

# HIGHLIGHTING *Japan*

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THE SPORTING LIFE

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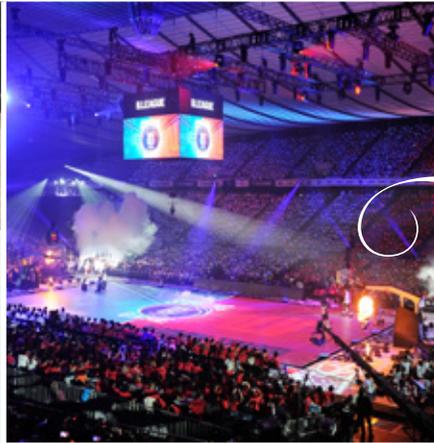
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The Olympic and Paralympic Games Tokyo 2020 are now less than a year away and preparations are in full swing. In this issue, we look at some of the features of sports in Japan which underpin their universal appeal and accessibility: their administration, use of science and technology, coaching, and deeply ingrained sports culture.

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**PRODUCTION** The Japan Journal  
**MANAGING EDITOR** Osamu Sawaji  
**EDITORS** Alex Hendy, Hitoshi Chiba, Mao Fujita  
**EDITORIAL SUPPORT** Eriko Kiura  
**CONTRIBUTORS** Rob Gilhooly, Takashi Sasaki, Kumiko Sato, Mamoru Sugiyama, Akira Umezawa  
**DESIGN** Mei Imai, Hirofumi Okadome  
**PHOTOS** Rob Gilhooly, Satoshi Tanaka, Yuichi Itabashi  
**VIDEOGRAPHY** Satoshi Tanaka

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Photo: Courtesy of B.LEAGUE

## JAPAN-NEW ZEALAND SUMMIT MEETING



The Japan-New Zealand Summit Meeting

On September 19, 2019, Mr. Shinzo Abe, Prime Minister of Japan, held a Summit meeting with Rt. Hon. Jacinda Ardern, Prime Minister of New Zealand, who is paying an official working visit to Japan. The two leaders issued a Joint Statement.

At the outset, Prime Minister Abe said that he welcomes the visit of the Prime Minister of New Zealand, winner of the past two World Cups, in the eve of the Rugby World Cup 2019. Prime Minister Abe also said that Japan and New Zealand are strategic cooperative partners founded on common values and would like to elevate the bilateral relationship to greater heights and cooperate with New Zealand toward a free and open Indo-Pacific taking advantage of this visit.

With regard to bilateral relations, Prime Minister Abe said that he would like to promote concrete security and defense cooperation including joint exercise, cooperation on Pacific Island countries and high-level exchanges between Japan and New Zealand. Prime Minister Abe also said that he welcomes steady progress in the economic relationship in recent years and the extension of access to eGate for Japanese nationals at airports in New Zealand. Prime Minister Ardern expressed her pleasure of visiting Japan this time and appreciated Japan's hospitality (*Omotenashi*) extended to her. Referring to very active high-level mutual visits, Prime Minister Ardern said that she would like to further develop the bilateral relationship together with Prime Minister Abe.

The two leaders shared the view that the two countries will commence a joint study toward negotiations for an agreement on security information sharing. Further-

more, the two leaders discussed cooperation in the economic field including hydrogen and agriculture, cooperation in areas such as cyber space and expansion of sport exchanges and people-to-people exchanges.

As for the Pacific Island region, Prime Minister Abe said that Japan intends to materialize the partnership between the two countries in achieving a "Free and Open Indo-Pacific," in coordination with New Zealand's 'Pacific Reset' policy on the Pacific. The two leaders shared the view that they will strengthen bilateral cooperation in this regard.

With regard to North Korean issues, the two leaders confirmed their cooperation toward realizing the complete, verifiable, and irreversible dismantlement of all weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missiles of all ranges and shared the view on the importance of full implementation of United Nations Security Council resolutions. In addition, Prime Minister Abe said that he hopes for New Zealand's continued understanding and cooperation toward an early resolution of the abductions issue and Prime Minister Ardern expressed her support.

The two leaders also exchanged views regarding other regional situations including the East and South China Seas.

The two leaders also discussed international economic order and shared the view that the two countries will lead the international community and cooperate toward steady implementation and expansion of the TPP 11, conclusion of high-quality RCEP within this year, WTO reform and other issues.

The two leaders also exchanged respective views on the whaling issues.



The leaders exchanging uniforms of their countries' national rugby teams

# THE SPORTING LIFE

Preparations for the Olympic and Paralympic Games Tokyo 2020 are in full swing even as Japan hosts what is proving to be a spectacular Rugby World Cup 2019. In this issue, we look at some of the representative features of sport in Japan, in particular those which underlie their universal appeal and accessibility: their public and private administration, use of science and technology, coaching, and deeply ingrained sports culture. In Japan, people enjoy sports and exercise from a very young age and throughout their lives. Through interviews with former Olympians, sports administrators and coaches, this feature story helps to explain why.



# World Peace through Sports

Dai Tamesue



**D**AI Tamesue won the bronze medal in the men's 400-meter hurdles at the Edmonton 2001 8th IAAF World Championships in Athletics. This was the first Japanese medal in a sprint event at an Olympic Games or World Championships. He also won the bronze medal at the Helsinki 2005 10th IAAF World Championships and competed in three consecutive Olympics, the first at Sydney in 2000. Since his retirement from competition in 2012, Tamesue has been involved in sports-related businesses and social contribution activities. We asked Tamesue about athletics, athletes' second careers and his hopes for the Tokyo 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games.

## **Why did you start to participate in athletics?**

I joined an athletics club at the age of eight, influenced by my older sister, and started to run. I really began to apply myself because I was happy that I could rapidly improve my best times and people around me praised me a lot. Even though I was a child, I felt that if I continued to participate in athletics, my world would expand. Athletics showed my ability in clear numbers. I could also easily compare my performances over time. I liked to think about not only my best times, but also how to reach specific goals, such as national and world records.

## **Why did you switch from the 100-meters**

### **to the 400-meter hurdles as a high school student?**

When I struggled to improve my time in the 100-meters, my teacher suggested that I switch to the 400-meter hurdles. I thought that any event would be fine as long as I could show my ability. The hurdles are a track and field event that require refined technique. Unless you get your steps just right and consistently in front of each hurdle, it is difficult to clear them. At that time, we did not have any clearly defined techniques or patterns for improvement. Because I was athletically minded, I felt that I would be able to compete globally in this event.

In addition, I chose the hurdles partly as a way to express myself in society. I thought that I might be able to have a greater social impact with the hurdles than with the 100-meters, where gaps in natural physical ability are more clearly reflected in the results and there is a larger number of competitors too. That is why I switched to the hurdles.

### **What did it mean to you to compete in the Olympics three times?**

It was a really valuable experience to represent Japan in three Olympics. I think that competing in special circumstances in which winning or losing is directly connected to the national image was a very rare opportunity to learn something about myself. It was also a unique experience to spend time in the Olympic Village. The people there all had an identity purely as athletes, regardless of nationality. Athletes who competed in the same event were able to understand the challenges they had overcome and empathized deeply with each other. It may sound grandiose, but I felt that this empathy could prevent the divisions between countries that cause conflict.

### **Why did you and four other athletes, including a table tennis player and a bicycle racer, establish the Athlete Society in 2010?**

With the exception of the few athletes who are tremendously successful, for many athletes developing a second career after retirement is a serious matter. Aiming to be a new role model for retired athletes, I founded the Athlete Society with four friends. A wide range of athletes from many different events participate in the Athlete Society to make social contributions through sports. Because I was particularly interested in sports diplomacy, I launched Sports Asia to connect Asian countries through sports. Since being appointed Sports Goodwill Ambassador for the Bhutan Olympic Committee in 2015, I have taught athletes and coaches in Bhutan and Japan. In addition, in February 2019, I started a project in which track and field athletes from Asian countries, such as Bhutan, Nepal and Laos, lived under one roof in Japan for about two weeks and trained together. I was really happy to see them deepen friendships that went beyond their nationalities.

### **What are your expectations for the Tokyo 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games?**

Japan is a super-aging society. Not a few people are struggling with physical pain and disabilities. It is predicted that a lot of countries will experience this in the future. If Japan can demonstrate how it manages as a super-aging society through the Olympics and Paralympics, it will be very significant for the world.

In addition, as I travel to many countries, I feel that Japan is such an open country that people from other countries can easily settle in. I hope that a permanent facility similar to an Olympic Village will be created in Japan using the country's unique qualities. I believe that providing a place for people from many different countries to interact through sports will contribute not only to the development of the sports world but also world peace. 🇯🇵

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Interview by OSAMU SAWAJI

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# Swimming for Life

Satoko Takeuji, bronze medalist at the 1960 Rome Olympics, is a member of the International Swimming Hall of Fame. Since her retirement as a top class athlete, she has taught swimming to children with asthma.

AKIRA UMEZAWA

As a child, Satoko Takeuji loved playing and swimming in local ponds and rivers. Victory in an elementary school swimming competition prompted her to start serious competitive swimming at middle school. In her first year of high school she took part in the Asia championships, earning first place in the 100 meters backstroke.

In her third year of high school she appeared at the 1960 Rome

Olympics and took bronze in the same event. At the 1964 Tokyo Olympics she missed out on a medal with a fourth place yet achieved the satisfaction of a 0.8 second improvement on her personal best.

“It’s finally over, I thought. It’s a personal best so I should be proud,” says Takeuji.

Following her retirement, Takeuji’s eldest daughter, then in the first year of elementary school, suffered an asthma attack, which

spurred her to start swimming lessons for children with asthma. One of the doctors she met during her daughter’s treatment told her, “It’s generally assumed that swimming is effective as part of asthma treatment, but I want data to prove it. Please help me.”

Takeuji worked with the doctor and started swimming lessons at a public pool in cooperation with doctors. Thanks to her submitting data from the classes to what is now the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, the effectiveness of swimming for asthma was recognized, and a few years later the hospital set up a pool specially for children with asthma.

The classes have now been running in Edogawa City, Tokyo for thirty-one years since 1989. They are held twice a week on Tuesdays and Thursdays, and around 120 children with asthma take part.

“Children with asthma can tend to be withdrawn. But when they get involved with swimming and



Satoko Takeuji, at a public swimming pool in Edogawa City, Tokyo



Takeuji teaches swimming to children with asthma

All Photos: Yuichi Itabashi

Takeuji supervises a child taking a peak flow measurement test before swimming



gradually get better at it, you can see how their faces fill with confidence. That's what makes it all worthwhile for us," says Takeuji.

Before taking classes, the children take a peak flow test, breathing in fully then blowing out into a tube to measure how fast their lungs can expel air and thus how open their airways are. After their asthma condition has been checked, they change into swimsuits, are divided into four classes from beginner to advanced, and the practice begins. Each of the four classes has four instructors. There is also a doctor and a nurse by the side of the pool, so any sudden asthma attacks can be handled safely. At first, some children cry and try to run away. But they start by sitting at the side of the pool and gradually get used to the lessons; and by six months most of the children can swim.

"It's very difficult for children who don't know when they might have an asthma attack to attend a

class each week and exercise. But if they overcome that and keep going for several years, the attacks almost completely stop. Swimming is good for abdominal breathing. Also, since the air in swimming pools is very moist it helps to remove excess phlegm, which makes it harder for asthma attacks to happen. Exercise increases children's appetites and they start to sleep deeply at night. When that happens, they really start to

enjoy swimming and they come to classes happily," says Takeuji.

Even now at 77 years old, Takeuji competes in Masters swimming contests.

"You can start swimming at any age," she says. "I want swimming to make people's lives fun and fulfilling. That's why I want to continue teaching."

Takeuji has spent much of her life so far swimming; and she intends to keep on swimming. 



A coach leads children in a swimming class

# Dream Arena

Japan's new professional basketball league aims to provide outstanding entertainment that is grounded in the local community.

**MAMORU SUGIYAMA**

Big crowds, loud music and dramatic stage effects create an electric atmosphere at B1 matches

B. League Chairman Masaaki Okawa with players announcing the opening fixture of the 2019/20 season



THE B. League was established in 2015 as the new top league of basketball in Japan, replacing the two longstanding leagues. According to B. League Chairman Masaaki Okawa, the league was founded to energize Japan through basketball, with teams no longer merely publicizing a company, but instead representing their communities across Japan.

The B. League is split into two divisions, B1 and B2, each with eighteen teams. The thirty-six teams in all represent communities from Japan's northernmost main island of Hokkaido to southernmost Okinawa Prefecture. B1 and B2 are further divided into three local divisions with six teams in each. The teams play a minimum of sixty league matches per season, with the top teams proceeding to the championship playoffs. Teams are promoted or relegated between the leagues based on their performance, financial health and arena capacity.

is to create an exciting atmosphere not just in the stadium but for audiences watching on TV. When the B. League began soliciting for entries, many teams and municipalities worked to meet the requirements.

"I had high expectations for the B. League," says Okawa, explaining the high standards for participation that he set.

For a professional sport to succeed it has to grow, meaning improvements in the quality of play and an increase in the number of spectators. The B. League has three missions: providing entertainment of a high enough standard that spectators will enjoy a match regardless of whether their team wins or loses; developing players and a team that can compete to an international standard through improved competition and an increase in the number of players; and realizing a community-based "dream arena" where people can enjoy their lives through sports.

the local sights, food and drinks, according to Okawa. Basketball tourism can be expected to have an impact on the local economy, he says.

Through measures such as offering "luxury" seats in harder-to-sell parts of the arena—these enabling spectators to enjoy the match in a more relaxed manner—the annual number of spectators increased from 2.24 million in the first season to 2.59 million in 2018/19. The B. League hopes to develop more players of the standard of Rui Hachimura and Yuta Watanabe, who play in the NBA, the world's top professional league. In developing its players and squad, each team also provides coaching to young people in the community. The B. League meanwhile broadcasts matches, highlights videos and player interviews online, enabling basketball fans to enjoy the sport at any time on their smartphones or PCs.

The new B. League is evolving day by day with the goal of creating a "dream arena" by providing high quality matches and associated entertainment so that people can enjoy basketball in the wider arena of their local community. 



B1 teams are required to have a home arena with a capacity of 5,000 or more spectators, which is one or two thousand more than the average capacity of a basketball arena in Japan. One reason for encouraging higher attendances

During the season, teams play two matches every weekend, with an average of 6,000 spectators attending each match. Because games are played over two days, supporters of opposition teams are likely to stay overnight and enjoy

All photos: Courtesy of B.LEAGUE



Passing on the sash

# Ekiden, Connecting People

**Ekiden is a long-distance relay road race in which runners pass a cloth sash, or *tasuki*, to the next runner on their team having completed their leg. Ekiden competitions are held throughout Japan, with many people gathering along the route to cheer the runners on.**

## KUMIKO SATO

**O**RIGINATING in Japan, ekiden is a long-distance relay road race and one of the nation's most popular athletics events. Japan holds inter-prefectural team races, corporate team races, school- and university-based team races, as well as wheelchair races. The total distance, number of runners, and distance run by each participant varies depending on the event, but typically involves teams of 5 to 8 runners covering a distance of between 42.195 kilometers—the length of a marathon—and around 100 kilometers.

“A team with a single fast runner cannot win an ekiden. Equally, if one runner is off form and loses time, other team members can make it up. Also,

All photos: Courtesy of Izumo City

since the ekiden is a long-distance event, the position of the teams may change along the way so the winning team is not known until the end. It's a race that offers plenty of drama,” says Yukio Seki of the Japan Association of Athletics Federation.

By far the most popular ekiden competition of any in Japan is the Tokyo-Hakone Round-Trip College Ekiden Race, commonly known as the Hakone Ekiden, which is held annually on January 2 and 3. This is a 217.1 kilometer race over ten stages, starting from Otemachi in central Tokyo, climbing uphill to Mt. Hakone, and ending at Ashinoko Lake. The Hakone Ekiden is an annual New Year's event in Japan, with more than one million supporters lining the route.

The first ekiden ever held in Japan was the Tokaido Ekiden Toho Kyoso in 1917, with two teams of twenty-three runners each running around 500 km between Kyoto and Tokyo over three days. The race followed the historical Tokaido road that was built in the Edo period. Since ancient times, people ran or rode on horseback between each station along the highway, “transmitting” goods and information. This race is said to have been the first time that the



Action from the Izumo All-Japan University Ekiden



Team cheerleaders and ordinary folk line the streets to support the major ekiden races



Action from the Izumo All-Japan University Ekiden



A winning team celebrates in the traditional manner

term “ekiden,” a combination of the words “*eki*” meaning “station” and “*den*” meaning “transmit,” was used.

Later, the first Japanese Olympian, Shiso Kanakuri (1891-1983), helped to popularize ekiden as a sporting event in Japan. Kanakuri participated in the 1911 Stockholm Olympic marathon but could not finish. On returning to Japan, the disappointed Kanakuri worked hard to improve the skills of Japanese long-distance runners. In 1920, a relay race was held by students from the Kanto region. This was the first Hakone Ekiden event, which has continued to this day. The style of running that requires participants to pass on a sash called a “*tasuki*” that hangs from the shoulder instead of a baton has not changed to this day. The *tasuki* are in team colors and show the name of the team, enhancing the sense of unity between its members.

“Receiving the *tasuki* worn by the previous runner and passing it on to the next runner enhances the sense of group camaraderie. I think the tradition of ekiden in Japan is the reason why Japanese athletes are so good at long distance competitions that

require solitude and endurance,” says Seki.

Recent ekiden competitions have seen the participation of international athletes. Kenyan athletes in particular actively participate. Douglas Wakiihuri, for example, who won the silver medal in the marathon at the 1988 Seoul Olympics, trained in Japan’s *jitsuyodan* corporate team system as an ekiden runner.

“There was a time when International ekiden competitions were held in Japan, and some countries, such as France, continue to hold ekiden races,” says Seki.

Ekiden do not have to be large-scale events, but can also be enjoyed by smaller groups such as families, schools and communities.

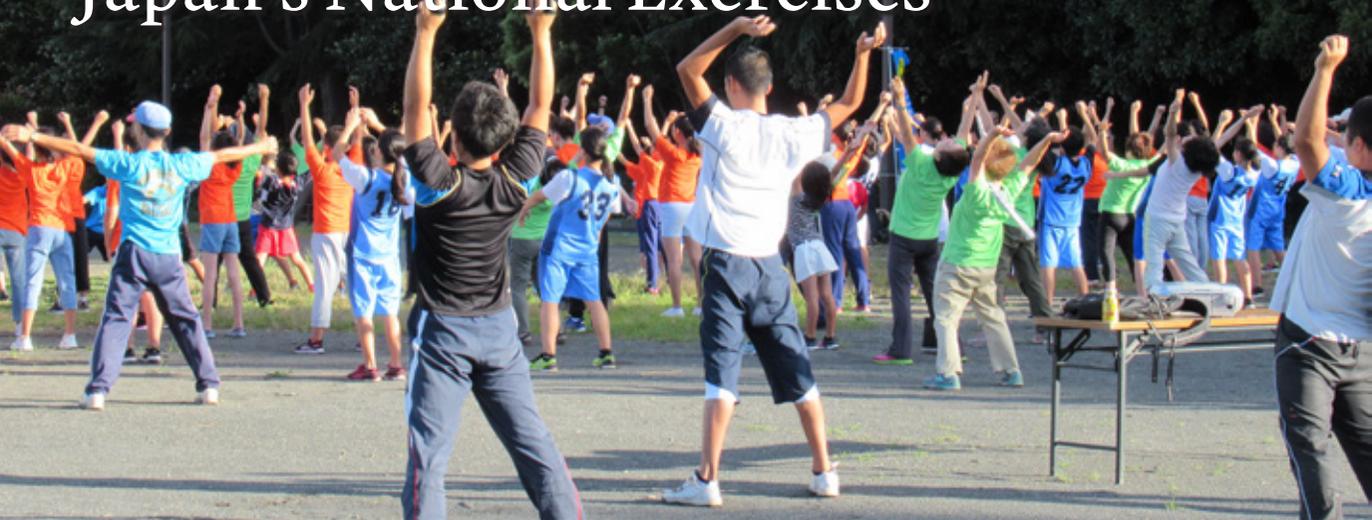
“People seem to enjoy small-scale events too, such as family competitions between mixed teams of adults and children running in their neighborhood. I would urge you to experience ekiden for yourself once and see just how much fun it is,” says Seki.

Ekiden is not only about the result of the race. The true joy is to be found in the deepened bonds that are formed between teammates, family and fellow residents by passing on the *tasuki*. 

# Rajio Taiso

## Japan's National Exercises

A large group practices radio-taiso gymnastic exercises in a public park



**Radio-taiso gymnastic exercises have long played a role in health promotion in Japan, which is said to enjoy the world's longest life expectancy. The short exercises have been practiced for more than ninety years by young and old in groups large and small.**

### TAKASHI SASAKI

**R**ADIO-TAISO gymnastic exercises are carried out in schools, workplaces and other community gathering spaces. For Japanese people, these exercises are deeply familiar. Participants carry out thirteen types of exercises in about three minutes to recorded light piano music.

Radio-taiso gymnastic exercises are said to have been initiated in the 1920s, when an employee of what is now Japan Post Insurance Co., Ltd. proposed a Japanese version of health exercises that were broadcast by radio in the United States, says Toshihiko Aoyama, president of the NPO Zenkoku-Rajiotaisou-Renmei

(Japan Radio-Taiso Federation).

In 1927, the then postal life insurance bureau in the Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications, in cooperation with Japan Broadcasting Corporation (NHK) and what is now the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, created national health exercises to promote the health of Japanese people on the radio. The exercises started to be broadcast in the following year.

The exercises were officially called *kokumin hoken taiso* (national health exercises) at the time, and the

People of all ages are familiar with the exercises



All photos: Courtesy of Zenkoku-Rajiotaisou-Renmei



A radio-taiso gymnastic exercises session on the grounds of a school

term *rajiio taiso* (radio-taiso gymnastic exercises) was just a nickname. It was the early period of radio broadcasting and radio itself was uncommon, so when the music for the radio-taiso gymnastic exercises came out of the speaker, it attracted a lot of people, says Aoyama.

To disseminate the radio-taiso gymnastic exercises, post office workers across the country provided a pamphlet with illustrations of the choreography of the exercises and held a training session in each area. With the widespread adoption of radio, the exercises gradually became familiar. By 1938, ten years after the start of the radio broadcast of the exercises, as many as 157 million people participated in the radio-taiso gymnastic exercises in Japan each year.

When World War II ended in 1945, however, the General Headquarters of the Allied Forces (GHQ), which was implementing the occupation policy for Japan, prohibited the exercises for some time. They considered the exercises, which were practiced in groups to music broadcast nationally, to be totalitarian. Radio-taiso gymnastic exercises with slower tunes and free moves were subsequently created, but they failed to become established and their broadcast was suspended. However, since many Japanese people told the government and NHK that they hoped that the radio-taiso gymnastic exercises would start again, new exercises that could be practiced regardless of age or gender were created, and their broadcast commenced in 1951.

The new radio-taiso gymnastic exercises were disseminated nationwide in no time. One of the reasons for this was that practices were conducted on school grounds or in parks during elementary school summer holidays. Free attendance cards were provided to students through the schools, and the cards were stamped when a student participated in the radio-taiso gymnastic exercises in the early morning.

Aoyama says that students received a pencil or a notebook at the end of the summer holidays,

depending on the number of times they participated, and those with perfect attendance received a commemorative item. As a result, the students competed against one another in terms of participation. At one time, as many as 30 million copies of the attendance cards were printed, which had a substantial impact on the spread of the exercises.

According to a recent survey, it is estimated that about 27 million people still practice radio-taiso gymnastic exercises twice or more a week in Japan. The results of a survey show that those who continue to carry out the exercises have a higher metabolic rate than those who do not, and among elderly people, their body's internal age is about twenty years younger than their actual age.

In the 1920s, when the radio-taiso gymnastic exercises were initiated, the average lifetime of Japanese people was some forty years, but it now exceeds eighty years both for men and women. From the standpoint of health promotion, there are many requests from overseas to learn the exercises, and Zenkoku-Rajiotaisou-Renmei sends employees to



Groups of people practicing radio-taiso gymnastic exercises in the park is a common sight in the early morning

carry out training sessions.

Aoyama says that few attendance cards are delivered to schools these days, and that radio-taiso gymnastic exercises are taught less frequently in physical education classes than they were in the past. Instead the management of radio-taiso gymnastic exercises is typically conducted by neighborhood associations, local retailer associations or local companies, and a wider range of age groups now participate. Radio-taiso gymnastic exercises continue to be loved by people in Japan, not only for their health benefits, but also as an activity that brings people together. **7**

# “Superhuman Sports” for All



Masahiko Inami's optical camouflage cloak  
Photo: Courtesy of Ken Straiton/  
Superhuman Sports Society

**T**HE Superhuman Sports Society aims to develop new sports that everyone can enjoy by incorporating the latest technologies such as robotics and computer technology to acquire strength that goes beyond the limits of natural human ability. The society plans to hold an exhibition in Tokyo in 2020, the year of the Olympics and Paralympics. Masahiko Inami, joint representative of the society, says, “Only a select handful of players can participate in the Olympic and Paralympic Games. Of course, that’s great, but it would be good to also have sports that everyone can participate in equally, by using technology to reduce differences arising from physique or disabled or able-bodied status. That’s how we came up with the idea of ‘Superhuman Sports.’”

The Superhuman Sports Society was formed in 2015. With a membership made up of researchers, engineers, media artists, game creators, and athletes,

the society works to develop and scout new events. So far, the society has officially certified twenty-two events. Some of the most popular are Bubble Jumper, a combat sport where players wrapped in transparent bubble protectors crash into their opponents, and HADO, where two teams of three players wearing AR (augmented reality) goggles fire virtual energy balls at each other while trying to dodge their opponent like a dodgeball game.

Inami conducts research on human augmentation engineering, which enhances human actions and senses aided by technology, at the Research Center for Advanced Science and Technology, the University of Tokyo. Inami’s research leapt to worldwide prominence around fifteen years ago when he created an actual optical camouflage cloak that makes the person wearing it look invisible, which featured in the science fiction film *Ghost in the Shell*. Commenting on the fusion of technology and pop culture such

“Superhuman Sports” are gaining popularity around the world as sports that anyone can enjoy, regardless of differences in strength or whether or not they have a disability, by using technology.

**KUMIKO SATO**



Hover Crosse players in action  
Photo: Courtesy of Superhuman Sports Society

as manga and anime, Inami says, “Human augmentation engineering should help resolve many challenges in society, including those relating to medical care. When technology ceases to be concerned solely with usefulness and an element of ‘fun’ is added, it will evolve and become more popular.”

Superhuman Sports are also seeking to innovate by trialing the application of technology within the framework of sports. To that end, the society holds an annual Superhuman Sports Hackathon, bringing together researchers and creators from various backgrounds and private companies under one roof to create new games in accordance with the three guiding principles of Superhuman Sports: “All participants can enjoy sports”; “Sports continue to evolve with technology”; and “All spectators can enjoy sports.”

The popularity of Superhuman Sports is growing in Asia, especially in Hong Kong and Taiwan. Last

year, the Superhuman Sports Design Challenge was held at the Delft University of Technology in the Netherlands, presenting events from all over Europe and offering an opportunity for participants to try them out.

The Superhuman Sports Society does not seek to create major sports with large numbers of people taking part. Rather, its aim is to develop a diverse range of sports. “If there are many different sports, you may find one that suits you. I myself won the Hover Crosse ball game tournament that involves trying to score goals while standing on an electric-powered balance board. For someone like me who was never any good at sports, it was a really impressive achievement,” says Inami.

Everyone can participate, and everyone has the opportunity to be a winner. Superhuman Sports show that technology offers hope for a diverse and inclusive society. <sup>11</sup>

Participants throw virtual energy balls in a game of HADO [image photo]  
Photo: Courtesy of meleap inc



Start Line Tokyo runners in action  
Photo: Courtesy of Fumio Usui

# Enabling the Joy of Running

**Fumio Usui has worked for over thirty years on the development of prosthetic legs for use in sport, in which time he has enabled countless amputees to experience or taste again the joy of running.**

**TAKASHI SASAKI**

**S**TART Line Tokyo, formerly known as Health Angels, was founded in 1991 and is a running club for amputees who use prosthetic legs. The club started with just a handful of members, but that number has now increased to around 220, some of whom have even become Paralympic athletes. Fumio Usui, the founder of the club, is Japan's leading maker of prosthetic legs for sports.

"I kept switching jobs without finding one that satisfied me," says Usui, "but at the age of 28 I got a job at the Prosthetic and Orthotic Care Center of Tetsudo Kousaikai Foundation. That was thirty-five years ago, now. At the time, there was no national qualification for prosthetists, so I learned by watching how my seniors made prosthetic legs."

It was about two years after he started the job that

Usui first encountered prosthetic legs for sport. Usui was on his honeymoon in Hawaii when by chance he visited a prosthetics workshop and was shown a carbon-fiber prosthetic leg shaped like a flat spring. The staff member said, "I bet you don't have anything like this in Japan." At the time, prosthetic legs specially



Fumio Usui in his workshop  
Photo: Yuichi Itabashi

designed for running had only just appeared in the United States, and almost no information about them had reached Japan. Usui was intrigued and after returning to Japan, he bought one of the sports prosthetic legs to use in research at his workplace, then worked at the trial and error process of research and development.

“Up to that point, the quickest way to run with a prosthetic leg was with a skipping-like motion where the healthy leg is kicked out twice, then the prosthetic leg once. Using a carbon-fiber sports prosthetic leg however, runners can kick out each leg alternately. Several young



Prosthetic legs for sports made by Usui  
Photo: Yuichi Itabashi



Usui fits an amputee with a prosthetic leg  
Photo: Yuichi Itabashi

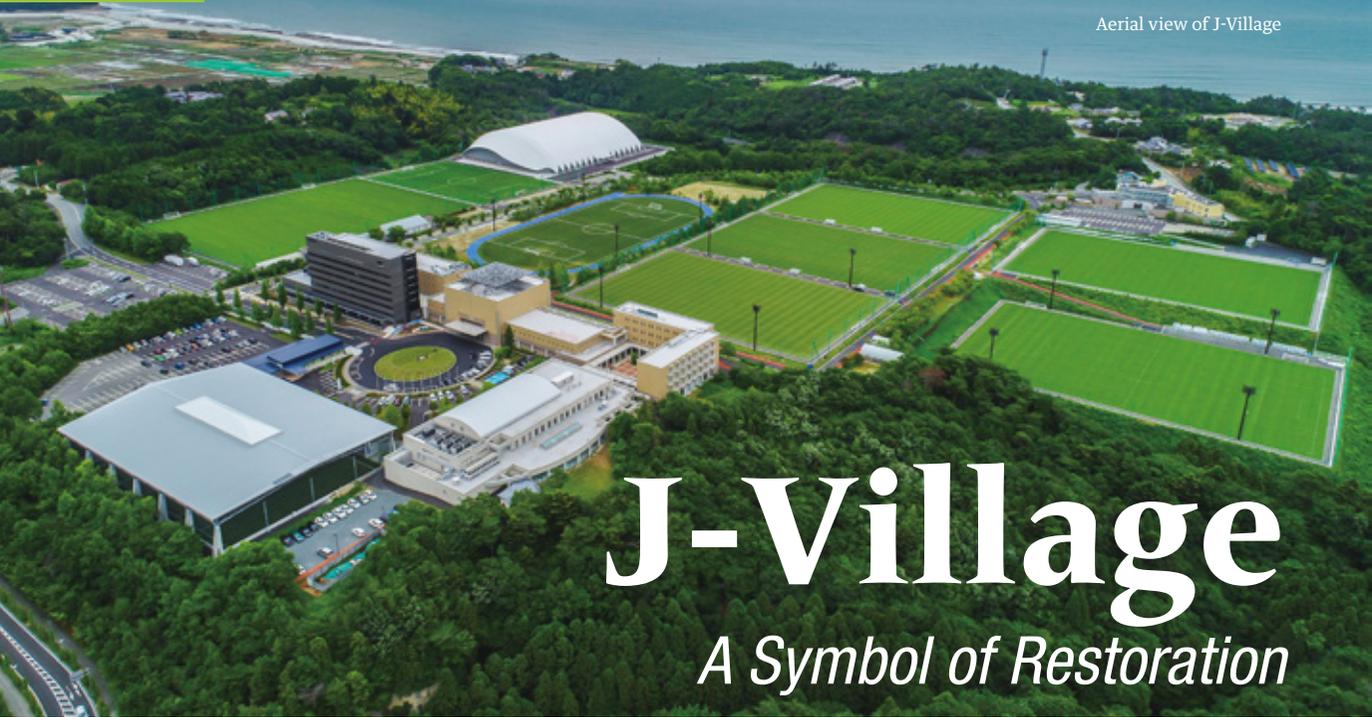
people came for the prosthetics’ first trial runs; and after running about ten strides, one of them suddenly stopped with tears running down his face. He’d suddenly remembered how it felt before his leg was amputated; what it was like to run quickly. The instant I saw him, I thought, *‘This is it!’*” recalls Usui.

After that, Usui launched Start Line Tokyo. As well as boosting the number of participants in para-sport through the club’s activities, he worked with Japanese prosthetic limb makers and sports equipment makers to improve prosthetic legs for sport. As a result, Start Line Tokyo has produced many top Japanese parathletes, and since the 2000 Sidney

Olympics, Usui himself has been involved with the Paralympic team as a mechanic for Japan’s athletes. Nevertheless, “Not everyone needs to become a Paralympian,” says Usui.

Although around fifty people from Start Line Tokyo’s membership currently take part in each practice, fewer than ten are really serious athletes aiming to take part in the Paralympics and other events. Most enjoy running as a way to make everyday life more fulfilling. There is a huge age range among the members: from the first year of elementary school to 75 years old. There is an elementary school student who runs to increase his immune system strength after having a leg amputated due to childhood cancer; and there is an elderly person who hadn’t run for forty years, but who obtained a sports prosthetic leg and started running to fulfill a dream of running one more time.

“As an exercise, running involves coordinating many bones, muscles and joints to produce forward momentum and jumping ability, so it is an extremely difficult movement for people with prosthetic legs,” says Usui. “That’s why when people become able to run quickly and easily, it gives them great confidence, and their independence in everyday life increases by itself. I want as many people as possible to taste the joy and excitement of running.”



# J-Village

## *A Symbol of Restoration*

**After the Great East Japan Earthquake, J-Village national training center for football, which was used as an operational base to cope with the disaster at the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Station, resumed operation in July 2018 following renovation.**

**AKIRA UMEZAWA**

**J**-VILLAGE in Naraha Town, which faces the Pacific Ocean in eastern Fukushima, was originally unveiled in 1997 as Japan's first national training center for football. The Argentina National Team used the facility as their training camp at the time of the 2002 FIFA World Cup, which was jointly hosted by Japan and Korea.

When the Great East Japan Earthquake struck the area on March 11, 2011, it was used as an operational base to cope with the disaster at the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Station, which was managed by Tokyo Electric Power Company. Yusuke Takana, Business Operation, J-VILLAGE Inc. recalls the time as follows.

“Immediately after the disaster occurred, J-Village was converted into a hub to enable the relevant people to congregate, including the members of the Self-Defense Forces, fire departments and Tokyo Electric Power Company who were involved in the disaster response operations. They prepared everything here before traveling to the accident site by bus.”

Workers' dormitories were constructed on the



All photos: Courtesy of J-Village

premises, and the turf fields were graveled to create parking spaces. J-Village had no choice but to suspend its business after the earthquake.

However, the appointment of Tokyo as the host country of the 2020 Summer Olympics and Paralympics prompted the reopening. In January 2015, Fukushima Prefecture drew up the J-Village Restoration and Redevelopment Plan with a view to resuming the operation of J-Village as a symbol of restoration before the 2020 Summer Olympics and Paralympics. They initiated the process for reopening with a new mission covering five core areas: (1) Show people in Japan and overseas how Fukushima Prefecture has risen to the challenge of restoration; (2) Lead the restoration and regeneration of the area; (3) Contribute to the promotion of sports; (4) Nurture top athletes; (5) Contribute to the health promotion of the local residents.

After restoration work carried out over seven years and four months, J-Village resumed operation on July 28, 2018 after an extended closure. Approximately 1,000 people attended the commemorative ceremony to celebrate the resurrection of J-Village, including Hisako, Princess Takamado, Honorary Patron of the Japan Football Association; the Governor of Fukushima Prefecture; members of the football community; and residents of Fukushima Prefecture.

One stadium with spectator stands, seven natural turf pitches, two artificial turf pitches, and a roofed all-weather practice field have been added to the new J-Village, which occupies approximately 49 hectares in total. The practice field of approximately 10,000 square meters is the largest indoor practice field in



Argentina's national football and rugby teams have both used J-Village as pre-tournament training camps in Japan

Japan, and it is suitable for multiple sports including football and rugby. A seven-story hotel with a convention hall that can accommodate up to 300 people was also constructed to meet the demand from businesses, including the Fukushima Innovation Coast Scheme drawn up by the government and Fukushima Prefecture to create robot and energy-related new industries and employment opportunities, as well as conferences held to bring decommissioning experts together.

The Argentina National Team used J-Village as their training camp during the Rugby World Cup, which is being held in Japan between September and November 2019. The facility has already been selected as the starting point for the Japan leg of the 2020 Tokyo Olympic torch relay.

“We hope to welcome people from around the world here by cooperating with the local residents, and show them how Fukushima has risen to the challenge of restoration,” Takana says.

J-Village has made a new start as a place where the joy of sports can be shared with people around the world. 





- 1 Foreign embassy staff on a fishing boat as part of a Japanese government program to visit the areas affected by the Great East Japan Earthquake
- 2 Foreign embassy participants eating dishes prepared with fish caught in waters of the areas affected by the Great East Japan Earthquake

# Safe and Delicious Tohoku Fish

Some fishery products from the Tohoku region including Fukushima Prefecture had been subjected to distribution restrictions due to the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Station accident. However, fishery products that have undergone stringent inspections are now being distributed to the market.

OSAMU SAWAJI

THE waters off Fukushima Prefecture are at the confluence of two ocean currents, the Oyashio from the north (Tsushima current) and the Kuroshio from the south (Japan current), so the area is known as Shiome no Umi (the point where two ocean currents meet). An abundance of plankton provide nutrients for fish that live in both warm and cold currents, enriching these fishing grounds. The fish caught in this area is known as *joban-mono*, a term synonymous with flavorful fish.

However, radioactive materials were released from the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Station by the tsunami caused by the Great East Japan Earthquake in March 2011. Immediately following the nuclear power station accident, the government, relevant prefectural governments, and fisheries-related organizations began collaborating in an effort to ensure the safety of fishery products by conducting monitoring inspections of radioactive cesium in fishery products, mainly in Eastern Japan including Fukushima Prefecture.

In April 2012, the standard limit of radioactive

cesium in foods was revised from 500 Bq/kg to 100 Bq/kg and also applied to fishery products. This limit is stricter than the 1,000 Bq/kg adopted by the Codex Alimentarius Commission that establishes international food standards.

The scheme for monitoring inspections of fishery products was developed by local governments, and determines the target species, inspection frequency and monitoring areas. Monitoring inspections are normally conducted on a weekly basis, focusing on major commercial species and species that exceeded 50 Bq/kg in the previous year. For species exceeding the standard limit, distribution restrictions are issued by the Nuclear Emergency Response Headquarters (whose director-general is the Prime Minister), with the lot containing the same species from the same areas recovered and not distributed to the market. Fish species and areas that exceed the standard limits are subjected to strengthened monitoring inspections. When the inspection results are consistently below the standard limit, then the distribution restrictions are lifted. In addition to the above-mentioned prefectural monitoring inspections, the Fukushima Prefectural Federation of Fisheries Co-operative Association (JF Fukushima Gyoren) is voluntarily conducting inspections in accordance with the government's screening methods. The voluntary standard limit established by JF Fukushima Gyoren (50 Bq/kg) is stricter than that established by the government. Moreover, the prefecture requires a detailed inspection to be conducted if the level detected at the screening inspection exceeds 25



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3 Inspecting a sample of landed fish for radioactive substances

4 A section of AEON supermarket selling seafood from Fukushima Prefecture

5 Fishing ports on the Pacific coast of the Tohoku region that were seriously damaged by the Great East Japan Earthquake are gradually regaining their former vibrancy

Bq/kg. If the level detected at the detailed inspection or the prefectural monitoring inspection exceeds the voluntary standard limit, the prefecture refrains from distributing the fishery products. All of these results are published on the websites of the Fisheries Agency, local governments, and relevant fishery associations.

## ENSURING SAFETY

Immediately after the nuclear power station accident, approximately 122,000 fishery products (marine species) were subjected to monitoring inspection up to August 31, 2019, mainly in Eastern Japan including Fukushima Prefecture. Immediately after the nuclear power station accident, around 21% of those samples exceeded 100 Bq/kg. Since then, however, the number of samples that exceed the standard limit has decreased with the passage of time. One sample exceeding the standard limit detected recently in Fukushima Prefecture for the first time after three years and ten months of no such cases in marine fish species (as of January 2019).

The concentration of radioactive material has also decreased over time. As of August 31, 2019, two marine fish species caught in the coastal waters off Fukushima are subject to distribution restrictions.

The volume of landed fishery products in Fukushima Prefecture is gradually returning to normal, with the volume of fish being distributed both within and outside the prefecture increasing. Various initiatives have been implemented to boost this trend. One such initiative is a collaborative venture by Fukushima Prefecture,

JF Fukushima Gyoren and AEON Retail, AEON's supermarket operator, opening a permanent section in ten AEON stores in the metropolitan area and Miyagi Prefecture for the sale of fish caught in the coastal and offshore areas of Fukushima Prefecture such as skipjack tuna, Pacific saury and flounder under the "Fukushima Sengyo-bin" (Fukushima Fresh Fish Service) brand. Manned by a dedicated salesperson who communicates the appeal of the products to consumers face-to-face, the initiative has been very popular.

Iwaki City on the southern coast of Fukushima Prefecture works to promote the attractiveness of the local "Joban-mono" brand through activities engaging all involved in the city's fisheries industry such as designing a logo and managing a website. This cooperative initiative has been highly evaluated by those working in the fish market. 

### Evaluation by International Institutions

The monitoring inspection team dispatched by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) from November to December 2013 is credited with ensuring the safety of marine products distributed to the market through measures such as establishing the standard limit for radioactive materials in marine products, comprehensive monitoring of seawater and distributed food, and distribution restrictions. In addition, in November 2015 and November 2016, the IAEA conducted an interlaboratory comparison of the measurement of radioactive materials in fishery products with the aim of confirming the appropriateness of the method for measuring radioactive materials in fishery products in Japan. The comparison confirmed high accuracy and competency on the part of participating Japanese laboratories in respect of the analysis of marine products for radioactive materials.

The new glass antenna  
Photo: Courtesy of NTT DOCOMO and AGC

# An Unobtrusive Antenna

A new, transparent antenna has been developed that can be attached unobtrusively to a building's windows rather than to its walls.

OSAMU SAWAJI

**B**ASE stations are essential for making calls, browsing the Internet and sending emails on a mobile phone. A base station is made up of an antenna and a wireless transceiver. More than 860,000 base stations of various sizes have been installed in Japan, on structures such as towers, buildings and electric utility poles. Through these base stations, mobile phone signals are sent and received.

In recent years, an increase in the use of mobile phones and other mobile radio communications, together with a large increase in data traffic, has made it necessary to establish stable, high-speed connections. NTT DOCOMO has increased the number of small cell base stations that create smaller



Yukito Katsuyama (left) and Akinobu Ueda (center) from the Radio Access Network Engineering Department at NTT DOCOMO with Kentaro Oka from AGC Building & Industrial Glass Company  
Photo: Osamu Sawaji



Image photo showing the glass antenna installed on a window (middle window, upper left)  
Photo: Courtesy of NTT DOCOMO and AGC

service areas for places with a lot of traffic, and breaking up the traffic has led to improvements in service. But it is not so simple to increase the number of base stations within an urban area.

Akinobu Ueda, from the Radio Access Network Engineering Department at NTT DOCOMO, says, “It is difficult to get permission from building owners to install small cell base stations in the mid to lower floors of a building, as the base stations can spoil the scenery of an area. The same holds true for indoor installations. In addition to spoiling the interior design of a building, it’s difficult to create the ideal service area as attenuation occurs when signals pass through the building.”

To solve these problems, NTT DOCOMO entered into joint development with major glass manufacturer AGC, presenting a new glass antenna in November 2018. The antenna is 85 cm wide, 21.2 cm high and 6.6 mm thick, and on first glance appears to be normal transparent glass. However, the antenna becomes a base station when connected to cables and a wireless transceiver in the ceiling and attached to indoor window glass.

The antenna makes use of the laminated glass manufacturing technique used for the front windshield in cars. For laminated glass, resin is put between two sheets of regular glass and melted at high temperature, forming a single piece of glass. The glass antenna is made from the unified transparent resin and conductive materials that are placed between the two sheets of glass. In this way the glass becomes an antenna that can send and receive signals by conducting electricity.

Kentaro Oka, from AGC Building & Industrial Glass Company, says, “I don’t think the idea for using transparent conductive materials as an antenna existed before. The durability of the antenna was significantly

increased by placing the conductive materials between glass.”

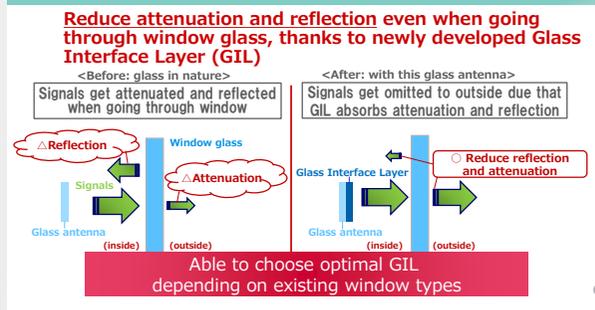
Moreover, a newly developed Glass Interface Layer (GIL) applied to the surface of the glass antenna reduces the signal attenuation and reflection that normally occurs when passing through window glass. The thickness of window glass varies according to window size and building floor height and normally affects the amount of signal attenuation and reflection, but by selecting the appropriate type of GIL, signals can be sent and received seamlessly no matter the size of the window glass the antenna is installed on.

Plans for commercialization of the glass antenna are now in the works and many inquiries have been received not just from Japanese mobile phone companies but also from companies overseas.

NTT DOCOMO and AGC are investigating the development of a glass antenna compatible with 5G, the next generation system of mobile communications. 5G will enable large amounts of data to be transmitted at very fast speeds, but the 5G signal has the disadvantage of being susceptible to attenuation from buildings, the atmosphere, rain and other obstacles.

Yukito Katsuyama, from the Radio Access Network Engineering Department at NTT DOCOMO, says, “Many base stations will be necessary if we move forward with implementing 5G. I think there will be an even greater need for glass antennas that can be installed without spoiling the scenery.”

Figure: Characteristics of the glass antenna



Courtesy of NTT DOCOMO and AGC

Natalie Emmons

# “Jon-nobi” Traveling in Japan



Although born and raised in the United States, Natalie Emmons is a familiar face to many who watch Japanese television. Most widely known as a television and commercial actress, Emmons was recently made an ambassador of Japan Heritage and currently appears as the host of a travel program that shares the beauty and traditional culture of Japan with viewers around the world.

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**MAMORU SUGIYAMA**

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**W**HEN Natalie Emmons first appeared in a Japanese commercial speaking fluent Japanese, her accent was so accurate that many viewers assumed that the commercial had been dubbed over with the voice of a native Japanese speaker. Originally from California, Emmons has been working as an actress and singer-songwriter in both Japan and the United States for several years. Thanks to her experience of Japanese culture, she was able to advise the almost entirely European film staff, of this notorious TV



Natalie Emmons pictured around Japan for the TV show “Jon-nobi Japan Heritage”:

- 1 On the 88-temple pilgrimage trail in Tokushima Prefecture
- 2 At the Agency for Cultural Affairs
- 3 In Matsushima, Miyagi Prefecture

commercial, regarding Japanese clothing style and mannerisms.

During her student years, Emmons developed an interest in Japan from watching anime and Japanese TV dramas with a Japanese friend. Emmons says she was fascinated in particular by Japan’s hot spring culture, old wooden buildings and the worldview that gods exist in all things, as depicted in the animated movie *Spirited Away*. She also loved the simple homemade food she was able to try at her Japanese friend’s house. “I was amazed by flavors I had never tried before and it made me want to experience life in Japan as opposed to only visiting for vacation,” Emmons says with a smile.

In 2010, Emmons’ wish came true when she was cast in a singing role at a major theme park in western Japan. She moved to Osaka and quickly started learning Japanese through conversations with her friends in the entertainment industry. Emmons feels that, “Conversing is the quickest way to learn a language. By listening intently, with your ears attuned to the voices of many different people, you can enjoy experiencing both the language and the culture simultaneously.”

Subsequently, the roles Emmons was cast in expanded to commercials, reality singing competitions, and TV dramas. In 2018, Emmons was cast as the host of a brand new TV show called “*Jon-nobi Japan Heritage*.” The word “Jon-nobi” means “relaxed” or “easy-going” in the Niigata dialect. In the TV program, Emmons visits various Japan Heritage Sites designated by the Agency for Cultural Affairs. In each location, she learns about ancient traditions, architecture, performing arts, agriculture, and often partakes in sumptuous local cuisine. Having visited more than thirty Japan Heritage Sites so far, Emmons says her memories are overflowing with incredible and diverse experiences.

One such experience that remains unforgettable is Iwami-kagura, a traditional performing art in Shimane Prefecture based on Japanese mythology. During the filming of the program Emmons donned a costume and mask and joined the local performance. “I was very nervous, but greatly honored to be a part of such an ancient traditional performing art,” says Emmons. “While I was wearing the mask, I felt a mysterious power flowing through me and when the performance was finished and I removed the mask, I realized my face was covered with sweat and tears. It was a very moving experience unlike anything I’ve felt before.”

Emmons then mentions her wintry afternoon trip down the Mogami River, which flows through Tsuruoka City in Yamagata Prefecture, as another highlight. As a California native with not much exposure to snow, Emmons enjoyed the frosty landscape and local cuisine from a sightseeing boat, while warming herself at a *kotatsu* (a low table with a built-in heating device). “Because Japan has four distinct seasons, there are always changes in nature and seasonal events to look forward to throughout the year. With the “Jon-nobi Japan Heritage” program, I get to see various aspects of Japan’s historical heritage and each experience has left its own unique fingerprint on my life,” says Emmons.

In May 2019, Emmons was appointed Japan Heritage Ambassador by the Agency for Cultural Affairs, in which role it is expected that she will work even more actively as a bridge-builder between Japan and the rest of the world.

Regarding her future plans Emmons divulges, “I am planning to continue working as an actress, but I’m also focused on absorbing unique experiences in Japan and improving my language skills in order to write a bilingual screenplay.” 📖

# Bon Odori Symbol of the Japanese Summer



**Bon Odori, a dance performed every year for centuries by people of all ages across Japan, is for many the highlight of Japan's summertime festivities.**

**ROB GILHOOLY**

A woman clad in *yukata* (summer kimono) skips elegantly around the narrow marble rim of a large circular fountain in Tokyo's Hibiya Park, hands waving gracefully above her head as hundreds of fellow dancers on less slippery terrain below cheer her on.

They had gathered for Bon Odori, a summertime dance festival that's the highlight of a centuries-old Buddhist custom called Obon, which is held annually throughout Japan for the repose of the souls of the deceased.

Despite the solemn roots, there's nothing remotely somber about this and many other Bon Odori events.

Although the dances performed and the music played tend to differ from region to region, typically residents dressed in *yukata* dance around a raised stage known as a *yagura*, which also functions as a bandstand for musicians and singers, who perform mostly traditional Obon music and *minyo* folk songs.

The dances, which take place on streets, inside parks or within temple grounds and usually beneath rows of *chochin* paper lanterns, involve relatively simple steps, with participants of all ages following an imaginary circle.

Dancers on the inside of the circle are often the more seasoned performers, while those with two left feet tend to stick to the outer limits - closer to colorful stalls selling food and beverages.

Typically it's a social event bringing communities together for a drink and chin-wag. But many people are here for one thing only: to dance the night away and, in some cases, carry on until sunrise.

"I love it so much, I simply can't get enough of it," says Kumiko Yamada, a member of a Tokyo-based group preserving traditional Japanese dances. "I go to other Bon Odori events outside of Tokyo, too. I love the lively atmosphere. It's a symbol of Japanese summer."

Bon Odori has its roots in dances called Nembutsu Odori, a Buddhist chanting ritual-cum-dance that dates back to the Kamakura era (1185-1333), according to Bijo Ageha, an expert in Japanese traditional dance who wrote his university thesis on Gujo Odori - one of Japan's "big three" Bon Odori dances.

Nembutsu Odori became an integral part of the Obon



Video by Satoshi Tanaka



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- 1 A woman wearing a *yukata* (summer kimono) dances around the rim of the Hibiya Park fountain
- 2 Young and old dance together

- 3 Bijo Ageha demonstrates a Bon Odori dance
- 4 Performers atop and in front of the traditional *yagura* stage

festival when it began in Japan around 500 years ago, adds Ageha, who is a professor with Japanese Folk Song & Dancing (Public Interest Incorporated) Foundation and also runs the Ageha School of Bon odori dance.

“It’s commonly believed the dance was performed to welcome and console the deceased, while the *yagura* stage was erected to allow deceased ancestors to come down and communicate with the living and enjoy the event together,” he says.

While some places strive to protect traditional dances, others, particularly bigger conurbations like Tokyo, have evolved, with more popular songs supplementing traditional ones.

Meanwhile, the typical musical ensemble - consisting of musicians playing *shamisen* (three-stringed guitar), flutes and other traditional instruments - is frequently replaced by recorded music.

Last year, Ageha was involved in a Bon Odori event in his own community – Tokyo’s Nakano City – that included guest DJs playing disco and rock tracks.

Among them was “Living on a Prayer” by US rock band Bon Jovi and a video of “Bon dance meets Bon Jovi” uploaded to social media was greeted by 150,000 likes and a message of appreciation from band frontman Jon Bon Jovi himself.

“Tokyo residents come from all over Japan so the Bon Odori events tend to be hybrids anyway,” said Yuto Takahashi as he danced with friends during the August dance at Hibiya Park. “Tokyo’s also pretty international, so it seems natural to include songs from other countries, too.”

Indeed the Hibiya event fused songs by popular J-Pop artists being played alongside overseas numbers and what is perhaps the capital’s well-known Bon Odori folk song, Tokyo Gorin Ondo.

That song was originally written for Tokyo’s last Olympic Games in 1964 (*gorin* is Japanese for Olympics), and a new version, with updated lyrics and simplified choreography was recently unveiled in anticipation of the 2020 Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games. Its release was accompanied by a humorous video showing the uninitiated how to perform the Bon dance.

“Song and dance are universal languages, entertainments enjoyed by everyone all over the world regardless of race, gender and status,” says Ageha, adding they are representative of the kind of “Unity in Diversity” to which the Olympics aspires. “I think it would be wonderful if, through Tokyo 2020, a quintessential aspect of Japanese culture could become a part of that global language.” 

The Boso Satoyama Torocco  
sightseeing train

The Kominato  
Railway

# A Trip through *Satoyama* with a Sprinkling of Modern Art

The Kominato Railway line in Chiba Prefecture takes passengers on a trip through age-old *satoyama* farmland, forests and waterfalls, and surprises them with works of modern art.

OSAMU SAWAJI

THE Kominato Railway line connects Goi Station in Ichihara City on the west coast of the Boso Peninsula with Kazusa-Nakano Station in Otaki Town 39.1 km to the south. The journey of one hour and ten minutes passes through beautiful *satoyama* scenery in which mankind has long interacted with the natural environment, although Ichihara is only about an hour from central Tokyo.

The countryside along the line is one of the railway's major attractions, with rapeseed and cherry blossoms ubiquitous in the spring, green rice filling the paddy fields in the summer and forest leaves turning red and yellow in the fall.

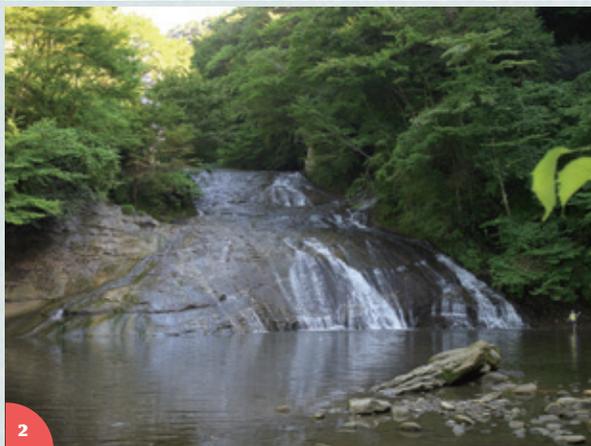
The sightseeing train Boso Satoyama Torocco, which began operating on the line in 2015, enables

passengers to enjoy the cultivated scenery unobstructed, having two observation trolleys with glass ceilings and partially open sides. The train also has two standard carriages and a diesel locomotive modeled on a steam engine that used to run on the line. The train makes two or three round trips a day, four or five days a week mainly during the holidays, between Kazusa-Ushiku Station halfway down the line and Yoroikeikoku Station near the Kazusa-Nakano terminus. The train runs at a slow speed of around 25 kph. Passengers are greeted along the way by station attendants and by pedestrians walking along the line waving and smiling. At Satomi Station, where the train stops for several minutes, local people sell vegetables and other foods and drinks on the platforms on weekends and holidays.





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- 1 A conductor tends to passengers in an open-air trolley
- 2 Awamata no taki waterfall viewed from a Yoroikeikoku valley hiking trail
- 3 Mori-radio Station by Takahito Kimura

for TV commercials and dramas.

There are a variety of sightseeing spots along the Kominato Railway line. The Yoroikeikoku valley is a popular destination for leisure activities such as hot spring bathing, hiking and camping. A number of large and small waterfalls can be seen from the hiking track along the Yoro River. Awamata no taki, one of these waterfalls, flows gently down a rock surface about 100 meters long and looks beautiful against the background of red leaves from late November to early December.

Art is another attraction of the Kominato Railway line. The international art festival Ichihara Art × Mix was held in Ichihara City in 2014 and 2017 with locations along the line serving as the main venues. At these art festivals, art projects utilizing local resources such as a disused elementary school, station buildings, cars, nature and food, were implemented with the aim of revitalizing the local communities. Some of the works exhibited at past art festivals have become fixtures in the local communities. *Mori-radio Station*, for example, which adjoins Tsukizaki Station, is a work created by artist Takahito Kimura at the art festival in 2014. The roof and walls of a building formerly used by railway workers are covered with more than sixty types of wild grass and moss. The roof has a window of polarized glass, and on sunny days light pours into the room in the colors of the rainbow.

*Toilet in Nature* by Sou Fujimoto, a world-famous architect, is a work located close to Itabu Station. The installation features a glass toilet cubicle behind high black fences on a roofless site of about 200 square meters. Cherry, plum and rapeseed flowers bloom on the site in spring. The toilet is for women only.

Ichihara Art × Mix 2020 will be held again as part of the Japan Cultural Expo from March to May 2020. Trains on the Kominato Railway line, which will transport passengers through satoyama during this spring blossom season, will themselves seem like works of art. **1**

Courtesy of JA Kushimashi Otsuka

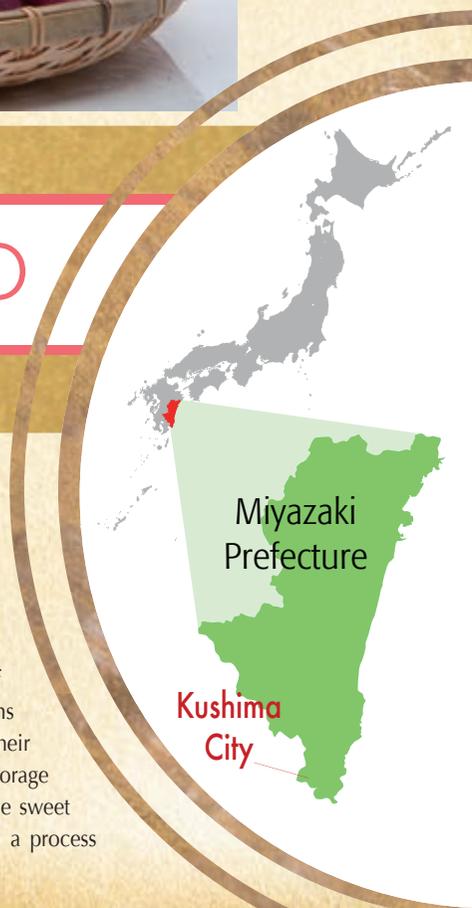


GI JAPAN PRODUCTS

# SWEET POTATO

## Yamadai Kansho

**Y**amadai Kansho is a brand of sweet potato produced in Kushima City, Miyazaki Prefecture, by farmers of the Kushima City Otsuka Agricultural Cooperative. The vegetable, first cultivated only fifty years ago, is considered a local treasure and nicknamed the “red diamond” because of its shiny red skin. The tuber is also distinguished by its soft, chewy texture and subtle sweetness when cooked. The Yamadai Kansho cultivation area in Miyazaki Prefecture is warm with long hours of sunlight, while the volcanic ash soil has excellent drainage — ideal conditions for producing sweet potatoes. Over the years, the local farmers have honed their production and distribution techniques, including establishing a winter storage facility that enables them to ship Yamadai Kansho throughout the year. The sweet potatoes are carefully sorted and cleaned one by one before distribution, a process which includes the removal by hand of their fibrous roots.



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