

awa life

April 2026

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Reflecting on Six Months in
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Something Borrowed



TOPIA

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

Happy April, everyone! We hope you've all been enjoying the gradually rising temperatures and sunny weather. This year the sakura (cherry blossom) trees were quick to flower, but we should be able to catch the last of the beautiful blooms this month. One popular way to celebrate the season is *Ohanami*, or flower viewing picnics, with friends, family, or even coworkers. Often participants will bring food and drinks and set up on a blanket or tarp near sakura trees to spend a leisurely time enjoying the spectacular views.

April is a time of many changes in Japan as the new school year and new fiscal year begin. Some of you may have changes to your lifestyle, big or small, starting from this month. As for us at TOPIA, we will be saying goodbye to four of our staff members, and welcoming new faces in their stead. You can read their goodbye and welcome messages this edition and the next, so be sure to take a look!

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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Farewell Messages from TOPIA Staff

**Chen Sizhe,
Coordinator for International Relations**

Time flies, and my year in Tokushima has passed in the blink of an eye. When I first arrived, I felt unsure and anxious about life in a foreign country. However, thanks to the warm welcome from my coworkers at the Prefectural Office and TOPIA, my fears gradually eased. Their kindness allowed me to feel at home, even while living so far from it. The generosity and support I received from everyone this past year are something I will never forget, and it's thanks to everyone that I was able to enjoy my time here to the fullest.

To tell the truth, I've been meaning to write this farewell message for a couple of weeks now. But every time I tried to get the words down, I was faced with the emotional reality of what "farewell" really means—that I would be leaving Tokushima and all the people I've met here. Although I'm sad to say goodbye, I want to make sure to always treasure the priceless memories I've made here.

My encounter with Tokushima was, in a word, serendipitous. After completing graduate school in Japan and returning to China, I took a position in administrative work at a public hospital, thinking that my ties to the Japanese language and Japan would come to a natural end there. However, upon being dispatched by the Hunan Province to spend a year in Tokushima as a CIR, I came to know this quiet, simple, cozy town, and reconnect with the culture I love.

This past year has brought me countless invaluable experiences. As an interpreter, I visited Beijing and participated in the Japan-China Table Tennis Exchange Tournament. I took part in activities like the National Convention on Shokuiku

Promotion and One World, and attended trainings with my fellow JET colleagues. I traveled to Kagawa to hear the "Kukai" concert, saw the early-morning screening of "Avatar 3," and went strawberry picking, all with my coworkers. Both my work experiences and the small joys of daily



Pictured from left to right: Bando, Chen, Yen Vy

Farewell Messages from TOPIA Staff

life have become cherished memories for me, deepening my affection for this place even further.

As the time to part approaches, I am filled with gratitude that words cannot fully express. I wish to give my heartfelt thanks to everyone who has warmly supported me until now. Your kindness is what carried me through my days here. I believe my connection with Tokushima doesn't end with this goodbye, and someday, I hope to return to this beloved place as a traveler and relive the warmth I felt here. Tokushima, I look forward to the day we meet again.

Le Thi Yen Vy, Multilingual Consultation Staff - Vietnamese

For the last two years, I've had the privilege of serving as multilingual consultation staff for TOPIA. While my role was to support my fellow foreign residents, looking back, it was often I who was supported by the warmth of the community. I am so incredibly grateful for all the Japanese individuals I met throughout my time here, the community members who welcomed me warmly, and my wonderful colleagues at TOPIA. It is because you were all by my side, during both the good times, and when struggling with language barriers and cultural differences, that I am who I am today. My memories from this time will be a great source of strength for the rest of my life.

Now, I plan to return to Vietnam and embark on a new path. While I do feel some anxiety about what lies ahead, I will walk forward always facing the light, following the saying, "Keep your face always toward the sunshine, and shadows will fall behind you." Even after returning home, I believe the bonds I've made here will be unchanged. I can't wait for the day we meet again, whether in Japan or Vietnam. Thank you so much for these past two years!

Nong Thi Hoa, Multilingual Consultation Staff - Vietnamese

The time I spent at TOPIA as a multilingual consultation staff member is incredibly precious to me. I met many people and had many unforgettable experiences, for which I

am incredibly grateful. Although the time has come for me to leave the association to move toward my goals, I will always carry with me what I learned here, along with the warmth I received from everyone,



Nong Thi Hoa

and continue moving forward with a positive outlook. I sincerely wish you all good health and success, and I pray for TOPIA's continued growth and prosperity. If the opportunity arises, I hope to see you all again in the future! Thank you for everything.

Yoshiko Bando, Long-term Work Experience Trainee

Although it was only one short year, my time at TOPIA now draws to a close.

During my university days, I spent a year studying abroad in Sweden. Although all street signs and store displays were in Swedish, I still managed everything, from classes to dormitory and bank procedures, using English. I left this experience with one very large misconception—that "as long as you can just speak English, you can get by." After returning home to Japan, I went to my local international exchange association and told them I wanted to volunteer as English language support. They replied, "There are hardly any English-speaking foreigners in this area, so there aren't really any volunteer opportunities where English is needed." At the time, I couldn't understand the meaning behind those words. In fact, I went on to spend over a decade as an English teacher without fully understanding. However, this last year I've finally come to realize their true meaning.

After being dispatched to TOPIA as a trainee, I very quickly learned that English isn't everything.

Farewell Messages from TOPIA Staff

Working with children and families with foreign roots, I felt the importance of understanding one's culture and background, and frequently reflected on my past self and mindset as an English educator. Often, speaking in English simply didn't get through to the other person. Yet, when I could communicate with Japanese learners using simple Japanese, photos, translation apps, and other tools, I felt an irreplaceable sense of joy.

I am deeply grateful for the encounters I had at TOPIA with Japanese language learners, Japanese teachers, international understanding support instructors, and all the TOPIA staff. In my future teaching, I intend to continue making an effort to "understand what's beyond the words." Lastly, in this year alone, I've checked at least three things off my long-term goals list! Thank you very much for the past year.

Letter from SUKETO NAKAYOSHI

By: Kazue Inoue (Center for Early Childhood Education and Care SUKETO NAKAYOSHI)

Just as April is the month for cherry blossoms to bloom, it is also start of a new school year. Perhaps some of you reading this have young family members that will be starting at a new nursery, daycare, or kindergarten this year?

only makes them prone to slipping off, but also prevents proper use of the toes while walking, which can delay arch development and lead to increased fatigue.



During this season of new beginnings, many people will likely be purchasing new shoes to carry them through the next phase of life. This month, I'd like

to introduce a few things to look for if you are choosing new footwear for a child.

1. Absorbency, breathability, flexibility, and washability
2. Sufficient width and height to allow free movement of the toes, with 5 mm to 1 cm of space at the toe
3. Cushioned soles that properly support the foot's natural arch
4. Adjustable laces, Velcro straps, or zippers to prevent foot movement inside the shoe
5. Sufficient depth to surround the ankle, secure the foot, and allow for stability when walking

*Please note: Children's bones are softer and more malleable, so wearing shoes that are too small can cause deformities to the foot. Furthermore, wearing shoes that are too big not



Apple Oyaki (Makes 6 pieces)

1. Peel and slice 1 apple (300g) into 7mm-thick quarter-rounds. Place in a microwave-safe bowl, sprinkle with 75g sugar, cover with plastic wrap, and microwave on 500W for 5-6 minutes. Once cooled, squeeze out excess liquid and divide into 6 equal portions.
2. In a bowl, combine pancake mix (200g), water (4½ tablespoons), and oil (1 tablespoon). Knead until smooth. Wrap in plastic wrap and let rest for about 15 minutes.
3. Divide ② into 6 equal portions and roll into balls. Cover with plastic wrap and let rest for about 5 minutes. Flatten each ball, place a portion of ① on top, and wrap dough around.
4. Lightly grease a frying pan and cook the dumplings. Once browned, flip them over, cover, and cook over low heat for 10-15 minutes until cooked through, being careful not to burn them.

Measurable Change: Reflecting on Six Months in Tokushima

By: Jaden

How do you quantify adjustment? Is it the number of days you've been in a certain place? Pointing to a date on the calendar and saying, "here, this is where I felt settled." Or is it the unpacking of personal belongings? Finally putting the suitcases and boxes away so you can look around your new home and find solace in the fact that there isn't anything else left to hang up or fold. It's interesting, that you can look back and know you've been somewhere for a certain amount of time but not quite be able to tell exactly when everything just seemed to click.



Here is my answer: it is an accumulation of little moments. Small differences that become familiarities, like remembering where everything is in your new grocery store or realizing you're now a regular at the local bakery. Consistency,

repetition, routine, and the comfort of a place you can find your way around. You build yourself a new life the same way you learn to do anything else, one step at a time.

Truthfully, I spent my first two months in Tokushima hoping I wouldn't acquire a horrifying eight-legged roommate and sweating through most of the clothes I packed. By the time summer had relinquished its sticky grip on Japan, finally giving way to autumn, I noticed that more than just the leaves had begun to change. I had stopped converting everything to CAD in my head, started learning where all the best restaurants were, and slowly tended the ache in my chest left behind from homesickness.

Of course, I still feel the twinge; the kilometers between Japan and Canada stretch out endlessly,

and hidden in each one is a reminder of the things I miss the most. On days like that, I tell myself to remember how far I've come since that first night in August, back when it was difficult to see past my immediate homesickness. I think about the time my school's librarian told me she ordered new cookbooks just for me, because she knows how much I enjoy reading them. When a student told me they look forward to Thursdays specifically because they know they'll get to see me in class. My coworker gifting me a sticker sheet of a character she knows I like, for no other reason than she had thought of me when she saw it. The joy I get out of going out for dinner with my friends, sharing stories about whatever funny antics happened in class that day. All of this and so much more, is how I've come to measure my acclimatization to life in Japan.

In a blink and you'll miss it kind of way, six months have passed. My fondness for Tokushima grows relentlessly, fighting against the homesickness with a determination that refuses to be pushed aside. Every day I learn something new about both Japan and myself, whether it be my coworker telling me how to pronounce a certain kanji or discovering a personal love of making origami cranes. So, while I'm here, I hope to explore more of the prefecture, dive deeper into learning Japanese, and continue to show up to school with a positive attitude. And, even though I may not know what the next six months will look like, I can honestly say that I'm excited to find out.



Tokushima Culture and Reading Corner: ランドセル

By: Yoshiko Bando

4月に^{がっ}入り、^{はい}入学式の^{にゅうがくしき}季節が^{きせつ}やってきました。小学校には、^{しょうがっこう}新一年生が^{しんいちねんせい}「ランドセル」を^せ背負って^{にゅうがく}入学します。ランドセルは、日本の^{にほん}小学生の^{しょうがくせい}通学用かばんで、^{つうがくよう}教科書や^{きょうかしょ}筆記用具など^{ひっきようぐ}を入れます。ランドセルは、オランダの^{ぐんじよう}軍用かばんが^{にほん}日本に^{ゆにゆう}輸入されたのが^{だいじようぶ}はじまりです。そして^{ぜんこく}全国に^{ひろ}広まったのは^{ねん}70年くらい前だと^い言われています。人工皮革や^{じんこうひかく}牛革で^{ぎゆうかわ}できて^{すこ}いるので、^{じようぶ}丈夫で^{みず}少しの水に^ぬ濡れても^{だいじようぶ}大丈夫ですが、^{ちい}小さな^こ子どもが^せ背負う^{おも}には^{もんだい}とても^{おも}重たいのが^{もんだい}問題です。



30年ほど^{ねん}前までは、^{まえ}男子は^{だんし}黒、^{くろ}女子は^{じよし}赤と^{あか}いうのが^{いっばんてき}一般的でした。しかし^{げんざい}現在では^{むらさき}ピンクや^{みずいろ}紫、^{ちやいろ}水色や^{ちやいろ}茶色など、^こ子どもたちが^{じぶん}自分の^す好きな色^{いろ}の^{えら}ランドセルを^{しりゆう}選ぶのが^こ主流と^こなっています。子どもたちの^{カラフル}カラフルな^{ラン}ランドセルには、^{みらい}未来への^{ゆめ}夢と^{きぼう}希望が^こつまっています。

Vocabulary List

^{にゅうがくしき} 入学式 school entrance ceremony	^{ひっきようぐ} 筆記用具 writing implements	^ぬ 濡れて (濡れる) to get wet
^せ 背負う to carry on one's back	^{ぐんじよう} 軍用 for military use	^{いっばんてき} 一般的 general; common
^{つうがくよう} 通学用 for school commute use	^{ゆにゆう} 輸入 import	^{しりゆう} 主流 (the) mainstream
^{きょうかしょ} 教科書 textbook(s)	^{じんこうひかく} 人工皮革・ ^{ぎゆうかわ} 牛革 faux/real leather	^{カラフル} colorful

Something Borrowed

By: Riley Henke

Nihongo Know-it-all

It likely doesn't come as a shock to anyone to hear that the Japanese language borrows from English from time to time. Sometimes just walking down the street or stepping into the konbini can feel like you're being bombarded with katakana words. However, it is not just vocabulary Japanese has borrowed from English. In this Nihongo Know-It-All, we're going to look at affixes (suffixes and prefixes) from English that have been adopted into the Japanese lexicon, as well as a few examples of how they can be used.

EN Affix	Use	Examples in JP	Etymology	Example Meaning
-er	Someone who does/likes ____	マヨラー プヨラー	<i>Mayo(nnaise) + er</i> <i>Puyo + er</i>	One who loves mayonnaise/puts mayonnaise on everything One who plays/is skilled at the game "Puyo-puyo"
-ist	Someone who is often ____	はったりスト ロマンチスト	<i>Hattari + ist</i> <i>Roman(ce)+ ist</i>	One who bluffs (<i>hattari</i>) often One who is always romanticizing things; an idealist
-ism	Mindset; Way of thinking	がんばりズム Name + イズム	<i>Ganbar(u) + ism</i> <i>OO + ism</i>	A mindset of always trying your best/never giving up (Person/Company's) doctrine; principle; motto; -ism
-tic (-ic)	____-esque, ____-like	メルヘンチック SF チック	<i>Märchen + tic</i> <i>SF + tic</i>	Fairytale-like (" <i>Märchen</i> " is German for "fairytale") Science Fiction-like
my-	Personal ____	マイカー マイホーム	<i>My + car</i> <i>My + home</i>	One's own* car One's own* home *Note: Not limited to the speaker (i.e. <i>すずきさんってマイカー</i> ーありますか? Do you have your own car , Suzuki?)

Events & Memoranda

Entries Open for World Masters Games 2027 Kansai Japan ワールドマスターズゲームズ2027 関西参加エントリーを開始！

The World Masters Games 2027 Kansai, one of the world's largest lifelong sports festivals open to anyone aged 30+ will be held for the first time in Japan across the Kansai region in 2027. Tokushima Prefecture will host 6 events across 5 sports: Canoe Slalom, Golf, Bowling, Triathlon/Aquathlon, and Weightlifting. Registration opens March 2, 2026. Join us as an athlete or volunteer!

Registration Period:

Mar. 2, 2026 @10am - Feb. 28, 2027

Event Dates: May 14, 2027 - May 30, 2027

Location: 13 prefectures and cities, including Tokushima Prefecture

Inquiries: Tokushima Pref. Sports Promotion Div.,
Exchange Expansion Office TEL: 088-621-2553

概ね 30 歳以上なら誰でも参加できる世界最大級の生涯スポーツの祭典「ワールドマスターズゲームズ 2027 関西」が、2027 年、関西各地を舞台として日本初開催！徳島県ではカヌースラローム、ゴルフ、ボウリング、トライアスロン・アクアスロン、ウエイトリフティングの 5 競技 6 種目を開催します。参加エントリーは 2026 年 3 月 2 日から。選手として、ボランティアとして、ぜひ参加してください。

参加エントリー受付期間：

2026 年 3 月 2 日午前 10 時～ 2027 年 2 月 28 日

大会会期：2027 年 5 月 14 日（金）～ 30 日（日）

開催地：徳島県を含む 13 府県市

お問い合わせ：県スポーツ振興課交流拡大室
TEL: 088-621-2553



2026 TOPIA

Study Japanese Online!



Dates: May 2026 – February 15, 2027

Time: Once per week for 1 hour

Number of Classes: 20 - 30

Teachers: Volunteer Teachers (Not specialist teachers)

Eligibility: Those living in Tokushima

Those not already studying Japanese at school, their company, a Japanese class, etc. **(First-time participants will be given priority.)**

Necessary Items: Please download ZOOM on your computer, tablet, or phone.

It may be necessary to purchase a textbook.

(Please consult with your teacher.)

Number of Spots: About 20 People

Cost: Completely Free

Application: Please see TOPIA's website: <https://www.topia.ne.jp/english/>



Inquiries: Tokushima Prefectural International Exchange Association (TOPIA)

Contact: Nomizu - coordinator2@topia.ne.jp Okamoto - tagengo1@topia.ne.jp

TEL: 088-656-3303



Events & Memoranda

2026 TOKUSHIMA PREFECTURE JAPANESE SPEECH CONTEST

1. **PURPOSE** True internationalization cannot be achieved without first coming in touch with other cultures and ways of life, fostering a sense of international awareness and gaining mutual understanding with people of the world to create a society in which we can all work and live together in harmony. This speech contest seeks to give a voice to the international residents of Tokushima Prefecture and engage them in a dialogue to further discourse on cross-cultural understanding and fostering multiculturalism.
2. **DATE & PLACE** July 18th, 2026 (Saturday), 13:00 - 16:30
Awagin Hall (Tokushima Arts Foundation for Culture) Small Hall (5F)
3. **ELIGIBILITY** Only foreign residents whose native language is not Japanese are eligible to apply.
(Additionally, foreign residents who have had over three years of compulsory education in Japan, or those who have previously won the Grand Prize or the Tokushima Prefectural Assembly's Chairman of the Federation of International Exchange Assembly Members Award, are not eligible to apply.)
4. **SELECTION** We are recruiting a wide-array of foreign residents. We will have all applicants submit a draft of their speech. After a screening of the speech drafts, we will select 10 applicants to participate in the actual contest.
5. **THEME** The topic is left to your discretion, but it should relate to the event's purpose of fostering cross-cultural understanding and multiculturalism.
* Speeches must not include political or religious content, and must not criticize a particular person or group.
* Speeches must be original content that you have not presented on before. If it is discovered that the speech is not original or has already been presented on, awards may be rescinded.
6. **LENGTH** Speeches should be no more than 6 minutes in length.
7. **AWARDS**
 - Grand Prize, one person (Prize: 50,000 yen gift certificate)
 - The Tokushima Prefectural Assembly's Federation of International Exchange Assembly Members Chairman's Award, one person (Prize: 30,000 yen gift certificate)
 - Awa Bank Award, one person (Prize: 30,000 yen gift certificate)
 - Tokushima Taisho Bank Award, one person (Prize: 30,000 yen gift certificate)
 - Tokushima Chamber of Commerce and Industry Award, one person (Prize: 30,000 yen gift certificate)
 - Tokushima City International Association Special Recognition Award, three people (Prize: 10,000 yen gift certificate)
 - Special Effort Award, to be decided (Prize: 5,000 yen gift certificate)

* All participants will receive a participation award.
8. **HOW TO APPLY** Submit your application form and speech draft by email, FAX, or in-person (information written below). Please type your speech on a computer. You can download the application form from TOPIA's website. Please contact us by phone after submitting your application form and speech draft to confirm we've received it.
9. **DEADLINE** May 24th, 2026 (Sunday)
10. **ORGANIZED BY** Tokushima Prefecture & Tokushima Prefectural International Exchange Association (TOPIA)
11. **SPONSORS**
(Planned) The Tokushima Prefectural Assembly's Federation of International Exchange Assembly Members, Awa Bank, Tokushima Taisho Bank, Tokushima Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Tokushima International Association (TIA), Otsuka Pharmaceuticals, Nichia Corporation
12. **WITH THE SUPPORT OF**
(Planned) NHK Tokushima, Shikoku Broadcasting, Tokushima Shimbun, Cable TV Tokushima, FM Tokushima, FM Bizan
13. **WHERE TO APPLY** Tokushima Prefectural International Exchange Association (TOPIA)
Address : 〒770-0831 Tokushima City, Terashima Honcho Nishi, 1-61, Clement Plaza 6F
Website: <https://www.topia.ne.jp/>
Tel: 088-656-3303 Fax: 088-652-0616 Email: coordinator1@topia.ne.jp
Person in Charge: Kimura

Speech Contest in 2025



This year, we will introduce a presentation category for junior and senior high school students in the Japanese Speech Contest. We would greatly appreciate it if you could help spread the word to people you know.

For more details, please visit our website.



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)