

awa life

March 2026

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in Tokushima Anymore...

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Forum

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be Introduced in April 2026

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What's in a Name?



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

Happy March, everyone! We've almost officially made it to spring. In fact, the Vernal or Spring Equinox (March 20), which marks first day of spring, is a national holiday in Japan. Additionally, Japan celebrates Hinamatsuri (also known as Girls' Day or Doll's Festival) on March 3rd, so be sure not to miss out on the festivities!

In tune with the excitement of the changing seasons, this Awa Life edition is jam-packed with fun articles and information. In particular, make sure not to miss the "behind-the-scenes" look at AJET's 2026 English Musical on pages 3-4, and our annual Hanami (cherry blossom viewing) Map in the events section.

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



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International Understanding Support Forum

By: Yoshiko Bando

On January 25, 2026, TOPIA held the combined International Understanding Support Forum and Instructor Skill Up Workshop. At this event, three medium- to long-term foreign residents of Japan spoke as guest lecturers. Mixing in stories from their own experiences, speakers provided insight from diverse perspectives and gave participants a chance to reconsider what multicultural coexistence means to them. Additionally, the lectures served as training for International Understanding Support Instructors (volunteers who speak at schools and events to promote international understanding), showing by example how to provide even higher-quality lectures to Japanese students and local residents. Altogether there were 44 people in attendance, including 8 foreign residents from Vietnam, China, Germany, Taiwan, South Korea, and Pakistan.

The first speaker is from South Korea, but for the past twelve years has been raising four children in Japan. When the family of six first arrived in Japan over a decade ago, none of them understood Japanese. In fact, the lecturer explained, their children actually came to TOPIA for help with their homework at the time. Naturally, there was



no small number of struggles to face in their new lives. Aside from not knowing the language, the school culture in Japan was completely different from that of South Korea. Furthermore, each of their children had to face the question of “Who am I?” in the struggle to find their own identity. Now, after overcoming countless hardships, the four have grown up splendidly and are thriving on their respective paths.

The second lecturer, who is from Pakistan, spoke about the religion of Islam. Nowadays, the number of Muslims (followers of Islam) is increasing in Tokushima. However, many Japanese people still don't fully understand the religion, and tend to have a vague image of Islam as a strict religion with many prohibitions. Yet, the speaker explained that what may simply seem like “restrictions” often

International Understanding Support Forum

have underlying reasons to them. For example, in Islam, daily prayer serves to calm the mind, abstaining from alcohol is to preserve one's power of reason, and women wearing hijab is not an act of oppression, but rather so one's value is placed on the inner self. He shared that Islam is about "inner peace." He also mentioned that in Pakistan, there is a culture of hospitality where "a guest is not just a visitor, but a responsibility." As I listened, I couldn't help but feel that this resembles the "Osettai" culture of hospitality for pilgrims on the Ohenro pilgrimage in Tokushima. In this way, even though countries and religions differ, there will always be areas where hearts can connect as fellow human beings.



Assimilation, Separation, Marginalization, and Integration (Berry, 1992). The most ideal outcome is integration, in which aspects of both one's home culture and the host culture are valued and maintained. In addition, the lecturer spoke about how in Japan today there is a tendency to view foreign residents as synonymous with laborers. However, in order to truly achieve intercultural cohesion in society, we must not forget that foreigners living in Japan are first and foremost human beings, just like you and me, as well as fellow members of our local communities.

Following the three presentations, a casual social exchange session was held with the speakers

and participants. The lively chatter and laughter heard from each table, along with the abundance of smiling faces, left a strong impression on me. Moving forward, the Tokushima Prefecture International Exchange Association will continue to create opportunities for active exchange between foreign residents in Japan and local community members on the path to promote mutual understanding.

The third and final speaker, a Coordinator of International Relations from the United States, presented about bridging differences between cultures and customs. What stood out to me most was the lecturer's discussion about Berry's Model of Acculturation. This model describes four adaptation strategies that occur in individuals when cultures, nationalities, etc. mix, which are

Toto, I Don't Think We're in Tokushima Anymore...

By: Katie Saunders

The AJET Musical is celebrating its 30th year with a production of the beloved classic *The Wizard of Oz*.

With *Wicked: For Good* (ウィキッド 永遠の約束) finally hitting cinema screens across Japan, there's no better time to follow the yellow brick road and join us for a special Shikoku reimagining of this timeless story, packed with all the magic, madness, and musical joy audiences know and love!

The AJET Musical is an annual, volunteer-run project that brings together participants from the Japan Exchange and Teaching Programme and

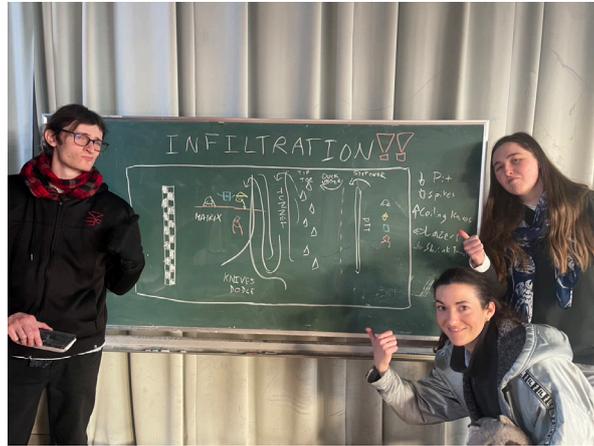


members of the local Tokushima community. Each year, performers and crew from as far as South Africa, North America, the UK, New Zealand, and beyond pool their talents in acting, singing, dancing, costume-making, set design and stage tech to bring the musical to life. The group makes

Toto, I Don't Think We're in Tokushima Anymore...

no profit from performances, aiming instead to provide a free, fun, and accessible English-language cultural experience for audiences across the prefecture.

Designed with students and English learners in mind, the musical blends easy-to-understand English with plenty of songs and dance numbers to make a show that's fun for all! Whether you're a native English speaker, a student studying English at school, or someone encountering English theatre for the first time, you'll be sure to enjoy it.



work. From painting sets to building props and crafting costumes by hand, everything in the show is made with love (and a lot of cardboard).

Despite the early starts, frostbitten fingers and my terrible Werner Herzog impressions, rehearsals have been full of laughter, teamwork, and maybe too many convenience store coffees.

This year's production is co-written and directed by two local ALTs: myself and Frida Ruff. I first

stepped into Oz 15 years ago in my junior high school production of *The Wizard*, while Frida more recently charmed Tokushima audiences as *Cinderella* in last year's AJET musical. We have been developing the script together since last summer, and seeing it brought to life by the cast and crew has been a truly special experience, especially as the show has turned out even bigger and funnier than we ever imagined!

This year's production also adds local cultural touches for a fresh spin on the classic tale. Our story follows Dorothy, a farm girl from Tokushima dreaming of big-city life, who is swept away on a bizarre adventure through the magical land of Oz. Along the way, she'll face off against the Wicked Witch of Ehime, make some very unexpected new friends, and even encounter a certain baseball star you might recognise...

Rehearsals have been an adventure of their own. Our wonderful cast and crew brave freezing temperatures and long drives deep into the mountains, starting each day with a grueling radio taisou workout before getting to

The *Wizard of Oz* opens on Sunday, March 8th in Ishii, before touring venues across Tokushima Prefecture. All performances are completely free, and everyone is welcome!

For full performance dates and locations, scan here →



News from Tokushima Prefecture: Basic Policy on Japanese Language Education Promotion Established

The Tokushima Prefectural Government has established the "Basic Policy on Japanese Language Education Promotion."

In order for foreign residents to live with peace of mind as fellow members of our community, this policy promotes two main initiatives throughout the prefecture: 1. Japanese language acquisition, and 2. The understanding of manners and rules necessary for life in Japan. In addition

to the volunteers and international exchange organizations that have supported our communities thus far, municipalities and companies that employ foreign workers will all come together as one to advance these initiatives.



News from Tokushima Prefecture: Basic Policy on Japanese Language Education Promotion Established

"I want to try teaching Japanese." "I'd love the chance to talk with people from all around the world!" If you've found yourself thinking things like this before, why not take the chance to make that dream a reality? Tokushima Prefecture offers training programs such as Japanese language support volunteer training courses to help even newcomers feel confident jumping in. We hope you will take that first step and give it a try! Or, for those of you who have thought "I want to study Japanese and learn more about the rules for life in Japan," or "I wish I had a someone to study with!" we are happy to direct you to lessons near you.

Even just a little interest in getting involved can become a powerful force for your community. Feel free to contact us anytime for details on classroom locations, trainings, etc.

Contact Information:

For inquiries regarding the Basic Policy on Japanese Language Education Promotion: Tokushima Prefectural Government Social Affairs and Environment Department, Intercultural Cohesion and Human Rights Division
Phone: 088-621-2028

For inquiries regarding Japanese language classes: Tokushima Prefecture International Exchange Association (TOPIA)
Phone: 088-656-3303

For more information on the Basic Policy on Japanese Language Education Promotion, scan here →



New Bicycle Fine System to be Introduced April 2026

By: Riley Henke

Starting April 1, 2026 there will be a major change made to the enforcement of bicycle regulations. In short, the Japanese government is introducing a "Blue ticket system" which will allow police officers to issue fines on the spot to bicycle riders for even minor traffic violations.



Under this system, police would issue a "red ticket" for major rule violations, such as riding while intoxicated, that would result in heavy fines and/or possible jail time.

Under the new "blue ticket" system, police will be able to issue fines to cyclists immediately, even for minor infractions. Up until now, police have mostly stuck to issuing warnings for minor violations, such as using an umbrella or wearing headphones while riding a bicycle. However, it

seems we can anticipate that they will start to issue these "blue ticket" fines instead.

Put simply, the traffic rules for bicycles are not changing; rather, enforcement against prohibited actions will be strengthened starting this April.

Below are some examples of prohibited actions and their respective fines under the new system. (These fines apply to any cyclist over 16 years old. This list is not comprehensive.)

12,000 yen

- Using a phone while riding

6,000 yen

- Ignoring traffic signals
- Riding on the sidewalk
- Riding against the flow of traffic (on the right)

5,000 yen

- Using an umbrella while riding
- Wearing earphones while riding
- Ignoring stop signs
- Cycling without a light

3,000 yen

- Riding side-by-side

Tokushima Culture and Reading Corner: 藍染め

By: Yoshiko Bando

みなさんは 藍染めをしたことがありますか。徳島には、「藍染め体験」ができる施設があります。まずは染めたいものを用意します。藍染めの施設には、白いハンカチやスカーフなどが売られているので、それを買って染めてみましょう。美しい柄ができるように、布を折って、染料の入った容器に浸けます。そして、約1分経ったら、取り出します。取り出したまま約1分待ちます。その工程を3~5回繰り返します。最初は少し黄色く染まっているように見えます。そのあと、しっかり水で洗ってすすぎます。そして、アイロンで乾かしたら完成です。難しく見えますが、スタッフが丁寧に教えてくれるので安心してください。みなさんも自分だけのすてきな藍染めの作品を作ってみませんか。



Vocabulary List

藍染め indigo dyeing
施設 facility
柄 pattern; design
布 fabric

染料 dye
容器 container
浸けて (浸ける) to dip in
経ったら (経つ) to pass (time)

工程 process
すすぐ (すすぎます) to rinse
丁寧に politely
安心 peace of mind
作品 piece (of art)

What's in a Name?

By: Riley Henke

Nihongo Know-it-all

I don't know about you all, but when I first started learning Japanese (and especially when I first came to Japan) I really struggled with reading Japanese names. It felt like there were so many different readings for the same characters, and so many different characters for the same readings! In this month's Nihongo Know-it-all, we're going to take a closer look at Japanese names.



Although Tanaka (田中) is often used as the "default" Japanese surname in textbooks, it's actually only the fourth most common surname in Japan. In third we have Takahashi (高橋), in second place is another textbook favorite, Suzuki (鈴木), and in first, holding the title for the most common surname in Japan is Satō (佐藤). When looking at Tokushima Prefecture residents' names only, while Satō remains most common, second place goes to Kondō (近藤) and third to Yoshida (吉田).

While most of these readings are fairly straightforward (although 近 read as "kon" puts 近藤 on thin ice, in my opinion), the same can't be said for all Japanese surnames. For example, the (albeit rare) surname "一" (the character for the number one) can actually be read as "Ninomae" because one (一) is before (mae) two (二 ni) so therefore it is "ni no mae" (before two). Or the name "月見里", which can apparently be read as "Yamanashi". Why, you ask? Well, in order, the characters 月見里 mean "moon", "see", and "village." What must be true about a village where you can see the moon? There must not be any mountains (山 yama) blocking your view! In other words, it has to be 山無し (yamanashi, lit. "Mountainless"). I wonder if the 月見里さん's out there ever get tired of explaining...

どうし じしよけい どうし けい
「動詞辞書形／動詞ない形＋ようにする・ようにしている」

This month we will study the phrase 「・・・ようにする」.

This phrase expresses the meaning of “striving to bring about an action or situation; keeping in mind; taking care to ensure.” When used in the negative ない形 form, it means “aiming not to bring about.” The phrase 「・・・ようにしている」 indicates “making it a habit to do so.”

1 動詞辞書形

- わたし にく ちい き ことどもにも た 食べられるようにしました。
- いしゃ 医者にアドバイスされたので、これからは もっとたくさん水 を飲むように します。
- けんこう 健康のために、毎晩、1時間ぐらい 歩くように しています。
- きゅうりょう 給料をもらったら、毎月2万円ずつ 貯金する ようにしています。
- アルバイトを休むときは、できるだけ 早めに言う ようにしてください。
- つか 使ったものは 必ず元のところに戻す ようにしてください。

2 動詞ない形

- また びょうき になると大変ですから、これからは あまり無理をしない ようにします。
- よる あぶ 夜は危ないですから、あの道は 通らない ようにしています。
- パソコンは 長い時間 続けて しない ようにしています。
- めざまし時計を2台セットして、寝坊 しない ようにしています。 *寝坊する= To oversleep
- できるだけ 遅刻 しない ようにしていますが、ときどき 遅れて しまいます。
- 試験の時間に 絶対に 遅れない ようにしてください。
- 決められた日以外、ごみ を出さない ようにしてください。
*決められた日以外 = On days other than those pre-determined (i.e. by the municipality etc.)

Let's Practice! Fill in the () using the word bank below.

- 必ず 規則 を () ようにしてください。
- できるだけ 甘い 物を () ようにしています。
- もっと 魚 や野菜を () ようにしてください。
- 絶対に パスポート を () ようにしてください。
- 最近 飲み に行かないで、できるだけ早く うちへ () ようにしています。

食べる、なくさない、帰る、食べない、守る

Answers: ①守る ②食べない ③食べる ④なくさない ⑤帰る

Events & Memoranda

2026 Awa Zomeki National Contest 阿波ぞめき全国競演会 2026

"Awa Zomeki" refers to the music that accompanies the Awa Odori dance. In this national contest held at Awagin Hall, participants will compete to put on the top performance of Awa Zomeki in three divisions: the Awa Yoshiko Song Division (Sung to shamisen accompaniment), Shamisen Performance Division, and Original Composition Division.

阿波おどりの音楽に親しむ人たちが集い、腕を競う「阿波ぞめき全国競演会」の本選を、徳島市のあわぎんホールで開催します。三味線伴奏に合わせて歌う「阿波よしこの節の部」と、ぞめきを演奏する「阿波ぞめき三味線の部」、オリジナル曲を発表する「創作阿波ぞめきの部」からそれぞれ入賞を決定します。詳しくは徳島新聞社ホームページをご参照ください。

Date & Time: Fri. March 20, 2026 (Nat. Holiday)
Starts at 14:00

開催期間：2026年3月20日（金・祝）
14:00 スタート

Venue: Awagin Hall, Tokushima City

開催場所：あわぎんホール（徳島市）

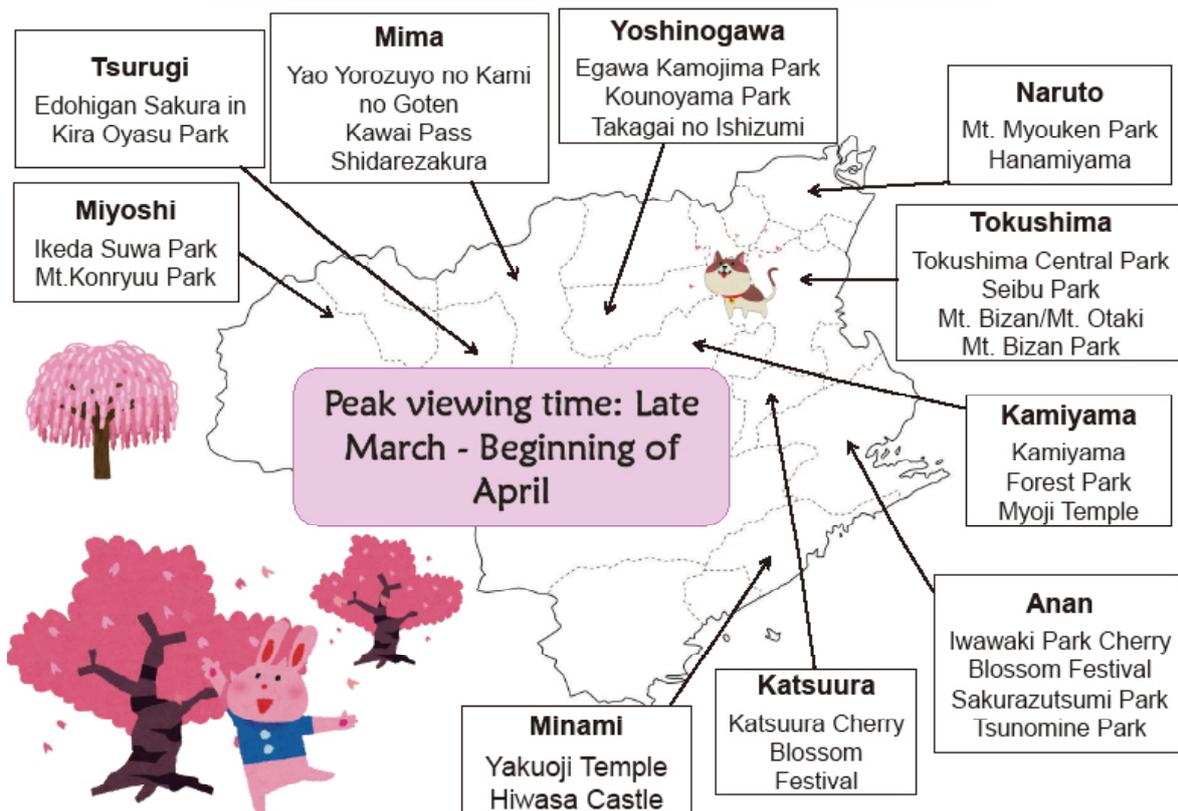
Tickets: Advance tickets 1,500 円
Day-of tickets 1,700 円

チケット：前売券 1500 円
当日券 1700 円

Advance tickets or inquiries: Tokushima Shimbun Co., Ltd. Business Division TEL 088-655-7331

前売券又はお問い合わせ：徳島新聞社 事業部
TEL 088-655-7331

Tokushima Hanami Map 2026 徳島県花見案内図 2026



Events & Memoranda

2026 Term 1 (April to Sept.) TOPIA Japanese Classes Schedule



Time: 10:30-12:00 Location: Meeting rooms at TOPIA Cost: 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	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	April 7th (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).)	April 8th (20 times)
THU	Ms. Yamada	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	April 2nd (25 times)
FRI	Ms. Aoki	Beginners	We will take the first step towards learning basic expressions. Text: Minna no Nihongo I from Chapter 1~13	April 3rd (20 times)
SUN	Volunteers	Group Lesson	This is a flexible group study class split up into 3 different groups.	April 5th (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 post on our Facebook page by 9:00 AM if classes that day 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. Website: <https://www.topia.ne.jp/english/> →



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)