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**Series: My Favorite Kyoto**

## My Way of Living

Paola Cordi (Italy)

I came to Kyoto in the autumn of 2013. Up until then, I had been working in Italy, but had been unable to find satisfaction with life there and felt as though something was missing. In order to change this, I decided to try out life in a foreign country. Because I had studied Japanese for a while during my college years, I chose to move to Japan.

However, to say I had studied a little Japanese in college really meant that my language ability at that time was terrible. For example, on my third day in Japan, I went to buy a bicycle, but I was unable to communicate effectively with the person working in the bicycle shop. Nevertheless, relying on the one dictionary I brought with me that time, I was somehow able to get my meaning across and buy a bike. That experience gave me some self-confidence, and I began to give myself new, little challenges every day.

Last October marked my second full year in Kyoto. Over the past two years, I have had the opportunity to meet many people and had many different experiences. However, the fact is, as I think you all may know, Japan is not an easy country for foreigners to live in. Studying Japanese and getting familiar with Japanese culture are not simple things to do, and there are many societal and systemic problems. Although many foreigners come to Japan to study, it can be very difficult for them to find work afterward, and many end up returning to their home country. In order to live as a foreigner in Japan, it requires putting in more effort than other people; it also means taking the initiative in finding work and being successful in other things. However, it is precisely because I am in this kind of environment that I have been able to challenge myself and to grow stronger as a person.

My hard work has paid off; now I work at an Italian restaurant called *il pozzo*, where I arrange the importation of ingredients from Italy; I also teach Italian language and Italian home cooking. Although every day is very busy, I have found a very fulfilling way of living.

And finally, my favorite Kyoto:

To be honest, I am not all that fond of pretty or famous things. Instead of cherry blossoms,



Paola in a narrow backstreet in the Gion area

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## The Customs of Setsubun

February 3 is *setsubun* (the last day of winter), the day before *risshun* (the beginning of spring), according to the old lunar calendar. It was believed that the turn of seasons, such as that day, brought out otherworldly spirits and *oni* (ogres), so various customs, some to fend off unearthly evils, have been passed down for *setsubun*. Among the different customs, the “sowing” of *mame* (soybeans) is presently the most famous and common one. *Irimame* (roasted soybeans) are put into a *masu* (small wooden box), and then they are thrown by hand out the door while saying, “*oni wa soto*”, and then thrown within the house while saying, “*fuku wa uchi*”. After that, people eat the same number of soybeans as their age plus one, hoping for good health and good fortune throughout the year.

Also, another custom of *setsubun* is eating *ehōmaki*, which is a special kind of *makizushi* (*sushi* roll). This tradition originated in Kansai, but has been seen and made famous throughout all of Japan. Customarily, people eat *ehōmaki* silently, without making any noise, while facing *ehō*, the direction in the sky from which good fortune will come; this year that direction is South-Southeast. Ingredients for *ehōmaki* include *kanpyō* (dried gourd shavings), *datemaki* (sweet rolled omelet), and *kyūri* (cucumber).



*Irimame* in *masu* (left), and *ehōmaki* (right)

Sho

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## Monkey Park of Iwatayama Mountain in Arashiyama



The year 2016 is “the year of the monkey” in Chinese astrology, and so let me introduce the park\* on Iwatayama Mountain in Arashiyama where wild monkeys live. This park is very popular with foreigners, because approximately 130 Japanese macaques, a native species, live there. On one fine afternoon of the early winter, I interviewed some visitors, searching for what was so appealing to them. I asked a blonde-haired woman who was using a tablet computer what made her visit here. She answered that she was travelling worldwide for 9 months to see wild animals and that she knew about this place from the information in a guide book. I asked the same question to a man and woman from Australia, and they answered that, since monkeys do not live in Australia, we cannot see them. I asked a Mexican man a similar question and he answered that he liked monkeys but he could not see them in Mexico. I asked a young Taiwanese man who looked like a student, and he answered that he had visited Japan 9 times, because he liked nature in Japan.

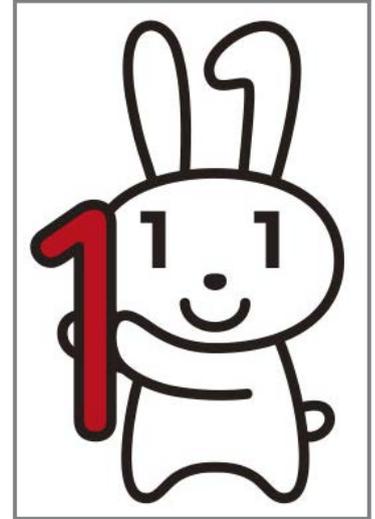
I asked Mr. Asaba, the top park official, why it was so popular with foreigners, even though monkeys live everywhere in Japan. He said that although monkeys live worldwide in tropical and subtropical areas, they do not live in cold climates. And Japan is the northernmost point where they live. So, for foreigners living in cold climates, they cannot see any wild monkeys. Also, park visitors can look out over all of Kyoto from the scenic viewpoints there.

\* <http://monkeypark.jp/en/>

FURUTA Tomiyoshi

# Important Information: My Number

“My Number” has been used since this past January for social security, disaster relief and administration of tax payments. This system was created by the government for the purpose of managing all information such as individual income, pension programs and tax payments by assigning a twelve digit number to each resident. Let’s look at an example where “My Number” would be used. Some of you may be students with part-time jobs. Typically the pay you receive from this job has been reduced beforehand by deductions such as income tax; the company you work for withholds these taxes on your behalf. Since the beginning of this year, the company must also report your “My Number” information when it makes the tax deductions. Accordingly, you are required to give your “My Number” information to the company you work for. However, you should only give your “My Number” information after you formally agree to be employed there. Please pay attention to the fact that you are never required to provide your “My Number” information in a job interview. “My Number” is very important personal information. Please do not carelessly reveal it to others. Furthermore, absolutely do not throw away your “My Number” notification letter.



Maina-chan:  
the My Number mascot

With the “My Number” notification you received, you will be able to apply for your “Individual Number Card.” The application procedure can be completed not only by mail, but also by smartphone, personal computer and some photo ID booths around town. This “Individual Number Card” has many advantages. It can certainly be used as evidence of your “My Number”, but it can also be used as a convenient way to get public certifications such as a residence certificate, and for getting a personal seal registration at convenience stores. You really should apply for an “Individual Number Card.” Please manage this “My Number” information properly so that you can live comfortably.

### For more information:

0570-20-0178 (Japanese) or 0570-20-0291 (English, Chinese, Korean, Spanish, Portuguese)  
<http://www.cas.go.jp/jp/seisaku/bangoseido/index.html>

NISHIMURA Makoto

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## kokoka news \* \* \* Kyoto International Community House news \* \* \*

### “kokokon” – Global Matchmaking Party at kokoka!

Come and meet lots of people from different cultures at our fun and casual get-together at kokoka. We are hosting this event for single people, Japanese and foreigners alike, as an opportunity to exchange languages, cultures, friendship, and maybe even find some romance! We encourage you to leave your worries behind and open the door to a new future!

- **Date & Time:** March 13, 2016, Sunday, 2:00p.m. - 6:00p.m.
- **Place:** kokoka - Kyoto International Community House (6 min walk from Keage Station (T09) on the Tōzai subway line)
- **Participants:** Singles in their 30’s and 40’s, Japanese and foreigners; limited to 50 men and 50 women.
- **Requirements:** Foreign applicants must live in Japan. Japanese applicants must reside or work in Kyoto. \*If the number of applicants exceeds the limit, participants will be selected by lottery
- **Participation Fee** (Includes Snacks and Drinks): Foreigners: 2,000 yen, Japanese: 3,500 yen
- **Activities:** Workshops, games and a party



Last year's participants

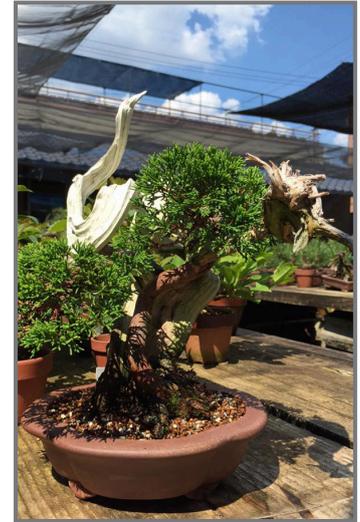
- **Organizer:** Kyoto City International Foundation
- **Sponsors:** ROKUSISUI KYOTO OKAZAKI / Restaurant TSUMUGI / The Westin Miyako Kyoto / Kyoto Hotel Okura / Kyoto Tokyu Hotel / Motohiro & Co. Ltd.
- **Supported by:** Kyoto City

# The World of *Bonsai* - Part 1

Since *bonsai* is an important part of Japanese culture, in this edition we interviewed Mr. Tomohiro Masumi, owner of *Koju-en*, a *shohin* (small size) *bonsai* specialty store. This year, from January 7 through 10, Japan's annual top-level *shohin bonsai* exhibition was held in Kyoto. The exhibits submitted by the general public were evaluated, and awards were given; this year more than 170 exhibits were entered. Following are our questions and his answers from the interview.

## **In general, how do foreigners and beginners enjoy *bonsai*?**

Like paintings and other forms of art, people will see things and enjoy them differently, but no one needs to explain how to look at them. People will see a piece of art, think it looks nice, sprout some interest, and start looking into it. Some people will begin because they like plants, Japan, or Japanese culture; people will feel things in their own way. Some may think one *bonsai* looks cool or cute, and from that feeling, I hope they will start to enjoy it. Nowadays *bonsai* is popular internationally; knowledge and information can easily be obtained on the Internet, and that has helped to spread *bonsai*.



Bonsai at Koju-en

## **How should a beginner get started?**

First, I just want you to take a look at some *bonsai*. After choosing one that you think looks nice, you will have to take care of it, giving it water and placing it where it can get some sun. From there, you start to become attached to it; it is similar to when you keep a pet. Then you think, “I want to make this one look cooler! How can I do that?”, and from that feeling, you will be motivated to look into what you need to do next.

## **At what age do you suggest starting *bonsai* as a hobby?**

I strongly suggest starting when you are in your twenties. It takes at least ten years to truly understand the beauty of *bonsai*. If you start after you retire, you will be in your seventies or eighties when you start to understand it. At first, it may seem like simply routine work, but you gradually start getting a feel for it. Also the idea that *bonsai* is an old person's hobby only exists in Japan. This is not true in other countries and therefore there is a wide range of people who take care of *bonsai*. Foreigners who have *bonsai* are generally people with a surplus of money, while the Japanese are generally people with a surplus of time. Recently a few foreigners have joined apprenticeships to learn the professional cultivation of *bonsai*.

## **From which countries do you often see visitors here at the store?**

People come from France, the USA, Australia, Italy, and so on.

## **Why do you think so many visitors are from the Western world?**

I think there is more than one reason; however, a lot of people have come here after accessing a foreign (English) *bonsai* website. There are quite a few people from the above-mentioned countries who have taken up *bonsai*.

## **Can you describe what the January *Gafūten* (small *bonsai* competition) exhibit is like?**

This exhibit has specific rules for evaluation. The space allowed for each entry exhibit is the same, about the size of a *tokonoma* (small alcove in a Japanese-style room). Within this space, each entrant considers the look, the angles, the setting, and the container for their *bonsai*, and they compete with each other on those points.

Website: <http://www.kyoto.zaq.jp/kojuen/0index.html>

Facebook Page: Search: Koju-en

The World of Bonsai - Part 2 to be continued in next issue.

Yoshinori TAKEDA



Italian home cooking at *il pozzo* restaurant

I prefer plum blossoms; instead of Japanese maples, I prefer ginkgo trees; and instead of nice Pontochō Street, I prefer Kyoto’s narrow back streets. When you walk along those back streets, you may come across many interesting discoveries. Most of these are things that tourists here hardly ever see, and I believe that this is the privilege of those who actually live in Kyoto. From now on, I hope to walk along many more back streets and to continue looking for new things — just the way I have always lived.

**kokoka news \* \* \* Kyōto International Community House news \* \* \***

**Counseling Day for Foreign Residents**

Do you have any questions or concerns regarding legal issues, visa problems, taxes, insurance, your pension, etc.? Are you worried about something? Professionals in those areas can discuss any of these with you. Interpreters will be available on request. Advanced reservations are required. We will protect your confidentiality.

When: Saturday, February 20, 13:00 - 17:00

Where: kokoka Kyōto International Community House, 3F, Conference Room and Counseling Room

Reservations: phone 075-752-3511

kokoka Kyoto International Community House Library

February - March 2016

**Library Letter**

**kokoka recommends this book**

**“I Became the Ocean – the story of a small life extinguished by the Great East Japan Earthquake”**



Text and Images: Usa  
 Publisher: Kumon Shuppan, 2014

Nearly five years have passed since the Great East Japan Earthquake, which took place on March 11, 2011. Because a huge tsunami came soon after the earthquake, a large number of animals died, as well as people.

This picture book describes the bond between a dog and its owner, who were direct and indirect victims of the tsunami. Based on a true story, it is a way to hand down from generation to generation the reality of this earthquake and the importance of life.

Please come to the library to read this book.

In the Japanese islands, we cannot predict when and where a big earthquake will occur. How about reading the book “Cooking Skills for Earthquake Times (One week until electricity restored)” by Hiroko SAKAMOTO [Shibata Shoten, 2006], to learn how to cook with limited ingredients and under difficult circumstances, in order to survive.

It would be nice to eat safe, tasty food even during times of disaster, wouldn’t it?

**The following items are also available**

Books for foreigners to help their daily life in Japanese, study Japanese, learn about Japanese law, visas, Japanese culture and sightseeing in Kyoto.

Books for Japanese to learn about foreign countries, overseas travel, extended stays, studying abroad, working holidays and volunteering.

Newspapers and magazines from all around the world.

**Books are not available for check-out**

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# Using *sakekasu* for tasty, warming treats

In the cold winter, we need special food and drinks to warm up our bodies; my recommendation for this season is to use *sakekasu*. *Sakekasu* is edible leftover solids from *sake* production; it has also been used as a fermented food in Japan, handed down from ancient times. *Sakekasu* is rich in nutrition, having B-vitamins, amino acids, and dietary fiber, and has great benefits for health and beauty; additionally, *sakekasu* helps to relieve constipation. Drinks and soups made from *sakekasu* will warm your body nicely, and help to turn away the cold and “a cold.”



*Sakekasu*

You can get *sakekasu* easily at supermarkets, liquor stores, and some other shops. Let me show you some easy recipes; please try them and enjoy the taste. Let's live a healthy winter life with *sakekasu*!

☆ You can make some changes to these recipes to suit your taste!

※ Please keep in mind that *sakekasu* contains some alcohol. If you want to get rid of the alcohol, please cook the *sakekasu* longer.

## *Amazake* (sweet *sakekasu* drink)



*Amazake*

Ingredients for 2 servings:

*sakekasu*: 100g, water: 400ml, sugar: 4 teaspoons, salt: 1 pinch, ginger juice: a few drops (to taste)

Preparation:

1. Put the water and the *sakekasu* (in small pieces) into a small pan to boil.
2. Add the sugar and salt to the boiling water. Mix well until all ingredients are completely dissolved. (Adding some ginger juice gives the *amazake* a good flavor)
3. Pour from the pan into cups; serve this drink hot for winter.

## *Kasujiru* (*sakekasu* soup)



*Kasujiru*

Ingredients for 2 servings:

*sakekasu*: 100g, water: 600ml, cut-up pork pieces: 100g, *daikon* radish: ~1/6, *ninjin* (carrot): 1/3, *aonegi* (scallions): ~1 small stalk / leaf, *dashi* powder (Japanese soup stock): 1 teaspoon, *miso* (fermented soybean paste): 2 tablespoons, *usukuchi shōyu* (light, salty soy sauce): 1 teaspoon

Preparation:

1. Cut the *daikon* and the *ninjin* into lengthwise quarters, and then slice these to about 2 mm thick. Finely slice the *aonegi*.
2. Put the water, sliced *daikon* and *ninjin* into a pan to boil.
3. Add the pork pieces to the boiling water. Add the *dashi* powder and the *usukuchi shōyu*, then dissolve the *sakekasu* in a ladle before adding it to the pan, and do the same with the *miso* paste. When well cooked, pour into bowls, and top it with the chopped *aonegi*.

FUJITA Risa

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