

# wagazasshi

¥0

## Winter. magic

Embracing the season  
in Hokkaido

Event guide | Setsubun | Surgical masks | Visiting Bali

# nagazasshi

Volume 4 Issue 4  
January/February 2012

## Editor-in-chief

*Kim Durinick*

## Deputy Editor

*Qi Yang*

## Assistant Editors

*Audrey Akcasu  
Raymond Arcega*

## Copy Editor

*Rosario Paz*

## Treasurer

*Ashleigh Allen*

## Layout and Design

*Hugh McCafferty*

## Web Design

*Douglas Bonham  
Rosalind Manning*

## Contributors

*Doug Bonham  
Hannah Conklin  
Alex Dougan  
Shiori Funakura  
Katelyn Schwartz  
David Sho Ly  
Carol Anne Stanton*

## Founders

*Andrew Morris  
Matthew Nelson*

[www.nagazasshi.com](http://www.nagazasshi.com)

Cover photo: Ashleigh Allen

**T**he trees have lost their leaves, the trains are a set 28 degrees and convenience stores are sold out of surgical masks. Welcome to winter in Nagasaki.

Despite Nagasaki having a relatively mild winter, the lack of insulation makes it nearly impossible to escape the cold, unless you've discovered Japan's most remarkable piece of furniture, the kotatsu. It's like a table and it's also like a heater, but calling it either would be a gross understatement. I'm willing to bet most of you are currently snuggled under one and have already conceded to the idea of waiting until after Golden Week to start working on those New Year's resolutions. If your New Year's resolution was to spend four months of the year under a heated table, I raise my glass to you. You've mastered how to survive the Japanese winter.

For those who are looking to escape the confines of your kotatsu, check out our guide to staying warm this winter (page 11), or Nagasaki's famous Lantern Festival should provide a reason to go to the city for Chinese New Year. However, if you have the money and the time, the Nagazasshi staff recommends getting out of Nagasaki altogether and going somewhere much colder: Hokkaido. The annual snow festival in Sapporo is arguably the best winter event in Japan and is worth every layer of clothing. Be sure to read page 6 for itinerary tips and ideas.

Being held back by the cold can make winter feel hopeless, but, if you do find yourself falling into a winter slump, remember that things like onsens, mulled wine and hot chocolate are best overdone in the wintertime. Be sure to take advantage of these now because nabe season doesn't last forever.

Kim Durinick, Editor-in-chief



photo Carol Anne Stanton

16



# Contents

**Events** 4

**Demons out, luck in** 6

*The lowdown on Setsubun*

**One mask, two mask, red mask, blue mask** 8

*Surgical masks and Japan*

10

**Staying warm in winter** 10

*How to survive the big freeze*



**Kanji of the month** 11

**Winter wonderland** 12

*Sapporo's world-famous snow festival*

**Beautiful Bali** 16

*Tips for visiting "The Island of the Gods"*

**Defining experiences** 18

*A recent high school graduate on travel*

**Money game:** 20

**The rise of the yen**

*What does a strong yen mean for Japan?*

**AKB family** 22

*Yasushi Akimoto's unstoppable pop franchise*



photo Qi Yang



photo Raymond Arcega





A vibrant photograph of the Nagasaki Lantern Festival. The scene is filled with numerous large, red, spherical lanterns hanging from the street. Some lanterns have white panels with black Japanese calligraphy. The lanterns are strung with yellow and red ribbons. In the background, a crowd of people is visible, and the street is lined with buildings. The overall atmosphere is festive and colorful.

## Event of the month

### *Nagasaki Lantern Festival*

***Nagasaki City, January 23-February 6***

This festival provides a bright spot in the middle of the gloomy winter. In fact, it provides over 1,000 bright spots.

Originating from the historical relations between Nagasaki and China, Nagasaki's most famous festival commences on Chinese New Year and for two weeks thereafter, the city will be filled with the glow from lanterns of all shapes and sizes. As 2012 is the year of the dragon, this year's feature lantern will be a giant dragon to accompany the annual dragon dance.

# Events

Photo Joe Van Acker

### **Nomozaki Daffodil Festival** **Nomozaki, January 8-February 5**

Just south of Nagasaki City, daffodils are awaiting you in full bloom. From the flower-covered rolling hills, enjoy a spectacular view of Gunkanjima and let yourself be tricked into thinking that spring has come early this year.

### **Hetomato Festival** **Goto Island, January 15**

In one of Nagasaki's strangest festivals, newly married women ride on four-meter long straw sandals carried by scantily clad young men. This is Goto Island's unique way of praying for a good spring harvest and fishing season.

### **99 Islands Oyster Festival** **99 Islands Resort, Sasebo, February, weekends/holidays**

This biannual festival gives you your first chance of 2012 to indulge in famous Sasebo oysters. Barbeques and grilling essentials are provided, so you just need to bring a friend and an empty stomach. Don't miss out this month because this festival won't come around again until November.

### **Hirado Onsen and Castle Festival** **Hirado, mid-February to mid-March**

Visit the beautiful island of Hirado and its historic sites while earning rewards. At seven sites around the city, traditional dolls will be displayed and if you visit five of the seven locations, you get free admission to one of the cities' onsen, win local products and will even be entered in a drawing to win a free night at one of Hirado's hotels.

### **Ultraman Exhibition** **Nagasaki Prefectural Art Museum, January 27-March 31**

An exhibit will be displaying the history and art behind this beloved superhero that has been around for nearly 50 years. The exhibit will feature design drawings, costumes, photographs and of course, Ultraman figurines.



### **Child Crying Sumo** **Hirado, February 3**

Just as the name suggests, two babies are matched up in a sumo ring and the baby who cries first wins. A registration fee is required for participating children, but spectating is free.

### **Arie Warehouse Tour** **Minami Shimabara, February 18-19**

Take a tour of Arie's warehouses, featuring historically acclaimed products such as chai, soy sauce, miso, noodles and sake. You can also visit the various monuments depicting the town's Christian heritage and walk along the old streets. 📍

# *Demons out* Luck in

**Alex Dougan** explains  
how to make 2012 your  
lucky year



Jun Ohwada [flickr.com/june29](https://www.flickr.com/photos/june29/)



**O**f the countless festivals that take place in Japan every year, one of the more peculiar festivals is that of Setsubun. Whether you've taken part many times, or this is the first you've ever heard of it, Setsubun is an interesting Japanese festival with a long history.

Setsubun literally means "seasonal division." Historically, it was celebrated four times each year – once before the start of each season. Today, Setsubun is assumed to refer to the coming of spring, and is celebrated each year on February 3<sup>rd</sup>. It is just one part of a bigger "spring festival" (*haru matsuri*), and although it's not a national holiday, the tradition is widely practiced across Japan.

For a long time, Japan celebrated the Lunar New Year (this is the same New Year that China, Korea and Vietnam still celebrate), but when Japan adopted the Gregorian Calendar in 1873, New Year celebrations shifted to January 1<sup>st</sup>.

In ancient Japan, it was thought that the spirit world and physical world were closest in proximity at the turn of the Lunar New Year. As Setsubun falls around this time, it is assumed that this would be the best time to influence spirits. One of the spirit influencing rituals is *Mamemaki*.

*Mamemaki* is the famous bean-throwing custom that started to gain popularity in Japan around 600 years ago. Practicing the custom couldn't be easier: Take roasted soybeans – also known as

"fortune beans" (*fuku mame*) – and throw them out the door. Or, throw them at a mask-wearing family member to symbolize the purging of evil spirits. Do this while chanting "demons out, luck in" (*oni wa soto, fuku wa uchi*) and you're well on your way to a proper Setsubun ritual.


The bean-throwing used to be done at home, but now it's common to find families attending local shrines to see this ritual carried out, which is a good idea if you think about all the money you could save on soybeans.

So, by throwing the beans, you get the "demons out." To get "luck in," it is customary to eat one soybean for each

year of your life, although in recent years, peanuts have become a popular substitute. In the

next 10 years, scientists speculate that people might even venture into the world of almonds, cashews, and walnuts, though they cannot say with certainty until more data is collected.

At bigger Buddhist temples and Shinto shrines across Japan, you'll find priests and special guests throwing beans and other prizes – including money and candy – onto the crowds gathered below. At the biggest and most televised ceremonies, celebrities are inevitably invited to do the throwing.

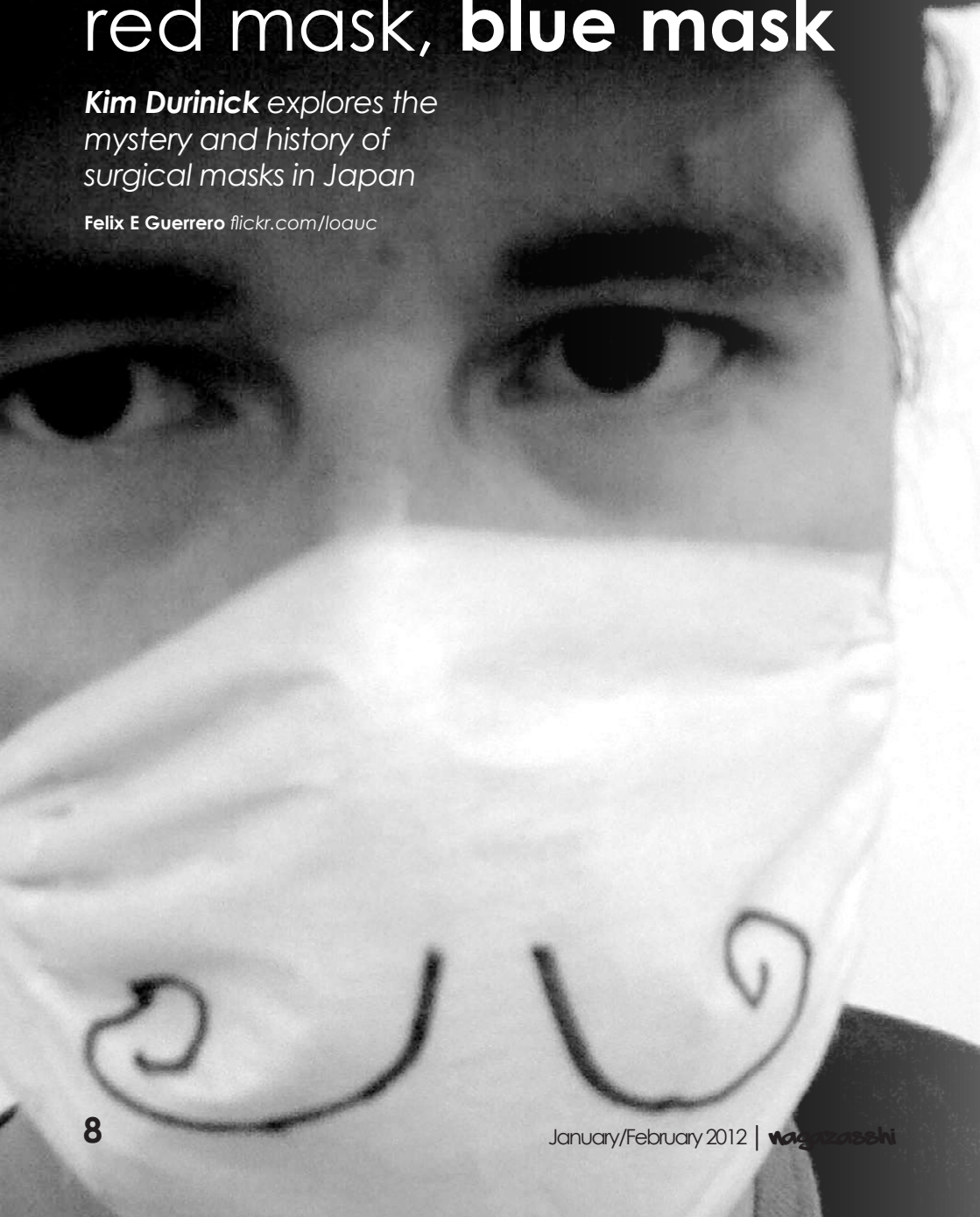
That's Setsubun in a nutshell. If you've no plans on February 3<sup>rd</sup>, make your way down to a local shrine and check it out. 

“**Setsubun is an interesting festival with a long history**”

# One mask, two mask, red mask, blue mask

**Kim Durinick** explores the  
mystery and history of  
surgical masks in Japan

**Felix E Guerrero** [flickr.com/loauc](https://www.flickr.com/photos/loauc/)





**J**anuary. A new beginning. A clean slate. A chance to accomplish your New Year's resolutions. Flu season.

In Japan, January and particularly mid-January, sees sharp rises in already elevated reports of influenza. If during this time you find yourself in a crowd of Japanese commuters, it's only a matter of time before you'll start to wonder about the history of the surgical mask.

In the West, we are familiar with the surgical mask as something worn only by health care professionals and Michael Jackson, but in Japan they are commonplace. It wasn't always that way, though. The surgical mask was only invented about 100 years ago, shortly after Louis Pasteur was finally able to convince people that bacteria cause disease.

Before the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, surgeons were not required to sterilize instruments or wear specialized garments. However, after Pasteur's findings, surgical attire, including the mask, was mandated and accompanied by the development of antiseptics.

In Japan, the masks made the leap from medical use to popular use to protect against pollen allergies, factory pollution and influenza. They continued their rise to fame and hit the international stage during the 2003 SARS epidemic. In most countries, their popularity died out as the SARS scare subsided, but in Japan they prevailed. Nowadays, people wear them with everything from business suits to


party dresses and they are available in a wide variety of colors and designs to match any outfit so there is no need to sacrifice style in the fight to stay healthy. But do masks actually help prevent sickness?

Studies show conflicting results, with the belief that they are ineffective and can even have adverse effects when used improperly commonly accepted. However, independent of their effectiveness, it is unlikely that they will fall out of use anytime soon. In Japanese society, masks are more a social obligation than a choice. Get sick in a western country and you show your respect to coworkers by staying home and minimizing contact with people.

**“Independent of their effectiveness, it is unlikely that they will fall out of use anytime soon”**

In Japanese society, however, you're going to need a better excuse than that to get a day off. In Japan, workers and students are expected to show up

and work hard until they are unable to do so. Yet, it is important that this fighting spirit be accompanied with a face mask to show consideration for coworkers, classmates and other members of society. In turn, healthy Japanese use them to protect themselves against those very same coworkers and classmates who are socially pressured to avoid absence, leading to the widespread use of masks in Japan.

These masks, which originated solely for health reasons, have come to mean much more to Japanese society. Beyond the perceived health benefits, they have become symbolic of the Japanese ideals of hard work and consideration for others. 

# Staying warm in winter

**Katelyn Schwartz** and  
**Qi Yang** on how to  
keep warm this winter

**W**inter in Nagasaki can be rough. Since Kyushu homes are built to withstand humid summers, most of them lack basic insulation. How does this architectural design fare in the winter? It doesn't. The chill is enough to make people crave the steamy heat of summer. While we could spend many hours hating the winter cold that seems to penetrate our bones, it's better to focus on the small joys and ways to beat it. Here are our tips.

## **Kotatsu** (炬燵)

This is the quintessential piece of winter furniture in Japan. The kotatsu is a wooden table with a mini-heater underneath. The tabletop is removable so a futon or blanket can be placed under it to cover all four sides. Stick your feet inside and the kotatsu warms from the bottom up. Beware: this table has been known to put people into hibernation mode from which they won't emerge for days.

## **Nabe Party** (鍋)

Nabe is an amazing "anything soup" you

cannot mess up. Get any vegetables or meat that strikes your fancy along with a pre-made broth, available in a variety of flavors (I recommend the kimchi). Throw it all in a pot and you're done! Nabe boils away on the portable stove while you eat. Invite your friends over for some good soup and laughs.

## **Heated carpets/blankets**

These convenient gadgets keep your floor or bed toasty. Do you shudder at the idea of crawling into ice cold sheets? Use a heated blanket to warm up your bed half an hour before bedtime and you are set. The heated carpet is also a great addition to your kotatsu as it will keep your bottom warm, too.

## **Kigurumi** (着包み)

You never really wanted to give up that footed onesie as a child, but social conventions made you? Kigurumi is the onesie that you could have only dreamed





about as a child. It's a hooded fleece outfit in the fashion of a cartoon character.

Do you like Doraemon? Tigger? How about Pikachu or Winnie the Pooh?

You can be any of these characters and more! You will not only be comfy and cozy, but also thoroughly entertained.

### Layers

If you don't feel like you want to dress as your favorite cartoon character to stay warm, then why not try layering? Check out Uniqlo's heat-tech section for undershirts that will have you sweating in a heated room. Also, try wearing neck warmers and thicker socks

you can wear to bed.

### Kairo (懷炉)

Last but not least, these convenient heat packets come in all sizes and shapes. The most popular ones are for your pockets as hand warmers, but they range from ones you can stick to the soles of your feet, to ones you can attach to your back. You can find them at most stores, including convenience stores. The best part: they last eight hours.

One can easily get bogged down in the frost-bitten heart of winter with no hope of thawing in sight. So, enjoy what you can because you would look pretty ridiculous huddled under a table, sipping soup, dressed as Gachapin in the middle of July. 🍲

## Kanji of the Month

# 年

HAPPY NEW YEAR!

Shinnen, (新年), Japanese for "new year," is made up of the two characters 新 and 年, respectively meaning (you guessed it!) "new" and "year." This month's kanji is the latter of the two, 年, but don't write it off as a limited-time-only character. On the contrary, 年 is ranked in the top five most frequently used kanji, so it's good all year long.

So when do you use this popular kanji? Much like 日, when talking about 昨日 (kinou, yesterday), 今日 (kyou, today), and 明日 (ashita, tomorrow), 年 can be used to refer to 去年 (kyonen, last year), 今年 (kotoshi, this year), and 来年 (rainen, next year). You can even use it when asking someone their 年齢 (nenrei, age), or when telling someone about your 年下 (toshi shita, younger) girlfriend. Just make sure she's not a 未成年 (miseinen, minor).

Like China, one of twelve zodiac animals is ascribed to each year in Japan. This year is the year of the dragon, or 辰年 (tatsumidoshi). You've probably been seeing an excess of dragon decorations, cards and merchandise at your local convenience stores since November. Now you know the message being conveyed! Here's to hoping that 辰年 is an 当たり年 (ataridoshi, lucky year) for you!

Hannah Conklin





# Winter wonderland

Who says playing in the snow is only for kids?

**Ashleigh Allen** takes us on a tour of  
Hokkaido's world-renowned snow festival

Photos Ashleigh Allen



**F**or those not used to enduring long, freezing winters (and even for some who are), the countless hours of shivering in non-insulated buildings and long hours of darkness associated with Japanese winters can feel a little depressing. There is however, an annual event which coaxes people out from under the warmth of their kotatsu to come together and celebrate winter.





The Sapporo Snow Festival welcomes around 2 million tourists for 7 days each February. Originating in 1950 when local high school students created 6 statues in Odori Park, the festival has since expanded to numerous sites and displays approximately 400 snow and ice statues.

Odori Park, the main venue, houses several enormous and incredibly detailed snow sculptures. The sculptures usually depict an event, a famous building, or a famous person or character from the previous year. Odori Park is also the site of the International Snow Sculpture Contest, where various countries around the world have a chance to showcase their talent. Several stages and ramps are constructed from

snow to hold concerts, sporting events and other performances. The Tsudome site boasts many sledding runs and fun winter activities for kids and families.

You can also see some of the largest sculptures on display here. Further, the streets of Susukino, a popular nightlife

district, are lined with intricate ice sculptures. Be sure not to miss the Susukino Queen of Ice beauty pageant, also held here.

**“ While the winter atmosphere warms your heart, Sapporo’s delicious cuisine will warm your belly ”**

While the beautiful winter atmosphere of Snow Festival fills your heart with warmth, Sapporo’s culinary dishes will warm your belly. Sapporo is known nationwide for its delicious miso and butter corn ramen. There is even an



entire alley of shops (creatively named Ramen Alley) specializing in the dish. Some other specialties include the oddly named Genghis Khan, which is yakiniku lamb, and soup curry. Hokkaido is famed for its exceedingly fresh seafood including salmon, sea urchin and crab, and the Sapporo Beer Museum is also a popular attraction that houses a beer garden with a great dining atmosphere.

Many tourists also take advantage of nearby ski resorts. Sapporo Kokusai Ski Resort is about an hour outside of the city and offers competitive prices. Niseko Resort is about three hours away and is more expensive, but is larger and famed for its deep powder snow.

Another great spot, only a short train ride from Sapporo, is the city of Otaru. During the snow festival, Otaru hosts an illumination festival, which pairs simple snow sculptures with candles and lanterns. After sunset, lanterns are strung over Otaru Canal for a beautiful view. Couples can buy a cup with a candle and write their hopes for the year on the outside.

Tourists hoping to visit Sapporo during Snow Festival should make plans far in advance as hotels and flights fill up extremely quickly, and as February approaches, prices soar. Some also recommend arriving a day or two before the festival officially starts. Not only will you save money, but you'll also be able to see the building process of the sculptures. If you get a chance, Sapporo Snow Festival is not to be missed. 🐾

**Nagasaki International  
Hostel AKARI**

Kojiyamachi 2-2  
☎ 095-801-7900



ENGLISH OK!  
NO CURFEW!  
FREE INTERNET!

FOR YOUR WEEKEND STAY  
CLOSE TO DOWNTOWN

**Riverside Budget Accomodation**

Dormitory	¥2,500 ~ ¥2,900 / bed
Twin/Double ensuite	¥5,900 ~ ¥6,500 / room
Single ensuite	¥3,900 ~ ¥4,000 / room

akari@nagasaki-hostel.com  
http://www.nagasaki-hostel.com

Deliciously  
Yummy!



## KEBAB STAND PLUS +

4-12, Tokiwa-machi,  
Sasebo-city, 857-0053

Open 11:30-19:30

Closed / Wednesday

Call-in order are OK

☎ 0956-76-8477

### **Message from the shop:**

You will feel right at home with our great tasting kebabs!  
Please check our Kebab Stand Plus + page on Facebook.  
We look forward to your business.

Photo Carol Anne Stanton

Ever considered travelling to Indonesia? **Carol Anne Stanton** and **David Sho Ly** share some tips on visiting Bali - "The Island of the Gods"

## Food

### Where to eat

There are tons of little shack-style eating establishments on the beaches, called **warungs**. Some of them are pretty elaborate with upstairs eating areas, brightly colored sun umbrellas and beautiful lamps. Despite my initial skepticism, food at temporary structures set up on the beach is actually really good! Get there reasonably early to get a great view of the sunset while sitting on bean bags!

Make sure you have a meal near **Batur**; a volcano backdrop really makes for a truly stunning venue.

### What to eat

**Gado-Gado:** Originating from an Indonesian word that refers to the habit of snacking between meals, *gado-gado* is a common vegetable dish often served with boiled eggs and *emping* crackers.

**Mie Goreng:** Similar to Japanese yakisoba, this noodle dish is eaten in Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore. In this popular dish, noodles are fried with garlic, prawns, chili, tomatoes,

# Beautiful Bali

meat (usually chicken or beef) and eggs. It is a definite must-try for those who are planning to visit the “Island of the Gods.”

Locals also recommend **babi gulgeng**, which is suckling pig.

## Fun

**Camel riding:** Ride a camel along one of the beaches in Nusa Dua located in Southern Bali.

**Water sports:** Bali offers many water activities from jet skiing and banana boating to parasailing and white water rafting. There is even marine walking, in which they put a huge helmet on your head, pump air in, give you weights and fish food and then help you down a ladder to the bottom of the ocean. You get to see all the tropical fish up close and even get to touch them as they eat the fish food you’ve brought along! Whatever you want to do, find out more information by checking out pamphlets in hotel lobbies.

**Hiking:** Mt. Batur is a beautiful place to hike. There are loads of trails and activities on this mountain. The sunrise trek is recommended. You get picked up around 2 AM, hike up and reach the peak just in time for sunrise.

**Temples:** If you are interested in traditional Balinese culture, check out some local temples. Put on a sarong and learn about the Balinese way of life.

With a **tour guide** you can experience another side to Balinese culture, such as dancing, silver smithing, kite making,

wood carving, and even check out batik and other local art studios.

**Monkey Forest:** This famous attraction is located in the Ubud area, approximately a 2-hour car ride from the airport. Monkeys are considered sacred in Bali, so when entering this forest and temple area, you will see monkeys running around freely. A word of caution: if you have food in your bag, they WILL find it.


## Insider tips

Beware of the infamous “**Bali belly**”! When in doubt, avoid the water, ice and salad. Bring medication just in case.

**Visa:** Yes, it’s required. You can get it after you arrive in the Denpasar Bali Airport and before you wait in line to get through immigration (which takes forever). The cost is \$25 and you can pay in U.S. dollars.

**Airport Tax:** You have to pay a tax of U.S. \$20 to *leave* Bali, after which you receive a slip that is required to board the plane.

We recommend hiring your own **driver**. With the tour guide you can see a lot, even things you didn’t know you wanted to see. It’s worth the extra money.

Finally, we recommend limiting your time in Kuta or Seminyak. Bali has a lot more to offer! Try spending one or two nights in the south, then go to one of the islands (Nusa Lembongan) and stay there a few nights for the beach experience. Then, stay in Ubud for a few nights to do the mountain activities and to experience the various cultural aspects of the city. 



# Defining experiences

**Shiori Funakura** a recent graduate of Sasebo Minami High School, shares what she has learned through various experiences of world travel

**T**raveling abroad gives us a chance to see a different world.

Unfortunately, some people have bad experiences in foreign countries that prevent them from doing so. Culture shock is one example. Despite these obstacles, I personally got a wide variety of views by traveling to various countries. I have had many important experiences in my life, but traveling abroad is an experience that has changed my world views forever.

My first trip abroad was to the US when I was a fifth grade elementary school student. I went to California, New Mexico and Texas. Although I had attended English conversation school since I was 4 years old, I couldn't make myself understood in English. It

inspired me to study English harder. I also experienced differences in culture between Japan and the US. For one, I was really surprised at the food portions. I had never eaten such big pizzas or hamburgers before. Plus, I was amazed how friendly American people were. I think that is one of the unique things

about people in the US. For the first time, I realized that there are many different cultures in the world.


**“ By chance, I stepped into a back alley of some modern high rises and felt as if I was in a totally different world ”**

Going to China was another experience that completely changed my world view. I have been to China four times. I went to Shanghai and Yunnan province when I was in my first year of middle school. I witnessed poverty firsthand, something I had only seen on TV, when a woman and her children begged me for money on the street. There were also many people on

the sidewalks selling goods. In Shanghai, I could experience modern China, but when by chance I stepped into a back alley of some modern high-rises and I felt as if I were in a different world. It made me aware of the astounding difference between developed and developing countries. There are those who lead comfortable lives, while others don't even have the comforts of food or shelter. After the 2008 Olympics, I went to Beijing for my school trip. I saw modern China in contrast to the way it was before. I visited a high school in Beijing and it was the first time that I was able to become friends with Chinese high school students. As we talked to each other, I found that they are similar to Japanese high school students. I learned that we had some things which we could share even if we had different cultures, languages and nationalities.

Lastly, going to Canada and learning about multiculturalism had a huge influence on my world view. I went to Vancouver three years ago and was shocked to see how many Asian people lived there. Also, most of the goods at the supermarket were written in the country's two official languages, English and French. It is a unique culture compared with Japanese culture. I learned the

importance of coexistence. Canadian people welcome outsiders kindly. I think it is very important in a global society and this experience taught me this lesson.

In conclusion, by traveling abroad many times, I had many interesting experiences. In the US, I experienced a different lifestyle. In China, I learned about poverty and also that all of us can share something with others in the world, despite differences in language or nationalities. Lastly, in Canada, I learned about multiculturalism. In a global world, it is wonderful that many people can accept many cultures. I am glad I have been able to visit different continents. Thanks to these valuable experiences, my world view has been broadened. 



Alberto Garcia [flickr.com/bertogg](https://www.flickr.com/photos/bertogg/)

# Money game: The rise of the yen

**Doug Bonham** explains  
what the strength of its  
currency means to Japan

**Ivan Walsh** flickr.com/ivanwalsh

**W**e are all aware that the worldwide economy is suffering; from Europe and America to Japan, much of the developed world is staggering through recession and depression. However, the underlying reasons – how and why – can be very difficult to understand. Why is Japan struggling right now?

Let's look at the issues facing Japan by starting with one we see every day: the strength of the yen. It impacts everything, from the slowing of the Japanese economy to why Toyota and Nintendo are suffering losses, and even why most foreigners living in Japan are benefitting by sending money home.

Currently, the yen is at a historic post-World War II high against the United States dollar. This means it takes

less yen (approximately 78 yen as of December) to purchase one dollar. It is roughly 20 percent stronger now than “normal,” when the exchange rate was approximately 100 yen to 1 dollar in the late 1990s and early 2000s. This is fantastic for those of us from foreign countries who receive our wages in yen.

**“ Much of Japan's export products are high-value - like cars and electronics - and with the strong currency, they are more expensive than the competition ”**

For the myriad companies in Japan doing business overseas, however, it's a major problem. Much of Japan's export products are high-value – like cars and electronics

– and with the strong currency, they are more expensive than the competition. Products have become more expensive to produce in Japan, so they must be sold at a higher price. Moreover, once sales are made, returning that profit to yen is now more expensive. As the currency is strong, companies make less money in yen. Compounding the problem is that



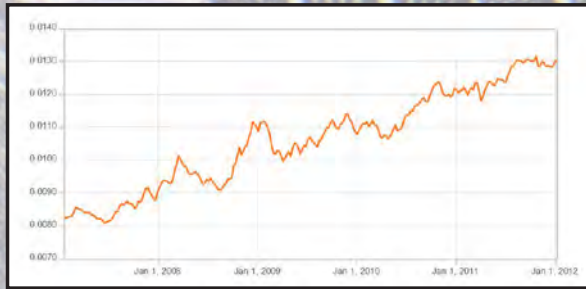
all associated costs of doing business are more expensive, as well.

This is a major problem for Japan. Why is the yen strong in the first place? Investors buy currency in bulk and trade it, both to facilitate business and to invest. With so much

economic turmoil around the world, two “safe haven” currencies have emerged in the financial world: the Swiss franc and the yen. The yen is considered safe for

a few reasons: Japan borrows less from foreign countries, it is politically and socially stable, and the Japanese yen has carried incredibly low interest rates. In

addition, in a world where the dollar and euro are weak, there aren't many other places to turn to.



Yen vs. dollar since 2008. [oanda.com](http://oanda.com)

No one knows when foreign economies will be remedied, so all we can do for now is wait it out and make the best of the situation. ☑

## KUMON HAIKI CENTER

Let's study  
***Japanese***  
the **most effective** way!



**Instructor**  
Kiyoko Hayashi



2-19-22 Haiki  
Sasebo City  
Nagasaki



090-7162-7577



kuumons@  
mtf.biglobe.ne.jp

# KUMON

A large, vibrant poster for the Japanese idol group AKB48. It features a collage of the group's members in various poses and outfits. The text 'AKB family' is prominently displayed at the top in a large, red, stylized font. Below it, the text 'Audrey Akcasu reveals the inner workings of Japan's girl band obsession' is written in a smaller, white font. The poster also includes the text 'AKB48 飛翔入手' (AKB48 Flying Get) and 'フライングゲット' (Flying Get) in large, red, stylized characters. There is also a vertical text on the left side that reads '選抜メンバー 八人による二枚目のシングル' (Selected members 8 people's second single). The background of the poster is a mix of yellow and red, with a 'KING RECORDS' logo in the top right corner. The poster is mounted on a wall, and some utility wires are visible on the left side.

# AKB family

Audrey Akcasu reveals the inner workings of Japan's girl band obsession

When writer, producer and college professor Yasushi Akimoto created AKB48 in December 2005, I wonder if he had any idea what lay ahead. Standing for **AKiBa**ra (the area of Tokyo in which they are based) and the 48 original members in the group, AKB48 was created based on the concept of “idols you can meet.” Keeping to this idea, despite their unsurpassable fame, they still perform daily at their theater above Don Quixote in the famed “Electric Town” of Tokyo - granted, tickets are only available through lottery.

If you live in Japan or have any interest in Japanese pop culture, I don't have to tell you about AKB48's success. It's hard to go a day without hearing an AKB48

song, seeing their picture or one of their three TV shows (and soon to be anime), or hearing kids, boys and girls alike, asking each other who they like the best. It's a pop culture phenomenon and the producer, Akimoto, knows it.

Seeing the astonishing success of AKB48, Akimoto decided to try again. And again. And again. Presently, there are five sister groups performing or in the works, a “brother” group (you'll understand the quotation marks later) and more of a cousin group. Each sister group is keeping to the “idols you can meet” ideology, performing daily at their respective theaters. Here's the run down:

## AKB48

**Base:** Akihabara, Tokyo

**Debut:** December 2005

**Hit songs:** “Heavy Rotation” (2010),  
“Kaze wa Fuiteru” (2011)

### **SKE48**

**Base:** Sunshine Sakae, Nagoya

**Debut:** October 2008

**Hit Song:** “Pareo wa Emerald” (2011)

### **NMB48**

**Base:** Namba, Osaka

**Debut:** October 2010

**Hit Song:** “Zetsumetsu Kurokami  
Shoujo” (2011)

### **HKT48**

**Base:** Hakata, Fukuoka (Theater in  
Hawks Town Mall, Chuo-ku)

**Debut:** November 2011

**Average Age:** 14 years

### **JKT48**

**Base:** Jakarta, Indonesia

**Debut:** December 2011

**Hit Song:** TBD

### **TPE48:**

**Base:** Taiwan

**Debut:** Summer 2012 (expected)

Akimoto is looking to further expand around the globe, and is considering Singapore, Russia and Thailand for the next potential “48”.

On another note, there’s OSJ48. While their single “Deep Breath” didn’t hit the charts, OJS48 (yes, **O-Ji-San**), a group of retired police officers, were welcomed into the 48 family as “brothers” in October of 2010.

As if that’s not enough, there is yet another! Created with the “adult idol” concept, SDN48 (**SaturDay Night**) was created for a more mature audience, thus the prior labeling as “cousin.” However, Akimoto has kept the internal structure of the group in line with the other 48s.

Internal structure? Why does an idol group need internal structure? With 48 or more members, you’ve got to keep them organized somehow. Each group is split into 2-5 factions. For example, AKB48 has Team A (16 members), Team K (16 members), Team B (16 members), Team 4 (11 members) and the Kenkyusei (19 trainees). Each team has its own concert set every year. The newer 48s don’t necessarily have this structure, but maintain the separation between members and trainees.

So, who gets to sing the hit singles? Starting in 2009, the public would vote in a “general election” to decide. In the last election this past summer, fans picked 40 girls from the 152 combined members of AKB, SKE and NMB, to sing on the next AKB single. On top of the election system, they also utilize good ol’ fashioned *janken*, or rock-paper-scissors, to make decisions.

What started as one ridiculously large idol group has transformed into an international franchise of many ridiculously large idol groups. So rest assured, AKB, SKE, NMB, HKT, SDN, and every other soon to be 48 aren’t going anywhere anytime soon. 🐣



*Nomihoudai  
party plans  
available*



*A short walk  
from Sasebo  
Station*

# MIKE'S

*The best Mexican food in Nagasaki*

*Contact*

[www.mikes-sasebo.com](http://www.mikes-sasebo.com)  
0956-24-2704

*Open*

11.30-14.00  
17.00-22.00

*Address*

長崎県佐世保市下京町4-8  
Sasebo, Shimokyo-cho 4-8



*Homemade salsa and guacamole*



*Taco Salad*



*International beers and specialty margaritas*



*Hungry Hombre Special*