

## NEW YEAR COURSE STARTS

# 11<sup>TH</sup> JAN



- General Japanese Course  
(Beginner to Advance)
- Business Course
- JLPT Course
- VCE Tuition Course
- Travel Survival Course
- Online Skype Course

For information regarding available time schedule, please contact us!

## Gift Giving in Japan

Have you made your Christmas list for Santa Claus this year? Japanese people do not traditionally celebrate Christmas, but they exchange gifts due to strong influence from the western culture.

There are many occasions when you're expected to give a gift in Japan. Gift giving is a traditional part of Japanese culture. Different types of gifts are given on different occasions. The custom helps keep social relations smooth and includes formal social expressions of appreciation as well as more personal gestures.

For example, Japanese people send gifts in July and December, these gifts are called お中元 (Ochugen) and お歳暮 (Oseibo). Ochugen and Oseibo gifts are sent to family, business clients and bosses, anyone to whom you wish to show gratitude. Japanese department stores offer variety of items which can be nicely wrapped and arrange to be delivered for the customer.

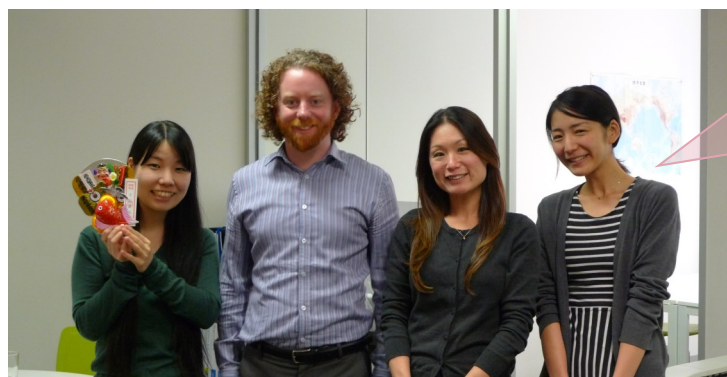
Another interesting gift is お土産 (Omiyage / souvenirs). As in most other countries, travelling normally entails setting aside time to buy omiyage such as sweets or little local products for family members and friends. However in Japan it's considered to be an obligation, you are expected to bring omiyage back from your trip not only for family



members or friends, but also for your classmates or colleagues even short trip or business trip. Consequently, tourist spots and airports feature many souvenir shops specialising in local foods and products. You might have seen colourful omiyage boxes containing individually wrapped snacks, perfect for sharing.

Other important gift-giving occasions in Japan include children receive New Year's money, お年玉 (Otoshidama) from parents and relatives, as well as お祝い (Oiwai / celebration events) such as the birth of a child, starting school and graduation, coming of age, marriage, building a new home, and moving house. There are also gifts for less fortunate times, including お見舞い (Omimai) for those who are sick and 香典 (Koden) for funerals, both are monetary.

*By Noriko*



メリークリスマス!  
来年もよろしく  
お願いします!

# Student from iJapanese

## Lachlan Arundell san

### My Japan Adventure...

After a year of studying Japanese with iJapanese, I finally felt ready to try my skills in Japan, so my girlfriend and I booked our tickets and flew off into the unknown.

I was very excited about experiencing the variety of Japanese culture, so we took flights between Hokkaido, Honshu, and Okinawa. Travel costs were helped along by Jetstar opening new flights to Japan.

We arrived into Tokyo, and promptly picked up a pair of Japanese SIM cards, and a pair of Suica passes (really handy passes that allowed us to travel on most local trains and buses we came across). At lots of the train stations there are coin lockers for bag storage, however the larger ones seemed to be taken every time we arrived, so we ended up carrying our bags through Meiji Jingu shrine before flying away to Hokkaido the same night.

One important note is that although Japan has a fantastic train system, there seem to be far fewer trains around rural Hokkaido, so whilst we were hoping to train from Asahikawa airport, instead we had to catch a cab because our flight arrived at night.

There are many important lessons we learnt at Mt Asahidake - firstly, going away from the major tourist destinations means that far fewer people will be able to speak English. Fortunately, this was just what I needed - in Tokyo (and later, in Kyoto), it was really easy to find English-speakers, however checking into our hotel here was the first real test to my language skills. Also, working out how to properly bathe in an onsen (hot spring) is really difficult when you don't know the words for towel! This brings me to the second important lesson - the Japanese people are super-welcoming.

Our first day in Asahidake brought a gentle snowfall, which intensified overnight. Watching the steam rise off streams cutting through the freshly fallen snow was very relaxing.

After a few days of tramping through the snow, enjoying the serenity, we headed back to Asahikawa airport to hire a rental car (we had been going to use a JR pass, but unfortunately it was impossible to get from Asahikawa to Lake Kussharo by train in a single day).

The drive to Lake Kussharo was amazing, as the autumn colours were in full flight. Also, the roadworks signs are all animals that have 'Sorry!' written on them!



At Lake Kussharo, we learnt another amazing fact. You don't buy breakfast out in Japan... Restaurants open at 11:30am. Most hotels we went to only offered buffet breakfasts, so the hunger pains got pretty extreme.

Speaking of food, it was amazing! Because all the menus are written almost exclusively in Kanji, I had no idea what we were ordering 9/10ths of the time (some menus do have pictures!), it was lucky that everything we ate tasted fantastic!

We then flew to Osaka, and took a train to Kyoto. Kyoto was lovely, and people were super-friendly. We saw several amazing cultural spectacles, which were by and large massively attended - we snuck off to Fushimi Inari early in the morning, and we had the shrine almost to ourselves, which was fantastic. Fushimi Inari is an excellent example of how Japan mixes its major cities with tranquil retreats.

Okinawa, our next location, was a real treat. We stayed in an Airbnb house in both Kyoto and Ishigaki (in the Yaeyama Islands), and I can't speak highly enough of our Japanese Airbnb hosts. I wouldn't feel comfortable staying in many people's home's in Australia, however I haven't ever felt more welcome than I did in Japan. I highly recommend the experience.

Ishigaki had lovely beaches (and, in the October weather, the tropical jellyfish weren't active, so snorkelling was spectacular), fantastic landscapes, and some great kayaking. I had a cold at the time, so I couldn't do the major attraction on the island, scuba diving with manta-rays, however we had a marvellous time regardless!

A return to Tokyo was the wrap-up. Tokyo was amazingly different to the rest of our experiences. A city of bright neon lights, bustling streets, and entertaining Konbini's. Akihabara was a lot of fun, seeing the 7 floor stores filled

with manga, a rather conservative maid cafe, and getting interviewed in English by a french reporter on our experiences in Japan (the reporter's English was worse than her Japanese cameraman!). Ueno koen was a charming retreat in the middle of the city. Fuji-san was also an unmissable spectacle, however I'd strongly recommend spending some time there and not simply taking a tour - a 10 minute walk from the fifth station took us completely away from the over-packed tourist area to a charming path along the mountain.

Such a short overview can't really do justice to Japan: experiencing the juxtaposition of massive cities with such an amazing respect for nature; the quaint Bird Cafe we went to in Tokyo; or just chatting with Japanese tourists, very relaxed and open on their holidays; any one of the

myriad of experiences we had will be lost a little in translation. All I can really advise is that, with a little respect, a healthy dose of adventure, and an interest in history and culture, Japan is an unparalleled experience. We can't wait to return!

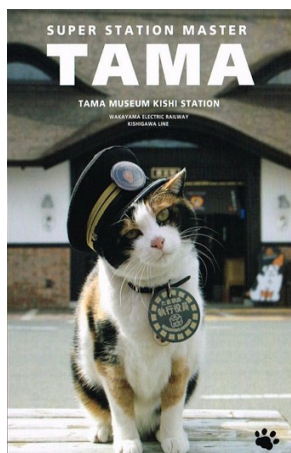
Many thanks to Mihono sensei, and the team from iJapanese, for helping us to have an unforgettable holiday!



## Station master... neko?!!

Tama (1999 - 2015), the world's first cat as a station master, "the only female in a managerial position" of Wakayama Electric Railway, is the station master and operating officer of Kishi station (貴志駅) on Kishigawa Line (貴志川線) in Kinokawa (紀の川) Wakayama (和歌山).

Tama was originally a stray cat, born and grown with other fellow stray cats near Kishi station. They were at that time mainly fed by passing passengers and the informal station manager. In 2004, the station faced a financial crisis and was almost shut down by the railway company. Luckily the station was demanded to remain after a citizens vote, but in order to cut cost, Wakayama Electric Railway had to dismiss all staffs on Kishigawa line and to employ local people who do business around the station to look after it.



In January 2007, noticing Tama and the other stray cats' popularity among passengers, the railway company decided to officially appoint Tama as the station master of Kishi station. Tama's duty was to greet passengers, and for annual salary, Wakayama electric railway provided Tama cat food for the year.

Since Tama's appointment, the station's passengers have increased rapidly, 17% for the month compared with the same time last year.

In January 2008, Tama was promoted to "super station

master". Both the president of the company and the mayor attended her inauguration.

In January 2010, Tama was again promoted to "Operating Officer". A study estimated that the publicity surrounding Tama has contributed 1.1 billion yen (\$12 million) to the local economy.

In August 2010, the station was rebuilt into the shape of a cat's face, in recognition of Tama's great job and contribution to the area.

In spring 2009, a new "Tama Densha" (たま電車/Tama train) went in operation. The train is designed based on Tama and is decorated with cartoon figures of her.

Sadly Tama passed away on June 22, 2015 due to apparent heart failure, at the age of 16 (approximately 80 years old, human age). A Shinto-style funeral was conducted for her by Wakayama Railway Company at the station and she was given the posthumous title of "Honorable Eternal Stationmaster." Tama is enshrined at a nearby Shinto cat shrine as a goddess.

Tama's job is now succeeded by her official apprentice Nitama (二玉) second tama, who was praised for her "hat wearing" skills.

*By Yueeie san*

Our student, Yueeie san worked with us for her year 10 work experience in October of 2015. You will see series of her articles in coming Newsletters.



## Let's welcome – Maiko Murakami

Hajimemashite! My name is Maiko, let me introduce myself.

I was born in Tokyo. When I was 6, my family moved to Okinawa where my mum's side originally comes from. Okinawa is the place blessed with bright blue sky and beautiful blue ocean. I lived there with my family for 5 years, then moved back to the main land of Japan to Kobe.

So I speak Hyojun-go, which is standard Japanese as well as Kansai-ben, which is a dialect spoken in the Kansai area, such as Osaka, Kobe, and Kyoto. Not much Okinawa dialect, as the real old Okinawans speak almost like a foreign language as it developed in the remote island for hundreds of years.

I am an enthusiastic everyday tea drinker. I grew up in Japan absorbing the aroma of green tea flowing from local teashops.

My interest of tea made me to knock on the tea masters door, so I am currently practicing genuine Japanese tea ceremony in Melbourne which is giving me a great understanding of spiritual effect of tea.



I feel really lucky to be able to join iJapanese. I am passionate about spreading Japanese language and culture. I am really looking forward to meeting with everyone at iJapanese. Dozo yoroshiku onegaishimasu!

## First Christmas in Japan

Christmas is coming soon!  
What do you do on Christmas in Australia? Having BBQ? Unwrapping presents?  
When Japanese people think about Christmas in Australia we imagine Surfing Santa Claus!

What do you imagine Christmas in Japan? Eating KFC and Christmas cake? Do you think we don't celebrate Christmas? Even though we have only 1% of Christian in Japan, we celebrate Christmas.

Did you know the first Christmas was in Yamaguchi?

Francisco de Xavier (1506 - 1552) was the person who was promoting Christianity in Japan. He came to Yamaguchi in 1551 and next year's Christmas they invited Japanese Christians and sang hymnal. And now we call Yamaguchi city 'Christmas city' in December.



If you would like to have an experience of Japanese Christmas come to Christmas city!!

*By Mihono*

