

Stranger in a Strange Land

Stephen Welch

Stranger in a Strange Land is the title of a book by science fiction author Robert Heinlein. In the book, an alien named Mike comes to Earth and meets up with a group of people who befriend him. During the course of the book, the alien learns about different human traits such as laughter and sadness. In some ways, I can relate to Mike after stepping off that plane over nine months ago, finding myself in a strange world without really knowing anyone, no friends or family. I can still remember riding on the bus from Narita airport down to Shinjuku being both amazed and terrified at the numerous signs filled with an almost strange pictograph-like language which I couldn't read. Even the hotel room seemed different. I remember looking at the odd electric water kettle in my room thinking to myself, "What would people need this for? Is there a constant need for hot, boiling water in Japan?" Actually yeah, apparently there is.

But of course, like Mike in his parallel story, I gradually started getting accustomed to Japanese life. I too befriended a group of people, meaning I was no longer a stranger, and yet, I still continued to find myself in a strange land. However, one day, several months after I arrived, I was walking down the street. As I passed by, I remember looking at a woman and a child playing in their driveway. That image triggered something in my brain: I had seen this before. A feeling of déjà-vu. Then it slowly began to dawn on me that I had seen this scene before back in my



Photo: NASA Marshall Space Flight Center

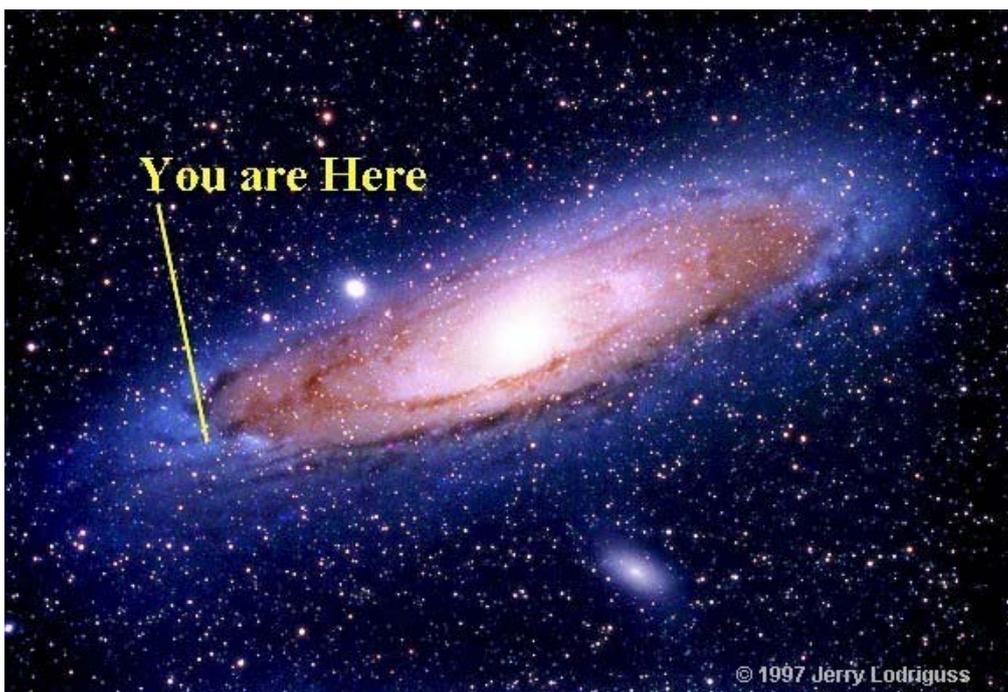
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country, in the United States. I noticed that the cars were a bit smaller, but they were still cars. The food was different, but it was still food. The people looked different, but they were still people. Even as I slowly began to understand Japanese more, the language was different, but the conversations were the same. “*Senban doko ni ikimashita ka? Nani ga tabemashita ka? Sō desu ka?*” “Where did you go last night? What did you eat? Oh really!” The strange land became less strange.



After speaking with a friend who had lived here for many years, he also agreed. He described it as a different coat of paint. All over the world people eat, they drink, they sleep, they have different forms of entertainment, they have different religions and customs, but the fact is that they all have these facets of humanity just with a different coat of paint. Because summer is coming up, it also means that many friends will be returning to their home countries while a new set of Jets will be arriving at the end of July. They will all come in as strangers in a strange land. Of course, I hope they enjoy all the different foods, sights, sounds, and language. But at the same time, I also hope that they come to learn the underlying connections between their country and Japan, or between any two countries! If there is an important lesson that I have learned, it is this lesson.



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Chocolate Conquers All in a Japanese Valentine's Day

Denise Schlickbernd

Perhaps you've noticed it at your neighborhood grocer and your city's department stores. Perhaps you've seen the enormous displays with poster boards a-glisten and candy molds, gourmet candies, and most tell-tale of all, the sea of red, pink, and more chocolate than the human mind should be capable of comprehending. Yes, Valentine's Day is here!

But ladies, before you get too carried away in sweet, sweet dreams of flowers, cards, and chocolates, beware: Just as it has with Halloween and Christmas, Japan has put its own unique touch on the holiday, and this time, it's the women who do all the gift-giving. Here, the burden of Valentine's Day falls on the female half of the population, and the winners in this exchange are their husbands, boyfriends, fathers, bosses, and coworkers. Even students are not exempt from this holiday as girls take the chance to make their feelings known to the boy they like. This can often result in particularly popular boys going home at the end of the day with enough chocolate to feed an army, while the more unfortunate may end the day with nothing at all.

And for this, we have the Japanese marketing machine to thank. How exactly did it happen this way? According to Millie Creighton, an anthropology professor at the University of British Columbia, it started with a simply mistranslation. The executive of a Japanese chocolate company had gone to Europe and seen the festivities, but an error (conveniently?) led him to believe that the giving was from women to the men. The initial advertisements that began in the 1960s touted Valentine's Day as a way for women to express both their love and their individuality by following this Western custom of giving chocolates.

From just a simple declaration of love, 50 years later there are several kinds of chocolate women give. Most prized of all is *honmei choko* (本命チョコ), "true feeling chocolate," which a woman might give to a guy for whom she has romantic feelings. The recipient might be a boyfriend or husband, but it also might be someone whom she has been admiring from afar,



Hint: If it looks like it took countless hours to make it by hand, it just might be *honmei choko*.

(Photo: YAMASHITAS)

waiting for Valentine's Day to confess her feelings in the form of chocolate. And since these represent "true feelings," they can be no simple affair; these chocolates can run into thousands of yen for a small box, or be an elaborate home-made confectionary event that took hours (and, of course, plenty of yen) to create.



Exhibit B: *Giri choko*. Hey, free candy!
 (Photo: 藤浪剛士/TFujinami)

Next is *giri choko* (義理チョコ), i.e. obligation chocolate. Typical recipients are male acquaintances to whom the woman feels no particular romantic attachment as well as co-workers and bosses originally to express general gratitude for assistance and cooperation (see: *oseibō* gifts, *ochūgen* gifts), but basically, this is the chocolate you give because it's a social nicety. These simpler gifts might not be Godiva, but for the boys and men with plenty of female co-workers, friends, or classmates, it's still a chance to rake in the goodies.—Unless, of course, the

gift is not *giri choko*, but instead *chō-giri choko* (超義理チョコ), “super obligation chocolate” for people that the giver doesn't really want to give anything to but has to anyway. The single, lone piece of 7-11 brand chocolate could be a tell-tale sign.

The list doesn't end there, of course. *Tomo choko* (友チョコ) is a tasty sign of friendship, but typically between girls or women. Teenagers and young adults are the ones enthusiastically (at least, according to the chocolate makers) taking up this relatively new practice, much to the happiness of confectionery companies hoping to continue their chocolate sales in spite of a declining population.

And for the women out there, especially those who may be used to a guys-give-the-gifts Valentine's Day as practiced in many European and English-speaking countries, who think this whole scheme is rotten, there is some consolation. Never to let an opportunity for marketing to slip their hands, in 1980 the National Confectionery Industry Association began promoting



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Chocolate fun fact #82: Once you melt it down into a new shape, no one can tell that it was leftover Christmas chocolate you used to make someone's Valentine's Day goodies.

March 14th as White Day, the specially-designated day for men, especially those who received chocolates on February 14th, to give gifts to women in return. Originally this gift category began as candy and, less successfully, marshmallows, but a 21st Century White Day can also mean gifts of cookies, accessories, and even lingerie (not given, one can only hope, by co-workers).

But for those women who don't want to wait a whole month to get their share, there may be a glimmer of hope. In 2008, Morinaga & Company (who claim to be the company responsible for Valentine's Day in Japan in the first place) began an advertising campaign to convince guys to give chocolate to women; this would be *gyaku choko* (逆チョコ), "reverse chocolate". Time will tell if the male population can be convinced to dish out the yen for this, but Japanese chocolate-making companies (and maybe a few girls and women) are keeping their fingers crossed that it might be so. If past advertising campaigns are any indication, Japanese women may have something to celebrate every February 14th not too many years from now (On the other hand, though, one has to wonder if this *gyaku choko* campaign for Valentine's Day will lead to some kind of *Gyaku White Day* in March. Marketing departments can only hope...). All this led to sales to the tune of ¥37 billion in 2010, and higher sales are expected this year since the 14th falls on a weekday for the first time since 2009.

It's easy to scoff at the whole affair as over-commercialized ritual (especially if you happen to be female), but then again, the same can be said for Valentine's Day in many of our home countries. The average Japanese woman will spend ¥3300 per person, with college students' budgets pushing ¥3900. If that doesn't make giving Valentine's gifts unappealing, chocolate, the main gift itself, might. Chocolate has been in the spotlight for over a decade for the exploitative methods by which it's made. The Ivory Coast and Ghana produce 60% of the world's cocoa, with about 70% of Japan's imports coming from the latter, but reporters and human rights groups have long reported the use of child labor and slave labor on cocoa farms in both countries and throughout western Africa. Meanwhile, farmers are paid 50% or less for their product than international market price, meaning that only fractions of the price the consumers pay for a chocolate bar reach the original growers.

Fortunately, fair trade chocolate is becoming easier to find in Japan, even in less metropolitan areas. This ensures that Valentine's Day fair trade gift givers can save the world with everything from the upper-end *honmei choko* to the discount fair trade *chō-giri choko* Top Valu brands sold Jusco, Aeon, and Saty stores.

Head spinning yet? Hard time sorting out whether to give the *tomo choko* to an acquaintance or whether you really need to include that one guy in the *giri choko* category? What happened to a bouquet of flowers and messages on heart-shaped candies? With all the energy it takes to keep up with a Japanese Valentine's Day, it can leave you thinking you should be getting a little bit of that chocolate for yourself, too—and the confectionery industry is ready to help those in need with *gohōbi choko* (ご褒美チョコ), "reward chocolate" that people buy for themselves. Maybe this is one category of the chocolate-giving typhoon that everyone can enjoy taking part in.

How to Get Kidnapped By Buddhists

Denton Clark

1. Stop in at your favorite local restaurant for dinner one night. You don't usually go by yourself, but that's all right. You're grateful to have some time to meditate, to decompress. Sit alone and muse over your Twitter feed. Take in the relaxing Nepalese melody playing over the sound system and order your favorite curry.
2. Finish your meal. You won't feel like moving, so just sit there for a minute looking around. Notice that all of the other patrons have already gone home, save for two guys around your age. Do your best to ignore their unconventionally noisy conversation.
3. Respond noncommittally when they try and speak to you. You've been through this before. People always want to try to practice their English with you. Normally, you've no problem with obliging them, but tonight you're just not in the mood. Only a moment ago you were reveling in your solitude.
4. Skillfully transition the conversation into Japanese. Discover that these two dudes actually are around your age and seem pretty cool. Get into it. Remember that everyone you know is moving away or dying or slowly building up enmity towards you, and that you'll die miserable and alone if you don't make friends. Exchange numbers with them.
5. About a week later, receive a call from one of them. Arrange to get lunch with the both of them this coming Sunday.
6. Invite another one of your friends to tag along. The more the merrier, right? Tell him that we're all meeting at the station and are going to go somewhere in town.
7. Be surprised when you show up to the station on Sunday. Only one of the two guys from the restaurant is there, and he's in a car with a balding man in a business suit who claims to be a *rakugo* TV personality. Ask him what the car is for and where we're planning to go. If he says he'd like to go to a charming pasta joint down the block, go back to step one because you've failed to get kidnapped by Buddhists. If he says he wants to take you and your friend to a really, really delicious and cheap restaurant in Omiya, do your best to ignore your building sense of dread and take a seat in the back.
8. Enjoy the ride. Make pleasant small talk and laugh more than is appropriate.
9. Notice how we have to pay for parking. Notice how you're being led to large office-looking building accented with black marble. Notice that this is weird. Ask yourself why a cheap, delicious restaurant would be located inside a building like this.

9. Enter the cafeteria. Make excuses as to why your new friends would take you to a cafeteria for lunch. The food must be good? Despite seeming well enough off and driving close to an hour to get to Omiya, they're actually both pretty poor and enjoy eating in cafeterias?
10. Order some vegetable stir-fry somethin'-er-other. Nothing looks any good, but you pick something that looks relatively edible. Brace yourself for what you hope to be a veritable taste explosion. Find ways to cope with your disappointment when then food tastes like it looks.
11. When the *rakugo* guy starts to talk about Japanese history, respond warmly. You took a class on the *Heike Monogatari* in university; your friend studied Buddhism. Drawn into this interesting conversation, slowly become aware of how the focus has shifted to Nichiren Buddhism miracle stories. Perceive a fervor burning behind Mr. *Rakugo's* eyes. Start getting worried when he tells you that Nichiren predicted the earthquake and that the only way we can save Japan from being invaded by China is to pray the Lotus Sutra. Realize that this guy is crazy and quietly freak out behind your composed countenance. If you're fearing for your life, then congratulations! You've been abducted by members of a New Religious Movement (*shinshūkyō*) based in Nichiren Buddhism called the *Fuji Taisekiji Kenshokai*.
12. Get angry. Get real pissed off. Get angry at your friend as he continues to converse and egg them on, oblivious to the fact you've been hoodwinked. Rage inside at these people who've tricked you. Most of all, be furious with yourself for believing that "other people" aren't crazy. They are. They most certainly are. My god, Satre was right. Dispel your delusion that people are generally good inside and gently stoke the flame of paranoia.
13. Remember that you've got to find a way out of there.
14. Rebuke all attempts at conversion. Reject the English-printed copy of the Lotus Sutra. Reject the numerous advances to take you to the prayer room. Resist laughing when they tell you miracle stories to convince you: a reformed taxi driver who used to drink four liters of *shōchū* a day, a reunion with a high school *senpai* suffering from domestic abuse, a man's kids FINALLY EAT THEIR VEGETABLES. Consider suggesting that they take their stage show on the road.
15. Insist that you have to leave. You thought you were eating back in your town and you have another engagement this afternoon. Get back in the car.
16. FIND A WAY TO GET OUT OF THE CAR.
17. Have them drop you off at the station. Run around the corner and down the street for a few blocks. Stop at a convenience store and get a six pack of beer. Sit in Omiya Park and drink yourself clean.

Destination: Saitama

Events In and Around the Prefecture

- **Winter Illumination** Daily 17:00-24:00 through Feb. 14 (Tues.) at Saitama Shintoshin (さいたま新都心), Saitama City. Christmas lights may be just for Christmas in many of our home countries, but here they go through the winter season. You can end your Valentine's Date with that special someone underneath the starry LED skies, or for the happily single, enjoy the lights that take the edge off the dark and drear of winter. There are restaurants, cafes, book shops, stores, and a movie theater to warm up in, too. **Access:** Outside Saitama Shintoshin station on the Keihin Tōhoku (京浜東北), Utsunomiya (宇都宮), and Takasaki (高崎) lines (note: Shōnan Shinjuku [湘南新宿] lines do not stop at Saitama Shintoshin).
- **“The Thirty Icicles” in Chichibu** (秩父の三十槌の氷柱, *Chichibu no Miso-tsuchi no Tsurara*) Through late February, with light-up daily until 20:00 (weekdays) and 21:00 (weekends) through February 12. Every winter in the Chichibu mountains where the great Arakawa River begins, the freezing temperatures create an enormous wall of icicles—far more than 30!—up to 50m across and 7m high. This natural work of art attracts visitors from near and far. **Access:** From Mitsumine-guchi (三峰口) station on the Chichibu Tetsudō (秩父鉄道) line take the Seibu Kankō bus for Chichibu-ko (秩父湖). Passengers can get on and off wherever they like, so tell the bus driver where you want to stop (*Tsurara no kengaku basho de oritai desu*, “I would like to get off at the place to see the icicles.”). **More Info** Bus time tables (Japanese): www.city.chichibu.lg.jp/menu2047.html (Mon.-Fri.) and www.city.chichibu.lg.jp/menu2049.html (Sat.-Sun.). See also: navi.city.chichibu.lg.jp/flower/misotsuchi/index.html (Japanese)
- **Plum Blossom Season** Mid-Feb. through late March. Fun fact: hanami (花見, “flower viewing”) originally began in China to enjoy not cherry blossoms, but rather plum blossoms (梅の花, *ume no hana*). Although cherry blossoms are the star of the flower-viewing scene now, *ume no hana* are the first heralds of the coming spring, and whether the temperatures are warm or not, thousands flock to parks and orchards to enjoy the soft scent of the pink, red, and white flowers. Chances are there will be blossoming plum trees and festivals (梅祭り, *ume matsuri*) near you; here are just a couple.

Koshigaya Plum Grove Park (越谷梅林公園, *Koshigaya Bairin Kōen*)

Festival: March 3-4 (Sat.-Sun.), 10:00-15:00, entrance free.

In an area known since the Edo Period (1603-1868) for its flowers, this park features over 350 plum trees and is considered a landmark for *ume* blossoms. During the festival there will be food stalls, outdoor tea ceremonies, and free *amazake* (a basically non-alcoholic, sweet, rice-based drink). This could be just the place to unwind after braving the massive Aeon Lake Town shopping center. **Access:** 20-min. walk from Kita Koshigaya (北越谷) station on the Tōbu Iseaski (東部伊勢崎) line, or take the free shuttle bus on March 3-4.

Ogose Plum Grove (越生梅林, *Ogose Bairin*)

Festival: Feb. 11 (Sat.) - March 20 (Tues.), 8:30-17:30, entrance ¥200.

Regarded as one of the Kantō area's three biggest plum groves, the oldest of the more than 1000 trees here are over 600 years old. The festival here has tons of stuff going on: traditional performance arts, photo exhibitions, local foods, miniature train rides, hiking (March 3, 9:00~), and more. **Access** From Ogose (越生) station on the Tōbu Ogose and Hachikō (東部越生) lines, take the temporary buses scheduled for the festival (to Ogose Iriguchi, 越生入口); [schedule at www.town.ogose.saitama.jp/umematsuri/traffic.html#bus](http://www.town.ogose.saitama.jp/umematsuri/traffic.html#bus).

- **Nagatoro Fire Festival** (長瀨火祭り, *Nagatoro Himatsuri*) March 4 (Sun.) from 10:00. Two words: fire walking. Need we say more? (In case we do: *laidō* sword demonstrations, *shishi* dances, visitors being able to try fire walking for themselves, and the chance to be warm during the winter.) The actual fire-walking by Buddhist monks is at 13:00. **Access:** 10-min. from Nagatoro (長瀨) station on the Chichibu Tetsudō line (follow the crowd). **More Info** at www.nagatoro.gr.jp (Japanese).
- **Kōnosu Bikkuri Doll Festival** (鴻巣びっくりひな祭り, *Kōnosu Bikkuri Hina Matsuri*) Feb. 12 (Sun.)-March 3 (Sat.), 9:00-16:00 (weekends until 17:00) at the Kōnosu City Hall. With a history of *hina* doll-making dating back 380 years, every year Kōnosu makes a pyramid of these Girl's Day dolls that is the tallest in Japan¹—nay, THE WORLD². This year's pyramid will have 31 levels and reach over 6.7m (22 ft). While in Kōnosu you can head to the Licensing Center to wage battle for a Japanese driver's license (weekdays only), see one of several doll shops (e.g. www.marutakeningyou.co.jp/corporate/map/map.htm), or visit a traditional restaurant along the Old Nakasendō Rd. **Access:** 20-min. straight out of the east exit of Kōnosu (鴻巣) station on the Takasaki line. A smaller display is at the Erumi Kōnosu Shopping Center near the east exit. **More Info** at kouno-subina.main.jp/access.html (Japanese), or 048.540.3333.
- **Peter Brook's A Magic Flute** (ピーター・ブルックの「魔笛」, *Pitā Burukku no "Mateki"*) March 22-23 (Th., Fri.) at 19:30, March 24-25 (Sat., Sun.) at 15:00. You may know *Der Zauberfloete* (*The Magic Flute*) from operas, but director Peter Brook's slimmed down production has been described as "a tasting menu of Mozart" returning it from the opera houses to the theaters from which it originated. How's this for international: an English director, text in French, songs in German, and subtitles in Japanese while the Saitama Arts Theater hosts the play for four days as part of its 24-country tour. A seats are ¥5000, S seats ¥8000. Tickets can be purchased online at www.saf.or.jp/ticket_info/index.html or by phone at 0570-064-939 (10:00-19:00). **Access:** 7-min. from Yono Honmachi (与野本町) station on the Saikyō (埼京) line. Map at saf.or.jp/arthall/guide/access.html. **More Info** at goo.gl/oB65K (Japanese) and goo.gl/eIPPF (English).

1. Thus spoke the City of Kōnosu, at any rate.

2. Not verified, but the editors doubt whether there are other countries vying for title.

Recipe Corner

Sato Imo Cream Stew (from www.pref.saitama.lg.jp/uploaded/attachment/385622.pdf)

Also known as taro in English, these small potato-like vegetables are a bit slimy, but their taste blends well with other foods and they make a great stew on a chilly winter night. (Serves 4)

- 4 *sato imo* (里芋・サトイモ) • 1 med/large carrot • 1 onion
- 200g chicken meat (breast) • 100g corn • 10g cooked spinach to taste
- Salt and pepper to taste • **A** 4 Tbsp butter/oil, 4 Tbsp flour, 2 tsp bouillon, 400 ml milk

- 1) Peel vegetables. Cut vegetables and chicken into bite-sized pieces.
- 2) Heat butter/oil in a saucepan and sauté meat. Add vegetables. Once heated, add enough water to just cover pot contents. Reduce heat to low. Leave uncovered to prevent boiling over.
- 4) Mix **A** together well, then add to pot and heat until the soup thickens. Season with salt and pepper and add spinach before serving.

Variations: For a more Japanese flavor, add some miso to the milk mixture, replace the onion with leek (*negi*, ネギ), or replace the milk with soy milk. You can also try using sausage instead of chicken, adding curry powder or cheese to the broth, or using broccoli as well.

Pork and Hakusai Lasagna (from www.pref.saitama.lg.jp/uploaded/attachment/385525.pdf)

Known as napa cabbage or chinese cabbage in English, *hakusai* is cheap and abundant in winter. If you're having a hard time figuring out how to use the 5-kilo heads you find at the grocery store, perhaps this recipe will help. (serves 4)

- 600g *hakusai* (白菜・はくさい) • 100g pork, thinly sliced • 60g pizza sauce
- 3 slices cheese, • 10g Parmesan style cheese • 1 Tbsp olive oil
- 1/2 tsp whole black pepper (to taste)

- 1) Cut the center the *hakusai* at 45° angles ca. 4cm long. Cut leaves 4cm long. Cut pork to desired size.
- 2) Place the following in a pot in order: Oil, *hakusai*, pork, pepper, pizza sauce, shredded sliced cheese; then a final layer of pizza sauce and Parmesan style cheese.
- 3) Cook for 10 minutes on medium heat, and you're done. Serve with vegetables of choice.

Easy-to-Make Chocolates

It's Valentine's season after all. Don't forget some *gohōbi choko* (ご褒美チョコ, reward chocolate) for yourself!

- 200g. chocolate • 100ml cream • 1 Tbsp honey (opt.)
- 1 Tbsp rum or brandy (or flavoring extract equivalent) • cocoa powder

- 1) Cut or break chocolate into small pieces.
- 2) In a saucepan, mix cream with honey. Heat until just below boiling, then switch to low heat and stir in and melt chocolate, stirring constantly. (Alternately, put ingredients in a bowl and melt in microwave or over a larger bowl/pan of hot water. Do not mix water with chocolate.)
- 3) When completely melted, add rum/brandy or flavor extract*. Stir well.
- 4) Cool until firm but still moldable in a pan lined with a baking sheet, or an empty milk carton open vertically to form a tray. Cut into squares or shape into balls by hand. Coat with cocoa. Keep refrigerated up to 1 week.

*The variations are endless. Use different flavorings, including instant coffee or almond extract in place of rum. Steep 2 Tbsp black tea in the cream and remove the leaves before mixing in chocolate. Instead of cocoa, use matcha powder, chopped almonds or peanuts. Add nuts, dried fruits, cookie chunks, even spices such as cinnamon to the chocolate.



Preventing Frozen Pipes

Denise Schlickbernd

Saitama isn't exactly Hokkaido, but this year's unusually cold temperatures do not mix well with uninsulated housing, particularly the part of the housing known as plumbing. Once the lows fall to -4°C (25°F), residents should start keeping an eye on things to make sure that frozen pipes don't lead to a lack of water, or worse, cracks that result in costly damage.

When to be careful

- Water not in use for extended periods (including overnight) when temperatures fall below -4°
- Pipes are exposed outside, facing north, or in the shade
- Water meters exposed to wind, faucets outside the house

Defense Tactics:

- Insulating tape (but electrified tape risks of fire, so some municipalities or buildings might not allow it)
- Wrap exposed pipe with a blanket or towels, or styrene and other insulation products (水道管 保温材, *suidōkan hoonzai*) sold at home centers. Make sure the insulating layer is also wrapped to prevent it from getting wet.
- Pack bags with styrofoam/styrene close around the water meter (though not so much that the meter checker can't do their job)

● Draining the pipes

• Turn off water main: usually a valve located behind the meter, sometimes in the house. You can turn that off, then run all the faucets in your apartment until all the water has run out. Close the faucets. To turn it back on, first make sure all the faucets are closed, then turn the valve back on. Turn on faucets slowly.

• You may have a special valve called a 水抜栓 (*mizunukisen*) especially for draining the water pipes. If you do, follow the same steps as for turning off the water main. If yours is electronic, the drain button should say 「水抜き」(*mizunuki*). The button to turn the water back on should say 「水出し」(*mizudashi*).

※If you have gas-powered instant hot water heaters, follow the directions on those for proper water draining methods.

- Last resort: Leave the water dripping. This prevents damaging pressure build-up between ice blockage and faucet itself, but this can mean higher bills and wasted water. Plus, it's hard to do this for all pipes.

If your pipes have frozen

- Wrap in a thick towel and slowly pour on warm or hot (not boiling) water. Keep faucet open. Start near the faucet and work backwards.
- You can also use a hairdryer, though beware of electrocuting yourself. That would hurt.
- Don't use open flames; plus the fire hazard, the sudden heat can damage pipes, rubber or plastic parts, and boil the water nearest the flame before thawing everything else, potentially damaging or destroying the pipes.
- Open faucet to help relieve pressure. Keep a bucket nearby to collect thawing water.
- Check pipes slowly for leaks. If there is damage, turn off water main, drain pipes, and wrap the damaged area securely with tape to temporarily halt the leak and contact your water company.
- If water is coming through your faucets, but you have no hot water, it's possible pipes are frozen near the heating device.

Residents are typically responsible for any water damage to their own or others' residence. Check with your landlord or your CO/school to see if your apartment has any insurance to cover the costs of any damage.



PA NOTES

Sign-ups for the 2012 Saitama Gakuen Children's Facility Visit

Every year the Saitama JET Council offers Jets the chance to visit Saitama Gakuen, a residential school for children who have suffered or are facing abuse and neglect at home. On Wednesday March 28 up to 20 Jets can participate in *kenshū* (training) to learn about the Japanese child welfare system and interact with the students at the school. Further information and sign-up forms have been sent to COs. For questions, please contact either your supervisor or Denise in the International Division (contact details on back page). We hope to see you there!

2012 Returner's Conference (March 5-7, 2012)

The original deadline to sign-up for the Returner's Conference was January 23rd, but since there is still extra space, CLAIR has announced that additional participants can sign up through late February. This is a great opportunity to speak with professionals from a variety of fields and prepare for leaving Japan. For more information, see the JET Programme website at: jetprogramme.org/e/news/crj_apps_notice2012.html.

Being Prepared

You probably heard the news that Tokyo University seismologists have estimated a 70% chance of a magnitude 7 earthquake epicentered in the Tokyo area (see mdn.mainichi.jp/perspectives/news/20120130p2a00m0na002000c.html), which, as geography aficionados know, includes Saitama. Even for those who were in eastern Japan during the March 11 earthquake, the passage of nearly a year has meant that the urgency of preparedness has faded from many minds. So just as a reminder (because we love you guys):

- Re-read your disaster preparedness materials. If you no longer have a printed copy of the "When Disaster Strikes" handbook from prefectural orientation or SDC, email a PA and we can send a copy.
- Verify that you have the contact numbers for your school(s) and/or supervisor; they are your first point of contact in case of a serious disaster.
- Make sure any furniture and belongings (bookcases, TVs, Ming Dynasty vases, etc.) are secured to walls and are not positioned to topple particularly onto you or others in case of a strong earthquake.
- Ensure that you have a three-day supply of water (9 L per person), non-perishable food, important documents, batteries, emergency blankets, etc. pre-packed and ready to take with you in case you need to leave your home.
- Know where your evacuation center is (often a public building, e.g. schools, community centers) in case something happens outside of work hours. Practice walking the route there. Bonus points for practicing at night time!
- If your *keitai* (mobile phone) numbers or emails have changed, please let a PA know so that you will be more likely to be reached in case of a larger-scale disaster.



Saitama AJET Announcements

To sign up for the SAJET emailing list, and for more information about events, email SaitamaAJET@gmail.com and “like” www.facebook.com/SaitamaAJET.

Portraits for Tohoku

It has been almost a full year since the Great East Japan Earthquake, and the task of rebuilding the Tohoku area is still far from completed. There are still many ways that you—yes, MemoRandom Reader You—can help. Saitama Jet Beth Emery is offering commission portraits for ¥2000, donating all the proceeds towards the Tohoku rebuilding effort. Not only is this a great way to help out Japan and our neighbors to the north, it's a great Valentine's Day gift, or alternately, a great “Sorry I'm a little late but it's awesome like you so I hope you still like it” post-Valentine's Day gift.

To see some of Beth's other portraits, you can go to zsparky.deviantart.com/gallery/7499769. If you would like to continue to support Tohoku, and pick up a snazzy drawing/present, please send Beth an email via SAJET at SaitamaAJET@gmail.com.

Block 3 Announcement:

Online TEFL Course Discounts Available to All Jets

All current JET Program Participants are eligible for a US\$95 discount on the ITTT US\$295 120-hour online TEFL course with tutor support. In addition to the regular TEFL course, participants will also receive a course in teaching either Business English or English to Young Learners. For more information, and to sign up, please visit: ajet.net/outstanding-educators-program/tefl-discount-for-jet-participants/.

Planning an Event? Let Us Know!

East, West, North, South, Central, or Chichibu, let us know if you'd like to plan or host an event for Jets and friends. Not only will you have the chance to show people how awesome a particular area of Saitama or neighboring areas are, it's also a chance to win friends, influence people, and recruit minions for that top-secret project you have brewing. If you would like Saitama AJET to advertise your event, send us an email and we can help you get the word out!



Editor's Note

I never had any particularly strong feelings about the cold before coming to Saitama. In fact, perhaps because I spent several years growing up in a sub-tropical climate, I even looked forward to winter: preluded by fiery autumn colors, patterns of frost etched on the water and sparkling in the grass, and even, if we were lucky, a day free from school or work to go play outside in fresh white snow.

Oh how quaint! I had thought that by Saitama Winter #4 that I would give no second thought to the effort to keep warm in a 10°C (50°F for the Americans out there) uninsulated apartment, but this winter's constant subfreezing temperatures and subsequent perpetually frostbitten fingers and feet haven't permitted a change in sentiment. Though it is convenient to use entire kitchen as a refrigerator, this Jet will simply be guzzling hot tea, coffee, and soup by the gallon (erm, liter) and impatiently waiting for the cherry blossom season. Best of luck to our readers as they endeavor to keep warm this winter, too.

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