

awa life

Japanese Culture and
Reading Corner: 卒業式

"That'll do."

March 2022

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Introduction to the
Ishii Town International
Exchange Association

Gairaigo Galore:
ピーマン



Awa Life is a Monthly Publication of the Tokushima Prefectural International Exchange Association

March and the beginning of spring is a great time for enjoying sunny days without temperatures that are too chilly. For example, you can take a walk through nature while listening to the first twittering sounds of spring birds. It's a time when many people gather strength and energy for the new year while being surrounded by positive vibes. Of course, it's also the month where cherry blossoms in Tokushima begin to bloom. If you would like to know where you can find good cherry blossom (sakura) spots in Tokushima, just check out last year's hanami map (3/2021 issue). We wish everyone a wonderful start to spring!

For all of those who like writing, please feel free to submit an article to us at any point in time about basically anything. There are a few limitations though, such as you can't write about religion, politics, commercial activities or businesses or anything that we deem inappropriate. But, other than that, we would be more than happy to receive articles about anything and everything including but not limited to concerts, lectures, other events, culture, sports, community group information or anything cool that's happening in your local community.

We highly appreciate all of your articles and we love reading them. So if that writing bug of yours is buzzing about, grab a pen or a computer and write and send away! Please send all submissions to our email:

awalife@gmail.com

Your editors,
Sydney and Nico

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"That'll do."

By: Michael R. Comer

“Eh, that'll do.”

Most people might judge this as not being the best of attitudes to possess when picking out what could, and ultimately did, end up being my new home in Japan, yet sure enough, those were precisely the nonchalant words I said when ticking the box as a part of my application to the JET Programme. That single, flippant decision was one which would turn out to have great significance to me, in so many ways. In truth, it is hard to look back on it with any real sense of scale, for in reality, it all feels like it is a world away.

I had been to Japan before. Shortly after graduating, I took all of my savings and dropped them into what would be a month-long adventure in which I explored the sprawling metropolis of Tokyo. A country which was, at that time, about to host the rugby world cup. It was a real challenge, and despite nearly two years of self-study of the language, I felt like I had learned more in my relatively short time in Japan than I ever had from the textbooks. I loved the bright lights and warm welcome that I found in Japan, and decided that I wanted to come back and see as much of the country as I could, over a much longer period of time.

The fact of the matter was, however, that I simply did not know enough about the many prefectures

in Japan outside of Tokyo to make an educated choice on where I wanted to end up. Indeed, when it came to Tokushima and Shikoku in general, my knowledge was quite literally limited to what I had read in the contents of a single blog post from five years previous. I suppose that, being relatively fresh out of university and having spent a year training to become a newly qualified teacher, I was filled with a sense of indomitability; a notion that whatever the world threw at me, I would take it in my stride and dare it to try again. Tokushima has lots of nature spots? Check. Tokushima has lots of historic sites to satiate the history teacher I had become? Absolutely. So naturally, when I got the email saying that I would be flying to Shikoku, I was ecstatic!

That new enthusiasm lasted until an entirely unforeseen, and sudden, global problem cropped up in the final weeks leading up to departure, and completely scuppered any idea that plans would be going ahead as anticipated. In the end, it took those few remaining weeks and morphed them into an excruciating eighteen months before I finally set foot on Japanese soil again.

As with many people struggling through the pandemic, I sought out any positive that I could find to help me work through it. In my case, that positive was the idea of my new life on JET. The idea that somehow it would become some kind of a silver bullet that would vanquish all of my

newfound problems and I could dance off into the sunset. The idea of JET became more than simply a coping mechanism; it became an obsession that, in hindsight, may well have bordered on the unhealthy. Family and friends whom, throughout the first year, had been so supportive of my going abroad, had themselves become worn down by the groundhog days of the 'new normal' and switched to trying to temper my expectations. They suggested that maybe it was time to move on, that it probably wouldn't happen; despite myself, I freely admit that I was beginning to come round to their way of thinking.

Once I had heard that I was heading to Mima in March of 2020 I developed a thirst for all knowledge related to the subject; courtesy of the pandemic, I found myself with a lot of spare time to research it. My curiosity on the subject was completely insatiable. Where is it? How many people live there? How long does it take to get around the prefecture using those famously efficient trains? I must have exhausted Google's knowledge on the topic in those months. I made lists of places that I wanted to see, and things that I wanted to do; things which felt that I may never get to do. Then finally, after all that time waiting, hoping and even praying to any deity that would listen, I finally made it out here and the reality of it hit me with the full force of a freight train.

Not so surprisingly, it was not the silver bullet that I had been anticipating the whole time that I was waiting. Admittedly, Mima is not as easy of a place to live as I had expected. It is a small city (if one stretches the meaning of the word to within an inch of its life), and although it has all of the essentials, it does lack the frills which one might expect from city life. If one wishes to get anywhere, then generally speaking, you are going to be doing so by car (a rather alien concept to me as I had always been one to walk whenever possible, regardless of distance). It was tough, and far more daunting than my initial blasé attitude had ever accounted for in the little amount of thought I had given to it.

It was a real hit to the system and certainly had its effect on me personally. I lost much of my appetite and the idea of returning to an empty and, courtesy of the oncoming Japanese winter, cold apartment was thoroughly unpalatable (despite the reality that my apartment is actually pretty decent). My independence had been sucked away by a lack of skill with the language, meaning that what would have been the most basic tasks in the UK now took two or three times as long. Shop shelves were full of completely unfamiliar products that I was unsure of how to use successfully. Then, as the icing on the cake during my first weekend in my new placement city, likely due to the stress of it, I was struck down with an illness that left me bed-ridden, delirious with fever and prevented me from attending a local party, which would have been my first real opportunity to socialise. Not the most ideal start I think it is fair to say.

So daunting was it, that I have to admit that I thought in my first week of throwing in the towel and returning home to the safety and security of what I had always known. Mima was nothing like home, and what Japanese I did know did little to assist me in the initial endeavours of getting a phone plan sorted. I even had to drive an automatic car! This was something which was truly unthinkable to me in the UK. Fundamentally, Japan was simply different. It was strange and alien. It was altogether... foreign.

Yet despite these doubts, and they were plentiful and oppressive, there remained a tiny piece of my mind that hadn't grown jaded over the long wait, quarantine, and shock at the reality differing from what I had expected throughout it all. A part of my mind still clung on tightly to that initial optimism and was not about to tumble at the first hurdles. It saw the positives of Mima, of which there are many and many of those were the other side of the coin for many of the perceived negatives. Ultimately, as I lay feverish and staring at the ceiling from the stony ground of what I felt to be my 'rock bottom', the only way things could possibly go was up... surely.

"That'll do."

Yes, there weren't a lot of people, but the people that are here were incredibly warm and welcoming. Away from the hustle and bustle of the bigger cities, life takes on a pace of its own. The people seem to have more time to actually care, to ask you about your day, to connect.

Yes, there are none of the bells and whistles of cities like Tokyo or Osaka, but it has a wealth of its own, which the great concrete jungles of Japan are lacking. There is green everywhere you look. Drive or walk for five minutes in any direction and you are bound to encounter something more rugged and wild. Here, the works of people go with the land rather than simply through it. The roads follow the rivers as they flow languidly over the rocks, with little more than delicate foam to mark its passing. The roads meander as the water does, in such a way that the drive itself becomes a pleasure rather than the chore it might otherwise be. It is not simply about getting from point A to B, for the first time that I have experienced, it really does feel like it is more about the journey than the destination (although driving some of these roads really is to take your life in your hands).

I think the phrase 'culture shock' is given a lot of lip service in discussions about moving abroad, but despite this, the shock of uprooting your life and moving across the globe to Japan is something which is entirely intangible as a concept. The reality being, you can discuss coping strategies until you are blue in the face, but until one has actually landed in Japan and been presented with the pointy end of culture shock first-hand, no amount of discussion or presentations on the subject will ever truly prepare you for it.

In my case, much like an amateur boxer getting ready for his first title match, I was able to talk a big game and that was what carried me through the weigh ins and waiting for the big day to arrive. My original confidence in being able to take on the world was fine in theory, because I believed that I could back it up. But when the bell rang, culture shock came out swinging... and it was packing brass knuckles. It beat seven bells out of me, and

was so bad that it drove me to something which I would never have considered at home in England; I asked for help. After all, if you can't beat it alone, call in some mates to help you give it a good kicking.

Help could not have been more forthcoming, either from my fellow ALTs or from staff at the board of education. I was taken on night walks and shown the blanket of stars that Mima's limited lights did nothing to hide, taken to excellent places to eat and introduced to a side of Japanese cuisine and hospitality which I had not been able to experience in the likes of Tokyo. In short, I was shown that Mima might have been cut from a different cloth, but that cloth was still of the finest quality.

Sitting in a local open-air onsen, shortly after a somewhat shocking experience with an electric bath (think taking a dip with your favourite four-slice toaster and you're probably not that far off), and watching the moon hang overhead is a memory which will stick with me for a great many years to come, if not the remainder of my life.

It was an experience of contemplative calm that gave me ample time to think over just where I was and how incredible an achievement that was. Against all odds, and during one of the most turbulent times in living memory, I had crossed the world. Through eighteen months of short-term work, unemployment, constant money worries, stringent national lockdowns, 'will-it-wont-it' departure dates and finally two weeks cooped up in quarantine, I had survived it all in order to even be able to sit in that hot spring and look up at a sky so markedly different from the one I had become so familiar with at home (if only because I, myself, was now naked and surrounded by several locals who were too).

So profound was the realisation and change in my thinking that my worries began to move away from being whether I would make it to the end of my contract year, and instead whether I would be able to achieve my goals and see what I want to see in that time. My journeys thus far had

never failed to show me new beautiful places and exciting adventures that I might go on.

I suppose the core of what I want to express here is the notion that one should discard any and all preconceptions about what life in Japan, especially in the more rural reaches, might be and how it will go. Understand that culture shock will come for you and that that fight is a tough one. Sure, you can arm yourself ahead of time with sticks of the pointed variety, but fundamentally, it has the home field advantage.

There is no one way to fight it, and each person has to do what works for them on the individual level. If you are a social butterfly, push to get out and see what your area has to offer. If you prefer quiet spaces, then put on your best walking shoes and go find that place. Be proactive and make culture shock fight on your own terms. Drag it onto

your level and give it a thrashing on experience.

It is easy to read all of these wonderful stories from JETs that have had surprise encounters that resulted in incredible experiences and lifelong friendships, and then somehow feel like you are missing out when it doesn't happen to you immediately upon landing in your prefecture.

So, in summary, while my past-self had been wrong in just about every aspect of his approach, and naïve regarding his own resilience in the face of sudden and drastic change, there was one aspect of his thinking which has stuck with me and which I often find myself murmuring with some fondness whenever Mima reminds me of the fact it is a hidden gem nestled in a sea of green, and I catch sight of a mountain or river view on my way to work or the shops. I say my past-self was right... That'll do, and it'll do nicely.

Introduction to the Ishii Town International Exchange Association

By: Atsuko Endo

In 2015, the Ishii Town International Exchange Association began holding a variety of events such as English conversation classes, Chinese classes, Japanese classes, exchange meetings, cooking classes, lectures, etc.

As the number of foreigners has been increasing, Ishii Town has put a lot of effort into its Japanese classes which are open free to the public. The classes are for technical interns and foreigners living in the town who want to study Japanese. Occasionally there are exchange meetings with members.

At our general meetings we have planned a variety of events such as a performance of the morin khuur, instruments of the world by Michio Kawatake, Balinese dancing, and more in order to increase our new membership rate. However, gaining new members is quite difficult, especially young ones.

For our cooking classes, we've invited foreign teachers to come and cook/sample foreign foods together, including Vietnamese food, German

food, Canadian food, Chinese food, etc.

Through our exchange meetings and thanks to an introduction from a professor at Bunri University, every year our members started accepting Korean students from the University of Suwon and study abroad students from Taiwan for homestays. The students visit the Ishii Town Hall to learn about the town and then visit Hyakushouichi. They also enjoy pottery, shodo, the koto, tosenkyo, the kendama, okonomiyaki, and more. Members greatly enjoy the homestays and exchange meetings.

English picture book storytelling events are periodically held where foreign teachers choose the picture books. Families with small children enthusiastically gathered at the community center to listen to the stories. When held at a large shopping mall, many kindergarteners, elementary schoolers, and adults came as well.

Continued on page 9!

Japanese Culture and Reading Corner: 卒業式

By: Isao Kobayashi

卒業式は、生徒や学生の卒業を祝う式典で、3月の恒例の行事です。
 卒業式には、先生と生徒や学生だけでなく来賓も出席し、厳肅な雰囲気の中で式典は行われます。
 卒業式の服装は、制服や正装です。大学では男女ともスーツが多いようですが、女性は、袴を着用することもあるようです。
 卒業式といえば、思い出の曲が二つあります。「蛍の光」と「仰げば尊し」です。
 どちらも、かつては必ずと言っていいほど、卒業式で歌われていて、まさに卒業式の定番中の定番と言える曲でした。
 しかし最近の卒業式では、生徒達が自ら選んだ曲を歌うことも増えてきました。少し寂しい気もしますが、これも時代の流れなのでしょう。
 皆さんは、卒業式にどのような思い出がありますか。



Vocabulary List

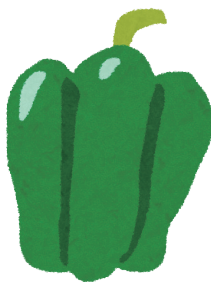
卒業式	Graduation Ceremony	生徒	Student	学生	University Student	祝う	Celebrate
式典	Ceremony	恒例	Custom	行事	Event	来賓	Guest
出席	Attend	厳肅	Solemn	雰囲気	Atmosphere	服装	Dress
制服	Uniform	正装	Formal Dress	袴	Hakama	着用	Wear
思い出す	Remember	曲	Song	かつては	Formerly	必ず	Definitely
定番	Standard Thing	時代の流れ	Flow of Time	思い出	Memory		

Gairaigo Galore

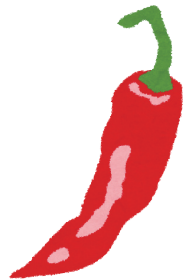


ピーマン (Green Pepper)

By: Nico Bohnsack



“Pee man? Huh? Strange!” Have you ever stood in a Japanese supermarket, looked at the green peppers, and asked yourself why the Japanese name for this delicious green vegetable is “piiman”? Although the name sounds funny to some, people who know the French language might be able to come up with the answer: ピーマン stems from the French word “piment” which means “chili pepper”. But wait! Why does the Japanese language use the word for “chili pepper” as the word for “green pepper” then? It is said that the Portuguese brought chili peppers to Japan in the Edo period which is where the Portuguese word for “chili pepper” (which is similar to the French word) found its way into the Japanese language. However, from the beginning of the Meiji era also the sweeter version, now called “green pepper”, became widespread in Japan while still maintaining the former name, now in the French version due to the influence of France in the Meiji period. The result was ピーマン. Chili peppers on the other hand are now usually sold under the name とうがらし. That's why green peppers were sometimes also called 甘とうがらし (sweet chili pepper) or 西洋とうがらし (western chili pepper) in the Meiji era.



A cartoon illustration of a young boy with black hair, wearing a blue long-sleeved shirt and dark blue pants. He is climbing a set of grey stairs, with his right foot on the second step and his left foot on the third step. He is looking up and to the right with a slight smile. To the left of the stairs, there is a horizontal line and the text 'Step 1'.

Events & Memoranda

Japanese Classes 2022 Term 1 TOPIA Japanese Classes Schedule

Time: 10:30-12:00 Location: Meeting rooms at TOPIA Fee: Free

Textbook: We will be using the "Minna no Nihongo I" or the "Minna no Nihongo II" (2nd edition) textbooks (2,750 yen for the book and audio CD). Please prepare the textbooks on your own. Additionally, there will be themed lessons on various topics such as seasons and life in Tokushima.

*Due to the spread of COVID-19, the classes may change to an online format (Zoom, etc.). Please confirm class status by phone or by checking TOPIA's website. TEL: 088-656-3303 Website: <https://www.topia.ne.jp/english/>

DAY	TEACHER	LEVEL	CLASS DESCRIPTION	START DATE
TUE	Ms. Tamaki	Elementary 2	We will study various phrases/forms such as potential, intention, orders, prohibitive, conditions, etc. Text: Minna no Nihongo II – from Chapter 26-37	April 5 (20 times)
WED	Volunteers	Group Lesson	This is a flexible group study class split up into 3 different groups. *For parents of young children, a childcare worker will be on hand to look after your child during the lesson. (Please inquire in advance. Depending on the current COVID-19 situation, this service may not be offered.)	April 6 (20 times)
THU	Ms. Yamada	Conversations & Cultural Activities	We will practice Japanese conversations relating to a variety of topics. Additionally, while studying Japanese we will experience Japanese culture and seasonal events firsthand. *For those who have finished up to Chapter 25 of Minna no Nihongo I. (Schedule is subject to change.)	April 7 (20 times)
FRI	Ms. Aoki	Elementary 1	We will study various forms such as conjugated forms, te form, nai form, dictionary form, etc. Text: Minna no Nihongo 1 – from Chapter 14~25	April 8 (20 times)
SUN	JTM	Conversations & Cultural Activities	We will practice Japanese conversations relating to a variety of topics. Additionally, while studying Japanese we will experience Japanese culture and seasonal events firsthand. *For those who have finished up to Chapter 25 of Minna no Nihongo I. (Schedule is subject to change.)	April 10 (20 times)
	Volunteers	Group Lesson	This is a flexible group study class split up into 3 different groups.	

* Please register for Group Lessons at least a day before the class. (If you do not sign up in advance and show up on the day of the class, we may not be able to find a group for you to study with.) Additionally, as the number of groups are limited, we may not be able to find a group that suits your level.

* If you are unable to attend class, please call and let us know. (TEL: 088-656-3303, Email: topia@topia.ne.jp)

* The Volunteer Classes on Wednesday and Sunday will be cancelled if no students show up within the first 30 minutes.

TUE	Ms. Kimura	Special Beginners Class	A class for those who cannot read or write hiragana or katakana. We will study the basics, such as the Japanese alphabet, greetings, numbers, and items. We will also be learning about Tokushima.	You may join at anytime.
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*Classes may be cancelled if there is a typhoon, heavy rain, heavy snow, etc. Please call and confirm if classes will still be held.

Japanese classes are also available at the Anan International Association, Aizumi Town International Exchange Association, Yoshinogawa International Exchange Association, Mima no Sato, Minami Multicultural Coexistence Network "Harmony", the Club for Thinking about Multicultural Coexistence "Tomoni" in Tsurugi Town, Awa International Exchange Association, and the NPO "Attakaiyou" in Kaiyo Town.

Introduction to the Ishii Town International Exchange Association (Continued)

By: Atsuko Endo

Ishii Town is a sister city to Minnedosa, Manitoba in Canada, and every year we send a small amount of money to help maintain the Japanese garden they have there. In June of 2020, Minnedosa suffered from a large flood, and many roads, businesses, and facilities were damaged. The Japanese garden was also damaged. Global warming and abnormal weather have been affecting many places across the globe. However, with a tiny bit of help from us and their volunteers, we received word that



the garden was restored at the end of last year. We also sent Hina dolls, but we haven't received word if they set up the dolls or not. Canada has also been facing COVID-19, and the Japanese garden was closed for 18 months. It was opened back up, but due to the spread of the omicron variant, it may be closed again.

2016 marked 20 years of our international exchange with Canada. At that time, we were invited by Canada embassy in Akasaka, Tokyo to attend a symposium in December at the ambassador's residence. At the symposium, we learned about Canada's politics, economy, trade, and more through use of headsets and a simultaneous interpreter. Afterwards, there were presentations from the consulates in

Fukuoka, Osaka, Nagoya, and Sapporo, and then presentations relating to exchange from various organizations. We were the smallest organization there, but we presented on the projects we had been working on. There were many groups that had stopped exchange projects, so I felt that we had done well to continue for this long. In January of last year, a meeting was held to greet the New Year, but after the 3rd meeting, all meetings were cancelled and have continued to be cancelled due to COVID-19.

The AJET musical is an event enjoyed by the people of Ishii Town and the members of the international exchange association. They did their best, but due to COVID-19 the performance has been cancelled this year as well which is very unfortunate.

Many events and classes have continued to be held or cancelled depending on the situation. We publish a newsletter for our members twice a year to keep them updated. Finding new articles to write about is difficult, but I hope to continue to provide everyone with new information and keep this association alive.

Counselling Service at TOPIA ・ トピアの相談窓口

TOPIA provides consultation on everyday life, education, labor, medical institutions, and disaster prevention; and information on sightseeing spots to overseas residents and visitors. When necessary, we will refer you to the appropriate organization that can assist with your needs. Counselling is available in English, Chinese, Vietnamese, and Japanese. Please note that although every effort will be made, we may not be able to deal with all cases.

Everyday, 10:00 - 18:00 (closed during the New Year's holidays)

Tel: 088-656-3312 or 088-656-3313 (allows for three-way conversations with an interpreter)