

The Yamanashi Grapevine

January 2003

Table of Contents

p.2	Yatsushiro Town
p.4	Tabayama Village
p.6	G r a p e v i n e News Spotlight
p.8	ALT Experiences
p.10	Upcoming Events
p.12	Meet the Authors

Editor's Note

~ by Maguelonne Billy

In this edition of the Grapevine we decided to cover some news items not only from around Japan, but also a focus on Yamanashi news (p. 6-7). We thought it would be a good idea for our readers to have an idea about what is happening within the Prefecture.

As a continuation of the two previous editions of this magazine, you will make the discovery of two places in Yamanashi. We first visited Yatsushiro Town, with its outstanding views of the Kofu Basin, and then the small and remarkable village of Tabayama, located to the extreme east of Yamanashi. You will also read about the experiences of Rebecca Antrum, an Assistant Language Teacher who lives in the city of Enzan. We have also included a 6-month calendar of upcoming events in the Prefecture. Enjoy your reading!

Yatsushiro Town...

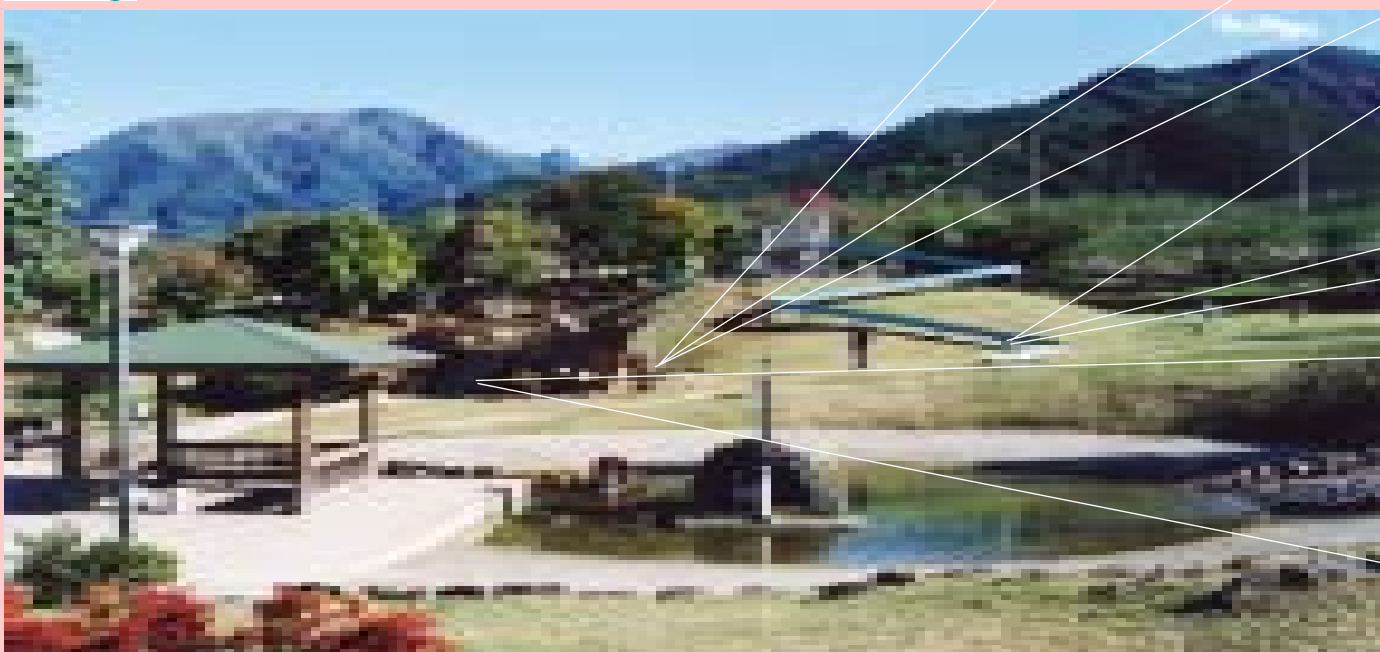
Yatsushiro town is a place which will remain in the album of my heart... Even when I visited for the first time, I felt some nostalgic feelings; it seemed familiar somehow!

The actual population is about 8,626 and this number has been increasing steadily over the last 5 years. Agriculture is the basic economy and it has encouraged Yatsushiro's growth in the region. Nowadays, Yatsushiro is the No. ONE producer of "kiku" (chrysanthemum) in Yamanashi Prefecture. The flower is also distributed outside the town as well as to other prefectures. Besides chrysanthemum production, the area is also famous for producing peaches and grapes. (Actually, grapes happen to be my favourite fruit!!) Anywhere you go here in Yamanashi, fruits are simply delicious. They taste really good!

A gentle breeze brings the season of spring to the town. It's an announcement that is the season for the representative Sakura (cherry flower) to start blossoming in the area. Within a few weeks, the city is coloured in pink, especially the "Furusato Park" (right).

Right next to the park there is a playground called the "Shinsui Hiroba". This is a place where residents go with their families to enjoy paddling and taking a stroll. While I was taking some pictures of the view, some children and their father were enjoying spending time together. Certainly, it is a very enjoyable "hiroba" where both children and adults can have a great time.

Yatsushiro's logo (left) was designed on the 40th Anniversary of the town. It symbolizes nature's richness in the shape of a tree and leaves, and also the image of a bird flying toward the future...



... a town full of flowers and fruits which spread a fresh fragrance and fruity flavour!!!

With that future in mind, the town has developed various plans and projects, and specific targets it would like to reach by the year 2010:

1) Delineating a picture of Yatsushiro's future

"Yatsushiro - an Alive & Active town with Nature's blessings and fellowship between people" is the slogan which heads this new town project. First of all, it encourages the passing on from generation to generation the life, culture and habits born out of the natural environment all around. The second aim is to foster exchange and genuine relationships between people, which help to bring about the residents' happiness and lead to an active transformation of the town. The third target is to create a healthy environment where people may live comfortably. Finding meaning and vitality in life brings happiness and com-

2) Target population

The current population of Yatsushiro is 8,626 people, but the aim is set at 9,300 people for the year 2010!



Yatsushiro town has much to offer to residents and visitors - beautiful surroundings, flowers and fruits, and a vision for the future!

人と自然にやさしい環境を守るために!

To protect a people- and nature-friendly environment!



by Deysi Lika Kamiji

For further information, access the Yatsushiro town website at:
<http://www.town.yatsushiro.yamanashi.jp>

Small but Spectacular - Tabayama Village

Population: 932. Nearest City: Enzan, Yamanashi. Beauty: Immeasurable.

Setting

Found in north-east Yamanashi, the mountain village of Tabayama is perhaps easier to reach from Tokyo than from within Yamanashi itself. The village is surrounded by the mountains of the Chichibu-Tama National Park (one of 27 in Japan) which covers parts of the prefectures of Yamanashi, Nagano, Saitama and Tokyo.

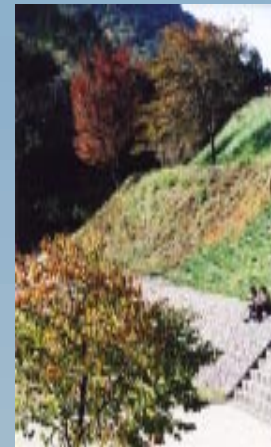
This is a village with a history spanning over a thousand years, and though the population may be gradually decreasing in the face of urban migration, when you drive up through the breathtaking mountain scenery there is still much that Tabayama villagers and residents here can be proud of and strive to maintain. Over the last decade or so, various projects have been started to introduce others to the beauty and special environment of this mountain village. The Parent-Child Study Programme invites families of primary and secondary school students to live for a year in the village, mixing with the locals, experiencing the wonders of nature and becoming a true part of village life. For high school students, it is necessary to travel to Tokyo or Enzan, the nearest accessible cities, for school, and in return Tabayama benefits from tourists travelling from these and other nearby cities to enjoy what the village has on



A central focus of Tabayama Village is the river, which is linked to Japan's capital in more ways than one. This pure and clean mountain river provides not only the possibility of fishing and bathing to tourists coming from Tokyo, but also flows out of Yamanashi into the famous River Tama which forms the water supply for Tokyo itself.

Seasons

Tabayama Village is blessed with stunning scenery all year round. The Grapevine visited in early November, and witnessed fantastic autumn colours. Everyone had spoken highly of the kouyou (autumn red leaves) of the region before this visit, but I was nonetheless amazed at the true beauty of the colours all around as we drove along the steep winding mountain roads. Not only red leaves, but a whole spectrum of warm and bright autumn colours carpeted the way, and from the approach to Tabayama we could gain a truly impressive view of Mount Fuji in its snow-capped glory. Though winters seem to be less harsh of late, and Tabayama Village is indeed beautiful in the snow, it remains too cold or inaccessible for most tourists and the attractions are closed for the season. Spring sees Japan's ubiquitous sakura cherry trees in bloom, and when summer arrives, many happy hours can be spent along the river fishing, bathing, or just relaxing.



Sights

Japan's longest roller-slide has enjoyed great popularity with young and older folk alike since its completion in the summer of 1990, and the starting point at Tabayama Castle affords splendid panoramic views of the valley. Be prepared for the walk up the steps to get there, though! Another important stop-off point in the village is the hot spring resort, opened just 3 years ago and providing relaxation to the 150,000 people to visit so far.



Festivals in Tabayama include the unusual style omatsu-hiki New Year festival on 7 January each year, which involves plenty of pine branches, mikan oranges and the local Shinto shrine. July is the season for summer festivals around Japan, and Tabayama is no exception, with its sasara shishimai lion dance festival whose origins go back 300 years and is noted as being unique in style to this region of Japan. Carrying mikoshi portable shrines across the river is also a feature of the village festival spirit in Tabayama.

Specialities

Stop off for handmade soba noodles, to be enjoyed either inside the cute log cabin or outside in the fresh, clean Tabayama air. As it was a chilly autumn day, we opted for the former. Grating fresh wasabi to accompany the noodles was a new experience for me! Alternatively, you could always use the barbecue facilities to cook your own meal of rainbow trout, yamame trout, or char freshly caught from the village-run fishing spot or the river running alongside.



If mushrooms are your thing, this is the place to be. Whilst people living in Japan's cities have to make do with what they can find in the shops, Tabayama locals enjoy the luxury of being able to pick only the best and tastiest of the many varieties of mushroom growing in the verdant nature all around. People in Tabayama Village certainly know how to make the most of their abundant natural environment, and how to share it with those fortunate enough to visit!

by Lisa Barrett



Grapevine News Spotlight



Governor Amano retires

Ken Amano, Governor of Yamanashi for 12 years, has decided, at age 74, to retire from the political arena. He officially announced on 25 September 2002 that he would not run for a fourth mandate. The main reasons he gave for his decision were that he felt too old to fulfil his task as a politician, along with his desire to enjoy other things in life. He added that it was time for him to hand over to someone younger, able to adapt to a new era with innovative ideas to fit in with the 21st century.

The people vote directly for the governor, who is elected every 4 years. This year, elections are to take place on 2 February.

Town, village and city mergers in Yamanashi

As a way to enhance administrative efficiency and reduce administrative costs, and in view of its decentralisation initiative, the Japanese government is urging the different Japanese administrative entities to merge. This is one of the biggest socio-political issues in Japan at the moment.

In Yamanashi, newspapers and special local TV programs are covering the problem. All the local governments in Yamanashi are holding negotiations and trying to reach a suitable arrangement. One merger of six towns and villages has already been decided. The new city (the result of the merger of the towns of Shirane, Wakakusa, Kushigata, Kousai and the villages of Hatta and Ashiyasu) will be named "Minami-Arupusu-shi" (South Alps City). This merger will become effective as of 1 April 2003.

Other similar mergers are also likely to be announced in the near future.

Faster than a speeding bullet?!

Yamanashi Prefecture is making rail history for Japan with the Linear Chuo maglev train. The superconductor system uses a series of magnets running along the track to propel the streamlined train carriages at record speeds of 550km/h. Following testing in Miyazaki, Japan, the Yamanashi test track for this innovation was first set up in 1990 by the Central Japan Railway Company. The testing of the track and carriages has been ongoing since this time, and a further 100 people have recently been given the opportunity to take part in a manned test run of the new style carriage. 28 November 2002 saw the opening of the "Linear Chuo Early Realization Symposium" in Tsuru City, Yamanashi, where people had the chance to gather and discuss the role and possibilities of this technological project. It only remains to be seen whether the financial barriers can be overcome in order to bring this vision to reality.

Death of Prince Takamado

Prince Takamado, seventh in line to the Japanese Throne and a cousin of Emperor Akihito, died from heart failure at age 47 on 21 November 2002.

He was well known in Japan, in particular because he was taking numerous and active roles in sports associations. He was honorary president of the Japan Squash Association, he was also a member of the Japan Hockey Association. As the honorary president of the Japan Football Association, he attended the opening ceremony of the 2002 Japan-South Korea World Cup in Seoul (South Korea), becoming the first member of the Japanese Imperial Family officially invited to South Korea. He was also an authority on ballet, and regularly wrote reviews of performances.

He was born on 29 December 1954, the third son of Prince Mikasa, younger brother of Emperor Hirohito, and had three teenage daughters. He graduated from Gakushuin University (Tokyo) and studied at Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario (Canada). He consequently had very close links with Canada and was named honorary president of the Japan-Canada Society. He was also one of the rare members of the Imperial Family to work: he had been working for the Japan Foundation since 1981.

His funeral took place on 29 November at Toshimagaoka Cemetery (Bunkyo ward - Tokyo), with about two thousand people accompanying the funeral procession. Prince Takamado will be remembered as an active and valued member of Japan's Imperial Family.

Two Nobel Laureates for Japan

The announcement of the 2002 Nobel Prizes, with two Japanese scientists earning the prestigious award, has been greeted with great enthusiasm in Japan. It is the first time ever that Japan has received two Nobel Prizes in the same year.

Masatoshi Koshihara, 76, professor emeritus at the University of Tokyo, shares his Nobel Prize for Physics with Raymond Davis Jr. and Riccardo Giacconi, both of the United States of America. This Prize is in recognition of his work "for pioneering contributions to astrophysics, in particular for the detection of cosmic neutrinos".

Koichi Tanaka, 43, researcher at Shimadzu Corp., received the Nobel Prize for Chemistry (it is the third year in a row that a Japanese person has received the Nobel Prize for Chemistry), which he shares with John B. Fenn, of the U.S.A., and Kurt Wüthrich, of Switzerland. He has been awarded for developing new methods of analysing biological macromolecules.

Photocopying humans?

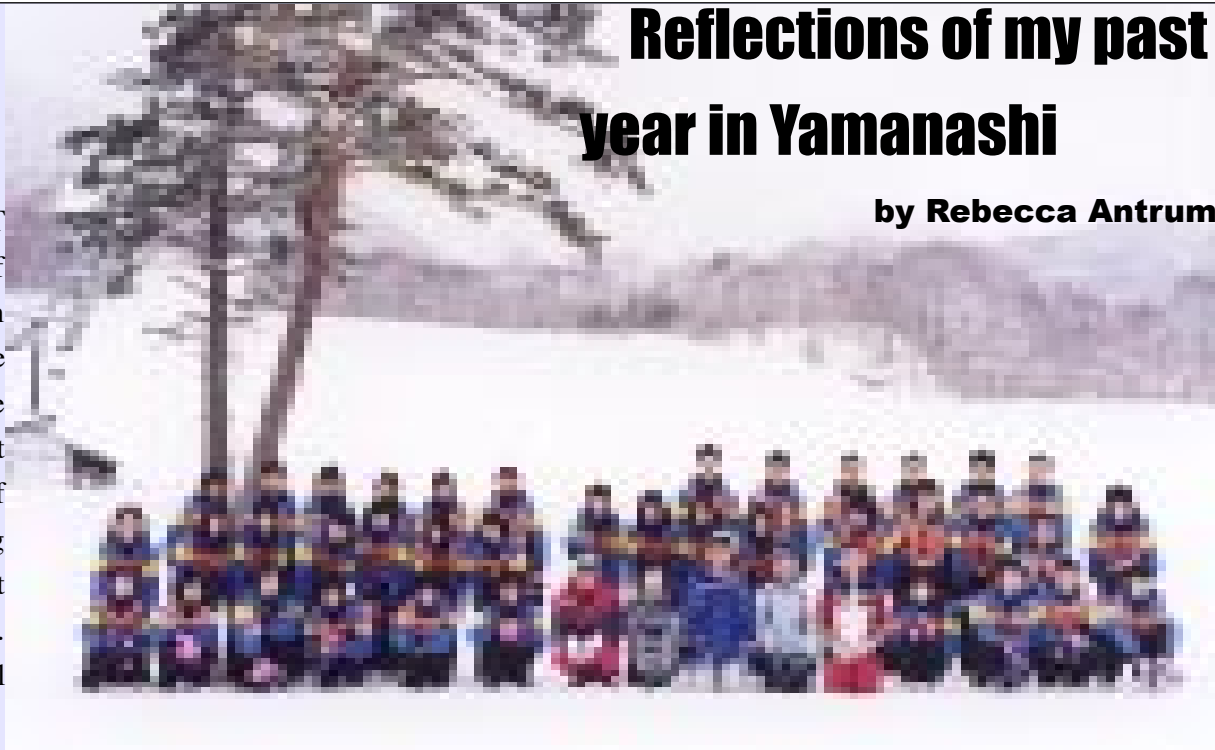
Dainippon Screen Manufacturing Ltd. has developed the first photocopier of humans, the Azero Originator. It was first displayed at the Tokyo Game Show (Chiba City) on 20 September where 200 lucky people were given the chance to get a copy of themselves for two thousand yen.

To be "photocopied", you need only to lie at full length on a big scanner and then you get a high quality poster, almost life-size (115 cm by 81 cm) of yourself printed out. You won't need to break the office photocopier anymore!

Reflections of my past year in Yamanashi

by Rebecca Antrum

When I first heard that I had been accepted on the JET Programme I was so excited. As I read through my letter of acceptance it said that I had been placed in a town called Enzan in Yamanashi prefecture. I must confess that I had no clue where this was until I looked it up on the Internet. Then the brochure came in the mail describing Yamanashi and the attractions it offered. Mount Fuji, famous hot springs, and the wine capital of Japan! I was sure I was going to love this place and after being here for a year I have yet to be disappointed. Japan has taught me many things about myself from humility to accomplishment. At times I felt very lost and confused, as I expect most of us feel when we are living in a different



country and then there are the other times where even if you communicate the simplest of things to someone you can feel the greatest sense of achievement.



I arrived in Yamanashi at the end of July in 2001. This is the hottest season in Japan and coming from Calgary, Canada I was slightly unprepared for the heat and humidity. At first, it was slow going as my body adjusted but to help manage the heat I was taken to various places to help cool down. One such place was Ojiragawa, a beautiful waterfall that you have to hike up to. The hike is pretty strenuous but the pay off is a refreshing swim in the cool water, a nice treat on a hot day. Towards the end of summer the peaches and grapes are in abundance and many of the teachers at my school brought them in on a daily basis. There is nothing like eating delicious fresh fruit, especially when you know that it was practically grown in your own back yard!

As summer turns to fall, there are some distinct changes that Yamanashi undergoes. The weather becomes much cooler and the humidity decreases. This season is also very beautiful in that the surrounding mountains change from their lush green to an array of orange, yellow and red. A great spot that I went to see this was Nishizawa Ravine. A very light hike takes you around the Ravine and offers you a chance to see some great scenery, not to mention some monkeys! I spotted at least half a dozen while I was there so keep your eyes open for the nimble little guys. In October, there is a big wine festival held in a town called Katsunuma. You pay ¥500 for the opportunity to taste all the different kinds of wine that are produced in Yamanashi. There are also different food stalls and live entertainment. You just have to be careful how much you drink, as the wine can be strong and you never know who you might run into!



Winter is also the perfect opportunity for getting out and trying some winter sports. Since Yamanashi is so central it is easy to get to some of the best ski resorts in Japan. After a day on the slopes what better way to warm up than by going to an onsen. At first, I was a little dubious about 'baring it all ' in a public bath until I tried it. The initial wariness soon dissipates as you are sat in the most relaxing hot spring, where the hot water and minerals soothe your tired aching bones.

As much as I loved winter, when March arrived I was very happy to feel the chilling air turn warm and see everything come back to life. I have to say that the most beautiful season has to be spring. The cherry and peach blossoms are like a blanket of pink and white stretched out over the valley basin. With the arrival of the cherry blossoms there are many blossom viewing parties to attend, called 'hanami' . This is a great opportunity to socialize with your friends, bask in the warm weather and look at the beautiful scenery.



As I fill the pages with memories of last year, I realize how much I have done and how much I have had to leave out of this essay. My experiences in Japan have taught me a great deal about myself and have given me a new sense of independence. I have been very lucky to have met some wonderful people here in Yamanashi. From the teachers and students at my school who have shown me patience, acceptance and an overwhelming degree of generosity, to my A.E.T. friends who have always been there for me and with whom I have shared these unique experiences. I feel lucky that I still have a whole year left, as there is still so much that I would like to do before I go back to Canada.



Upcoming Events in Yamanashi~ January-June 2003

January

1/1 Watching the sunrise on New Year's Day in Yamanashi City

At an altitude of about 600 metres, the Fruit Centre in Yamanashi is certainly a most suitable location to watch the first sunrise of the year. Sweet rice wine and miso soup are served for free for people who arrive in the small hours of the morning. For more information, call 0553-23-5111.

1/28 Kanayama Festival in Futaba Town

This is a very traditional festival which is held every year at the Kanayama Temple. Its history goes back to the first half of the 18th century. In this temple stones which look like male and female reproductive organs are enshrined in order to ensure descendants for the worshippers. On the 28th, traditional Japanese cakes are made in the same shape and offered to the temple deity. Many people from outside the prefecture come to attend the event. For more information, call 0551-20-3666.

February

2/3 Traditional celebration of the end of winter in Minobu Town

Every year, famous Japanese singers and other celebrities are invited to participate in this celebration held at Kuonji Temple, the head temple of the Nichiren sect. If you want to increase your autograph collections, this could be your chance, so be sure to be there in the morning. The religious ceremony starts at 1pm in the main Hall of the temple. And as this day's tradition requires, the throwing of beans to chase away evil spirits takes place at 1:30pm. For more information, call 05566-2-1011.

2/10-11 Toka-ichi Market in Wakakusa Town

This market has a very long history and there is a saying which goes "There is nothing you cannot find at Toka-ichi, except perhaps cat's egg and horse's horn". So don't miss out on the rarities and visit the market! For more information, call 055-282-3100.

March

3/9 Cross Country in Shikishima Town

This is a good chance to run surrounded by the scent of plums brought by the fresh spring breeze. Different courses, for individuals as well as families, are available depending on the participant's choice. For more information, call 055-277-4111.

April

4/5 Shingen-ko Festival in Kofu City

This is by far the biggest festival held in Yamanashi every year. It honours one of Japan's finest warlord and ruler of ancient Yamanashi, Takeda Shingen (1521-1573). About 1,600 people dressed

as warriors, preparing to fight the Battle of Kawanakajima, parade through the streets. Each year, a Japanese film actor is invited to take on Shingen's role.

beginning of April Cherry Blossom Festival in Kajikazawa Town

Obochi Hill, in Kajikazawa Town, is famous for its 2,000 cherry trees. In early April the hill is entirely covered with pink and this festival is held in celebration. It is a very nice place to experience cherry blossom viewing while enjoying some local food. For more information, call 0556-22-2151.

4/29 Koshu Kite Festival in Kosai Town

This festival was first held in order to keep the tradition of the Koshu kite (a kite typical of Yamanashi) alive. You can join the competition which takes place on the dry Kamanashi riverbed, by applying for one of the 4 categories represented, depending of the size of your kite, or merely enjoy a barbecue while watching the competing kites. A mountain bike race is also held the same day. For more information, call 055-282-6915.

May

5/31 The 10th National Haiku Contest in Tsuru City

Tsuru City has close links with Japan's most famous haiku writer, Basho (1644-1694), who spent half a year in the city after his Edo home was burnt down. To commemorate this, the city organises a haiku contest every year. Why not come and present some haiku of your own invention? For more information, call 0554-43-1111.

mid-May~end of June Mitsutoge Walk – Nishikatsura Town

Enjoy a walk up this sacred mountain, altitude 1,786 metres, discovering many historical sites on your way to the top. For more information, call 0555-25-2121.

June

6/15 Saiko Lake Road Race in Ashiwada Village

This race, which attracts 5,000 runners every year, will be held for the 19th time. Join the race by choosing your preferred distance: 5, 10 or 20 kilometres. The deadline for applications is 11 April. For more information, call 0555-82-2311.

6/20~7/13 Herb Festival in Kawaguchiko Town

This is the occasion to smell the perfume of lavender from more than 10,000 bushes, and to take nice photographs of Mount Fuji with the purple colour in the foreground. This Herb Festival is one of the big festivals held every year around Kawaguchiko lake. Everyone, from children to adults, can enjoy different kinds of herb tea, concerts and the romantic illuminations at night. For more information, call 0555-72-3168.

Meet The Authors

Maguelonne Billy

A native from France, Maguelonne is spending her second year working as a CIR in the Yamanashi Prefectural Office. After she leaves the JET Program, she plans to work elsewhere in Japan, in order to gain other new and rewarding experiences.



Deysi Lika Kamiji



Deysi started her work in Yamanashi Prefecture on April 10th, 2002! Actually, it is her third time living in Japan, but the first time to work as a government employee. She is enjoying her new life so much in "freezing" Yamanashi that she just re-contracted for another year, until April 2004. All the best to her!

Lisa Barrett

Lisa arrived in Yamanashi in August 2002, having just graduated from Durham University in the north of England. She is enjoying life in beautiful Yamanashi so far, and is glad to be able to use the Japanese she studied at university in her work as a CIR.



Rebecca Antrum



Rebecca is a second year ALT, who works at Enzan Senior High school in Enzan City. She is from Calgary, Alberta in Canada and enjoys winter sports very much. Rebecca plans to stay for at least another year as she has had many great experiences in Yamanashi.

Produced and Printed with the Sponsorship of
The Osano Memorial Foundation

For a free subscription or a change of address, contact:

The Grapevine Editor

International Affairs Division

Yamanashi Prefectural Government

1-6-1 Marunouchi, Kofu-shi, Yamanashi-ken, 400-8501 Japan

Tel +81 (0)55 223 1436

Fax +81 (0)55 223 1438

<http://www.fynet.or.jp/grapevine>

Cover photo: Erinji Temple in Enzan, spring 2002.