

# HIMEJI CIR NEWSLETTER

April and the cherry blossom season are over before we knew it! I hope everyone has lots of exciting plans for Golden Week and enjoys reading this month's edition of the Himeji CIR Newsletter!

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## About Me

Hello! My name is Cessan Smith and I am the fifth Coordinator for International Relations (CIR) in Himeji City. I was born in Scotland but lived in Australia for seven years.  
よろしくお願いします！

## What is a CIR?

A Coordinator for International Relations (CIR) is a position on the JET Programme that involves providing international expertise in a local government office. My everyday work involves translation, interpreting as well as holding cultural exchange events in Himeji.



## Things I have never been able to wrap my head around in Japan

1. How to translate よろしくお願ひします。 Every time I have to translate or interpret this phrase, it always comes out differently. If it's a greeting I will use 'nice to meet you' or in an email I will use 'I look forward to your reply.' Sometimes it comes out randomly when I thought they were already finished speaking so I just go with 'thank you', and hope no one notices.

2. Why a country that is so particular about lining up at the train/bus stations and being quiet on public transport would allow such crazy wild-west style driving and cycling. I was almost killed twice by cars skipping red lights, people will cycle in the direction of traffic or randomly swerve between cycling on the pavement and the road, and high school students will cycle side-by-side one another and leave you to cycle in the gutter, AND YET... people rarely jay-walk. Why? The road is really dangerous that's why.

3. How shop workers managed to talk about their special deals while they're folding up clothes. Have you ever walked through a shopping center and heard someone literally reciting word for word something like 「本日は、靴下、Tシャツ、日傘、ミートソースパスタを半額で販売しておりま〜す」 while they're doing other work? I can barely even cook while listening to music.

### St. David's Day event

We celebrated St. David's Day with a special stamp rally event at Himeji Castle! Himeji Castle celebrated the five year anniversary of its sister castle relationship with Conwy Castle in Wales last year.



### Cruise Ship: Viking Eden lands in Himeji

The Viking Eden cruise ship landed at Himeji port for the very first time. They were welcomed by Himeji Castle Ambassadors, Shiromaruhime and Hyogo Prefecture's mascot, Habatan.



## Japanese Word of the Month

# たん ご せ っ く 端午の節句

端午の節句（tango-no-sekku）was a national holiday celebrated on May 5th for samurai boys before being replaced by こどもの日 in 1948. The holiday included practices such as the displaying of the samurai helmet kabuto and eating of kashiwa mochi (a sweet treat wrapped in oak leaves). What are your plans for this year's golden week?



# Foreigner in Japan Spotlight

## S. Bengisu Mersinli

Hello! My name is S. Bengisu Mersinli. I was born on the west side of Turkiye, and grew up in Griffith, a rural town in the same state as Sydney, Australia, before moving to Sydney. I have been living in Japan for the past two and a half years.



### What is your favourite food?

Too many to list! I've been told that I am a big eater and everything I have tried so far are either 'edible/alright tasting' or 'divinely delicious'. I am particularly fond of zaru soba and udon, though.



### What is your least favourite food?

Food with poor artificial raspberry flavouring and dishes with bitter almond (think annindoufu or Chinese-style almond jelly). While I will eat them occasionally (the annindoufu ice cream in Yokohama Chinatown was quite good!), they rank among my least favourite food.

## What is your role?

I work as the Coordinator for International Relations (CIR) at the Nachi-Katsuura Town Hall Tourism and Planning Division. Although I am part of this department, my primary work locations are town information centres. I collaborate with all tourism-related organisations, including the town Tourism Organisation, the local guide associations, town chamber of commerce, Onsen Ryokan & Hotel Union, local restaurants, hotels, businesses and of course, the townspeople who work tirelessly to welcome the growing number of tourists, pilgrims and hikers.

My main duties include translating and interpreting (Japanese-English and occasionally Turkish-Japanese) various materials, including formal documents, restaurant menus and providing interpretation for tour guides, travel programs, and town locals who struggle to communicate with the growing number of foreign tourists. I also assist at the tourist information desk, where I handle a range of tasks, from providing basic guidance to assisting with events, organising bicycle rentals, foreign currency money exchange and assisting Tourism Organisation with events or attending monitoring tours.

## Where is your favourite place in Himeji?



Himeji Castle Loop Bus

I have been to Himeji once, and it was a very short visit- only a few hours. To make the most of my time, I went to the tourist information centre at the train station. I already knew a bit about Himeji from participating in an online tour during COVID-19 pandemic, where a local guide, equipped with a camera and microphone, showed participants around the JR Himeji Station and Himeji Castle. Since I had limited time but still wanted to see as much as possible, I took the Himeji Castle Loop Bus, which was a beautiful, efficient, and reasonably priced way to explore the area. Next time, I really want to go to Engyouji Temple on Mount Shosha! Mount Shosha itself looks absolutely stunning, and Engyouji Temple, like the Seiganto-ji Temple here, is part of the 33- Sacred Temple Kannon Pilgrimage route so I would love to see it. There are also many foods I want to try that I did not get to last time, such as kujayaki, Himeji style Takoyaki and Himeji oden!

## Why did you want to move to Japan?

Ever since I was very young, I have been fascinated by Japan. I'm not sure why, as I was born and raised in a small town in Turkiye, then in rural Australia, with little connection or mention of Japan. But I have always felt drawn to experience life here.



Kumano Kodo Daimon-zaka Slope ©NACKT

This experience, as challenging as it was, also made me realise my love for learning and exploring different languages and cultures. I had the opportunity to study languages at university, so I chose to major in Japanese studies alongside my law degree. I was also actively involved with language and cultural exchange associations, student bodies, and exchange student support groups, through which I made many friends from Japan and around the world. Having experienced the process of adapting to a new country, a new country, a new education system, and a new language, I wanted to support others going through similar challenges, while promoting cultural exchange and diversity.

## Why did you want to move to Japan?

Before moving to Japan, I travelled there as a third-year university student for about a month. It was my first time visiting Japan, something I had always wanted to do. I knew I wanted to experience life in Japan, but I felt I should at least visit once before making the move. I felt a sense of nostalgia for Japan, one that is still quite difficult to put into words, and experienced a feeling of homecoming when I finally visited.

After this experience, I was accepted for an internship in Japan. However, the timing of this coincided with the pandemic and I was forced to change my plans. Around the same time, I heard about the JET Programme from my teachers, who adamantly recommend that I take part in it. It sounded perfect for me, as I knew I wanted to experience living and working in Japan, but also knew it wasn't something I wanted to do for long term. I also felt that this programme would allow me to positively contribute to the community of my placement and facilitate lingual and cultural exchange. Furthermore, my desire to live in Japan was heightened by the frustration of not being able to undertake the internship.

After completing all my studies and endeavours in Australia, I applied for the JET Programme and have been happily living in Japan since August 2022 😊

## Story Time: The Ebisu Conundrum

As you may have already noticed, I have a “unique” name that has terrified many receptionists, admin staff, and substitute teachers to this day. Despite all the troubles, nicknames, and embarrassing times it has caused me, I quite like my name.



Nigiwaiichiba Market ©NACKT

Mainly because of its origin (it's old Turkish with Mesopotamian roots), its meaning (elixir of life/fountain of youth), and its biggest saving grace – it's easy to write in katakana and sounds accurate to how it is meant to be said (ベンギス). So, most of my Japanese friends and colleagues had no trouble pronouncing my name correctly- something I hadn't experienced in decades! Since Bengisu is slightly shorter and easier to pronounce than my last name, it was collectively decided that they would refer to me as Bengisu (also as ベンちゃん)

## Story Time: The Ebisu Conundrum

I was riding high on the contentment of finally being surrounded by people who could say my name correctly! I used 'Bengisu' in my introductions, in emails, and whenever I answered the Tourist Information and Tourism Organisation phones.



Tuna Auction

A couple of months after, we started receiving thank-you emails and people stopped by the tourist information centres to thank the person who helped them out over the phone. This is a common occurrence at the information centres, and we usually gratefully receive it and inform the person it's directed to. However, we began receiving emails and visits from people thanking "Ebisu-san". The only problem was, there's no Ebisu working here. We checked with some of the longest-serving staff to see if anyone named Ebisu had ever worked at the centres before, but there was no such person.

## Story Time: The Ebisu Conundrum

To add to the mystery, Ebisu is the name of one of Seven Lucky Gods in Shintoism. We soon gave up on our fruitless investigation and began jokingly saying that our workplace was blessed by this deity and that he had been supporting us during our bust times.



Ebisu, Japanese God of Luck

A few months later, while I was manning the information desk, a Japanese visitor asked for my name after I helped her with directions and local specialties. I told her "It's Bengisu" and she repeated it back as "Ms Ebisu"... It turns out that when I introduce myself over the phone, it sounds like I'm saying "Ebisu" instead of "Bengisu" on the other end of the line. Some of us were embarrassed that we hadn't made the connection earlier, while others retorted that it doesn't sound like Ebisu when I say my name. Most of us just had a really good laugh. To this day, I'm still called Ebisu- sometimes by visitors, and occasionally by coworkers who want to reminisce about the day we were collectively embarrassed- the day I officially added Ebisu to my list of nicknames. And so, my "difficult name" journey continues ^^;

## Visit Nachi-Katsuura



那智の滝と三重塔\_Nachi Waterfall and Three-Storeyed Pagoda

©NACKT

I currently live in the beautiful town of Nachi-Katsuura, located south of Wakayama Prefecture- a town famous for fresh tuna, hot springs and UNESCO World Heritage sites.

Nachi-Katsuura is home to many UNESCO World Heritage sites, including parts of the Kumano Kodo Pilgrimage routes, one of the Three Grand Shrines of Kumano Region (Kumano Nachi Taisha Grand Shrine), the Seiganto-ji Temple (the first temple on the Saigoku Kannon Pilgrimage), as well as Nachi Waterfall- the tallest waterfall in Japan.

## Visit Nachi-Katsuura



忘帰洞\_Boukido Hot Spring ©NACKT

In addition to these historically and culturally rich sites, Nachi-Katsuura is also home to many hot springs, including the nationally rare boukido, which are hot springs inside a natural cave overlooking the Pacific Ocean.

Thanks to the Kuroshio Current, Nachi-Katsuura is blessed with an abundance of fresh fish, especially tuna! From Pacific bluefin tuna (dubbed the “black diamond” for its quality and rarity) to bigeye, yellowfin and albacore! The tuna landed in Katsuura Port are caught using the sustainable “longline fishing” method and auctioned off super fresh.

You can watch these auctions and enjoy the freshest, most delicious tuna at one of the many restaurants in Nachi-Katsuura. Be warned, though- once you taste the raw tuna here, no other tuna will compare!

## Visit Nachi-Katsuura

Visit Nachi-Katsuura to see breathtaking UNESCO World Heritage Sites, sample the delicious fresh tuna, and relax at the natural hot springs! For more information about Nachi-Katsuura, please visit the Tourism Organization Website, Instagram, or email Nachi-Katsuura CIRs at [info@nachikan.jp](mailto:info@nachikan.jp)

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