

— THE INSIDER'S —

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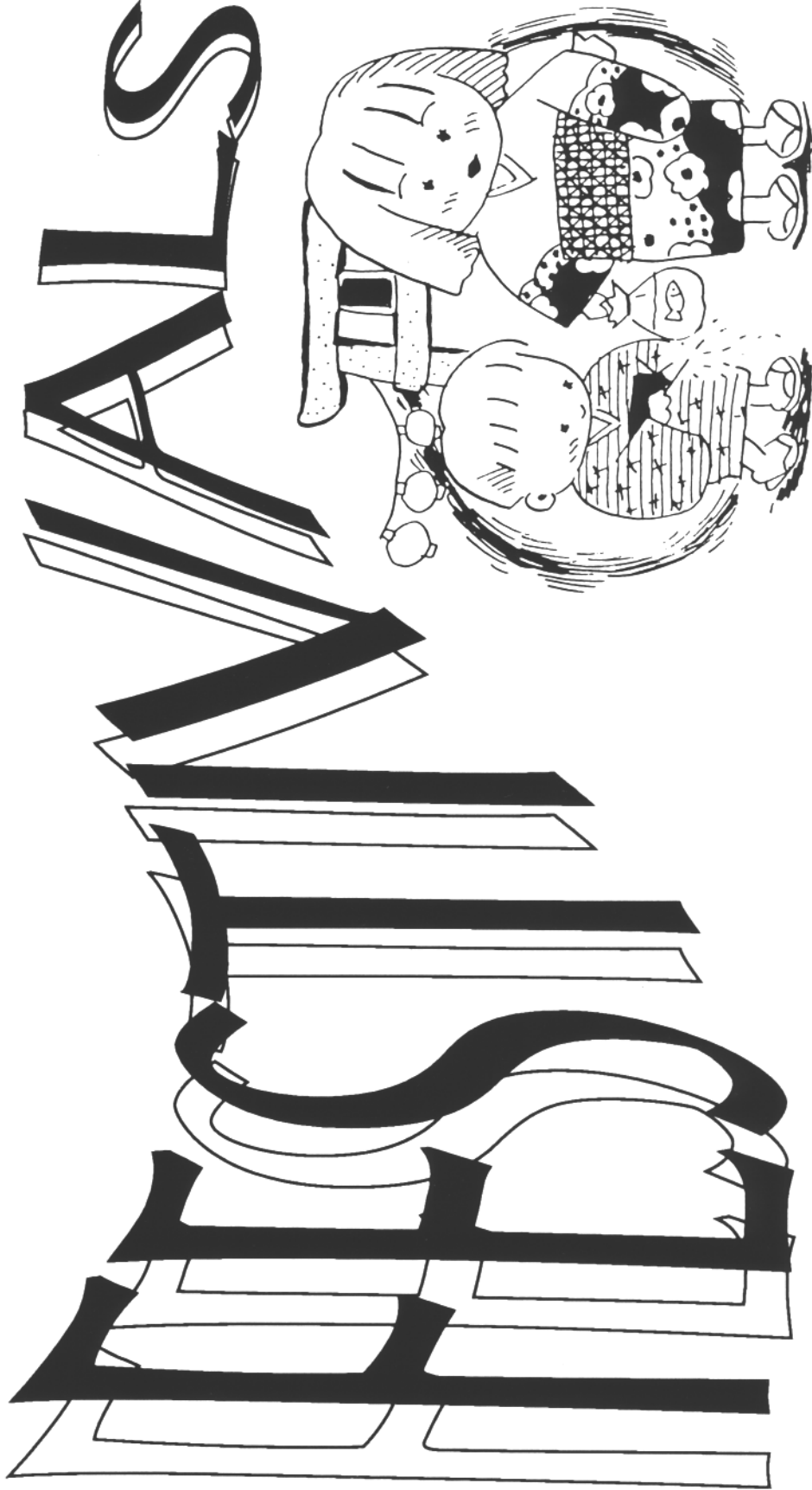
RAMAZAN

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We hope you enjoy this compilation of 33 of our most popular cover stories from "The Insider." The stories offer just a glimpse into the fascinating country of Japan, a country rich in history, culture and natural beauty. "The Insider" is printed as a free

service by Misawa Insatsu Co., Ltd. as a weekly publication for the Misawa Air Base community. Information (prices and driving instructions) contained in this publication are current as of August 1993.



HIROSAKI SNOW LANTERN FESTIVAL

By John P. Smith

Winter in northern Japan means snow festival time. And every year Misawans swarm to the island of Hokkaido to either take part in, or just visit the city of Sapporo during the Snow Festival held there each February.

However, in light of all the hype, excitement and advertisement of the Sapporo Snow Festival – generally acknowledged as the monster of snow sculpture shows – a less expensive alternative often goes unnoticed.

The Hirosaki Snow Lantern Festival, held each year during the month of February, is a smaller version of the Sapporo festival.

While the Hirosaki festival is called the Snow Lantern Festival, it has, like Sapporo's festival, snow sculptures and ice carvings by

some of the world's foremost ice carvers.

The festival is held in beautiful Hirosaki Park. Hirosaki Castle provides a picturesque background for the frozen forms of art. The park, complete with castle, moat and guard towers from times past, is located right in the middle of the industrial and farming city of Hirosaki.

In the summertime, paths and roads winding through the park are surrounded by cherry and apple trees and cool, dark-green firs. Depending on the time of the year, the cherry and apple trees may cover the ground with petals from full, white and pink blossoms.



In February however, with the coming of snow to northern Honshu, the trails and paths of the city are covered in a winter coat of white.

During the Snow Festival, the paths are lined with intricately carved lanterns – each derived from a block of snow supplied by the city.

Schools, businesses and civic groups all carve their own snow lanterns for lighting the night of the festival.

On the night of the lighting, each lantern must be complete, with an electric light inside to illuminate the colored panels of the lantern faces. The electric lights are used in

lieu of the candles of old.

However, candles are still used in the lighted ice caves built in another part of the park by friends and relatives as monuments to the deceased.

These ice caves are also part of the snow lantern festival.

In addition to the lighted lanterns, a display of ice and snow carvings can be found in the park.

Also, ice carvings can be found in the park in a roped-off area near the snow sculptures.

Overall, the Hirosaki Snow Lantern Festival can be a great adventure for the whole family. It can provide all the excitement of a larger festival, yet can be seen in just a day. And for those who can brave the cold of the evening, the lantern-lit park lined with flickering flames provides a beautiful setting.

ENBURI FARMER'S FESTIVAL

By Larry Armstrong

While a blanket of snow may cover the soil of Northern Honshu, and the farmer's tool – his hoes, picks and shovels – may be put away until spring, the harvests of the past and those of the future, are not forgotten.

Each year the many farmers in this rich agricultural area take part in a festival in which they thank their gods for the harvests they've had, and pray for good crops in the coming years.

Enburi, which takes its name from that of a farmer's tool used to cultivate the soil, is celebrated in Hachinohe, Kamikita and

Sannohe every year from February 17 to 20. Exact origins of the festival are not known, but it is believed to have begun about 800 years ago. Today it is recognized as an important cultural asset by the national government.

Enburi is a dance ritual that in the past was performed by women dressed in men's clothing, but nowadays is performed by the men themselves. The various groups of dancers make their way down Hachinohe's main shopping street in a lively and colorful parade.

Originally, each group included a leader, three to five lord stewards, several dancers,

a flag bearer, a pair of drummers, two flute players and two miniature cymbal players, but today the groups are normally smaller.

Members wear tall hats called *eboshi*. In the olden days, these hats were worn by nobles as part of their court dress. Today, the decorative hats depict farming scenes and have become so tall that the dancers must tie them in place with a chin harness. The *eboshi* wearer is meant to signify a horse. Colored paper streamers at the top of the hat signify the horse's mane.

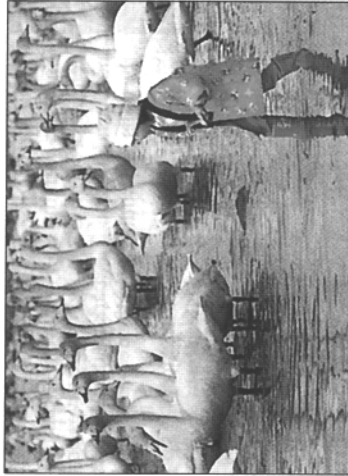
Various chants and prayers can be heard throughout the festival, while traditional folk dances are performed.



Following the parade, the participants scatter to their own districts or neighborhoods, visiting residents and dancing in front of their homes or stores. Normally the people inside will offer the group's leader some money wrapped in paper. This will encourage the dancers to perform longer, since they are dancing to thank the gods for the occupant's health, happiness and prosperity ... renewing hopes before another farming season begins.

SHIMODA SWAN FESTIVAL

The Annual Shimoda Park Swan Festival is held in early March in nearby Shimoda Town. The festival is held each year in an attempt to teach nature awareness and to stress the need for wildlife protection.



April, the swans conduct "flight ops" for up to one week prior to take-off in order to strengthen their wings for the long journey home. For those young swans who can't quite stay in the air

long enough, the swan families will prolong their stay until baby can make the return flight to Siberia.

Nearly 500 swans make the annual visit to the Shimoda Park from their home in Siberia. Due to their lengthy stay, from mid-October to early

The Japan Wild Bird Association visits the area each year to observe the beautiful and graceful "messengers of peace."

Festival events normally include opening ceremonies, followed by courtesy cups of Shimoda's wantan soup and *amazake* (sweet sake), photo contest, bird-watching, swan impersonation contest (costumes provided – just bring the personality!), swan calling contest, and a singing contest. Food and souvenir booths are also set up throughout the day.

Donations are taken throughout the day for bird feed – or you can bring your own bird feed – an all-time favorite is popcorn! Shimoda Park is just a 15 minute drive

from Misawa and offers a picnic area, a short nature trail and a small fishing pond. Don't forget to bring a sled ... nearby is a great playground for the kids, perfect for sledding.

How to get there

Go straight out the POL (Falcon) Gate, make no turns. In approximately 12 minutes, you will come to a traffic signal and Rt. 45. (At the halfway point, there's a home for the elderly on the left with a "Shimoda Swan Day" sign in front of it.) Turn left onto Rt. 45 and follow the signs (also in English) to the Festival which will be a left turn just a short way onto Rt. 45.

CHERRY BLOSSOM FESTIVAL

More than 1,500 cherry blossom trees shower the lanes around Hiroasaki Castle with their beautiful pink petals every April. Drinking in the colors of spring, visitors from near and far welcome the new spring season and bring a festive atmosphere to the castle park.

The Hiroasaki Cherry Blossom Festival is normally held the last week of April through the first week of May.

Hiroasaki City was once the location of the Tsugaru Clan who, along with the Nambu Clan of Morioka, divided northern Honshu. Tsugaru Tamenobu selected Hiroasaki as the site for the family castle in 1603 when, after many hard battles, he won the area. But it was his son, Nobuhiro, who actually laid the foundation plans for the city.



The *Saishin Gojunoto* (five-story pagoda) was completed in 1668 under the fourth Tsugaru lord, and was built to honor the warriors who died in battles to unite the Tsugaru district.

Hiroasaki is also the center of the richest apple-producing region in Japan. Over 70% of the apple crops of the nation are grown in the Hiroasaki area.

How to get there

Option 1: Go out the main gate to the second traffic light, then turn right. Continue on this road to Nagasakiya Department Store, then turn right onto the shopping street (Green Pole Road), coming back toward the base. At the first traffic light, turn left. (You will pass Misawa Insatsu on your left!) After approximately 18 kilometers you will see a blue sign in Japanese over the road denoting the Michinoku Toll Road.

At the next traffic light, turn left. You will cross a bridge over some railroad tracks, then you will go up a small hill past a pachinko parlor on your left hand side. About 250 yards after the pachinko parlor, there will be a turn to the right with another blue sign for the Michinoku Toll

Road. Turn right at this intersection.

You will cross another long bridge spanning a valley. Continue on this road and you will eventually come to an intersection where you will meet Route 4.

Continue straight through the intersection, crossing Route 4. This is the entrance to the expressway. The only toll gate is on the Aomori end of the expressway. When you get to it, pay the toll and continue

straight until you come to a "T" intersection. Turn left at the "T," and at the second traffic light you will come to a "Y" intersection.

Bear right at the "Y" and you will come to Route 4. Turn left onto Route 4 and you will go straight into the downtown section of Aomori. Once in downtown Aomori, you will see a green sign for the Tohoku

Expressway (also a toll road). Follow the signs, enter the expressway. Exit the expressway at the Kuroishi Exit on Route 102 and follow the directions to Hirosaki City

Option 2: Go out of the main gate to the second traffic light, then turn right.

Continue on this road to Nagasakiya Department Store, then turn right onto Green Pole Road, coming back toward the base. At the first traffic light, turn left. (You will pass Misawa Insatsu on the left!) After approximately 18 kilometers you will see a blue sign in Japanese over the road denoting the Michinoku Toll Road. At the next traffic light, continue straight. You will go through several small villages and eventually come

to Route 4. Turn right onto Route 4, and continue straight into Aomori.

In the middle of Aomori, Route 4 turns into Route 7. Follow Route 7 until you come to Route 102. Turn right onto Route 102 and take this road into Hirosaki City.

Note: Option 2 normally takes about 30–40 minutes longer, but involves no toll roads. During the festival, parking is limited, so be sure to get an early start. Drive safely and have a great time!

By Dale and Loma Geesaman

Horses have been an important part of everyday life for the people of Tohoku for hundreds of years. Once a year on June 15th, the farmers from the area around Morioka celebrate the end of the rice planting season with their horses.

In the morning, they assemble at the Sozen Shrine in Takizawa. The farming families, dressed in their traditional ethnic style clothing, decorate their horses in brightly colored trappings with many bells. The horses are then led to the shrine one by one to pray before beginning their 15 km pilgrimage.

Large crowds of people line the streets to watch the single file procession of horses as they make their way to the Hachiman Shrine in central Morioka. Meanwhile, at the Hachiman Shrine, festivities are already underway featuring traditional music and dances performed by various groups to celebrate the occasion. The grand finale to the festival is the arrival of the horses. They are led in a large circle around the plaza in front of the shrine and then tied to the fence railing around the plaza. The families assemble near their horses for a Japanese-

style picnic lunch. Prayers are offered for the success of the rice crop and appreciation is shown for the horses before they are loaded on trucks for their trip home.

How to get there

There are several routes you can take to get to the festival area in Morioka, depending on the amount of time and money you are willing to spend and the type of scenery you would like to view along the way. The fastest but most expensive is to take the expressway. This is a toll road that costs approximately ¥3,000 each way.

To take this route, depart the base through the POL gate. If your car has a trip odometer, reset it to zero as you leave the gate.

Continue straight until you reach the intersection with Route 45 (11 km on your trip odometer). Turn left and follow Route 45 towards Hachinohe. You will have to make a right turn at 14.3 km where Route 338

intersects with Route 45 and another right at 17.8 km to get on the recently constructed highway. Both of these intersections have traffic lights and are easy to find.

At 22.9 kilometers you will be at an intersection with a four-lane street. Turn right and watch for the Hachinohe Express-



way signs, which are green and white suspended above the street. At approximately 26 km you will be crossing a long bridge, you should merge to the right lane to prepare for a right turn onto Route 104 at 26.7 km. Merge to the left lane on this road as soon as possible and turn left at 27.2 km onto the expressway access road.

Exit left off this access road, proceed through the toll gate, receiving your toll ticket and enter the expressway. Follow the Hachinohe Expressway to the Tohoku Expressway. This highway will remind you of the interstate highways in America. It travels through a high mountainous region

and offers beautiful scenery and many breathtaking views.

When the Hachinohe Expressway merges with the Tohoku Expressway, follow the signs for Morioka. Exit the Tohoku Expressway at Exit 42. After you pass through the toll gate and pay your toll, follow the signs for Morioka. This will put you on Route 46. Follow Route 46 to the intersection with Route 4. Signs in English are plentiful in this area.

Turn right on Route 4. Reset your trip odometer at this intersection. Follow Route 4 for 4.2 kilometers. You will turn right at a traffic light at the bottom of a large gradual hill. (This intersection is marked by a sign showing Route 106 to the left.) Proceed on this street approximately .3 km to the first traffic light and turn left. This street passes in front of the Hachiman Shrine on your left.

To avoid the expense of the expressway and see the quaint countryside and small villages, follow Route 104 to Route 4 (40.5 km from the gate). Turn left on Route 4 and follow it to Morioka. Follow above directions from the intersection of Routes 4 and 46.

MORIOKA CHAGU-CHAGU

SHIMOKITA FESTIVALS

Scenic Shimokita is a spectacular place to experience the unspoiled natural environment, along with a culture rich in tradition.

In addition to its abundant agriculture, natural hot springs and fisheries, Shimokita is also known for its annual festivals. The following are just three of the popular summer festivals held in the region.

Osorezan Grand Festival

The festival is held from July 20 ~ 24 near Mutsu City. It is a solemn religious festival during which worshippers from near and far come to the mystical mountain of Osorezan in hopes of making contact with departed loved ones through *Itako* (female mediums).

Visitors to Osorezan are startled by the smell and steam bubbling up from the desolate volcanic landscape. Acidic Lake Usori lies nearby, along with four sulfurous hot spring spas to the north. Piles of rocks

are stacked by Buddhist pilgrims and bright pinwheels spin in the breeze in memory of deceased children.

This "Mecca for Mystics" is located in central Shimokita.

Ohminato Nebuta Festival

Held in the beginning of August, the Mutsu City festival has a history dating back over 100 years.

The entire city comes alive as gigantic floats and thousands of dancers parade through the streets of Ohminato (port area). Young men pull the dazzling floats made of lumber, bamboo, wire and paper. The themes of the floats are chosen from Kabuki, historical characters or legends.

Costumed dancers wear colorful *Yukata* (summer kimono) and fancy hats decorated with paper flowers. They dance to the



ancient rhythms of flutes and drums, keeping the tradition alive year after year.

Tanabu Festival

The Tanabu Festival is the largest festival in Shimokita. It started approx. 350 years

ago. Floats are paraded through the streets of the Tanabu area of Mutsu City with dancers and onlookers joining in the fun.

The first floats were made in Kyoto during the Edo Era. Each float was built to represent a god and was decorated with holy ornaments.

During the festival, thousands of people dressed in *Yukata* and *Hanten* (festival dress) visit Tanabu Shrine, the central focus of the festival.

The festival begins on August 18 and reaches its climax on the evening of August 20. Come out and join in the fun!

Whether you attend the festivals or just take a scenic drive around the picturesque coast, Shimokita is a definite "must" for the visitor in Japan.

(Information and map courtesy of Mutsu International Relations Association (MIRA) and its president, Satoshi Tomioka)



Fireworks are the plan of the day at the Lake Towada Festival normally held for two days in mid-July. Food and game booths operate throughout both days, with a fireworks display on the lake beginning at approx. 8 p.m.

The festival commemorates the lake's designation as a

national park. Traffic is usually very congested, so visitors are advised to get there before dusk.

How to get there

Go out the main gate, turn right at the second traffic light, and pass Nagasakiya. After passing the Misawa train station, follow the road to a Y-intersection. Turn left and stay on that road. At approximately 10km from Misawa, you will see Daiet department store and the Towada City train station on your left. Turn left at the traffic light. You will then be on Route 4.

Two blocks from that point you will see the Route 102 sign. Turn right and follow the 102 signs. About 38km from there you will enter Towada National Park. There are detailed signs telling you how to get to the lake. Driving time from Misawa (in moderate traffic) is about 1 hour and 40 minutes.

A lakeside legend...

Once upon a time, about 2,000 years ago, a high lord named Tachibana Chunagon-Michitada lived in Kyoto. After a political conflict, he disappeared from his



hometown.

He left his two beautiful daughters orphaned, since their mother had died when they were very young.

One autumn day, a traveler from Michinoku (northern Japan) came to Kyoto with news that Michitada was alive and

TANABATA

Tanabata is unique among Japanese festivals as it is a celebration of love. This legend of love, originating from China and introduced to Japan in the seventh century, has appealed to people's romantic sentiments for hundreds of years.

As the story goes, two stars - Altair the Cowherd and Vega the Weaver Princess - were deeply in love. However, they let their love interfere with their heavenly duties thereby incurring the wrath of the King of Stars. As punishment, the king banished the two stars to opposite sides of the Milky Way, allowing them to meet only once a year to renew their love.

During the seventh month of every year, a festival is held in dedication of the meeting of the two stellar lovers. During the festival, romantic poems are written on long strips of paper and hung on decorated bamboo cuttings around homes and

well and living in the north. Upon hearing the good news, the daughters left Kyoto in search of their father.

After six months of exhausting travel, they arrived in Michinoku. There was no trace of their father. The girls continued to Ogasawara where they spent the night at a farmer's home near a river.

Late that night, they were awakened by a voice. It was their father's voice calling out to them! They followed the sound of his voice down the river. It led them to two deserted swamps.

Michitada was living on the opposite side of the swamps. Longing to see his daughters again, every night he wandered near the swamps calling out their names.

His daughters came to the edge of the swamps, but in the darkness could not see

their father on the other side. They believed his voice was coming from the swamp itself, and entered the dark waters. They soon encountered a 20-foot shark, which attacked them. The girls next found themselves in the heavens, together having been transformed into a huge snake.

The snake made its way back to the swamp waters and a great fight ensued between it and the shark. When it was over, the snake (and the daughters' love for their father) had won.

In their new form however, the daughters could not meet with their father, but were content to live in the swamp to be near him.

The swamps became known as Anenuma (Elder Sister Swamp) and Imoto-numa (Younger Sister Swamp), and today they border what we call Lake

Ogasawara. (The road to Security Hill on base passes by these swamps.)

An annual festival is held in July to celebrate the legend and the official opening of the Lake Ogasawara city beach. A crowd of over 50,000 is usually on hand to welcome Misawa's summer season and participate in the various events at the beach. Highlights of the festival have been the Japanese-American Miss Ogasawara contest, children's sumo, a clam dig and water sports.

Food and drink booths operate along the beach, and nearby is plenty of space to picnic.

Parking is available near the beachside and also near the tennis courts located in the lakeside park. The beach is most easily accessible for Misawa Air Base residents through the Base Beach Gate.

outside of businesses and offices. In addition, children are encouraged to write their special wishes on the strips of paper.

Some of the festive decorations have become quite large in size through the years, but the traditional symbolic

forms have remained the same. Some of these folded miniature symbols include: paper cranes, which symbolize long life;

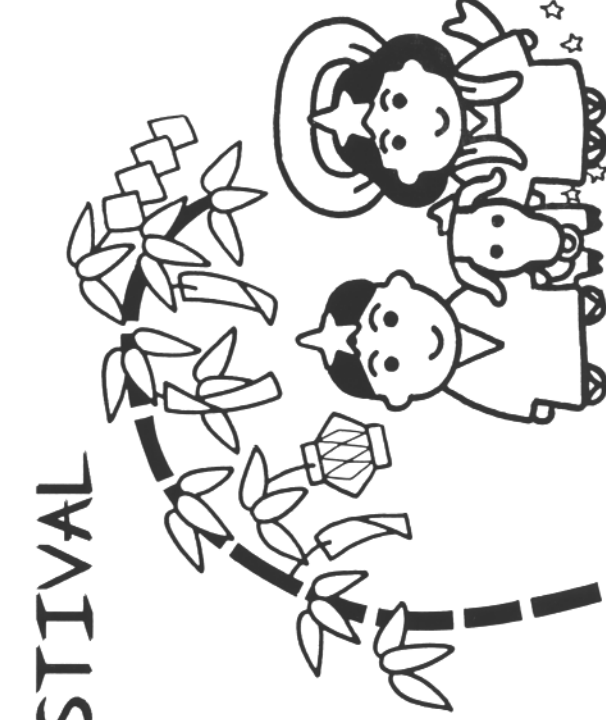
paper fishing nets, which symbolize hopes for plentiful catches; and paper kimonos, in hopes of improving weaving or sewing

skills.

The colorful festival is held throughout Japan during the month of July. Hachinohe's Tanabata Festival is held in mid-July. Misawa's Tanabata Festival is usually scheduled for the second to last weekend in July. Festivities are held along Green Pole Road and on the road directly out of the Misawa Air Base main gate. The roads will be closed to traffic during the festival.

For camera buffs, photo opportunities abound as the brightly colored decorations are suspended over city streets. Nighttime is just as colorful as the decorations are illuminated and many Japanese wear their traditional summer kimono, or *yukata*.

Food and game booths will be open during the days and evenings. Other activities are also planned for the three-day event.



KAPPA FESTIVAL

Ancient Japanese folklore tells of a three foot tall, forty pound water elf called "Kappa." The kappa's most marked characteristic is the top of his head which is shaped like a concave dish. Within this cavity is the source of his strength. When it is filled with water, the kappa becomes stronger than any mortal man. He is also able to change colors as a chameleon does, and has webbed fingers and toes.

Kappas are believed to live in small rivers or ponds, but exist on a diet of cucumbers rather than fish. They occasionally come out of the water to cause mischief, normally during the hours of darkness or in the shade of trees. If the water in the kappa's dish-like head begins to evaporate, he immediately begins to weaken in strength, therefore he tries to avoid sunlight.

Kappas love to wrestle and will challenge anyone - man, woman or child. If you are ever challenged, here are two tips to follow: First, shake your whole body vigorously, including your head. The kappa will imitate you, thereby spilling the water from his head.

Along with the water goes his strength, thus making his defeat inevitable. Another option is to bow graciously and accept his challenge. Being an extremely polite water elf, the kappa will return your bow, again losing his empowering water.



Nowadays, many people believe that the image of the kappa was originally created to educate and discipline children regarding water safety. Young people are told of the mythical elf's love of children

and that while the children are swimming or playing in the water, the kappa may try to wrestle with them. Sometimes the kappa tends to get overzealous and pulls the child

down into the water. So, to be on the safe side, a child should always have mom or dad around to supervise water activities.

Along with being mischievous, the kappa is known as a grateful creature. It has been told that after helping a kappa in need, a person may find fresh fish mysteriously left at their home.

The ancient legend of the kappa lives on as the Annual Komaki Kappa Festival is held during the last weekend in July at Komaki Grand Hotel, located near the Misawa City Train Station. The festival consists of brightly costumed performers, singers and dragons. It normally includes a wedding procession and a dragon-bearer battle on the resort's man-made lake.

(Information provided by Susmi Graul and Masashi Morita)

HACHINOHE 3-SHRINE FESTIVAL

Along the Japan Railroad Hachinohe Line, there is a Shinto shrine called Ogeami Jinija. Long ago, the first lord of Hachinohe, who came from Morioka in Iwate Prefecture, often visited that shrine in which was housed a statue of the god of farming. It was believed that by praying to the enshrined god, a good harvest would be ensured.

In 1721, the statue of the god was brought to another location called Chojasan for viewing. The god was carried in a gorgeous portable shrine and the people held a three-day festival in celebration along the transport route. At the end of the festival, the god was carried back to

the original home shrine. That parade and festival were the origin of what was to become one of the most spectacular festivals in the northern district of Tohoku. The festival is called the Hachinohe Sansha Taisai (Three Shrine Festival). It is said by some to be the number one festival of floats in Japan.

The history of the grand festival continued to grow, when in 1824 the commander of the Nambu Clan decided to make the parade even more elaborate by ordering his warriors to take part in it. He also asked that a group of Tiger Dancers from a neighboring village join in.

Later, a third shrine, called Shinmeigu,

became part of the festival and the festival was then known as the Three Shrine Festival. The parade reminds many people today of the scenes found in historical picture scrolls.

The three-day event is usually held during the last week in July. The primary attraction of the parade are the festival floats, which are made by the residents of the various sections of the city. Every year there are more than 25 beautifully decorated floats. The scenes they depict are based on mythology, legends, fairy tales and Kabuki plays. Guiding the floats



along their path are happy children wearing colorful yukata (light-weight summer kimono) who are accompanied by musicians playing drums and flutes. Also taking part in the parade are warrior-clad men, and many others dressed in traditional costumes unique to the Tohoku area.

In addition to the floats, the parade also features:

Tengu: The long-nosed guide who led the gods from heaven to Japan.

Ogura: A group of court musicians that accompany the Karashishi (lion dancers).

Omikoshi: A portable shrine carried by oxen or men.

Nobori: Banners carrying warriors' crests and flags portraying the 12 animals of the oriental zodiac.

The floats are judged by various city

officials and prizes are awarded for the best. They are then passed on to surrounding communities, sometimes undergoing minor repairs or changes, thus becoming the center of other colorful and historic celebrations.

NEPUTA AND NEBUTA FESTIVALS

Hirosaki Neputa Festival

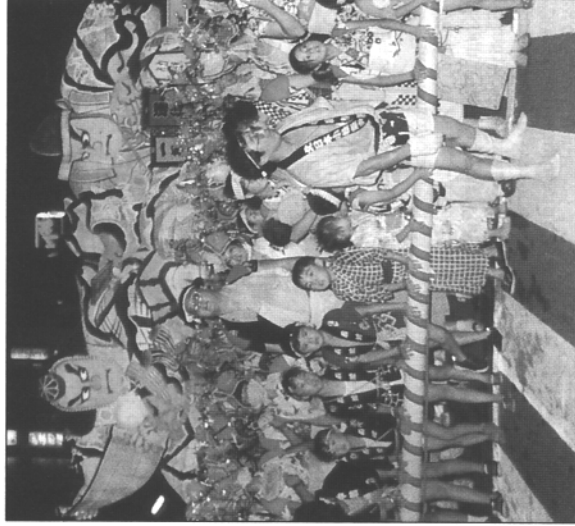
During the first week of August, the nights of Hirosaki are filled with the color and sound of the Neputa Festival. From tiny Neputa for children, which are less than 90 cm (three feet high), to giant Neputa that are pulled by hundreds of people, they all form a brilliant parade that jams the streets of Hirosaki. The splendor of the illuminated fan-shaped floats and haunting melody of the flutes and drums leave a deep impression on every visitor. The oldest official record of Neputa Festival dates from 1713, during the rule of the Tsugaru Lord, Nobuhisa. It is believed to have originated from early folk festivals, during which people paraded with lighted lanterns and expressed their wishes for a good harvest. But though this festival brightens up the brief hot summer nights of the north country, it is tinged with a touch of sadness, for the end of Neputa is also a sure sign that the chilly days of Tsugaru autumn will be just around the corner.

Aomori Nebuta Festival

Welcome to the biggest event of Aomori City, the Nebuta Festival. This annual event, representative of the flavor and color of all Japan has grown each year, so that it has become the largest event in all of the Tsugaru District. The festival takes place in early August.

There are many theories about the origin of the Nebuta Festival. One is that it is said to have originated after the subjugation of rebels in this district by General Tamuramaro in the early 800s. He had his army create large creatures, called "nebuta," to frighten the enemy.

Another theory is that the Nebuta Festival is a development of the "Tanabata Festival" in China. One of the customs during this festival was "toro" floating. A "toro" is a wooden frame box wrapped with Japanese paper. The Japanese light a candle inside the "toro" and put it out to float onto the river or into the sea. The purpose behind this is to purify themselves and send the evil spirits out to sea. "Toro" floating is still one of the most impressive and beautiful sights during the summer nights of the Japanese festivals. On the final night, "toro" floating is accompanied by a large display of colorful fireworks. This is said to be the origin of the Nebuta Festival. Gradually these floats grew in size, as did the festivities, until they became the size they are now.



Many Aomori citizens are involved in the building of these beautiful floats. The "artists" create their designs, patterned after historical people or themes. Development of these themes takes place immediately after the previous year's festivities come to a close. Consequently, it takes the entire year, first in the development, then in the construction of the Nebuta float. In spite of the extensive amount of time and money put into these floats, the financial remuneration for them is quite low. The actual cost of one of these floats averages ¥10,000,000. Only about ¥4,000,000 of these material costs and personal expenses are actually reimbursed. However, the personal reward of viewing a finished masterpiece is greater than any financial reward could ever be.

One of the reasons for the popularity of the Nebuta Festival is the free participation of many Aomori citizens. The sounds of the Nebuta drums and bamboo flutes inspire people to prepare costumes and begin practice of the Nebuta dances. As the beginning of the parade is signaled, "haneto", Nebuta dancers join hand-in-hand and begin their journey through the streets of Aomori. These dancers, colorfully arrayed in Nebuta garb, welcome audience participation. Feel free to join in a circle and enjoy the festivities!

(Information courtesy of Aomori City.)

MISAWA PORT FESTIVAL

A great way to spend a hot summer day is on the oceanfront. And that's just where the action is in early September when Misawa's Fishing Port hosts its annual Port Festival (Minato Matsuri). The festival usually begins at 10:00 in the morning with great bargains on fresh fish. A variety of other events including a fishing boat race, fish grab contest, karaoke and a harbor parade are scheduled throughout the two-day festival. Food and game booth operators can also be found lining the pier, selling everything from squid on a stick to cotton candy!



The last event of the festival is a fireworks display over the ocean, normally beginning at 7:00 in the evening.

How to get there

Go out the POL Gate. Turn left at the second stop light. Follow this road until it ends at a T-intersection. This is Route 338. In *approximately* 6 kilometers, Misawa Port (Misawa Minato) will be on the left. The drive normally takes 10-15 minutes, but be advised that traffic is very congested during the festival.

CHRYSANTHEMUM & CULTURE FESTIVALS

Chrysanthemum Festival

In celebration of Japan's national flower and its emperor's official crest, chrysanthemum festivals are held annually allowing growers to exhibit the products of their gardening skills as well as having the plants judged for their beauty.

The main attraction at these festivals are dolls covered in chrysanthemums. The sometimes larger-than-life size dolls are decorated and arranged to form scenes from popular television shows, kabuki plays and well-known people. The creation of these dolls requires considerable artistic talent in order to harmonize the colors of the flowers, thereby giving "life" to the figures.

Local festivals are held in Hiroasaki and Hachinohe for approximately two weeks in autumn. The Hiroasaki festival is held on the grounds of Hiroasaki Castle Park from mid-

October through the first part of November during daylight hours. Entrance fees are 600 yen for adults and 300 yen for children.

The Hachinohe festival is a smaller version of Hiroasaki's and is held at Nagane Koen (Nah-gah-nay Koh-en), near Nagane Skate Rink. It is also held from mid-October through early November. Entrance fees are 300 yen for adults and 200 yen for school-age children.

* "Chrysanthemum Festival" is *Kiku Matsuri* (Kee-koo Maht-soo-ree) in Japanese.

Culture Festival

November 3rd is a national holiday in Japan, recognizing the unique culture of this country. The majority of cities and towns hold festivals in celebration. Displays and exhibits of the traditional arts, including *bonisai* (dwarfed trees), *ikchama*

(flower arranging), painting, pottery, tea ceremony and calligraphy.

The performing arts are also highlighted, with performances of ballet, traditional dance, and other musical shows. Bazaars, sporting events, agricultural competition and children's activities are included in Misawa City's Culture Festival held annually during the first week of November. Normally a three-day event, it is held in the City Park, City Gym and Civic Center.



SHIMODA SALMON FESTIVAL

The annual Shimoda Salmon Festival is held in late November at the Shimoda Town Public Skate Rink. It is a two-day festival, normally held on the weekend.

Events include three rounds of salmon catching each day. The rink is stocked with 1,000 salmon from nearby Otrase River. Tickets must be purchased for this event. Advance tickets were ¥1,300 in 1992 and tickets purchased at the festival were ¥1,500. Each ticket is good for one salmon. If you can't grab your own salmon, don't feel bad - no one walks away empty-handed. Wading boots and gloves are also available to rent.

Another popular event at the festival is a contest in which participants try to climb up slippery tatami mats, a human version of the salmon's seasonal swim upstream.

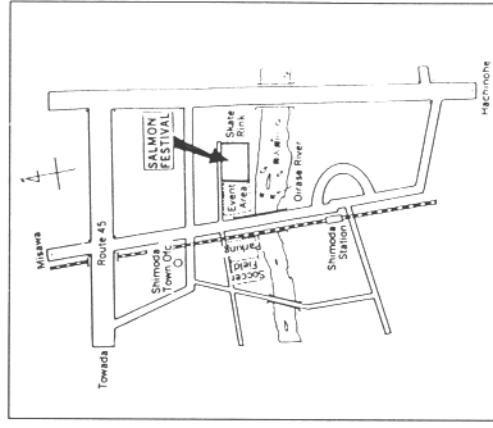


Traditional folk dancers make an appearance, along with the well-known Hachinohe Drum Group. There is also a fresh vegetable sale, mini market, salmon taster's fair, handicraft sale, a salmon-catching technique contest, fireworks and more.

There is ample parking and the festival takes place rain or shine.

How to get there

Go out the POL Gate and continue straight. This road will intersect with another main road. Turn left and continue straight. Continue across Route 45. The festival will be on the left once you enter Shimoda Town.

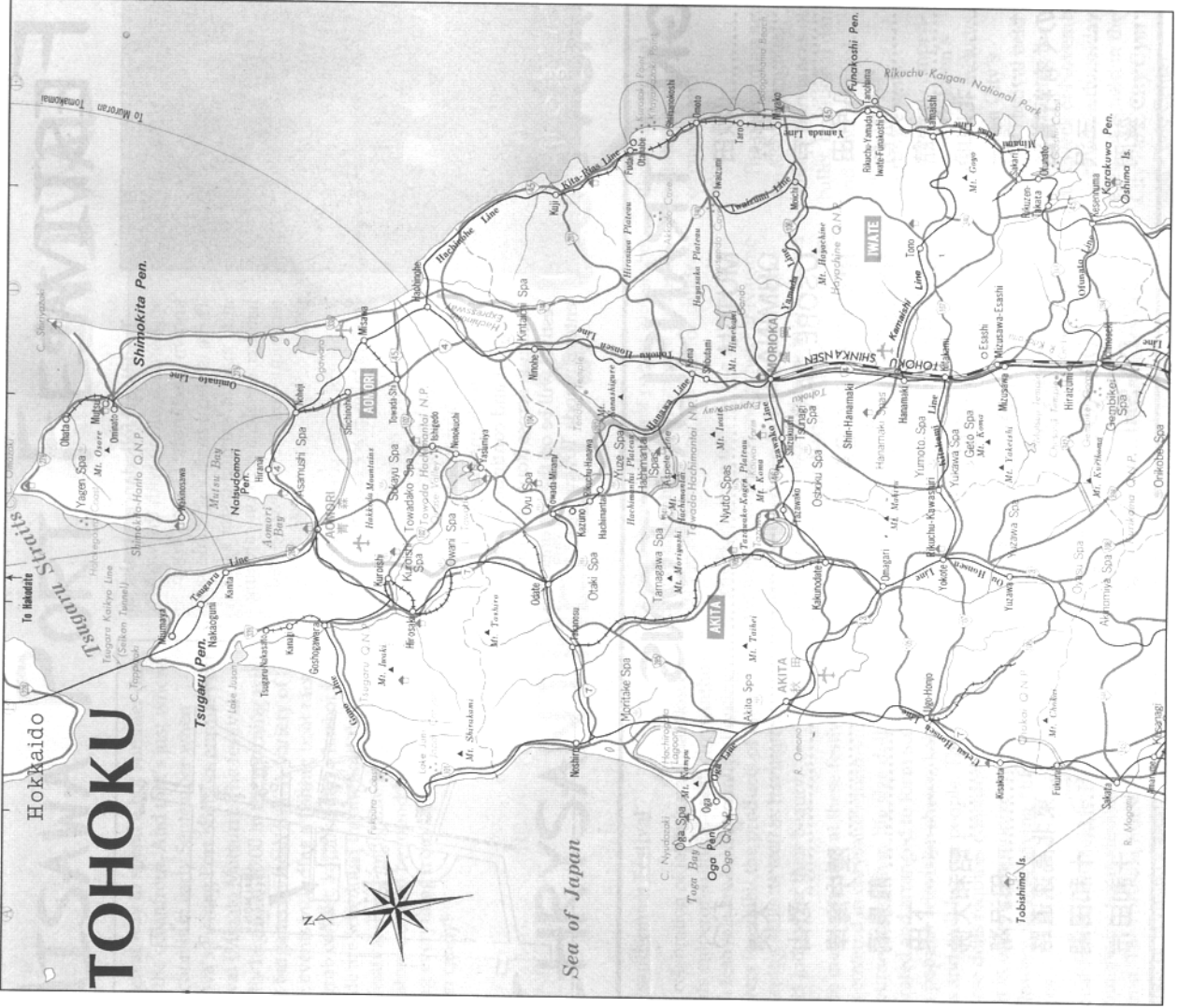
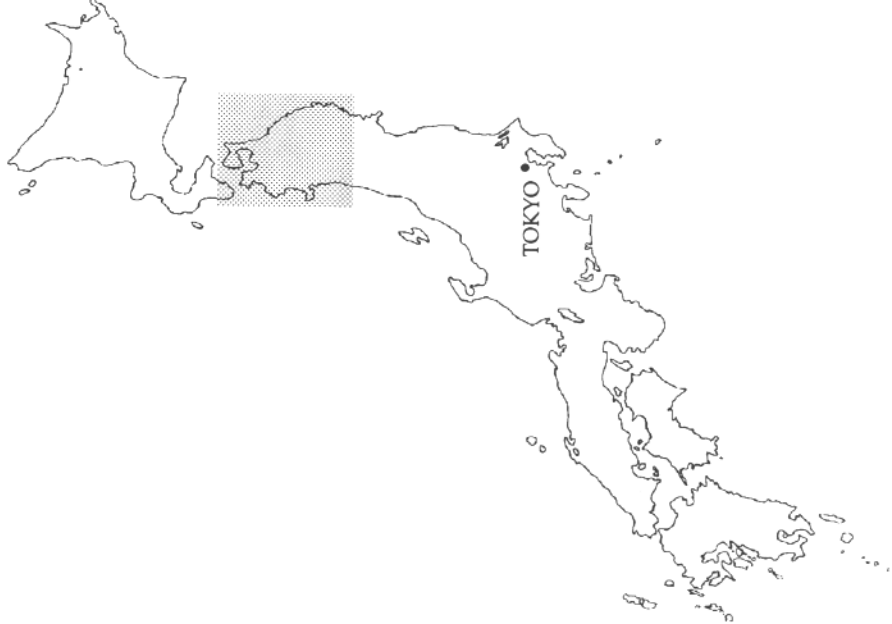


ROADSIGN TRANSLATIONS

AKITA	秋田
AOMORI	青森
HACHINOHE	八戸
HAKKODA	八甲田
HIROSAKI	弘前
KAKUNODATE	角館
KITAYAMAZAKI	北山崎
KUROISHI	黒石
MICHINOKU TOLL ROAD	みちのく有料道路
MISAWA	三沢
MORIOKA	盛岡

MUTSU	むつ
OHMINATO	大湊
OSORE-ZAN	恐山
RIKUCHU KAIGAN	陸中海岸
RYUSENDO	龍泉洞
SHIMODA	下田
SHOWA DAIBUTSU	昭和大佛
TAZAWA-KO	田沢湖
TOHOKU EXPRESSWAY	東北高速道路
TOWADA-KO	十和田湖
TOWADA-SHI	十和田市

NORTHERN JAPAN





AOMORI AXE

By Kathy Varner

Looking at a map of Honshu, Japan's main island, a coastline that often forms some interesting and unique shapes is revealed.

One of the most striking of these shapes can be found where the waters of the Pacific Ocean, Mutsu Bay and the Straits of Tsugaru have chopped at the shores of the Shimokita Peninsula in northeastern Honshu to form what has been nicknamed the "Aomori Axe". The nickname stems from the peninsula's unusual land mass in the shape of an axe.

Travelling north from Misawa on Route 338, the road will eventually turn westward, leading you to the city of Mutsu.

The historic city was the site where the Japanese Imperial Fleet gathered before launching its attack on Pearl Harbor. Ironically, today it's the regional headquarters for the Japan Maritime Self Defense Force.

Approximately 45 kilometers to the southwest lies Wakinosawa-mura, home of the world-famous snow monkeys.

These monkeys are known for their smooth coats of fur during the winter months and the Japanese list them as a

monument of nature.

Travelling north along the coast on Route 338, some of the most breathtaking scenery available in northern Japan comes into view.

The Hotoke-ga-ura inlets are especially noteworthy for their size. The nearly two miles of cliffs often soar to more than 325 feet, and provide a spectacular view of thunderous waves crashing against them.

Because of the many different shapes and peculiarities of the cliffs, a few have been given names. One of them, Gohiyaku-rakan, is thought to resemble the 500 images of Rakan - a Buddhist deity.

At the northernmost tip of the axe, on Route 279, is Cape Oma. Ferryboats offer sightseers a trip across the waters on the Strait of Tsugaru to Hakodate.

On a clear day, the Shiokubi Bluff on Cape Shiokubi - nearly 12 miles away - is visible.

Travelling east on Route 279, you will come upon Shiriya Bluff with its wild and romantic beaches. The sea-eroded terrace gradually descends to the shore, while innumerable rocks and reefs, large and small, are scattered along the scenic coastline.

By John P. Smith

Tucked away on a tree-covered hillside on the outskirts of Aomori City, sitting in peaceful coexistence with the nature surrounding it, is a statue of Buddha.

This statue is a little different from most

At the tip of the headland stands a lone lighthouse, usually surrounded by grazing cattle and horses, adding to the picturesque seascape.

In an area abundant with hot spring spas, one of the nicest, Shimo-furo, is found on Route 279 along the northern coast of the peninsula.

Moving inland, the Yunokawa Valley is filled with rushing mountain springs and is even the home for a few antelope herds. The valley is located just 40 minutes north of Kawauchi-machi.

Due west, next to Ohata-machi, is Yagen Valley, home of the Yagen Resort and Spa. The spa's natural hot spring water is transparent and abundant. Visitors are attracted by its open-air bathing, the sunlight and changing colors of nature with the passing of each season.

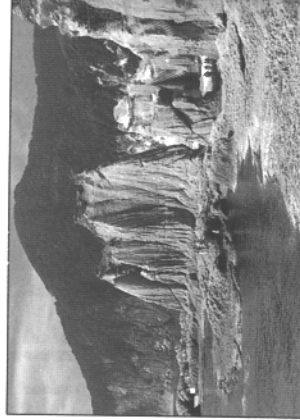
The valley itself is a nature-lover's treasure. From the city of Ohata, it's located about 10 kilometers west on Route 279 along the Yagen River, with the forest on either side reflected in the river.

The river is a perfect retreat for weekend anglers. Main catches include char, sweetfish and rainbow trout.

Directly south of the Yagen Spa, a

The Japanese call this colossus *Shiowa Daibutsu* - most Americans from Misawa know it as "The Big Buddha." It is one of the largest in Japan.

The statue is set in a small park surrounded by the jagged, tree-covered hills



disturbingly beautiful sight comes into view.

Mt. Osoresan, a dormant volcano, is the focal point of Shimokita peninsula. It consists of seven peaks, with Mt. Kamabuse being the highest. In its crater, surrounded by a primeval forest, lies Lake Usori.

Noted for its sulfuric spas, the crater is devoid of all vegetation.

To explore the Axe, it is best to plan on at least three days. Driving is certainly the best option, although trains are also available. You can get to Wakinosawa-mura in about four hours by car from Misawa. The rest of the coast can be seen in as little as eight hours if you don't stop along the way.

and crevices that make up much of the country of northern Japan. The Buddha, however, towers head and shoulders above these hills in quiet meditation - appearing as a spiritual guard on the outskirts of the city.

Admission to the park in which the Buddha sits costs 400 yen for adults and 200 yen for children under 12. The park is open daily from 8:00 a.m. until 5:00 p.m.

Inside the park, the statue casts it contemplative shadow over a field of thousands of small, plastic pinwheels planted on a hillside.

Incense and candles burn in small altars beside smaller versions of Buddhist figures that line the twisty pathway to the big guy.

Several of what Americans would call "wishing pools" also stand beside the path. In these, yen coins of various values glisten when any ray of sunlight happens to chance its way through the trees. At each one, a figure stands guard beside a waterfall or fountain.

Just outside the Big Buddha is a small, rock-covered area with benches for the weary traveler. This small level plateau conveniently stretches just far enough away from the huge statue that the whole thing can be captured with the average camera – just right for getting the one good shot before going inside where dimness and incense smoke make it difficult to photo-



graph without a flash. Visitors are allowed to enter the hollow interior of the statue which is a small museum of sorts.

Thousands of small plates, with names of those who made a contribution to the construction, line all the walls except for a small section deeper inside dedicated to a

display explaining the design and construction of the statue itself.

Small statues with names engraved line the walls of a circular room upstairs and are placed on racks under signs of the Chinese zodiac.

Constantly making its way through the gloomy interior is the chanting and singing of what would at first sound like monks.

The sound, however, comes from loudspeakers and is only a part of the commercialism that offsets the basic serenity of the park. Gift shops are located inside and outside the statue along with several other small food and trinket shops just outside the park area.

Overall, the Big Buddha is a must for the Aomori tourist, or just for the person who wants to get away on a one-day excursion.

How to get there

Go out of the main gate to the second traffic light. Turn right. Continue on this road to Nagasakiya, then turn right on the shopping street (towards base). At the first traffic light, turn left. Continue on this road (past Misawa Insatsu). After approx. 18 km there will be a blue sign over the road denoting the Michinoku Toll Road (in Japanese). At the next traffic light, turn left.

You will go across a bridge over a valley and railroad tracks, then up a small hill past a pachinko parlor on your left. About 250 yards after the pachinko parlor, turn right and you will see another blue sign for the Michinoku Toll Road. Turn right at this intersection. Continue on this road past another long bridge spanning a valley.

Continue until you come to an intersection with Route 4. Continue straight through the intersection, this is the entrance to the Michinoku Toll Road.

The only toll gate is on the Aomori end of the expressway. When you get to it, pay the toll and continue straight until you come to a "T" intersection. Turn left at the "T." You will pass two gas stations on the right then come to a "Y" intersection. Turn left and you will see the Big Buddha on your left. Follow the signs to the park.

*To get to Aomori City, turn right at the "Y" intersection, then left at the first stoplight. This road will lead you into Aomori City.

Travel time to the Big Buddha is about one and a half hours. The Buddha faces in a westerly direction, so best photos will be taken after noon.

THE HAKKODA MOUNTAIN RANGE

By Leslie J. Pratt

On clear days you've probably noticed with curiosity some mountains on the horizon toward Aomori which appear a bit higher than the rest. These ten mountain peaks are the Hakkoda Range between Lake Towada and Aomori. The Hakkodas offer some of Japan's finest alpine recreation. Take some time to explore one of Tohoku's best kept secrets and head for the hills.

The Hakkoda range offers a variety of recreational opportunities including hiking, backpacking, skiing, hot baths and more. The entire range is encircled by a 40K "loop road" granting easy access to many attractions. You may want to begin your visit with a ride up the Hakkoda Ropeway gondola car which takes you to the peak of Mount Tamoyachi for a magnificent panoramic view of the other mountain peaks, Mutsu Bay and Aomori City. If a short hike is all you're up for, disembark

from the ropeway and hike the figure eight shaped trail which takes about an hour and leads to a beautiful mountain meadow and splendid views.

If you feel especially vigorous and have a few more hours, you can take another trail up to the peaks of Mt. Akakura. After this challenging climb, you'll be greeted by a picturesque shrine adorned with Japanese flags brought up by other explorers who have conquered this mountain. The trail then follows a ridgeline which leads to two

other mountain peaks. The second peak, Mt. Hakkoda, forms the rim of an ominous crater. The ropeway cars run every half hour, so you don't need to worry about a ride back down, but be careful to not miss the last one down in the late afternoon.

For the very ambitious, there are a few flat areas near the peaks where backpackers can pitch a tent and wake up to a very impressive sunrise; impressive even for the Land of the Rising Sun. There is also a

crude mountain hut with non-luxurious sleeping 'racks' at the foot of Mt. Odake should the weather overwhelm you. If you intend to stay the night, be sure to pack your best woolly underwear and rain gear as the area is notorious for extreme weather changes. Even day packers need to bring a pack with at least some rain gear, snacks, and plenty of water. As with all such trips, be sure to tell some friends where you're off to so that someone will have some clues to help find you, should you fail to return from your alpine encounter. And as always, it's safer to travel with at least one other person.

The Hakkoda mountains are peaceful and serene, but in 1902 they became the backdrop for a grisly horror story which is well known by most Japanese. On the northernmost side of the range's loop road is a massive statue of Corporal Goto, a heroic young soldier. The corporal and 209 others from his Aomori infantry regiment marched, poorly equipped, to the Hakkoda range for a winter training exercise in preparation for the ensuing Russo-Japanese War in Siberia. Only ten men survived a severe winter blizzard, and most of them

were horribly disfigured by frostbite. Corporal Goto emerged as the hero of this famous disaster when he left the snowlogged soldiers and went out on his own against all odds to find help. The corporal led soldiers from another regiment to the ghostly frozen figures strewn about their icy graves, just in time to rescue the meager survivors. Many people of the time never forgave the military leaders for what seemed to them to be gross negligence in allowing the tragic "Hakkoda Death March" to occur. Be on the look-out for the soldiers' ghostly spirits which are said to frequent the area.

Of course, no tour in Japan would be complete without a visit to the hot baths. One of the Tohoku area's more intriguing hot baths can be found at the Sukayu Onsen on the southwest part of the loop road.

This charming onsen is centered around a pungent hot sulphur spring which feeds its enormous wooden hot bath. For several hundred years, folks have been coming here to bask in the odoriferous therapeutic baths (making it especially popular with

the over-sixty crowd). The baths somehow escaped the post-WWII wrath of General MacArthur's traditional American bathing edicts, and remain mixed-sex.

Many folks hike from the top of the ropeway, across the mountain peaks, and down to Sukayu and soak their tired bones in the hot bath. They then dine on the onsen's famous buckwheat soba, before taking the hourly bus back to the ropeway to retrieve the car.

Tired of those pesky hemorrhoids and other posterial ailments? Come to Manju, near Sukayu and have a seat on the therapeutic "bun steamers." At first glance they appear to be western toilets, but they offer so much more. The sulphur steam seats, in addition to medicinal fumes, provide unique photo opportunities to show the folks back home how you pass the time keeping warm in northern Japan!

If you're not properly equipped for camping or backpacking, you can still spend a weekend in the mountains and stay in an affordable cabin at the Sukayu Campground across the road from the onsen. Remember also that MWRSS

Recreation Supply has a wide assortment of camping supplies for nominal rental fees.

How to get there

Easy! Just take Highway 102 towards Lake Towada, but go straight rather than turning left across the bridge at the town of Towadako. This intersection is easy to spot. Just look for the large Towadako Onsen arch sign on the left and a Shell gas station on the right; this is where you go straight. You'll follow this winding road about 11 kilometers and meet up with Highway 394, which forms the southern leg of the "loop road."

Bear to the left and this road will take you to the Sukayu Onsen and eventually to the Hakkoda Ropeway. This road is actually several different highways which form a convenient access road around the entire mountain range.

As with all *gaijin* (foreigners), navigation in Japan, a road map in English is recommended. You can get a more detailed map of the mountain trails from the ropeway ticket office. Don't forget to practice your yodelling, and enjoy the trip!

KAKUNODATE AND LAKE TAZAWA

By Leslie J. Pratt

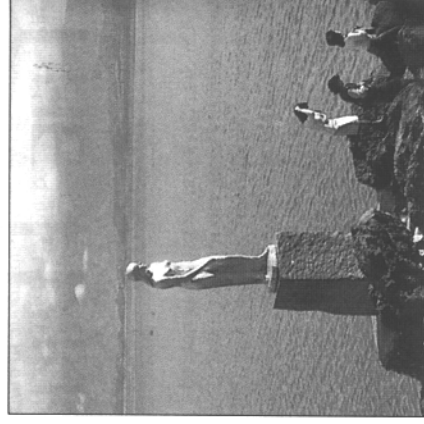
If you've spent much time travelling around the Tohoku region of Japan, you know there are many places to see and things to do. Sometimes it's hard to decide where to go on a weekend of recreational gallivanting. Here's a recommendation you'll really enjoy. Lake Tazawa and the town of Kakunodate offer exciting sight-seeing and a taste of breathtaking scenery. There's plenty to see and do there for an entire weekend, but it's close enough to base for a fun one-day trip.

Start by driving around Lake Tazawa for a taste of natural splendor and unusual tranquility. Nestled under spectacular mountains, Lake Tazawa is as legendary as it is serene.

According to local legend, the lake was formed many years ago when a peasant boy, Hachirotao, ate a fish which made him so thirsty he drank water for thirty days. He became so full, he turned into a huge water dragon. Needing a place to stay, the dragon blocked up a river and formed Lake Towada. He was later forced

to leave Towada by a sorcerer and moved south toward the Akita coast to a shallow lagoon called Hachirogata.

During Hachirotao's tribulations, a beautiful maiden was on a quest of her own – to remain beautiful forever. In an attempt to prevent growing old and ugly, the maiden, Takko Hime, went to a mountain top where she prayed for 100 days. On the 100th day a voice told her to drink from a nearby stream. After drinking the water, she also became a water dragon and a massive rainstorm then filled what is now



Lake Tazawa with water. She eventually made the lake her home and began hosting dragon Hachirotao every winter between the autumnal and vernal equinoxes for a season of heated love-making. The fact that Lake Tazawa doesn't freeze in winter can either be attributed to the heat of the dragon lovers' passion as legend has it, or that the lake is partially fed by a natural hot sulphur spring; see for yourself. A lovely bronze statue of the maiden Takko Hime in human form adorns the western shore of the lake.

The crystal clear waters of Lake Tazawa form the deepest lake in Japan. There are a variety of activities available at the lake ranging from hiking along the lake shore, nearby demanding mountain trails, powerboating, sailing and much more. There are plenty of camping areas, as well as a variety of youth hostels, pensions and hotels for those interested in staying

overnight.

The mountain villages on the Tazawako plateau east of the lake offer many natural hot sulphur spring outdoor baths. The smell of the baths has an "acquired" liking, but the scenery is well worth the pugnance. The springs were once frequented by powerful samurai and daimyos from points south who sought the therapeutic qualities of the hot springs. On the way up the plateau, be sure to visit the spectacular Golden Kannon statue and temple grounds.

About 20 kilometers southwest of the main entrance to the lake is the charming town of Kakunodate. The town was chosen by the Satake Clan in 1620 as the site of their castle. One part of the town retains the air of the samurai residents who lived there during the area's feudal period. Though the castle has long since disappeared, many old style homes are open to visitors in the Uchi-machi Samurai district. The homes display

NOBORIBETSU

By Karen R. LaMontia

Hokkaido, the island north of Honshu, often lends itself to images of the romantic skyline in Hakodate, or the world renown snow festival in the capital city of Sapporo. Or perhaps the image is of eating a plate of delicious Hokkaido crab legs. These images are justified given the beauty and bounty of the island. However, there is more to Hokkaido than crab legs, snow festivals and skylines, so let's take a journey through the scenic resort town of Noboribetsu located on the east side of Japan's northern island.

Noboribetsu, which means wonderful river, is derived from the old Ainu word "Nupurpetsu" and was settled approximately eight hundred years ago by the

many of the old artifacts and traditional well kept gardens.

Many shops in Uchi-machi sell various types of *kaba-kaizu* crafts. This unique type of craftsmanship was taken up by the members of the local samurai class to help make ends meet when the samurai class was slowly becoming defunct. Cherry bark is used to create very attractive (and expensive) articles such as boxes, trays, plates, clock cases, etc. This splendid little town is a great place to spend several hours of sightseeing and enjoy a lunch along the picturesque samurai house district.

How to get there

Lake Tazawa is about 80 kilometers south-southwest of Lake Towada in Akita Prefecture, approximately halfway between the cities of Akita and Morioka. Train service is available from the town of Tazawako via the Tazawako Line which

can be accessed from the Morioka Station. There is a bus service available from the town to the lake. To see the most with greater flexibility, a car is the best bet. Drive to Hachinohe and look for the signs to the Hachinohe Expressway Toll Road. Like all toll roads, the expressway is expensive, but you make good time. When you reach the Morioka Exit a few hours later, exit and head west toward and through Shizukuishi on Highway 46.

About 50 kilometers later, you'll reach the town of Tazawako. You'll see plenty of signs leading to the lake. Before heading up to the lake, swing by the Tazawako rail station, which is plainly marked by signs, and grab a copy of an area map (in English) which gives you details about the area. Consider coming back on Highway 341 north toward Lake Towada for more spectacular scenery. *Yoi tabi o* (have a good trip)!



souvenir shops along way.

Driving into the resort area of Noboribetsu is somewhat overwhelming. As you drive up the winding road that leaves coastal Noboribetsu temporarily behind, the forested mountains quickly avert your attention from the sea to the mountainside. The road winds into the resort town and soon the asphalt gives way

and industrialize the area by building small inns and managing the hot springs. Eventually his small inn turned into the now famous Dai Ichi Takimoto Hotel.

Noboribetsu is approximately five hours by car from the port of Hakodate. Driving along Routes 278, 5 and 37 guarantees feasting your eyes on beautiful seaside landscapes, quaint fishing villages and a few 7 - 11 stores. Although there are no surpluses at the 7 - 11 stores, many of them sell slices of the delicious Hokkaido ubari melon. Driving to Noboribetsu is relaxing because of the serenity of the rolling hills with their tropical flora and the almost constant view of the sea. For the traveler who enjoys a rest every now and then there several crab houses, food stands and

Ainu tribe, the original settlers on Hokkaido Island. Noboribetsu is nestled between volcanic mountains that breathe steam and produce mineral pools. It is said that the Ainu chose to settle there because of the many mineral springs they could use to heal their bodies. In this area, brown bears are plentiful so the Ainu tribe could find warmth from bear skins and they staved off hunger by eating the meat of the bear. Another food source for the Ainu was salmon from the nearby rivers and streams. Although Noboribetsu was originally settled by the Ainu, it was not made popular until 1858 when Kinzo Takimoto visited the spa with his wife in search of a cure for her skin disease. When he found that the hot spring waters cured his wife's disease, he decided to settle in Noboribetsu

to cobblestone road housing hotels, restaurants and stores on either side of it.

At the end of the cobblestone road, the God Aoni and Akaoni welcome you to Jigokudani, or the "Valley of Hell" where smells of sulfur permeate the air and the earth spews steam and boiling water at locals and visitors alike. For those who don't mind the strong odor there is a walkway that takes you close to the steamy mountain and the colorful boiling mineral waters. If walking along the Jigokudani pathway doesn't get you close enough to the boiling waters, there is always the option of taking a mineral bath at a local hotel.

Although there are several hotels that offer mineral baths, the Dai Ichi Hotel is the largest, offering some 20 pools of various sizes, mineral content and temperatures, including an outdoor pool where for ¥1,500 you can have your photo taken in a traditional Japanese setting. The baths are open to the general public until 3:30 p.m. each day at a cost of ¥2,000 per person;

towels, shampoo and soap are provided at no extra charge. Or you can choose to take a room at the Dai Ichi Hotel for the meager amount of ¥25,000 per night and take as many baths as you want to, when you want. This price also includes meals. Not all the hotels in Noboribetsu are this expensive. There are several ryokans and there is even a youth hostel for the young or the young at heart. You do not have to hold a youth hostel membership card to stay at the Akashiya-so Youth Hostel.

If bathing in mineral water is a little too sublime there is a bear park nearby where, for a nominal fee, the brown bears of Hokkaido will perform for you. There are some beautiful scenic drives in the area as well, including a road that leads to the viewpoint of the two "hot" lakes, one large, and one small with temperatures upwards of 250 degrees Fahrenheit. It's also easy to relax in the lush green tree-lined city park in Noboribetsu with its many benches, picnic tables and the melodic sounds of

local birds. For those who love to shop there are plenty of souvenir stores selling wood-carved items such as Ainu salmon-eating bears.

If you are looking for restaurants, there are several places to dine including a few ramen shops to choose from. However, if you don't like the fare in this area it's a short drive down the hill back to coastal Noboribetsu with its assortment of restaurants. You can also continue driving north on Route 36 for a further selection of places to eat.

After dining you can see many wood-carvers creating traditional local art forms as you walk around the town. You will also see hotel guests walking along the streets of Noboribetsu wearing their hotel's summer yukata and zori. During your evening stroll, it is inevitable that you will catch a glimpse of the sly Hokkaido North Fox peering at you from around the corner of one of the many buildings in Noboribetsu. Although the fox appears friendly and

unafraid of humans, it is advisable not to get too close.

Getting to Noboribetsu is fairly easy. You have a choice of leaving from Hachinohe, Noheji, Aomori or Oma. Most of the ferries go into Hakodate, however, there are some that will take you into the port of Muroran, which is closest to Noboribetsu. Prices vary, depending on the port you leave from and the port you go into on Hokkaido. For example, a round trip ticket from Oma, the most northerly port on Honshu is ¥20,000 for a small car and one passenger.

Additional passengers are ¥1,000 each. Driving to Oma from Misawa takes approximately 2 1/2 hours. Leaving from the port of Oma has a short travel time of 1 hour and 40 minutes. Leaving from one of the other ports is not only more expensive, but it takes longer as well. You can leave your car behind, ferry across to Hokkaido, catch a train to Noboribetsu and then take a bus or taxi into the resort area. However you choose to go, it's one of those not-to-be missed places to visit on Hokkaido Island.

RIKUCHU KAIGAN NATIONAL PARK

Mysterious. Romantic. Breathtaking. These words come to mind when describing the Ryusendo Caves and the Rikuchu Kaigan National Park.

Located just four hours south of Misawa and running almost the entire length of the east coast of Iwate Prefecture, this may be the getaway you're looking for.

There are two famous points in this area, the Kurosaki Coast and Kitayamazaki Coast. Both are jagged and often nearly vertical, but Kitayamazaki - known for its natural rock arches - is easily the most spectacular.

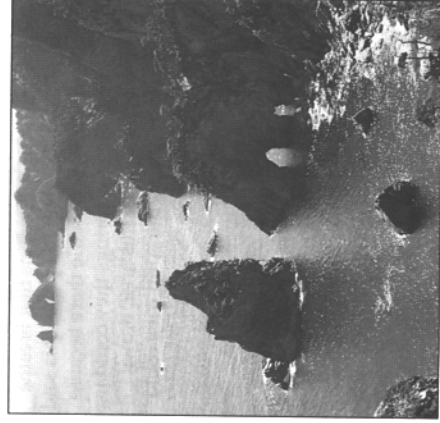
The arches can be viewed from a number

of platforms set up along the coast. However, the park area at Kitayamazaki offers the best view and steps lead down to the ocean near the bottom of the first arch.

At Ryusendo, brilliant blue and green hues dance on the walls of underground caverns. For millions of years, water droplets have trickled down the walls of the caves to form the mysterious calcium shapes of stalagmites and stalactites.

Another attraction at Ryusendo is the Shindo (New Cave) Science Museum, the only cave museum in the world.

Picnic grounds and camp sites, ranging from primitive to well-equipped, dot the



cavern area. There is also a resort hotel, Hotel Rigaso, located about 9 kilometers south of Kitayamazaki.

Admission to the caves is ¥820 for adults and ¥410 for students. Children under 4 get a free look.

The Rikuchu Coastal National Park is a nature-lover's haven. Romantic beaches with transparent water and dazzling white sands set the scene for a secluded picnic lunch. Angular rocks and cliffs provide a breathtaking backdrop for the amateur photographer. The rough scenery of the park has won it the name "Alps of the Sea". On land, hiking and biking trails offer the tourist a different perspective.

Ferryboats make regular trips around the waterways for seagoing sightseers. The cost is ¥1,080 for adults and ¥515 for children over 5.

The base Travel Time office sometimes offers very affordable tours to the Rikuchu Seacoast during the summer months. Call them at 226-3502 or stop by the Mokuteki Recreation Center for more information.

If you can't catch a tour, or would rather drive yourself, the drive to Rikuchu Park is relatively easy. Exit the POL gate and take a left at the second light. Follow this road until you come to a "T" intersection. Take a right at this light. You are now on Route 338. Follow Route 338 south until you come

to the intersection for Route 45. The intersection is well marked by blue information signs.

Once on Route 45, head for Hachinohe. Stay on Route 45 - it'll take you all the way through Hachinohe if you just follow the blue signs. Once in Hachinohe, follow the signs for Miyako.

Route 45 will take you south along the coast and most of the information signs have both Kanji and English. Rather than pass through Kuji City, you'll want to take Route 45 around it. The signs for the loop are written in Kanji and English, you'll be able to tell the intersection easily. A road sign saying "Central Kuji" will be straight

LAKE TOWADA

By Larry Armstrong

There's one thing you have to admit about being stationed in Northern Japan - if you want to get back to nature, this place is as good as any to do it.

One of the closest and most popular places is nearby Lake Towada and Towada National Park.

The lake is the result of a volcano that last erupted about 4,000 years ago and then filled with water. At nearly 1,100 feet, it's Japan's third deepest lake. Lake Towada's water is amazingly blue, and clear to a depth of 70 feet. The Japanese describe the water as being "as blue as melted lapis lazuli." That semi-precious stone is said to have been the sapphire of the ancient Egyptians.

The lake is stocked with trout, and has been since 1903, when a man named Sadayuki Wainai decided that the blue water should be inhabited. Until that time it never had fish in it.

in front of you. Take 45 to the left.

Follow this road until your trip counter reads 105 kilometers - then start looking for the green signs that point out the entrances to the park area.

Take the first one you see into the park and follow it until you hit the coast. Once on the coast, you can go either north or south along the coast - you'll be on a loop that is connected at both ends to Route 45.

The point here is - explore - no matter where you go, you can't get lost. You'll eventually end up on either the coast road or Route 45.

The rock formations at Kitayamazaki are

along its winding roads you get the feeling you've just dropped into a South American rain forest. That feeling is enhanced by the Oirase River which runs through the valley. From just about any point you can hear one

of the many waterfalls gushing down from the high cliffs bordering each side of the stream. The Oirase is especially beautiful in the summer

because of the thousands of moss-covered boulders lying within its swirling waters.

The park offers many excellent camping sites if you'd like to get away for a night or a weekend. You can

take your own tent or rent a raised cottage-like structure. It is suggested that if you plan on camping, get there early. Spring is

easy to find once you're on the coast road. Just follow the road south until you see a three diamond service station.

Turn left just before it and you're there. Leaving the Kitayamazaki coast and continuing on the coast road south will eventually bring you to the village with the tour boat. It's about 13 kilometers from the entrance to Kitayamazaki (by a gas station).

One last thing, the area you'll be driving in is quite rugged and many of the roads, while well-kept, are steep. Some as much as a 10% grade. There are also many tunnels. While you're out and about at Kitayamazaki, don't be afraid to explore - but remember to drive safely.

normally the busiest time of the year for camping, although the autumn months provide a colorful setting all around the lake and neighboring Mount Hakkoda.

How to get there

Getting to lake Towada is easy. The drive to the lake generally takes about 1 1/2 hours. To get there, go out the main gate and take a right at the second light.

Continue straight past the Nagasakiya department store. This road will take you past the Misawa train station. About 16km after the train station, you will be in Towada City. At this point, you will see Daei Department Store and the Towada train station on your left. Turn left at the traffic light (that's Route 4).

Two blocks from that point you will see a large Shinto shrine and a Route 102 sign. Turn right and follow Route 102 all the way into the Lake Towada National Park. There will be detailed signs telling you how to get to the lake. Enjoy the trip!



take your own tent or rent a raised cottage-like structure. It is suggested that if you plan on camping, get there early. Spring is

If your idea of a trip to the lake involves getting out on it, you can do that here. The park offers an excursion boat ride across the lake for about ¥800. It takes a couple of hours and the scenery is breathtaking.

One of Lake Towada's most popular attractions is a bronze monument that is the symbol of the lake. The

large square granite structure is topped by the statue of two women, hands stretched out toward each other in greeting. "The Maidens" was dedicated in 1952 to the memory of those who helped make Towada a national park.

If you've never been anywhere that's really GREEN, visit the park during the summer. It's thickly wooded and very lush, especially the Oirase Valley where most of the campsites are. Driving

THE
SUN



EDUCATION IN JAPAN

By Susie Davis

Education plays a very important role in the Japanese family. Parents spend vast amounts of money and students invest what American students might think to be an excessive amount of time studying to achieve their scholastic goals.

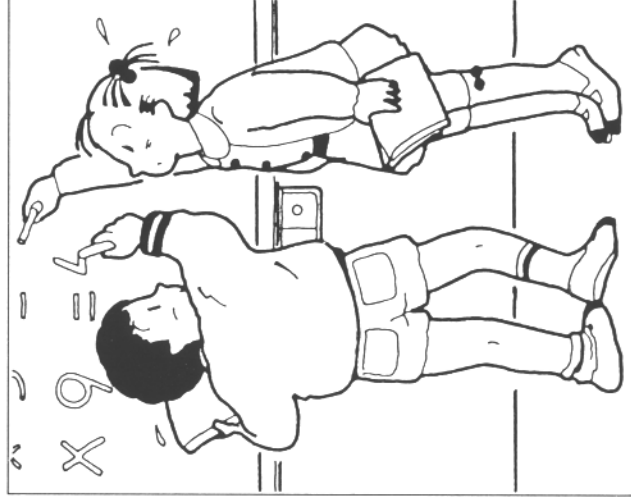
Education is compulsory through grade nine, at which time students must take an examination at a high school of their choice to gain admittance. After completing ninth grade, nearly 98 percent of all students will enter a high school. Students test for a public or private high school, hoping to be accepted into the most prestigious school. It is felt that being accepted to the best of high schools will eventually pave the way to a top-ranking university. Most universities will provide the opportunity for placement with a reputable company upon graduation.

For the parents, education is a costly affair. Although costs vary from school to school, estimates given were supplied by a parent with four children attending public school in the local Misawa area. Each month, the parents must pay a set amount per child for lunches, supplies and various other expenses. The monthly amounts are approximately 7,000 yen for an elementary student, 13,000 yen for junior high school and 25,000 yen for a high school student. Private schools can cost as much as twice these amounts. If the children need a bus pass it will cost approximately 50,000 yen per child per year.

One idea stressed throughout Japan is uniformity in education. On any given, day, all students in the same grade will be studying the same subject across the

country. This means all fifth grade students in Tokyo, Misawa and Sapporo will be working on page 52 in their math book on the same day.

This uniformity can have its drawbacks. The student who cannot keep up is often left behind. But holding the student back a grade to let the child catch up is almost never done. In general, children are passed on to the next grade. Students are put under great pressure to be at the top of their class - to achieve. Thus, standards



become higher and higher. This is one reason most parents enroll their children in private supplementary schools called *juku*.

Although the regular school day is from 7:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. (which includes travel time), students also spend several hours a day in *juku*. These after-school classes are private, given to small groups, and are usually taught by retired teachers or education graduates who have not yet passed the examination to receive their teaching credentials. Some students in these special sessions begin at the early age of three. Each subject area has a separate instructor and each student pays approximately 4,000 to 5,000 yen per month to each instructor. For the lower grade students, subjects studied might include piano, abacus and Japanese language. At the third grade level, English, science and math may be added. In the junior high grades, English, science, Japanese language and math are studied. Many parents feel *juku* is most important to the junior high school student because he or she will benefit most in preparing for the all-important high school entrance exams.

Similar schools, but with larger classes, are held for senior high school students to help them cram for college entrance examinations. Nearly forty percent of high school graduates go on to some form of higher education, usually universities or junior colleges. With education costs running so high, many mothers are working just to help with school expenses. One mother stated that when some Japanese women marry and have children, the mother stops buying clothing and

cosmetics for herself so that she can put that money towards her child's education. Most parents want their children, no matter the child's age, to attend *juku* so the child can have all the extra learning opportunities possible.

The cost of sending a son or daughter to college, according to one parent, is completely out of reach for many people in this area. A public university may cost 1,000,000 yen for the first year's entrance fee plus 600,000 yen, payable in two payments. Medical school can cost twice the yearly amount and run for six years, rather than four. The cost of a private university is approximately twice the amount of the public tuition and private medical schools can run as high as ten times the cost of a public medical school. In addition to these costs, parents usually send their children money for room, board and living expenses, which in some areas requires 100,000 yen per month.

Considering costs and the sacrifices families must face for their children's education, Japanese parents are dedicated to getting their children the best education available. But the parents are not alone in sacrificing, as the students give up a considerable amount of their leisure time as well as sustain a great deal of pressure to achieve.

For a short time in March, the pressure is off, as graduation ceremonies are held nationwide for junior and senior high school students. At the end of March, it's back to school for the students as they begin a new year and move one step closer to their ultimate goals in life.

GOLDEN WEEK

Springtime in Japan is easily recognizable by the bright splashes of color which dot the countryside. First the plum blossoms, followed by the soft pinks of the cherry blossoms and ending with the colorful *koinobori* or carp streamers.

The carp was chosen as a symbol for boyhood because of its fearless courage, swimming up a waterfall when other fishes would not survive.

The *koinobori* are made from cloth or paper and displayed outside the house by families with sons. When the carp are hoisted up into the air, flying high over rooftops and gardens, they appear to be swimming vigorously against a water current. It has come to symbolize parents' desires that their sons should face and overcome obstacles they encounter in life with the same vigor and positive spirit.

Tall poles braced against the roof or set in the garden anchor the fish. The black fish represents the father of the house, the red one for the mother, followed by one representing each male child in the house. In some instances, the carp can measure up to fifteen feet in length for the eldest son and, running down the pole, proportionally smaller ones for the younger sons. The colorful display is in celebration of *Kodomo-no-Hi* or Children's Day.

The national holiday is annually observed on May 5 and is a festival for children. On this day, wishes of happiness and prosperity are passed along to boys and girls alike.

The custom dates back to the seventeenth century when city commoners developed the more peace-loving approach to celebrating what was then called "Boys'

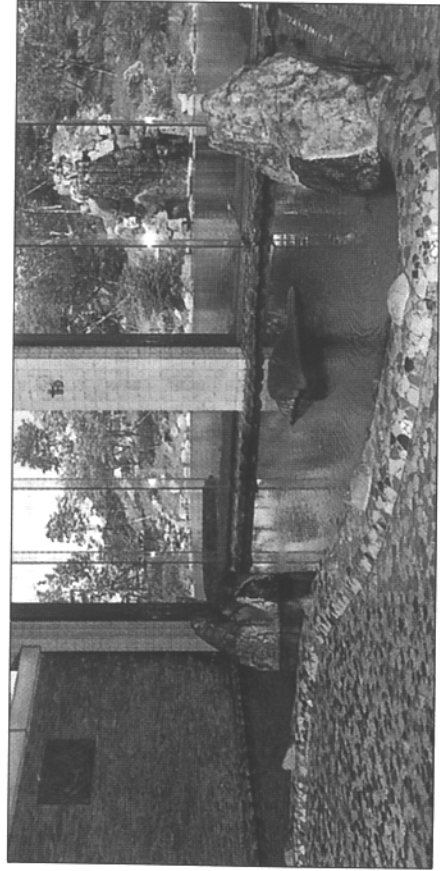
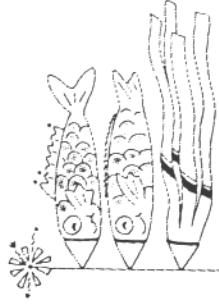
Day." In prior days, the samurai displayed swords and armor to commemorate the holiday. Today, some families have small replicas of the swords and armor displayed in their homes, similar to the custom of displaying dolls during March (Hinamatsuri) when young girls in the family are honored.

On May 5, 1945 the holiday was renamed "Children's Day." Although the ancient custom of carp displays lives on, it is truly a day to honor all children. It is one day set aside to bring attention to the importance of respecting the character of the children and the importance of children's gratitude to their parents. Nowadays, some families even raise a *koinobori* to the sky for their daughters.

The celebration of Children's Day on May 5 provides a colorful end to a week-

long celebration known as Golden Week. The holiday begins on April 29, which is called Green Day. It was the late Emperor Hirohito's birthday and is now celebrated in recognition of the deep love and knowledge he had of nature. The holiday goes on to include Constitution Day on May 3. Many places of business, official offices and schools are closed during the holidays. Shoppers abound, as do travelers, enjoying the colorful Golden Week.

(Information from JTB's "A Look into Japan" and Kodansha International "Discover Japan.")



HOT BATHS

Bring your own or purchase them at the bath house.

As you enter the bath house, you will first come into an area called the "genkan" or entryway. Slip off your shoes here and leave them in the shoe rack.

When you enter the main area, purchase a ticket from a vending machine nearby and give it to the cashier as you enter the bathing area. Purchase the yen amount of tickets that you will need.

Japanese baths are sexually segregated, so as you enter, the men's side is usually found on the left and the women's on the right. If you're not sure, check with the management.

By Gary Miller

When's the last time you went out for a hot time and could still take the kids with you? If your family is looking for some good, clean fun, you do not have far to go.

The community bath (*onsen*), or hot bath as most Americans know it, is a daily ritual in most Japanese households. For those who dare to try it, it can become one of the most enjoyable benefits of a tour in Misawa.

Most hot baths cost ¥250 for adults, ¥150 for school children and ¥50 for preschoolers.

Standard bath equipment usually consists of soap, shampoo, washcloth and towel.

Inside the dressing room, use the lockers and laundry-size baskets for your belongings. Disrobe and head to the bathing area, behind the sliding doors, taking your washcloth and soap with you. Remember to close the door.

Choose an empty spot along the wall of spigots and cover yourself with as much soap from head to toe as possible. It is very important to wash thoroughly, to let your neighbor know you're clean. Use the basin to rinse your body. Some baths have shower-like attachments over the scrubbing area for each set of faucets. These can be used to wash your hair.

It's advisable to use cold water sparingly, as your body needs to adjust its temperature to the hottest water possible.

After washing and rinsing, take your washcloth, leaving your soap in the washing area, over to the soaking area. If you're body-modest, use the washcloth to

discreetly cover the lower part of your body. However, don't let the cloth touch the hot water, as it's considered community property, while the cloth is a personal article.

The bath water may be hotter than you're used to (100°F) so take your time getting in. Once in the water, sit down and don't move around, the water will only feel hotter. Relax in the water for no more than 10 minutes to begin with. Slowly get out. If you feel dizzy. Sit and cool off. The brave can immerse themselves in the cold plunge, and then enter the bath again.

In some larger operations, a smaller, hotter bath is separate from the regular bath. This bath has a substance added to it to smooth your skin and promises long health and added vitality. The Japanese may try to speak to you especially if you're friendly. They will be eager to find out what attracted you to a Japanese hot bath.

If you go to the bath at the same time each day, you'll get to know your neighbors and the bath house personnel. And, you'll be accepted as a "regular". Don't stop here though: almost every town and area of northern Japan will have at least one onsen, so go out and explore!

One of the best places to go and learn the routine of hot-bathing is the Airport Inn hot bath. Located one block south of the Misawa City airport terminal, this bath is often frequented by Americans. It features a sauna, a medium-sized (30'x12') hot bath, a smaller very hot bath, and a cold plunge. Aside from the numerous Americans usually there, the clerks also speak enough English to steer you in the right direction.

To get there, go out the P.O.L. gate and turn left at the first light. The hot bath will be on the right at the next stop light.

Then, there's Komaki's Resort hot bath, Misawa's largest and most famous onsen.

To get to Komaki's, go out the main gate and turn right at the second stop light. Bear right toward Nagasakiya's at the fork in the road. Turn left at Nagasakiya. Turn left again after crossing the railroad tracks. The entrance to Komaki's is about 300 meters past the train station on the left.

Go in the hotel main entrance and purchase your ticket from the attendant in the information booth. Ask the attendant for directions to the hot bath area.

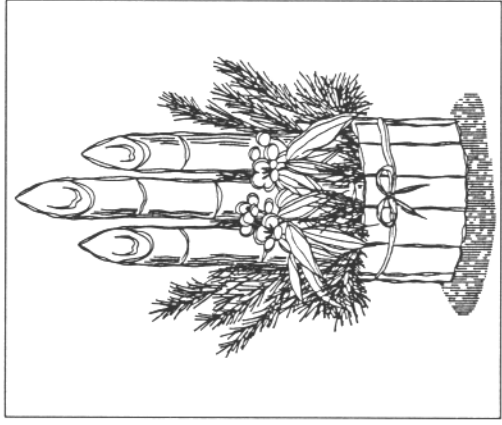
Inside, the hot bath is an exact replica of Lake Towada, with trees, rocks, foliage and a 30 foot high, 60 foot wide waterfall that gives a great back massage! Although more expensive than other community baths, the initial fee allows you to visit Komaki's museum, amusement area, view cultural plays and tour the resort grounds.

Find your favorite hot bath now, and you'll be ready to wash away those winter chills!

Japanese kimono.

Preceding New Year's festivities are a few other time-honored traditions... The last week in December is *mochi-tsuki*, or rice cake time. It is eagerly looked forward to by all, particularly children. Mochi is indispensable in celebrating the New Year. In old days, mochi-tsuki men brought mortars, pestles, big kettles and rice steaming frames to each household. In the presence of the whole family, they pounded mochi for them. The eating of the newly made mochi was done with quite a ceremony. Nowadays in cities, mochi-making is generally done by confectionery shops which take orders and deliver the mochi.

On December 22nd and 23rd, the arrival of winter, *toji*, is heralded. It is said that one



can avoid catching cold during the entire winter season by eating pumpkin and taking a citron bath on these days.

On New Year's Eve, Japanese visit local shrines to pray for good fortune. At midnight, a nation listens for the 108 bells (signifying a Buddhist belief that man has 108 worries), simultaneously, from Hokkaido to Okinawa, which signal the passing of the old year. This ancient ritual, *joya-no-kane*, is televised nationally.

New Year's Day itself is spent, replete with good food, including the traditional mochi, and the even more traditional *sake*, in front of the television set. TV plays an important role of modern day New Year's in Japan because the day's programs feature a celebration of the traditional Japanese performing arts.

NEW YEAR CELEBRATION

O-Shogatsu, or New Year's, is Japan's most important holiday. It is equivalent to our Christmas, being a family day devoted to quiet reflection, joyous renewal, presents for children - usually in the form of *otoshidama*, spending money. It is also equivalent to our birthdays since most Japanese, regardless of the month they were born, consider themselves a year older on January first.

It is also a day for eating. Family members are busily at work days before preparing the various delicacies for the main New Year's meal. It is, likewise, the single day of the year when Japanese housewives can be prevailed upon not to do any housecleaning. It is the one certain day of the year when this western-conscious nation will wear the traditional

It is a day to read all the greeting cards received. Custom has it that the more best wishes sent to friends and acquaintances and the more received, the more popular a family is.

In Japan, New Year's season is a week-long celebration. If shopping is not done before the holiday, there may be nothing to cook because all the stores throughout the country are closed for at least the first three days of the new year.

The Japanese work right up to midnight

NOKYO

It is not uncommon these days to see a group of sun-darkened Japanese farmers, neatly dressed in Western suits, travelling together on a sight-seeing tour to someplace in Japan or abroad. According to John Stevens in the *Discover Japan* series, Vol. 2, the image of the poor farmer bound to his field is fast becoming a thing of the past, thanks both to the increased value of land and to the efficiency of local agricultural cooperatives, or *nokyo*.

Agricultural cooperative societies were established across Japan during the land reforms that followed World War II. The system of tenant farming controlled by landlords was abolished, and the large estates were parceled out in small sections of ten to twenty acres to the new owner-farmer. Today, virtually every farm household belongs to one of the more than ten thousand cooperatives with a combined membership of nearly six million regular members.

On the local front, Misawa Nokyo boasts a membership of nearly 2,000. Established in 1948, the cooperative plays an important role in the Misawa community - economically, culturally and

spring cleaning, the brooms abound with red and white strings as a seal against their use lest the gods of Good Luck, which the New Year brings into the house, should be startled out of it by the bustle.

At the front entrance to the house are decorations consisting of two pine trees - one with smooth bark denoting the female, the other of rough bark symbolizing the male - on either side of the entrance. At the back of each pine tree are three stalks of bamboo. Across the top of the gate or the

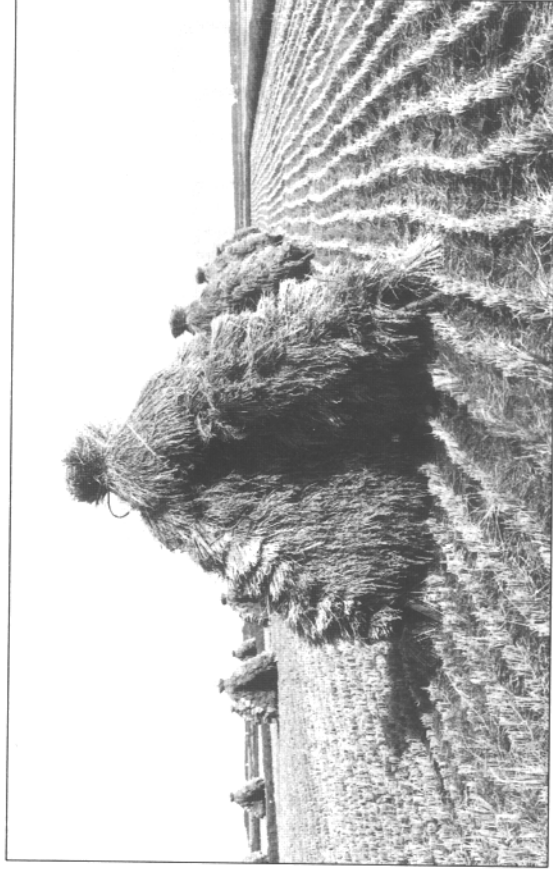
house's main entrance is the *shimenawa*, a deep fringe of straw along which is strung *gohei*, little angular strips of white paper, an emblem representing offerings to the deities of a Shinto shrine, all of which combine as a host of good wishes to passersby for a long, strong and fruitful life.

In Japan, the New Year is really just what the phrase implies - *Akemasite omedeto gozaimasu* - a Happy New Year to you.

(Information from the "Discover Japan" series, Vol. 1: Words, Customs and Concepts.)

operation of the farm. These duties, passed on from generation to generation, are taken quite seriously. It is becoming increasingly difficult for the young farmer to meet a woman willing to accept the fulfilling, yet very demanding life of a farmer's wife. In some cases, when the young man has exhausted all avenues of finding that special woman to share his life with, he can turn to the Nokyo. Serving as a go-between in the centuries-old custom of *miai*, or arranged marriage, Nokyo has provided the opportunity for a young male farmer to meet a prospective spouse.

Nokyo prides itself in taking care of its members, yet also sponsors many community event. Various food expos, tasting fairs and produce sales are sponsored by the groups every year. Once shown in Misawa City is the Annual Misawa Nokyo Festival/Furniture Discount Sale. The small festival is normally in September or October. A warehouse of furniture is on sale, as well as household goods, fresh produce and food booth vendors selling *soba*, *yakitori* and other treats to tempt your taste buds!



politically. While maintaining many traditions of the past, Misawa's Nokyo also looks ahead to the future. Travelling to the United States and Europe, many of the younger farmers get a first-hand look at the varied farming techniques and crops harvested by their counterparts

abroad.

In addition to the many benefits listed above, being a Nokyo member offers yet another, traditional Japanese service. In this society, the eldest son of a farming family has responsibilities to his family which include ensuring the continued

OBON MEMORIAL HOLIDAY

By Susan J. Hallden

Obon, called the Feast of Lanterns, is a celebration which Japanese Buddhists hold annually in mid-August for the spirits of their deceased relatives. Obon comes from a Chinese word which the Japanese pronounce Urabon, meaning a mass for the spirit of the dead suffering in Hades. The custom came to Japan in the 7th century from India and China.

According to tradition, Mokuren, one of the 10 disciples of Guatama Buddha, saw his mother dying of starvation. When he was unable to help her himself, he pleaded to Buddha and asked for help. Buddha then ordered a mass to be held for her on the last day of the 90 days of religious devotion. This mass delivered her from her sufferings.

The celebration begins with Kusa-ichi, the Green Fairs, the night before Obon

officially starts. This pre-ceremony is held to provide the families with items needed for the celebration. Some of the materials needed to prepare the altars and invite the spirits home are: bamboos, dried stems of taro plant, green mats, lotus leaves, cucumbers, eggplants, white eggplants, water grasses, corns, green grapes, persimmons, pears, apples, dried hemp reeds and tiny fences made of green Japanese cedar twigs.

The altar is made up of a green mat spread over a table and covered with two lotus leaves. Cedar fences line the outer edges of the table to complete the altar. The food, flowers, two Japanese paper lanterns and other things are arranged on the table in a certain order. The Green Fair is not a joyous occasion as are the other fairs. The mood is more melancholy and sometimes even sad as people remember the loved ones they have lost.

The following day Obon begins, and lasts for four days. During these four days the Japanese Buddhists live very close to the spirits of the deceased. They believe that the people of the spirit world are still very real.

During the Obon celebration, cemeteries are filled with people attending the graves of their ancestors. Graveyards and tombstones are cleaned, prayers are said and flowers are placed before the headstones.

Although the ways of celebrating may differ from region to region, the basic ceremony is the same. To start off, pieces of dried hemp are burned in a clay basin in front of the house to light a path for the spirits to come. A Buddhist prayer, Namu-ami-do-butsu, Namu-ami-do-butsu, is said over the burning reeds.

Women make special food to offer to both the living and dead members of the

family. This may be different in some areas. People who live in small rural areas may not have an elaborate set-up, whereas people who live in bigger cities may have many different food delicacies.

Buddhist priests are often invited to homes to console the spirits and offer prayers. Sometimes people often feel the presence of spirits and may even converse with them just to satisfy themselves.

On the next to the last day, a dish of white rice dumplings is placed on a table so that the spirits may have food on their way back to the other world. Once again hemp reeds are burned at the front of the house to light the way for the departing spirits.

The sounds of song and drums ring throughout the night and into the early morning as a simple dance is done by dancing in rings to the music. The Bon-odori dance marks the conclusion of the Obon celebration.

By Mark Zoellner

Discovering "authentic" Japan is a difficult pastime these days. This nation's technological wizardry, its emphatic economic dynamism and dizzying pace obscures the search for places of solitude. One such elegant Old World notion, the Japanese inn, or ryokan, thrives however, and its delicious privacy may be enjoyed quite conveniently here in Tohoku.

We booked a one-night reservation at Tsuta Ryokan, a famous establishment sitting unpretentiously in the Hakkoada foothills, to see if we might "drink in" some of the essence of the old Japan.

disappoint us.

Greeted at the front door with a hearty "Irasshaimase!" by the Innkeeper, we slipped out of street shoes and into "house" slippers, symbolically leaving behind the urban work world of tension and grime. An aged male caretaker led us over cold wooden floors, worn smooth by decades of human shuffling, to our second-floor room.

The rooms, a variation of the classic Japanese design theme of wood, shoji doors and tatami, was as delightfully spare as it was comfortable. The main sitting space, punctuated only by a low table and two legless chairs, could be entirely sealed off

from the adjoining bathroom and outdoor viewing hallway simply by closing the shoji doors. Our main room's only other

furnishings included a spare alcove area with Japanese calligraphy scroll, a small television, and various Japanese-style electric lights. Lest anyone conceive of our arrangement as too rustic, note that the private, Western-style toilet, located in a kind of foyer between the main room and the door, was equipped with an electrically heated seat.

An elderly, kimono-clad maid allowed herself in, presented a slip of paper

RYOKAN EXPERIENCE

requiring name and address, promptly informed us of a 5:30 evening meal to be served in our room, and bustled away, leaving us only hot water and a delicately lacquerware covered bowl of various teas.

Sansai-ryori, mountain greens and river fish, served faithfully in backcountry regions, was delivered as promised. Our maid scurried about, setting before us a large tray filled with delicacies – *izunari*, a broiled river fish; *warabi*, fiddlehead ferns; *takenoko*, creamy bamboo shoots; wild black fungi with a mustardy sauce; salmon and scallops sashimi with *wasabi*, the Japanese pale-green horseradish; *renikon*, lotus root – each dish neatly nestled in antique bowls and plates of varying shapes (some exquisitely proportioned, some vaguely reminiscent of the ashtrays of my father's generation). In addition, we feasted on *kamomabae*, a cast-iron kettle soup concoction of boiling chicken liver, tofu, onions, enoki mushrooms, and on toban yaki, a tasty heap of thin beef strips and shiitake and oyster mushrooms sauteed in butter over an earthen clay pot.

We dined in relative silence, stunned I think, by the amount, texture, quality and

floated through frosty, quiet corridors of dark, polished wood, past starkly lovely displays of ikebana and smooth stones, to our room, still feeling the radiating warmth of the onsen.

Discriminating hands had laid out futons for our return. This bedding, placed directly on the tatami, is as comfortable as any mattress of the West's devising. We turned off the heat, closed our sliding doors, and watched shadows flicker across the opaque shoji as we drifted off to sleep.

A breakfast table had been reserved for us at 7:30 in the shokudo downstairs. We repaired there at the appointed hour, feeling casually appropriate in our yukatas. Cups of *hojicha*, roasted green tea, were continuously poured, complementing our morning meal of cold broiled salmon, miso soup, yellow pickled daikon, poached egg, *nagaimo*, a yam-like liquid paste, fish roe, rice, *umeboshi*, pickled plums, and a yogurt drink.

We hurried back to onsen waters for a mid-morning dip. I was led this time to a smaller bath where an aquarium had been hollowed into one of the onsen walls. Trout

swam silently behind glass while a Japanese bather and I benignly gazed at each other through the heavy mists.

10:00 a.m. is the expected checkout time; we paid our bill in the office downstairs and then strolled Tsuta's grounds. A walking trail immediately behind the complex restaurant winds around a series of pools and marsh areas. In winter, through bare trees, it is easy to appreciate the size and scope of this still very wild and secluded country.

We left with a deep appreciation for this place, for Tsuta itself and for the Japanese ideal of an attentive, all-inclusive hospitality in harmony with the design of nature.

And yet, not the least of Tsuta's charms is its accessibility. Drive west to Towada City. Continue west on Route 102 toward Mt. Hakkoda to Yakeyama. Do not turn left there (towards the popular Otrase Gorge and Lake Towada) but rather continue straight another five kilometers up the curving mountain road to Tsuta. Signs are in Japanese and English. The entire trip, from Misawa Base to Tsuta, is only forty-five kilometers, and, depending on Towada City traffic, is roughly an hour's drive.

SETSUBUN

By Larry Armstrong

If you follow the Chinese calendar, you'll know that February third is the end of winter and the beginning of spring. And, if you closely follow Japanese traditions and superstitions, you'll also know that that's the day to cast out the demons of bad luck which have taken shelter in your home during the long winter months.

Setsubun, which means "change of season", is celebrated throughout Japanese



gathered up and tossed outside while the master shouted "Oni-wa soto!" "Devil go out!"

To further ensure riddance of the demons, a branch of the *hirrogi* tree, a type of holly, and the head of a sardine were hung at the doorway

sheer strangeness of these morsels arrayed before us. We dined in peace, afterwards contemplating our bathing ritual.

Our maid, knowing enough of gaijin cleansing rituals to know that we simply don't do it correctly, appeared to clear our table and implore us in acceptable English to bathe first in our room before venturing downstairs to the onsen. This we did, scrubbing away the impurities in anticipation of the healing waters. Then, swaddled in summer-cotton and winter-wool *yukatas* (the ryokan multi-purpose robe that can be worn anywhere on the premises) to ward off the winter chill, we padded down to the first-floor baths.

Onsen is something of a religion in Japan and rightly so; partaking of Tsuta's clear hot-spring bathwaters, bubbling up from the wide beechwood floorboards, has about it the aura of spiritual cleansing and renewal.

"Does it get any better than this?" I heard my wife ask over the wood wall separating the men's and women's baths. And then I drifted off, my mind lost in the heat and the mists rising into the cold confines of this mountain air. Later, our bath finished, we

homes, temples and shrines by throwing beans or peanuts which, according to tradition, will pierce the eyes of the devils and drive them out.

In the early days of *Mane-maki*, which the ceremony is called, the master of the house would dress in traditional Japanese ceremonial attire and throw the beans while shouting "Fuku-wa uchi!" or "Good luck come in!". The beans were tossed in every closet, corner and anywhere else a demon might hide. They were then



of a home before the bean-throwing ritual was held. Legend has it that this practice dates back thousands of years ago to the time of Emperor Uda, the 59th emperor of Japan.

As the legend goes, a devil was harboring in a cave and would come out each night and prowls a nearby village. The villagers were terrified and went to the emperor to get him to do something about the pesky intruder. After several failed attempts to force the devil from its cave, the emperor

turned to seven wise men for a solution to the problem.

They found that if they threw parched beans into the cave and then covered the entrance with hirrogi and sardines, the devil was driven away.

Today, the bean-throwing ceremony is less a religious festival than a time for fun. While many of the same customs are followed, peanuts are more commonly used now. Just about any store will carry specially wrapped bags of them attached to

a devil's mask. Many of the bean throwers will add candy to the peanuts for the children who are enjoying the ritual.

In many homes the family will merely place the beans on the family altar and pray for the removal of demons.

When shrines and temples hold the bean-throwing ceremony, they will often invite a local personality such as an actor, singer or sumo wrestler to be the bean thrower. The priests, dressed in ancient costumes, and the guest toss the beans to the crowd outside.

SEVEN LUCKY GODS

By Susie Davis

Shichifuku-jin, the Seven Deities of Good Fortune, are a favorite souvenir of visitors to Japan, but most know little about the history behind these gods. Each has been recognized as a god for at least one thousand years, but the first recorded grouping of the seven was in 1420 in Fushimi. They are each patron to several professions and their origins are rooted in India and China as well as Japan. Daikoku and Ebisu, patrons of business, were the first to gain popularity in Japan.

Ebisu is easily recognizable by his fishing rod and a giant *tai*, or sea bream in his hand. Ebisu serves as patron of executives, fishermen, housewives, merchants, sailors and producers. It is believed he is also patron of the doll plays. Dressed in his courtly garment and hat with two points, he is more likely to be found fishing than at court functions. It is said he began the custom of clapping hands before a shrine to call the attention of the gods to prayers being given.

Daikoku, a rich god, stands on bales of rice and carries a bag of valuable possessions, along with a mallet that grants

wishes when struck. Many believe he originally held the position of the Indian god of death and the god of war.

Patrons of the performing arts look upon Benten or Benzaiten, the only female of the seven, as their patron. She always holds a *bizen*, a type of Japanese lute, and is the goddess of music and art. Couples pray to Benten for

beautiful daughters but they must not pray together or they will surely be separated.

The god of war, Bishamon, dresses in armor and carries a spear. The pagoda he holds shows he serves as a Buddhist missionary. As one of the four kings of heaven, Bishamon protects Buddha and uses his armor and spear only for defense. He is the patron of soldiers, reporters, policemen, doctors, ambassadors and clergymen.

Fukurokuju, a Chinese hermit, has a high forehead and peaked scalp. He is said to have been able to live without food and

bring the dead back to life. He dresses in the costume of a scholar and carries a scroll representing learning.

Fukurokuju is the patron of magicians, watchmakers, athletes, chess players (a game he loved), gardeners and jewelers.

Jurojin, always accompanied by his messenger, a black deer, has a white beard, holds a scroll and carries a *shakki*, or holy written. The wisdom of the world is said to be on the scroll. He was known as the god of long life but is now honored as the god of wisdom. Judges, journalists, inventors, fortunetellers, clerks, airmen and administrators claim him as their patron.

Hotei, a Chinese Zen priest died in 916 but now is worshipped as the god of good

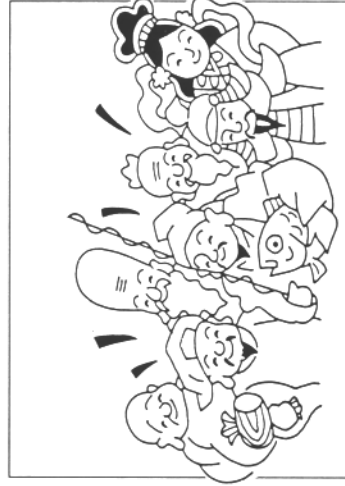
It is believed that if you eat three of the beans the first time you hear thunder after Setsubun, you will not be struck by lightning for the rest of the year. And, if you are at an unlucky age (25 or 42 for men and 19 or 33 for women) you can change your luck by picking up the same number of beans as your age, wrapping them in white paper along with a few coins and tossing them away at a crossroads.

But at whatever age they are, everyone likes to eat a bean or peanut to ensure themselves a year of good luck.

fortune and the god of happiness. The fat, bald, jolly god whose stomach, if exposed, makes him easily identifiable stands with one foot raised and both arms outstretched. He is patron of cooks, fortunetellers, and bartenders and is guardian of children.

Of all the legends surrounding the Shichifuku-jin, the best known involves their transformation into sailors and merchants at the beginning of the new year when they sail the *takarabune*, treasure ship, from heaven into actual ports on New Year's Day. It is further believed that if you place a picture of the ship under your pillow on the second night of the new year, you will have a lucky dream and good fortune for the entire year. Wooden models of the treasure ship are sometimes sold door to door in the local Misawa area during the month of December.

The beliefs and theories concerning the origin of the seven lucky gods are as varied as the scholars who study them, the books that are written about them, or the believers that worship them. A composite description of these is presented here, but the important thing to be remembered is that the Shichifuku-jin have truly become the Seven Lucky Gods of Japan.



SPORTS OF JAPAN

Sumo, or Japanese wrestling, is Japan's national sport, and the unique combination of ancient ceremony and the tremendous power of the wrestlers themselves makes it a marvelous and exciting spectacle.

Terms used in the sport

Shiore, or salt container. Before each bout, the wrestlers scatter salt in the ring to purify it. About thirty kilograms of salt is used in this way every day during a tournament.

Chikaramizu. This is the special name for the water the sumo wrestlers refresh themselves with before each bout. The winner of the previous bout and one of the wrestlers from the following bout serve it in ladles to the wrestlers in the ring.

Sonkyo. This squatting posture was a way of showing respect in the olden days.

Shiko. When the wrestlers raise their legs high and stamp them down onto the ring, they are symbolically crushing any evil spirits that may still be lurking there.

Chirichojo or **chiri**. When the wrestlers clap their hands twice and spread out their arms with their palms visible, they are showing that they are carrying no concealed weapons.

Shikiri. This is when the wrestlers squat down on their marks and glare at each other, trying to "psych each other out." This action is repeated along with the stamping and scattering the salt.

Basic Rules

The winner is the one who first makes his opponent step outside the ring or touch the ground (in or out of the ring) with any part of his body except the soles of his feet.

Sumo ceremonies

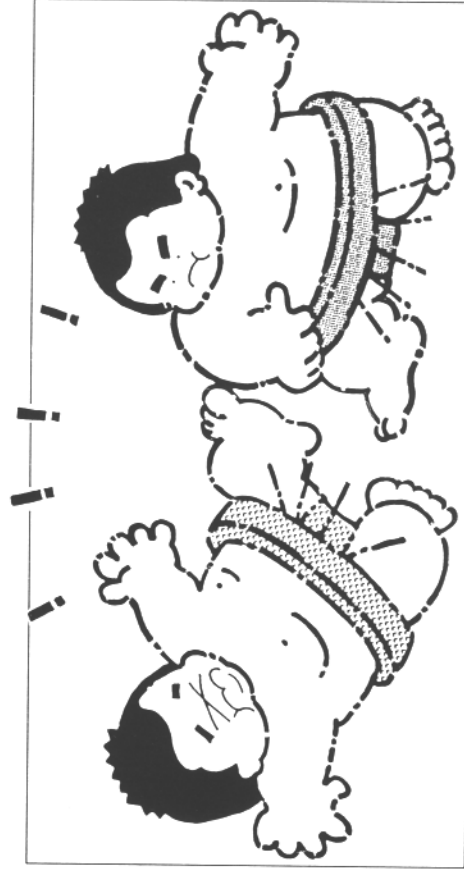
Dohyoiri. In this ceremony, which takes place before each tournament begins, the *yokozuna*, or grand champions, enter the ring one by one, accompanied by their herald, *tsuyuharai* and swordbearer, *tachimochi*, and give a special performance with actions unique to sumo.

their performance starts to become unworthy of their rank.

Ozeki wrestlers are demoted if they record two successive *makékoshi*.

A wrestler is promoted if he wins eight or more of the fifteen bouts that make up one tournament.

Sumo ranks, beginning at the top, are as



Yumitori, or bow dance is performed at the end of the tournament after all the matches are over. It is done to purify the ring, and is usually carried out by a wrestler from a lower division.

Sumo ranking

Sumo wrestlers all belong to training stables called *heya*, and a wrestler never fights another from the same *heya*.

Yokozuna is the highest rank a wrestler can achieve, and even if he records a *makékoshi* (eight or more losses) in a tournament, he cannot be demoted. However, *yokozuna* always retire as soon as

Judo is a self-defense art in which no weapons are used. It is a system of punches, kicks, throws and holds by which one subdues one's opponent. The basic principle of *Judo* is "strength and softness." It is a sport which trains both the body and mind, and since 1882 when it became organized, it has attained great popularity throughout the world.

Karate was originally thought to have been developed as a means of attack and defense by the people of Okinawa, who at one time were forbidden to carry weapons. It is generally considered to be extremely aggressive, but the famous karate master, Gichin Funakoshi taught the maxim that "there is no first strike in karate."

When two or more people practice *karate* together, this is called *kata*, or formal exercise.

Aikido was originated by Morihei Ueshiba. It places great emphasis on the spiritual aspect and has been called "Zen in motion."

Aikido, while a martial art, is not merely a matter of technique. It also teaches correct breathing and meditation, and is a way of "encountering the energy of the universe."

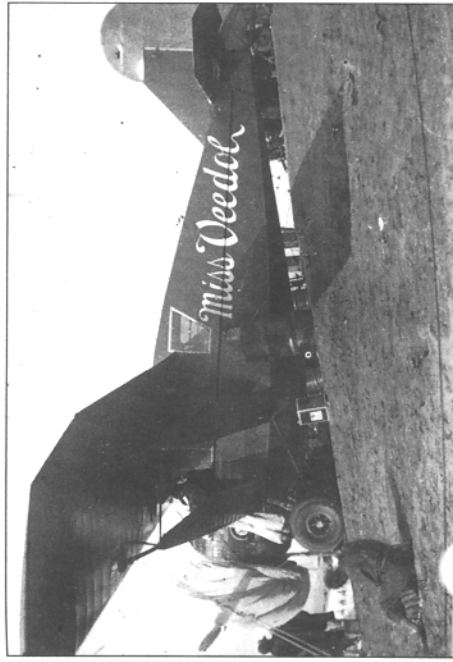
The movements are similar to those of *Buyo*, or classical Japanese dance. *Ki*, or "life force" emanates from the practitioner's fingertips.

All of the sports discussed above are rich in history, yet are just as popular in modern day Japan, and are currently taught in schools nationwide.

follows: *Yokozuna*, *Ozeki*, *Sekizake*, *Komusubi*, *Maegashira* and *Juryo*.

Kendo is the art of Japanese swordsmanship practiced by the *samurai* together with their philosophy of life. The body is protected by a mask, arm padding, and a chest plate. A bamboo sword is used in place of a real weapon during the training period. The winner wins by striking his opponent's mask, arm or body with the correct combination of force (both physical and spiritual), bodily posture and sword position.

MISS VEEDOL



around the world.

Pangborn and Herndon set off on July 28, 1931 in their aircraft named Miss Veedol, which was much slower than the record-holding aircraft which first flew around the world. Pangborn hoped to compensate for speed by superior first hop, intended to be from New York to Moscow non-stop (a new distance

The area surrounding Misawa is rich in both Japanese and American history. It gained historical importance both before and during World War II as a training facility for the Imperial Forces and again as an American base after the war.

Until the early thirties, most of Misawa's history had been shared only locally. However, in 1931, an event which began in the Misawa area made headline news in the United States in the small Washington town of Wenatchee.

The event which caught the eye of some Americans was the first non-stop trans-Pacific flight ever made. The daring duo who accomplished this feat was Clyde Pangborn and Hugh Herndon.

The idea of crossing the Pacific in a non-stop flight did not occur to them until they were halfway through their attempt to break the standing record for a flight

were bailed out of prison and the weary pair were given permission to depart in Miss Veedol.

Because of the heavy load their aircraft carried, they were obliged to use an airstrip at Sabishiro Beach, hundreds of miles north of Tokyo (a beach on the outskirts of Misawa). All expendable items, including a radio and life raft, were discarded in favor of food and fuel. Even with a maximum load of 900 gallons of gasoline, Pangborn doubted whether the aircraft could reach the coast of Washington, over 4,000 miles away. He reassured Japanese officials however, while he and Herndon constructed a secret weapon - a cable release for dropping the main landing gear after take-off. He estimated this would add 15% to airspeed and range.

All went well with the departure at 7 a.m. on October 4, 1931. The wheels and axle went spinning down into Akukeshi Bay on schedule. However, when Pangborn looked over the side and saw two bracing rods still protruding from the fuselage, he realized they could be rammed into the airplane, at great risk to life and limb, on any attempted belly-landing ashore. They would have to be removed.

Pangborn decided to put off the problem of removing the wheel rods until they reached cruise altitude, hoping the air would be steadier. But storm clouds followed them up to even 19,000 feet. The temperature dropped well below freezing inside the cabin and light began to fail. He eased himself out onto the monoplane's starboard wing strut, wrapped his legs around it and reached down to unscrew the wheel rod.

At this point, he realized the folly of his having adopted the Japanese custom of

flying without shoes. His feet quickly became numb, as did his hands and face. He wrestled with the stubborn rod while dangling three miles in the sky over the Bering Straits, roaring at Herndon to hold the bucking plane steady. By the time he had released the rod, he was frozen almost too stiff to move, but he managed to crawl back to the cabin. He thawed out briefly then repeated the performance on the other side.

They passed over the Aleutians in darkness, the sound of the engine deafening them to the point that conversation was impossible; they communicated with notes.

With the first light of day, they peered through a break in the clouds below and caught a glimpse of what appeared to be Dutch Harbor. They were right on course.

At 17,000 feet, ice was forming on the wings, slowing them down considerably. Still, they dared not risk plunging down into the turbulent cloud build-up below. They huddled close together and wiggled their numb toes. The engine never missed a beat and Miss Veedol chugged steadily on across the Gulf of Alaska.

They had about 3,000 miles behind them when the engine sputtered a few times, then stopped dead. Panic reigned for a few minutes, and the plane descended to an altitude of 1,000 feet before they remembered to switch fuel tanks. Soon, the wind-milling prop restarted the engine.

At 5 p.m. Sunday afternoon they sighted the shores of Queen Charlotte Sound - they were home free, almost. By the time they reached cloud-covered Seattle, it was 3 a.m.

and too dark to land. They circled Mt. Rainier three times, debating a course of action. They decided to press on farther east, perhaps to Salt Lake City, which would give them the long distance record.

In the continuing darkness and poor

visibility, the prospect of a belly landing on a remote mountainside dimmed their interest in Salt Lake City as a destination. They turned back and as dawn was breaking, Clyde Pangborn headed for Wenatchee, Washington, his hometown.

WEDDINGS IN JAPAN

In the United States, most couples choose to wed in May or June. In contrast, in Japan, most marriages occur in October, November or December. Your first hint that the wedding season has begun is large department stores displaying beautiful wedding kimonos and *obi* (sashes) made of expensive silks. These displays signal parents of daughters to begin preparations for the big event.

Approximately 46% of all marriages in Japan are *o-miai*, which literally means "interview." Parents of young adults interested in marriage will ask a friend or relative to be the *nako-odo* (go-between). The *nako-odo* screens possible mates and finally introduces them through photos and information on their family history, health, occupation, hobbies, interests and character.

After careful negotiation, the *nako-odo* arranges a meeting to be held at a very nice restaurant, private home or special location. The participants are the couple, both sets of parents and the *nako-odo*. This is usually their first official face-to-face meeting. After the meeting (*miai*), the couple is expected to date several times before they decide whether or not they will marry.

Of all the marriages in Japan, 46% are the result of a traditional *miai*, 28% are

Clyde came in over the familiar strip low and slow and managed to stop the prop in the horizontal position, but a last minute gust of wind spun it around and Miss Veedol came to an ungraceful halt with her tail in the sky.

specified. If it is not, it is best to check with others who you know that may be going for the average amount. Average fees are normally 15,000-20,000 yen per person. If you are closely related to the family, you should bring a much higher amount.

This fee may seem high to an American, but it helps defray the cost of the lavish (normally 3-4 hour) celebration, to include costumes. Even with an average of 300 guests bringing approximately 20,000 yen each, the family of the bride is usually left with a large bill to deal with.

Guests' attire is always formal, with men in suits (preferably a dark color, but be careful not to wear a black tie as it is normally worn at funerals only). Women will wear formal dresses, ranging from knee-length to floor-length to formal kimono.

Also of note: If you receive an invitation to a Japanese wedding, it is for only the person whose name appears on the envelope. In addition to seating limitations at the

Out of the cabin climbed two deafened, frostbitten, shoeless aviators - grinning and unhurt. They had spanned the Pacific... 4,000 non-stop miles in 41 hours and 13 minutes! History was made.

wedding hall, multiple invitations to one family means multiple wedding fees which can be costly.

Most importantly, though, if you are invited to a Japanese wedding, enjoy yourself... as it will probably be one of your most unique and fondest memories of Japan.

