

# The Yamanashi Grapevine

July 2004

## Editor's note

Welcome to the latest Grapevine issue. We invite you again to discover two wonderful places in Yamanashi Prefecture. First, Mitomi Village, a secluded green heaven in Northern Yamanashi which is home to an uncommon animal. Then, Minobu Town, where one of the most impressive Buddhist temples I have ever seen is hidden. This issue will also take you on a lyric journey with Mathew Eccles who tells about his experience as an Assistant Language Teacher. Finally, I will personally guide you through an unusual visit to the Yamanashi Prefectural Museum in the new Discovery section. So please sit down, relax, and enjoy the tour.

-Sébastien Noël-

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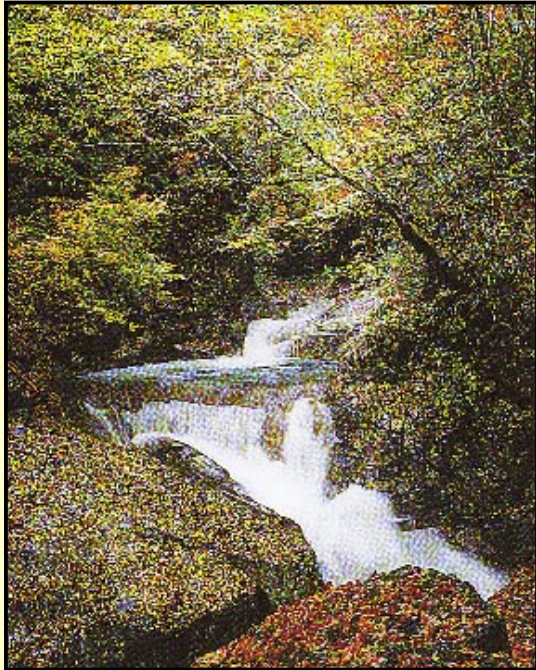
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Even without the increase in altitude, anyone who pass through Mitomi Village in Northern Yamanashi will find themselves gasping for air in the midst of breath-taking views.

Located 690 meters (2,262 feet) above sea level, Mitomi village is 96% mountain and forest with a population of 1,309. A seemingly out-of-the-way location has many assets putting it on the maps of adventurous nature enthusiasts.

**Nishizawa Ravine**, Mitomi's main attraction is known throughout Japan. A three-hour walking course allows trekkers to survey a series of waterfalls and innumerable trees and flowers, and wild life -including maple trees and perhaps copper pheasants, Mitomi's tree and bird, respectively. Serenity surrounds those

who embark on the short journey-as well as magnificent sights that no-doubt excite novice and professional photographe alike. Nishizawa is beautiful year-round, although wandering along the trail is risky in winter, walkers should practice caution around icy patches. Fall is recommended as a time to plan a trip to the northern reaches of Yamanashi.

People travel to Mitomi in autumn to witness an exceptional cornucopia of colors. Drastic changes in temperature between morning and night make for a unique hodgepodge of hues, blanketing the mystic sights that encompass the ravine's walking course.

While autumn is the most popular season for a brief stay in Mitomi, spring's fresh verdure also draws in a substantial amount of people. Rhododendrons, the flower of Mitomi, begin to bloom in spring and monkeys, bears and other creatures in the region's charming forests might be spotted traversing around.

Mountain climbers should bring along climbing gear and make time to climb some of Mitomi's nationally known mountains-including Mount Kentoku which peaks at 2,031 meters (6,659 feet) and, according to the Mitomi Tourism Division, has many visitors every year. Mitomi's tallest mountain stands at 2,592 meters (8,498 feet).

Despite its remote location, Mitomi is easily accessible by car, bus or train and also has ample accommodations for guests (this hidden treasure of a village has received many foreign tourists, according to its Tourism Division staff).



For fans of Japan's infamous natural hot springs, four ryokan (Japanese style inns) with hot springs are located in Mitomi. In addition, privately owned hot springs are scattered throughout the vicinity. Also worth soaking in the older Fuefuki no yu, which is quite reasonable in price and allows residents and tourists alike to experience traditional Japanese culture in a calming environment.

Mitomi is accessible by the Japan Railways Chuo Line, via Enzan, Yamanashi. Alternatively, busses and taxis are available to transport people from Enzan as well; when split between 5 people, cab fare is roughly the same-if not slightly cheaper 葉 han bus fare.

No Yamanashi town, city, or village would be complete without its contributions to the prefecture's infamous selection of wine and fruits (namely grapes, peaches, plums and apples). While at Mitomi Station's gift shops, visitors can purchase products like blueberry, strawberry, peach and grape wines. T-shirts, local dishes, specialized Hello Kitty (originally from Yamanashi) goods and various other gift options are also for sale.

One local product you will not find in any of Mitomi's stores is the rare Inobuta. Inoshishi (猪) is the Japanese word for wild boar; buta (豚) means pig. Inobuta (イノブタ) as you

may have gathered, is the combination of wild boar and pig, and also makes for a delicious dish. Mitomi has several restaurants serving this exotic animal's meat and visitors can see inobuta up



close at various breeding grounds within the village. One of Mitomi's inobuta restaurants is even mentioned in a Japanese manga (comic book)! Inobuta is served in thin slices for grilling, with various Japanese noodles, or in other delicious ways.

Whether searching for something to suit your adventurous side indoors, outdoors, at dinner time or under water, an outing in Yamanashi Prefecture's northern Mitomi is guaranteed to please-and will surely capture your heart and your breath.



For more information on Mitomi Village, please visit the following website which, although available in Japanese only, offers many beautiful photographs:  
<http://www.vill.mitomi.yamanashi.jp/>

by Dilek Dogruyusever



# Minobu Town

身  
延  
町

“...Over seven hundred years ago, before he settled on Mount Minobu, Nichiren Shonin traveled the area teaching the Lotus Sutra. A woman with different beliefs to Nichiren Shonin, named Keicho, held a strong dislike for the teacher and together with her friend, Hoki, she plotted to kill him. One autumn's day, the two women prepared some ohagi\* laced with poison and took it to Nichiren Shonin's hermitage, where he was overjoyed to see them. He sat down to eat with them when, from nowhere, a white dog appeared and began barking for the ohagi in Nichiren's hand. Nichiren gave his ohagi to the white dog, who devoured it and died instantly. Shocked at what they had done, the women said, “From now on we must never do that kind of thing again. Please make us your disciples.” Nichiren gave them Buddhist names and made them his disciples.

In recognition of the white dog who had appeared to take the place of Nichiren Shonin, a tomb was prepared in the grounds of Jotaku-ji temple. To mark the grave, Nichiren took his walking stick, made from the wood of the ginkgo tree, and planted it upside down in the ground. The cane put down roots and became a tree which grew taller and taller. If you go to Jotaku-ji temple today, the tree still stands in recognition of the white dog who saved Nichiren Shonin.”

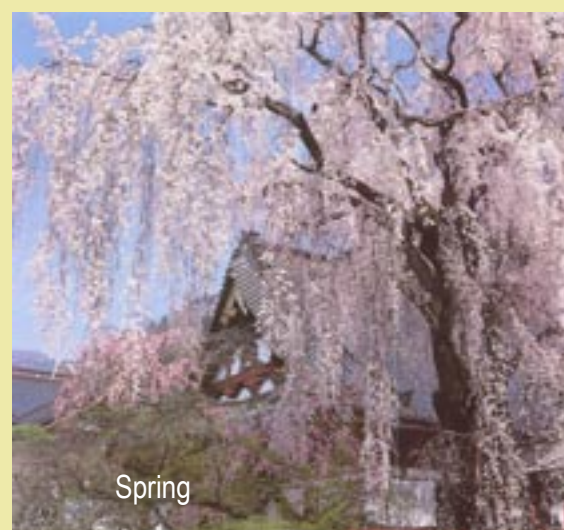
The story of “The upside-down ginkgo tree at Jotaku-ji” is just one that surrounds Minobu and founder of the Nichiren sect of Buddhism, Nichiren Shonin. Nichiren first came to Minobu Kuonji Temple on the slopes of Mount Minobu. He taught there for nine years, without once he was forced by illness to seek treatment and left for hitachi-no-kuni (present day Ibaraki) could reach his destination and his remains were carried back to Mount Minobu where the. Nowadays, Kuonji Temple has become the destination point for a mixture of travellers: Nichiren's understanding of his teachings; curious tourists seeking ‘old Japan’ and traditional architecture; appreciate the area for its natural beauty, air of solemnity and serenity.



Any visitor to Kuonji will first need to formally enter Mount Minobu by passing through the So-mon gate. Once through, to the left is a stone which apparently Nichiren Shonin himself sat on over seven hundred years ago. The Temple is reached slightly further on by passing through the grand San-Mon gate and climbing the 287 stone steps which ascend the 104 metres to the Main Hall. This final stage on the route to Kuonji leads you up through a forest of Japanese cedars and is known as bodaitei, “steps towards enlightenment”. In the basement of the Main Hall is an exhibition of precious Buddhist artifacts; the Temple precincts are home to a number of other lesser known, but still impressive, buildings. Given its importance, the temple is the site of many Buddhist festivals throughout the year, and the grounds are arguably at their most beautiful in the spring, when painted with the light pink of sadare-zakura (cherry blossoms).

\* ohagi : a ball of rice covered in bean paste

“A wealth of nature and history...”



Spring



Autumn



Summer



Winter

...in Minobu



Despite the central role of Kuonji in Minobu's history, with a little exploration it is apparent that there is much more to this town than its famous temple, and you don't have to stray too far from Kuonji to find out. A short walk from the temple grounds is the beginning of the Minobu ropeway, which climbs the 763 metres to the summit of Mount Minobu in approximately 7 minutes. Nichiren Shonin built Okunoin Temple on the summit of Mount Minobu in memory of his parents and the grand setting is fitting for a memorial. Visitors to Okunoin are rewarded with 360 degree panoramic views, taking in the townscape of Minobu, the Fujikawa river carving its way through the valley below, the nearby peak of Shichimanzen, Mount Fuji and the distant range of the Minami Alps. The most striking sight, though, is reserved for sunrise when the sun emerges from behind Mount Fuji and temporarily illuminates the summit-- a sight known as ‘Diamond Fuji’.



Another area for shopping enthusiasts is Shonin-dori, the common name for the shopping district outside of Minobu station. Famous for being a “Modern day historic city”, great care has been taken to provide this uniform, historically accurate visual scene. All of the shop buildings have traditionally tiled roofs, with the edges bearing the family crest of the architect. Perhaps the biggest step towards authenticity, and the biggest difference with any other street in Japan, is the sky. Shonin-dori is pleasantly devoid of any overhead electrical or telephone wires, all of which have been buried underground. Also, on weekends and public holidays, rickshaws are on hand to give traditional

- Ben Morris



<http://www.town.minobu.yamanashi.jp/>



## Soccer Tournament

The Yamanashi International Association will hold the 3<sup>rd</sup> World Cop on August 2004. The World Cop is an international tournament for amateur teams. Each team will represent their own country; this event is a great opportunity for foreigners and Japanese people to get to know each other.

The preliminary round will be on August 1<sup>st</sup>, at Katsunuma Central Park Ground; and the final on August 14<sup>th</sup>, at Midori ga Oka Sports Ground. The winning team will be awarded the World Cop trophy. Food and events from various countries will be available for nonparticipants.

The Yamanashi International Association is currently looking for players and volunteers. For applications and further information, please contact the Yamanashi International Association, and ask Ben (English) or Deysi (Portuguese, Spanish and Japanese).

Yamanashi International Association  
Tel: 055-228-5419 Fax: 055-228-5473

## Talking about soccer

Did you know that Nakata Hidetoshi, the famous Japanese soccer player, is from Yamanashi? You will find a short profile and a brief summary of his career below.

Nakata Hidetoshi

Year of Birth: 1977

Birthplace: Yamanashi Prefecture

Height: 175cm

Weight: 72kg

High School: Nirasaki High School (Yamanashi)

Professional career (teams):

1995-1998: Belmare Hiratsuka

1998-2000: A.C.Perugia

2000-2001: A.S.Roma

2001- : Parma A.C

## Largest Drum in the World

Yamanashi's own Otsuki City is home to the world's largest taiko drum. This special drum, known as the Great World Peace Drum, is 4.8 meters in diameter, and weighs around 2,000 kg (according to the Otsuki Akafuji Taiko website). Two weeks were necessary to complete the enormous drum's paintings, done by students of Kutani Porcelain Technical Institute. Five-hundred sheets of gold leaf were used as a finishing touch to this worldwide artistic treasure.

In January, 2001, Guinness World Records certified the drum as the biggest in the world.

Because of its revolutionary and innovative design, the main body of the drum can be broken into six sections.

In the past, taiko were symbols of the cities they were located in, and transporting the drums was virtually impossible due to size. The Great World Peace Drum, however, has been to other cities and prefectures within Japan and also overseas, traveling by truck or plane.

When the drum travels, it takes with it Japanese traditional and technical art, sharing its splendor with the rest of the world.



## Bank of Japan Governor "one in a hundred "

In April, 2004, TIME magazine published its list of the 100 most influential people in the world-- among which, in the section entitled, Leaders and Revolutionaries, they named the Governor of the Bank of Japan, Toshihiko Fukui, "Japan's Money Man". Described as "activist and interventionist", Fukui has taken to tackling the country's crippling six-year bout of deflation, flooding the nation with cash, and is seen as a key figure behind Japan's current economic upturn.

Certainly, some of Japan's banks, burdened with bad loans, are beginning to look healthier than they have done for a long while, and this has been helped in no small part by the strengthening economy. Real GDP rose by 5.6% in the first quarter of 2004, expanding for the eighth consecutive quarter, but perhaps the most encouraging aspect of the growth data was evidence of stronger domestic demand. Consumer spending has been referred to as the lost piece of Japan's recovery puzzle, and with a rise in personal consumption of 4% in the first quarter, this accounted for more than one-third of the rise in GDP.

However, growth in consumer spending could prove short-lived if demand from China and America slows, hitting corporate profits and dragging the mood of optimism down with it. Not all of Japan's banks are so steady either; UFJ and Resona are still losing money, and the former was forced in March to slash its earning estimate as expected charges for bad loans mounted. Added to this, the recent bail-out of Mitsubishi Motors, losing money and embroiled in a safety defect cover-up scandal, by the Mitsubishi keiretsu (family of companies) shows that these old-fashioned loyalties-- a barrier to an

open Japanese market-- still hold in the 21st century. Toshihiko Fukui has certainly done a good job, but unfortunately this is just the beginning.

Source: TIME; April 19th, 2004

The Economist; www.economist.com

## Robo-Maid?

While robots have become a mainstay of the industrial world - doing everything from assembling cars to aiding in scientific discoveries- the idea of robots working in the domestic world has been confined to comics and science fiction films. However, in Japan it has been predicted that this, too, will become an everyday reality in as little as twenty years. The domestic robot market is currently worth 400-600 billion yen annually.

However, according to an advisory council for the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, the next-generation robot market is estimated to expand to 7.2 trillion yen by 2025. These next-generation robots will be designed for co-existence with mankind and hopes are growing for them to shoulder Japan's economy in the 21st century.

Honda Motor Co. has taken the initiative by successfully developing a two-legged humanoid robot, and Sony Corp., Toyota Motor Corp. and other representative Japanese enterprises have followed suit. Besides two-legged robots, Sony has also manufactured the dog-shaped AIBO, which has proved to be a hit despite being priced at 250,000 yen.

On the more serious side, Sohgo Security Services have developed the guard robot Guardrobo C4, which voluntarily patrols at a fixed time and reports to the guard centre when it spots something suspicious or a fire.





As if woken from an enchanted slumber, the valleys of Yamanashi are an explosion of vibrant green. The snows clinging to the slopes of Mount Fuji slowly recede to reveal the crumbly rock below. As I await the barmy climes I am aware that this will be my third and penultimate such experience. Jolted by the realisation that my time on the JET Programme is indeed finite, I pause to reflect on a few aspects of my 'yamanashi adventure' that have made the greatest impression upon me.

Arriving almost two years ago, I recall feeling a distinct sense of relief. Having researched the prefecture I was expecting mountains, trees and rivers; I was not disappointed. Exploring this environment has been one of my favourite things about life in Yamanashi.

I have found that my most rewarding times were had when taking my bike deep into the mountains from my hometown of Rokugo. These trips generally entail 'Tour de Francesque' climbs which, though tiring, transport you to remote, tranquil locations where cars are uncommon and signs warning of bears dot the roadside.



Traversing a steep valley whilst being followed at head height by an effortless eagle, watching a troop of monkeys drink from a mountain stream, and startling the owner of a tiny store who clearly hadn't entertained a scary foreign customer for a very long time are some of my fondest memories.

Climbing Mount Kitadake, which I heartily recommend to all those with a love for outdoor adventure, was another one of my favourite experiences. As mentioned in the previous addition of this magazine, despite being Japan's second highest mountain it is frequently overlooked (or indeed unknown) in favour of the fanatically revered Fuji. Having been to the summit of both I can honestly say that Kitadake is by far the better climb, offering a variety of landscapes, terrain and vista. The views are stunning, both out over the ken towards Fuji and northward towards the Nagano Alps.

The JET Programme has not only enabled me to experience the natural delights abound in Yamanashi, but also to be an active witness to the processes of communication, and to the succinct, occasionally unrealised effects it can have.

Upon arriving in Japan I was essentially reduced to an infant, unable to speak, read or write all but the simplest Japanese.



Dependant on both the English abilities of my Japanese Teacher of English (JTE) and the goodwill of others, communication occurred through gestures, body language and the ability of one human to 'read' what another may feel, need or want in a certain situation.

Though the study of Japanese has allowed me to converse at a basic level, 'communication' still occurs on a non verbal level. This became especially apparent in the week prior to the third-year graduation. Like many Assistant Language Teachers (ALT's) I received letters, notes and inscribed



origami creations thanking me for the last two years of interaction. What surprised me was that some of these came from the quiet students whose English ability was low and who I had seemingly been unable to 'communicate' with. Realising that these students had gained something from our time together emphasised the occasionally obscured (or forgotten) importance of ALT's and of the JET Programme as a whole.

My time in Japan has further defined my belief that cultural difference both dissolves in the face of 'common human experience' and manifests itself through differing perceptions of reality. Many times have friends from Britain remarked how Japanese students must be so different from those at home. Whilst mine are remarkably well behaved I reply that the differences are marginal. My students have similar hopes, fears, struggles and desires as I did when I was a student, and the relieved smile of success or the pained look in the eye of disappointed failure are undoubtedly universal.

Part of our role is described as 'grass roots internationalisation', in a sense, bringing the world to Japan. What I have found to be one of my most fascinating experiences on the JET Programme is when I also have been 'internationalised'. I see internationalisation as the discovery of an alternative perception of a reality, with the subsequent realisation that we view things from a 'biased' viewpoint (mine being Eurocentric). When talking with my students about what colour they would draw the sun, every one of them told me red, as did my entire adult English class. I would have replied yellow, as did all my friends from Britain. The same object was therefore perceived in two different ways. The difference lay in our respective positions of view, and through our discussion we experienced mutual 'internationalisation'.

With a final year left in Yamanashi I hope to explore more of this beautiful region by pedal and foot, storing memories and taking photos to carry back home. I also hope to further 'communicate' with my students, teachers and townspeople, whilst personally developing into what I perceive to be a more 'international being'.



- Mathew Eccles

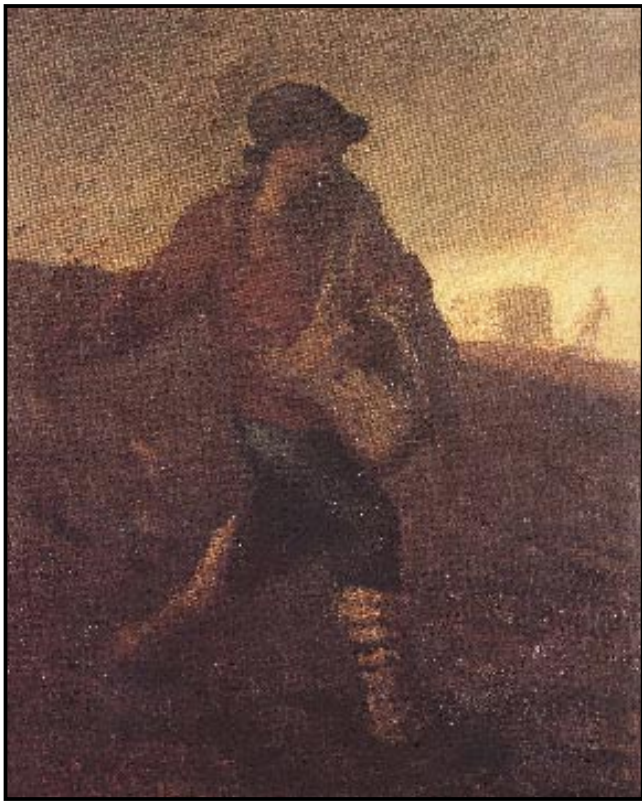


# The Yamanashi Prefectural Art Museum

Text by Sébastien Noël

Better known in Japan as Millet's Museum, the Yamanashi Prefectural Art Museum contains unexpected treasures.

Art museums were not widespread in Japan two decades ago, as local governments were more concerned about building roads and bridges than promoting art and culture. So when Mr. Kunio Tanabe, governor of Yamanashi from 1967 to 1979, wanted to build an art museum, many people considered the project impractical. Nevertheless, after countless discussions regarding the feasibility of the project, the Yamanashi Prefectural Museum was finally built in the capital city of Kofu in



Jean-francois Millet: The Sewer

The new museum needed a main exhibition to attract visitors. An art dealer in Tokyo advised the prefecture to find art that would reflect Yamanashi's primary characteristic: a land surrounded by natural beauty. Jean François Millet's masterpiece, the Sewer, was up for sale at an auction at the time. Who could better represent Yamanashi than this French artist who devoted his life to painting nature? And thus, Millet's Museum was born. At present, the Yamanashi Prefectural Art Museum boasts no less than nine of Millet's masterpieces and 60 of his watercolors, drawings and prints. About 20 works from Barbizon School artists such as Rousseau and Troyon are also owned by the museum.



Shohin Noguchi: A Beautiful Woman with a Fan

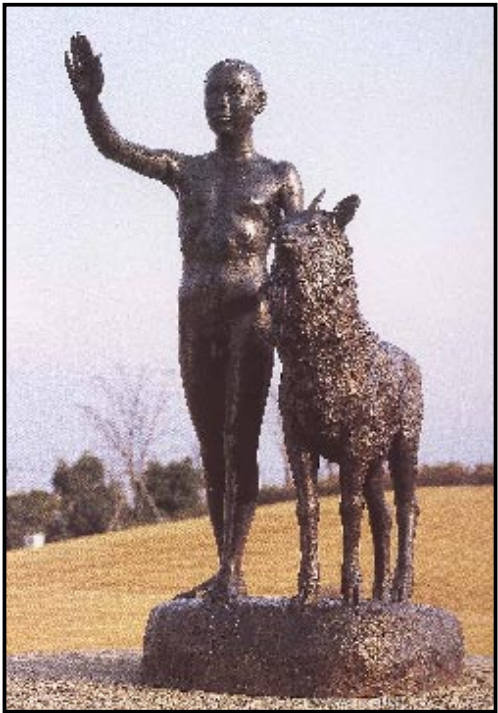
The museum is also home to famous Japanese paintings such as A Beautiful Woman with a Fan, painted in 1887 by Shohin Noguchi (1847-1917). Shohin Noguchi was a female poet and painter who painted in a Chinese style called Nanga, used by the literati of Japan since the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Her works, full of refinement, have had an immense impact on the Japanese art world. Other works on exhibit include pieces from Shunko Mochizuki (1893-1979), Koichiro Kondo (1884-1962), and Seiichi Ishii (1937-1987). All of these artists were from Yamanashi and had a lasting impact on the Japanese art world.

In addition to the permanent exhibition, temporary exhibits are also organized based on various themes. In the most recent temporary exhibition entitled

God, People, and Pharaoh, treasures from Ancient Egypt were displayed. Apart from the historical value of these cultural pieces, the exhibition was aimed at increasing public awareness of art in Ancient Egypt. In September 2004, the museum will host a special exhibition recounting the evolution of modern art in the old Japanese capital of Kyoto.



The Yamanashi Prefectural Art Museum is more than a mere museum; it is equipped with a wide range of facilities including an auditorium, workshop studio, and a restaurant. These facilities enable the staff to plan lectures for children and painting workshops, or to host concerts in the summer and around New Year. Special visits are also organized for the blind. Even without sight, one can explore the beauty of artwork by touching sculptures and special boards representing paintings. Touch, hearing, and smell: these senses contribute to the visual diversity and unique atmosphere of the museum. If you have the opportunity to visit Yamanashi, don't



Churyo Sato: the Antelope and the Boy

The Yamanashi Prefectural Art Museum's English website can be found at:  
<http://www.art-museum.pref.yamanashi.jp/index2.html>



# The Yamanashi



Sébastien Noël arrived in Yamanashi a year ago and is currently working for Yamanashi Prefecture. Sébastien enjoys so much his life in Yamanashi that he decided to stay another year. His next challenge is to climb Mt Fuji in summer.



Having spent her first year in Yamanashi exploring Japan's various hot spots, Iowa native Dilek Dogruyusever aspires next to see some of the Land of the Rising Sun's lesser-known natural treasures (all major theme parks included).



Ben Morris began to work as a Coordinator of International Relations for the Yamanashi International Centre a year ago. He is now seeking spiritual enlightenment, or perhaps just a black belt, through the practice of aikido.



Deysi Kamiji is in her third and last year on the Jet Programme. By working as a Coordinator of International Relations, she has learned a lot about the Japanese working system. She wants to travel extensively in Japan before going back to Brazil.



Mat Eccles left the comforts of British culture in 2002, when he began working as a JET Programme ALT in Rokugo, Yamanashi. Mat enjoys traveling in and out of Japan, as well as exploring the mountains of Yamanashi--both on foot and by bike.

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