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*Community Publication*

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We're here to help you **EXPLORE!**

Our community products at Stars and Stripes are geared toward one very important thing: giving you the tools to make the most of your time while stationed in the Pacific.

Whether you are in mainland Japan, Okinawa, Korea or Guam, we're going to help you get off base and explore. We'll help you find that tasty restaurant, eye-popping day trip or fun festival that really lets you dive into the local culture.

And don't worry, we'll take it step by step. We'll show you how to get on a train, bus or taxi. Or if you are driving, we'll show you where and how to park. Seriously, we're here to hold your hand, help you take some baby steps and then set you free, with the knowledge that if you ever get lost or are looking for

some travel tips, destinations or anything else, all you need to do is pick up this paper, one of our magazines or special supplements, or click on one of our community websites or Facebook and Instagram pages to get all the free information you seek.

So how do we compile the thousands of stories that are at your fingertips? Well, besides partnering with dozens of outside organizations from around the world, we also count on you, our military community, to submit stories. And you always come through! Hey, like we like to say, "We're going to make you famous!"

And then there's our team: writers Hyemin Lee (Korea), Shoji Kudaka (Okinawa), Takahiro Takiguchi and Luis Samayoa (mainland Japan) and their editor, Denisse Rauda (mainland Japan). Yes, that's them in the photo on the front page hard at work. Yes, hard at work. You see, for us to do our job properly, we go out and experience things first-hand so we can tell you about it, offer tips and give you directions. The pictures above were taken in June, during a 5-day gathering at our headquarters in Tokyo.

SEE EXPLORE ON PAGE 6

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# USO Okinawa staff spotlight

- **NAME:** Susie Gong
- **POSITION/TITLE:** Center Operations Specialist
- **TIME WORKED AT USO:** 5 months
- **CENTER/OFFICE LOCATION:** USO Camp Hansen

### About Susie:

Susie, a former English language teacher and administrator, is the Center Operations Specialist at USO Camp Hansen.

In August 2023, she and her husband moved to Okinawa after spending ten years in South Korea, Malaysia, Saudi Arabia, Ecuador, Germany, and the United States.

Susie's talents know no bounds as she often shares her creativity with USO Camp Hansen patrons through various programs!

She attended the Culinary Institute of America and briefly enjoyed working in the food service industry—a hobby she shares with the Camp Hansen community.

In her spare time, Susie enjoys traveling, cooking, crochet, and perfecting her photography.

volunteers, patrons, and my colleagues. We have a lot of fun while serving others and providing a comfortable and supportive environment for service members.

### Q. What's your favorite memory of working at the USO?

A. When I first moved to Okinawa, I started volunteering at the USO to meet people and learn more about my new home. I'll always remember the kindness and welcoming nature of the USO staff and volunteers.

### FEATURED PROGRAM:

We have Karaoke Night on the third Friday of every month, 5PM-9PM. It's a lot of fun and people can sing, read poetry, recite monologues and/or speeches, play instruments, and/

or enjoy other resources in our center like the pool tables and gaming room. We provide snacks and refreshments, and it's free!

We're always impressed with the amazing talent in our community and would love to see everyone there!

Check out our Facebook at USO Hansen for the most up to date information.

– USO Okinawa



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# SWEET POTATO!

Bring Okinawa to you with tasty treat you can cook up at home

STORY AND PHOTOS BY SHOJI KUDAKA, STRIPES OKINAWA

Umukuji tempura, or umukuji andagi, is an Okinawan snack food commonly sold at local supermarkets. Cooked with imokuzu (potato starch) and beniimo (purple or reddish-violet sweet potato), its soft, chewy texture and subtle sweetness are a delight to the taste buds. Plus, its purple color is very pleasing to look at. If you have tried “beniimo tarte” a popular snack sold at local souvenir shops, you would know the color that I am talking about.



Though you can get umukuji tempura at your local market, nothing beats a fresh batch made at home.

Just recently, I had a chance to try cooking this Okinawan snack on my own.

The recipe I found on the web was simple and didn't take a lot of ingredients. However, it required sweet potatoes to be steamed and pureed, which could be time-consuming. So, instead, I chose to cut corners by microwaving and mashing them in a bowl. Skipping the process probably cost me some smoothness in the tempura, but most of the softness, chewiness and sweetness was still there in the final product. The fresh umukuji tempura put me in the mood for a snack time with a cup of coffee.

kudaka.shoji@stripes.com



## INGREDIENTS (makes about 12 pieces)

- ▣ Beniimo (purple sweet potato) 200g
- ▣ Imokuzu (potato starch) 133cc
- ▣ Water 100ml
- ▣ Sugar 15cc
- ▣ Salt 2.5cc
- ▣ Oil (reasonable amount)

## RECIPE



1 Rinse the sweet potatoes with water. Wrap them in Saran wrap and microwave them for 5 minutes or so.



2 Once soft enough to skewer through, peel them. (The potato gets really hot. So, I used chopsticks and a spoon for this step.)



3 Mash the potatoes in a bowl and mix them with sugar and salt.



4 In another bowl, mix potato starch and water. While stirring the mixture, add it to the potatoes little by little. (The sweet potato should be as soft or hard as an earlobe)



5 Heat oil to 170 degrees Celsius (338 degrees Fahrenheit) in a pan. Mold the dough into small pieces (about the size of a thumb) and fry in batches.

6 Remove from oil as soon as the surface crisps. You can place on a napkin-lined plate to strain extra oil. Serve immediately, but be careful in case it is still too hot from the frying.

Pairs well with coffee. いただきます (Bon appetite)!

Tip: Normally, umukuji tempura is not served with any dipping sauce. However, its light flavor might go well with some butter or whip cream.



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# SWEET HISTORY

## The tale behind Japan's favorite potato

STORY AND PHOTOS BY SHOJI KUDAKA, STRIPES 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!

kudaka.shoji@stripes.com



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



# COMICS CORNER



WELL, I STILL SAY WE QUALIFY AS A QUARTET!

- Daryl Talbot

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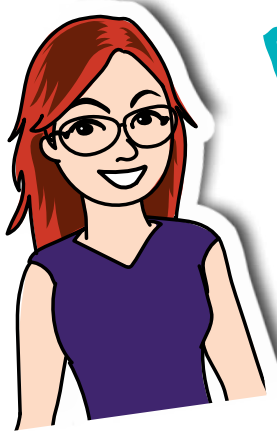
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# Hit the road with Stripes

**P**icture this: a 5 a.m. wakeup to hop into an OV loaded up with five sleepy colleagues headed to Japan’s iconic Mt. Fuji. It might sound like work, or it might sound like fun; for us it was both...even if we didn’t get back until midnight!

On a bright June morning, the writers of PMD, with me behind the wheel, headed northwest to experience the rolling green tea

fields of Fujinomiya, Shizuoka, and crowded sites of Kawaguchiko in Yamanashi.

It was a long drive from Tokyo and back, but we all got to know each other better and had a great time exploring together. Read along and let our travel tales guide you next time you plan to visit the Mt. Fuji area.



– Denisse Rauda



Mt. Fuji World Heritage Center Photo by Takahiro Takiguchi



Yamataka Sakurai Tea Farm

## EXPLORE: We do it for you!

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

It was a week where our writers, page designers and web team could brainstorm story ideas and discuss how to best display and tell the tales of our adventures.

And it was a week to show Hyemin a little bit of what Japan has to offer on this, her first visit to the country. And what better way to do that than take a day trip. When we planned the trip, we also considered our Okinawan, Shoji, and what his tropical paradise-influenced take might be on a mainland excursion. And, of course, we were also excited to show Luis, the new kid on block, a thing or two about getting the most out of a day trip.

And if you’re visiting Japan for the first time, Mt. Fuji is on your must-see list. Fortunately, the iconic volcano can be seen from so many places in the mainland, so our team decided to work its way around the mountain from afar, enjoying the picturesque views of Yamanashi and Shizuoka prefectures. Hyemin definitely got a taste of Japanese culture, Shoji was able to revisit a trip from decades ago, and Luis found out what it’s like to pile into a van and hit the road for 9 hours!

The five of them, a motley crew from different generations, cultures, backgrounds and interests, piled into a van and hit the road. In the next couple of editions, you’ll read all about their trip, what they learned, what they liked and what they would probably skip next time. So, sit down, and let our crew tell you about themselves and show you how to enjoy a day of picking tea leaves and sipping green tea, tie-dying shirts, taking a cooking class, visiting shrines, eating local cuisine (lots of ice cream), picture-taking, lots of walking ... and lots of laughs. Yes, they have a tough job, but they do it for you.

– Chris Carlson,  
Publishing and Media Design Manager



## FUJINOMIYA

### Scenic city filled with mystery

**L**ocated in the center of Shizuoka Prefecture on the foothills and lower slopes of Mt. Fuji, Fujinomiya is a scenic city developed as a home to a magnificent Shinto shrine, Fujisan Hongu Sengen Taisha.

The small city with a population of around 133,000, accommodates a lot of renowned Shinto shrines and Buddhist temples, along with beautiful waterfalls and mysterious lakes, giving Fujinomiya an unworldly, mysterious atmosphere.

The city is part of Shizuoka Prefecture, which boasts the nation’s largest green tea production at 25,200 tons per year. Within Fujinomiya you’ll find many farms with sprawling green tea bushes with Mt. Fuji looming over.

Fujinomiya offers one of the four trails to start an ascent to Fuji’s peak, the area also has many attractions for tourists to enjoy year-round.

Here are some of the must-see attractions Fujinomiya City has to offer:



#### Omiya Yokochi

Only a stone’s throw from the main torii gate of Fujisan Hongu Sengen Taisha, Omiya Yokochi is a small alley home to dozens of food and souvenir shops. Here you’ll find the local dishes, Fujinomiya Yakisoba noodles and Fujinomiya Oden hot pot. You can sample these local delicacies, famous Shizuoka tea, local vegetables or various sweets, along with free Fuji spring water from a fountain.

■ **LOCATION:** 4-23 Miyacho, Fujinomiya City, Shizuoka Prefecture  
■ **HOURS:** 10 a.m. – 5 p.m.



WEBSITE

#### Mt. Fuji World Heritage Center

■ **LOCATION:** 5-12 Miyamachi, Fujinomiya City, Shizuoka Prefecture

■ **HOURS:** Sept. – June, 9 a.m. – 5 p.m.; July and Aug., - 6 p.m. (closed: third Tuesday of the month)



WEBSITE

See story!  
Page 8

#### Fujisan Hongu Sengen Taisha

Fujisan Hongu Sengen Taisha is the head shrine of the nation’s 1,300 Sengen (or Asama) Jinja that enshrines Mt. Fuji as a god. This holy site is a UNESCO World Heritage Site and the grounds spread beyond the shrine buildings and field in the city, as the entire peak of Mt. Fuji from the Eighth Station up are also included in the shrine grounds.

In the 9th Century, pilgrimages to Mt. Fuji became common and a stop at the 1,216-year-old Shinto shrine was a must to wish for a safe climb. At the shrine in Fujinomiya, check out the magnificent “honden” main hall, as it is built in a distinctive “sengen-zukuri” style with a two-story gate tower.

In the shrine field, you will find a large pond called Wakutamaike (literally, pond of rising bubbles), which pumps out no less than 2.8 tons of spring water every second. The spring water comes from Mt. Fuji, as its melting snow travels through the aquifer made of layers of lava and volcanic rock before bubbling up from the ground. The spring water flows into the Kanda River running through the entire city.



WEBSITE

■ **LOCATION:** 1-1 Miyamachi, Fujinomiya City, Shizuoka Prefecture  
■ **HOURS:** Apr. – Sept., 5 a.m. – 8 p.m., Nov. – Feb., 6 a.m. – 7 p.m., Mar. and Oct., 5:30 a.m. – 7:30 p.m.



Photo by Takahiro Takiguchi

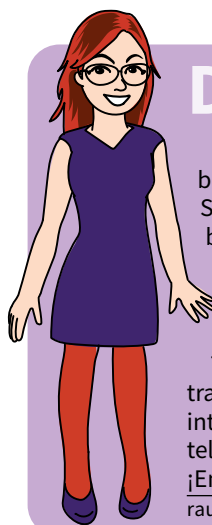
#### Shiraito Falls

Designated as part of Fuji World Heritage sites, Shiraito-no-taki (literally waterfalls of white threads) is considered one of Japan’s most beautiful 100 waterfalls. The spring water of Mt. Fuji falls as thin streams that resemble white threads across the 150-meter-wide and 20-meter-high cascade. Go down to the base of waterfalls along the short walking trail, then you can enjoy the cool and refreshing mist.

■ **LOCATION:** 273 – 1 Kamiide, Fujinomiya City, Shizuoka Prefecture



WEBSITE



### Denisse

I’m Denisse Rauda from El Paso, Texas, but now living in Tokyo. I have been with Stripes for 10 years. My interests include binge-watching TV shows, karaoke, tennis and exploring Tokyo. Nice to meet you!

Soy Denisse Rauda de El Paso, Texas, pero ahora vivo en Tokio. He trabajado en Stripes por diez años. Mis intereses incluyen maratones de series de televisión, karaoke, tenis y explorar Tokio. ¡Encantada de conocerle!  
rauda.denisse@stripes.com



### Hiro

I’m Takahiro Takiguchi from Yokosuka City in mainland Japan. I have been with Stripes for 11 years. My interests include food, drinks, travel and music. Nice to meet you!

神奈川県横須賀市在住の滝口隆弘です。星条旗新聞でのライター歴11年。趣味は旅行、食べ歩きに飲み歩き、それに音楽です。よろしくお願ひします!  
takiguchi.takahiro@stripes.com



File photo

### Lake Tanukiko

Lake Tanukiko is a tiny and quiet lake known as a nice camping and fishing site, especially in spring and fall. Visit the lake around April 20 or Aug. 20 when, for around a week on those dates, you can enjoy the “Diamond Fuji.” This phenomena is when the sun appears to rise out of the Fuji peak in the morning, making it appear as though Fuji has a diamond glittering at its peak.



#### Lake Tanukiko Camp Ground

■ **LOCATION:** 63 Saori, Fujinomiya City, Shizuoka Prefecture

WEBSITE



Photos by Takahiro Takiguchi

### Asagiri Kogen (Plateau)

Located at the southwest base of Mt. Fuji around 800 meters above sea level, the Asagiri Plateau is a large pastureland where dozens of dairy farms are situated. As the name Asagiri (foggy morning) indicates, the high altitude gives the plateau a cool and comfortable summer, while the weather often changes quickly, and the plateau can easily be covered with fog. With the nice views of green pastures and majestic Mt. Fuji, the plateau offers one of the most popular hang-gliding and paragliding sites in Japan. Drop by Asagiri Kogen road station to sample tasty “milk soft cream,” a soft-serve ice cream freshly made from local dairy.



WEBSITE

#### Asagiri Kogen Road Station

■ **LOCATION:** 492-14 Takarayama, Nebara, Fujinomiya City, Shizuoka Prefecture  
■ **HOURS:** 8 a.m. – 5 p.m.

### Tea-leaf-picking at Yamataka Sakurai Seicha Tea Farm

■ **LOCATION:** 877 Yamamoto, Fujinomiya City, Shizuoka Prefecture  
■ **HOURS:** 9 a.m. – 6 p.m.  
■ **TEA LEAF PICKING AND FACTORY TOUR:** 1,000 yen  
■ **TEL:** 0120-37-2238



WEBSITE

– Takahiro Takiguchi



## Picking green tea leaves

Photo by Takahiro Takiguchi

At the foot of Mt. Fuji, Fujinomiya City in Shizuoka Prefecture offers an impressive view of vast bright green tea fields spreading against the backdrop of the majestic volcano.

While touring around Fuji area, my fellow writers and I stopped to enjoy tea leaf-picking and a facility tour at Yamataka Sakurai Seicha tea farm.

We were greeted by Yutaka Sakurai, the owner, and led into a greenhouse to learn how to pick the perfect green tea leaf.

The tea bushes in the greenhouse were short and picking leaves was pretty easy. We noticed that there were both light- and dark-hued leaves and Sakurai advised us to pick the lighter ones. He said the light green leaves provide a fresher, sweeter tea flavor.

According to Sakurai, tea leaves can be harvested four times a year in Shizuoka – from April to May, from June to July, around bon season (mid-August) and from September to October.

“Among the four times, the first harvest around April or May is called ‘shincha’ (the first tea of the year) and has the best, full-bodied flavor and sweet aroma,” Sakurai said.

Shizuoka Prefecture is known for its enormous tea production. In 2020, the prefecture produced no less than 25,200 tons of tea or about 36.1 percent of all national tea products (69,800 tons). Shizuoka’s tea is in high demand and is often ranked alongside Saitama Prefecture’s Sayama Tea and Kyoto Prefecture’s Uji Tea as one of the best. According to Sakurai, Shizuoka is blessed with mild temperatures, clear water and well-drained soils comprised from Fuji lava, making it a suitable place for great-quality tea.

Sakurai said he and his family have been producing quality tea for over 70 years. After filling our basket full of fresh tea leaves, we walked through Sakurai’s tea field and went up a hill overlooking the grounds. Although most of Mt. Fuji was hidden in the clouds,

we were able to catch a glimpse of the snowy peak above.

Our next stop was to check out some of the tea production process at the farm’s factory. Here tea leaves are steamed, dried and crushed before being bagged and sold.

Though we didn’t process the leaves we picked, we were able to take them home and attempt to complete the production process on a smaller scale with a pan or microwave. Sakurai suggested watching a YouTube video or searching for instructions online to complete the process.



VIEW VIDEO!



Yamataka Sakurai Tea Farm

After the facility tour, Sakurai’s wife demonstrated how to brew tea and extract the umami flavors of the premium tea leaves from the farm.

She showed us the proper way to cool down the water and heat the tea cups before pouring the water over the tea leaves on a small sieve sitting on the teapot opening. We sampled the tea after brewing once, twice and three times to experience the evolution of flavor. The strength and subtle sweet taste is adjusted with the steeping time and water ratio.

When I sampled changing the flavor of the same tea leaves in several pours, I noticed that the first service of tea and the second had a completely different flavor and aroma. The second pour was smoother with a milder aroma compared to the sweet and sour richness of the first brew. Both were wonderful, but I preferred the first brew.

The tea farm also has a small shop where you can buy a variety of tea, matcha and tools to brew the perfect cup.

You can enjoy tea leaf-picking and tea tasting at Yamataka Sakurai Seicha from April to October. Plan to drop by when you visit Fujinomiya!

– Takahiro Takiguchi

SEE MORE FUJINOMIYA ON PAGE 8



## Shoji

I’m Shoji Kudaka from Okinawa. I have been with Stripes for eight years. My interests include travel, sports, movies, TV shows, cats and dogs. Nice to meet you!

沖縄県在住の久高将司です。ストライプスに在籍して8年になります。トラベル、スポーツ、映画、テレビ、犬や猫に興味があります。よろしくお祈いします！

kudaka.shoji@stripes.com




## Hyemin

I’m Hyemin Lee from Seoul, Korea, South Korea but currently living in Pyeongtaek. I have been with Stripes for two years. My interest include drawing, writing, cooking and traveling. Nice to meet you!

안녕하세요. 저는 이혜민입니다. 스타스앤스트라이프와 함께한 지는 2년정도 되었습니다. 저는 그림 그리기, 글쓰기, 요리, 여행을 좋아해요. 만나서 반가워요!

lee.hyemin@stripes.com



## Luis

Hi, I’m Luis Samayoa, I’m from San Diego, California. This is my first year with Stripes. My interests are riding bikes, traveling and eating, exploring Hokkaido and collecting art as souvenirs everywhere I go. Nice to meet you!

samayoa.luis@stripes.com

# FUJINOMIYA



## Enjoy a virtual hike at Mt. Fuji World Heritage Center



VIEW VIDEO!

The Mt. Fuji World Heritage Center Shizuoka in Fujinomiya City is within a 2.5-hour drive from most military bases in the Kanto Plain and is a great place to learn about the majestic symbol of Japan. This stunning building features a comprehensive overview of Mt. Fuji's geological makeup and other interactive exhibits.

The exterior of the building features a unique modern, inverted cone shape with a lattice design made with locally-sourced cypress wood. Although it was a bit cloudy when we visited, we saw the V-shaped building clearly reflected on surrounding artificial pond, which reminded me of the famous view of "Sakasa Fuji," or inverted Fuji reflected on a lake.

Inside the impressive building, the design and exhibits were even more striking than I imagined.

The museum exhibit path follows a 193-meter spiral slope up five stories where every section features time-lapse videos from each of Mt. Fuji's stations. So, by walking up the slope and watching the videos, you would feel as if you were climbing Mt. Fuji without the physical toll.

Silhouettes of mountain climbers are projected onto the screens and sounds of the wind and footsteps played over speakers to increase the illusion of climbing. As the silhouette climbers often stop for breaks and meals, visitors can rest and enjoy various exhibits on the third, fourth and fifth floors to take a break, too.



Photos by Takahiro Takiguchi

Some of the exhibits feature touch-screen monitors that provide facts about Fuji in Japanese, English and other languages. There are exhibits on the animals that live on Mt. Fuji, the aspects of the mountain as an active volcano, and the effect it has had on the arts and religion in Japan. On the second floor, a theater plays a 15-minute video about the birth of Mt. Fuji.

When you reach the "summit" of the museum, not only have you gained physical achievement, but you've also attained plenty of knowledge about the majestic mountain.

At the top of the building, there is an observation deck for a view of the real Mt. Fuji and the surrounding Fujinomiya City. The clouds didn't allow us to enjoy the view during our visit, but hopefully you will during yours!

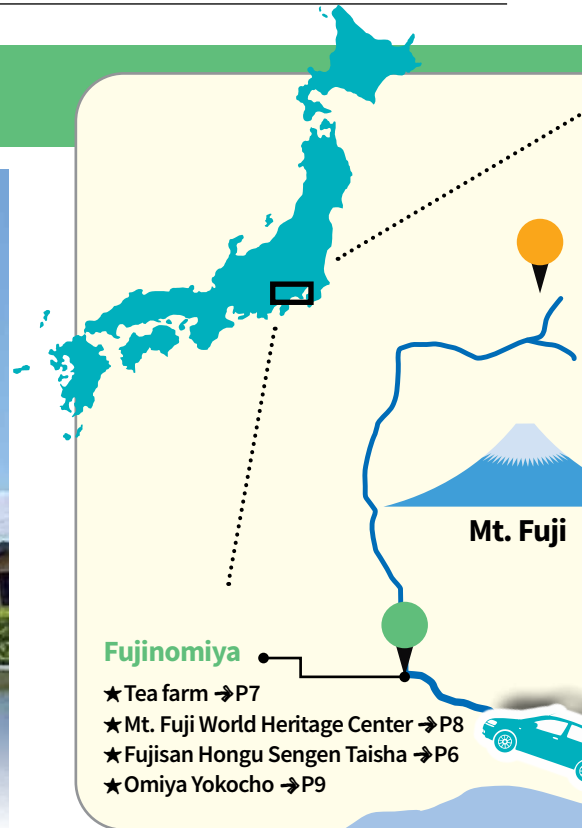
When I got out of the museum to see the inverted-cone-shaped museum once again, I felt the 3,776-meter-high symbol of Japan even closer to me.

– Takahiro Takiguchi

- **NOTE:** The museum is close to the Fujisan Hongu Sengen Jinja Shinto Shrine and so there is also a large vermilion torii gate at the entrance of the center.
- **LOCATION:** 5-12 Miyamachi, Fujinomiya City, Shizuoka Prefecture
- **HOURS:** Sept. – June, 9 a.m. – 5 p.m.; July and Aug., - 6 p.m. (closed: third Tuesday of the month)
- **TEL:** 0544-21-3776



WEBSITE



## Fujinomiya nourishes

Once we walked through the World Heritage Center in Fujinomiya...

our next stop was for lunch at Omiya Yokocho, a popular food yokocho alley near Sengen Taisha shrine.

This yokocho is a side street with several shops offering light foods like omusubi (rice balls), dango (rice cake), oshiruko (sweet red-bean soup), and most importantly, the local dish, Fujinomiya yakisoba (pan-fried noodles).



I was looking forward to trying this signature local noodle. It was on my wish list since it earned the Gold Grand Prix in the B1 Grand Prix 2006, a competition to pick the best local food in the country.

Near the entrance to the street was an official antenna shop of Fujinomiya Yakisoba Society, as if to welcome a "noodle guy" like me.

In addition to classic Fujinomiya yakisoba, they also offered red chili, green chili, and mixed chili yakisoba too.

Despite being a spicy food lover, I chose a non-spicy serving of the classic Fujinomiya yakisoba for 500 yen (about \$5.33) since this was my first time trying it. I wanted to know how the standard one would taste.

## Fuji fun facts

Japan's symbol mountain is a 100,000-year-old stratovolcano



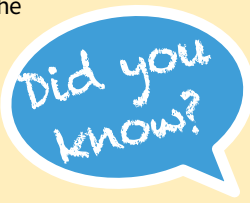
VIEW VIDEO!

Located on the border of Yamanashi and Shizuoka Prefecture, Mt. Fuji is Japan's highest mountain with an altitude of 3,776 meters.

Though it hasn't erupted since 1707, it is still considered an active volcano. That fact has not stopped over 200,000 yearly visitors seeking to hike up to the top of this iconic volcano during the hiking season from July through September.

Year-round, Mt. Fuji and the surrounding area are popular destinations for day trips and staycations. At the foot of Mt. Fuji are five lakes including Yamanakako, Kawaguchiko, Saiko, Shojiko and Motosuko, as well as the Oshino Hakkai (eight ponds) to enjoy beautiful views and crystal-clear water.

The majestic mountain is not only considered a sacred site, but also is a muse for countless artists and writers who have produced masterpieces dedicated to its beauty. In 2013, Mt. Fuji and its surrounding area were registered as a UNESCO World Heritage site inscribed as a "sacred place and source of artistic inspiration."



Here are some interesting facts about the symbol of the Land of the Rising Sun:

- Mt. Fuji is a stratovolcano, born about 100,000 years ago.
- Fuji is 3,775.63 meters (12,389 ft) tall; 1,200 square kilometers of footing area (equivalent to Okinawa Island (1,208.29 square kilometers)); and about 1,400 cubic kilometers of accumulation (equivalent to 17 years' worth of tap water usage in Japan (1385.5 cubic kilometers).)
- The lowest average temperature of the mountain peak is -18.5 degrees Celsius (-1.3 degrees Fahrenheit) in January, and its highest temperature is 6C (42.8F) in August.
- Fuji's main crater is 780 meters (2,560 feet) in diameter and 240 meters (790 feet) deep. A walk around the mountain top along the 3-kilometer trail takes about 1-1.5 hours to complete.
- In 2023, about 221,000 people hiked the trails to the peak of Mt. Fuji.
- There are four climbing routes to the mountain peak (available from July to early September.)
  - Yoshida Route: 7 kilometers (a 6-hour hike)
  - Subashiri Route: 7.5 kilometers (a 7-hour hike)
  - Gotemba Route: 11 kilometers (a 7.5-hour hike)
  - Fujinomiya Route: 5 kilometers (a 5-hour hike)

– Source: Fujiyama Navi (<https://www.fujiyama-navi.jp/>)

## TYPES OF YAKISOBA

### ★ Fujinomiya Yakisoba

Known for its chewy texture, Fujinomiya Yakisoba is arguably one of the most famous pan-fried noodles in Japan. Its origin dates to right around the time when flour became available after World War II thanks to Government Appropriation for Relief in Occupied Areas (GARIOA). It was a favorite among women who worked for yarn-making factories, according to Fujinomiya Yakisoba Society.



### ★ Yokote Yakisoba

This is a type of pan-fried noodle from Akita Prefecture, known for its straight noodles and straight noodles. Yokote Yakisoba is a type of pan-fried egg sunny-side-up with vegetables.





Photo by Takahiro Takiguchi

## Shizuoka hamburger chain Sawayaka worth the wait

On our way back from Fujinomiya and Fujiyoshida, we swung by sumiyaki (charcoal grill) restaurant Sawayaka. Learning that this chain is popular for hamburger steaks and that it is limited to Shizuoka Prefecture for quality control, I could feel my expectations growing. I was especially looking forward to trying their signature menu items with funny names like “genkotsu (knuckle)” and “onigiri (rice ball).”

When we arrived at the restaurant, however, we learned that we would need to wait 70 minutes. It was right around dinner time, and many customers were waiting at the door.

Although my initial instinct was just to drop the plan and go back to Tokyo, some folks in my group were adamant that we should stick to our original plan. So, we decided to take a number and wait. Luckily, we were able to check on the remaining time to wait on smartphones, so we killed time at BookOff, a secondhand store nearby.

When we were finally back at the restaurant and guided to a table, my stomach was growling. I could not wait any longer to place an order. Sawayaka’s menu offered many options for hamburger steak like “tedzukuri (hand-cooked),” “cheese,” “yokubari (greedy),” in addition to those mentioned above.

Though all of them looked enticing, I just went with the first one on the list, which happened to be “genkotsu” (1,250 yen, approx. \$8). I was too tired and hungry to give any more consideration but to couple it with an A set (rice and a drink for 517 yen more). The restaurant’s interior was warmly lit and comfortable, making it less painful to wait.

When my food was brought to the table, a server asked me to hold up a paper placemat. I followed the instructions not knowing what it was for. As soon as he began slicing my hamburger, meat juice began gushing out and sizzling against the placemat.

I could instantly feel my mouth watering. The table mat could have served as a drool bib as well. One bite was more than enough to get hooked. Cooked rare, the hamburger steak tasted exceptionally sweet and soft. When it was coupled with onion sauce, a Sawayaka signature, the flavor was taken to another level.

To be fair, I was exhausted and hungry at the time, so I could have eaten anything. However, this charcoal-grilled hamburger steak, which has been loved by the people of Shizuoka for almost 50 years, not only tasted good but also made even a first-time customer like me feel nostalgic as well.

By the time we finished the meal, it was already past 9 p.m. We had more than one hour drive back to Tokyo. But, I was glad I got to try Sawayaka’s hamburger steak.

Looking back at the dining experience, I will say with confidence that no trip to Shizuoka would be complete without a stop at a Sawayaka for a generous, juicy hamburger steak.

– Shoji Kudaka

## Fujinomiya’s yakisoba a ching noodle delight

I walked before spicing it up. I took a seat at a table in the middle of the yokocho with my coworkers. While I waited for my food, I sipped on Mt. Fuji spring water from a water spout in the center of the dining area.

It was lunchtime, and there were many other customers waiting by us. Hungry and anxious to dig in, I felt fortunate I only waited 10 minutes for my food to arrive.

With one bite, I was struck by the exceptional texture of the noodles. It was a textbook example of “mochi mochi men,” meaning pleasantly sticky and chewy noodles. It was fun to chomp on the noodles served with cabbage and green onion. Although the taste of its sauce was on the modest side, toppings such as dried sardine powder, dried pork fat and red-pickled ginger had me hooked. The sardine powder was especially working its magic on the flavor.

Washing the noodles down with Mt. Fuji’s fresh spring water felt like a luxury without spending too much.

– Shoji Kudaka

### Fujinomiya Yakisoba Society antenna shop

- GPS COORDINATES: 35.22497, 138.61018
- HOURS: 10 a.m. – 5 p.m. Open every day.



### ★ Namie Yakisoba

This is a signature food of Namie Cho (town) in Fukushima Prefecture. Its recipe is believed to have been invented about 50 years ago

to satisfy laborers with hearty meals. It typically features noodles three times thicker than regular ones, richly flavored sauce, pork and bean sprouts.

### ★ Sechiyaki

Recognized as a unique recipe of Gobo City in Wakayama Prefecture, Sechiyaki looks almost exactly like okonomiyaki. The difference is the noodles are grouped and coated with egg without using flour. The name is thought to be derived from the word “sechigau,” which means to “make a mess” or “bully” in Gobo dialect.



Photos courtesy of photoAC

Ice cream madness



When the group finished touring the Mt. Fuji World Heritage Museum in Shizuoka, we went off for lunch at Omiya Yokochi. Among the many yakisoba shops, there was Omiya Yokochi Puku-Ichi advertising a super cool Mt. Fuji shaped ice cream for 450 yen (about \$2.93). I wanted it. I was first in

line and immediately asked for the bright blue ice cream topped with a white scoop to look like Mt. Fuji.

I didn’t need lunch yet, but I did need that Mt. Fuji-shaped ice cream.

When I received my order, I was a bit disappointed with a lackluster clear cup with blue and white ice cream that did not resemble Mt. Fuji nor the shop’s advertisement at all. I felt like an upset five-year-old. To this day I can’t even recall the flavor of the ice cream. I just know it tasted blue.

Imagine my shock when Denisse walked over to the shop, ordered and received the very ice cream I wanted but didn’t get. I looked at her in envy as she licked away at her Mt. Fuji-looking ice cream cone. I was not happy. It was like I was a kid who got regular chicken nuggets when everyone else got dinosaur-shaped ones.

Not yet confident in my Japanese language skills to ask the staff to correct my order, I sat next to Denisse and ate my cold, blue ice cream in a basic cup.

– Luis Samayoa



WEBSITE

### Omiya Yokochi Puku-Ichi

- ADDRESS: 4-23 Miyacho, Fujinomiya, Shizuoka 418-0067
- HOURS: 10 a.m. - 5:30 p.m. daily



Photo by Denisse Rauda

### ★ Ota Yakisoba

Considered one of the three major yakisoba along with Fujinomiya and Yokote yakisoba, this type of pan-fried noodles is unique to Ota City in Gunma Prefecture. Although there is no strict definition of what Ota Yakisoba is, it is often recognized as “kuroi yakisoba” (black pan-fried noodles) because of its dark-colored sauce. Ota Tourist Association notes that it arguably has its origin in Yokote Yakisoba, which was introduced thanks to laborers from Akiba Prefecture.



To be fair, I was exhausted and hungry at the time, so I could have eaten anything. However, this charcoal-grilled hamburger steak, which has been loved by the people of Shizuoka for almost 50 years, not only tasted good but also made even a first-time customer like me feel nostalgic as well.

By the time we finished the meal, it was already past 9 p.m. We had more than one hour drive back to Tokyo. But, I was glad I got to try Sawayaka’s hamburger steak.

Looking back at the dining experience, I will say with confidence that no trip to Shizuoka would be complete without a stop at a Sawayaka for a generous, juicy hamburger steak.

– Shoji Kudaka

### Sumiyaki Restaurant Sawayaka (Gotemba Interchange branch)

- GPS COORDINATES: 35.300791, 138.938847
- HOURS: 10:45 a.m. – 11 p.m. (last order needs placed by 10 p.m., opens at 10:30 a.m. on Saturdays, Sundays, and holidays) \*Subject to change during New Year’s holidays, Golden Week, and Obon period)
- \*Closed on Dec. 31 and Jan. 1
- \*Numbered tickets issued starting at 9:30 a.m.

SEE YAMANASHI ON PAGE 10

# YAMANASHI

## Lake Kawaguchi a beautiful spot year-round

Yamanashi Prefecture's Fuji Five Lakes are home to impressive landscapes including a great view of Mount Fuji.

Among the five, Lake Kawaguchi is the most popular and busiest. The lake is surrounded by many hotels and activities for visitors. Here you'll find impressive shrines, delicious

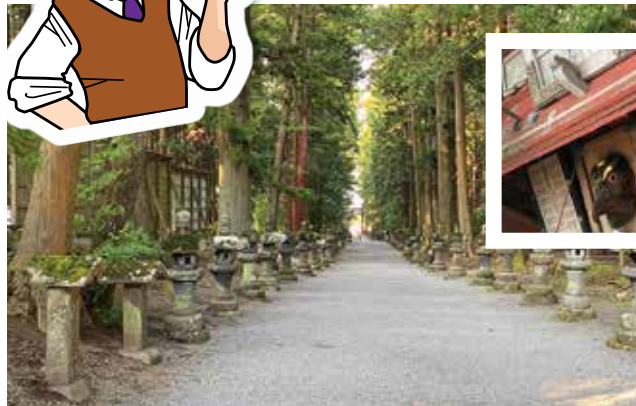
local produce and more.

In the spring, visitors come for the cherry blossoms, in the summer for the fragrant lavender and in the fall for the colorful foliage.

Don't forget to sample (or cook) the local dish hotou. This miso-based broth soup features flat and thick noodles, a variety of meat options, and chunks of hearty local vegetables like pumpkin, green onions and mushrooms.

Below is only a sample of all the beautiful spots to see while you're in Yamanashi.

— Takahiro Takiguchi



Kitaguchihongu Fuji Sengen Jinja Photos by Takahiro Takiguchi



Hotou Photo by Shoji Kudaka



Oishi Park Photo by Denisse Rauda

### Things to know

■ **LOCATION:** Around Nashikawa River, Lake Kawaguchi, Fuji Kawaguchiko Town, Yamanashi Pref. (Within a 2-hour drive from most of U.S. military bases in the Kanto Plain; 30-minute drive from Camp Fuji).

## Enjoy traditional Indigo-dyeing near scenic Fuji Lake



Photos by Takahiro Takiguchi

■ **LOCATION:** 3250-3 Funatsu, Fuji-Kawaguchiko Town, Minami Tsuru-gun, Yamanashi Prefecture  
■ **HOURS:** 9 a.m. – 5 p.m.  
■ **TEL:** 050-6882-5580



WEBSITE

Lake Kawaguchi, one of Fuji's Five Lakes, is a popular destination for hiking, entertainment and activities.

Near the scenic lake, Art Cycle, a hand-cloth-dyeing workshop, offers a hands-on Aizome Japanese indigo-dyeing experience. Known for its beauty and durability, Aizome indigo dyeing is one of the traditional crafts that has captivated Japanese culture for centuries.

When I visited the tiny wooden studio to join a beginner-friendly, 60-minute indigo-dyeing workshop, an instructor welcomed me and showed me dozens of samples of dyed T-shirts, scarves, towels, pouches and caps.

The instructor encouraged me, saying I could dye virtually any type of clothing I chose and to use different shibori tie-dyeing techniques to produce a unique product of my own.

While various items, techniques and indigo liquids were available at the studio, I decided to dye a T-shirt using the so-called "murakumo (cluster of clouds) shibori" tie-dyeing method with lighter-hued indigo liquid.

The instructor brought me a plain white T-shirt and asked me to wet it with tap water before spreading it on the table to apply the murakumo shibori.

When I spread out the wet T-shirt on the table, the instructor demonstrated the murakumo shibori. She crumpled the wet shirt and made countless wrinkles with her hands, then crunched it with all her strength into a small cylinder shape.



VIEW VIDEO!

"In this way, only the surface of the cylinder-shaped shirt can be contacted and dyed blue in the tank, and the other part of the shirt remains undyed in white," the instructor said.

Following her instruction and with her aid, I tried to do the same and finally crunched my T-shirt into a cylinder shape then firmly tied it up at the three points with linen strings.

After confirming the T-shirt was firmly tied up, the instructor allowed me to dip it into a large tank of light-hued indigo liquid.

I kept holding the shirt while swinging it in the tank to apply the liquid to the entire shirt for a couple of minutes until the instructor asked me to remove it.

I was so excited when I spread it out and saw the shirt was perfectly dyed and adorned with deep blue hues and intricate patterns. According to the instructor, indigo liquid oxidizes when it is exposed to oxygen and percolates the fabric.

Next, I rinsed out the excess indigo dye and set my shirt out to hand dry.

"There are no failures in the art of Aizome indigo-dyeing, and your T-shirt looks beautiful with your own patterns

and hues," the instructor said while looking at the freshly dyed T-shirt.

I was glad that a clumsy person like me could dye a whole T-shirt so easily, quickly and beautifully. The success of my first attempt led me to making a second shirt for my wife, this time using the tsutsumaki (wrapping with a pipe) shibori pattern.

Both shirts came out great and the hour-long workshop was a good way to get a hands-on experience with this vibrant Japanese craft.

— Takahiro Takiguchi





Photos by Shoji Kudaka

# Hearty hotou: Getting reacquainted with Yamanashi's signature noodles

**H**otou is a hot pot noodle dish unique to Japan's Yamanashi Prefecture dating back to the Heian Period (794-1185).

I encountered this local dish when I traveled around Mt. Fuji with my parents about 15 years ago. We fell in love with the delicious noodles, and it became our family tradition to cook it in our own way.

So, when I learned there was a hotou workshop on how to make it, I knew I had to take it and learn the authentic recipe.

I was looking forward to learning everything from kneading noodles to making the broth.

The workshop was held at Fujiya, a small restaurant about a 10-minute drive from Lake Kawaguchi. To begin, Ms. Miura, the workshop instructor, and I sat in the tatami room of Fujiya to go over the recipe.

"It takes only flour and water to make hotou noodles. Our restaurant uses hard flour, while all-purpose flour is common for home cooking," Miura said, adding that the noodles I would be making in the class were meant to have a relatively hard texture.

As a fan of chewy noodles, my expectations were soaring. The first step was to mix 100 grams of flour and 50 cc of water. Using my fingers like a whisk, I quickly moved my hand in a circle until a dough started to form. After, it was time to knead the dough.

According to Miura, kneading fast and strong was key to getting it right. The next step was to spread the dough on a thin sheet with a rolling pin.

"The dough will be stretched into a circle or an oval," Miura said. "This is okay either way. Don't fold it, just keep on pressing on the same surface."

I tried my best to form a perfect circle of dough as if forming the base of a pizza. The more I kneaded, however, the dough morphed into an elongated shape, like a belt.

Good thing the shape didn't matter much.

The final step was to slice it into noodles. Before I did, I was supposed to fold the dough in three and slice it. Since my dough was too long, I had to fold it four times. I was concerned

about the unusual shape of my dough, but Miura said not to worry.

"The edge of the dough may result in an oddly shaped noodle, but it will taste especially great," she said.

After slicing, I carefully placed my noodles into a bowl, treating them like my babies. Then, it was time to let my noodles bathe in miso-based broth along with squash, carrots, leeks, and other vegetables.

After all the physical labor, it was finally time to try the final product. The gentle taste of the broth went very well with the chewy noodles and veggies. Enjoying the hotou brought back memories of my first encounter 15 years ago.

Off to the side on my table were six small jars of Yamanashi Prefecture's signature seasoning, suridane. These spicy seasonings included togarashi (chili) powder magma and shibikara (electrifyingly spicy).

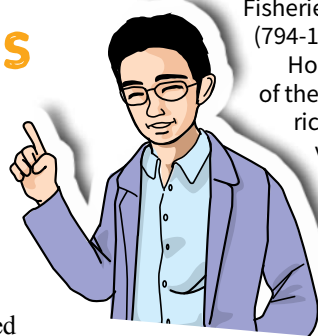
I started with a "basic" one, trying to be cautious. One spoonful of miso soup sprinkled with the basic suridane later, I was hooked.

The red chili powder paired with bonito flakes, sesame, garlic, and many more spices created a complex taste that is hard to describe. I ended up trying all the types of suridane, making my soup super red hot and so delicious. Even after the noodles were gone, I couldn't stop sampling the suridane with the remaining broth.

After eating, I am sure I was sweating like the guests on the YouTube show "Hot Ones." However, unlike those celebrities, who sweat and start swearing once they can't eat their spicy wings anymore, suridane somehow made me smile and want to keep eating more. Fortunately, I could score a bottle of suridane as a souvenir to try at home.

In total, I spent about an hour and a half at Fujiya working on the hotou. The pace of the workshop was partially self-led, so if you're looking for a class where the instructor is guiding you every step, this is not it. Although the focus of the workshop was mostly on the noodles and not the broth, I still enjoyed the process and working on it at my own speed.

- Shoji Kudaka



### ★ Hotou

According to the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (MAFF), hotou dates back to the Heian Period (794-1185) and originated in Yamanashi Prefecture.

Hotou was a staple in the mountainous areas of the prefecture since it was difficult to cultivate rice there, according to MAFF. The recipe was valued as it didn't take long to cook, and the noodle dish went very well with vegetables and meats, offering great nutritional value. Making the thick noodles in broth was even an important skill for women to learn in preparation for marriage.

As for why the noodle dish is called "hotou," one theory suggests that the name was after Lord Takeda Shingen (1521-1573) cut ingredients with his "hotou" (treasured sword).

### ★ Suridane

This spicy and versatile condiment appeared in the Fujiyoshida area during the Edo Era (1603-1868). Suridane is typically made of red chili, sesame, sansho (zanthoxyli fructus), and other spices.



VIEW VIDEO!



**FUJIYA**  
■ GPS COORDINATES: 35.492559, 138.767934  
■ HOURS: 10 a.m. - 5 p.m.  
\*Closes on an irregular basis  
\*Reservation required.



RESERVATIONS

SEE MORE YAMANASHI ON PAGE 12



VIDEO LESSON

Is this matcha?  
"korewa matcha desuka?"



VIDEO LESSON

I want to buy this.  
"kore wo kudasai."



VIDEO LESSON

Cheers!  
"Kanpai!" "Karii!" "Geonbae!"  
(Japanese) (Okinawan) (Korean)



VIDEO LESSON

I'm full!  
"Onaka ippai desu!"

# YAMANASHI



Photo by Denisse Rauda



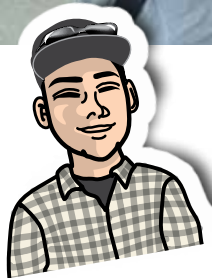
Photo by Takahiro Takiguchi



Photo by Takahiro Takiguchi



Photo by Luis Samayoa



## Be prepared for crowds at Oshino Hakkai's prized ponds

Oshino Hakkai in Yamanashi Prefecture is known for its ponds, and views of Mt. Fuji.

The ponds' water is fed from snow melted from Mt. Fuji. As the snow on the famous mountain melts, it is filtered through porous lava layers underground, creating crystal-clear pure spring water we can drink from.

This was my first visit to Oshino Hakkai, so I did some research before going. I found lots of beautiful pictures of Mt. Fuji, a thatched-roof house and crystal-clear ponds. It looked amazing online with vibrant colors and not too many people! But one thing I have learned about Japan since living here is how overhyped the expectations are compared to reality.

As we arrived to Oshino Hakkai, I was pleased to find parking nearby! They use the honor system for payment, so bring some yen coins. Walking near the first pond, I saw a beautiful reflection of the old house and Mt. Fuji and snapped a quick photo. As soon as I walked around,

I immediately saw tour groups in the gift shops by the second pond. It was very crowded even though it was late afternoon. When we arrived, the workshops and the museum were already closed, so our trip was cut a bit short.

I visited the gift shops first to browse around and get a feel for the place. Inside there were lots of gifts, ranging from magnets and photos to even alcohol. It's not a big area, but overall, it's a cool place to find unique gifts from the region. They also had a small soft serve ice cream shop inside. Some of the flavors were peach, vanilla, matcha, strawberry and ramune soda. I decided to go with vanilla since I already had so many sugary snacks during the trip. As I licked away at my cone, I watched in amusement as people took selfies.

Outside the gift shop, they have a small water fountain where you can get a taste of Mt. Fuji. Denisse managed to fill a bottle of water up while Mr. Takahiro drank from the cup. I also noticed fish swimming in some of the ponds. Even

amongst the crowds, it was a very peaceful place to stop by and browse.

Near the end of our stay, we walked around as a group for a while, enjoying the atmosphere. From my observation, the waters are not as blue as online and it was crowded. My expectation was cyan blue waters and a beautiful orange sunset sky, but all I got was clear waters and average lighting. Still, it was a nice place to visit if you're nearby or planning a trip. But be prepared for large crowds.

– Luis Samayoa



VIEW VIDEO!



INSTAGRAM



WEBSITE

- ADDRESS: Shibokusa, Oshino, Minamitsuru District, Yamanashi 401-0511
- MUSEUM: Hannoki Bayashi Shiryokan
- HOURS: 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Admission is 300 yen a person.



Photo by Luis Samayoa

## Flowers, Fuji and more at Oishi Park and Kawaguchiko Natural Living Center



When traveling, sometimes things don't always go according to plan. But hey, when in Rome, drink wine. So, when near Mt. Fuji, why not eat ice cream by a flower garden?

Originally Denisse and I planned to mountain bike near Fuji, but commute time and lunch cut our activity time short. With the other writers off to experience some local activities, we headed to Oishi Park at the edge of Lake Kawaguchi for the stunning views and sprawling garden.

Once we arrived, the first thing that caught my attention was the beautiful lake and, of course, Fuji. This attraction, while crowded for a Wednesday afternoon, was a picture-perfect spot. Tourists were trying to get the perfect photo along the garden's many pathways. Though it was a little claustrophobic, the sights were incredibly beautiful.

The garden at Oishi Park featured hundreds of roses of many different varieties. There were also bunches of lavender just days away from blooming. A gazebo covered in vines and roses was a central point in the garden and a stunning frame for Mt. Fuji behind it.

A walk around the park only took about 15 minutes, but it also has a green house, and inside the Kawaguchiko Natural Living Center is a souvenir shop and a classroom for cooking and craft workshops. Near the parking lot, there are also vendors selling snacks and local produce.

The souvenir shop has many garden and Mt. Fuji-related souvenirs. But most importantly, it sells soft serve ice cream cones in flavors like grape, lavender, peach, rose and more. We decided a walk along the garden earned us another ice cream break.

I was very excited to try the ice cream here and did not let the disappointment of the Fuji ice cream from earlier discourage me



Photo by Denisse Rauda



Main torii gate Photos by Takahiro Takiguchi

## Kitaguchihongu Fuji Sengen Jinja a boundary between mount's holy grounds, secular world



The Land of the Rising Sun is home to 81,000 Shinto shrines, outnumbering its nearly 50,000 convenience stores.

Shinto is Japan's indigenous animistic religious practice in which spirits of nature, such as the sun, mountains and other landforms, or people (usually, the deceased) are worshipped as gods. Shrines are considered houses for those gods.

You may have already visited some popular shrines like Meiji Jingu in Tokyo, Fushimi Inari in Kyoto, or Tsurugao-ka Hachimangu in Kamakura, as they are top spots for visitors. Aside from their religious functions, the colorful facades, large torii gates and unique architecture create the perfect back drop for great travel photos.

Located near Mount Fuji, Kitaguchihongu Fuji Sengen Jinja by Lake Kawaguchi is one of the nation's largest forest shrines spanning 99,000-square-meters. Ditch the crowds to this quiet place tucked into a corner of Fuji's surrounding landscape, reconnect with nature and experience its unworldly calm.

The large torii gate, towering cedar trees and stoic stone lanterns leading up to the shrine were overwhelming. The shrine is one of those dedicated

to Mt. Fuji, as "sengen" is related to Shinto animistic worship to it and other majestic volcanoes.

Kitaguchihongu Fuji Sengen Jinja was constructed in the year 788, but its torii gate was there long before as a symbol of the boundary between Fuji's holy grounds and the secular world, according to shrine legend.

As a sign of respect, I bowed once before the large torii gate and passed through it on the side, yielding to the deity who is supposed to walk through the torii in the center.

The shrine is home to very large cedar trees which, according to sign boards on the grounds, were said to be upwards of 1,000 years old.

The sprawling grounds of the shrine contain many buildings including two housing guardian deity statues, a stage for Kagura (a sacred Shinto performance), a main shrine hall and a temizusha fountain sheltered by a 300-year-old wooden building.

I purified myself at the temizusha fountain by taking a ladle with water and rinsing both hands and mouth before walking up to the impressive main shrine hall, where I prayed for a successful trip with my coworkers. I followed Shinto tradition, bowing once and tossing a coin into the offering box, bowing deeply twice and clapping my hands twice, making the wish, then bowing deeply one more time.

To the right of the shrine hall, was a torii gate marking the start of the Yoshida Trail that, after a multiple hour, tenuous hike, will take you to the peak of Mt. Fuji. There were about 10 tiny red shrines lined up along the path on one side and red banners donated by worshippers along the left.

Climbers who start at this trail stop at the



One-thousand-years-old cedar tree

shrine to purify their body and mind before making the steep climb to the top. Shizuoka Prefecture, on the other side of the mountain, also has a similar trail entrance at the Fujisan Hongu Sengen Shrine for those using the Fujinomiya Trail to make the journey up.

Although I didn't pass through the torii gate and walk any further, I enjoyed taking deep breaths to inhale the extremely refreshing air there, reminding me of the countless pilgrims who dropped by the shrine to offer their prayers for thousands of years.

– Takahiro Takiguchi



VIEW VIDEO!



WEBSITE

LOCATION: Around Nashikawa River, Lake Kawaguchi, Fuji Kawaguchiko Town, Yamanashi Pref.  
TEL: 0555-72-3168

from getting one at Oishi Park.

The line was long, but the wait was worth it. I had my mind set on a matcha-peach swirl soft serve cone for 500 yen. The other flavors, except for the lavender one since that reminds me of laundry detergent, seemed good. But I stuck to my gut. Denisse, unphased by the possibility of soapy ice cream, chose the lavender-rose swirl soft serve.

This time, I was not disappointed! The delicious matcha soft serve fused well with the juicy peach flavor. Denisse liked her ice cream and said it wasn't soapy at all — I had to take her word on it. Either way, the ice cream was refreshing, our cones both looked as advertised and the treats were only made better by the view of Lake Kawaguchi and Mt. Fuji.

If you don't mind the crowds and waiting in line for the interesting floral flavors, Oishi Park and its stunning surroundings are worth a visit.

– Luis Samayoa

ADDRESS: 2585 Oishi, 富士河口湖町 Fujikawaguchiko, Minamitsuru District, Yamanashi 401-0305  
HOURS: 9 a.m. to 5:15 p.m. daily  
PAYMENTS: They accept yen and credit cards.

\*There is free parking, but spaces can fill up fast.



WEBSITE

Don't miss the tasty ice cream while traveling Japan



I've been in Japan a long time – nearly a decade. So, I know a thing or two about traveling around the country. And, as someone with an insatiable sweet tooth, one of my favorite food groups is dessert.

No matter where you go or what tourist trap you find yourself in around this beautiful country, you're sure to find some interesting desserts and, in particular, ice cream.

So, on this trip with the writing team, when I saw the Fuji ice cream for 450 yen (about \$2.93) at Fujinomiya's Omiya Yokocho food alley, I knew I had to have it. I'm not sure what Luis did wrong when ordering at the Puku-ichi counter, but I pointed at the picture and the lady had my Fuji cone in my hand in seconds.

The ice cream flavor was ramune soda, which tastes sort of like a mix of cream soda and lemonade. It wasn't bad, but the ice cream was more for a visual delight than a tasty one. Or maybe it was actually really delicious, but my writer with the sad cup of ice cream sitting next to me shooting daggers

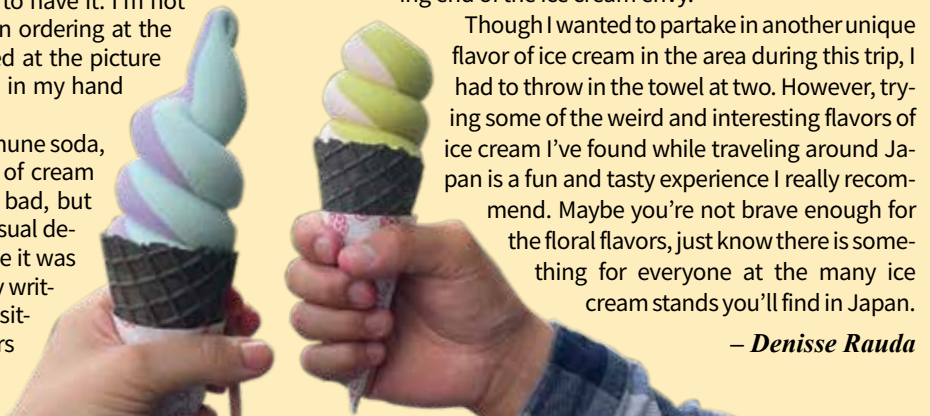
my way could've had something to do with it. Either way, I'd say if you can get the right one, the Fuji cone is cute and not so expensive for a novelty item.

A couple of hours later, o'er on the other side of Fuji at Oishi Park next to Kawaguchiko, I made sure to grab a lavender-rose swirl soft serve for 500 yen — a risky choice that could've easily been a laundry detergent disaster. I was pleasantly surprised that both lavender and rose could taste so sweet and creamy. This time around, Luis was happy with his matcha-peach swirl soft serve, so I was not on the receiving end of the ice cream envy.

Though I wanted to partake in another unique flavor of ice cream in the area during this trip, I had to throw in the towel at two. However, trying some of the weird and interesting flavors of ice cream I've found while traveling around Japan is a fun and tasty experience I really recommend. Maybe you're not brave enough for the floral flavors, just know there is something for everyone at the many ice cream stands you'll find in Japan.

– Denisse Rauda

Photo by Denisse Rauda



# Naha Giant Tug-of-War Festival returns Oct. 13

STORY AND PHOTO BY SHOJI KUDAKA, STRIPES OKINAWA

One of Okinawa's big festivals, the Naha Giant Tug-of-War, will be held this year on Oct. 13.

This is one of Naha's three major festivals along with the Naha Dragon Boat Race and Shurijo Castle Festival. According to organizers, this event usually draws

a crowd of 270,000 or more. This is the second year it's been back at full capacity after restrictions and cancellations during the COVID-19 pandemic. Last year, an impressive 275,000 participants and spectators welcomed the event back to its full glory.

Route 58, arguably the busiest street in Okinawa, will be the stage for this big-time game. The lead up to the war includes festivities to

entertain you and your family.

Starting at 11:30 a.m., a procession of locals will march down Kokusai Street with vertical banners to open the event. You can also enjoy karate demonstrations and firecrackers.

At 2:30 p.m., as the procession reaches Route 58, the main event

will commence.

Before the competition can begin, the two teams participating work together to join the ropes according to tradition. Participants are divided into an east and west team and during the joining of the giant, 5-ft diameter rope, smaller ropes are attached to nudge it into the right position. Once that is accomplished, an 805-lb bar joins the ropes at the center.

The two ropes combined measure 650 feet in length and weigh about 40 tons, requiring about 15,000 people to pull and carry it.

Whichever side you choose, you will most likely be surrounded by people of various backgrounds; Okinawans, those from mainland Japan, Americans, tourists from Asian countries, and more. Once working side-by-side and chanting "Haaiya," where you come from will not matter.

The Naha Tug-of-War is thought to have originally started in the 15th century during the days of the Ryukyu Kingdom (1429 – 1879). You'll see many homages to the history throughout the event, including labarum carries dressed in traditional attire and locals dressed like Okinawa's historical figures.

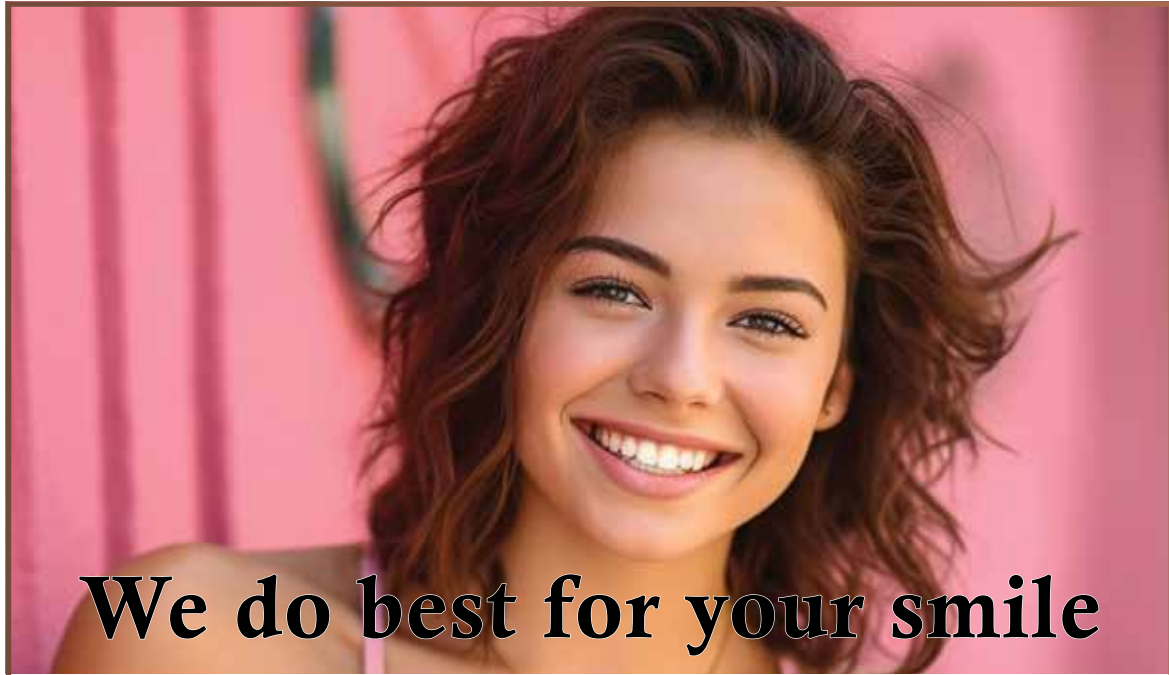
The tug-of-war itself can be a heated competition. Sometimes, it takes almost half an hour to pick a winner. But a victory is not the only thing that motivates people toward the game.

According to organizers, people wish for peace, prosperity, health, and success as they pull the giant rope. Once the game is over, a significant portion of the rope will be

cut into pieces, which participants can take as good luck charms.

The action-packed day at the tug of war offers a glimpse into the past, while also allowing you to feel the energy of the crowd in the present and to seek good luck for the future. You don't want to miss this fun Okinawa event!

kudaka.shoji@stripes.com

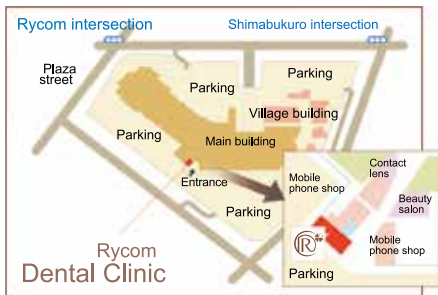


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### Things to know

- DATE:** Oct. 13 (Sun.)
- LOCATION:** Kumoji Intersection on Route 58
- GPS COORDINATES:** sN 26.215820, E 127.678458
- SCHEDULE OF EVENT:**
  - 11:30 a.m. - 2 p.m. Parade on Kokusai Street
  - 2:30 p.m. - 7 p.m. Route 58 between Matsuyama and Izumizaki intersections is closed to vehicles. Ceremony, performances and joining of the rope start around 4 p.m.
- \*A tour is currently available from MCCS.

MCCS Tours+  
MCCS Tours+ website  
(Naha Giant Tug-of-War info)



\* There will also be Naha Otsunahiki Matsuri, a festival at Onoyama Athletic Park (26.204450, 127.676153) from Oct. 12 - Oct. 14 between 11 a.m. and 9 p.m. featuring live music, fireworks, and more.



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# Stripes Sports Trivia

When it comes to college football mascots, Huskies are one of the most common in the country. These majestic dogs, known for their unique eyes and thick, furry coats, can often be seen patrolling the sideline of the teams they represent. On New Year's Day 2013, one Huskies program fell in the Orange Bowl to a Florida State squad that had a not-quite-yet 'Famous Jameis' riding the pine. Can you name the underdog program?

**Answer**

Northern Illinois University

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### DID YOU KNOW?

The entrance to traditional Japanese houses are usually built higher than ground level by about six inches, so you can take off your shoes before entering. If you are invited to a Japanese house, be sure to wear your clean socks, preferably the ones without holes, so you can take off your shoes without making your feet the talk of the party. Slippers can be used on the floors, but make sure you take them off when you enter a tatami room.

Kanji of the week

港

Minato/koo (port)

## Language Lesson

It's scary.

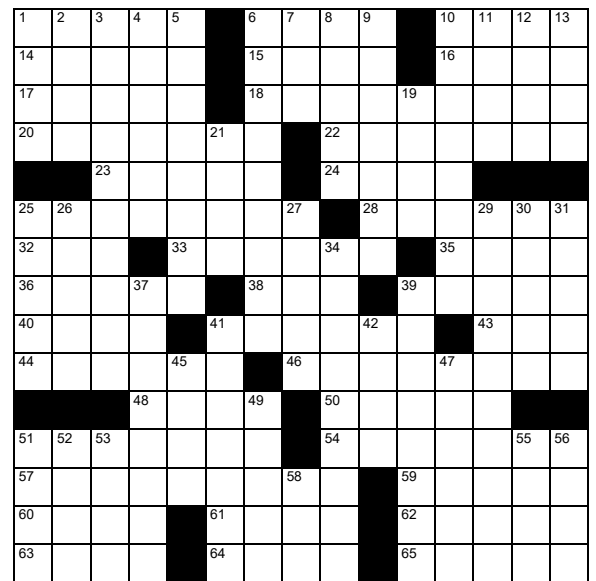
Kowai desu.

## Crossword

by Margie E. Burke

### ACROSS

- 1 Like mud, in an idiom
- 6 Can't stand
- 10 Takes badly?
- 14 Lustrous fiber
- 15 "A Prayer for \_\_\_ Meany"
- 16 Race track shape
- 17 Jason Bateman series
- 18 Ritzy apartment
- 20 Golf course freebies
- 22 Like tidy beards
- 23 Dunce cap shaped
- 24 Ump's call
- 25 Umbrella pelter
- 28 Dummy
- 32 Sixth sense, briefly
- 33 Current fashion
- 35 Antler prong
- 36 Map feature
- 38 Stinky, for one
- 39 48th U.S. VP
- 40 Oz visitor
- 41 Viking serf
- 43 Large wine cask
- 44 Foul odor
- 46 Team in black and gold
- 48 Active type
- 50 Type in
- 51 Substitute for
- 54 Title for Gandhi
- 57 Unoccupied
- 59 Burger topping
- 60 Rodeo critter
- 61 Hold in check
- 62 Send payment
- 63 "Trick" joint
- 64 List anagram
- 65 One of the Astaires



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- 3 Free from bondage
- 4 House cooler, for short
- 5 Ignite again
- 6 Sidewalk game
- 7 Leave dumb-struck
- 8 Campground sights
- 9 Race participant
- 10 Sleeping car feature
- 11 Egg, biologically
- 12 It may be stolen
- 13 Toy with runners
- 19 Platter player
- 21 Milan money, once
- 25 Musical intervals
- 26 Fancy tie
- 27 Anjou and Bartlett
- 29 Cold season
- 30 Run up, as expenses

- 31 Most new drivers
- 34 Witness account
- 37 Like some batteries
- 39 Overabundance
- 41 Ocasek's band
- 42 Songstress Horne
- 45 Snowman's eyes
- 47 Tilted
- 49 Billy Idol's "\_\_\_ Yell"
- 51 Billiards need
- 52 Hunter of fiction
- 53 Whitish
- 55 Work like a dog
- 56 Initial stake
- 58 52, in old Rome

### Answers to Previous Crossword:

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

## SUDOKU

Edited by Margie E. Burke

Difficulty: Medium

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

### 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:

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

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# 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 watching. (“tsukimi” = moon watching; “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
  - “sanma” = local mackerel
  - “shiitake” = shiitake mushrooms
  - “shinmai” = the year's new rice
  - “budo” = grapes
  - “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.