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Southeast Botanical Garden shines through summer

BY SHOJI KUDAKA,
STRIPES JAPAN

Enjoy a summer evening at an eco-friendly illumination experience at the Southeast Botanical Garden.

The sprawling park is only a 10-minute drive from Kadena AB's Gate 3 and is home to nearly 1,300 kinds of trees and plants. Visitors can enjoy walking among the Alexandra Palm, baobab trees, dragon's blood tree, flying monkey tree fern, lotus and many more varieties there.

In the winter and spring, the botanical garden is also a popular attraction thanks to its annual Nangoku Illumination. This year, however, you don't have to wait until winter as the garden is hosting "Nangoku ECO Lights Summer."

The park is keeping the illumination eco-friendly by limiting the number of lights and using LED lights due to their low electricity consumption.

Expect a dreamy, mystic mood as you escape the summer heat to the evening illumination at the Southeast Botanical Garden!

kudaka.shoji@stripes.com

Nangoku ECO Lights Summer

GPS COORDINATES: 26.375540, 127.806574

DATES: Until Sept. 27 (Sun.). In Sept., this event takes place only on Fridays, weekends and holidays.

HOURS: Open 7 p.m. to 9 p.m. (last admission at 8:30 p.m.)

ADMISSION: 2,000 (approx. \$12.60, ages 15 and over), 800 yen (ages 4 to 14), free admission for ages 3 and under.



WEBSITE



Photo courtesy of Southeast Botanical Garden



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BY TAKAHIRO TAKIGUCHI,
STRIPES OKINAWA

Respect for the Aged Day

Respect for the Aged Day may call to mind Japan's rapidly aging population, but that only underscores this national holiday's emphasis on honoring and appreciating the contributions senior citizens have made to society.

Sept. 15 used to be a holiday that traces its origins back to 1947 when a farming village in Hyogo Prefecture proclaimed Sept. 15 as "Day for the Elderly," or Toshiyori-no-Hi. They held a meeting to

honor seniors and listened to them speak in order to benefit from their words of wisdoms. The idea spread throughout the prefecture, then spread nationwide.

"Respect for the Aged Day (Keiro-no-Hi) was legislated in 1966 according to the National Holidays Act," said Yukihiro Miura from the holiday section of the National Cabinet Office's General Affairs Division. "The purpose of

this holiday is to express respect for the elderly in our communities and wish them longevity."

"I think sometime after Japanese society started recovering from the devastation of the war, people began to think of how they could appreciate the elderly who had contributed so much to society, and how to glean from their wisdom," Miura added.

Although the holiday was

originally observed on Sep. 15, the National Holidays Act was amended in 2003, introducing the so-called Happy Monday system which moved several holidays to Mondays to create three-day weekends. Respect for the Aged Day has been celebrated on the third Monday of September ever since. In 2026, this holiday falls on Sept. 21.

On this day, many communities

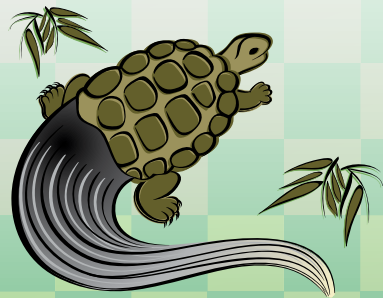
honor the elderly with parties or ceremonies and present them with gifts. TV stations usually air senior-related programs such as features on the number of elderly in Japan or the oldest people in the country.

And school children often visit facilities for the elderly to entertain them with song and dance.

How will you honor the elderly in your community on Respect for the Aged Day?

Western ways changing Okinawa longevity

Okinawa Prefecture was once long recognized for having the highest longevity rate out of all 47 prefectures in Japan. But times have changed according to a Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare study conducted every five years. Apparently, nothing really does last forever.



While a 1995 survey showed that overall there were 22 centenarians for every 100,000 persons in Okinawa – 3.8 times the national average at the time – survey figures show longevity has been declining in Okinawa ever since. By 2005, male Okinawans had dropped from first to 25th place.

Most recently, in 2020, Okinawan women dropped to sixteenth place in the survey with a life expectancy of 87.88 years, slightly higher than the ministry's national average of 87.60. Okinawan men, however, plummeted to 43rd place at 80.73 years, just shy of the national life expectancy for males of 81.49 years. The

results are no surprise to Dr. Makoto Suzuki who predicted the trend a decade ago in an interview with Stars and Stripes in 2013.

Suzuki, now a retired medical doctor, Ryukyu University professor emeritus and co-author of the best-selling "The Okinawa Program: How the World's Longest Lived People Achieved Everlasting Health," conducted a 25-year study of the traditional Okinawa diet. He said the prefecture's claim as a haven for centenarians (once the most per capita in the world) came from an old island lifestyle that literally has been dying out. This has opened the door to diseases associated with

obesity – once rare on Okinawa – like diabetes, heart failure and strokes that are now becoming all too common.

"The chief factor is diet," he said in 2004, pointing a finger at ubiquitous fast-food chains like A&W, McDonald's and Kentucky Fried Chicken. "Their (younger Okinawans') eating habits are more westernized, which raises their cholesterol."

While older Okinawans still take walks, he added, their younger counterparts, "have the tendency to hop into a car."

"The last two factors are the loss of the Okinawan culture and tradition in our everyday lives,"



Suzuki said. "Traditionally, Okinawans were more involved with their community and religious activities, which kept them active." takiguchi.takahiro@stripes.com

Kajimayaa a celebration of longevity, childhood

BY SHOJI KUDAKA,
STRIPES OKINAWA

In Japan, getting older is a celebration. In the tradition known as Toshiwai, elders are celebrated as they reach age milestones.

Kanreki is usually the first of such Toshiwai and marks a person's 61st birthyear milestone. Next, koki is for the 70th birthyear, kiju for the 77th, sanju for the 80th, beiju for 88th, sotsuju for the 90th, hakuju for the 99th, and hyakuju for the 100th.

The count for these milestones is done by kazoedoshi, the traditional Japanese way. For instance, the kazoedoshi way assumes that a baby is in their first year as soon as they are born.

In Okinawa, Toshiwai is called Tooshibii and is celebrated every 12 years of a person's life. Tooshibii is not just a celebration of elders. This tradition celebrates those who are in their 13th, 25th, 37th, 49th, 61st,

73rd, 85th, and 97th birth years.

Kajimayaa is the name for the 97th year Tooshibii and is a very special celebration. The word means pinwheel in Okinawan dialect and was chosen because of the idea that people relive their childhood when they reach that stage of life. Pinwheels are given to those elders who have reached their 97th birthyear to mark their longevity and to give them an item they used to play with as children.

The concept of returning to childhood is part of Japanese Toshiwai years as well.

For kanreki, the celebration of the 61st, elders are thought to be born again. It is based upon the concept of "eto" symbols in the Chinese Zodiac, which consist of 12 creatures and cycles every 12 years. For example, if you are born in a Year of the Dragon, the same symbol will come around when you reach your 61st year (for the fifth time). Theoretically, then is when you start a new cycle of life.

To celebrate their new life, chanchanko, a padded sleeveless kimono jacket, and zukin, a hood are commonly presented to the elders as gifts. Both of the items should be in red for this tradition because the color is supposed to bring good luck and repel evil spirits.

These days, kanreki is celebrated in Okinawa as well. But "kajimayaa" is still the biggest longevity celebration on the island.



One of the reasons why it is special is that the celebration involves not just families and relatives but also local communities.

On or around Sept. 7 of the lunar calendar, parades take place in local communities where those who are in their 97th year ride in open cars with a pinwheel in their hands. Folks in the neighborhood march together in traditional attire following the car, just like a part of an Eisa Festival. Since this is a unique tradition of Okinawa, kajimayaa is often covered by the media. Pinwheels are often handed out to participants as well.

This year Sept. 7 in the lunar calendar falls on Oct. 17 in the Gregorian calendar.

Many kajimayaa parades are expected to take place on this day. If you happen to see elders with a pinwheel in their hands waving at you from the seats of an open car, please smile and wave back at them. Their smiles are a reminder of the joys of longevity and the fun of being a kid again.

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SWEET HISTORY

The tale behind Japan's favorite potato

STORY AND PHOTOS BY SHOJI KUDAKA,
STRIPE OKINAWA

In Japan and Okinawa, the beloved sweet potato is considered the taste of autumn. Rich in nutrition such as starch, sugar, fiber, and vitamin C, this root vegetable is popular for those seeking a healthy way to satisfy their sweet tooth.

You'll find that "sweet potato" goes by many names here, including satsumaimo (which means potato of Satsuma), karaimo (Chinese potato), kansho (sweet potato), Ryukyuimo (Ryukyu's potato), or Noguniimo. The names for sweet potatoes and the crop itself are deeply rooted in the history of Okinawa and Japan.

These delicious purple-skin and starchy-sweet root vegetables first arrived in 1605 in Okinawa during the Ryukyu Kingdom (1429 – 1879), according to Kadena Town. Noguni Sokan, a government official from Noguni Village (part of present-day Kadena Town), is credited with bringing and cultivating sweet potatoes from Fujian of Ming (present-day China).

Soon, neighboring villages on Okinawa would receive saplings and start to cultivate their own crops of sweet potato. Shinjo Gima, who governed Gima Village, now known as a part of Naha, was the one who helped accelerate the spread after studying the crop and finding that it fit in with the island climate, could be harvested every five to six months and, as a bonus, had a good taste.

In 15 years, sweet potato spread



Noguni Sokan Guu, a shrine in Kadena Town, is dedicated to the historical figure who is credited with bringing the sweet potato to Okinawa.

across the island and soon could also be found on the mainland.

As early as 1611, sweet potatoes appeared in Satsuma Domain, a present from King Sho Nei Ryukyu, who reigned from 1589 to 1620. Then, in 1615, sweet potatoes arrived in Nagasaki Prefecture with the help of the "English Samurai" William Adams, the first British person to come to Japan. Adams sent a crop he found during port call in Naha to Richard Cocks, director of the British East India Company's outpost in Hirado at the time.

Cocks' diary notes that he received a bag of sweet potatoes from William Adams on June 2 of 1615. Around that time, he also

received another pack of the root vegetables from William Eaton, another member of the company, who was visiting Ryukyu. Cocks planted the crops in a garden, the first documented cultivation of sweet potatoes in the country, according to Hirado City.

In 1698, Hisamoto Tanegashima, a lord of Tanegashima island in Satsuma domain, received a basket of sweet potatoes from King Shotei of Ryukyu, who reigned from 1669 to 1709. Then the Lord ordered his subordinate to cultivate the crop.

By 1735, the Satsuma Domain's sweet potatoes reached what is now modern-day Maku-hari in Chiba Prefecture. The crop was commissioned to scholar Konyo Aoki by Yoshimune Tokugawa, the eighth shogun of the Tokugawa, as a means to fight off famine. From the 17 sweet potatoes, Aoki succeeded in harvesting about 500 liters of the crop, according to Chiba Prefecture.

Later, sweet potatoes would continue to be the go-to crop when famine struck in the 18th and 19th centuries, then again during the food shortages pre- and post-WWII (1939-1945).

Though today, Japan is in "hoshoku no jidai", or an era of food satiation and without threat of famine, the love of sweet potatoes continues. So, next time you enjoy a steamed sweet potato from your local grocer, remember this simple, delicious root is steeped in rich history, too!

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A monument standing just outside of Kadena Marina commemorates "Noguniimo Declaration," which was made by Kadena Town in 2005.



Speakin' Japanese

Autumn talk

Autumn has arrived! Here are some useful words and phrases that might come in handy when getting into the spirit of the season.

"Suzushiku natte kimashita." = It has gotten cool.
(**"suzushiku"** = cool; **"natte kimashita"** = has gotten)

"Aki ga totemo suki desu." = I really like autumn.
(**"aki"** = autumn; **"totemo suki desu"** = really like)

"Tsukimi ga shitai desu." = I want to go moon viewing.
(**"tsukimi"** = moon viewing; **"shitai desu"** = want to)

"Aki no mangetsu ga ichiban kirei desu." = The autumn full moon is the most beautiful.
(**"mangetsu"** = full moon;
"ichiban" = most [literally, No. 1]; **"kirei"** = beautiful)

"Aki no mushi no koe ga kikoemasu." = I hear the song of autumn insects.
(**"mushi"** = insect; **"koe"** = song [voice])

"Octoobaa Festival ni ikimasho." = Let's go to the October festival.
(**"ni ikimasho"** = let's go)

"Koyo ga tanoshimi desu." = I am looking forward to seeing the red leaves.
(**"koyo"** = red leaves; **"ga tanoshimi desu"** = be looking forward to)

"Sanma ga oishii kisetsu desu." = Local mackerel are delicious this time of year.
(**"sanma"** = local mackerel, **"kisetsu"** = time of year [season])

• AUTUMN FOODS	"shinmai" = the year's new rice
"sanma" = local mackerel	"budo" = grapes
"shiitake" = shiitake mushrooms	"kuri" = chestnuts

• OLD JAPANESE SAYING
"Aki nasu wa yome ni kuwaseruna." = Don't let your wife eat autumn eggplant.
(This saying has two meanings. It means that autumn eggplant is too good to share with your wife. Another meaning is that autumn eggplant has less seeds so, it is bad luck for those trying to have babies.)

– 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.

Japan's autumn tra

Gleaning the reasons for ringing in

BY TAKAHIRO TAKIGUCHI,
STRIPES OKINAWA

In the Land of the Rising Sun, September marks the waxing of autumn and the traditional harvest season in which local customs such as “tsukimi” (moon viewing), “inekari” (rice harvesting) and “Higan” memorial services take place throughout Japan.

These can be ideal opportunities to learn something about the local culture and maybe even experience a side of Japan that some modern Japanese miss out on these days. With that in mind, here are some basics to get you started:

Inekari (rice harvesting)

It's no surprise that in Japan – where 7.79 million tons of rice was produced in 2025, alone – much ado is made about harvesting this prized staple food. Its cultivation was once even considered sacred, involving invocations of an “inadama,” or rice spirit. When the grains began maturing in the fall, for example, green sheaves were offered to this deity whose generosity was celebrated at season's end.

A reflection of this practice can still be found in some traditional performing arts today; and “Inekari,” or rice harvesting, remains a traditional event in farming regions where harvest festivals are held annually. A few farms even allow visitors to join the time-honored tradition of harvesting rice.

Rice harvesting can be done manually with sickles, mechanically with a harvester or by using a combination of both. Regardless of the method, a number of guidelines are followed to preserve quality.

“We need to harvest rice at the right time with the right moisture content,” explains Shigeru Oyama, a rice farmer in Ibaraki Prefecture. “After threshing, we have to clean and dry the grain immediately.”

While most rice is harvested between September and October throughout Japan, Okinawa's warm temperatures afford two harvests a year.

In addition to harvesting 1,580 tons of rice between January and June of 2025, the island's farmers harvested a second 409-ton crop, between July and December, according to data from the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications.

Ishigaki Island is famed for its rice. It produces about 1,000 tons of annually – about 50 percent of all the rice grown in Okinawa Prefecture – due to its fertile soil and temperate climate which allow some fields to produce three crops annually. In the true spirit Japanese rice cultivation, Ishigaki is also famed for its many “hounensai,” or harvest, festivals that occur island-wide – especially from late July to early September.



Tsukimi (moon viewing)

Tsukimi is a long-held custom observed on the 15th night of eighth month (“jugo-ya”) and the 13th night of the ninth month (“jusan-ya”) of Japan's old lunar calendar. This year, the dates fall on Sept. 25 and Oct. 23, respectively. On these evenings, many take in the splendor of the Harvest Moon (and the less-famous “Hunters' Moon” in October) in all its awesome, orangish glory from their homes or yards.

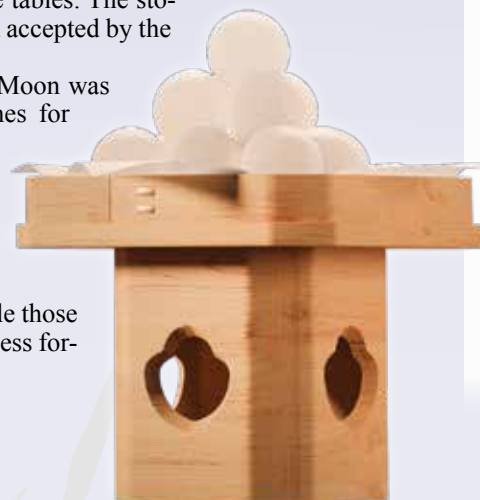
Traditionally, tsukimi ranks with “yukimi” (snow viewing) and “hanami” (cherry-blossom viewing) as one of the three most favored settings for declarations of love and poetic outpourings of the soul.

This is also considered a time to wish for a rich harvest and prosperity for the coming year. It's customary to set out “tsukimi dango,” or moon-viewing dumplings, taro, soybeans, chestnuts, persimmons and other round-shaped seasonal foods, along with sake and sprigs of “susuki” grass on a portable table. The table is placed on a porch or in a corridor from which the moon is viewed.

There are a number of other customs that may be observed depending on where you are. As a kind of pre-harvest-fest activity, for example, the sprigs of susuki grass represent rice and are sometimes hung from the eaves of a home to ward off illness after an evening of moon viewing.

One old custom, slightly reminiscent of trick or treating in the States, encourages children to go around the neighborhood “stealing” the dumplings and other offerings on the tables. The stolen offerings are considered to have been accepted by the moon, thus the more stolen, the better.

In Okinawa, the light of the Harvest Moon was once used to divine households' fortunes for the coming year in some areas. Locals would make rice cakes with sweet beans called “fuchagi,” offer them to the moon, then climb a nearby hill to survey their village by moonlight. It was said that residents of homes that appeared dark would be prosperous, while those whose houses appeared bright would be less fortunate.



ditions

the season

Higan (memorial)

There is a saying in Japan that, “No heat or cold lasts over the equinox.” The autumnal and spring equinoxes are considered the border, and thus the end, of the respective hot and cold seasons. In Japan’s Buddhist tradition, these times also represent passing from one realm to the next.

Higan (literally, “other shore”) is a seven-day Buddhist memorial service held on the equinoxes (three days before and after). The concept can be likened to Memorial Day in the United States, in that it is a special time set aside to remember friends and family who have died.

Both the Vernal Equinox (Mar. 20 or 21) and Autumnal Equinox (around Sept. 23) have been observed as holidays for more than 1,000 years in Japan. Originally, the Higan ceremony called on devout Buddhists to visit temples and offer prayers for the souls of the dead. Records indicate Higan was widely observed as far back as the 9th century A.D. when the equinoxes became religious holidays and the emperor called on

Buddhist monks to read scriptures for these rites.

Today, people visit family tombs in temples or common cemeteries to offer prayers for deceased family members and friends. Sweet rice-gluten balls, or “ohagi,” are commonly eaten during these periods. (The name ohagi comes from autumn flower “hagi,” or bush clover.)

takiguchi.takahiro@stripes.com



File photos

Under the moon

Best spots in Okinawa

Kaichu Doro



This 2.9-mile-long causeway over Kin Bay connects Okinawa’s main island and Henza Island. Halfway across the causeway, there is Umi no Eki Ayahashikan, a roadside station where you can enjoy a panoramic view of the night sky. From Camp Foster it is but a mere one-hour-drive to get to this great moon-viewing spot.

• GPS Coordinates: N 26.332335
E 127.928707

Chinen Misaki Koen (Cape Chinen Park)

Experience a superb view of the moon over the Pacific Ocean at this park on Chien Peninsula on Okinawa’s southeastern coast. The lawn, promenade and pavilion are all great places to sit and enjoy the harvest moon.

• GPS Coordinates: N 26.167531
E 127.828860



Cape Zanpa



Cape Zanpa is an ideal location to enjoy the beautiful autumn moon. A popular spot close to Torii Station, many now head there to catch the sunset. Once the sun goes down, watch the beautiful night sky emerge over the cape’s iconic lighthouse.

• GPS Coordinates: N 26.441264
E 127.713641

– Shoji Kudaka, Stripes Okinawa
File photos

Kashichii: Celebrating Okinawa’s harvest

This tradition is how Okinawa marks the harvest of rice. Celebrated on August 10 of the lunar calendar, Kashichii shares the rice and pleasure of a good harvest with one’s ancestors. During this time, locals present okowa, a rice and red bean dish, to the butsudan family altar and to Hinukan, the god of fire enshrined in the kitchen. The word Kashichii literally means okowa in Okinawan dialect.

Kashichii is also held in June of the lunar calendar as well. While locals mix rice with red beans for the August tradition, they serve up white rice for this June event. Kasichii was an important custom during the Ryukyu Kingdom. Though no longer as widely celebrated, today this day is an opportunity for many to wish their families good health.

– Shoji Kudaka, Stripes Okinawa



SEPTEMBER

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
			1	2	3	4
			5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30	31					

Autumnal Equinox

OCTOBER

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
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11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	31

Juso-ya (Hunters’ Moon)

BY YUU SATO,
LIVE JAPAN

Crazy Japanese bathrooms that shock foreigners



Naturally, different countries have different cultures! One of the things related to culture is the “toilet situation.” You may ask, “Isn’t a restroom always the same in every country?” What about it?

We asked Australian men, American men, and Italian women visiting Japan, how they felt as foreigners when it came to Japanese toilets, especially those that they had never seen before coming to Japan. We also asked about the difference from their home country.

(The following reflects the opinion of the interviewees only)

I don't know how to use a Japanese-style toilet

Traditional Japanese-style toilets are becoming less and less common, and even many Japanese people aren’t too familiar with them anymore. You might think they’ve practically disappeared. But according to a 2016 Japan Tourism Agency survey, out of 24,525 toilets at major tourist spots, 10,181—or 42%—were still the so-called “Japanese-style.”

That’s a lot more than you’d expect! So what do travelers think when they first come across one?

“I’d seen squat toilets in China before, so I wasn’t completely shocked when I found one in Japan. Still, it took me by surprise! Honestly, I wouldn’t want to use one for too long—my knees would give out. If I had the choice, I’d go for a Western-style toilet.” (Australian man)

“I’ve never used one either, but I’ve never had any problems with bathrooms in Japan.” (Italian woman)

“I have never used a Japanese-style toilet.” (American man)

It seems many visitors are stumped at first. If you’ve only ever known Western toilets, it’s hard to imagine how to use a Japanese-style one.

Foreigners often call it a “squat toilet,” which makes sense—it’s all about the position you take and the workout your thighs get, not unlike the squat exercise itself.

The first time I used a warm water jet toilet seat, I was so surprised I jumped!

In Japan, Western-style toilets often come with seats that spray warm water—commonly known as bidet toilets or “washlets.” They’re everywhere here, but did you know they’re still a rarity overseas? I asked a few travelers what things are like back home.

“We don’t have warm water toilet seats in Australia. I’ve never seen one! Maybe people would think it’s too strange...” (Australian man)

“At first I was shocked! In Italy we have regular bidets, but no automatic hot water jet toilets like in Japan. They only started appearing a few years ago, and they’re still not very common. But lots of Italians talk about them because the experience is so unusual.” (Italian woman)

“In the U.S., these toilets aren’t common at all. Most people just use regular ones. If you want one with warm water jets, you’d basically have to custom-build it.” (American man)

Clearly, Japan’s warm-water bidet toilets take many foreigners by surprise. Just press a button, and a gentle spray of warm water cleans you—it sounds simple, but it’s left quite the impression.

For people in Japan, these toilets are so normal you’ll find them not just at home but also in public restrooms. Overseas, though, they’re still a novelty. Many visitors encounter them for the first time here, and the reactions range from hesitant curiosity to outright amazement.

Some travelers admitted they weren’t sure about them at first. But after trying, many said they grew to love them—so much that going without became unthinkable. One Australian man confessed he resisted at first, but once he gave it a try, his opinion completely changed.

Japanese public toilets are as clean as the ones at home!

“Japanese public toilets are really nice and clean. They’re nothing like the ones back in Australia!” (Australian man)

“They’re definitely cleaner than American ones! Though I have to admit, in super-busy places like Shinjuku or Shibuya, it can be a bit different.” (American man)

“Japanese public toilets are so clean, I love them! Some even smell nice, which is amazing. My only complaint? Sometimes there’s no soap, and I really don’t like not being able to wash my hands properly.” (Italian woman)

One of the things that often surprises visitors is just how clean public bathrooms are in Japan. This may have roots in everyday life—children in Japan are taught to clean their schools, including the bathrooms, from a young age. In many other countries, schools and toilets are cleaned by outside staff, so the idea of “cleaning the toilet yourself” isn’t as deeply ingrained.

In customer-facing businesses, the thinking goes even further: restrooms are seen as a reflection of the overall quality of service. That’s why staff clean them several times a day, making sure they stay spotless.

This approach to cleanliness and care is likely one of the key reasons Japanese public restrooms are consistently praised by travelers from around the world.

Are there pay-to-use toilets? What are they like elsewhere?

“In Australia, we have ‘eco toilets’ in national parks. They’re eco-friendly, using a recycling system that turns waste back into soil.” (Australian man)

“In the U.S., toilets are mostly standard. You don’t really see many unique ones.” (American man)

“In Italy, most station bathrooms cost between 70 cents and 1 euro. Even in Rome or Venice, public toilets at tourist spots are pay-to-use. In cafés and bars, you’re expected to order something before using the bathroom. The cheapest thing is usually an espresso—so if you need the toilet, you’d better grab a coffee first!” (Italian woman)

Unlike Japan, where free public restrooms are the norm, many countries still have pay-to-use toilets. The fee usually covers things like toilet paper, soap, water, and hand dryers. In some places, you may even be expected to leave a tip after using a restroom, even if there’s no entry fee.

There are a couple of reasons behind this system. One is funding—charging small fees helps cover the cost of maintaining public facilities. Another is safety: requiring payment can discourage people from misusing or committing crimes in restrooms, since the doors only open once you’ve paid.

Wrapping Up

The Japanese government has been working to increase the number of Western-style toilets, especially in tourist areas. The thinking was that traditional Japanese-style toilets might feel inconvenient—or even stressful—for many foreign travelers, and that in the future they would likely prefer Western-style facilities instead.

Today, Japan’s modern toilets enjoy an excellent reputation among international visitors, and they’ve become one more way for the country to showcase its spirit of hospitality.

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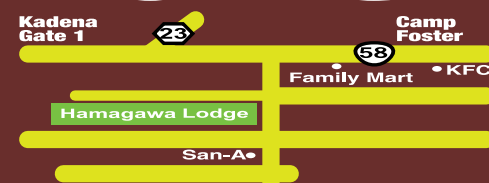
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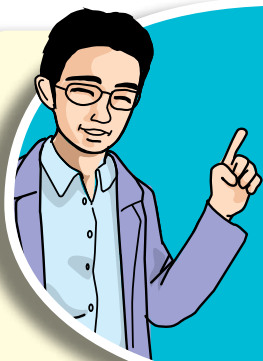
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Speakin' Japanese

BY SHOJI KUDAKA,
STRIPES OKINAWA

Madamada
Atsui Desune.

I can't wait

I really enjoy streaming shows on Netflix. After, I can't wait for the next season to arrive. To express my expectation in Japanese, I would say:

Tsugi no seezun ga machidooshii desu.

= I can't wait for the next season to arrive.

- tsugi = next
- no = of
- ga = an article to indicate a subject,
- machidooshii = can't wait for/much-anticipated
- desu = is



VIDEO
LESSON

It's still hot, isn't it?

Although summer may be over, in Okinawa the temperature is still pretty warm.

Madamada Atsui Desune.
= It's still pretty hot, isn't it?

- Mada/Madamada = sill/yet,
- Astui = hot,
- Desune = isn't it?

If you live on the mainland Japan and if you feel the temperature is too cool for this, you can say, "**Suzushiku Natte Kimashitane**", which means "it's getting cool, isn't it."

Ok, stay safe and see you in the next episode of speaking Japanese.



VIDEO
LESSON

What to say before and after eating

In Japan during mealtime, we often say "itadaki masu," which literally means: "I have this meal with gratitude." It's a phrase to thank those who cook the meal, and also a Japanese way of saying "let's eat."

Gochiso sama deshita.
= Thank you for the meal.

So next time you have a meal with your Japanese families and friends, try these phrases:

Itadakimasu.

= Gochiso sama deshita.

- Itadakimasu = the verbs "itadaku (receive)" + "shimasu (I do-)"
- Gochiso = a fancy meal,
- sama = a suffix to address a person with an honorific title or a polite way of referring to an object



VIDEO
LESSON

Let's make a stop

When we drive on the road, it would be a good idea to make a stop from time to time to take a break.

Saabisu eria de hitoyasumi shimasho.

= Let's take a break at a service area.

- saabisu eria = service area
- de = a particle to indicate a location
- hitoyasumi = a break,
- shimasho = let's do



VIDEO
LESSON

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- Wine Tastings
- Chef-Prepared Hors d'oeuvres
- Premium Wine Selection
- Elegant Afternoon Experience

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HIGHLIGHTS

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- Live Music & Entertainment
- Oktoberfest Games
- Family Activities

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LOCATION
Dragon Hill Lodge

US Army Garrison Yongsan Seoul, Republic of Korea



SCAN FOR MORE
INFORMATION

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Get your fill at Fatburger near Kadena AB

STORY AND PHOTOS BY SHOJI KUDAKA,
STRIPES OKINAWA

When Fatburger Okinawa opened its doors in December 2025, I was one of those who rushed to the store. Leading up to its pre-run period starting Dec. 15, the L.A. hamburger franchise created a lot of buzz in Okinawa. So, I should not have been surprised to see a long line of people in front of the burger joint.

Still, it was overwhelming to see so many customers patiently waiting outside even before its opening time at 11 a.m. So, I gave up, and I did not return to the store until recently.

I didn't try again until the late summer, when I needed a big burger to boost my energy. Contrary to the time of my first visit, there was not a long line of customers in front of its door.

It was around noon, and inside locals, as well as Americans, were enjoying hamburgers for lunch.

I ordered "The Original Burger" (1,390 yen approx. \$8.74), a signature product of the franchise at the counter. For a second, I was tempted to go for "Double Burger" (1,980 yen) or even "Triple Burger" (2,640 yen).

Also enticing were various menu items listed on the wall like the "1000 Island Burger," "Skinny Burger" and "Avocado Burger," but I went for the most basic one

THINGS TO KNOW

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(open daily).



INSTAGRAM



since this was my first experience at the shop.

For an extra 600 yen, I could have added fries and a soft drink, but instead, I coupled my burger with a milkshake made with real ice cream for 880 yen.

Unfortunately, the vanilla shakes were sold out, so I chose matcha in the hopes that this would be a slightly less caloric, healthier option.

I picked a seat near a wall featuring the photos of customers who had successfully completed the "Triple Challenge," meaning they'd finished a Triple Burger in a set amount of time. The folks in the photos looked pretty happy to have reached the goal.

Soon my meal was ready, and I went back up to the counter to pick up the tray.

I wasn't surprised by the size of

Fatburger's Original Burger, but I found the presentation a bit peculiar. The hefty burger was half wrapped in paper making it easy to grab and immediately dig into without danger of ingredients falling out from the bottom.

The first bite was greasy, and it had a smoky aroma making me feel like I was at a barbecue. Inside, the burger came loaded with mayo, mustard, pickles and relish,



a bold and tangy flavor balanced with the fresh lettuce, onions and tomatoes on a soft bun. Each bite was delightful.

The tasty burger was over as quickly as it started, making me think that perhaps I should get the triple next time.

The milkshake was sweeter than I expected, washing away any hope of making this lunch a less guilty one. I wanted to finish my drink, but I was starting to get full. I took the rest to go and figured I could finish it on the drive back home. With every sweet sip, I convinced myself that I should have had a double burger instead.

Whether you're up for a challenge or not, Fatburger has great options for a tasty meal!

kudaka.shoji@stripes.com



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Answer Ezekiel Elliott

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DID YOU KNOW?

Today, just like the National and American Leagues in Major League Baseball, there are two leagues in the Nippon Professional Baseball (NPB) - Central and Pacific. With the 12 teams scattered from Hokkaido to Kyushu, many of Japan's major cities have a team to call their own. For those on the mainland, check out the team closest to you and visit a ballpark this summer. Although Okinawa doesn't have a team, the island hosts Spring Training for many squads, and games are easy and often free to attend!

Kanji of the week

市

shi/ichi [city/market]

Language Lesson

Come here, please.

Kokoni kite kudasai.

Crossword

by Margie E. Burke

ACROSS

1 Walden, for one
5 Walk the floor
9 Kind of coffee
14 Winglike
15 Cassini of couture
16 Meta's home: _____ Park, CA
17 Turning off, as app notifications
19 Give a _____ the back (2 wds.)
20 Major mess
21 They play on the range
23 Math course, for short
26 Projecting window
27 Burst of energy
31 Blood fluids
34 Texas Panhandle city
35 Houston nine
37 _____ King Cole
38 Above all the rest?
40 Don't just sit there
41 Hollywood's Charlize
43 Fishburne of "The Matrix"
45 1986 #1 hit for Starship
46 Indexing term
48 Pep up
50 Coop residents
51 Safeguard
54 Clothing store section
58 Prince hit, "I Wanna Be Your _____"
59 Wake too late
62 Rehab candidates
63 Jellystone bear
64 Aware
65 Lively Latin dance
66 Messy dresser
67 Cozy spot

DOWN

1 Goalie's gear
2 Lena of "Nine Perfect Strangers"
3 "Apollo 13" org.
4 Schematic maker
5 DC denizen
6 Ryan's "Love Story" co-star
7 Wrestler-actor John
8 Holiday drink
9 Louvre Pyramid architect
10 Most authentic
11 Narrow-minded
12 Unappetizing food
13 Sharpen, as skills
18 Chipotle offering
22 Pirate's loot
24 Hawaii native, e.g.
25 Seaside soarer
27 Part of a suit
28 Mutual of _____

29 It rises after a good rain
30 Breadbasket items
32 Madonna's son
33 Daisylike flower
36 Orchestral section
39 To _____ his own
42 Poker players, at times
44 Greek vowel
47 Diplomats, e.g.

49 Vice _____
51 Not only that
52 "Undone" actress Salazar
53 Darwin subj.
55 Surrealist Magritte
56 Reply to "Shall we?"
57 Kind of check
60 It may need a boost
61 Barbecue bit

Answers to Previous Crossword:

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

SUDOKU

Difficulty: Easy

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

Answer to Previous Sudoku:

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

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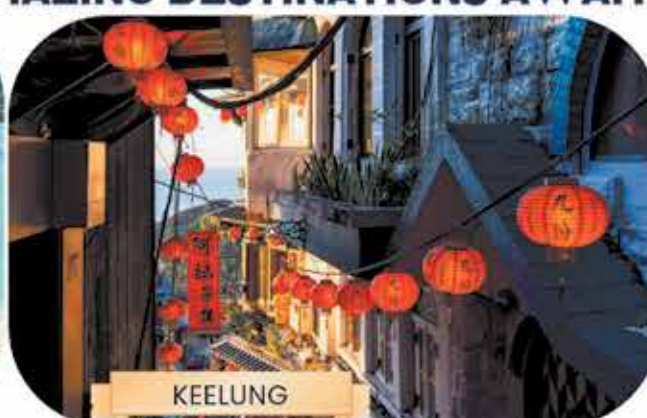

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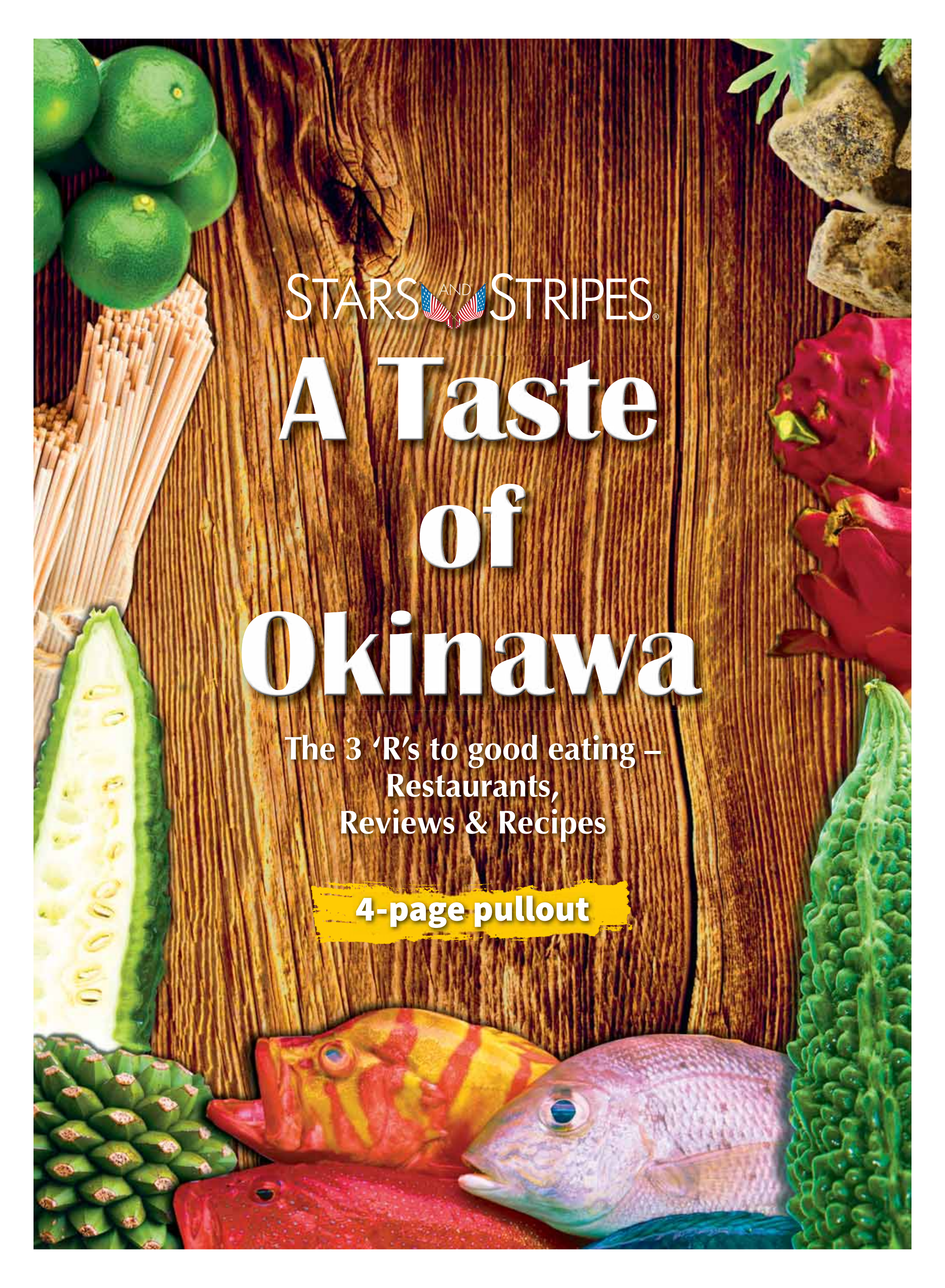
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TAKENOKO

ALL ABOUT JAPANESE BAMBOO SHOOTS

BY CATHERINE CORNELIUS,
BYFOOD

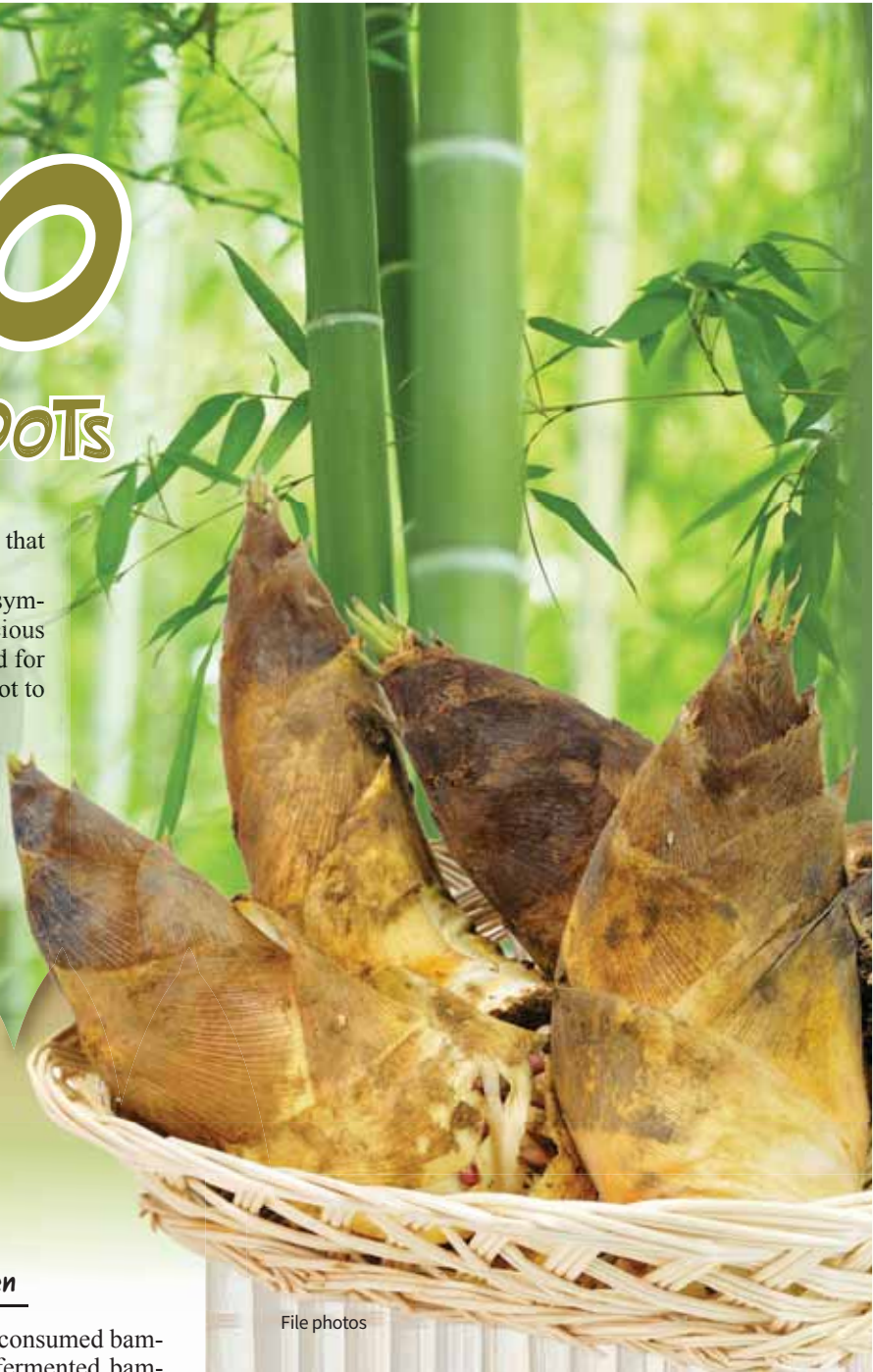
You're planning your dream trip to Japan when you see them — dozens of photos featuring one thing: lush bamboo groves towering high above the crowds. Dreamy and majestic, bamboo has mesmerized crowds of tourists for decades.

From travel guides to vlogs and photo ops to selfies, bamboo is a hot ticket item. Meanwhile, it's almost mundane to the locals. Furniture like chairs and tables and cutlery like chopsticks are

made from this vegetation, but did you know that bamboo even features in Japanese cuisine?

That's right, bamboo isn't just a beloved symbol of nature in Japan, it's also used as a delicious addition to a wide variety of dishes! Beloved for its health benefits and abundance, it's hard not to find bamboo in a meal when eating traditional Japanese cuisine. Bamboo in its edible form is called takenoko (bamboo shoot).

In this article, we'll introduce a bit of the culture behind bamboo and a few of the most popular takenoko recipes in Japan.



File photos

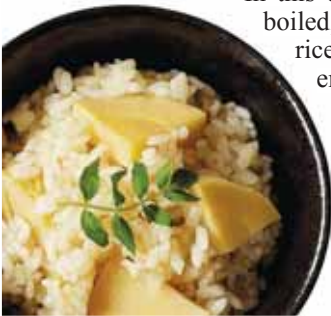
6 POPULAR JAPANESE BAMBOO SHOOT DISHES

Takenoko gohan

Bamboo shoot rice

Takenoko gohan, or bamboo shoot rice, is a variety of takikomi gohan (mixed rice dish). Takikomi gohan recipes are Japan's version of one-pot meals.

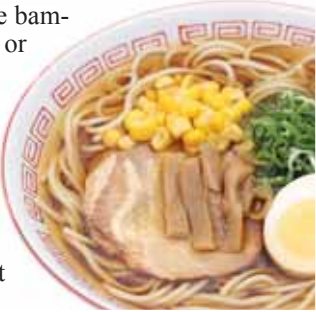
In this dish, bamboo shoots are boiled, sliced and placed in a rice cooker with rice and other ingredients. Common ingredients are aburaage fried tofu, dashi stock, soy sauce and mirin. Takenoko gohan can also be prepared in pots other than a rice cooker, like clay pots and dutch ovens.



Menma

Bamboo shoots in ramen

Arguably one of the most commonly consumed bamboo shoot recipes around, menma are fermented bamboo shoots. They are left to ferment for about a month after the bamboo shoot has been boiled or steamed to remove bitterness. You can find menma as a garnish on most bowls of ramen — they are crunchy and have a sweet, yet savory flavor that perfectly complements the richness of most ramen broths.



Tempura

The perfect crunchy addition to any tempura plate, takenoko tempura is prepared just like any other piece of tempura. Sliced, battered and then breaded in panko bread crumbs before being fried in golden oil.



Grilled bamboo shoots

Even simpler than the other preparation methods mentioned already, grilled bamboo shoots are exactly what they sound like! Bamboo shoots that have been grilled on the barbeque. Seasoning can be left up to the chef, with some opting for traditional options like soy sauce, and others opting for more Western flavors like consomme or butter.



Takenoko no nimono

Simmered bamboo shoots

One of the simplest preparation styles for bamboo shoots, takenoko no nimono are bamboo shoots that have been simmered in a savory broth. This broth is the secret sauce to many traditional Japanese foods: dashi stock, soy sauce, mirin, sake rice wine and some sugar to balance out the umami of the dashi and soy sauce. The bamboo shoots are chopped and then boiled in the dashi stock before adding other ingredients to simmer.



Sashimi

Takenoko sashimi is one of the simplest ways to prepare and eat Japanese bamboo shoots. After harvesting the shoots, the outer layer is removed, the shoot is sliced thinly and the inner flesh is boiled. The boiled takenoko slices are cooled in ice water and dried. Then, they are enjoyed with soy sauce and wasabi, just like actual fish sashimi!

WHAT IS TAKENOKO?

The Japanese word takenoko refers to bamboo shoots, but the literal English translation is much cuter! The literal translation breaks down like this: “take” means bamboo, “no” shows possession of the following noun, and “ko” means child, so when literally translated, takenoko means “Bamboo’s child.”

This is the stage of bamboo before it grows into the iconic, towering green stalk featured in postcards and film. Bamboo shoots grow underground so they must be dug to harvest. They are conical in shape, green on the outside and white on the inside, and after being harvested the shoot's green exterior turns brown while the inside remains white.

SYMBOLISM OF BAMBOO SHOOTS IN JAPAN

Given the number of bamboo groves in Japan, bamboo shoots are an easy ingredient to find, especially when they begin to sprout out of the ground in spring. Due to this, bamboo shoots are seen as a symbol of spring in Japan.

Activities like bamboo shoot harvesting are commonplace in rural Japan, with groups of people going into the mountains to dig for the shoots once April rolls around. This bamboo harvesting is called takenoko hori (bamboo shoot digging) in Japanese, and many bamboo grove owners and towns hold special bamboo shoot digging events for visitors.

Bamboo shoots grow quickly into bamboo stalks, and these stalks are difficult to break despite the bending heights they grow to. As such, the entire



plant is a symbol of vitality and growth in Japan. It also features heavily in the folktale The Tale of the Bamboo Cutter, which was made famous abroad thanks to the Ghibli film The Tale of the Princess Kaguya. In the story, the bamboo cutter and his wife are an elderly couple with no children. One day, the bamboo cutter happens upon a glowing bamboo shoot and cuts it open to reveal a small baby! The bamboo cutter takes her home to raise with his wife. Of course there are more elements to the story than this, but the adoption of the baby could be seen as the elderly couple momentarily regaining the vitality of their youth.

BAMBOO SHOOTS
NUTRITION

The vitality of bamboo and bamboo shoots may not just be symbolism found in folktales. According to healthline, bamboo shoots are low in calories while rich in fiber, copper and essential vitamins like vitamin E and B6. Due to their fiber content, they have been found to promote gut health and may reduce cholesterol levels and promote weight loss. One caveat of bamboo shoots is that they must always be prepared properly. Raw bamboo shoots are known to contain a compound that can cause food poisoning if consumed excessively. This compound has a bitter taste, so most individuals won't want to eat raw bamboo shoots anyway. By boiling or soaking bamboo shoots before preparing them, you can remove this bitterness.

byFood is a platform for food events in Tokyo, with over 80 experiences to choose from and a fantastic resource for learning about Japan's thriving food culture! What's more, byFood runs a charitable outreach program, the Food for Happiness Project, which donates 10 meals to children in Cambodia for each person who books a food event through our platform!



Arashiyama bamboo forest

Arashiyama is one of the most famous bamboo groves in Japan by far, with pathways that meander through a sprawling collection of towering bamboo. You've no doubt seen photos of the area while researching the top spots to visit in Japan. To get a better idea of what Arashiyama and the surrounding food culture of Kyoto is like, watch Shizuka as she strolls around the area!



View video



Bamboo noodle lunch in Beppu

Wanting to avoid the crowds of Kyoto and experience some quintessential Japanese summer vibes? Head on down to Beppu in Oita Prefecture to experience some nagashi soumen, or flowing noodles. These noodles flow downhill through a stalk of bamboo, and diners must be speedy enough to catch the noodles with their chopsticks.



Reservation

A Taste of Okinawa



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RESTAURANT INFO