

## Spring Beginnings



After a winter of early sunsets, frigid temperatures, and no insulation, spring time is a welcome time of year for many people. Warmer temperatures and blooming flowers are enough to make even the most staid office worker want to celebrate under the cherry blossoms (and celebrate they do!). It is liberation from the *kotatsu*! Freedom from Heat Tech! Reprieve from the cold before the rainy season hits!

Another time-honored Japanese tradition in spring is the beginning of the new *nendo* (年度), the school and fiscal year. Whether it is an occasion for celebration, however, could be an-

swered with those infamous four letters, ESID. Classes graduate and leave, and teachers and supervisors are transferred away to other schools and offices.

Though this might end any stress from the likes of difficult students or coworkers who have left, it's also decidedly not fun to say goodbye to colleagues and students who we enjoyed working with. But meanwhile, as we learn the names that go with the new faces around us, other relationships and opportunities open up as well, bringing new possibilities into focus under the warmer spring light.

Photo: Sakurapenguin

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# In Defense of Japanese Gym Memberships

Karl Hoeschen

You don't actually need a gym membership to be healthy if you can work out on your own. My respect to those who have the discipline; I am not usually one of those people. So for the people who are considering joining a gym but hesitating for some reason, here's the skinny: My gym was easy to join and the membership nearly pays for itself by saving me money elsewhere. The rest of this article is a small narrative followed by the "how," the "ORLY?" and the "YA RLY."

## It's easier than you might think.

Have a salary for the first time but also lots of loans to pay? That and the other usual reasons were what stopped me from even exploring the idea for more than a year. I had heard some things and invented other excuses for myself. The memberships are expensive, you might not know what you're actually getting with the fee, the application forms are in Japanese, general laziness...Then I hit an unhealthy point where I just didn't feel good mentally or physically and started getting pretty hostile towards living in Japan. I wasn't taking the best care of myself and attributing my physical and mental states to culture shock. But this time it really wasn't Japan that was the problem. Finally in September of my second year here I stopped fooling myself and got to the gym.

## Don't waste time, just go.

When I finally went, I learned my local gym lets guests have a free day to use and explore the facilities before deciding to join or not. There just so also happened to be a cam-

paign at the time, so I joined for a permanently-discounted membership. It's important to note here that my Japanese was not great at this point (and still isn't), so the gym workers were taking extraordinary measures to explain to me how I could get the best deal possible. My impression of Japanese gyms as rip-offs was dispelled immediately. The situation improved even more when the biggest reason I avoided joining, the cost, would be further offset by several unexpected perks.

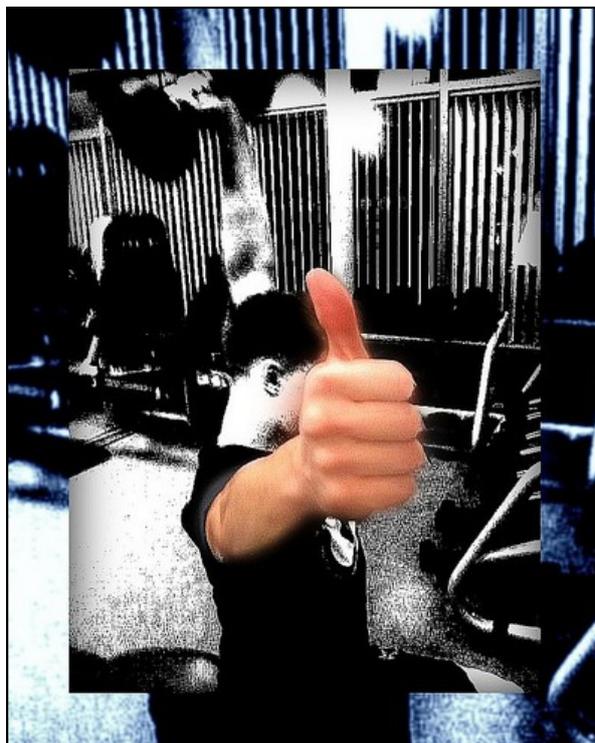


Photo: Nomad Thru Life

## Let's crunch some numbers.

People usually cringe when I say I pay ten thousand yen a month to go to my gym, but there are hidden savings that are significant. The biggest savings began appearing on my utility bills. Going to the gym all those winter evenings instead of huddling in my apartment

saved me close to ¥30,000 with lower gas, electricity, and water usage. Those savings being over four months, I paid ¥40,000 to exercise during that time, but I could *really* say I only paid ¥10,000. The gym also gives its members free tickets to the local hot spring every month, which meant even more time spent keeping warm using someone else's utilities. My membership fee suddenly looked much more reasonable.

**Use their stuff to save money.**

There are other similar, but more subtle perks to going to a gym. Several daily amenities are provided at no extra cost. Soap, shampoo, and conditioner are provided in the showers. There are also hair dryers, face creams, body lotions, and hair gel provided with the sinks in the locker rooms. Utilizing these services everyday saves some significant change from not having to buy as many of these daily necessities in addition to saving just a little more on apartment utilities. (More power and hot water.)

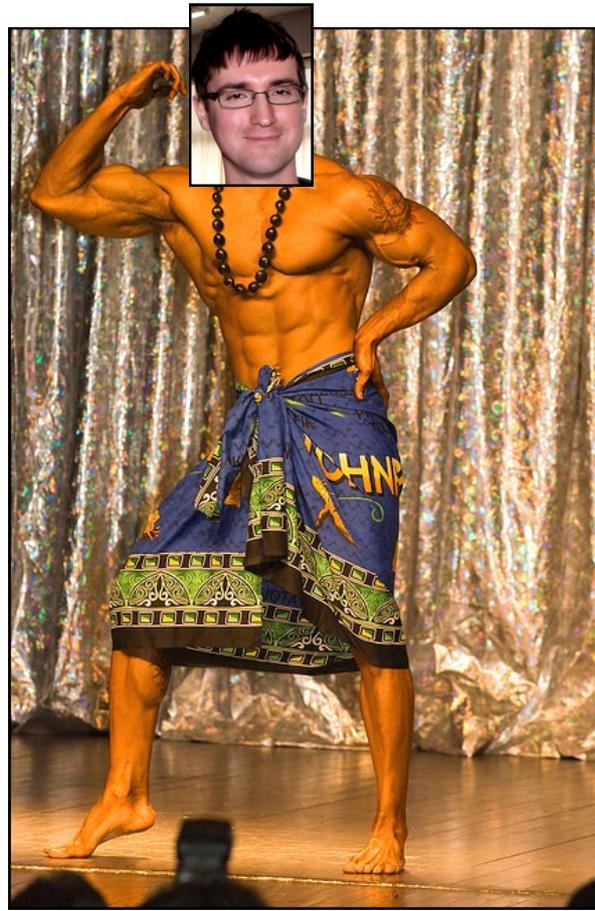
**My ¥10,000/month membership has nearly paid for itself at this point.**

There are social benefits too. I started encountering the same group of guys as I established my weekly routine, and they love practicing their English while teaching me Japanese. They have drawn me several maps during our mutually-broken conversations to show me where I can buy cheaper produce that is also organic, and which of my town's three sake breweries is the best. (Turns out that answer depends on the season.) We also go to fitness classes together, where they help me understand what to do while we "fail-batte" to learn Tai Chi, yoga, and kickboxing. (Did I mention the classes are free?)

**"Fail-batte" is a very creative reinterpretation of the classic, "Gaijin-smash".**

The biggest benefit from my gym membership is I feel more like a community member. As I meet more people at the gym, I get to learn and explore more of my town's not-so-hidden treasures. One payoff of this knowledge was surprising my wife Kate with fair-trade, organic chocolate for Valentine's Day, purchased just a ten-minute walk from our apartment. I'm sure this is just the tip of what could be a very delicious (and culturally-enlightening) iceberg. After all, aren't exploring and learning the reasons why we're here in the first place?

**Oh, and it's a gym membership. So there's the benefit of looking good naked too.**



## Whose Woods These are I Think I Know...

Stephen Welch

The title of this article is actually the first line of another poem by Frost who finds himself near the woods again. And like Frost many of us find ourselves near these woods from time to time, asking the same questions and thinking the same thoughts of those who lived 100 years ago. My hope is that by looking again at these questions, that hopefully can we find some answers or at least some insight.

“The Road Not Taken”

Robert Frost

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,  
And sorry I could not travel both  
And be one traveler, long I stood  
And looked down one as far as I could  
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair,  
And having perhaps the better claim,  
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;  
Though as for that the passing there  
Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay  
In leaves no step had trodden black.  
Oh, I kept the first for another day!  
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,  
I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh  
Somewhere ages and ages hence:  
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—  
I took the one less traveled by,  
And that has made all the difference.

One interpretation of this poem is that Frost was advocating a certain road, a certain choice. He ends the poem “I took the one less traveled by, / And that has made all the difference.” Many people say that this indicates Frost is advocating choosing the less traveled road, that it is the better choice.

However, I have a different interpretation of the poem. At the beginning of the poem Frost states that

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,  
And sorry I could not travel both  
And be one traveler, long I stood  
And looked down one as far as I could  
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Frost tells us there are two roads, two choices. And he says that he wishes he could travel both, and he was sorry he couldn't. He thinks to himself, *Well hmm, if I can't travel both, then maybe I'll compare the two, figure out which one is the better road, the better choice.*

We pick up in the next stanza,

Then took the other, as just as fair,  
And having perhaps the better claim,  
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;  
Though as for that the passing there  
Had worn them really about the same,

Frost is comparing the two paths. He says to himself, “Ah look, this one is better, it looks newer and, ah, I think I've figured which path is the better one.” He looks

down one as far as he can, trying to see where it leads, but one can only look so far; it's hard to see past a certain point. And the longer he stares, the less convinced he becomes. He finally relents: that the passing of time has worn them really about the same.

In the next stanza he states

And both that morning equally lay  
In leaves no step had trodden black.  
Oh, I kept the first for another day!  
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,  
I doubted if I should ever come back.

So he finally decides that really they both look the same, that they both seem quite equal. But he is still trying to figure out which path is the better one, so he decides upon a solution. *I'll keep the first one for another day, then I'll come back and then take that other path.* Then again, the more he thinks about it, the less convinced he becomes. *But actually, when I go down this path, there will be another two paths after this, and then another, and another. Probably by the time I'm ready to come back to this choice, well, it'll be too late. I don't think I'll find my way back here.*

Many of you may be in a similar situation to Frost. Maybe as you think about leaving the JET Program this year or at some point in the future, you are wondering about what to do next or where to go. Many of you are probably trying to choose the next path, the next road, and maybe it's not so clear. Maybe both paths seem quite equal. Or maybe you have already chosen your path, but again you aren't really sure if it's the best path, the best choice.

And like Frost, I wish I could tell you the better path, but actually, I'm not really sure, and honestly it may be impossible to tell which is the better path. But like Frost we



do the best we can and make a choice: we try to choose the better one.

As Frost states in the last stanza,

I shall be telling this with a sigh  
Somewhere ages and ages hence:  
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—  
I took the one less traveled by,  
And that has made all the difference.

He sighs to himself, *Ah, I can't travel both, and I have to make a decision, so I'll go down this road.* Frost makes his choice. I don't think Frost was necessarily sighing at his decision, but at his inability to travel both paths. Nor do I think Frost is expressing regret about this choice at some point in the future. He may be quite happy with his decision and his life. I think Frost is wondering about that other choice. What would have happened down that path? Was that the better path? As the title of the poem states, he is wondering about the road *not*

taken. And many of us may still have those thoughts about past decisions and many of us may still have those concerns about the decisions we face now or in the future.

But Frost leaves us with a very important statement and something we can maybe find a bit of comfort in. He states that he took the one less traveled by and that has made all the *difference*. As I stated at the beginning, some people interpret this poem as Frost advocating the road less travelled. I think they believe that difference means better. But I disagree; difference sometimes means better, sometimes it means

worse, but also sometimes difference simply means different.

I think what Frost was saying is that sometimes the paths really are just different, not better or worse. There may not always be a better path, just a different one. And because of that decision our lives will not be better or worse, just different.

Whatever path you choose after JET, I wish you all the best of luck. Please keep in touch, I'm interested to see where your roads and paths lead you. Thank you for reading!



Photo: Andrew Pescod

# A Saitama Jet's Experience Getting a Japanese Driver's License

Kesha Ann Willis



Hi everyone! My name is Kesha Ann Willis. I'm five feet short, many pounds overweight (I curse that miso ramen) and I'm currently a holder of a Japanese driver's license. Nice to meet you!

I clearly remember when I first came to Japan and we were told about driving in Japan at Tokyo Orientation. They described the process carefully and showed how miserable an experience it was to switch to a Japanese license, especially in Saitama and Tokyo. They informed us that people (foreigners) had to go through the test many times, taking time off of work for the privilege of spending more and more money to fail the exam multiple times. Of course, I was very skeptical, especially when they said that someone actually did the driving test twenty-one (21!!) times before he received his driver's license. *Ha!*, I thought to myself, *that's just simply impossible!* If you are an experienced driver in your country and you're able to drive for one year on an international license in Japan with no problem, then it stands to reason that you should be able to transfer your country's driver's license to a Japanese license quite easily. Well, suffice it to say, I was the one who was quite mistaken.

I should tell you firstly, that there are a few countries that are exempt from taking a written or driving test to transfer to a Japanese license. I'm so jealous! FYI, these countries are Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portu-

gal, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom. Yes people, when citizens of these countries want to switch to a Japanese license, they can just walk in, pay a fee, sign some papers, wait a little and then voila! They have their Japanese license. Awesome! Right? (Overcome with jealousy now. しょうがない。)

I can only write about the procedures in Saitama, but it's quite similar all over Japan. However, that the closer you are to the metropolitan areas, the harder it is to acquire a license. Before you head over to license center in Konosu (鴻巣運転免許センター / *Kōnosu Unten Menkyo Sentaa*, near Kita-Kōnosu station), the first thing you need to do is get certain documents ready. These are:

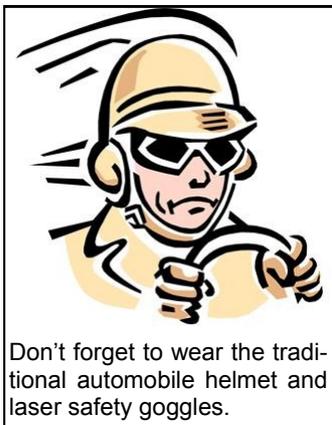
- ◆ A driver's license issued by the government of your home country. You need to have used it for no less than three months in your home country;
- ◆ A professional translation of your driver's license (日本語による翻訳文, *nihongo ni yoru hon'yakubun*). This is only accepted from the Japanese Automobile Federation (JAF), embassies or general consulates (¥3000; see [www.jaf.or.jp/e/list\\_translation.htm](http://www.jaf.or.jp/e/list_translation.htm) for more information);
- ◆ Passport with your Japanese visa;
- ◆ Alien registration card (外国人登録証明書 / *gaikokujin tōroku shōmeisho*) or residence card (*zairyū kādo*), original and one copy;

- ◆ Two passport-sized photographs taken within the last six months (hatless, facing front, approx. 3 cm×2.4 cm);
- ◆ A stamp for the test (¥2400). You pay this at the license centre in Konosu and paste the stamp to your application form.

The JAF also publishes a driver's handbook called *Rules of the Road* (交通の教則, *kōtsū no kyōsoku*) in several languages, including English. If you're interested in obtaining a copy, consult the JAF. Their Saitama Office phone number is 048.849.0024, and their address is: 〒338-8531 さいたま市中央区下落合4-1-1 (411 Shimo-ochiai, Chuo-ku Saitama-Shi, Saitama 338-8531)

Before I move on, I think I should let you know that if you don't have a driver's license from home, the only way to get a license here is to do it the way Japanese people do it. In Japan it costs up to ¥300,000 to complete driving school and take the test. The written test is much longer, quite tricky, and oh yes, all in Japanese. There are several places in Japan, two of them in Tokyo, that have the complete written exams in English. There are 50 questions and you must get 45 correct.

Now, back to switching over your foreign license. The eye test is first. That's pretty simple. You just have to tell which direction the open side of the C is pointing. Then you wait



Don't forget to wear the traditional automobile helmet and laser safety goggles.

some more before doing the written test. This test takes ten minutes and it's simple, so you should have no problem here. That finished, you will wait upstairs some more

before taking the driving test. Three of you will be in the car at all times: you, the examiner, and another examinee as the rear passenger. The test will be done completely in Japanese. However, if you are lucky enough, you may have an examiner who speaks just a little English to help you out. Good luck with that!

My first time taking the test, I got super flustered when I was told to take a right turn, and I attempted to ask this particular examiner to repeat where I should turn—and wow did he get mad at me! I went through the motions of finishing the test and at the end he failed me, saying that I should never talk to the examiner (I found out later that's not really true, actually). I was sad and thought that all the examiners were like that, which was enough to make me want to give up. But, I continued my grand license hunt. Six tries later, I had ended up just annoyed and confused about what they really wanted and *still* had no license. Meanwhile, even without including the train fare I was spending, the fees meant I was ¥15,000 yen out. After the sixth attempt, however, a wonderful lady at the office told me to do a practice run on the track with an instructor. It's costly (¥6000 for 50 minutes), but I definitely recommend it before you take the test.

You see, the examiners need you to really exaggerate all your movements and check everything all the time, as per their specifications. So you need to get it right all the time. Here are some important principles that apply throughout the whole driving test:

- ◆ Stay to the left. The left lane is for driving and the right lane is for passing.
- ◆ If you drive down the center of a double wide lane you'll fail the test for sure. Don't drive in the gutter, but stay within about meter to the left of it.

- ◆ Do not be too confident. Look scared, they like it.
- ◆ Show the instructor that you are looking everywhere. Move your head all around in an exaggerated way to show you are looking in your mirrors and checking over your shoulder. If turning or changing lanes to the right, look over your right shoulder. When turning make sure to check carefully (to make sure you aren't going to run over an abandoned baby, a bicycle, a pedestrian or a crazy, imaginary driver that isn't going to suddenly emerge): rear view mirror, side mirror, and turn your head and look to the back. Do this twice to make sure.
- ◆ Stop with your bumper behind the line at stop lights and stop signs. Slow down in advance so you don't jerk to a stop at the line.
- ◆ Be cautious and drive slowly. There is only one part of the course where they want you to speed up to 40km/hour. Even there, you don't need to rush into it. They'll tell you if they think you need to speed up.
- ◆ Make good, clean turns at all times. Don't swerve right before turning left, or vice versa. Be careful not to hit the curb when

turning. If you ever run up on a curb that's an instant fail. However, if you feel that you will hit the curb then stop, reverse and fix your position.

I received my Japanese license on my seventh attempt and I felt so elated. At first, I didn't hear what the examiner said because I was expecting to hear that I failed. Then he said again, おめでとう! I was so excited that I could have kissed him. (I didn't though. Ha ha!) In the end, it cost me approximately ¥25,000 to get my Japanese license. Yes! I can say now though, that it was worth it as I can drive anywhere I feel like without trying to hide from the law. It's better that way. Good times. If you are thinking of getting a driver's license here, I recommend doing the practice sessions before trying to pass the test on the first try. Remember, 9 out of 10 foreigners fail the driving test on the first time. I know. I was one of them. Just food for thought guys. Happy trails!



**Editor's note:** *International Driving Permits (IDPs) can be used together with a valid driver's license from overseas. If you use one, you must carry your home country license with you as well, otherwise you will be driving illegally and face severe penalties. You can only obtain IDPs to use in Japan while overseas. However, IDPs are valid in Japan for a maximum of only one year beginning the date of your entry into the country, even if your IDP is valid for a longer period of time. In other words, if you go visit your home country during your second year and bring back an IDP with you, it will not be valid because you have been a resident in Japan for longer than a year. If you want to be able to drive after living here for more than a year you must switch to a Japanese license.*

*If you have a Japanese license and want an IDP for overseas travel (including your home country if they recognize IDPs), you can get them at the Kōnosu Licensing Center or at the Overseas License Center ( 国外運転免許センター, kokugai unten menkyo sentā) on the 4th floor of the Omiya Sonic City Building (west exit of Omiya Station). You'll need a 4x5 cm photo, passport, Japanese license, and ¥2400; the procedure takes about 30 minutes. Hours: weekdays 8:30-11:30 and 13:00-16:30.*

## Easy Exercises for School

Allison Conkey

Do you find yourself sitting at a desk during most of your free time between classes? Are you grading papers, studying, reading, or trying to look busy? Have you ever felt like your legs were slowly turning to mush as a result from all the sitting? If your work schedule is anything like mine then you probably find yourself in any of these situations more often than you'd like. Recently, I have been using most of my free time to study for the Japanese Language Proficiency Test (JLPT), and when I am not doing this I find myself grading papers or making lessons plans. All of these activities find me sitting at my desk or in front of a computer. Doing so many things that require sitting is a bit frustrating for me because it would be so nice to move around as well.

However, the warmer and more humid the weather gets, the more my desire to move heads steadily in a downward fashion. What to do? Going to a gym would be nice, but there aren't any near where I live, and they are too expensive for my ability to visit (once a month maybe, depressing I know). Working out with a *bukatsubu* is a nice option but not always possible because of things like busy schedules. Luckily, however, the Internet is an amazing thing, and while perusing it one day I stumbled on a nice solution.

So, for those of us who are trying to find little ways to add a bit of activity into the work day, here are some exercises I found at [divine.ca](http://divine.ca) (it's an online woman's fitness website, but the benefits of these exercises can be felt by everyone). The ones I intro-

duce here can be done while sitting, which is a plus, plus, plus for all of us sitting at our desks most of the day. All these exercises and much more for the rest of the body are featured in divine.ca's "Exercise Finder". If you are interested in looking for more exercises for different parts of the body, check out their website at [www.divine.ca/en/fitness-and-nutrition/exercise-finder/c\\_266](http://www.divine.ca/en/fitness-and-nutrition/exercise-finder/c_266). In the mean time, here are some little ways to move while still sitting at your desk.

### Leg lift

While sitting, lean your elbows on your desk, keeping your back straight. Contract your abs and lift one leg about 10 centimeters off the ground. Hold the position for about 10 seconds. Then, release and let your leg slowly go back down. Repeat the move with the other leg. Do one series of 10 repetitions. This exercise works your ab region and thighs.



### Foot lift

While sitting, place each of your hands on either side of your body. Keep your shoulders and back straight. While contracting

your abs, lift your feet about five centimeters off the ground. Hold the position for about 10 seconds. Slowly let your feet down back on the ground. Do one series of 10 repetitions. This exercise works your ab region and thighs.



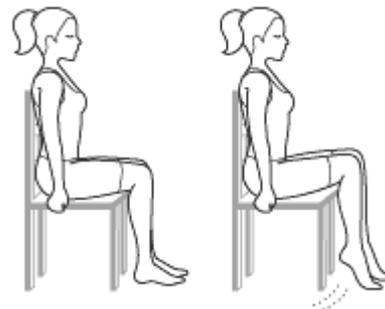
### Leg extension

While sitting, place each of your hands on either side of your body. Keep your shoulders and back straight. Join your feet together and lift them up by contracting your abdominal muscles, until your legs are parallel with the ground. Maintain the pose for about 10 seconds. Bend your knees to then bring your feet back to the ground. Do one series of 10 repetitions. This exercise works your legs and tummy.



### Calf flexes

Sit in a chair with your back straight. Place your feet on the ground, shoulder-width apart. Raise your heels as high as you can, making sure your toes still touch the ground, and hold the position for three seconds. Then, lower the heels back to the ground. Do two sets of 20 repetitions. To increase the degree of difficulty, hold a soup can in each hand, placing your hands on each knee.



Source: Guimont, Marie-Andrée. "Exercise Finder." *Divine Women*. 2012: n. page. 0. [http://www.divine.ca/en/fitness-and-nutrition/exercise-finder/c\\_266/](http://www.divine.ca/en/fitness-and-nutrition/exercise-finder/c_266/).

## Destination: Saitama

### Events in and around the prefecture

- **Arakawa River Shidare-zakura** Now through ca. April 20 in Chichibu. Cherry blossom and hanami season is done in more southerly Kanto areas, but the best that spring has to offer is still in bloom. Seiunji (清雲寺), Shōfukuji (昌福寺), and Chōsen'in (長泉院) Temples, located within 2.3 km of each other, boast a variety of weeping cherry blossom trees (*shidare-zakura*) in a range of pinks and whites. The tree at Seiunji is believed to be around 600 years old with a trunk circumference of over two and a half meters **Access:** From Bushū Nakagawa (武州中川) Station: on the Chichibu Tetsudō (秩父鉄道), a 15-minute walk to Seiunji and Shōfukuji Temples, 25 minutes to Chōsen'in. **More Info** [here](#) (Japanese).
- **Shibazakura Festival** Now through May 6, 8:00-17:00 at Hitsujiyama Park in Chichibu City. That picture of the hill that's carpeted in brilliant white, pink, and purple flowers? You've seen it on folders, posters, ads, and anything else to do with Saitama: Now you can see it with your own eyes! Local crafts and products will also be on sale. Admission ¥300 during the festival. **Access:** From Hanabatake (花畑) Station on the Chichibu Tetsudō Line or Seibu Chichibu (西武秩父) Station on the Seibu Chichibu Line (西武秩父線), follow the signs/people for a pleasant 1.5 km stroll to the park. **More info** [here](#) (English).
- **Kazo Citizen Peace Festival** (加須市民平和祭, *Kazo Shimin Heiwa Matsuri*) May 3 (Fri./holiday); rain date May 4. Families across Japan fly carp streamers (*koinobori*) as Children's Day (May 5) approaches to symbolize their hopes that their sons will grow strong and healthy. Kazo has been Japan's top producer of carp streamers since the late 19th Century, and to partially advertise and partially celebrate this status, the city flies an enormous 100m long, 350kg *koinobori* on May 3. While you're in the area, you can pick up a smaller, more portable version of your own. There is also the wisteria festival at Tamashiki Park, site of a massive 400-year old wisteria tree, running from April 29-May 5 with related events and performances. **Access:** A free shuttle bus runs from Kazo (加須) Station on the Tōbu Isesaki (東武伊勢崎) line; it takes about 30 minutes to the *koinobori* site. **More Info** [here](#) (Japanese).
- **Kasukabe Kite Festival** May 3 & 5 (Fri./holiday and Sun.) in Kasukabe; main kite flying event 14:00. What's so special about flying kites? Nothing much—the biggest kite they fly here measures only 11 x 15 m (that's 36 x 49 feet for our American readers) and is a paltry 800 kg (likewise, over 1750 lbs). Visitors can also bring and fly their own kites. The Ōdako



Photo: Kazo City

Kaikan also has kites on display, some nearly 200 years old. **Access:** From the east exit of Kasukabe (春日部) Station, take the Asahi bus (20 min.) to Ōdako Kaikan Iriguchi (大風会館入口) and a 1-min. walk. There should also be a shuttle bus on the days of the event. **More Info** at the [city website](#) (Japanese). See [this page](#) (Japanese) for the process of getting the biggest kite put together and off the ground.

- **Hikigun B Gourmet Festival** May 4-5 (Sat.-Sun.) from 10:00-15:00 in Higashimatsuyama. Higashimatsuyama boasts excellent local dishes, particularly its pork yakitori with spicy miso sauce. Come try this and dozens of other down-home delicacies from western Saitama. You can also pop in to enjoy the gardens in the nearby temples and shrines, or head over to Shinrin Kōen just 10 minutes up the Tōbu Tōjō line and enjoy an afternoon in this woodland park and garden. **Access:** In the vicinity of the east exit of Higashimatsuyama (東松山) Station on the Tōbu Tōjō (東武東上) line. **More Info** [here](#) (Japanese).
- **Suisokuken Forest Spring Culture Festival** May 5-12 (Sun.-Sun.) from 9:00-16:00 near Heirinji Temple in Niiza. Suisokuken Forest is a nationally designated natural monument that is part of Heirinji Temple. These woods, over 9 sq km, have been preserved for several centuries, making it one of the only places in the metropolitan Kanto area to still have its natural environment. At this festival visitors can take in the fresh colors of early spring while enjoying performances of traditional music, outdoor tea ceremony, and a variety of hands-on activities, including a free beginners Zen meditation session. **Access:** 30-min. walk from Niiza (新座) Station on the Musashino (武蔵野) line; or Seibu bus to Heirinji (平林寺行き) from Shiki (志木), Niiza (新座) (south exits), or Kita-Asaka (北朝霞)/Asakadai (朝霞台) Stations. Map at [saf.or.jp/arthall/guide/access.html](http://saf.or.jp/arthall/guide/access.html). **More Info** at [www.city.niiza.lg.jp](http://www.city.niiza.lg.jp).
- **Yorii Hojo Matsuri** May 12 (Sun.) from 9:00-15:00 in Yorii. For over 50 years Yorii has recreated the hard-fought battle of 3500 Hojo Clan soldiers against the 50,000-strong force of Toyotomi Hideyoshi as he sought to gain control of the entire Japanese archipelago in the 1590s. A parade of costumed re-enactors begins at 12:30, and the main battle event is held along the Arakawa River at 14:00. **Access:** In locations 5-20 min. from Yorii (寄居) Station on the Tōbu Tōjō, Chichibu Tetsudō, and Hachikō (八高) lines; just follow the people. Map at [saf.or.jp/arthall/guide/access.html](http://saf.or.jp/arthall/guide/access.html). **More Info** [here](#) (English) and [here](#) (Japanese).
- **Takigi Noh** May 24-25 (Sat.-Sun.) at Omiya Hikawa Shrine from 17:40-21:30. These fire-lit Noh performance feature performances from three main styles of this centuries-old art form. Noh is not known for being fast-paced and adrenaline-pumping, but the skill of the actors (born into Noh families and performing since they were three) allows staid expressions and wooden masks to convey a range of emotions, and kyōgen (comedic farce pieces) livens things up between pieces. **Access:** 15 min. from the east exit of Omiya (大宮) Station; just follow the people. **More Info** [here](#) (Japanese PDF) and 048-647-8339. Tickets are ¥6000-¥7000 and available at the Omiya and Urawa Sightseeing Offices (観光案内所, *kankō an-naijo*). Omiya's is in Omiya Station, Urawa's near the west exit of Urawa Station) or by mail.

## Recipe Corner

The four-character saying *sankan shion* (三寒四温, lit. “three cold four warm”) captures the beginning of spring perfectly—three cold days followed by four warm days before it’s back



Photo: JanneM

to cold weather again. But spring does triumph in the weather battles, bringing with it fresh and delicious ingredients to use at mealtime. Among seasonal foods on the shelves are fava beans/broad beans (そら豆, *sora mame*) bamboo shoots (竹の子 or 筍, *ta-kenoko*). Pre-cooked and packaged bamboo can be used as-is. If you buy fresh shoots, Just Hungry [explains how to prepare them](#).

### Sweet and Spicy Bamboo Stir-fry (serves 2)

Good as a side dish, for a bento, or over rice.

- 1 piece boiled bamboo (ca. 160g)
- 100g ground or sliced meat
- 1 tsp. sesame oil
- 1 tsp minced ginger
- 2 Tbsp each sugar, sake, soy sauce
- 2 tsp. white sesame
- red chili powder (to taste)

- 1) Chop bamboo into small pieces. Heat oil in pan and add meat and ginger. Brown the meat, then add bamboo.
- 2) After several minutes, add sugar, sake, and soy sauce in above order.
- 3) Cook until most of the liquid evaporates. Add sesame and chili powder, stir, and serve!

### Broad Bean and Onion Stir-fry (serves 2)

- 30 broad beans (ca. 7-8 pods)
- 1/2 onion, cut in wedges 1 cm thick
- 150g sliced, chopped pork
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- 1/2 section chunk of ginger, minced
- 1/2 tsp Konbu dashi (powder ok)
- 1 Tbsp ketchup
- 1 tsp. soy sauce
- 1/4 tsp. *tōbanjan* (豆瓣醬, Chinese chili paste)

- 1) Remove beans from pod and blanch in boiling water for 30 seconds, then remove outer skin.
- 2) Heat oil in a pan, then add meat. When meat browns, add onions and cook on med-low heat until onions are translucent.
- 3) Add beans, garlic, ginger, and konbu dashi and cook on low heat.
- 4) When all is thoroughly heated, stir in ketchup and chili paste. Drizzle soy sauce on top before serving.



# PA Corner

## Information for Leaving Jets

CLAIR's [After JET Guide](#) is available online and is full of information for Jets leaving the Programme. The PAs in the International Division have also prepared the *Out on a High Note* guide, a Saitama-specific supplement with information about status of residence, moving in Japan, and much more. Please read both as you prepare for your summer move.

There is also the Predecessor's Guide to Saitama, a custom worksheet for you to fill out for your successor and give them all the information they need for their new home, and the handy-dandy end-of-appointment expenses worksheet so that you can start budgeting now for your final bills.

All of these Saitama JET documents are available on the International Division page for Jets [here](#).

## 4th Year Jets: Check your foreigner cards



If you will be in Japan for another year, check the expiration date on your alien registration card; it will probably be up before you finish your fifth year. Because of the new residency management system, you will need to apply for your new residence card (*zairyū kādo*) at the regional immigration bureau. The procedure can be finished in a day; click these links for [details](#) and [directions](#). Jets can generally take special leave for this; check your terms and conditions. Double check your card for the expiration date and be sure to have it updated in time.

## 3rd Year Jets: Don't Forget to Extend Your Status of Residence!

If you're staying for a fourth year in Japan, don't forget that your status of residence (also colloquially referred to as visas) is only good for three years; to stay for longer you'll need to apply to extend your period of stay. Immigration can begin processing your application up to two months before your current status of residence expires, and processing usually takes 2-4 weeks. Applicants will need to visit the regional immigration bureau twice (special leave may be given at the discretion of schools or COs). It costs ¥4000 and you will need to prepare documents in advance. For details, go to [www.immi-moj.go.jp/english/tetuduki/kanri/shyorui/03.html](http://www.immi-moj.go.jp/english/tetuduki/kanri/shyorui/03.html). For directions to the bureau, go to [www.immi-moj.go.jp/english/keiziban/happyou/20100903\\_saitam\\_en.pdf](http://www.immi-moj.go.jp/english/keiziban/happyou/20100903_saitam_en.pdf).

※ If you haven't already received your residence card (*zairyū kādo*), you will receive it when you go to extend your status of residence.

## 1st and 2nd Year Jets:

Actually we have no announcements specifically for 1st and 2nd year Jets except to tell you how awesome you are (we didn't want to leave you out of the PA Corner). Carry on!



## Editor's Note

While doing a bit of in-country travel, a friend and I happened to meet a man named Imai-san who is a salt maker. Until then, the most thought I had ever given to salt was when I needed to pick some up at the store, and my purchase was selected based only on price; after all, salt is just salt, right? But Imai-san explained the salt-making process, showing us the steaming tubs where the sea water slowly boiled away, the barrels where the crystallized salt and minerals separated from the *nigari* (magnesium chloride, used to make tofu), and the room where it dried and impurities were painstakingly removed by hand. The composition and flavor of the brine, he told us, change depending on the weather and time of year, and it must be carefully watched to prevent it from becoming too bitter or losing too many of the other minerals. All of this he learned from one of the only traditional salt makers who survived a 92-year long government monopoly that ended in just 1997.

It was fascinating to learn this small part of the history of his work, but it was just as fascinating to see the world that lay behind something so apparently simple. It was a reminder that behind the things we pass over as minor and inconsequential may lie new worlds awaiting our discovery.

—Denise Schlickbernd

## PREFECTURAL ADVISORS

### International Division

Denise Schlickbernd	<a href="mailto:schlickbernd.denise@pref.saitama.lg.jp">schlickbernd.denise at pref.saitama.lg.jp</a>	048.830.2708
Blain Keller	<a href="mailto:keller.blain@pref.saitama.lg.jp">keller.blain at pref.saitama.lg.jp</a>	048.830.2708
Tomoko Kawamura	<a href="mailto:kawamura.tomoko@pref.saitama.lg.jp">kawamura.tomoko at pref.saitama.lg.jp</a>	048.830.2704

### Prefectural Board of Education

Simon Free	<a href="mailto:free.simon@pref.saitama.lg.jp">free.simon at pref.saitama.lg.jp</a>	048.833.0548
Diego Yonamine	<a href="mailto:yonamine.diego@pref.saitama.lg.jp">yonamine.diego at pref.saitama.lg.jp</a>	048.833.0548
Eden Aquino	<a href="mailto:aquino.eden@pref.saitama.lg.jp">aquino.eden at pref.saitama.lg.jp</a>	048.822.0899
Mikihiro Sakashita	<a href="mailto:sakashita.mikihiro@pref.saitama.lg.jp">sakashita.mikihiro at pref.saitama.lg.jp</a>	048.833.7391
Akira Mochida	<a href="mailto:mochida.akira@pref.saitama.lg.jp">mochida.akira at pref.saitama.lg.jp</a>	048.833.7391

## EDITORS & PUBLISHERS

**Editor:** Saitama Council for Effective ALT Utilization (Saitama JET Council)

**Publisher:** Saitama Prefectural International Division

The opinions and articles published are not necessarily the views of the editor or publisher.

### Please send your contributions to:

Prefectural Advisors  
International Division  
Saitama Prefectural Government  
3-15-1 Takasago, Urawa-ku  
Saitama-shi, Saitama 330-9301

Phone: 048.830.2708

Fax: 048.830.4748

Email: [a2705-02 at pref.saitama.lg.jp](mailto:a2705-02@pref.saitama.lg.jp)

### Special Thanks to

Kesha Willis  
Stephen Welch  
Karl Hoeschen  
Allison Conkey

**Next Deadline: June 1**