



wagazasshi

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amaste,
Nepal

Events | Festivals | Aikido | Pachinko | Hanami

wagzasshi

Volume 6 Issue 5
March/April 2014

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春宵一刻值千金 (*shunshou ikkokuatai senkin*)

A moment in a spring evening is worth a thousand pieces of gold.

I whole-heartedly agree with this Japanese proverb, or *kotowaza*. Not much can compete with spring, especially here in Japan. The weather is so nice (it's amazing how a cool 15 degrees Celsius can seem so cold in October, but so warm in March), the cherry blossoms are blooming and the world awakens, both physically and spiritually.

If you're looking for the quintessential Japanese springtime experience, we can set you on the right path to a successful *hanami* (p. 20) and some great annual events (p. 5). If you're looking for a different kind of adventure this spring, take some time to go to Nepal (p. 12) or try a new sport, like a martial art (p. 10). You can even test your new year's luck with some gambling at the local *pachinko* place (p. 16).

Many of my favorite memories of Japan have taken place while enjoying the spring weather, especially during *hanami*. I have made many friends under cherry trees, but unlike the falling petals, those friendships are not ephemeral. So as the flowers bloom, the green emerges, and bugs start crawling around, I hope all of you can find growth, beauty and friendships in your own lives.

Audrey Akcasu, Editor-in-chief

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Event of the Month

Omura Flower Festival

March 25 - June 20

Omura

With over 2,000 trees, Omura Park is the place to be this spring. There are food stands all spring long as visitors enjoy the cherry blossoms in March, the special Omurazakura variation in April and an expanse of irises in May and June.

Events

The 12th Annual Doll Festival

March 1 - April 6, Omura

Storefronts throughout central Omura will be displaying traditional dolls. Other events include a tea ceremony.

Tulip Festival

March 2 - April 7, Huis Ten Bosch

Enjoy Holland's famous flower, the tulip, at this annual event. There will be over 650 kinds of tulips on display against the backdrop of traditional windmills. A special walk will be available between March 21 - April 6.

Razor Clam Festival

March 9, Urankashira, Sasebo

Enjoy the spring weather by doing some clamming and then grilling and eating your catch. You can also buy plenty of seafood and enjoy the other festival attractions.

Saikai Spring Festival

March 15 - April 13, Saikaibashi Park

Spring is the season for flowers, but in Saikai you can enjoy the cherry blossoms while watching a natural phenomenon: the whirlpools in the channel where Omura Bay meets the ocean.

Dejima Brewery Festival

March 21 - 22, Nagasaki

Experience some Western culture with this ticket-only event at Dejima. There will be an exhibit of traditional brewery and art.

Cocoon-shaped Cakes Festival

March 21 - April 6, Emukae

Have you ever heard of 繭玉, *mayudama*? It's a traditional decoration covering trees, a unique sight not to be missed!

Tenkaimine Rape Flower Spectacle

Late March - Late April, Sasebo

Nothing can complement the beautiful view of the 99 Islands better than a field of flowers. Not a spectacle to be missed.

Obama Onsen Festival and Unzen Fireworks Show

April 7, Obama

Join the locals to honor the natural hot springs of Obama with a parade of portable shrines. At sunset, there will be a fantastic fireworks display over Tachibana Bay.

Shimabara Rebellion Memorial

April 13, Minamishimabara

Help commemorate the 40,000 victims of the Shimabara Rebellion of 1637. The night view of Hara Castle, decorated with one candle for every victim, is an enchanting sight.

Nagasaki Tall Ships Festival

April 27 - May 1, Dejima

Tall ships from all over the world gather in Dejima for Japan's premier ship festival. Visitors can watch sail drills and fireworks, ride ships and enjoy hands-on events such as rope-tying tutorials and canoe trips.

Hasami Pottery Festival

April 29 - May 5, Hasami

Head to Hasami for the prefecture's biggest porcelain market. You can get the famous pottery for once-a-year low prices and also try out a pottery wheel or pottery painting. Don't miss the Hasami-themed photo contest either!

Kanoukaen Festival



photos Aimee Crocombe

Aimee Crocombe relives a local fire festival that is a feast for the senses.

While I get the feeling that the Kanoukaen Festival (観櫻火宴) in Chijiwa is still not well-known, it is definitely impressive and is said to be the largest fire festival in Nagasaki Prefecture with a total of 200 would-be warriors participating in this parade.

Based on historical information dating back 400 years, this is the reproduction of a mysterious history of heroes depicted on an *emaki* 絵巻 (illustrated hand scroll). It is the representation of the counterattack by Shimazu (lord of Satsuma domain) against the arrival of Takanobu Ryuzoji (a feudal lord of Hizen province) to the Shimabara Peninsula.

“ **As the park came into view, it was like stepping back in time** ”

After making our way to Chijiwa a few hours before dark, we parked our car at Tachibana Shrine, known by many for the famous *Kadomatsu* (traditional pine and bamboo decorations) that decorate the entrance around the New Year period and which are said to be the largest in the world.

We then wandered downhill on foot, a ten or so minute walk through a small village to a park by the ocean. As the park came into view, it was like stepping back in time. Nearly everyone there, from the young children to the adults, were kitted out in traditional samurai attire.

There were mock battle performances between young and old samurai and also traditional dance performances. Later, as



of hand, and about halfway through the walk, as our fires started to dwindle, the old sticks were taken from us and we were given fresh ones to light for the final march into the shrine.


Entering the shrine, we walked down a path lined with *yatai* (food stalls) and cherry blossom trees shedding petals to the end point. We were

the sun began to disappear, with a short ceremony and the blast of a cannon, kerosene soaked sticks were lit one by one until there was a sea of fire lighting up the night sky. They also handed out sticks to the lucky bystanders, a welcome source of warmth on the chilly spring evening!

then free to walk around and take in the surroundings.

Local residents have been celebrating the march for about 70 years now. If you are interested in wearing the samurai costume, it is also possible, provided that you make reservations

in advance. (<http://kanoukaen.m.web.fc2.com/>)

The festival will be held on Saturday, March 29th this year. 

“ **As we headed to Tachibana shrine, the surreal scene made us feel like we were really living that historic day of 400 years ago** ”

The samurai lead the way, chanting ‘*Iya-saka!*’ (弥栄), meaning “hurray,” similar to the expression “*banzai*” and the rest of us replied “Oooh!” over and over again. We marched our way back up the same village street we came down, now with onlookers cheering us on. As we headed to Tachibana shrine, the surreal scene made us feel like we were really living that historic day of 400 years ago.

A few firemen were scattered amongst the crowd to make sure things didn’t get out



Hello, Doll(y)!

Niel Thompson explains
one of Japan's early
spring holidays.

What is Hina Matsuri? Hina Matsuri ("Girls' Day" or "Doll Festival") is a Japanese holiday that occurs on March 3rd for families with young daughters. It is also referred to as *Momo no Sekku*, or Peach Festival. A holiday with this many names or interpretations has got to be important, right?

The point of the holiday is to help guarantee the healthy growth and good fortune of young girls by offering rice crackers and other food to intricate dolls. Carrying out the festival itself involves a complex

“ **The point of the holiday is to help guarantee the healthy growth and good fortune of young girls** ”

placement of these dolls on a tiered platform covered in red felt.

The dolls themselves wear clothes in the style of the Imperial Court during the

Heian period (794-1192). The size of the dolls and the number of tiers on the platform vary, but most of the

time the platform will consist of five or seven steps.

The top tier is, of course, reserved for the Emperor and Empress of this tiny doll kingdom. There is even a miniature,

folding screen to separate the rulers from the other lowly and undeserving members of doll-land. On the second tier are three ladies-in-waiting, while the third plays host to five court musicians. On the fourth step are the ministers on opposite sides of the trays of food. (Just like the real world, the people who do the actual work in the kingdom rate lower than members of the entertainment industry.) The fifth level is home to a trio of samurai, drinking away to their hearts' content, one each being happy, angry and sad. The sixth and seventh levels hold a variety of furniture, tools and carriages.

Hina Matsuri became a part of the traditional Japanese calendar during the Edo Period (1603-1868). It originally started as a way to ward off evil spirits. Even today, there are people in some parts of the country who release paper dolls into rivers at the end of the festival, hoping that the dolls will take any sickness or misfortune in lieu of themselves.

If I learned anything from movies and TV, it's that dolls are always evil and should be burned before they come to life


and try to eat your soul. Most people put the dolls away immediately after the festival because of an old superstition that families that are slow in putting the dolls away will have trouble marrying off their daughters. Which of course, only confirms my theory that those dolls are evil and need to be destroyed. 



photo flickr.com/geraldford

Aikido

*The first in a series about Japanese Martial Arts, **Benoît Forgues** tells us about a lesser-known style.*

Aikido is a relatively new form of martial arts compared to its predecessors such as Daitou-Ryuu Aiki-Juujitsu, Iaido or Judo. It is also an art that transcends traditional beliefs of stance, technique and self-awareness. Looking at the word itself, Aikido (合気道), we can immediately see that unlike most martial arts today, this one involves training of the spirit as well as the body. Aikido literally means “The Way of Harmony”; something rarely associated with martial arts. This, however, is the basic principal of Aikido.

“ **When studying Aikido, one must train both the body and the mind** ”

Most martial arts practiced today come from techniques and methods that have survived real battle fields, while weaker systems have died along with their masters.

Most of the surviving techniques and ways have withstood the test of time. Many of Aikido skills are no exception, having been adapted from age-old techniques.

Aikido was developed throughout the 1920's and 1930's by Ueshiba Morihei (植芝盛平). Ueshiba studied many different

martial arts early on in life. Aside from training at his father's Judo *dojo* for many years, Ueshiba broadened his ex-

perience and knowledge under many other martial art masters. After serving in WWII, testing his techniques in real life or death situations, and after having witnessed the horrors of war, he came back to Japan with a totally different outlook on life and on the role martial arts had to play. He spent the next few years perfecting the techniques

he considered most effective on the battlefield. He also spent a great amount of time cultivating his spiritual dimension and adapted the Omoto religion. After a while, Ueshiba started blending his battle-tested techniques with his newly-formed spiritual ideas, which led to the birth of Aikido. Ueshiba's ultimate goal was to promote peace and harmony through his martial art.



When studying Aikido, one must train both the body and the mind. The *Aikidoka* (合気道家 practitioner of Aikido) has to be patient, friendly and helpful. Respect for others is essential. In order to really understand Aikido, one has to step on the mats with an open mind—leaving all competitiveness behind.

The most important thing to learn when starting Aikido is proper *ukemi* (受身). New students have to first learn how to safely fall or roll out of techniques. Once the *ukemi* becomes smoother and more natural, the *Aikidoka* can start learning proper techniques.

It is essential to learn two parts of a technique: the *uke* component, that is the receiving end of a technique, and the *shite* element, which is the act of applying a technique. When

practicing, each partner takes turns being *uke* and *shite*, so everyone learns both parts equally. It is impossible to properly learn a technique if the only thing practiced

is its application. A practitioner needs to feel the intricacies of techniques in order to better apply them.

As with any martial art, to become skilled at Aikido, you must

practice the same techniques over and over, until your body performs them instinctively. It takes years to become simply good at Aikido. It takes many more to become great. Considering that Aikido has over

2,000 techniques, one might think it is quite impossible to attain a level adequate enough for the techniques to be effective. However, like anything else in life, if a practitioner is serious

and puts in the necessary time and effort, Aikido can become a very efficient method of self-defence. In paradox, due to spiritual growth, the more one studies the art, the less one sees the necessity to apply any of the techniques in real-life confrontations.

“ **The ultimate aim of Aikido is to be able to harmonize with any opposing force** ”



The ultimate aim of Aikido is to be able to harmonize with any opposing force, permitting both parties to walk out of the conflict unharmed.

Aikido is an “art” and a “way” that goes beyond the mats on which it is studied. ■



Krystal Korber gives us some tips and insights for traveling in Nepal.

How was Nepal?" It's the question I've been asked the most since coming back from winter vacation. Well, I have to ask myself, "What is Nepal?" Nepal is many things. It is the birthplace of Buddhism, one of the major world religions. It is a country struggling to support its people. It is also a country rich in culture, history, and natural beauty. Coming as a Westerner, Nepal made me take a step back and re-evaluate my position of privilege and my impact as a tourist.

The poverty is striking, but beyond that is the unfettered hospitality, generosity and kindness of Nepali people. Smiles come without reservation, and 'Namaste' greetings are given with warmth. Even the act of haggling with shopkeepers turned into lighthearted conversations and always ended with a smile.

No greater example of Nepali hospitality and kindness was seen than in our trekking guide, Rajan Pandit. I was fortunate enough to receive Rajan's contact information through a connection he had with the Nagasaki International Women's Association. They sponsored Rajan through the Nepal Youth Foundation (NYF) from 2000 to 2005 via a scholarship to help pay for school. With this, Rajan was able further his studies in the United States.

Rajan took what he learned to give back to his people. He continues to work with the NYF, which provides education, health care and shelter to street children. He also told me about their program that works to free bonded children from child labor, a project that continues with much success. Yet with all of this on his plate, he started his own tour company, Adventure Bound Nepal, which allows people to design and create their own trekking experience in Nepal.

I can say without any hesitation that thanks to Rajan's help, we were able to have an amazing trekking experience in the Himalayas. With 10 Nagasaki ALTs in tow, each of our backpacks bigger than the last, we were geared up and ready to go! Our trek to Poon Hill was considered to be one of the lighter treks, yet it was challenging for all of us. Five days doesn't sound like much, but when you're hiking through high altitudes, being herded up steps by donkeys, and forfeiting warm showers, five days was just the right amount of time for our group. Despite its challenges, it was the perfect chance to be present in the moment. I can't count the number of times I stopped in my tracks in awe of the Annapurna Range, trying to open my eyes as wide as possible to drink it all in. Crossing glacial rivers with rope bridges, passing swinging monkeys in the jungle, pit stops in small villages, and being completely surrounded by epic mountains made this trek an experience of a lifetime. Just a word to the wise: If you see a sign that says "German Bakery"

“ Smiles come without reservation, and ‘Namaste’ greetings are given with warmth ”





“ **Nepal truly is a country that captivates the hearts and minds of those who travel through it** ”



in a small mountain village, don't put all your hopes and dreams in it. Lesson learned.

Nepal also seemed to attract many Japanese tourists, who we encountered during our trek. It was pretty surreal to be giving fellow trekkers shouts of encouragement in Japanese. It was a like a piece of home in the unfamiliar.

Our group experienced the wilder side of Nepal, while staying in Chitwan. We went on a jungle trek through the national park, a UNESCO World Heritage Center that Bengal tigers, wild elephants and sloth bears call home. During our trek we were extremely lucky to spot a



I wasn't quite sure what to expect from the Poon Hill trek. I knew it was the easiest of the treks and pictured my group leisurely walking through the lush forests and a bit of snow. Fortunately, there was no snow, but it was no stroll through the park either. Despite its challenges I am grateful for the experience.

– Jasmine Francois

Spotlighted in a group shot (left) with the article's author Krystal Korber (right)



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couple of one-horned rhinoceroses! To be able to watch animals in their natural environment is not an opportunity many of us get these days. I can honestly say that nothing makes you feel more alive than the possibility of being run down by a wild rhino! But seriously, florescent-colored jackets are probably a bad idea.

Nepal truly is a country that captivates the hearts and minds of those who travel through it. So, back to the question: "How was Nepal?" I have only scratched the surface, but it left no doubt in me that I will be back again. 🇳🇵

Photo Credits & Information

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- Left: Monkey jumping mid-air, Swayambunath Temple, Kathmandu **Karl Po**
- Right: Three women eating on a hill, Birethani **Karl Po**

Pp. 14 - 15

- Top Left: Elephants, Chitwan National Park **Dan Cohen**
- Top Center: Fabric shop, Bhaktapur **Dan Cohen**
- Top Right: Pottery artisan, Bhaktapur **Karl Po**
- Side Left: Woman sitting on a hill, near Nayapul **Karl Po**
- Bottom Left: Group photo taken after a morning trek to the summit of Poon Hill, Ghorepani **Karl Po**

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Only in Japan—

A Night of Pachinko

Dan Ayres discusses the allure behind one of Japan's top pastimes.

They can be found throughout the Japanese archipelago, great, hulking behemoths that sit squalid and innocuous in towns and cities. They are pachinko parlors, mighty arenas where great warriors come and watch a load of metal balls fly around a machine. More

often than not they are brashly colored and gaudy, bedecked in neon lights more fitting of Vegas than the Land of the Rising Sun. The gigantic “Sun Friend 21” in Omura can literally be seen from space. By which I mean, from a plane landing in Nagasaki Airport. So what on earth is the

story behind these pinball parlors presiding in your prefecture?

For an outsider it's difficult to see the appeal. I trotted in to Sun Friend 21 with an open mind, but swiftly found the experience less than enchanting.

The noise is cacophonous, as if one of those monkeys that inexplicably wears a fez and bashes symbols together is banging around in your brain. Except he's been technofied and J-popped like some simian electro monster. It's noisy, and that's the point. Pachinko is not a social activity. In fact, the primary companions in pachinko are migraine-inducing bright lights and a plethora of cigarettes.

Machines are arranged in endless rows, and individuals choose their robot companion based on their favored design, which may vary from an ultra vivid oceanic scene to a futuristic cityscape. The game itself consists of twisting a knob that in turn flings pinballs around, most of which drop dejected

down into the tunnel of doom. Occasionally the balls will cascade into targets, prompting the electronic screen to display

an elaborate slot machine. Get three of a kind on the screen and you get a fresh explosion of balls, and a real sense of elation and pride.

It's a gambling game of chance, almost entirely devoid of skill, but highly addictive.

“ **It's a gambling game of chance, almost entirely devoid of skill, but highly addictive** ”



photo flickr.com/31029865@N06

Perhaps then that is where the appeal lies. Players don't have to think. In fact, thanks to the senses being overwhelmed by noise and brightness, they are encouraged not to. They can simply sit back and enjoy the hypnotic effect of

pinballs falling, free of crippling societal, familial and work pressures.

The popularity and commerce wrapped up in pachinko is staggering. It accounts for no less than 5 percent of Japan's gross national profit, and a hefty quarter of the population participates in a pinball jolly on a regular basis.

“ **It accounts for no less than 5 percent of Japan's gross national profit** ”

Dr. Iain Stewart, 'The Rock Star of Geology,' asserts that it is Japan's chronic lack of space, a product of its mountainous terrain and huge population, which explains the popularity of pachinko. The pachinko machine is a miniaturized entertainment marvel, small enough that they can be shoved together side by side but entrancing enough that you can lose yourself entirely in it.

“ **The pachinko machine is a miniaturized entertainment marvel** ”

These dystrophic pleasure houses have had their share of controversy. In a land where gambling is illegal, pachinko parlors evade the fuzz by having separate institutions where players cash in their winnings. Critics also claim that prof-

its are siphoned out of the country, as around 70 percent of pachinko parlors are owned by ethnic Koreans.

I emerged from Sun Friend 21 feeling rather frazzled. My eyes were blood shot, the techno monkey had left a malicious

ringing in my ears and I had bronchitis. I looked back at the great big yellow goliath as

another vehicle pulls into the parking lot and a dark figure scuttles into the building. Whilst I may not have been converted to this unique form of entertainment, it still proves as popular as ever. And whilst folk keep craving sensory annihilation, the pachinko lords will keep raking it in. ♡

photo Dan Ayres





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Martha Elk gives us recommendations and tips on how best to enjoy cherry blossom viewing season.

How to: *Hanami*

So, we're slowly but surely entering the last stretch of winter. The days are getting longer and a bit warmer; though not nearly warm enough to justify your coworkers *not* using the stinky kerosene heaters! We're coming into spring and assuming you don't live under a rock, you should know that this is by far Japan's favorite season of the year.

One of their favorite ways to celebrate the season is to have *hanami* (cherry blossom viewing) parties. These are picnics held under the blooming trees with friends, co-workers, or family. They are a great way to eat some good food, enjoy the blossoms and—let's face it—get drunk!

Here's how to plan one of your very own:

First, scope out the best places: If this is your first year, ask your co-workers, or Japanese friends for their favorite places. You can also take the time to explore and find the best spot for yourself. Keep in mind that popular places get *really* crowded during peak bloom (usually around late March), so finding a smaller place might be in your better interest!*

Look up when peak bloom is (see map): News programs and newspapers will announce and update this information all throughout the end of March, so keep checking. Either turn on the TV or

ask a friend! Peak bloom is really beautiful, but it also coincides with the craziest times to try and plan a party. Partial blooms are also really lovely and going then can give you more of a chance to enjoy the scenery... as well as actually getting a spot!

Plan what to

bring: For most Japanese people, this usually includes a bento (lunch-box), alcohol (beer is the most common, but allow me to recommend some *umesu* (plum wine)), and a blue tarp to sit on under the trees. Since the ground can often be quite wet, tarps are a good idea; though not very cushioning! From there, the sky's the limit! Music, chairs, blankets, pillows; customize your party to your liking!

Finally, decide when to go: If you do choose to go during peak bloom, get there *early* to find and save a spot. While most people go for a relaxed lunch or dinner, bring a book or some entertaining friends and you can spend a lovely afternoon or even a whole day doing *hanami*!

See you out there! 🍷

* Also check *Nagazasshi* Vol. 5.4 (March/April 2013) for a location guide.

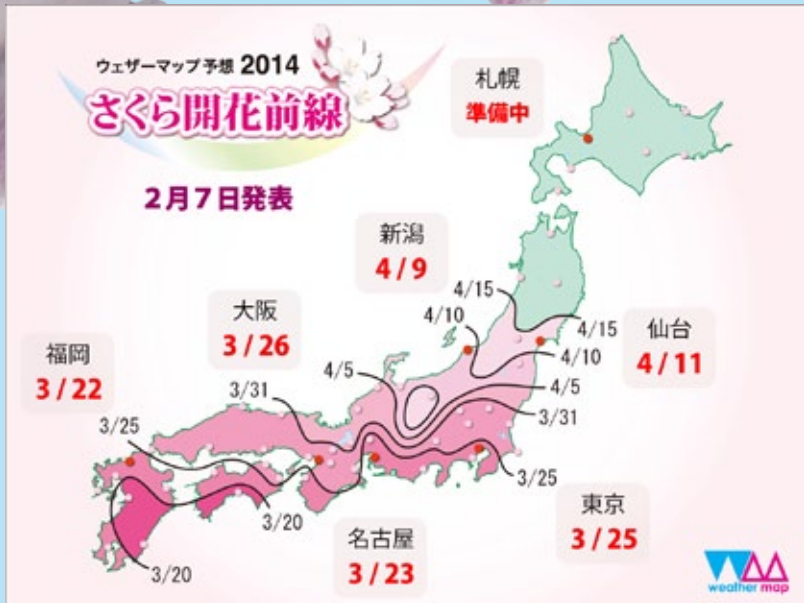


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Kanji of the Month

火

Radical Kanji hi, hihen, renga/rekka

It's almost spring, but it's still cold, so let's think about something warm. Fire! The character for fire is 火 (hi) and it appears in a variety of everyday words, such as 火曜日 (kayoubi, Tuesday) and 火山 (kazan, 'fire mountain' = volcano).

The shape represents a fire rather well, I think. I'm feeling toasty already. (Not really). Roll on summer!

The most common fire radical is called hihen and usually appears on the left of a character. Another possible position is below the character, when it looks like this: 𤇀, almost in the shape of a fire underneath a pot and is called renga/rekka. Let's take a look at some examples:

Cooking

炊く (taku, to cook e.g. rice)	炊飯器 (suihanki, rice cooker)
煮る (niru, to boil, simmer)	煮込む (nikomu, to cook together, boil well)
焼く (yaku, to bake, burn)	焼酎 (shouchuu, vodka-like liquor made from grain or potatoes)

Light

灯 (tomoshibi, lamp), usually in compound e.g. 街灯 (gaitou, streetlamp) or 灯油 (touyu, kerosene)

Heat

炎 (honoo, flame) ~炎 (~en, suffix meaning 'inflammation', e.g. 肺炎 (haien, 'lung inflammation' = pneumonia))
熱 (netsu, heat, fever, passion) 熱い (atsui, hot)

One last character, which is particularly important to know in Nagasaki, is 爆 (baku), which means 'bomb'. It is used in many words connected to the atomic bombing, for example, 被爆者 (hibakusha, atomic bomb victim).

I hope this Kanji of the Month warmed you up a bit!

Amy Gifford

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