

awa life

“Kukai”

September 2025

Life in Kamikatsu Town

#418

2025 Tokushima Japanese
Speech Contest Winner

Nihongo Know-it-all:
語呂合わせ Number
Wordplay



TOPIA

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

Happy September, everyone! As the summer starts to wind down and get ready to transition to Autumn, I hope you all are staying healthy and cool in the lingering heat.

Did you know that September is designated as Disaster Prevention Month in Japan? Let's all take this month to double-check our preparations for natural disasters. Make sure you know your local evacuation points, have a "go-bag" ready, and make plans for how you will contact your family/loved ones in case of emergency. If you haven't been already, the Tokushima Prefectural Disaster Prevention Center is a great place to visit to get more information (tours conducted in Japanese). Additionally, TOPIA has published a multilingual [Disaster Prevention Handbook](#) that you can access from the website. Staying safe in a disaster starts with awareness and preparation ahead of time.

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. Additionally, please keep articles around ~400-700 words (if writing in English), or ~1000 characters (if writing in Japanese). If you have any questions or want to check if your topic will work, feel free to reach out to us before you start writing.

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,
Riley and Lisa

Tokushima Prefectural International Exchange Association (TOPIA)

1-61 Terashima Honcho Nishi, Tokushima City 770-0831 JAPAN, Clement Plaza 6F

Tel: 088-656-3303 Fax: 088-652-0616

<http://www.topia.ne.jp/>

Download a PDF file of awa life or view the online version by going to TOPIA's website!



Editors:

Riley Henke, Lisa Knitter

Contributors This Month:

Guo Yingnan, Chen Sizhe, Zayyan, Miyui Okamoto, Yoko Aoki

Contents

Pg. 2-3: 2025 Tokushima Japanese Speech Contest Winner

Pg. 4: “Kukai”

Pg. 5: Life in Kamikatsu Town

Pg. 6: Tokushima Culture and Reading Corner: 月見ヶ丘海浜公園 つきみがおかかいひんこうえん

Pg. 6: Nihongo Know-It-All: 語呂合わせ ごろあ Number Wordplay

Pg. 7: Japanese Lesson: 「おねがいします」

Pg. 8-9: Events and Memoranda



2025 Tokushima Prefecture Japanese Speech Contest

On July 20, the Tokushima Prefectural International Exchange Association held the 36th annual Prefectural Japanese Speech Contest for Foreign Residents at Awagin Hall. 14 participants from 7 different countries and 1 region spoke on topics such as cross-cultural understanding, differences between Japan and their home countries, and their lives and experiences here in Japan. Including spectators, judges, and participants, approximately one hundred people gathered to attend the competition in total.



The grand prize winner of the 2025 Tokushima Japanese Speech Contest was Guo Yingnan, Naruto University of Education exchange student from China who arrived in Japan only four months prior to the competition. Guo spoke eloquently about stereotypes, prejudice, and multicultural coexistence with an incredibly high level of Japanese proficiency. An English translation of Guo Yingnan's winning speech, *Change Isn't Scary—the Road to Coexistence* is available to read below.

Change Isn't Scary—the Road to Coexistence

By: Guo Yingnan (Grand Prize Winner)

Before I came to Japan as an exchange student, my relatives, and even my mother warned me, “You’re better off not going. Japanese people are unfriendly and scary.” Hearing that, I wondered, how could they possibly say that without having spoken to or even met a Japanese person in real life? Upon reflection, I realized that this mindset must have been something

unconsciously instilled in us from things such as TV, the news, and gossip. “Japan has lots of earthquakes, and the people are coldhearted. You won’t be happy there.” Every time I heard such words, my doubts grew. But at the same time, so did my determination to go to and see for myself. With that determination, my mind was set—I was going to study in Japan.

Change Isn't Scary—the Road to Coexistence

To my surprise, after arriving in Japan, I had the chance to experience the kindness of Japanese people. One day, as I was doing my laundry in my dorm room, I heard a knock at my door. An exchange student from Africa who lived on the floor below me greeted me, and asked, “Are you doing laundry? There’s water leaking into my room from the ceiling.” I had no idea what to do in such a situation—all I could do was stand there and apologize repeatedly. The next day, I received an email from the school saying that someone would come to fix the washing machine immediately. Reading that message, it was like someone had gently doused the fire of my irritation with cool water, my heart deeply touched by their kindness. This experience completely changed my perception of Japanese people, and after recounting the experience to my family, I think theirs started to change as well.

However, this experience once again opened my eyes to how harmful stereotypes can be. In truth, I’ve heard that there isn’t a very good image of Chinese people in Japan. Chinese people are often assumed to be “loud,” “obnoxious,” and “unable to follow rules,” judged by the one-sided portrayal of them that is shown in the media. When I go out in Japan, I am sometimes asked, “Are you Japanese? Or Korean?” When I answer that I’m from China, people have reacted with surprise, saying, “But you don’t seem very Chinese.” I wonder, what does a Chinese person look or act like? Could it simply be that I don’t fit the stereotypical image of Chinese people in their minds? Of course, not all Chinese people act or look the same, or have the same personality. But somewhere along the way, we have lost sight of that obvious reality. The truth is, there are plenty of kind, sincere, and considerate people, in China, too.

In this way, we sometimes view others through narrow, one-sided perspectives, making snap judgments and saying things like, “Japanese people are like this” or “Chinese people are like that.” But in reality, you don’t know what someone is really like until you try meeting and talking with them for yourself. After all, isn’t it much more frightening to be afraid of things that are unknown? In our minds, we tend to view things we don’t understand or can’t see as scary, like the Boogeyman—and I believe it’s precisely this fear which leads to prejudice, misunderstandings, and discrimination.

So then, what can we do? Since entering graduate school, I have learned that Japanese language education is not simply studying language, but about recognizing differences in culture and values. When teaching Japanese to people with different cultural backgrounds and native languages, it’s very important to put yourself in their shoes. The same applies to everyday communication. For example, even if there are cultural differences, is it not the most beautiful, noble thing a human being can do for another to respect those differences instead of denying them? Furthermore, I feel that we need to stop viewing stereotypes lightly and casually going along with them, and instead ask ourselves if we are making assumptions about others.

Any country, culture, or person has both strengths and weaknesses. However, rather than simply labeling and judging others, I believe that the first step toward creating a peaceful and bright future lies in countries and people facing each other, acknowledging their differences, and learning from one another.

Thank you for listening.



“Kukai”

By: Chen Sizhe

The choral symphony “Kukai,” created by Beijing’s Tian Gou No Sound Cultural Media Corporation, is based on the theme of Kobo-Daishi, the great Buddhist monk also known as Kukai. It contains themes of compassion, world peace, and cultural exchange, and was first performed in Japan in Kyoto and Tokyo in 2023, and in Europe in 2024. In the most recent Japan tour, Kousuke Tsunoda conducted, the Osaka Philharmonic Orchestra performed, and the China Central Academy of Music Choir participated.

I was invited to the concert by a colleague, and we were lucky enough to get seats. The afternoon of July 11, we departed from Tokushima Station, heading to the Kagawa show. As we talked and enjoyed the scenery in the car, we arrived at our destination in no time.

Before the concert, we of course had to eat Kagawa’s specialty—udon. The restaurant we chose was very old and famous, and there were countless autographs of famous people from all over the world on the wall. As

expected, the udon was satisfyingly chewy, and the chicken was tender and delicious.

After that, we made our way to the Kagawa Kenmin Hall. The hall is a two-story building with about 1,800 seats, and ours couldn’t have been better—front and center of the first floor. They weren’t too far or too close, so we could see the stage clearly. As the concert began, an indescribable sense of awe struck my heart, as if my entire body had been awakened by the power of the music. The harmonious melodies, rich in emotion, intertwined to create a deeply moving performance. Even someone like me, who knows nothing about musical instruments, was completely engrossed for the entire hour and a half, lost in the music.

The piece, “Kukai,” honors its namesake, who introduced esoteric Buddhism to Japan and had a great influence on culture, education, and art. The symphony uses music as a bridge, allowing the rhythms of Eastern civilization to cross mountains and seas and spanning country borders, much like Kukai’s cultural exchange efforts in his time; an endeavor of profound significance.



Life in Kamikatsu Town

By: Zayyan

Kamikatsu and London have a lot more in common than people think. For example, they both have a population over 1000, at least one Italian restaurant, and I have also lived in both of them. Moving from a global city to a small town in the mountains was a big adjustment and I had a lot of misconceptions that were swiftly dispelled. I thought that I’d be working in a school with less than 20 students, dodging all sorts of wild animals whilst driving and spending every weekend tending to a farm. In reality, I only visit my farm once or twice a month (my corn is growing big and strong and will soon be ready to devour).





When I applied for the JET program to teach English, I wanted to experience living in a city in Japan. One of the big cities, like Tokyo, Osaka or even Tokushima. But I was ready for anything.

After finding out my placement, I turned my laptop on, typed in my password, opened my default Internet browser and watched some YouTube videos. Then I did my best to research Kamikatsu, but most of the results were about an anime of the same name. Instead I looked up people's personal experiences living in rural Japan. A lot of the accounts were positive, saying that they became ingrained in their respective communities and were able to live a unique experience you couldn't get anywhere else. I came to find this to be accurate.

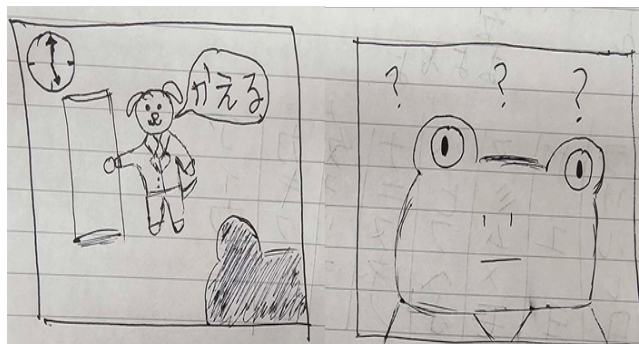
Kamikatsu is a very special place. It is not a big city, but it has a big personality and welcoming community that more than make up for it. Ever since I arrived here, I was accepted and invited to every event, festival and drinking party (people in the inaka LOVE to drink). I was worried I wouldn't be able to connect with people due to my lack of Japanese ability, but many of the locals speak English and even those who don't are really friendly and willing to talk with me anyway.

You may already know, but Kamikatsu is famous for being the "zero waste town". In 2003, the town made a "Zero Waste Declaration" to become a society that produces zero waste. Through its efforts over 22 years, Kamikatsu now recycles over 80% of its waste; four times higher than Japan's national average. This is achieved

through the Zero Waste Centre and the 45 recycling categories. The Zero Waste Centre is a question mark shaped building where all residents of Kamikatsu must visit to separate and recycle their waste. There are 45 different categories to recycle into and the helpful staff are on hand to provide support and answer questions. The 'dot' at the bottom of the question mark is a hotel, where guests can stay and also receive a guided tour of the facilities.



I implore everyone to make a trip out to Kamikatsu before you leave Tokushima. There's so much to do and see, and you will be welcomed with open arms. Also, Kamikatsu will be at the Osaka World Expo on the last day of the expo, October 13th. They will be participating in an event at a booth next to the Kansai Pavilion, so if you are around please drop by! In the meantime, please enjoy this two-panel comic that me and my associate Katie created. Thank you.



"Home time" by Zayyan and Katie

Tokushima Culture and Reading Corner: 月見ヶ丘海浜公園

By: Miyui Okamoto

徳島阿波おどり空港の 近くにある、月見ヶ丘海浜公園。遊具や、バーベキュー場、コテージや ドッグランがあり、子どもから 大人まで楽しむことができます。海沿いを 散歩したり、芝生の上で お弁当を 食べたり、のんびり 過ごすのも おすすめです。また、公園



には、月が よく見える 丘や 広場があります。日本では、古くから 9月や 10月に 見える 美しい月を 眺めて楽しむ「お月見」という 文化があります。徳島では、いたるところで 月や 星を 見ることができますが、今年の お月見は、月見ヶ丘海浜公園で 楽しんでみては いかがですか？



Vocabulary List

遊具 playground equipment

バーベキュー場 barbeque grounds

コテージ cottage

ドッグラン dog park

芝生 lawn; grass

のんびり in a relaxed manner

丘 hill

広場 open space; clearing; plaza

眺めて to gaze at

お月見 moon viewing

いたるところ all over

語呂合わせ Number Wordplay

By: Riley Henke

Nihongo Know-it-all



If you've spent enough time in Japan or around Japanese media, you may have seen what looks like nonsensical code made up of numbers. However, this might be a type of Japanese wordplay called goroawase! Originally used in pager codes back in the day, a string of numbers is used to indicate a word or phrase. As each digit has at least a few different readings (such as how "1" can be read as "ichi" or "hito(tsu)"), they can be used in place of syllables to spell out words.

As a simple example, say you receive a text from a friend after doing them a favor that just says "39". What are they trying to say? Why, "thank you," of course! Because "3" in Japanese is read as "san" and "9" as "kyuu," when you combine them you get "sankyuu" which sounds like "thank you" in English. Another example is "4649". This one can be tricky, since "4" can be read as "yon" or "shi", but if we use both of those readings and think of it as **yon-roku-shi-ku**(another reading of 9), perhaps you can see the hidden message? Taking the first syllable from each, we get the Japanese word "yoroshiku"! One last example is "084". While "0" can be read as "zero" or "rei", it also looks like the English letter O, so is sometimes read as that in goroawase. Combining that with the other numbers we get **O-hachi-yon**, or "ohayo(u)", the Japanese word for good morning.

Goroawase wordplay can take a while to get the hang of, but if you practice hard at it, you'll be a master in no time. There are countless other examples, so look into it if you're curious to learn more!

「おねがいします」

This month, we're going to learn about the phrase “おねがいします.”

In what situations can you use this phrase?

1. When you want to buy something at a store; when ordering at a restaurant

- これ（を）おねがいします。／ このりんごを ^{みつ} 3つ おねがいします。
- カレーライスを ^{ふた} 2つ と オレンジジュースを ^{ふた} 2つ おねがいします。

2. When you want to receive something

- すみません。{ お水 ^{みず} / 部屋 ^{へや} のかぎ } を おねがいします。

3. When asking someone to do something

- これ（を）おねがいします。（コンビニなどで）
例：支払い ^{しはら} (payment) / 宅配便 ^{たくはいびん} (express home delivery)
- { 修理 ^{しゅうり} (repairs) / 配達 ^{はいたつ} (delivery) / 予約 ^{よやく} (reservation) / コピー (copy) } を おねがいします。
- { 禁煙席 ^{きんえんせき} (seat in non-smoking area) / 喫煙席 ^{きつえんせき} (seat in smoking area) }
を おねがいします（レストランなど で）
- { もういちど / ゆっくり / 英語 ^{えいご} で / ○○語 ^ご で } おねがいします。
(日本語 ^{にほんご} が わからないとき)

4. As a greeting when you first meet someone new

- はじめまして。どうぞ よろしく おねがいします。

5. When telling the taxi driver your destination

- 徳島 ^{とくしまえき} 駅まで おねがいします。

6. When you're stating who you'd like to speak with (e.g., on the phone)

- すみません。田中 ^{たなか} さんをおねがいします。

Let's practice! Pick the option that fits best in each sentence. *Note: Some sentences may use either/both.

- 1) 日本語 ^{にほんご} が わかりません。英語 ^{えいご} で (ください ・ おねがいします)。
- 2) スマートフォンの修理 ^{しゅうり} を (ください ・ おねがいします)。
- 3) この料理 ^{りょうり} の名前 ^{なまえ} を おしえて (ください ・ おねがいします)。
- 4) ハンバーガーを ^{ふた} 2つ (ください ・ おねがいします)。
- 5) 一万円 ^{いちまんえん} を 千円札 ^{せんえんきつ} 10枚 ^{まい} に 両替 ^{りょうがえ} (exchange) を (ください ・ おねがいします)。

Answers: ① おねがいします ② おねがいします ③ ください ④ ください ⑤ おねがいします

Events & Memoranda

日本語支援ボランティア養成講座

あなたのまわりの外国人の方に日本語支援をしてみませんか？

日時：9月25日（木）～11月20日（木）19:00～20:30

開催場所：オンライン開催

実地研修：三好町（11月9日 13:00～17:00）・神山町（11月16日 10:00～15:00）開催予定

実施団体：徳島県国際交流協会 参加費：無料

★皆様のご参加をお待ちしております！ 詳細は TOPIA ホームページをご覧ください。



2025 Japan National Census 2025 年国勢調査

The census is the most important statistical survey in Japan. It is conducted once every five years and covers all people living in Japan (including non-Japanese people) and their households.

国勢調査は、日本に住んでいるすべての人（外国人の方も含む）と世帯を対象とした、日本で最も重要な統計調査です。

The purpose of the census is to understand the actual conditions of people and households in Japan and to obtain basic data for various administrative measures and other programs such as improving the living environment and disaster prevention planning.

国内の人及び世帯の実態を把握し、各種行政施策その他の基礎資料を得ることを目的としています。生活環境の改善や防災計画の立案など、わたしたちの生活に欠かせないさまざまな行政施策に役立てられる大切な調査です。

Census documents will be delivered starting late September. A Census taker with an official ID card will visit your household to deliver the documents. Please answer the door when they come. Everyone living in Japan is **legally obligated** to respond to the census.

令和7年9月下旬頃、調査員が各世帯を訪問し、調査書類を配布します。

インターネットでご回答いただくか、紙の調査票を郵送又は調査員に提出いただくかのいずれかの方法により、ご回答いただけます。

Responses online or on paper are accepted. It takes about 5-10 minutes to respond online. →

For more information (English), visit:

<https://www.kokusei2025.go.jp/about/en/>

Events & Memoranda

2025 Term 2 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.

DAY	TEACHER	LEVEL	CLASS DESCRIPTION	START DATE
TUE	Ms. Tamaki	Beginners	We will take the first step towards learning basic expressions. Text: Minna no Nihongo I from Chapter 1~13	October 14 (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 make a reservation in advance. Childcare will be offered at TOPIA's meeting rooms or at the child-care facility in the Amico Building (5 min. walk from TOPIA).)	October 1 (20 times)
THU	Ms. Yamada	Elementary 1	We will study a variety of verb conjugations such as te form, nai form, and dictionary form. Text: Minna no Nihongo I from Chapter 14~25	October 2 (20 times)
FRI	Ms. Aoki	Elementary 2・3	We will study various forms and expressions such as potential, volitional, imperative, prohibitive, conditional, reasoning, passive, causative, and honorific expressions. Text: Minna no Nihongo II from Chapter 26~50	Sept. 19 (25 times)
SUN	Volunteers	Group Lesson	This is a flexible group study class split up into 3 different groups.	October 5 (20 times)

* 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.

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

THU	Ms. Kimura Others	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 any time.
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*Classes may be cancelled if there is a typhoon, heavy rain, heavy snow, etc.

TOPIA will also post on their Facebook page by 8:30 AM if classes are cancelled, so please take a look. →



TOPIA TEL: 088-656-3303 Email: topia@topia.ne.jp

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.



←Scan here for information on other Japanese classes in Tokushima.

R7年度地域日本語教育の総合的な体制づくり推進事業
この講座は文部科学省・徳島県の協力で実施します。



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

TOPIA provides consultation on everyday life, education, labor, medical institutions, and disaster prevention as well as 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. Consultation 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.

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

Vietnamese: Mondays, Wednesdays, Thursdays, Fridays, 10:00 - 14:00

Saturdays, Sundays, and holidays, 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)