.

takiguchi.takahiro@stripes.com



Dressing the part in style

For most of young women, Coming-of-Age Day and the related ceremony are an opportunity to dress up in their most formal clothes. Many don “furusode,” a style of kimono with long sleeves that hang down.

The furisode is the most formal style of kimono worn by an unmarried woman in Japan. It is made of very fine, brightly colored silk, and is commonly rented or bought by parents for their daughters to wear to celebrate their coming-of-age.

By wearing a furisode, a young woman signifies that she is both single and a legal adult, and thus available for marriage, since the garment may not be worn either until adulthood or after wedlock. In this sense, a furisode might be associated with the formal

gowns worn by debutantes in the West.

A full furisode set is very expensive, so it is usually borrowed from a relative or rented. Typically, a young woman rents a kimono, dresses up and has her hair styled at salon before having a formal photo shoot at a portrait studio to commemorate the occasion. This can easily cost 150,000 yen (\$1,250) or more. Purchasing a new kimono set may cost more than 1,000,000 yen (\$8,400).

There are some young men who might wear a traditional dark kimono, called a “haori” (half-coat) and “hakama” (loose-legged pleated trousers) on this holiday. However, nowadays most of young men wear a Western suit and tie for the occasion.

Post-teen shenanigans mar adult day

In recent years, there have been a growing number of complaints about the rude behavior of 20-year-olds celebrating their official arrival into adulthood at “seijin-shiki,” or coming-of-age ceremonies.

The most common problems are youth chatting with friends or talking on mobile phones when local officials and dignitaries give speeches at these Seijin-no-Hi, or Coming-of-Age Day, ceremonies that occur the second Monday every January. However, heckling speakers and other disruptive behavior also is often reported by media.

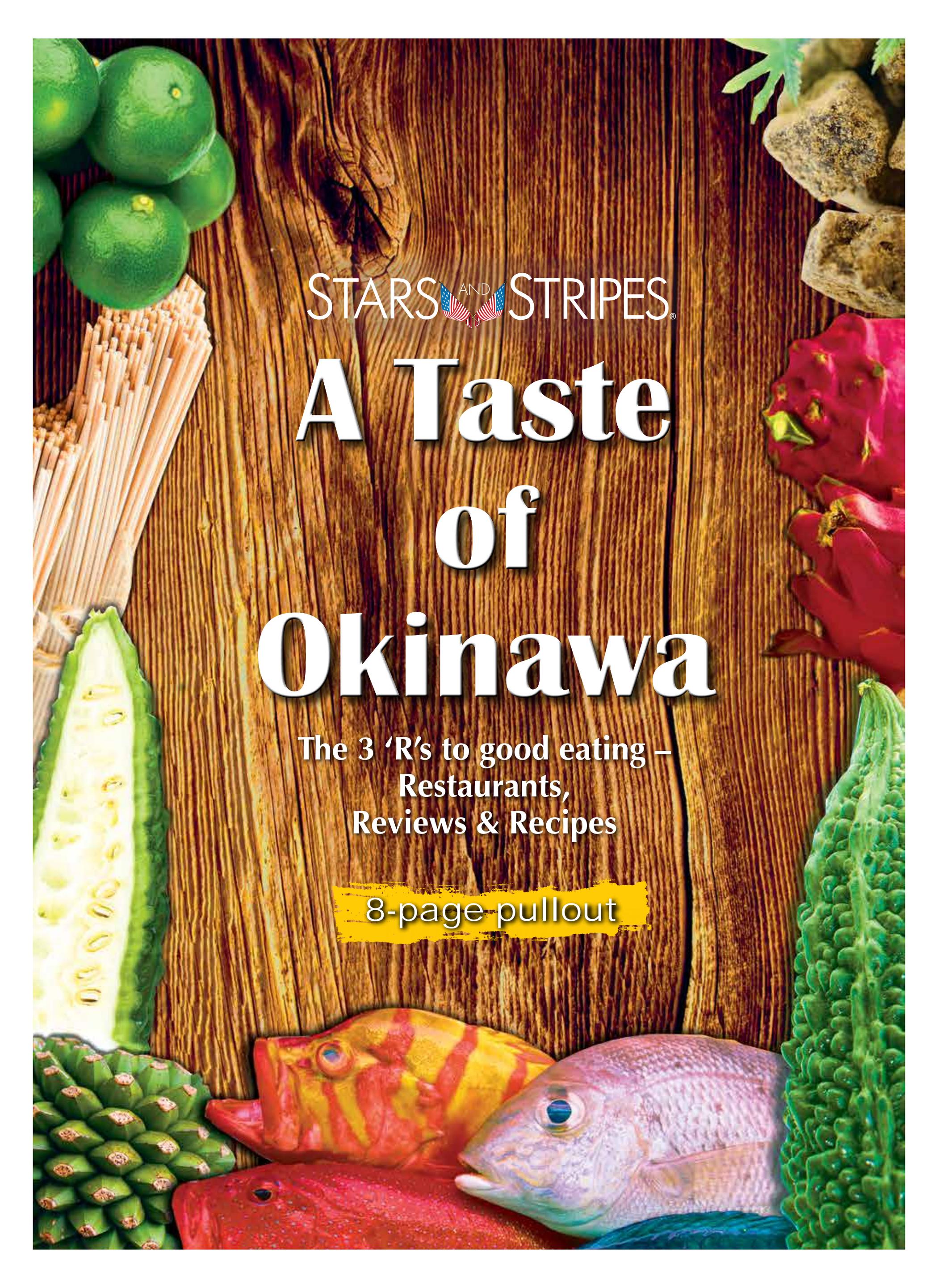
In some cities and towns, groups of participants have set off firecrackers or created disturbances inside and outside of the venue, sometimes resulting in arrests. Some municipalities have even canceled the annual ceremonies as a result.

Okinawa, in particular, garners

a lot of media attention every year for raucous drunk 20-year-olds that get arrested for reckless driving and other violations at or near these events.

In response to a spate of complaints in Okinawa and throughout the nation, Okinawan officials have issued a memorandum calling on local businesses to help curb the problem.

“We ask liquor shops not to sell new adults too much alcohol and to thoroughly verify their age,” says Keisuke Yamada, from Okinawa Prefecture’s Youth, Infant and Family Division. “We ask clothing rental shops to advise young patrons renting multiple matching sets of flashy traditional clothes (as potential gang-for-a-day uniforms) not to cause trouble. We are also asking car rental agencies not to rent to anyone that seems intent on reckless behavior.”



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Restaurants,
Reviews & Recipes

8-page pullout



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RESTAURANT INFO



Gen a real gem on Okinawa

Offering authentic Japanese and Okinawan cuisine at a reasonable price, Gen was recognized in Stripes' Best of the Pacific 2013 as the best restaurant to experience the local culture on Okinawa. Owner and Head Chef Naoki Tsukayama highly recommends the "Fish Garlic Butter Combo," a popular dish among American customers. Tsukayama and his staff make you feel at home, so stop by and enjoy a delicious meal. Gen is located across from Camp Foster's fire station. Just look for shi-shi dogs on a traditional Okinawan tile roof outside Foster's Fire Station Gate.

RESTAURANT INFO

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 Not accepted with any other coupons or discount tickets.
 Please present coupon when ordering.
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A JAPANESE A NORTH TO SOUTH



BY MATTHEW MACEWAN,
TOFUGU.COM

When it comes to cross-cultural experiences, some things are more universal than others. For instance, outsiders might find it difficult to understand the Japanese phenomena of deliberately crooked teeth, refrigerated underwear, or butt-attacking fingers. These cultural features are unlikely to be exported anytime soon.

Desserts, on the other hand, are one of the best ways to bring cultures together. Who doesn't enjoy sampling treats from around the world? Japan has its fair share of fine confectioneries, and most of them won't even induce that wide-eyed "seriously, Japan!?" look.

TOFUGU.COM

EIGHT 8 STEPS TO Deliciousness

We're going to travel through Japan from north to south, looking at a dessert associated with each of the country's eight major regions. But first, a few broad observations.

Japanese desserts, referred to broadly as wagashi, feature four principal recurring components: mochi (rice flour cake), bean paste (especially "red bean paste", made from azuki beans), fruit, and gelatin (especially agar, derived from algae). These components are also found in many regular, non-dessert foods. When used in desserts, however, they're generally sweetened with the addition of honey or sugar.

Not too sweet though. If there's one major barrier to Westerners enjoying Japanese goodies, it's an expectation of overwhelming sweetness. As is often the case, Japan's approach is more subtle. Well, except when they do things like deep-frying ice cream hot dogs...but we'll get to that later.

It's time to take a tasty trip through Japan, from top to bottom. Let's-a-go!

JAPANESE CHEESECAKE



Photo by yoppy

Hokkaido is the most northern, and least populated, of Japan's main islands. Here we find our first dessert: cheesecake.

That might not sound like a very Japanese choice to start with, but we're talking a different sort of cheesecake here. Japanese cheesecake is light, fluffy, and smooth. It's less rich and sweet than most American or European cheesecakes.

Why Hokkaido? Well, this island happens to be the agricultural heart of Japan, particularly renowned for its dairy products. It's only natural to try making cheesecake when local producers supply the wheat, egg, sugar (often made from beets), milk, and cheese. Naturally, Hokkaido cuisine in general is heavily influenced by these ingredients.

HOKKAIDO

TOHOKU

Tohoku is the northernmost region (the main island of Honshu) of Japan. Due to its harsh weather and long winters, it's not surprising that going to sample a dessert from this region is a bit of a challenge. The first dessert: edamame. It originates from Sendai.

Mochi is simply a rice cake made from glutinous rice (known as mochigome) that is steamed and pounded to a soft, sticky consistency. It can serve as a base for many different fillings. Bits of mochi can be eaten on their own or with a dipping sauce or cream.

Edamame (also known as soybeans) are immature soybean seeds (unlike mature soybeans, which are hard to mash). They are typically eaten on their own or with a dipping sauce. Edamame paste, a thick, creamy paste made from edamame, can be used either for cooking or for desserts (e.g., mochi).



THE DESSERT JOURNEY

WITH SWEETS EXPEDITION

COFFEE JELLY

Alrighty, time for a dessert that might sound kinda weird. Do you like coffee? Really really like it? So much that you'd even consume it in jelly form?

Kanto is the easternmost region of Honshu, containing about a third of Japan's population, mostly in the metro area of Tokyo. Coffee jelly was invented, likely in this region, during the nineteenth century. Under the influence of European culinary traditions and café culture, moulded jelly dishes were merged with coffee in a stroke of Japanese genius.

This will be the simplest recipe on our journey, consisting merely of coffee, sugar, and gelatin. Once again, sugar is added in moderate amounts, avoiding excessive sweetness. The coffee, however, is often quite strong, making coffee jelly a capable pick-me-up.

This isn't some niche product, either; coffee jelly is commonly available in restaurants and convenience stores across the country. The jelly may be eaten on its own, or added to ice cream, milkshakes, coffee (!), or tea. When eaten alone, coffee jelly may be garnished with bean paste, whipped cream, or condensed milk.



Photo by Arnold Gatilao

KANTO

UIROU

Chubu is basically the middle of Japan. Here we find uirou, a derivative of mochi. Uirou is associated particularly with Nagoya, the largest city of the Chubu region.

Like mochi, uirou is a mildly sweet cake made from rice flour. But while mochi uses glutinous rice (aka sticky rice), uirou uses non-glutinous rice, resulting in a chewier texture. Uirou are traditionally flavoured with azuki bean or green tea, and are typically brightly coloured, in such hues as green, brown, orange, and pink.

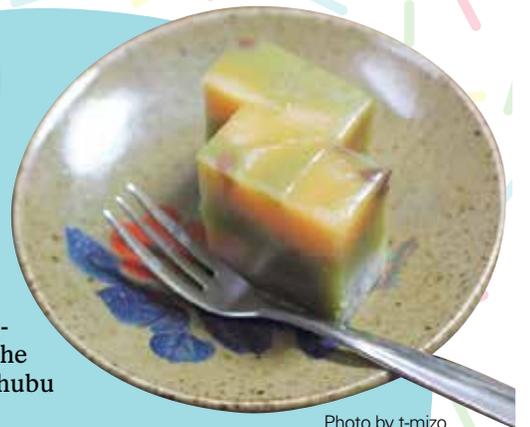


Photo by t-mizo

CHUBU

EDAMAME MOCHI

northernmost part of Honshu (and of Japan), with relatively low population. Here we're a much more Japanese-sounding dish, edamame mochi. This dish originates in Morioka, the principal city of Tohoku. It's a soft, chewy cake made from powdered rice flour or rice starch) that has a somewhat gummy consistency. It can be eaten as a meal or dessert, and is often served with a filling, such as bean paste or fruit. It can also be mixed into soup or ice cream.



Photo by Naotake Murayama

Edamame (also known as zunda) refers to soybeans, which make an excellent filling for mochi. Mature soybeans, which are too hard to eat, are often served as an appetizer. Like bean paste generally, can be used in various meals (e.g. soup, dumplings) or as a filling for cakes, jellied candies).

ICE HOT DOG



Photo by W236

We now move to Kansai, the southern-central region of Japan. The primary city of this region is Osaka, the second-largest city in the country. Here you'll find Amerikamura ("American Village"), an American-style retail/entertainment district. Within this district, you'll find a glorious union of American gluttony/joie de vivre and Japanese weirdness: the ice hot dog!

Instead of a regular hot dog bun, you have a sweetened "candy bun". And instead of a hot dog, you have ice cream (made from Hokkaido milk, natch). And it's deep fried.

Need I say more? This invention alone proves the importance of cultural fusion.

KANSAI

SEE SWEETS ON PAGE 6





SWEETS: A mix of conservative, radical

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5

MAPLE LEAF MANJU



Photo by Travis

The southernmost region of Honshu, Chugoku, is famous for its spectacular autumn leaves. Not surprisingly, this inspired the creation of at least one local dessert: maple leaf-shaped manju cakes, known as momiji manju. (Manju is a minor variation of mochi, in which the dough is well-kneaded before cooking.) Momiji manju are sometimes fried, resulting in age momiji. Traditionally filled with red bean paste, momiji manju (like wagashi generally) today feature a wide range of fillings, including fruit, chocolate, and custard. Momiji manju cakes date to the early twentieth century, when they were created in Miyajima. Incidentally, Miyajima is also home of the world's largest spatula! Presumably, this is much less of a tourist draw than the leaves.

Don't leave your manju unattended. Miyajima features a healthy population of deer, which have apparently developed a taste for momiji manju. They might sneak a bite if you aren't careful!

CHUGOKU

SUDACHI

Shikoku, the smallest of Japan's four main islands, is the home and main producer of sudachi, a citrus fruit similar to lemon or lime. The sour juice of the sudachi is used as a condiment with many meals, including fish, noodles, and vegetables. It's also a standard flavouring in mass-produced foods, including soda and alcohol.

Just like lemon and lime, sudachi is an extremely versatile dessert flavouring. You can find sudachi-flavoured mochi, bean paste, gelatin, mousse, and ice cream.



Photo by Zengame

SHIKOKU

SWEET POTATO



Photo by Charles Kim

Our final stop is Kyushu, the island that forms the southern tip of mainland Japan. Kyushu is renowned for its Japanese sweet potatoes. Enjoyed baked or fried, alone or as part of a larger dish (e.g. salads, stews), Japanese sweet potatoes have a relatively dry consistency and chestnutty flavour. Roasted sweet potatoes (yaki imo) are popular street vendor fare.



Photo by taylorandayumi

But where does the sweet potato fit in, dessert-wise? That would be ikinari dango (pictured above), a dish associated primarily with Kumamoto, the capital city of Kumamoto Prefecture. Ikinari dango are dumplings, each containing a chunk of sweet potato covered in red bean paste.

Not in the mood for fancy schmancy? Well, you could just take chunks of sweet potato, coat 'em in sugar or honey, and deep fry 'em. The scrumptious result, pictured above, is known as daigaku imo.



One might say that Japanese dessert cuisine embodies a curious duality. On the one hand, half of the recipes explored by this article are based on mochi (or something derivative of mochi), often with a filling of bean paste. This reflects a strong current of restraint and conservatism.

On the other hand, Japanese desserts also venture in unusual directions, including coffee gelatin, sugary sweet potatoes, and deep-fried ice cream hot dogs. Clearly, even as tradition is staunchly maintained, Japanese chefs enjoy developing novel recipes.

Altogether, the Japanese dessert world yields a lively mixture of conservative and radical. And it's delicious.

KYUSHU





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RESTAURANT INFO



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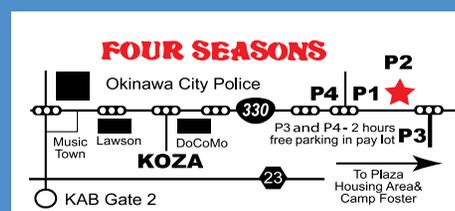
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Lunch Hours: 11:00- Lunch Steak Set
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- Okinawa City branch has 4 parking places.
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◆Current Prices

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2-5-2 Chatan, Mihama Town TEL(098)926-1329 Open Hours: 11:00-



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