Hey, all you kids in the military community need to read this. Seriously! So, please put down your iPad, iPhone or other digital device for the next couple of minutes. You’ll survive, and I promise no one will take them. And, I also promise that this has nothing to do with more COVID-19 restrictions.

Now that I have your attention, I want to give you a little job. No, wait! Don’t stop reading! If you do a little bit of work, you’ll have the opportunity to be heard by tens of thousands of people. Seriously! You see, April is the Month of the Military Child, and for the 11th straight year, the Stars and Stripes community publications are dedicating it to you, the children of our men and women in uniform.

Each Stripes Okinawa, Stripes Japan, Stripes Korea and Stripes Guam issue in April will contain your stories, poems, drawings and photos about what life is like as a military child.

Military children tell us your story!

INSIDE INFO

STAY WARM IN JAPAN WITH THESE NIFTY ITEMS
PAGE 3

Special 8-page pullout inside!

CHECK US OUT ONLINE!

OKINAWA.STRIPES.COM

SEE MOMC ON PAGE 2
For those children who are part of the military community overseas but not technically a military child, we want to hear from you, too. You and your Department of Defense civilian parents are also a key part of the military community. So, what’s life like as a military kid? Tell us. And after you share with us, your story, poem or drawing will be posted on our special Month of the Military website: Militarychild.Stripes.com and could appear in at least one weekly paper.

We are giving you a platform to say what you want. Of course, to have your say, you have to write, type or draw it. You can be funny or serious. You can write a paragraph or a longer story (250-word maximum, please). Or you can draw a picture or write a poem. But, whatever you do, be yourself. Stand up and be heard.

We get thousands of submissions a year, so for stories to run in the paper, they must be submitted by April 15. As we approach another April, our team is ready for the onslaught. In fact, we’re already receiving submissions. By the way, like every year, we’ve been in touch with teachers across the Pacific who are using this as a class project. So be ready for that. For those of you who haven’t participated in our annual salute, we hope to hear from you this year.

Stars and Stripes is very proud to serve the military community, and it’s an honor to spotlight its resourceful group of children.

We can’t wait to hear from you!

Chris Carlson,
Publishing and Media Design Manager
Stars and Stripes

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1
Stay warm in Japan with these nifty items

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

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

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

**Kairo heat packs**

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

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

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

Although there may be some difference in what’s inside the pack depending on the manufacturer, Kairo commonly utilizes the heat caused by iron’s reaction to oxygen. Included in each pack are powdered iron, active carbon, salt, and water-retaining materials. If you open a bag, which contains a pack, air will go inside the pack and initiate oxidization, thus causing heat. You may be inclined to let the pack touch your skin directly to make the most of the heat. But that should be avoided because doing so can inflict low-temperature burns. Applying the pack to a spot for a long period can cause the same problem. Some Kairo comes with adhesives to be stuck to cloth, while others come in the shape of soles to be used in shoes.

**Steteco (long Johns)**

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

Before that, Japanese long Johns were commonly called “mo-mohiki.” But because of this event, the name “steteco” came to be commonly used, noted Kotobank, an online dictionary.

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

**Haramki (bellyband)**

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

Another famous oijisan in a bellyband is “Henna Oijisan (weird pop),” an oddball played by late Ken Shimura, who caused nuisance to other characters in sketch comedies. Both Tora-san and Henna Oijisan wore steteco as well.

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

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

**Shogayu (ginger tea)**

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

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

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The Daruma is a traditional Japanese doll, which in Japan has become a symbol of perseverance and luck. But outside Japan, not many people know of its history, or what hides behind its goofy look. Imagine you’re visiting Japan. You have a few more days before you have to travel back home, and your friends and family all asked you to bring souvenirs. You want to be original, maybe avoid the usual alcohol, keychains with pictures of famous landmarks, or the very popular (rightfully so) but a little cliché multi-flavors of KitKat. As you walk you see a cute, red, round doll in one of the shops’ windows. You stumbled upon one of the most iconic Japanese items you can find.

The Daruma is indeed one of the symbols of Japan. It makes sense to take home with you and give it as a present, or display it on a shelf, but its appearance might be deceiving, as this doll, representing a deity, has a long history, rich heritage, and a quite disturbing origin.

The legend behind the daruma doll

The Daruma is modeled after Bodhidharma, a monk accredited with the founding of Zen Buddhism, who seems to have lived between the 5th and 6th centuries CE. His origins are shrouded in mystery, and most of the accounts documenting his life are mixed with legends, making the tracking of Bodhidharma’s pilgrimage from the “Western Regions” (possibly central Asia) a very hard task.

During his travels he stopped for a time in a Shaolin monastery in China, founding the famous homonymous martial art. He then continued his journey until he decided to settle in a cave and meditate. This is where the history of the Daruma (after Bodhidharma’s Japanese name) begins.

The monk became a wall-gazer. He meditated, eyes to a wall, in a seated position for nine years, without breaks, and without closing his eyes, except once, after seven years. He was so furious at himself for what he perceived as lack of discipline, that he sliced his own eyelids off so to prevent himself from ever sleeping again. As the eyelids touched the ground, they sprouted green tea plants.

This legend is one of the reasons behind Buddhist monks often drinking green tea to stay awake.

On top of self-mutilation, Bodhidharma also suffered the loss of his hands and legs (according to some legends they fell off his body) as a consequence of his immobility for nine years. Art and folklore depicting Bodhidharma show him almost exclusively displaying these characteristics, which is why the Daruma dolls, in all its aspects, symbolize Bodhidharma’s position and features.

In addition, everything about the Daruma’s design has deep roots and meaning, down to the most minute details, making this doll much more than a simple household item.

Features of daruma dolls

Daruma Doll Eyes: one of the most noticeable features of the Daruma is its blank glance. These dolls do not have pupils but they present large white circles to tip over. Tilting them would always result in the Daruma swinging back into its upright position. The Daruma is a talisman of luck, but more importantly perseverance. One asking for the help of this god acknowledges the importance of sacrifice in the face of adversity.

For this reason the doll serves as a reminder that no matter how many times one could get knocked down, one must always endure and stand back up, in order to achieve a goal. Strongly connected to this ideology and to the Daruma itself is the Japanese expression nanakorobi yaoki, which loosely translates into “seven times down, eight times up”.

Facial hair: The beard and eyebrows painted on the doll are meant to reproduce Bodhidharma’s facial features, but they do not serve a merely aesthetic purpose.

In fact the eyebrows are shaped to look like cranes, and the beard like turtles. These two animals often represent longevity, in Japanese culture (as well as in the rest of East Asia). Crafters started applying these shapes on the Daruma to match the Japanese proverb “The crane lives 1000 years, the turtle 10,000”.

Body: The Daruma presents no legs or arms, as a reminder of Bodhidharma losing his limbs in his quest to reach enlightenment through self-sacrifice and meditation, but there is more.

The original dolls were designed to be impossible to tip over. Tilting them would always result in the doll being acquired. Additionally, sometimes, people write their wish, or goal, on the doll itself, maybe to remind themselves, or to inform the god in a more “official” manner.

Color: The reasons behind the choice of the color of the Daruma are interesting, but consolidated, and hard to find consensus on. Nowadays we can find these dolls decorated in all sorts of colors, each one of them signifying a different auspice.

For example, in Japan, the color gold is linked to money and fame; black is meant to ward off bad luck; green symbolizes health and fitness. Yet these color-theme associations are drawn from a myriad of different beliefs, superstitions, and legends, all of which come together to form a collective image.

One thing that is certain, though, is that to this day the most common color used for the Daruma is red, and originally it was the only color. For centuries scholars tried to grasp the motivation behind this color-choice, but even today it proves to be hard.

One of the reasons might connect to Bodhidharma, who, given his Buddhist background may have worn red "clothes, or perhaps after the god himself (his name) begins. The beard and eyebrows painted on the Daruma to help them achieve their goals if the god helped them succeed in their endeavors.
How daruma changed over time

The history of the Daruma dates back to the 17th Century. It was local farmers in the city of Takasaki, in the Gunma prefecture, that crafted the first version of these dolls, as charms to be blessed by monks. Since the farmers’ livelihood depended heavily on luck, they devised this superstitious trick to help them in their harvest. In the span of a few decades the practice of using the Daruma spread across professions and regions.

As often tradition goes, the history and origin of the Daruma doesn’t carry the same weight it used to. Its colors are not the only thing that has changed. One of the biggest changes that occurred is that of its representation as female dolls, the so-called Princess Daruma, and Lady Daruma.

While these interpretations gave life to images such as Hello Kitty and Miffy as a Daruma, assuming that these changes happened in modern times would be wrong. In fact the first and most drastic spins on the image of the god happened during the Edo Period in Japan (1603-1868), shortly after the dolls were first introduced.

During that time, a very clear separation of social classes occurred. Merchants were often placed at the bottom of the ladder, which prompted them to create a sort of micro-society for themselves. Among many other things, they gave life to the female representations of the Daruma. This was probably intended to take jobs at the establishment, which always portrayed Bodhidharma as a masculine, strong figure. Paintings of Bodhidharma as a woman became more common, while more and more satirical associations to the god became every-day events.

The Daruma ability to stand up no matter how many times one would lay it down, was associated to prostitutes and their tendency to do the same. Phallic depictions of Daruma also became more commonplace until, in time, the original image and the satirical ones were almost on par with each other in number and use.

In modern and contemporary times the Daruma has become a souvenir, a display item, and a cute present. Yet it has not completely lost its original power in the collective imaginary. While it is not common to find people who know the full history behind this good-luck charm, the Daruma is often purchased to help achieve one’s goals.

How to use a daruma doll

If the grim history and legends behind the Daruma have not yet scared you off, you might want to learn just how exactly to use this talisman, if you believe it could help you. Its appeal is that its “power” is a mix of supernatural and psychological.

As mentioned earlier, upon purchase, the doll is missing its eyes. What you do is paint one eye in one of the robe of the same color. Similarly, monks today use robes of the same color.

Other theories refer to the supernatural power of the color red and its connection to the gods. According to the already very grim legends surrounding the Daruma, its staple color may have originated from a period of devastating smallpox outbreaks across Asia.

In Japan, and elsewhere, not knowing how to fend off illness, people started wearing red garments, thinking that this color pleased god of smallpox and would have helped in repealing illness. By the same token, people would decorate doors and houses with red ropes, in an attempt to ward off illness, and help with recovery (literally bringing back to health), and great part of this ability is associated to the color red, but no one was ever able to give a universally accepted reason as to why.

Robes of the same color. After the purchase, you should return it to the temple from where you obtained it and burn it, regardless of whether you succeeded in what you wished for. There is even a ceremony called daruma kuyo, or dondoyaki in several temples across Japan, during which huge piles of Daruma are burnt at the same time (but these are not the only occasions during which you can burn your Daruma doll).

One year after purchasing the Daruma you should return it to the temple from where you obtained it and burn it, regardless of whether you succeeded in what you wished for. There is even a ceremony called daruma kuyo, or dondoyaki in several temples across Japan, during which huge piles of Daruma are burnt at the same time (but these are not the only occasions during which you can burn your Daruma doll).

Originally, the beneficial effect of the doll was believed to expire after one year. After this span of time, the doll needed to be burned in order to free the god. This process is not meant to be interpreted as giving up on one’s goals. On the contrary, it’s imagined as a renewal of one’s vow (and a commitment to buy another Daruma).
CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5

Making a daruma doll

The production of Daruma dolls is an almost exclusive enterprise of the city of Takasaki, in Gunma Prefecture (north of Tokyo). The town produces over 80% of all the dolls distributed in Japan. From here, the dolls reach every corner of the country, and can be purchased in every city (or online through many websites – including Amazon).

The Daruma are crafted with a special kind of hand-made papier-mâché called washi. The making of washi is very labor-intensive and is considered, in Japan, an art of its own. The sheets are extremely resilient and are crafted from fiber, vats, and a limited amount of chemicals, through a process of beating (often by hand) and drying in the sun, or on heated plates.

All Daruma are handmade and hand-painted, so no two dolls have the exact same design.

Daruma in modern Japanese culture

Very much like among farmers (and later all kinds of businesses) in the past, it is not uncommon, even today, to see a Daruma doll decorating a restaurant, or a store, or a home. Its size could also give an idea of the magnitude of one’s wish, since it is believed that the larger the doll, the bigger the aspiration of the person who acquired it.

The use of Daruma, though, is not limited to business, or a few private households. This doll has gained, across centuries, such a privileged place in Japanese culture, that it tends to appear in a number of situations and venues.

Politicians, for example, often carry with them their own dolls during interviews, speeches, and addresses, particularly during the election period. Like everyone else who obtains a Daruma, they have a wish, and pledge to repay the god with eyesight should he grant it to them. Arguably, this also dips into a cultural belief in Japan, through which a politician may be showing his determination and commitment to the country and its people through the symbolism embedded with the Daruma.

This familiar Japanese staple item certainly underwent numerous changes and interpretations. It’s regarded as a god who may help achieving success. It represents one of the most important aspects of Zen Buddhism with its relation to patience, perseverance, and sacrifice. It became a figure to which one asks for help through threats (giving the god his sight back only if he helps us). In its history the Daruma was both a symbol of the ruling class, and a tool used to mock and challenge the establishment.

While Japan possesses a very interesting culture and is vastly rich of symbolism and traditions, few others of the country’s images can boast an equally multifaceted and mysterious origin and meaning so deeply rooted into society.

Common questions about daruma dolls

Over time, readers have asked us questions about daruma. We’ve checked our answers with knowledgeable Japanese and compiled them here.

1. I have read that a person can keep their daruma doll forever - though one year is more common. Is this true?

A daruma doll is typically kept until an objective has been achieved. Many Japanese will consider a goal that is achievable within one year, hence this is very common. However, as painting the eye is representing your commitment to a goal, it’s more about that achievement than anything else.

2. I have a daruma doll and would like to reset the eyes to be white so I can reuse it again. Is this allowed? Can you recycle a daruma doll?

Strictly speaking, a daruma doll is about your own achievement and most Japanese would likely not consider “resetting” or “recycling” one. If a daruma doll has brought you good luck toward your achievement, fantastic! As possible, let someone else experience the same feeling with their own, new daruma doll. According to our Japanese correspondents, “recycling” a daruma doll would not bring bad luck to a recipient, but as it is a personalized object, it should belong to one person. The analogy in Western culture might be akin to going to a wishing well, removing a coin someone else had tossed, wishing on it, and tossing it back in.

3. Can I buy a daruma doll for someone else?

Many Japanese would typically purchase a daruma doll for their own use, however, buying one as a gift for someone else is fine as well. Incidentally, just as there is no deadline placed on achieving a personal goal, there is no set deadline for the recipient to set his or her goal using the daruma.

4. Can I make a wish for someone else using a daruma doll?

As a daruma doll is intended for a wish about something achievable for you, it would typically not be used for a hopeful outcome for someone else. That said, close family members may use a daruma as a kind of omamori amulet and, for example, wish for a good score on a school entrance exam or similar.
**Stripes Sports Trivia**

Less than three months after his father’s murder, Michael Jordan shocked the world and abruptly retired from the NBA in 1993. A few months later, “His Airness” signed a deal to take his talents to the baseball diamond. Which Double-A minor league affiliate of the White Sox did Jordan hit three homers for?

**Answer**

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**DID YOU KNOW?**

With Family Marts located literally across the street from other Family Marts, and a 7-Eleven seemingly on every single street corner, it may be a surprise to know that convenience stores are outnumbered by sanctuaries in Japan. In fact, there are three times as many temples (77,000) and shrines (81,000) combined than there are convenient stores (49,000) in the Land of the Rising Sun.

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**Kanji of the week**

Man (Ten thousand)

**Language Lesson**

I’m angry.

**Okotte masu.**

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**Sudoku**

Edited by Margie E. Burke

**Difficulty: Medium**

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

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A STARS AND STRIPES COMMUNITY PUBLICATION
FEBRUARY 17 – MARCH 2, 2022
8 STRIPES OKINAWA
A Taste of Okinawa

The 3 ‘R’s to good eating – Restaurants, Reviews & Recipes

8-page pullout
If you’re familiar with Japanese popular culture, you’ve probably heard the hype about Japanese snacks from the konbini, or Japanese convenience store food. They’re excellently curated, they come in surprising flavors, and they’re the carrot (or rather, Pocky) on a stick fueling me to write my graduate thesis! Whenever I’m feeling stressed about life in a foreign country, the konbini is there on every street corner to remind me of the real reason I packed it up and moved 7000 miles away from everyone I know: for the glorious splendor of Japanese snack food. So let’s roam the colorful aisles of Lawson, 7-Eleven, and FamilyMart with 11 recommendations for popular Japanese konbini snacks!

**What I look for in Japanese convenience store snacks**

As an American, what strikes me as special about Japanese snacks is the unexpectedly accurate flavors. If a Japanese gummy says it tastes like peach, that likely means it tastes like an actual peach fruit, not an artificial approximation. Also, seasonal varieties of konbini food come and go notoriously quickly, so look out for tags that say “New” (新しい) or “Limited Time” (期間限定) so you don’t miss them! Here are my criteria when looking for the best snacks in Japan:

- Seasonal and limited time varieties
- Accurate flavors
- Quality of taste and texture

Whether it’s an old standby like Famichiki or a new twist on a favorite like cherry blossom Pocky, you can’t go wrong with any of the following tasty treats.

**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!

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1. **Calbee Jagabee**
   - Calbee Japan makes many of the most popular Japanese crackers and chips, but Calbee Jagabee potato sticks stand out proudly among them. In contrast to Jagariko, a more brittle Calbee snack, Jagabee provides a heartier crunch and rich flavor reminiscent of its glory days as a real potato. I especially recommend my all-time favorite savory Japanese snack, the shouyu (soy sauce) butter flavor of Jagabee!

2. **Seasonal Pocky**
   - When you think of popular snacks in Japan, for many foreigners, Pocky naturally springs to mind! Pocky Japan loves to innovate on the already winning premise of chocolate on a biscuit stick, so keep your eyes peeled for special seasonal varieties like heart-shaped cherry blossom in the spring, lemon in the summer, and even Japanese sweet potato in the fall. My top-tier flavor is Winter Butter Caramel Pocky (冬のきさらぎ), which is so addictive I’d pay Glico to keep it in stock year round!

3. **Black Thunder**
   - One of the lesser known snacks to buy in Japan is Black Thunder, a sleeper hit that’s bound to have you renewing your visa! Black Thunder is a chocolate-covered candy bar with a cocoa cookie base and Japanese rice puffs, forming a crispy chocolatey delight. Look out for the many twists on this old favorite available in the konbini! In my experience, the custard apple pie flavor and Shittori Premium made with fresh cream are the ones to beat.

4. **Sandwiches**
   - Japanese convenience stores are handy not only for their plethora of snacks, but also their quick and easy meal options when traveling. All konbini have a refrigerated section with perfectly fresh food kept in glass containers at the register. Here you’ll find treats such as teriyaki chicken katsu, tuna and lettuce, egg, and even special offerings like blueberry jam and whipped cream from time to time!

5. **Fresh hot food**
   - The must-try Japanese convenience store foods include a variety of hot, fresh food kept in glass containers at the register. Here you’ll find treats such as the all-powerful Famichiki, FamilyMart’s beloved take on impossibly juicy fried chicken, piping hot nikuman meat buns, and occasionally special Hello Kitty-shaped cream buns. A pivotal part of appreciating Japanese junk food is having your world rocked by Famichiki, so I recommend ordering it at least once!

6. **Baumkuchen**
   - When it comes to Japanese sweet snacks, Baumkuchen takes the cake for me! Technically a German dessert that became disproportionately popular in Japan, Baumkuchen is many thin brown layers of cake baked into a ring of soft deliciousness I didn’t know I needed. I constantly spot new spins on the classic cake in the konbini, so check both the regular dessert section and the refrigerated section to join my mission to try them all!

7. **Limited time ice cream**
   - No listing of konbini snacks would be complete without a ringing endorsement of Japanese ice cream! The goodies in the konbini freezers rotate within weeks or even days, so check often for seasonal treats like white peach Coolish or custard ice cream melon pan. Whether it’s a hazelnut praline ice cream bar with black currant jam from FamilyMart (pictured above) or some other fleeting beauty gone too soon, you’ll want to stock up with haste if you find a favorite!

8. **Limited time breads**
   - Out of all Japanese convenience store food, the special breads are my oldest and fondest standby. While classics like melon pan and Japanese curry bread may be the saviors of any foreigner looking for a safe but yummy lunch, the bread aisle is often ripe with innovations! Keep an eye out for zany new varieties like kinako whipped cream bread or strawberry steamed cakes.

9. **Wagashi**
   - If you’re hungry for some traditional Japanese wagashi sweets, I especially recommend 7-Eleven Japan snacks! 7-Eleven’s original line of wagashi-inspired desserts ranges from matcha cookies to yomogi daifuku to red bean rice cakes, so you can sample a wide variety of unique Japanese confections for cheap.

10. **Kirin strong chuuhai**
    - Thirsty for some crisp alcohol to wash down all those Japanese snacks? For me, no trip to a konbini is complete without picking up a tall can of chuuhai, a popular Japanese alcoholic drink that comes in tons of fruity flavors. The seasonal flavors of Kirin Strong, like mixed berry and double ume (Japanese plum), score especially well in my book!

11. **Wine/sake in a juice box**
    - An honorable mention goes to these charming little juice boxes filled with one single serving of sake or wine, found in the alcohol section of some konbini. For the novelty factor, I recommend trying an Oni Killer box of sake, just to say you’ve washed out your inner demons!

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Japanese konbini represent much of the wonderful aspects of Japan, filled with colorful novelties, unexpected flavors, and a special appreciation for the changing of the seasons. Whether you’re hunting for the perfect Japanese snack food to satisfy your cravings or in need of a quick but quality meal on the go, I hope the konbini brings as much joy to your life as it does to mine!
Strikers Café is a hidden gem on the Kadena Air Base. Pizza, burgers, wings, sandwiches, soups and even tacos! Strikers Café serves up all your American classics and also brings some Asian faves to the table. From the ever popular chili cheese dog to the sensational beef taco rice, there is something for every taste and preference at the Strikers Café. Swing by this month for their Burger of the Month, the Four Cheese Bacon Burger! We can't wait to serve you up some tasty good. We are located in the Emery Lanes Bowling Center, building 113.

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.
STARTING OFF WITH CLASSIC JAPANESE CONDIMENTS

1. Soy Sauce

Made from fermented soybeans and wheat, soy sauce or shoyu is the number one Japanese pantry staple ingredient you should always keep stocked in your kitchen. Whether it’s just a splash served alongside your sushi, or it’s the main component giving your sweet sukiyaki hotpot a salty kick, you will find that soy sauce is used in almost every savory Japanese recipe. Japanese soy sauce is lighter than soy sauce products from other countries, with a distinctively delicate yet clean and complex flavor to it. As it is used in almost all savory Japanese recipes, it is a good idea to buy a high-quality Japanese soy sauce.

2. Miso Paste

Miso is thick, fermented soybean paste that comes in different varieties including shiro (white), aka (red or dark), and awase (mixed). Each type of miso gives different flavors and intensities. Not just for making traditional miso soup, miso paste is used for lots of different sauces, marinades, and even dressings. It can be used in a range of Japanese dishes, such as making a broth for miso ramen or as a glaze for miso eggplant.

3. Toasted Sesame Oil

Toasted sesame oil is a rich, golden oil that gives a lot of Japanese dishes an intense, nutty essence and flavor. While it can be used for stir-fry dishes, often it is used as a finishing oil, like for adding extra flavor into a hot bowl of ramen. However, toasted sesame oil is used in many salad dressings as well.

4. Rice Vinegar

In comparison to Western vinegar, rice vinegar or rice wine vinegar is sweeter and milder in flavor with a significantly less pungent essence. It is a vinegar that is made from fermented rice, and it is generally used to season rice used for sushi or onigiri rice balls. Other common uses in Japanese cuisine are pickling, salad dressings, and sauces.

5. Chili Oil

Japanese chili oil (also known as raya) is a spicy oil condiment that has been infused with chili pepper flakes. You will find it commonly used in Japanese-style Chinese dishes. You can pour some into your ramen to give it a bit of a spicy kick, or dip crunchy gyoza dumplings into it for extra flavor. Check out these gyoza cooking classes in Japan and learn how to make your own Japanese dumplings from scratch!

6. Cooking Sake

Almost as essential as soy sauce, is Japanese rice wine (Japanese sake). Cooking sake is a lower grade of cooking alcohol that is used to enhance and intensify the flavor of a range of Japanese dishes. It is incredibly versatile as it can be used in soups and simmered dishes, as well as marinades for meat, fish, and even more heartily-flavored Japanese foods.

7. Panko Breadcrumbs

Japanese dishes a rich texture and great fish substitutes in vegan or vegetarian dishes. Kombu is often used in broths and intensify the flavor of a range of soups, sauces, and as the base of many other Japanese dishes.

Join the Dashi Workshop and Katsuobushi Factory Tour in Kagoshima to see how this is made and how to buy it from a dried product.

WAKAME

Wakame is a type of Japanese seaweed that is also an essential ingredient used to flavor various dashi soup stocks. Wakame can be bought as a dried product from a Japanese supermarket that is easily rehydrated to become wiggly and a bit slimy. Just soak it in water and after about 5 minutes you can squeeze the liquid out of it. It is then ready to be used in miso soup or traditional Japanese salads.

KOMBU

Kombu is often added to Japanese broths. It serves as a base for many Japanese sauces, marinades, and even dressings. Kombu is a type of seaweed that is used in many Japanese soups. Shiitake mushrooms are great as they are available both fresh and dried. While it’s a key ingredient used to flavor various soup stocks, kombu can be kept on your cupboard shelf and rehydrated for use in simmered dishes or Japanese soups. Shiitake mushrooms have a slightly nuttier flavor than kombu and are often used in broths and soups.

SHITAKE MUSHROOMS

There are a lot of other types of mushrooms like shimeji or enoki which are commonly used in Japanese cuisine, but shiitake mushrooms are great as they are available both fresh and dried. Dried shiitake mushrooms can be kept on your cupboard shelf and rehydrated for use in simmered dishes or Japanese soups. Shiitake mushrooms have a slightly nuttier flavor than kombu and are often used in broths and soups.

HISUJI NORI

Hisuji nori are another type of seaweed that is also an essential ingredient used to flavor various soup stocks. It is used in making tempura batter and is a great addition to Japanese soups. Shiitake mushrooms are great as they are available both fresh and dried. While it’s a key ingredient used to flavor various soup stocks, kombu can be kept on your cupboard shelf and rehydrated for use in simmered dishes or Japanese soups. Shiitake mushrooms have a slightly nuttier flavor than kombu and are often used in broths and soups.

7. Mirin

More like syrup in viscosity, mirin is a sweet condiment that is commonly used in Japanese cooking. It is part of the rice wine family, like sake is, but its alcohol content is lower and it is used more typically as a seasoning. It is used to help tenderize meat and seafood, and to add a distinct sweetness to some Japanese dishes. Its higher sugar content, mirin is often used as a substitute for sugar in many Japanese dishes.

8. Japanese Rice Vinegar

Japanese rice vinegars are perfect for use in pickling, salad dressings, and sauces. They are used in almost all savory Japanese recipes, making your sweet sukiyaki hotpot a salty and sweet Japanese rice dish that is perfect for cold weather meals.

9. Japanese Condiments

Starting off with classic Japanese condiments, here is a comprehensive list of the most essential Japanese pantry items that your kitchen can’t go without when it comes to making Japanese food at home!
Japanese ingredients being readily available at your nearest Japanese grocery store, you just need to know what to look for. So to help you get familiar with what is needed for Japanese cooking, keep reading for our tips on how to stock a Japanese pantry.

To make your shopping list easy, you will find our Japanese pantry staples split up into two sections covering key Japanese condiments and essential dry ingredients.

### 8. Sesame Seeds
Available as black or white seeds, sesame seeds, or goma, are a classic garnish when it comes to Japanese cuisine. Used liberally and with great versatility, white sesame seeds are frequently used as a dusting for donburi or stir-fries, and they are also used in sauces and even sweets!

Kombu is another type of Japanese seaweed, a type of edible seaweed, that can be bought as a dry pantry good. It is typically used as a base for soup stock and ingredients, and responsible for imparting a deep umami flavor (derived from glutamic acids) in many dishes.

### 9. Potato Starch
Also known as katakuriko, potato starch is used as a thickening agent to make Japanese sauces. This is often the case when cooking chuka-nyori (Japanese style Chinese food). It is lighter than wheat flours, meaning that potato starch makes for a great coating when making fried dishes like karaage (Japanese fried chicken), and it can also prevent sticking when making Japanese sweets such as chewy mochi. Cornstarch can also be used in a similar way but with varying textures.

What a surprise, another seaweed! That’s right, seaweed is very important in traditional Japanese cuisine as it is nutritious and umami-rich. In this case, dried nori seaweed can be in the form of either a sheet, shredded into strips, or as seaweed flakes (called sonori). Nori rolls, and sonori are all a classic toping for sushi or okonomiyaki.

### 10. Green Tea
Much like soy sauce, matcha, a type of Japanese green tea, is an essential Japanese pantry item you should always have. Slightly bitter and powerful in flavor, matcha is powdered green tea which is great to have with Japanese wagashi sweets. Loose-leaf green tea makes for a traditional accompaniment for any homemade Japanese meal! Both drinks you can easily buy at an Asian or Japanese supermarket near you!

### 11. Shichimi Togarashi
Also known as “Japanese seven spice,” shichimi togarashi is another key Japanese pantry item to give a little spice to your homemade Japanese dishes. As in the name, it is made up of a blend of seven dried aromatic spices that make it both hot in flavor and citrusy. This includes chili flakes, ginger, nori, sesame seeds, shiso, dried orange peel, and Sichuan pepper (with room for some other spice mix variants, depending on the brand).

As real wasabi is incredibly expensive and difficult to come by even in Japan, bright green wasabi powder or wasabi paste is the answer to getting a hit of Japanese horseradish in your hometown. Both wasabi powder and wasabi paste are imitations of fresh wasabi with just a small concentration of the real thing, however, you can still use it for adding to sushi or udon dishes.

Join a wasabi farm tour in Okutama, Tokyo to learn firsthand about the cultivation of one of Japan’s most expensive crops!

### 12. White Pepper
As opposed to black pepper which is more commonly used in Western countries, when it comes to Japanese cuisine, white pepper is used as an alternative. It’s a bit hotter on the tongue than black pepper, yet also milder in flavor to better suit the delicate nature of Japanese dishes. It can be used in dishes like Japanese ramen, fried rice and stir-fries, as well as for seasoning meat and vegetables.

So, were you wondering what is needed for Japanese cooking? For anyone who loves cooking Japanese food, these are the 23 most important condiments and dry ingredients that are essential for stock- ing a Japanese pantry. Plan on purchasing your Japanese ingredients like soy sauce, seaweed, sauces, and Japanese rice so you can create an authentic Japanese dish anytime!

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!
3 Japanese eggplant recipes to try at home

Here are three of my favorite Japanese eggplant recipes, which are also among the much-loved staple dishes of izakaya bars and Japanese home cooking!

**Let’s Cook**

### Nasu Dengaku (なすだんご)

Nasu Dengaku is a simple dish, delicious to eat both hot and cold as well as a perfect accompaniment for rice, or a snack with sake.

**Ingredients**

- 2 Japanese eggplants
- 3 tbsp sesame oil
- 2 tbsp red miso
- 1 tbsp potato starch
- 3 tbsp sugar
- 3 tbsp sake
- 2 tbsp mirin

**Let’s Cook**

After washing the eggplant, cut the skin into strips. In this way, we will facilitate the cooking of the flesh. Next, divide the eggplant into two equal parts vertically, and make incisions in a grid pattern.

(“Be careful not to make incisions too deep or you will risk that the heat will ruin the shape of the eggplant”)

Soak the cut eggplant in water to remove the lye and set it aside.

While they are soaking prepare the miso sauce. In a pan mix all the ingredients of the sauce (Miso, sugar, sake, mirin) and cook over medium-low heat. When the mixture begins to boil, turn off the heat and continue stirring with a spoon for 3 to 4 minutes, making sure it does not stick to the bottom. Set aside and let cool.

Take the eggplant and remove excess water with kitchen paper. Cover the surface with potato starch being careful not to overdry it as we only need a light coating on the outside.

Heat the sesame oil in a frying pan and cook the eggplant for 3 minutes per side.

Once cooked (they should be tender), place them on kitchen paper to wipe off excess oil and coat them with the miso sauce.

Sprinkle some sesame seeds and enjoy your nasu recipe while still warm!

### Nasu Donburi (なす丼)

Nasu donburi is perhaps one of the few vegan dishes available on the menus of izakaya here in Japan (but I suggest you ask for confirmation before ordering it). What characterizes this dish is the strong umami flavor and creamy texture of the eggplant, which blankets the delicate rice bowl, and the garnish of shredded shiso leaves that gives a final fresh touch to the dish. Absolutely a Japanese eggplant recipe that you must try!

**Ingredients**

- 2 Japanese eggplants
- 1 tbsp sake
- 2 tbsp mirin
- 1 tbsp sugar
- 2 tbsp soy sauce
- 1 tbsp grated ginger, finely chopped
- Potato starch (enough to cover the surface of the eggplant)
- 4 tbsp salad oil
- Donburi (bowl filled with rice)
- 2 shiso leaves

**Let’s Cook**

Remove the top part from the Japanese eggplant, and cut them into slices of more or less 1 cm in width (try to make them all similar sizes).

Soak the cut eggplant in water to remove the lye. In the meantime, prepare the seasoning. In a bowl mix sake, mirin, soy sauce, and ginger. Mix well and set aside.

Take the eggplant and wipe off the water with kitchen paper. Sprinkle the surfaces with potato starch, taking care not to put too much on, as we just need a thin layer.

Pour the cooking oil into a frying pan, heat it over medium heat, add the eggplant and cook on both sides for 3-4 minutes each.

Add the seasoning to the pan and cook for 2-3 more minutes and then turn off the heat after the seasoning starts to bubble. The sauce will get thicker and will be absorbed by the eggplant fast, so take care not to burn it.

While still warm, put the eggplant on top of rice and enjoy your nasu donburi with shiso leaves and white sesame on the top as a final touch.

### Dashi Eggplant Stew (なすの煮浸し)

Don’t let the term stew scare you. This simple Japanese eggplant recipe can be eaten either hot or cold, and the longer the eggplants are allowed to simmer in the fridge in contact with the dashi broth, the more intense and flavorful they will be!

**Ingredients**

- 2 Japanese eggplants
- 1 tbsp of salad oil
- 100ml of dashi soup
- 1 tbsp grated ginger
- 2 tbsp of mirin
- 2 tbsp soy sauce

**Let’s Cook**

Remove the top of the eggplant and cut it first in half vertically and then into three equal parts. Make diagonal cuts and soak in water.

Meanwhile, add all the seasonings to a bowl (dashi, ginger, mirin, and soy sauce) and mix well. Take the eggplant and wipe off the water with kitchen paper.

Place oil in a frying pan and cook beginning with the skin on medium heat. When it turns slightly brown, cook the other side the same way (it will take 2-3 minutes per side).

Add the dressing to the pan and let it sit on low heat for a few minutes, until you will observe that the eggplant has absorbed some of the broth. Serve on a plate and top with spring onion or grated daikon.
Let’s cook something easy, healthy, and fun with your kids! This tuna okara sandwich contains a good amount of soy protein and fiber from okara (soy pulp that you can get from local supermarket at quite a reasonable price). Slicing the tomato just a little bit makes it easier to keep it on the bread. I kept the stem of the tomato to make antennae, but it will do without them.

**Ingredients**

- 2 pieces of French baguette (15cm long each) or any bread you like
- 40g of canned tuna (drained)
- 2 tbsp of finely chopped onion
- 1 tbsp of yogurt
- 1 tbsp of mayonnaise
- A pinch of salt
- A pinch of pepper
- 1 tbsp of butter
- 1 cucumber
- 2 mini tomatoes
- Small amount of hard cheese (for caterpillar’s eyes)
- 4 pieces of black sesame seeds (for caterpillar’s eyes)

**Directions**

1. Combine tuna, okara, onion, yogurt, mayonnaise, salt, and pepper, and mix well.

2. Slice bread if needed, and toast lightly. Spread butter, then the tuna okara mixture.

3. Place cucumber slices and mini tomatoes on tuna okara spread.

4. Put small pieces of hard cheese on tomatoes, then black sesame seeds to make eyes.
Early in 2020, as COVID-19 made its sweep across the world, Disney closed all of its theme parks. As the closure was extended, Disney decided to share with its loyal fans the recipe to a crowd favorite—churros.

The recipe was a hit among YouTubers and food bloggers trying to bring a little taste of Disney back into their lives during quarantine.

Though now theme parks have reopened, there are times when theme parks in Japan are off-limits for the military community. Disney has since removed the churro recipe from their own website, but like everything shared online, this recipe, too, has taken a life of its own out of reach from Disney’s grasp.

I missed the initial Disney Churro craze but came across a video for it on YouTube recently. The video featured folks wearing Mickey Mouse ears while cooking and enjoying the treat, which motivated me to give it a try for myself.

It’s been a summer of instant noodles and donuts, so this didn’t seem like a smart choice for me, but one bite in and I am so glad I went for it.

The recipe seemed simple and easy to follow. I struggled a little bit with using a pastry bag. Some of my Disney Churros ended up taking on weird shapes, looking more like A&W’s super fries than churros. They were so delicious; I could hardly stop eating them.

And, while I may not be a Disney fan—the last movie I watched was Aladdin in 1992, the last time I visited a park was in early 2000s, not to mention how I am not crazy about how they’ve handled the Star Wars franchise—, I do give them credit for this awesome recipe and their tasty churros.

These churros were so good, in fact, that I may be inclined to give the Toy Story and Lion King movies a chance.

**Ingredients**

- 240 cc water
- 120 cc butter
- 1.25 cc salt
- 3.75 cc cinnamon
- 3 eggs
- 360 cc vegetable or canola oil
- 100 g sugar

**Recipe**

1. Pour water in a pot over medium heat and add in butter, salt, half of the cinnamon (1.25 cc).

2. Change the medium heat to low.

3. Add eggs in one at a time as you knead the dough.

4. Place the dough in a pastry bag with a star-shaped piping tip. Prepare a plate with paper towels to place fried churros.

5. Pour oil into a frying pan or another pot over medium to high heat until the oil reaches about 170°C (338°F).

6. When the oil reaches the temperature required, squeeze dough into the oil in 2.5 cm-long portions.

7. Fry until golden brown, then transfer onto the plate with the paper towels.

8. Mix sugar and cinnamon (2.5 cc) in a bowl.

9. After the churros have cooled and strained excess oil place into the sugar-cinnamon mix and coat.

10. After this, your churros are ready to devour. Bon appetit!