

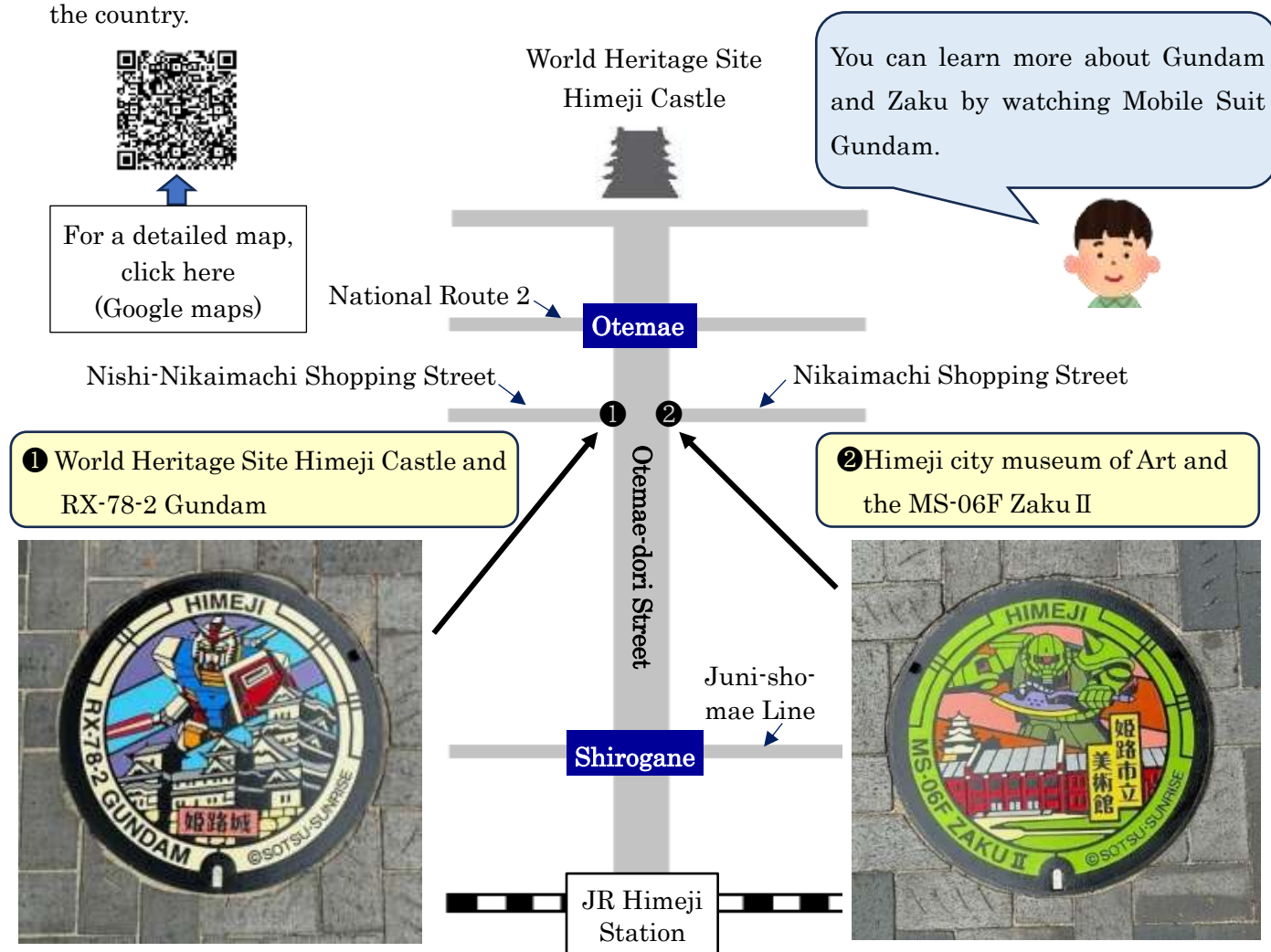
# VIVA! ひめじ English

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Himeji Cultural and International Exchange Foundation  
– newsletter editing volunteers

## Have you seen the “Gundam Manhole” yet?

Two types of “Gundam manholes” were gifted to Himeji City through the “Gundam Manhole Project”, planned by Bandai Namco Group’s “Gundam Project”. The project installs manhole covers featuring *mobile suits* (giant robots) from the Gundam series all across Japan. In collaboration with local governments, this initiative aims to bring new energy and excitement to communities throughout the country.



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## Chase Away Bad Ogres!

Ogres have long been feared in Japan as bringers of misfortune and disasters. It is said that illness and other troubles often occur during seasonal changes, known as *Setsubun*. On *Setsubun*, which marks the beginning of February, a traditional Japanese ritual called *mamemaki* (beans throwing) is held throughout Japan to drive away evil ogres.

During this time, shops and supermarkets sell ogre masks and roasted soybeans. At home and in kindergartens, children joyfully throw beans at adults wearing ogre masks to chase the “ogres” away.

Here are a few unique ogre-chasing rituals celebrated in different parts of Japan:

### ***Oni-Oi* on Lake Ashi**

At Hakone Shrine in Kanagawa Prefecture, people throw beans to drive away ogres. However, the defeated ogres escape across Lake Ashi on water skis and boats! People from the shrine and nearby areas chase after them in boats, throwing beans as they go.



### **Grilling Sardines to Defeat Ogres**

At Sumiyoshi Shrine in Hiroshima Prefecture, a sacred ritual called “Yai-kagashi” is held. The shrine’s women roast the heads of 1,000 sardines and fan them with large fans—the aroma is said to repel ogres. The roasted sardine heads are then placed on holly branches and distributed to participants, who display them at home entrances to ward off evil spirits.



※These events are usually held around February 3rd, but the exact date may vary each year.

### The Watanabes Don't Need to Throw Beans.

Once upon a time, there was a strong samurai named Watanabe no Tsuna, who is said to have defeated a powerful ogre. Because of this legend, it's believed that “people with the surname Watanabe are so strong that ogres won't come near them – so they don't need to throw beans.” Watanabe no Tsuna was also known for having a remarkably beautiful face.

## Himeji is Filled with Good Ogres.

Himeji is home to *Oni-Oi* events where good ogres make their appearance. Buddhas and gods take the form of ogres, who then chase away misfortune. These are good days to pray for bountiful harvests, good health, peace, and more. Local people have continued to pass down these *Oni-Oi* traditions for generations. In Himeji, such events are held at six locations from January to March.

### Hattokusan Hachiyo-ji Temple (January 7)

1068 Aisaka, Kodera-cho, Himeji

The first *Oni-Oi* of the year in Himeji is held at this temple. Red and blue ogres emerge from the Japanese chinquapin trees as if coming down from the mountains. After dancing, the ogres walk through the temple grounds carrying *taimatsu* (※1).



*taimatsu* ※1

### Engyo-ji Temple, Mt. Shosha (January 18)

2986 Shosha, Himeji

Red and blue ogres perform dances at Hakusan-Gongensha-Maiden and Mani-den, near the top of the mountain.

### Himeji Shrine (February 3)

83 Honmachi, Himeji

Sarutahiko (※2), along with red, blue, and young ogres, parade through the shrine grounds. The red and blue ogres then perform a dance, striking their *taimatsu* together.



Sarutahiko ※2

### Usuki-Hachiman Shrine (Last Saturday in March)

193 Miyauchi, Aboshi-ku, Himeji

Approximately 1,250 years ago, ships from foreign lands invaded this region. The local people prayed at Usuki-Hachiman Shrine for victory. Then, gods in the form of five ogres appeared, sank the enemy ships, and won the battle. The ogres then perform a dance reenacting the battle.

Other *Oni-Oi* events are also held at Masuiyama-Zuigan-ji Temple (February 11) and Hassho-ji Temple (first Sunday in March). Please check the exact dates in advance.



*Oni-Oi* at Himeji Shrine

## Let's Enjoy Winter Sports!

There are about 10 ski resorts in Hyogo Prefecture. Here are some of the major ones:

① Mineyama Kogen Resort White Peak (for beginners)

Location : 881-146 Kamioda, Kamikawa-cho, Kanzaki-gun, Hyogo

Directions : About 30 minutes by car from “Kanzaki Minami IC” on the Bantan Road.

A shuttle bus is also available from JR Teramae Station.

- An intermediate-level course is also available.
- There is a great area for playing in the snow, so families can have fun together.



② Hachikita Kogen Ski Resort (for advanced skiers)

Location : 580-1 Osasa, Muraoka-ku, Kami-cho, Mikata-gun, Hyogo

Directions : About 30 minutes by car from “Yoka Hyonosen IC” on the Kita-Kinki Toyooka Expressway.

- Recommended for those who enjoy grand scenery and challenging slopes.
- Hachikogen Ski Resort is located next to it, and visitors can move freely between the two ski areas.

③ Hyperbowl Tohachi Ski Resort

Location : 284 Bettku, Yabu City, Hyogo

Directions : About 55 minutes by car from “Yoka Hyonosen IC” on the Kita-Kinki Toyooka Expressway.

- You can use the same lift ticket at both this resort and the neighboring Sky Valley Ski Resort.
- There are also long slopes and forest courses to enjoy.



Hyperbowl Tohachi  
Ski Resort guide map

④ Rokkosan Snow Park

Location : 4512-98 Kita-Rokko, Rokkosan-cho, Nada-ku, Kobe City, Hyogo

Directions : About a one-minute walk from the “Snow Park-mae” bus stop on the Rokkosan bus route.

- Thanks to artificial snow, you can ski here every winter, even in years with little natural snowfall.

During the cold season, we often spend more time indoors.

Skiing on pure white snow surrounded by magnificent nature is both refreshing and fun.

Why not try winter sports this winter?



Rokkosan Snow Park



## People -Interview-

### Mr. RODET Frank (France)



Frank is from Grenoble in southern France, where he often enjoyed skiing and cross-country skiing with his family. He married a Japanese woman in 2009, and lived in Okayama before moving to Himeji in 2021. He runs his own French language schools in Japan where he also teaches.

**Q** You're fluent in Japanese, but when and why did you decide to start learning the language?

**A** When I was young, Japanese anime was very popular, and I often watched it on TV. I especially liked an anime called "Maison Ikkoku". It showed the everyday lives of people in Japan, which really fascinated me. At university, I began studying Japanese with friends who were interested in foreign languages. My professor was very kind, and through these experiences, I came to like Japan even more.

**Q** Why did you decide to live in Himeji?

**A** I first came to Japan about 30 years ago as an international student at Himeji Dokkyo University. The impression it left on me was one of the reasons I later decided to live here. My wife is from Okayama Prefecture, and I first started a French language school there. Later, I opened schools in Himeji and Kobe as well. I like Himeji because it's conveniently located between Okayama and Kobe, it has a beautiful castle, and it's not too big.

**Q** What is important when studying a language?

**A** I've studied Danish, English, German, and Japanese. Although my motivation for each language was different, I believe that effort is important for all of them. Repetition and consistency are the key. In my school, I try to make French easier to understand for students who say, "French grammar is difficult," by explaining things clearly in Japanese and by using enjoyable conversation practice to help them learn correct pronunciation.

**Q** Any plans for the future?

**A** While cherishing personal connections, I hope to expand our schools and help even more people become familiar with the French language and culture.

## When in Doubt, Just Call!

Most hospitals are closed during the New Year holidays. If you are unsure whether to call an ambulance or go directly to a hospital for a sudden illness or injury, please make good use of the telephone consultation services below.

# 7119 - Emergency Relief Center Hyogo (For all ages)

Available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year ※Some foreign languages supported

# 8000 - Hyogo Children's Health Hotline

(For children up to the third year of junior high school)

Monday to Saturday: 6:00 p.m. - 8:00 a.m. the next morning

Sundays, national holidays, and New Year holidays: 8:00 a.m. - 8:00 a.m.  
the next morning

079-292-4874 - Himeji City Pediatric Emergency Telephone Consultation

(For children up to the third year of junior high school)

Monday to Saturday: 8:00 p.m. - 12:00 a.m. (midnight)

Sundays, national holidays, and New Year holidays: 9:00 a.m. - 6:00 p.m.,  
8:00 p.m. - 12:00 a.m. (midnight)



On New Year's Eve, temple bells are rung 108 times in a tradition called "*Joya no Kane*". This Buddhist custom symbolizes removing human desires and suffering, allowing people to welcome the New Year with a pure heart. Why not bundle up warmly and go ring the bell yourself this year?

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These names are used with the contributors' permission. Their assistance is much appreciated.

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You can read previous issues of "VIVA! ひめじ" on the website of Himeji Cultural and International Exchange Foundation International Exchange Section. The next issue will be available in March 2026.

We welcome your comments and suggestions. We are also looking for translators and native speakers to assist us with translating and proofreading upcoming editions. If you are interested, please contact us at the address on the right.



Website

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