

FALL 2006



## THE "FOOD" ISSUE

THE JETAA NY INTERVIEW:  
NAOMI MORIYAMA  
By Justin Tedaldi



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Commemorative Ceremony

There are two kinds of cookbooks: those for the kitchen, and those for the coffee table. Naomi Moriyama and William Doyle's *Japanese Women Don't Get Old or Fat* stands out from the pack because it offers not only dozens of recipes for home-style Japanese cooking, it gives the reader a deeper understanding of how a good diet and eating habits can lead to a more healthy and productive life. JETAA NY.org recently spoke with Naomi about her book, which is now available in a Delta Trade paperback.

#### What was the inspiration for this book?

The book is a love letter to my mom Chizuko for cooking delicious, satisfying, healthful meals for her family, and helping us stay fit, healthy and feeling fantastic every day. These are traditional Japanese home-cooked meals that millions of people in Japan have been eating for many years, which helps explain why Japanese women have the #1 lowest obesity rate in the developed world and why Japanese women have both the #1 longest life expectancy, and longest healthy life expectancy, of all 192 nations on Earth.

I grew up in Japan in the 1960s and '70s. When I came to the U.S. for the first time to go to college in the early 1980s, I gained 25 pounds in two months by eating cheese- and pepperoni-loaded pizza, butter- and syrup-drenched pancakes, meat loaf and mashed potatoes with thick delicious gravy, multi-flavored ice creams with fudge and whipped cream, pies, cakes and cookies—all in "jumbo" American sizes. I loved every bite of it, and I loved every second of my life in America. When I went home after two years, one of my aunts said, "How could you be so happy? You got FAT!"

And after a couple of months of eating typical Japanese foods and getting back to the walking-intense city lifestyle, those extra pounds gradually melted away. I was not even trying to lose the weight!

And if you lived in Japan through the JET program, you might have a similar story to tell.

So you see, it's not all in our genes.

The book is a celebration of Japanese-style home cooking, a grand tour of Japanese food culture, and an exploration of expert opinions on the traditional Japanese diet, a way of eating based largely on fresh vegetables and fruit, rice, soy and fish, all served in modest portions.

The title *Japanese Women Don't Get Old or Fat* may not represent the humble quality of Japanese that you may be familiar with, but I chose to be provocative in order to get the audience's attention in the West. Once you really absorb the shocking obesity and longevity data, and the fact that obesity kills people and robs healthy productive years of life, you understand why I wanted to shake the world a little. I wanted to tell people that "If I can do it, you can do it, too!"

Delicious and healthy slimming secrets

Japanese  
Women  
Don't Get  
Old  
or Fat



"A delicious way to stay healthy."—Washington Post

Naomi Moriyama  
and William Doyle

("Moriyama" continued on page 7)

## About the "Food" Issue

I'll never forget one of the best meals I ever ate during my stay in Japan: The menagerie of vegetables was nothing short of kaleidoscopic in color; the soup was potent and hearty enough to warm the depths of my very soul; the hot foods were delectably prepared and arranged with a sensitive eye and a gingerly touch; the drinks flowed freely so that not an empty glass would remain from the first course to the last; and the dessert proved that if heaven does indeed exist on earth, nowhere would it be found more sweet.



Yes, we all enjoyed going to Sizzler in Yokohama that day. But for those with even more robust palettes, Japan is a culinary cloud nine that offers all kinds of goodies both wonderful and weird, whether you enjoy fish, or just *really* enjoy fish!

Besides the obvious contenders, I'll miss Calpis Ice, *norishio* potato chips, whole-bean nattou, those little square vanilla ice cream pops, Beard Papa at lunchtime, Cocoa Krispies with Charlie Brown and Snoopy on the box, vending machine ramen joints, *Akizakana*, and of course, the double delight of Qoo and Aquarius (the *real* official drink of the Olympics, dammit).

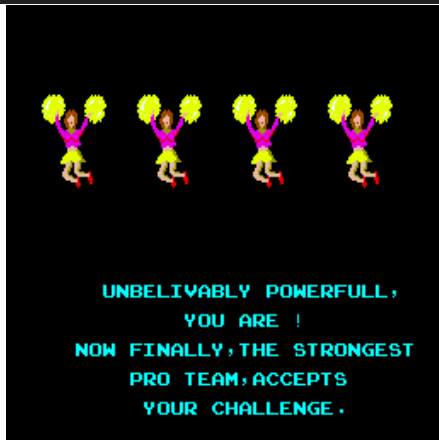
Inside this issue you'll find a cornucopia of food features that even the most seasoned Iron Chef would say "*savoureux!*" to. We hope you enjoy reading it as much as we enjoyed making it.

*Itadakimasu!*

*Justin Tedaldi*  
*Newsletter Editor*

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# JETAA New York

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Nearly 24,000 visitors to **Grand Central Station** on October 27-28 were treated to the second annual **Tokyo Fiesta**, an exhibition to shore up tourism devised by the **Tokyo Metropolitan Government**. Patrons experienced a blend of the old and new Japan through features such as demonstrations of *ukiyo-e*, *chochin* (Japanese lanterns), and other arts and crafts from the Edo period. The "New Japan" displays took travelers on a "3-Dimensional Visit to Tokyo" with a little help from a pair of 3-D glasses. Also included were a "Digital Art" exhibit which alters the viewer's perspective of photographs, touch-sensitive plasma TV screens, "panorama balls" and a live *koto* performance by **Masayo Ishigure** and New York's own **Sawai Koto Academy Members**. JETAA NY members also served as volunteers, adding an international twist.



On November 2, JETAA NY officers held a summit meeting with new Webmaster **Lee-Sean Huang** for planning the **next generation JETAA NY Web site**. Their goal is to increase the interactivity of the site for future JETAA plans, as well as to meet the needs of the growing number of JET alums who access the page to increase their awareness of what life after JET has to offer. So just what can JETAA members expect to see in the not-too-distant future?

"I'm *cho-ber*i excited about the Web site planning and what we'll be able to do down the road," said newsletter editor **Steven Horowitz**. "We'll be able to better communicate with JET alums, get more JET alums involved and, if I may be a bit frank, the implications for the newsletter make me just plain giddy."



223 East 30th Street was the place to be on November 18 for the **2nd annual JETAA NY Japan-A-Mania**, an afternoon of Japanese cultural learning for all ages.

JETAA members teamed up with **Big Brothers Big Sisters** for all kinds of activities that day along with manning various booths, which featured origami, Japanese writing, kimono/*yukata* try-ons (with plenty of photo opportunities), games, and everyone's favorite: *onigiri*-making!

The day loosely resembled a fair, where kids visited the different activity booths. Once they have been to a booth, they were awarded with special stamps which were later redeemed for prizes provided by the Japanese consulate. There were also questions they had to ask the volunteers to further encourage them to learn about Japanese culture. Two "everyone included" events were also held, including a karate demo followed by a large group *janken* game. A big thanks to all of this year's JETAA volunteers!

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WOULD YOU LIKE TO TAKE A SURVEY? By Alison Crump



Dear JETAA NY members,

Some of you may remember coming across a call for volunteers for an international survey of former ALTs. For those who do remember that call and answered the survey, I would like to thank you sincerely for your participation. Because the study that I am conducting is about ALTs, I thought it would be a good idea to let the JET alumni community know who I am, what I am doing, and why I am doing it. This is the first of two installments I will be making to your newsletters, in which I will answer the who, the what, and the why. The second installment, which will appear in the next issue of the newsletter, will be the really exciting one—where I will discuss some of the results of the study.

WHO: My name is Alison Crump and I was a senior high school ALT in Nara Prefecture from 2002-05. I had a wonderful time on JET, but I was left with many unanswered questions about the state of English education in Japan and, more specifically, about the role of ALTs in that state. This probably sounds familiar. I returned to Canada and started a master's in education at McGill University in Montreal.

WHAT: As I started developing the study, I found a common theme running throughout the reading I was doing: Issues of English education in Japan are approached from the perspectives of Japanese teachers and students, while ALTs' voices are rarely heard. It is true that we are not certified as teachers in Japan, and often not in our home countries either, but we are nevertheless placed in various kinds of teaching positions in classrooms all over the country. ALTs are written about, yet not invited into the discussion. Reports state that ALTs' language classes are more effective than those that are taught solely by JTEs. Has this been verified by the ALTs themselves?

Other reports have described the growing importance of ALTs in English education in Japan because of the focus in the course of study on developing communicative skills in students. Again, how are ALTs negotiating this role, given that many of them may not have had any training in communicative language teaching? Another topic that appears in many studies is Japanese teachers' and students' preference for American English. The problem here lies in the association that is made between American English, American culture and the JET Programme's main goal, which is to foster internationalization. ALTs come from many countries; therefore, how do they deal with these expectations, if they are in fact present in their classes?

While all of these studies and reports celebrate the successes and benefits of the JET Programme, they are all missing one crucial element—the voices and experiences of ALTs themselves. Furthermore, the JET Programme prides itself as one of the largest international exchange programs in the world, yet it remains surprisingly understudied in terms of its educational impact.

The study that I am conducting is a two-part study in which I am gathering ALTs' voices in order to enrich the discussion of English educational issues in Japan. Some of you are familiar with the first phase of the study. I sent a survey to the five main ALT-producing countries around the world and I have received 120 responses. Because surveys tend to yield quite a superficial and general picture of what is going on, I will be conducting in-depth interviews with a much smaller number of people for the second phase of the study.

It is important to highlight that this is truly an exploratory study. I did not set out with specific hypotheses to test. Rather, I began by placing the JET Programme in the socio-political context from which it emerged. This has taken me through the history of Japanese educational reform into Japan's changing political and economic relations with the West, and through the changes the JET Programme has seen and implemented since its inception in 1987.

WHY: My motivation for conducting this study is twofold. First, it grew out of my attempt to make sense of what I was doing in Japan, in my classes, and how what I was doing fit into the bigger picture of English education there. Second, I hope that this small scale study will encourage more research into the role of ALTs in English education in Japan. Until next time!

Advertisement for www.maxjob.com featuring a large arrow pointing to the website and the text 'register online!'. It includes contact information for MAX Consulting Group, Inc. in New York, NY.

A screenshot of a 'CORRECTION' notice. The notice is titled 'Microtek ScanWizard 5 Error Message' and contains the text: 'Scanner something error happens.' with an 'OK' button. Below the screenshot, a text block explains a correction to a previous article, stating that the correct title for Stacy Smith is Chief Information Officer.

## FROM JET TO HEADHUNTER: THE LONG ROAD BACK TO TOKYO

By William Nealy, Jr.



William (far right) with Al Parvez and colleagues in Akasaka

When I left Japan in 1997 after three years on the JET Programme in Oita City, Kyushu, I had the feeling that I would be back someday, perhaps for a visit, maybe for the World Cup—no real plans, just a vague feeling that I'd see the place again. Now, nine years later, I am a Tokyo salaryman, cramming into rush hour trains in the morning, hustling to get to my office in Akasaka to do my job as an executive search consultant with Interplace Japan. It's been a long and circuitous route to get to this point, but upon reflection, it's interesting to see how big a role JET and JETAA has played in just about every significant juncture.

I came back to Japan in the fall of 2004 as a Rotary World Peace Fellow at International Christian University to get a master's degree in peace and conflict resolution. A big reason I was selected for the RWPF program was my experience working as the information assistant at the Consulate General of Japan in my hometown of Kansas City. The position at the consulate general came directly from the JETAA Job Web site, and my experience as a JET and my participation in various JETAA-related activities in San Francisco and L.A. no doubt were the main factors in my getting there.

So JET and JETAA had a lot to do with bringing me back to Japan. I studied international relations and conflict resolution for two years, interned in New Zealand and Prague, and wrote my thesis on Japan's domestic refugee policy. In June of this year, it was time to graduate. But for various reasons, I wasn't quite ready to leave Tokyo. Japan is not typically known as a flourishing NGO and civil society hotbed. So I quickly realized that I had a decision to make: leave Japan for NYC or D.C. or somewhere else in the world to start an NGO career, or stay in Tokyo and get a job in the private business sector.

So after summer stints teaching English at an *eikaiwa* school and doing some crazy TV dramas and commercials, the JET connections came into play again. Through my job search, I found an executive search firm online and went in to interview to see if they could place me. There, I met former Yokohama JET Al Parvez (whom I was first introduced to when he spoke at my original JET Orientation in Tokyo), CEO of Interplace Japan. After going on a number of interviews, mainly at PR companies around Tokyo, I decided to accept Al's offer to become a recruiter at Interplace, and to help bilingual, bicultural Japanese and foreign nationals find the perfect job!

For more information on Interplace Japan, contact William at [wnealy@interplace.co.jp](mailto:wnealy@interplace.co.jp).

## TAJ ULTIMATE IN HYOGO

By Mac Maloney

AJET sports tournaments are always stellar. Although I went to the soccer tournament in Nagano twice, I can honestly say that it wasn't the athletic competition that inspired me to make the five-hour trip from Fukui-ken. No, what drove me were the hopes that I might "internationalize" with exotic women while imbibing fine local spirits.

The Taj Ultimate Tournament was a little different. Taking place in the Tajima area of Hyogo Prefecture, Taj Ultimate provided competitors with one of the largest, inexpensive Ultimate Frisbee tournaments in Japan. For those not familiar with Ultimate, it is a sport not dissimilar to American football. You must move the Frisbee up the field and into your opponent's end zone for a score. The only difference is that when you catch the Frisbee, you cannot move. So, the game consists of a lot of short passes and a lot of running. As an avid Ultimate player, I was hungry for some competition. Along with another fellow Fukui Ultimate nut, I convinced 13 people to suit up and accept the challenge.

Before we headed down, we had to decide on a team name. Team names



in Ultimate are a bit different than other sports. In "regular" sports, you have a plural name like the Cardinals, Dodgers or Rangers. In Ultimate, you can have that kind of name, but it is more "professional" to have something singular such as Lady Godiva or Old and in the Way. We decided on calling

ourselves "The Flood," in honor of a natural phenomenon that occurs in Fukui City. We also needed a great T-shirt, so we went with a friend's design: "Fukui: the Baka Inaka," accompanied by smoke rising from a nuclear power plant in the outline of Fukui. Fun fact: Fukui has a dozen nuclear power plants, the most of any prefecture in Japan!

The tournament took place next to the Tajima Dome, a very futuristic building in a beautiful athletic complex. Due to the lack of abundant field space and the high number of participating teams, we were limited to only two 30-minute games of round robin play on the first day. We lost both of our games, but they were hard-fought, and I felt that though inexperienced, we played well.

That night there was an all-out party at a local ski lodge with lots of internationalization. The hosts provided us with a couple of Viking-sized plates of *yakiniku* and vegetables. There was plenty of beer on tap as well as *chuhai* (oh, how I miss you so). The party (d)evolved into total recklessness when some players decided to slide down a very steep ski slope on serving trays. Unfortunately, one man hurt his leg enough to send him to the hospital, but we partied on. For many, the evening celebration was all for naught as Portugal squashed England's World Cup run.

The following day we awakened to torrential downpours, and game play was questionable. As the sky cleared up, we completed our final game (in honor of England) in the round robin format, and we also squared off in two playoff matches. We lost our first two games by a combined total of two points. However, we ended on a positive note by beating up on a very drunk, very happy team which eagerly shared its *umeshu*. That last win gave us the coveted 18th-place spot out of 20 teams.

Overall, Fukui had a great time at the Taj Ultimate Tournament. We had a lot of first-time players who were addicted by the end of the second day. In seven years of playing Ultimate, I have crossed paths with only one player with whom I did not get along, and zero parties that did not rock. It is a great sport and if you want to find out more, go to [www4.upa.org/resources](http://www4.upa.org/resources) to see about Ultimate in your area. New York has a lot of organized Ultimate as well as plenty of pickup. If you want to read up on Taj Ultimate, visit [www.tajultimate.com/en/index.php](http://www.tajultimate.com/en/index.php).



**TABEMONO-BANASHI!!!**



Renaud Blanchard 2001 under GPL licence

Although I prefer to eat ramen, I have more amusing stories with soba; the buckwheat noodle was especially popular in my area. The first time I had it, I had just climbed a local mountain, 1000-plus steps to the top...and back down again. I'd already been to my new school and met the teachers, walked around, and had quite a long morning, so I was especially looking forward to a late lunch. This, was also, by the way, one of my first meals with the tiny glasses of water that Japanese seem to think are sufficient to accompany a meal. I'm surprised the eight of us didn't drive the waitress crazy, asking for more water so often, and then getting up to get it from the machine ourselves. (Hey, we'd just climbed a mountain, after all!) Anyway, the soba shop we went to is very popular in the summer, partly due to its closeness to the mountain and partly to its unique charm.

I was able to sit at a long bar, facing what looked like a mountainside nestled in the restaurant. At the bottom of the "mountain" there was a channel for water, like a river, and down the side of the mountain were large grooves. Where the grooves and the river connected, there were flat wicker baskets. The reason for these baskets became clear once we ordered our soba, as we were treated to the sight of our noodles floating down the mountain grooves and landing on the basket (but woe betide the poor noodles that were too far to the side, as they got swished down the river, never to be seen again). It was quite a fun experience, really. It was also fortunate that there was a Japanese family to my side, so that I could watch how they put green onion bits and whatnot in their sauce, and how they dipped the cold noodles in the sauce...my first bite was really bland!

Also, there was a local soba farmer who always reserved one row of buckwheat for the students at the junior high at which I taught. Every December, the ichi- and ni-nensei students would spend a Friday morning making soba from scratch, as a sort of a *ganbatte* lunch for the san-nensei students prepping for their high school entrance exams. Soba-making was the hobby of one of the janitors, so he would always direct the students, and my English teacher would take me along, because she was really nice and liked to include me as much as possible when the students did activities.

So I added water to the flour, mixed it and got dough under my fingernails, kneaded the dough, pounded it, rolled it out, folded it, sliced it, cooked it...and ate it! That was always fun. It was tough cutting the dough to the proper thickness, however. Have any of you ever done it? It's hard. You hold the dough in place with a large flat wooden piece, and you cut it with something resembling a meat cleaver. Every time you make a downstroke to cut, you use the knife to nudge the board a tiny bit to the left, in preparation for your next cut. One year I did it *waaaay* too thick and got several slices wide before the teacher in charge saw me and went "No no no no no!" Such was his agitation that he actually said "no" in English; that alone was enough to stop me! They didn't look so bad to me, but when I saw some of the students eating them later, I was shocked! They were about a half-inch thick compared to the rest of the skinny-minny noodles. Ha ha, whoops. But the kids told me they tasted the same. Awww, aren't you sweet. Thanks, guys.

Jamie Collyer  
Yamagata-shi  
2004-06

I'm not what you'd call a seafood lover. So gastronomically speaking, living in Japan was not the ideal situation as what I understood to be fantastically fabulous food simply went unappreciated by me. While I felt self-conscious about this reputation I soon developed in the *suki-kirai wa ikenai* culture, I also found that it worked to my advantage. There was a very nice and fairly well-off couple that liked to have me over for dinner every Monday night, and since they knew I didn't like seafood, I would have *shabu-shabu* and *sukiyaki* on a regular basis. With my then-girlfriend's parents, though, the situation went a little over the top. They not only cooked me up a steak, they ordered a pizza too!

Steven Horowitz  
Aichi-ken  
1992-94

**YOKOSO UNIQLO TO THE BIG APPLE!**  
By Jenn Olayon



As the style capital of the world, it is only fitting that UNIQLO, the ubiquitous Japanese apparel maker known for its low-cost fashionable basics, launched its mega-global flagship store in trendy SoHo, New York. The buzz around this brand keeps bombarding me wherever I go. Instead of the typical "I Love NY" or Greek coffee cups, my latest purchase of coffee on the street was dispensed in one with the UNIQLO brand. Move over luxury brands, Helmut Lang and Diane Von Furstenberg, UNIQLO's name in katakana is taking over NYC taxi tops. In addition to their enormous store in SoHo, there are satellite container stores popping up all over the city from the east (in one of the Rockefeller buildings) to the Upper West Side.

My first UNIQLO experience was when I lived in Kyoto back in 2001. My friends at the language school I attended raved about their fleeces and a well-rounded selection of basics at rock-bottom prices. Maybe because it was after *o-shogatsu* and they needed to replenish their stock but I left with no purchases nor any real desire to return to the store. Fast forward to 2006 in NYC. My Kyoto experience pales to what a consumer at their SoHo store is offered in terms of customer service and selection. There are no chirping sounds of "*Irrashimase!*" to greet you at the front door but it is a neat shopping experience where you can find *yasumono* basic items like sweaters, socks (striped socks are my new favorite this season) and umbrellas with the Japanese-style slender handles. Stay tuned in February when UNIQLO rolls out commissioned T-shirts by artist Yayoi Kusama, designer Alice Roi and others!

Address: 546 Broadway, New York, NY Homepage: [www.uniqlo.com](http://www.uniqlo.com)

*("Moriyama" continued from page 1)*

Some background data:

Women in Japan live longer and healthier than everyone else on Earth. Their life expectancy of 85 years ranks #1 among all the world's 192 nations, according to the World Health Organization's (WHO) World Health Report 2005.

Even more important, Japanese women have the highest healthy life expectancy of every nation on Earth—they live the most years in full health, according to the WHO. Japanese men score #1 among all the world's men on these statistics, too. Experts say the Japanese diet is a key factor in healthy longevity.

On top of that, Japanese women enjoy the #1 lowest obesity rates in the developed world: 3% vs. 11% for French women, 22% for Australian women, and 34% for U.S. women, according to the International Obesity Task Force.

Obesity is a special problem for Asians. At a given level of obesity, Asians are even more susceptible to health problems like type 2 diabetes and cardiovascular disease than non-Asians. This makes it even more impressive that Japanese women have such high healthy life expectancy.

Our book is the story of why Japanese women are living longer and healthier than everyone else on Earth, and why Japanese women have, by far, the lowest obesity in the developed world.



Naomi Moriyama. Photo © Sigrid Estrada  
Author Naomi Moriyama

**For young people, what are some of the best benefits from a Japanese-style diet?**

Japanese-style eating is delicious, it fills you up, gives you loads of energy—and you don't feel sleepy or over-stuffed. It makes you feel "great!" in many aspects of your life.

The earlier in life you begin adopting the Japanese-style diet, the easier it is for you to change eating habits, and the longer you'll enjoy the benefits. While I won't say it's impossible, but it gets harder to break your eating patterns and lifestyle as you get older.

If you're going to Japan in the future or you are there now through the JET Programme, do take advantage of the total immersion. Enjoy the traditional Japanese dishes, get to know essential ingredients, and learn to make some basic home-cooked meals. And take that piece of knowledge with you when you return home to share it with your family and friends.

If you have already done the JET Programme—especially in a remote village in Japan where you were the only non-Japanese—you have been exposed to the real thing. You are much more familiar with Japanese cuisine than people who have never been to an authentic Japanese restaurant or invited to a traditional Japanese meal at home. I hope you continue to integrate the Japanese-style diet in your life for the benefits you already know and/or have experienced.

**Since this book was released, what changes have you noticed in your friends' or family's eating habits and general health?**

When my husband and co-author Billy visited my family in Japan, he fell in love with the food, started eating Japanese-style at home in New York and never stopped. Over several years he has lost almost 40 pounds and kept it off. Billy would tell you, "I don't eat this way because it's healthy, or I want to lose weight. I eat this way because it feels so good." And I say, "If *he* can do it, you can, too!" His personal experiences also inspired us to write this book.

Since the book was released, we have introduced some basic Japanese dishes to Billy's family in New York. We brought "mom's carrot-tofu dish" and "Tokyo fried chicken" to last year's family Christmas dinner. I bottled homemade salad dressing and teriyaki sauce as holiday gifts to his family. My mother-in-law and sister-in-law have placed refill orders since then. And we brought "country-style miso soup" and "spinach with sesame seeds" to the Thanksgiving family dinner.

**Based on your research, what kinds of foods do Americans need to eat more of?**

The Japanese-style diet is double-edged. Its beauty exists not only in what they eat but also what they don't eat. The six healthiest pillars of the Japanese diet are fish, vegetables, fruit, whole grains (brown rice and soba buckwheat noodles), soy and green tea.

Compared with typical Western diets, the Japanese diet has less total calories, red meat, trans fats and saturated fats.

Fish, especially fatty fish like salmon, gives you a dose of Omega-3 fatty acids, which scientists believe can help defend against heart disease. Japan accounts for 2% of the world's population, but eats 10% of the world's fish. The flipside of Japan's fish craze means the Japanese eat less red meat, which contains artery-clogging saturated fat that is

linked to heart disease. So this diet brings you double the benefits.

The Japanese diet is rich in fresh vegetables and fruit, which provide phytonutrients that Harvard University researchers believe can lower your blood pressure, decrease your risk for stroke and heart attack, protect your eyes and memory, and control your weight by making you feel satisfied with fewer calories.

Rice is the bedrock foundation of Asian diets, and in Japan it is served in its own little bowl with almost every meal. Rice is a low-fat, complex carbohydrate that fills you up, gives you energy and leaves less room in your belly for fattening foods like packaged cookies and pastries, which can contain heart-damaging trans-fats.

Brown rice was Japan's original ancient power food, and it's a great whole-grain, high-fiber source of "good carbs" filled with hearty, nutty flavor. The Japanese taste secret: be sure to look for short- or medium-grain rice, which is fluffy with a hint of slightly sticky and sweet chewiness.

And natural soy products like tofu and edamame are a good source of protein as an alternative to meat, which can have unhealthy saturated fats. Another big advantage is that many Japanese cook with canola oil, which is much more heart-healthy than animal fat or butter. Nutritional experts consider canola among the very healthiest of cooking oils because it has a healthy balance of fats, and is a good source of heart-healthy monounsaturated fat. It also has a light, clean taste that combines beautifully with fish and vegetables. Thanks in part to canola oil, Japanese-style home cooking is light and fresh, and brings out the natural beauty and flavor of ingredients.

*("Moriyama" continued on page 10)*

**JAPAN 100:  
CELEBRATING A  
CENTURY**  
Submitted by  
**Michelle Andrews**



Japan Society celebrates its 100th Anniversary in 2007 with an unprecedented array of high-profile programming in the areas of arts and culture, business, education and public policy. Japan 100: Celebrating a Century will take place throughout New York City and Japan including traveling exhibitions, performing arts tours, fellowships and exchanges. We are currently planning over 100 unique events to commemorate our centennial year and we would love to have you be a part of the celebrations.

Centennial Highlights Include:

- **Centennial Speaker Series** featuring discussions by top business leaders such as Fujio Cho, Chairman, Toyota Motor Corporation;
- **Awakenings: Zen Figure Painting in Medieval Japan**, the first major exhibition of its kind in 30 years (Spring 2007);
- **Big Dance Theater's *The Other Here***, a world premier commissioned by the Society;
- Education Program launches **About Japan: A Teacher's Resource**, a premier online resource for teachers;
- **Tech Epoch**, an 11-day summit covering all aspects of Japan's technological innovation with cutting-edge robotics, interactive demonstrations, multimedia performances, lectures, symposia and student workshops;
- **Japan Cuts**, the first-ever, large-scale film festival of new Japanese film featuring blockbusters, independents, shorts, outdoor screenings and panel discussions with Japan's top filmmakers

**Become a member today** and take advantage of the many exciting benefits throughout our centennial year. Benefits include free admission to Japan Society Gallery, invitations to members-only film screenings and gallery openings, discounted admission to films, lectures and performances, and discounts on Japanese language classes. Higher levels of membership are invited to various VIP events throughout the year, including tea and cocktail parties, private tours of gallery exhibitions, and our annual new year's party. JET alumni receive 20% off the first year of membership!

Visit [www.japansociety.org/join](http://www.japansociety.org/join) or call Michelle Andrews, Director of Membership at (212) 715-1270 for more information. To find out more about our centennial events, visit our Web site or stop by and see us at 333 East 47th Street, between 1st and 2nd Avenues.

**DISCOUNT FOR JET ALUMS!**  
Now, Japan Society is offering 20% off membership at any level ONLY for JET NY alumni! (Please note this applies to the first year of membership only. Discount cannot be applied when signing up online.)

日本 100  
**JAPAN 100**  
SOCIETY YEARS



Japan Society photos courtesy of Norman McGrath

Japan Society offers a variety of membership levels ranging from \$60-\$1,000+. 333 Club members (for those under 40) receive special invitations to social and educational programs, including meet-the-artist receptions, roundtable discussions with special guests, and various networking opportunities.

JETAA NY members gathered at Japan Society in November to help kick off our new partnership and were given an exclusive gallery tour of their current exhibition, Contemporary Clay: Japanese Ceramics for the New Century. Visit [www.jetaany.org](http://www.jetaany.org) for more on this exciting new partnership!

**History of Japan Society**

As announced on the front page of the *New York Times* 100 years ago, Japan Society was founded on May 19, 1907, by a group of prominent New York City businesspeople and philanthropists. Most of the original members remained active in the Society for many years, shaping the policies of exchange and collaboration that guided it through the 1930s until the outbreak of World War II. After the war, activities slowly resumed, and the stewardship of John D. Rockefeller III from 1952-78 led to a unified vision and a firm financial foundation with the revitalized mission "to bring the people of the United States and of Japan closer together in their appreciation and understanding of each other" (Rockefeller, 1952).

Built on land donated by Mr. Rockefeller, Japan Society's landmark building, Japan House, was designed by architect Junzo Yoshimura. Opened in 1971, it was the first contemporary Japanese building in New York. Located near the United Nations on 47th Street and 1st Avenue, activities at Japan Society are set against a stunning backdrop of indoor gardens, a reflecting pool and a waterfall. Furnished with a superb collection of tables, chairs and benches designed by master woodworker George Nakashima, the facilities include a 278-seat theater, art gallery, language center, library, conference facilities and over three floors of administrative space. The classic elegance and simplicity of Yoshimura's original vision has been preserved even as the building has been enhanced by a substantial renovation completed in 1998.

## JET ALUM LAUNCHES OZ-STYLE BAKERY By Laura Epstein



Waltzing Matilda's NYC founder Laura Epstein displays her wares

Days before Thanksgiving, several JETAA officers and friends were invited to a pie tasting at the home of another JET. What made this tasting special was that not only did the hostess prepare all the pies (and a bevy of other desserts) herself, but it also happens to be part of her business! Find out how traveling the world helped one JET get in touch with her inner sweet tooth.

It's been said before, but the JET Programme opens doors that we didn't even know existed. I've heard of people who discovered that they wanted to become teachers after going through the JET Programme, and others whose side jobs teaching English to local businessmen led them to corporate jobs in Tokyo. But JET works in subtler ways as well, and it set so many of us on paths that we never would have predicted.

That's certainly true for me, as JET was the first step on my (rather indirect) path to opening a bakery.

After returning home, I visited a friend from the JET Programme in Australia, where I ended up staying to earn my graduate degree. While there, my very astute and active sweet tooth discovered a continent of baked goods and desserts it had never tasted. Recipes for those desserts came back to the U.S. with me, and from there, Waltzing Matilda's NYC ([www.WaltzingMatildasNYC.com](http://www.WaltzingMatildasNYC.com)), a bakery specializing in delicacies from Down Under, was recently launched.

Before I left Australia I bought a couple of cookbooks, and when I returned to the U.S. I started baking some of the treats for my family and friends. The Pavlova—despite my dozens of attempts—was always messy, but it consistently got rave reviews. And the caramel slices (a bar cookie with caramel and chocolate) were also a hit. People also seemed to enjoy the ANZAC biscuits (a twist on our usual oatmeal cookie), and they seemed interested in what makes Australian pastries different from American ones.

Maybe it was New York, where everyone gets a bug of some sort, but the entrepreneurial bug hit me here when I noticed that Australian pastries were not easy to come by. My friends were extremely supportive, but the thought of opening my own bakery was completely overwhelming to me. I let it stew in my mind for about two years while I came up with excuses as to why it would never work.

Finally, a friend suggested that I start a Web site. This idea was extremely appealing to me because 1) it didn't involve quitting my job, risking my entire financial future, and potentially having to move back in with my parents for the next 40 years, and 2) it was a small step. What did I have to lose? I realized that I didn't have to have a storefront and 15 employees right away, and that a Web site would prove if the idea actually worked—and if I could actually bake!

I got extremely lucky in that I have great friends who work in design and e-commerce, and they were willing to help me out for payment in baked goods. A friend who is a designer created the brand and kangaroo logo, giving the business a much more professional feel than I'd be able to do alone. And of course, everyone's an expert taster, so I take advantage of friends in that way quite often!



Waltzing Matilda's NYC is unique in the NYC area (and the U.S.) because there are no other restaurants or bakeries that specialize in what we do. Our homemade pastries are made-to-order and delivered within New York City. We hope to introduce New York to something enjoyable and fresh and very unique, and above all—delicious.

Who would have thought that without that first nudge to the other side of the world, the next steps never would have happened, and then Waltzing Matilda's NYC would not exist today. I had no idea at the time, but an application I filled out on a whim senior year of college ended up setting me on the path that allowed me to discover what I really enjoy doing.



*("Moriyama" continued from page 7)*

A typical traditional Japanese-style home-cooked meal has a bowl of rice, a bowl of miso soup, a piece of fish, two side dishes like vegetables stir fried in canola oil, and sliced fruit or a small plate of little cookies for dessert, all washed down with a cup of green tea.

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 "While China, India and Korea are not considered developed nations yet, their traditional diets have several things in common with the Japanese diet—a greater reliance on vegetables versus the West and much less meat."
 

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**For Americans you've known who were previously unfamiliar with Japanese food, what kinds of things do they really enjoy eating or preparing? How about for Japanese people?**

I would place those people in two separate camps. One, even if they've never had Japanese food, they are adventurous and will try new dishes. The other is conservative, and wants to stick with foods that look, sound and taste familiar.

For the adventurous group, I recommend any of the dishes I introduce in the book, especially veggie dishes. I think people in the West don't know how scrumptiously delicious veggies can be and how many different ways they can be cooked and presented. My husband told me that in America vegetables are sometimes seen almost as punishments. That's just so wrong!

For the conservative group, I recommend easing into it by "Japanizing" your diet not necessarily eating "authentic" Japanese food. You don't have to eat traditional Japanese food to enjoy the benefits. You can transform Western meals into delicious healthful meals with Japanese-style diet twists: (1) serve modest portions, (2) eat more fish, fresh vegetables and fruit, (3) flavor with herbs instead of salt, heavy cream sauces and/or butter, (4) steam, broil and grill without cooking oil, (5) when you do need a cooking oil, use canola oil, (6) eat less red meat, (7) eat less sugary and deep-fried foods and (8) drink unsweetened tea.

**What Japanese restaurants do you recommend to your friends when they visit New York?**

It all depends upon the person's preference and budget. And there has been a surge of new Japanese restaurant openings here, so the list continues to grow and change.

For purist sushi, I love Sushi Yasuda. Make a reservation for one of the seats at the counter in front of Mr. Yasuda; his sushi is amazing and not inexpensive.

For sushi-meets-Latin, I love Sushi Samba.

For soba buckwheat noodles soup, I recommend Soba-ya, Honmura-an, and Soba Nippon.

For fun ambience and great dishes, I like Matsuri.

For astonishing Japan-meets-West, I recommend Morimoto.

For a late-night quick bite or casual meals with multiple choices, I like Sakagura and Seo.

**Most of the comparative diet and health statistics in the book are between Japan and other Western countries. For those curious, how does the Japanese diet compare with other Asian nations like China, Korea or India?**

In our book, we compared Japan to other developed nations to make it an "apples-to-apples" comparison. While China, India and Korea are not considered developed nations yet, their traditional diets have several things in common with the Japanese diet—a greater reliance on vegetables versus the West and much less meat. Unfortunately, the invasion of fast food is threatening to destroy the traditional diets of many Asian nations, including Japan, and obesity is rising fast as a result.

**I like fish, but I never realized how healthy salmon is before reading your book. What other kinds of foods are readily available at the supermarket that are worth eating more often?**

Any fatty fish that has Omega-3s like sardines, herring and mackerel. Canned Alaska salmon and sardines in water have the same amount of nutrients as fresh. I recommend that you keep a couple of them in your pantry so you can whip up a delicious healthy meal in a few minutes even when you're too tired or busy and would have reached for a less-healthy fast food option.

**Are there any Japanese foods you WON'T eat?**

Since I wrote the book, I became aware of one of the weaknesses of the traditional Japanese diet: that it has too much salt. So now I eat virtually no pickled vegetables—which is a staple of a Japanese meal—salted fish, or anything heavily salted.

Whenever I go grocery shopping, I always check the nutritional information on the back of the package to check sodium content. I have realized that many packaged/bottled food items have a frighteningly high quantity of sodium, like 1000-2000 mg per serving!

When I cook, I always use low-sodium soy sauce and miso pastes, and even with them I use a very small amount.

I won't eat animal meat other than beef and pork. I ate horse meat once many years ago in Tokyo, but I don't think I will ever eat it again.

**Do you have plans to write another book about Japanese foods, or something else entirely?**

I thoroughly enjoyed writing the first book especially because it gave me the chance to connect with my parents and ancestors. I am happy to have rediscovered the beauty of traditional Japanese home-cooked cuisine, and to be able to share it with so many people in multiple countries where this book has been published. I believe that the message is an important one. Unfortunately, the world's obesity rates continue to grow, along with an increased risk of chronic illnesses. I feel that the message is not reaching enough people or heard the way it needs to in order to reverse this nightmare trend.

I often hear people respond to the book with, "Yes, great, but I just don't have the time," and go on with their lives as usual. And I wonder if I really heard what I had heard. We are talking about life and death here. What does "having the time or not" have anything to do with life and death? Do you accept to die prematurely or become severely ill from what you eat day in and day out just because you didn't have the time? Do you accept to spend the last 5-10 years of your life under medical care because you just don't have the time now? That's absurd.

I have told my story. I think the next thing for me is to develop products and services that make it really easy for people to enjoy Japanese-style eating, and to truly experience its benefits.

#### Who are your favorite celebrity chefs?

I love them all as I love to eat all types of fabulous foods. Don't ask me to choose!

#### What's one item in the kitchen that no one should be without?

It's "love" for the people you're cooking for: first, love for yourself, and next for the people who are dining with you.

#### How can I get my girlfriend to eat nattou?

Did you notice that nattou is mysteriously absent from our book?

What is your motive here? How long have you known your girlfriend? Do you want to keep her as your girlfriend, or want to force her to break up with you? Are you simply trying to be mischievous?

Nattou is fermented soybeans. They look super-sticky, gooey, and, well, gross. The fermentation process makes the beans sticky, slimy and stinky, which are all good reasons for anyone not to want to eat them, let alone go near them. So if she could not overcome these characteristics, I wouldn't blame her. And many people in Japan don't eat nattou, especially in Osaka. They think we (who eat nattou) are crazy.

Natto also comes with health benefits of not only soybeans but the fermentation process. So if you are effective in conveying them to her, she might outweigh the true merits more than the mere appearances and give them a try.

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"I often hear people respond to the book with, 'Yes, great, but I just don't have the time,' and go on with their lives as usual. And I wonder if I really heard what I had heard. We are talking about life and death here."

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Some manufacturers are aware of the smell issue and sell brands with "reduced-aroma" (*nioi-hikaeme*). So you may look for them. You can dilute the stickiness by adding and mixing a small amount of Japanese cooking

broth, or *dashi*. I must agree that sliminess also makes it difficult to eat nattou, especially if you have not yet mastered the art of chopsticks. In this case, try a nattou sushi roll that's cut into six or so bite-size pieces (not a hand roll). Dab a drop of low-sodium soy sauce and pop one piece in her mouth and see if she likes it.

I personally love nattou for its flavors. I love eating it straight up. I eat it with fluffy steaming premium Koshihikari rice, that's just cooked. I love nattou sushi rolls.

And if you had nattou but she still didn't, remember to brush your teeth and wipe your lips thoroughly, before you try to cuddle with her!

#### Why can't America have butter-flavored potato chips like Japan?

It's actually a good thing that America can't get butter-flavored potato chips. Butter, along with whole milk, ice cream, cheese and red meat, contains saturated fat. It's a bad fat and is shown to increase the risk of heart disease.

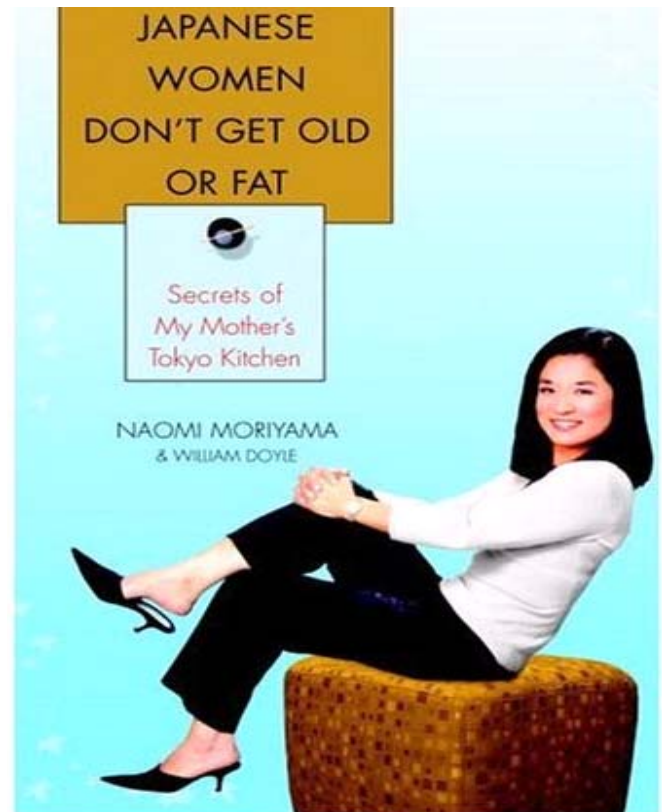
#### What Japanese foods do you miss the most here in the States?

Every dish that comes out of my mother's Tokyo kitchen.

#### It's said that New York has it all. So where can I enjoy a knockout Kobe beef dinner?

I've never had a Kobe beef dinner in New York, so I don't have any suggestions. I'd probably wait until I get to Japan for that. In the meantime, I'd enjoy local produces that are in season and in abundance and prepared deliciously and healthfully.

*Special thanks to Anna Crowe at Random House for interview assistance and author photos. For more information on Naomi and William, visit [www.japanesewomendontgetoldforfat.com](http://www.japanesewomendontgetoldforfat.com).*



## MEGU-LICIOUS By Clara Solomon



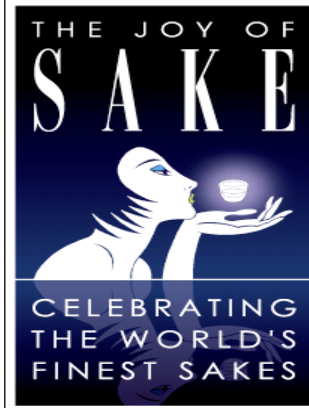
Dining with JETAA NY has officially gone upscale. Gone are the days of wasting away in seedy ramen shops in Roppongi or scarfing down curry rice at Shin-Osaka station. We can now claim Megu, one of New York's "mega" Japanese restaurants (you know the ones, with soaring high ceilings, multi-page sake lists, and at least one Kobe beef entrée on the menu) as one of our own, thanks to Norman Holt Kong, the manager and general director (as well as JET alum, Nagano 1991-94) of Megu's Midtown branch at 845 UN Plaza at 47th Street.

Always ready to sacrifice my free time in the name of serving the JETAA NY newsletter, I joined a few JETAA NY colleagues for a pre-Thanksgiving dinner at Norman's restaurant to see just what Megu was all about. The first thing I noticed about Megu Midtown was its location—845 UN Plaza is practically in the East River. And for someone who works in Greenwich Village, let's just say there was a bit of grumbling as I consulted my subway map to get up there. Fear not, fellow JETs, it is worth the trip to the edge of Queens. After hoofing it from Grand Central, I walked up the steps of Trump World Tower, which just happens to be Megu Midtown's home. Pretty swanky digs they've got for themselves, so I was glad I decided to wear my nice boots and took the time to splash on a little lip gloss before leaving work. Fortunately for Megu diners, the restaurant's decorators don't share Donald Trump's love of all things marble and gold. The interior of the restaurant was much more subdued, if you can call three-story soaring ceilings and gigantic lanterns adorned with dozens of family crests (the crests of various Megu bigwigs, according to Norman) subdued.

After checking my coat I was escorted up to the sleek second floor bar, where I enjoyed one of their signature cocktails. While I don't remember the name of my particular drink, it involved fresh strawberries with a real flower garnish, and it was delicious (though the \$15 price tag may have been a bit steep). As soon as the rest of the group arrived, we were shown to our table—also on the second floor—overlooking those huge lanterns as well as the sushi chefs and a few diners below. The extremely attentive (and attractive) waiters were all equipped with an earpiece and headphones, just discreet enough not to be a distraction, but obvious enough for customers like us to know that these guys were in constant communication with the rest of the operation—and it showed, as each course was perfectly timed, and our glasses were never empty.

And now the food—having eaten at many of the big names, I can certainly say that this experience was near the top of its class. The "Philosophy" section of Megu's Web site says that the restaurant strives to "endlessly pursue epicurean delights." Our meal was proof of this passion—at least nine small courses (including dessert) arrived at our table, each more delicious than the last. Highlights included: asparagus coated in crushed *senbei* crackers, thinly sliced beef *tataki*, miso black cod, a selection of luxurious sushi, and a beautiful sashimi seaweed salad. The *piece de resistance* was most certainly the grilled Kobe beef, which arrived at our table on a sizzling hot stone covered in fried garlic slices; this alone would have made the trek out to the East River worth it. Add some delicious desserts like a chestnut crepe cake or a custard-like cheesecake, and you'll start planning your next birthday party here.

In short, Megu is wonderful. The décor and price makes this not the kind of place that every JET alum would go for a weeknight dinner, but it is the perfect place for a celebration, or to treat oneself to a well-deserved night out. For more information, visit [www.megunyc.com](http://www.megunyc.com).



## THE JOY OF SAKE By Brian Hersey

In September, I attended The Joy of Sake, the largest annual sake-tasting event in New York, which features over 300 different kinds of sake (*Nihonshu* to Japan-snob). In addition to the sake, several Japanese restaurants cater the event. I eagerly anticipated an opportunity to refine my palate and expand my knowledge of Japan's most famous beverage. Despite my ambitions, I utterly failed to learn much about sake. I did, however, succeed in having fun and maybe even in getting my money's worth (\$75 if you pre-register online) of alcohol. Nevertheless, I do not plan to return next year.

Now before you write me off as a Philistine, understand that I had noble intentions. I have enjoyed sake for over a decade now, although I have never been a consistent enough consumer to really feel knowledgeable. Moreover, a number of smaller tastings have given me some foundation, as well as a list of sake I like—a list I was hoping to expand at this event. Things began to go awry early. No train arrived at my midtown station for 25 minutes (*sasuga* MTA), which made me late and put me in a mood to drink, if not quite the right frame of mind for a tasting. I had my notebook and pencil ready to take notes, but the vast majority of my legible notes were taken waiting for the train (including a reminder not to drunk-dial the ex no matter what). Eventually, I arrived, found the correct line (waiting in line became a dominant theme of the evening) and collected a plastic cup before wandering in to scope the place out and locate my friends.

The food tables were an immediate disappointment. They all had long lines, not to mention miniscule portions. Tables were set up in the center of the room with bottles of sake lined up. In front of each bottle was an explanation and a small cup with a cheap plastic syringe. The idea was that you used the syringe to draw a disappointingly small (another theme of the event) amount of sake out of the glass and infuse it to your cup. Normally, it took two or three syringe-fuls to have an amount sufficient for tasting. The tables were crowded and one had to sidle in, painfully fill the cup with the syringe and then back out. Frankly, after a long day at work and an irritating wait for a train, this proved a frustrating way to consume alcohol. Some industry reps wandered around answering questions. A few producers or distributors had their own tables and knowledgeable people poured the drinks, but these were overcrowded.

Unlike wine tastings, sake tastings provide no buckets for spitting out your sake (which is kind of gross anyway); thus, logic dictates that one is meant to drink it. Given the paucity of food, this limits the amount of meaningful "tasting" one can accomplish before it deteriorates into a "drinking" event. My notebook was soon relegated to my briefcase since it proved almost impossible to take legible notes while holding a cup and standing in a jostling crowd. The creeping buzz did not help, either. My notes wound up being a barely legible list of sake that I liked and a few odd notes like "Midorigawa [illegible]—brown bottle: \$150!"

On the whole, I would have to say that unless you are really serious about your sake and have some specific, rare sake in mind, you are better off not shelling out \$75 for this event. There are smaller, less-expensive, less crowded tastings around with more food. Really, how many kinds of sake do you need at one event? Three hundred syringe-fuls is an awful lot of sake. Once I abandoned my goal of developing an expertise, I had a good time approaching The Joy of Sake as a straight-up all-you-can-eat-and-drink happy hour. Still, there are better ways to learn about sake and definitely better drinking options out there. The verdict: worth going to once, but no need to make it an annual event.

**ENJOY THE FLAVORS  
OF JAPAN IN 2007**  
Submitted by Akihiro Tada

The Japanese Food Culture Festival Committee is gearing up for the first-ever Japanese Food Festival in New York. The events kick off at The Japan Pavilion, organized by the Japan External Trade Organization (a.k.a. JETRO) will take place in the International Restaurant and Food Service Show at the Jacob Javits Center from March 4-6. Twenty-five food and product vendors will display their products, some of which are making their international debut. Products on display range from artisanal oils and vinegars, tofu, kelp, teas, *shochu* and sake to those coveted Japanese knives and tableware essential to any Japanese-inspired kitchen. The subtle flavors and texture of Japanese premium rice as well as richly marbled *wagyu* (Japanese beef) will also be available to sample. These products represent the rich culinary lineage that is an important part of Japanese cultural identity. In addition, major Japanese food-related companies will also be exhibiting independently next to the Japan Pavilion. In conjunction with the show, a series of events will take place throughout the week.

In honor of this event, Nikkei America, Japan Society and JETRO will present a symposium about the popularity of Japanese food culture in the United States. The event will be held on Monday, March 5 at the Japan Society featuring keynote speaker Yuzaburo Mogi, Chairman and CEO of Kikkoman. Afterwards, a panel discussion will be held featuring star chefs Masaharu Morimoto, Daniel Boulud, and expert Japanese food journalist and cookbook author Elizabeth Andoh.

That same evening, the committee, with the assistance of JETRO, will present Gastronomic Discovery: An Evening of Japanese Food Culture, an invitation-only event at the Marriott Marquis Hotel. Opening remarks will be made by Ms. Andoh. At the reception, three of the highest-ranking *kaiseki* master chefs (and most respected among those in Japan's culinary world), Masahiro Kurisu, Motoi Kurisu and Kenichi Hashimoto, will take center stage. All three of these chefs, authorities on Japanese flavoring, hail from Kyoto, the legendary seat of Japan's food world. The Kurisu brothers are both owners and master chefs at Tankuma Kitamise and Tankuma Kumahiko, following in the family footsteps of their grandfather, Kumazaburo. Hashimoto Kenichi is chef of his own Ryozanpaku restaurant, a hidden pearl in the heart of Kyoto. These seasoned chefs will demonstrate how to prepare their favorite and time-honored dishes.

Following the *kaiseki* demonstration, famed culinary genius David Bouley will also take the stage to share his original cuisine based on Japanese ingredients. Attendees will also have the opportunity to taste the creations of these four talented artists. The evening is a cross-cultural learning experience to demystify Japanese food culture by highlighting traditional to contemporary Japanese cooking practices and how they are explored by Western chefs.

Throughout this week, diners can get to know the hottest Japanese establishments in New York during Japanese Restaurant Week, March 4-10, where participating establishments throughout the city will offer specially-designed gourmet menus. Further information is available at [www.JPRW.net](http://www.JPRW.net).

Additional events planned by Japanese food-related NPOs, The Gohan Foundation for U.S.-Japan Culinary and Cultural Exchange, and Kyoto Society for Inter-art Exchange, will take place in Manhattan during this week.

Visit [www.flavorsofjapan.org](http://www.flavorsofjapan.org) for more information.



*This event is produced by The Japanese Food Culture Festival Committee.*

*Event publishing for The Japanese Food Culture Festival is supported by JETRO.*

*The Japanese Food Culture Festival is a sponsored project of the New York Foundation for the Arts.*

**THE VLOGAZINE RETURNS!**  
By Janak Bhimani

Hey hey hey,  
Hope everyone is doing well. Work is always getting busier, but the fun never ends. And, as part of work, Vlogazine NY is still going strong. Every Monday, a new episode (or sometimes two episodes) are uploaded. Please check out the site at [www.watchme.tv/e/NY](http://www.watchme.tv/e/NY). There are many pages of videos going back to our first show. To access the earlier clips, just scroll down to the bottom of the page and click on "NEXT." There are six pages of videos now, and a recent highlight finds me waiting in line 26 hours to buy a Nintendo Wii! Tell your friends about it—every time someone clicks and watches a clip I get a grain of rice. Currently, I have nine.

**FILM LEGEND MAKES OVERDUE DVD DEBUT**  
 By Lyle Sylvander

Of all the great masterpieces of Japanese cinema, those of Kenji Mizoguchi (1898-1956) are least seen. The bulk of his work was produced before 1951, the year Akira Kurosawa's *Rashomon* awakened Western interest in Japanese cinema. Historical circumstances do not fully account for this deficit, however, as Mizoguchi managed to win Venice Film Festival prizes (including the same ones *Rashomon* won) three years in a row for *The Life of Oharu* (1952), *Ugetsu* (1953) and *Sansho the Bailiff* (1954). Of these three, only *Ugetsu* has stood the test of time, having consistently been ranked among the best films ever made. Academic scholarship has also placed him in the company of such great directors as Antonioni, Bergman, Hitchcock and Kurosawa (who looked up to him as "the master"). This near-unanimous reverence is so great that Mizoguchi's scant recognition among the movie-going public is difficult to explain. Whatever its cause, serious film buffs are attempting to rectify the situation. Last year, the Brooklyn Academy of Music arranged a mini-festival of his films, a series that was re-shown this summer at Film Forum. The Criterion Collection has joined the fray with its handsomely issued DVD of *Ugetsu*, complete with a 2 1/2 hour documentary about Mizoguchi's life and work. Hopefully, this will lead to the release of his other films (presently, *Ugetsu* is the only one available) and a fuller appreciation of his oeuvre.

After its success with *Rashomon*, Daiei Studios determined that stories offering an exoticized vision of traditional Japan were most marketable abroad. It is within this context that Mizoguchi—under contract at Daiei—decided to adapt two stories by Akinari Ueda, "The House in the Thicket" and "A Serpent's Lust." Both stories were set in feudal Japan during civil war, a time of uncertainty and violent turmoil. *Ugetsu's* narrative revolves around two peasant brothers: Genjuro (Masayuki Mori), a potter, and Tobei (Eitaro Ozawa), a farmer. Genjuro leaves his wife Miyagi (Kinuyo Tanaka) and son in order to undertake a dangerous trip to the city where he can profit from the widespread shortage by selling his pottery. Tobei, who dreams of providing a better life for his wife Ohama (Mitsuko Mito), wishes to become a samurai and joins him. Encouraged by their successful venture, the brothers return with loftier ambitions that quickly turn to greed. Their village is attacked, and the two families are forced to abandon their homes, traveling by boat to the city of Omizo, where they can sell the undamaged pottery.

Along the way, they encounter a lone, wounded boatman, who warns them of pirate ships in the vicinity, and Genjuro decides to leave Miyagi and their son behind for their safety. While selling pottery at the open market square, a ghostly woman named Lady Wakasa (Machiko Kyo) approaches Genjuro and orders several articles for delivery to her mansion, and immediately captivates him. Tobei seizes the momentary distraction to run away with their profits and purchase a samurai outfit. He clumsily kills a samurai and steals the head of a foe that the samurai had killed. Presenting this trophy to the samurai lord, he is praised and given a horse, a house and men to follow him. Filled with pride, he brings his men for the night to a geisha house, only to find that his wife, raped by soldiers after he abandoned her, has become a geisha. Genjuro's story also leads to despair when he eventually breaks Lady Wakasa's spell over him and returns home to find that his wife has died and has become a ghost as well.

Mizoguchi's film is a profound meditation on the nature of ambition, greed, betrayal and disillusionment. Stylistically, the film coexists in the physical and in the mystical realms. The scenes of earthly turmoil, particularly when the village is attacked, are shot with extensive crane shots and rapid pans. His long takes and moving camera create a sense of instability in the world at large. Turmoil is not limited to the political situation on the ground,

however—the spiritual realm is awash in sadness as well. Lady Wakasa's pale white appearance and eerie chanting-like voice are derived from Noh theatrical conventions. In the tradition of Noh, such characterization hints at a less overt tension, more psychological than physical. *Ugetsu's* set design combines aspects of reality and the supernatural, too, as when Lady Wakasa's house vanishes and becomes a site of rubble, much like that of the village destroyed by bandits. Ghostly representations are just as spurious as Tobei's earthly delusions of grandeur.

The accompanying DVD contains an NHK-produced documentary, *Kenji Mizoguchi: The Life of a Film Director* (1975). The film sheds much light on Mizoguchi's life, working methods and filmography. The extensive coverage of Mizoguchi's early career is especially valuable because this work is largely unavailable in the West. Only *Osaka Elegy* (1936) is commercially available on videotape and *Sisters of Gion* (1936) and *Story of the Last Chrysanthemums* (1939) are only available in pirated versions. This trilogy established Mizoguchi's reputation in Japan with its paradoxically traditional Japanese aesthetics and radical feminist sympathies. Mizoguchi's style established the long take and the slow camera pan (reminiscent of unfurling Japanese scrolls). Thematically, these films portray contemporary women in heroic stances among the traditional Japanese order. At the time, Mizoguchi found a large audience for his films in this departure from the standard male-dominated narrative.

When World War II arrived, Mizoguchi was forced to direct more nationalistic films in tune with the patriotic fervor sweeping the country. The epic *47 Ronin* (1941) was directed during this time and remains the best-known adaptation of the classic *Chushingura* story. During the postwar period, he followed the convention of most Japanese directors by making historically-set films, the kind that would win audiences and awards abroad. This period contains his greatest achievement—it not only includes *Ugetsu* but *Sansho the Bailiff* (an even better film than *Ugetsu*—though not as recognized), *Life of Oharu* (1952) and *A Story from Chikamatsu* (1954). Soon after, Mizoguchi prematurely died from leukemia at the age of 58.

While this vast amount of information is valuable to the film fanatic, it may be too much for the average viewer. The entire 2 1/2 half hour documentary is filled with back-to-back "talking heads" interviews intermittently broken up by old production stills. The film would also have benefited from a stronger focus on the subject matter of Mizoguchi's films. Too many of the interviewees recount Mizoguchi's explosive temper and difficult personality. Filmmakers are not generally known for their congenial disposition (especially when working) so these anecdotes throw little light on his psyche. On the other hand, we do learn that he was an obsessive perfectionist, often driving his cast and crew to the point of exhaustion. In this manner, he shares much in common with his younger protégé, Akira Kurosawa. Like Kurosawa, Mizoguchi's perfectionism shows in his mise-en-scène so that not one inch of frame space is wasted. One can feel the director striving for perfection in every shot.

The Criterion package also includes a booklet containing an essay by film scholar Philip Lopate, the two stories by Akinari Ueda (translated by Scholary Chambers) and a short story by Guy de Maupassant. The main character in the Maupassant story, "How He Got the Legion of Honor" (the translator is unknown), inspired the characterization of Tobei. In fact, the major plot elements of greed and wartime glory in *Ugetsu* are derived from de Maupassant rather than Ueda. This is yet another point of similarity between Mizoguchi and Kurosawa, who would incorporate elements of Western literature—especially Shakespeare and Dostoevsky—into Japanese narratives. Western literature provides a more psychologically complex characterization than that offered by traditional Japanese literature. This Criterion set is a true goldmine. Hopefully, this is only the beginning for DVD releases of Mizoguchi's other great films.



THE "FOOD ISSUE" TOP 12!

As good as it is, some Japanese food can be unappetizing to even the most adventurous New Yorker's taste buds. Therefore, it is our great pleasure to compile the...

TOP 12 FAILED "AMERICANIZED" JAPANESE FOOD PRODUCTS

- 12. "Miyazaki's Own" miso-battered popcorn
- 11. I Can't Believe It's Not Tofu!
- 10. Indigenous Japanese Animal Crackers
- 9. Tako Bell
- 8. Edible nattou
- 7. Crab jerky
- 6. Those really small chocolate chip cookies that shouldn't even count as chocolate chip cookies
- 5. George Foreman's "Banzai Teriyaki" Grill
- 4. Iron Chef Kitchen of Doom
- 3. Neon Genesis Evangelion chewable multivitamins
- 2. Gummi-zushi
- 1. Wasabee Whiz



CONTEST WINNER ATTENDS JET TANJOUBI

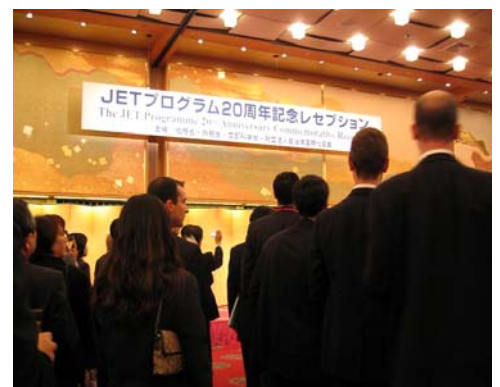
The winner of the JET Programme's 20th Anniversary Logo Contest, former Canadian JET Cathy Baranenko, was flown to Japan to attend the 20th Anniversary Commemorative Ceremony and Reception held on November 22 at the Hotel Okura Tokyo. She was awarded a certificate of commendation for her achievement. Amongst the 600 attendees were ambassadors from current participating countries, ministers of CLAIR, and His Imperial Highness, the Crown Prince of Japan, whom Cathy had a chance to meet.



Posters hanging at the entrance



Cathy (third from left) and her family in front of the ceremonial stage



More than 800 people attended the reception

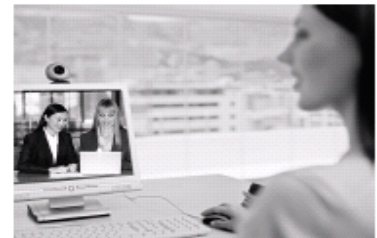


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