

awa life

December 2025

421

What's in a Bowl of
Noodles?

Ask your CIRs: Holiday
Edition

Pokémon Bones?!

Nihongo Know-it-All:
Guess that Country!

徳島県、中尾山高原付近
Near Nakoyamakōgen, Tokushima Prefecture



TOPIA

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

Happy December! We can't believe how quickly this year has flown by. It feels like just yesterday we were working on the January 2025 Awa Life edition. This December, make sure to take care of yourselves and keep warm (perhaps under the kotatsu?), as various illnesses are sure to be flying around. Take the holiday season and rest up as much as possible, or if that's not your style, get out there and make some amazing winter memories! We hope 2025 has been an excellent year for all of you, and look forward to welcoming 2026 together in January's Awa Life!

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

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What's in a Bowl of Noodles?

By: Kang Le



Tokushima Ramen

The first thing I ate upon arriving in Mima City, Tokushima for the first time was a bowl of the prefecture's famous Tokushima ramen. Its rich broth, tender chashu pork, bamboo shoots, green onions, and

soft-boiled egg combine in perfect harmony to create a rich, yet not too heavy, bowl of ramen. Despite its minimal toppings, this bowl masterfully balances flavors, capitalizing on the inherent umami of the broth and noodles.

As a staple food beloved across the globe, noodles hold an extremely important position in both Chinese and Japanese food cultures. While both use wheat or grains as their base, differences in geographical environment, lifestyle, and aesthetic sensibilities have fostered entirely distinct flavor systems and culinary philosophies.

In terms of form, Chinese noodles are truly endlessly varied. Hand-pulled noodles are thin like strands of hair, while knife-cut noodles have a thick center and thin edges, resembling willow

leaves. Hand-made noodles are wide and thick, and unique shapes like "Tie Jian" and "Min Jian" also exist, differing based on tools and production methods. Each shape is deeply tied to regional eating habits. In contrast, Japanese noodles emphasize balance and uniformity. Thickness and shape are largely standardized by type: somen noodles are thin like thread, while udon noodles are typically round and thick or flat. Their shapes are designed to optimize texture for the best culinary experience.

In terms of flavor, the core concept of Chinese noodles is "inclusivity." In China, noodles serve as a vessel to hold soup and toppings, enabling infinite variations. In the North, noodles often feature rich, savory flavors. For example, Beijing's zhajiangmian feature a thick sauce made by stir-frying soybean paste and sweet bean sauce, clinging to

each strand. Shaanxi's Biang Biang noodles (also called Yu Po Mian) involve pouring hot oil over chili peppers and garlic to



Chinese Ramen Noodles

What's in a Bowl of Noodles?

release their aroma, then enhancing the sour and spicy notes with vinegar and soy sauce. Southern flavors, on the other hand, are lighter and more refined. Suzhou's Ao Zhao Mian feature a light broth made from bluefish, paired with ingredients like fried fish or braised duck, achieving a perfect balance of sweet and savory. Sichuan's Dandan Noodles rely on the trinity of sesame paste, chili oil, and Sichuan pepper powder to create complex aromas and depth. In Chinese noodles, the toppings (浇头) define the overall flavor, utilizing meat, vegetables, seafood—every imaginable ingredient under the sun. The underlying concept is “letting the noodles complement the toppings.” In contrast, the philosophy behind Japanese noodles is “ultimate harmony.” The three elements—noodles, soup, and toppings—are meticulously designed, with none being dispensable.



Japanese Ramen

Broth is the soul of ramen. Tokushima ramen broth is made in three stages: simmering pork and chicken bones over an extended period of time, stewing to draw out umami, and then seasoning. Each step requires meticulous control of temperature and time. Udon is a prime example of highlighting the ingredients' natural flavors, with Sanuki udon being particularly famous. When eaten with a dipping sauce made from seafood broth and soy sauce, the aroma of wheat and the umami of the broth harmonize in the mouth. Soba emphasizes a refreshing quality, enjoyed as cold zaru soba in summer and warm kake soba in winter. Understated toppings like green onions, nori seaweed, tempura, and soft-boiled eggs are deliberately chosen to avoid overpowering the noodles and broth.

Culturally, Chinese noodles are both an everyday staple and a symbol reflecting culture and emotion. They are eaten daily throughout the year, and accompany life's milestones. Birthday

“longevity noodles” carry wishes for health and long life, wedding “celebration noodles” signify harmony, and the seventh day of the New Year's Renri, or “Human Day” noodles pray for peace. The idea behind the traditional proverb “民以食为天” (food is the god of the people) lives on, making noodles a warm symbol connecting daily life and emotion. Japanese noodles, however, place greater



Chinese Knife-Cut Noodles

emphasis on seasonality and ritual. In summer, people cool off with cold somen noodles dipped in ice water; in winter, they warm their bodies with piping hot ramen. On New Year's Eve, eating “toshikoshi soba” noodles symbolizes cutting away misfortune to welcome the new year. Furthermore, the “artisan spirit” permeates noodle culture, demanding pride and perfection in every step—from selecting ingredients to kneading the dough and crafting the broth. This dedication makes Japanese noodles representative of a refined and meticulous way of life. Chinese noodles embody “inclusivity and diversity,” while Japanese noodles represent “purity and refinement.” Though seemingly contrasting, both



Tokushima's Iya Valley Soba

share a sincere pursuit, all held in a single bowl.

Noodles are not merely a staple food; they are a mirror reflecting the

cultures and ways of life in both China and Japan. A single bowl of noodles bridges the culinary cultures of China and Japan across mountains and seas, allowing us to feel shared emotions and warmth through food.

Pokémon Bones?!

By: Robin Kelly



Excavator Pikachu

Pokémon are similar to animals that were on Earth. Honestly, I hadn't seen very much information about it beforehand but was looking forward to seeing the displays.

I had a friend visit me from the U.S.A. who also wanted to go and we planned to attend together. We headed to Bunka no Mori in the early afternoon, worrying along the way by the number of cars that it'd be too busy. Thankfully there was no wait, so we purchased our tickets from the machine and headed inside. If you can't read Japanese, do not fret! They have an option for viewing the translations in multiple languages from your smartphone.



Sheldon's evolutionary process

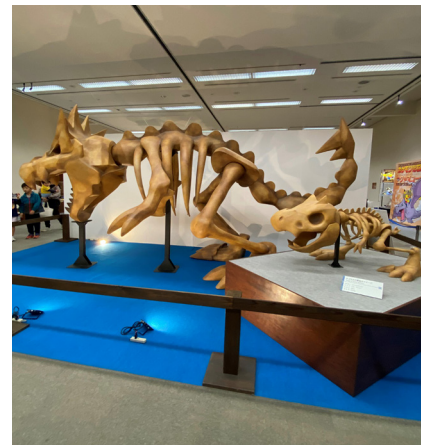
The first Pokémon we see is Omanyte (オムナイト), a small blue character with a spiral shell whose real world counterparts are ammonites. Omanytes were extinct but scientists were able to regenerate them from fossils. The museum explains, just like the Pokémon scientists, we can use fossils to understand more about animals that have gone extinct and no longer roam Earth. We can learn about how they lived based on the place they

were found and how long ago they died based on how deep they are buried in the ground. And as Pokémon do, animals also evolve. Granted it takes a lot longer, animals evolve to become stronger and change in ways that allow them to better survive in the wild. We'll look at Sheldon (タテオプス), another Pokémon regenerated from fossils. You can see it has facial armor that is very tough to help protect it. Its evolution, Bastiodon (トリデプス), has a larger and fuller cranial skeleton. This is probably similar to how triceratops evolved to have large bony skulls.



Bastiodon

My favorite fossils were the displays of Tyrunt (チゴラス) and Tyrantrum (ガチゴラス), two Pokémon that resemble T-rexes. The sheer size of them was incredible. There were some other cool featured fossils but I won't spoil all of them here.



Tyrunt and Tyrantrum

Overall, it was a small but cute exhibit. The gift shop was also nice. I bought an adorable Excavator Pikachu plushie. My friend summarized her thoughts: "The museum was very neat and informative! I enjoyed comparing the different Pokémon with their prehistoric counterparts". I recommend checking out the permanent museum area upstairs too. There aren't any Pokémon there but you can learn about our natural world. The Pokémon exhibit is running until December 28th, so there is still time to check it out.

Ask your CIRs: Holiday Edition

To celebrate this holiday season, we have decided to kick off a new segment here at Awa Life called "Ask your CIRs!". In Tokushima Prefecture, we have nine Coordinators for International Relations (or CIRs for short) representing six different countries. We asked CIRs from each country to answer:

What is the biggest holiday in your country? How do people celebrate?

Sizhe from China:

The biggest holiday in China is the Chinese New Year. Since it falls on the first day of the first month of the lunar calendar, the date changes every year. During this holiday, people return to their hometowns and reunite with family. On Chinese New Year's Eve, the whole family gathers around a round table, enjoying conversation while watching China's version of the New Year's Eve TV Special (commonly known as the "Spring Festival Gala") and savoring a delicious feast. On the first day of the Chinese new year, it's customary for children to receive red envelopes containing money. However, recently, it's becoming more common for adults who have entered the workforce to give red envelopes to their elder family members as well. These red envelopes carry wishes for the recipient's health and a smooth year ahead.

Yeonseo from South Korea:

The two most major holidays in Korea are Lunar New Year and Chuseok. Chuseok, or the mid-autumn harvest festival, falls on the 15th day of the eighth lunar month, marking the year's largest full moon. It is a day to celebrate the harvest and give thanks to ancestors. Recently, it has become popular as a long holiday spent in one's hometown with family. In 2025, it coincided with other holidays, creating an extended vacation of ten whole days!

Lisa from Germany:

The biggest holiday in Germany would have to be Christmas. Starting from four Sundays before Christmas Eve, we celebrate the "Adventszeit" with Christmas illuminations, Christmas songs, baking cookies, buying presents, going to Christmas markets etc. On "advent Sundays" the "Adventskranz" is lit (lighting one candle more per week) and families will often gather around the glowing wreath eating Christmas cookies and spending time together. From December 1st to 24th, children (and to be honest most adults, too) look forward to opening their advent calendars filled with chocolates, candy or toys. Presents are exchanged on Christmas Eve, while the big Christmas dinner with goose or duck roast is eaten on 25th and 26th. Christmas is probably the only German holiday I still celebrate since moving to Japan.

Riley from the U.S.A:

Americans love our holidays, and tend to go all out for pretty much all of them. However, I'd say that Christmas is probably the biggest holiday in the U.S. While originally a Christian holiday, Christmas has come to be celebrated secularly, with an estimated 90% of Americans partaking in the festivities. There are many different ways of celebrating, but in general, Christmas is celebrated by gathering with family or loved ones around a Christmas tree to exchange presents. There is no one set meal people have for Christmas dinner in the U.S. (in fact, some even have a Christmas lunch or breakfast as their big meal instead). However, some foods commonly eaten are ham, mashed potatoes, green beans, and bread rolls.

Gail from the Philippines:

The Christmas and New Year holidays are the biggest in the Philippines. We always say the season actually begins in September, when malls start decorating for Christmas and you begin to hear Christmas songs everywhere. Christmas Day itself is a non-working holiday, and a lot of people take vacation leave from well before the third week of December straight through to after the New Year. Many Filipinos working overseas also take the opportunity to come home and spend Christmas and New Year with loved ones. Families usually go all out on food feasts twice: on Christmas Eve and New Year's Eve. Staples include Lechon (Roasted Pig), Lumpia (Fried Spring Rolls), Bibingka (Baked Coconut Rice Cakes), etc.

Rishmita from India:

India is a very diverse country with A LOT of festivals, which are celebrated throughout the country. But regardless of where you are in India, you can experience all the festivals, just on different scales. For example, South India celebrates festivals like Dusshera more grandly than North India, which is why South Indian kids get about 7-10 days of Dussehra vacation, but 1-2 days for Diwali, while kids in the North get only 1 day for Dushhera but ~7 days of Diwali vacation! I love Diwali too, as it is the festival of lights. But, the reason I, a Jain (another religion), celebrate Diwali is different from that of Hindus! Isn't it interesting how there are so many festivals and ways to celebrate the same festival not just based on religion, but hugely on region and family preferences too?

Tokushima Culture and Reading Corner: 祖谷のかずら橋

By: Yoshiko Bando

徳島県西部の三好市にある祖谷のかずら橋は、「国指定重要有形民族文化財」に指定されていて、いつもたくさんの観光客でにぎわっています。この橋は、重さ約6トンのシラクチカズラで作られています。そして、長さは45m、幅は2mで、高さ14mのところにあり、3年ごとに橋の架け替えが行われています。足下をのぞくと、板の板の間から、下に流れる川が見えます。誰かが、大きな歩幅で歩くと、橋が揺れて、足がすくんでしまいます。



渡る時は、スマホや財布を落とさないように、気を付けましょう。今の季節は、かずら橋の周りでは、森林の景色を楽しんだり、名産の祖谷そばを食べたりすることができます。みなさんも、ぜひ行ってみてください。

Vocabulary List

くにしていじゅうようゆうけいみんぞくぶんかざい

国指定重要有形民族文化財 Nationally Designated Important Tangible Folk Cultural Property

シラクチカズラ hardy kiwi vines

ほはば

歩幅 length of one's stride

こうよう

紅葉 autumn foliage

か

か

架け替え rebuilding

すくんで to go weak at the knees

めいさん

名産 local specialty

Guess that Country!

By: Riley Henke

Nihongo Know-it-all

In October's Nihongo Know-it-all, we talked about 当て字 (ateji), or when the *kanji* in a compound are chosen not because of their meaning, but because of their sound. This month, we're going to learn about a specific type of *ateji* often seen in newspapers, but not much elsewhere. Any guesses what it could be? Here's a hint: have you ever seen America referred to as 米国?

In Japanese, most country names are simply written in *katakana*, the script normally used for words of foreign origin. However, did you know that many countries geographically close to and/or historically significant to Japan have *kanji* spellings as well? While somewhat archaic (nowadays, the *katakana* spellings are preferred), one can still see these *kanji* names used in newspapers where space may be limited. Here are some examples of different countries and their *kanji* names below. The shortened versions of these names are often used when discussing relations between countries, such as 日米貿易 (Japan-US trade), or 日中関係 (Japan-China relations).

America - アメリカ - 亜米利加 (shortened to 米国 or 米)

Australia - オーストラリア - 濠太刺利 (shortened to 豪州 or 豪)

Canada - カナダ - 加奈陀 (shortened to 加)

England - イギリス - 英吉利 (shortened to 英国 or 英)

France - フランス - 仏蘭西 (shortened to 仏国 or 仏)

Germany - ドイツ - 独逸 (shortened to 独国 or 独)

Italy - イタリア - 伊太利 (shortened to 伊)

Other Asian countries/regions:

China - 中国 (or 中)

India - インド - 印度 (or 印)

Mongolia - モンゴル - 蒙古 (or 蒙)

South Korea - 韓国 (or 韓)

Taiwan - 台湾 (or 台)

Vietnam - ベトナム - 越南 (or 越)

「～ませんか」「～ましょうか」「～ましょう」

The phrases 「～ませんか」「～ましょうか」「～ましょう」 sound similar, but have different meanings. This month, we'll study how to use each of them.

(Chatting with a coworker)

A: 来週^{らいしゅう}の休み^{やすみ}、海^{うみ}へ行きませんか。

B: いいですね、行きま^いしょう。

A: 私^{わたし}がお弁当^{べんとう}を作りま^{つく}しょうか。

B: ありがとうございます。じゃあ、私^{わたし}は飲み物^{の飲みもの}を持^もっていきま^もすね。



Sentence Pattern	Example Sentence	Nuance
～ましょう	・おいしそうですね、食べ ^た ま ^た しょう	A feeling of "Let's do ____ together!"
～ましょうか	・大丈夫 ^{だいじょうぶ} ですか、手伝 ^{てつだ} いま ^た しょうか	A kind offer to do something; "Shall I ____?"
～ませんか	・この映画 ^{えいが} 、一緒 ^{いっしょ} に見 ^み ませんか	A polite invitation; "Would you like to ____?"

Let's practice! Choose the appropriate option from 「～ましょう」「～ましょうか」「～ませんか」 and insert it into the sentences below.

(In front of the restaurant you have reservations at)

A: このレストラン、とてもきれいですね。

B: ほんとうですね。さあ、中^{なか}に（1. 入^{はい}りま^{はい}しょう／入^{はい}りま^{はい}しょうか）。

A: 何^{なん}にしますか。

B: このパスタ、この店^{みせ}で人^{にん}気^きがあるんですよ。注文^{ちゆうもん}（2. しま^{はい}しょうか／しま^{はい}せんか）。

A: ええ、そう（3. しま^{はい}しょう／しま^{はい}しょうか）。サラダはシェアしま^{はい}せんか。

B: ええ、いいですね。飲^のみ物^{もの}は…、ワインはどうですか。

A: ワイン、大^{だい}好^すきです。じゃ、店員^{てんいん}さん^{さん}を（4. 呼^よびま^よしょう／呼^よびま^よせんか）。

Events & Memoranda

International Understanding Support Forum 2026 令和7年度国際理解支援フォーラム及び 国際理解支援講師スキルアップ研修会

Three foreign residents working in Tokushima Prefecture will give presentations topics such as raising/educating kids in Japan, the religion of Islam, and differences in cultures/customs. After the presentations, there will be a casual exchange session between the speakers and participants. This event is aimed at those from junior high through adults interested in international relations. Participation is free. Further details will be posted on our website, so please take a look. We hope to see you there!

When: Sun. January 25, 2026 14:00-17:00

Where: TOPIA - Large/Small Conference Rooms

Inquiries: TOPIA (TEL: 088-656-3303)

徳島県内在住外国人3名の方から、「日本での子育てや教育」・「イスラム教」・「文化慣習のちがい」について、講演をしていただきます。講演のあとは、講師と参加者でざくばらんに交流会を行います。国際関係に興味のある中高生～社会人や国際理解支援講師を参加対象としています。参加は無料です。詳しくは、TOPIA ホームページに掲載しますので、ふるってご参加ください！

日時：2026年1月25日（日）14:00～17:00

会場：徳島県国際交流協会（TOPIA） 大小会議室

お問い合わせ：（公財）徳島県国際交流協会
TEL：088-656-3303

Christmas Market 2025 at the Naruto Germany House ドイツ館のクリスマスマーケット 2025

Christmas markets are an important winter tradition in Germany. During Advent (the four weeks leading up to Christmas), stalls line the city streets, bustling with goods and shoppers. The Naruto German House Christmas Market is Tokushima's take on this tradition! Alongside essential German Christmas items like Stollen Christmas cake, mulled wine, Christmas goods, and sweets, we'll host events including live performances, workshops, and a children's train ride. Plus, the plaza in front of the pavilion will be packed with booths featuring goods made by artisans in the prefecture and food trucks! Come enjoy an early taste of Christmas at the Naruto German House!

When: Sat. December 6 - Sun. December 7
10:00-16:00

Where: Naruto Germany House, 1F Hall + Plaza

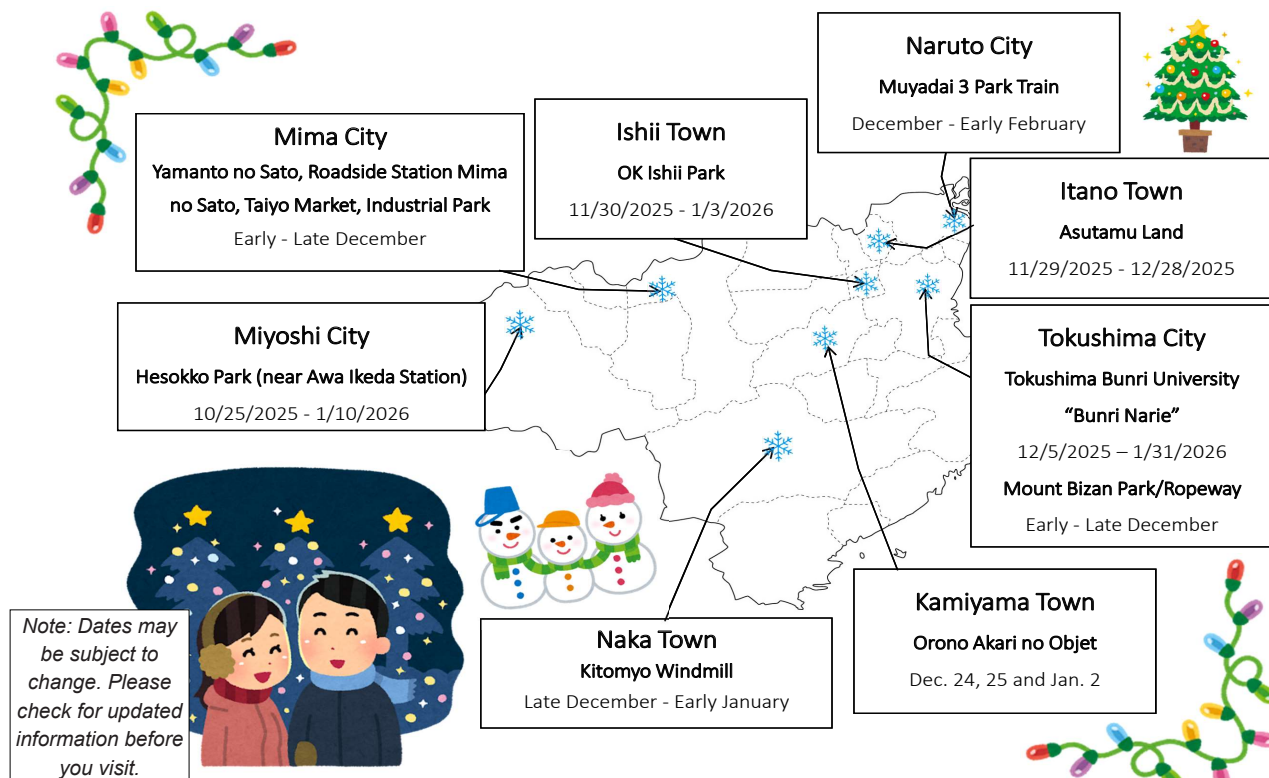
クリスマスマーケットは、ドイツにおいて冬の風物詩とされる行事です。ドイツではアドヴェント（クリスマスまでの約4週間）に、都市の広場や通りに露店が立ち並び、食品や雑貨の販売が賑わしく行われます。そんなクリスマスマーケットを、ドイツ館風にアレンジしたものが『ドイツ館のクリスマスマーケット』☆ドイツのクリスマスにはかかせないシュトレンケーキやグリュウワイン、クリスマス雑貨やお菓子の販売のほか、ミニイベントとして、ライブやワークショップ、こども鉄道の運転も実施します。さらに県内を中心に活躍するハンドメイド作家さんのブースや館前広場にはキッチンカーもたくさんやってきます！ひと足早いクリスマス気分をドイツ館でお楽しみください♪

日時：12月6日（土）～12月7日（日）
10:00～16:00

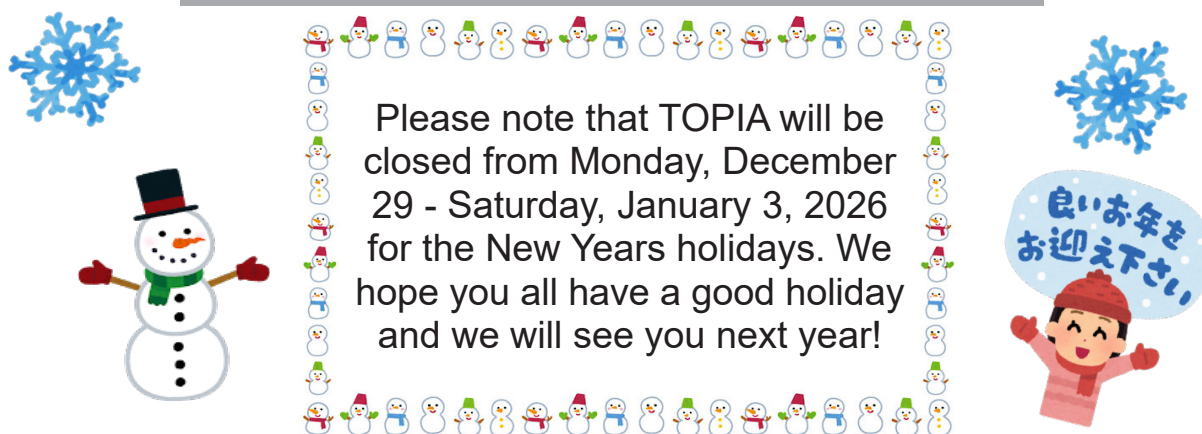
会場：鳴門市ドイツ館 1階大ホール / 館前広場

Events & Memoranda

Christmas Lights Map 2025-2026 イルミネーション案内図 2025-2026



TOPIA Holiday Closure Notice 2025



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)