

Kaleidoscope MEGURO

Vol.010 January 2019

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Welcome to MIFA Festival

The 14th MIFA International Exchange Festival - "Festival! Travel around the world in Meguro!"

Let's make friends and get to know each other.
You can enjoy stage performances, Japanese traditional culture, world cuisine and more.

Date and time: Jan. 20 (Sun) 10:00-16:00

Place: Meguro Persimmon Hall & Meguro Kumin Campus Park (1-1-1, Yakumo Meguro-ku)



Interview with Mr. Hiroki Abe, Leader of MIFA festival

Q. When and how did MIFA Festival start?

A. We started the festival in 2006 as MIFA's original event to provide more opportunity for all the embassies in Meguro City to participate in international exchange. By then, they had individually joined some of Meguro City's events.

Q. How do you run the festival?

A. MIFA has only five staff members, so it is impossible to hold the festival without the support from volunteers. In the beginning, the scale of the event was so small that only about 20 volunteers were enough. However, by 2017, the festival was supported by 227 volunteers, including about 50 non-Japanese residents. Recently, there are more high school students joining us and it is really

encouraging to see so many people helping our festival repeatedly every year.

Q. What is the goal that MIFA would like to achieve through this festival?

A. We would like to help people to build relationships with foreigners living around them. The festival is also a place where people can enjoy the out-of-the-ordinary: for example, meeting someone with a job they are unlikely to encounter on a daily basis. We would like everyone to experience different cultures and learn something new, it could be anything, language or food.

Anyone interested in volunteering for this year's festival, please do not hesitate to contact MIFA.

Interview with Mr. Jules Kankoe Aduayom, Togolese Embassy

Q. How did you start to take part in MIFA International Exchange festival?

A. We moved to Meguro City in October 2014, and we have taken part in MIFA International Exchange Festival ever since 2016.

Q. What impressed you the most about the festival?

A. The most striking fact is that a large-scale event as this MIFA festival is organized by volunteers. Another noteworthy thing is that I get to know new people there. Some students who get to know about Togo at the festival, for example, choose Togo as a subject for their research, as a part of their summer vacation homework and bother to come over to the Togolese embassy for their research. Other people who get to know Togo at the festival, get interested about Togo and take a trip there. An embassy tends to be isolated from ordinary people. As a member of the Togolese embassy, I would like to make the embassy open to everybody. I believe this contributes to international friendship between Togo and Japan.



Q. What is your goal to achieve through the festival?

A. Togo is a small country, comparatively less known than other countries. It is neither rich economically nor in terms of mineral resources. Nevertheless, Togo is often referred to as "Smile of Africa", meaning the people are friendly and never cease to smile. We are proud of this Togolese characteristic, and I would like people living in Japan, so remote from Togo, to get to know Togo and feel closer to Togo over ethnical and cultural differences.

How do you like *Ume* (Plum Blossoms) Viewing?

Talking about flower viewing, first of all, we recall cherry blossoms viewing. However it is plum which blooms before cherry blossoms. It blooms between mid-February to mid-March, and it is often referred as a forerunner of spring. The sweet smell of plum blossoms in the cold air gives us a feeling of early spring.

In Japan, before cherry blossoms were genetically modified to match the blossoms viewing needs, especially in the Nara period (8th century) plum blossoms were more popular than cherry blossoms. The compiled poem book *Manyoshu* contains 110 poems featuring plum blossoms while only 43 are related to cherry blossoms.



Famous spots of plum blossoms around Kanto region are Kairakuen (Mito city, Ibaraki pref.) and Atamibaen (Atami city, Shizuoka pref.). We would like to introduce several plum blossoms viewing spots and events in Tokyo especially around Meguro city which are best suitable for a date or stroll.

Place: Hanegi park, 4-38-52 Daita, Setagaya-ku

Event: "Setagaya Umematsuri"

Access: Odakyu Umegaoka sta., Keio Inokashira Line Higashi-matsubara sta.

URL:

<https://tokyocheapo.com/events/setagaya-plum-festival/>

Place: Yushima tenmangu, 3-30-1 Yushima, Bunkyo-ku

Event: "Bunkyo Umematsuri" (Bunkyo Plum Blossoms Festival)

Access: Tokyo Metro Chiyoda Line Yushima sta., Ginza Line Ueno- Hirokoji sta., Marunouchi Line Hongo-sanchohome sta., JR Yamanote Line/Keihin-Tohoku Line Okachimachi sta.

URL:

<https://tokyocheapo.com/events/bunkyo-plum-blossom-festival/>

The New Year custom of mochi-making

Mochi-tsuki

Mochi-tsuki is the pounding of steaming hot rice to make rice cakes for special occasions such as New Year celebration. Although ready-made rice cakes are easily available nowadays, *Mochi-tsuki* remains a year-end event that draws a crowd and gets you into the festive spirit. Using a large wooden pestle in the shape of a hammer, men pound the steaming hot *mochi-rice* in a mortar while steam comes at their face and sweat off their body. It is very tiring work. Children also participate using a smaller pestle which is almost as heavy as they are. Meanwhile, women skillfully turn and knead the steaming rice in the mortar between the pounding strokes. The shouting of "yoisho" by all participants during *Mochi-tsuki* can be heard from afar. After finishing the pounding, the women shape the dough into round, disk-like cakes while it is still hot. This is a difficult task because the dough is not only steaming hot but also very sticky, and there is a large amount of it. Freshly pounded *mochi* is soft with a smooth, chewy and stretchy texture, and of course very delicious.



These round mochi cakes are then dried and preserved for making New Year cakes. Getting the whole family and neighborhood involved to work as a team is the key to having a great *Mochi-tsuki* event.

Kagami-mochi decoration

Kagami-mochi is a New Year cake made by stacking two round rice cakes of different sizes - the smaller one on top of the larger one. They are then decorated with auspicious New Year items and placed in *tokonoma*, the sacred alcove of the home, as an offering to the New Year Deity. *Daidai*, a bitter Japanese orange, is also put on top of the *Kagami-mochi*. Because a *daidai* never falls from the tree even after it has ripened, it is believed to bring the family a fruitful and prosperous future for generations.

Kagami-biraki

Kagami-biraki is a special annual custom to wish for peace and strength from the New Year Deity. It takes place on the 11th of January every year when the *Kagami-mochi* decoration which has been offered to the New Year Deity is taken down from the *tokonoma* and eaten by the family. The *mochi* cake is broken into small pieces using a mallet so they can be easily consumed. They are added to sweet azuki bean soup, *shiruko* or *zenzai* and eaten by everyone wishing to have a peaceful, healthy and happy life throughout the year.

Interview with our international residents: Kakizome, a Japanese New Year's calligraphy

This is an interview with Ms. Noriko Otsuki from America and Mr. Florian Urach from Austria, before and after they practiced the traditional New Year's custom in Japan called *kakizome*. *Kakizome* is the act of writing in calligraphy or painting at the beginning of the year as a way to make a wish or express a goal for the New Year. Primary school pupils in Japan are sometimes required to write *kakizome* as a homework assignment during the winter holidays.



Noriko Otsuki is a Japanese American born and raised in the US. She is an active volunteer of MIFA. She is currently working enthusiastically in preparation for the MIFA Festival, taking an important role as an interpreter. She has always taken great interest in Japanese culture since her childhood in America, and has come to Japan in order to study

Japanese language and culture. She is very happy to be able to get acquainted with many Japanese people through MIFA activities and to enrich her life through cross-cultural interactions. Since coming to Japan, she has deepened her understanding of Japanese culture through a wide variety of firsthand encounters. While she has enthusiastically studied such traditional performing arts as kabuki, she is now taking another look at the art of Japanese cooking which has gained worldwide recognition. She also took great interest in old Japanese art and was an ardent antique collector. But looking back, she now thinks she may have collected too many less valuable items and would like to learn to better distinguish what truly has value. As a resident of Meguro City, she is quite satisfied with its convenient access to transportation and shops, as well as hospitals and clinics. As for her New Year wishes, she wants to live to be 105 years old. To be able to spend such a long life traveling between Japan and the US to help people of the two countries with her bilingual skills would make her very happy.



Florian Urach is from Vienna, Austria, the capital of classical music. Coming to Japan as a foreign student of a medical college in 2015, he has been living in Meguro City since this June. Although he worked as a doctor in his home country, he has been studying hard in order to achieve his dream of obtaining a medical license in Japan.



Q. How do you feel about living in Meguro City?

A. I really like living in Meguro City. There is a variety of nice stores, shops, and restaurants. Since my home is very close to Meguro River, I also enjoy walking along

the river everyday. And of course in spring the cherry blossoms are incredibly beautiful.

Q. What kind of a doctor would you like to be in Japan?

A. Since I believe the demand for English/German speaking doctors is very high here, I would like to open my own clinic focusing on providing foreigners with quality medical care. Many foreigners are not happy with the medical care currently available in Japan mainly because of the language barrier.

Q. How have you been able to improve your Japanese language ability in just two years?

A. I started off studying kanjis only. But recently I focus my studying on reading books from different genres and authors to increase my vocabulary and to get a better understanding of how to use kanjis. For improving my listening skills, I find it very helpful to listen to audiobooks and of course to watch the news on TV and so on.

In light of his endeavor to make his dream come true, Florian has chosen the word "challenge" for *kakizome* for the new year.



“Hero Bus” is running for children from nursery schools with no playground!

In Meguro City, many nursery schools don't have access to a big playground for the children to play safely. To deal with this issue, Meguro City started operating an exclusive shuttle bus service, which aims to accommodate these children's needs. The bus is modified to ensure the children's safety. It takes the children to large parks such as Komazawa Olympic Park and Rinshi-no-Mori Park in the neighborhood every day. It is nicknamed “Hero Bus”, a combination of *heroba* meaning an open space with bus. The name “Hero Bus” is given in the hope that it would act as a hero for the children,

which takes them to the place where they can play to their hearts' content. By promoting this project, Meguro City hopes to let the society realize that even nursery school children in the urban area can play and run around lively outdoors, while being embraced by the love of nature.



Filing tax return early is recommended

To file in your tax return, put down your Social Security and Tax Number (My Number) and present your personal ID or attach its copy. Visit the website or call for more details.

[Resident Tax]

Filing Period: Feb. 18 (Mon) – Mar. 15 (Fri)

Submission methods: send the form by post or bring it to the Tax Affairs Section, 2nd floor, Main Building of Meguro City Office Complex.

For more information, please call the Tax Affairs Section: **03-5722-9820** (Japanese only) or visit the following URL:

<http://www.city.meguro.tokyo.jp/multi/index.html>

[Income Tax and Others]

Filing Period: Feb. 18 (Mon) – Mar. 15 (Fri) for Income Tax, Special Tax for Reconstruction
Feb. 1 (Fri) – Mar. 15 (Fri) for Gift Tax
By Apr. 1 (Mon) for Consumption Tax for Individual Business

Submission methods:

- 1) Send the form by post or bring it to Meguro Tax Office
- 2) Bring the form to the Tax Affairs Section of Meguro City (Acceptance period is from Feb. 18 (Mon) to Mar. 15 (Fri). No consultation available)
- 3) Submit via e-Tax

For more information, please call Meguro Tax Office: **03-3711-6251** (Japanese only) or visit the following URL:

<http://www.e-tax.nta.go.jp/en/index.html>

Seminar for Disaster Prevention

Meguro City is offering a disaster prevention seminar for foreign residents. In this seminar you can learn how to act during a disaster through experience-based lessons. This seminar is available to residents, workers and students of Meguro City.

Time and Date: Feb. 16 (Sat) 13:00 - 15:00

Place: Meguro City Office Complex (2-19-15

Kamimeguro, Meguro-ku)

Contents: Experience on how to extinguish a fire, report a fire, emergency relief activity (emergency first aid) etc.

How to apply: Please contact Culture & Exchange Promotion Section with your name, nationality, language, address, phone number (03-5722-9291, Japanese only)

Meguro City Newsletter

5 languages are now supported on an e-book version! Read in your own language! Supports Text-to-Speech!

Easy to read even on the smartphone!



Access from QR code, and you can easily read Meguro City Newsletter anytime you want.

Foreign Residents Information Desk

Tel: 03-5722-9187 (English)

Main Building 1st Floor,
Meguro City Office Complex
2-19-15, Kamimeguro,
Meguro-ku, Tokyo

<http://www.city.meguro.tokyo.jp/multi/index.html>

Life in Tokyo

Site for Foreign Residents of Tokyo
<https://www.lifein.tokyo.jp/en/>



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