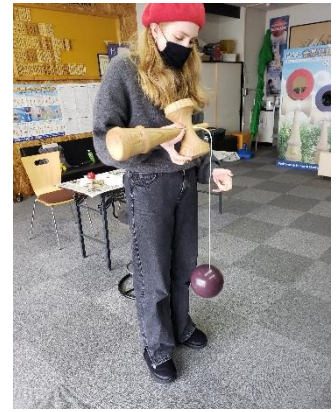


# FACE TO FACE



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## Yamagata in Focus: Kendama – A Communication Tool from Long Ago

Michiko Yoshino  
Coordinator for International Relations (CIR)  
Association for International Relations in  
Yamagata



Did you know that Nagai City ranks as the top producer of kendamas in Japan?

In this issue, the CIRs paid a visit to “Kendama Hiroba SPIKE” to learn more about the relationship between this toy and Nagai City. At SPIKE, we met the manager and Local Vitalization Cooperator, Mr. Takeshi Matsumoto, and Mr. Naoki Takaishi from the Nagai City Commerce and Tourism Division, who kindly showed us beginners the ropes.

Firstly, we learned that using kendamas require concentration and balance, making it a handy tool to promote



health for people young and old. Wielding a beginner-friendly kendama, we started practicing the basic grip and tricks. We missed on the first few attempts, but when we got the easiest trick of landing the ball on the big cup, the four of us could not contain our excitement.

After getting a bit more comfortable with the kendama, we moved on to the main activity, the “Kendama Painting Experience”, where we received a Nagai-made kendama to freely paint on with markers. While thinking up designs, we watched Mr. Matsumoto and Mr. Takaishi practice tricks with precision and grace, and chatted to learn further.

Apparently, kendamas have had a long and international history. During the Edo period, a European toy influenced

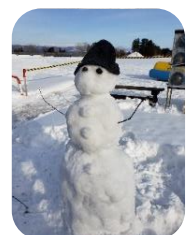


the unique shape of the kendama we know today. There has recently been an increase in kendama makers in America and Europe, and there is even the “Kendama World Cup,” held at its birthplace in Hiroshima. Although they are seen as traditional toys in Japan, abroad, kendamas are considered novel and cool. “Street Kendama” is also gaining popularity, and we learned that kendamas are a useful tool of communication that transcends age and language barriers.

Additionally, Nagai City has started several initiatives to promote kendamas to their residents over the past 5 or 6 years. For example, there is a campaign where one can get discounts by showing kendama tricks at designated stores. Nagai also created the “Kendama Domino” challenge and held the Guinness World Record for it up until last year. Kendamas were established as Nagai City’s “Shigi” (City Art), which further legitimized the bond between the city and the toy, both as a means of communication with the world, and as a tool to keep citizens active and healthy.

After departing Spike, we took a drive to Iide Town’s “Dondendaira Snow Park” and thoroughly enjoyed Okitama region’s plentiful snow with activities such as banana boating.

Satisfied by our busy day, we took our painted kendamas home to further hone our skills. Soon, I hope to master tricks like “Spike” and “Around the World” - this time, wielding a standard kendama!



## International Insights : In the Footsteps of Isabella Bird

Alice French  
Coordinator for International Relations (CIR)  
Yamagata Prefecture



As a CIR, I am often asked to talk about the differences between my home country, the UK, and Japan. Of course, it goes without saying that there are many differences. However, when it comes to international exchange, I find it more effective not to highlight the differences, but to focus on what the two countries have in common. Both are island nations; both still have a royal or imperial family; both are nations of tea-lovers. Historically, too, Britain and Japan share many common experiences: both were empires at some point, and both were able to navigate challenges of foreign trade as island nations to become modern economic powerhouses. In other words, despite being geographically very distant from each other, the bond between Japan and the UK is actually deeper than most might think.

Here in Yamagata, the UK and Japan's historical connection is most clearly apparent in the story of Isabella Bird. In 1878, Bird, an intrepid geographer from Hertfordshire, made a solo trip to Japan. As part of a national tour, she visited Yamagata and, unsurprisingly, fell in love with the area. In her popular travel diary, *Unbeaten Tracks in Japan* (1880), she wrote of the Yonezawa Basin as being “the arcadia of East,” a



compliment that has become something of a catchphrase among the locals.

To this day, Bird's travel diary is still widely read in the UK, especially by geography and history students. *Unbeaten Tracks in Japan* is one of the building blocks of modern-day Anglo-Japanese relations, and provides a rare and valuable insight into 19th century



Japanese society. The fact that Yamagata is featured so favorably is therefore testament to the region's appeal.

When I arrived in Yamagata from Cambridge in 2019, I knew that I wanted to continue the work started by Bird all those years ago and strengthen the bonds between Japan and the UK as much as possible. During my two years working at the Prefectural Office, I like to think that I have achieved this goal. Through helping out at AIRY's international exchange events, I have had the opportunity to introduce many aspects of British culture to the lovely people of Yamagata. I also started an English Lunch event for my colleagues, which has been very enjoyable. I have been touched by the kindness of everyone here and, over these two years, have really come to love Yamagata!

It is for this reason that, just as Bird did with her travel diary, I want to convey the charms of Yamagata to people back at home in the UK. I hope to follow in Bird's footsteps and commit myself to preserving the important connection between Yamagata and the UK.



## Foreign Residents Can Also Get the COVID-19 Vaccine!

- ♦ Vaccination is free.
- ♦ Foreigners with a *jūminhyō* (Japanese certificate of residence) can receive the vaccine. Study abroad students and those on Technical Intern Training Programs are also eligible. (Aged 16 and above)
- ♦ Each resident will receive two shots of the vaccine.
- ♦ If you experience any negative side effects from the vaccine, you are entitled to the Relief System for Injury to Health through Vaccination.

Vaccination Priority Ranking	① Health workers ② Senior citizens ③ Those with underlying health conditions/Those working in old people's homes ④ Everyone else
Vaccination Period	17 <sup>th</sup> February 2021 – 28 <sup>th</sup> February 2022
Vaccination Location	Medical institutions or vaccinations centers
What You Need for Your Vaccination	① You will receive a 'vaccination ticket' and 'notification of vaccination' from your local authority (city/town hall). The time and place for your vaccination will vary according to the municipality you live in. ② Book your vaccination over the phone or online ③ Bring a form of identification (Driver's License, Health Insurance Card, etc)

**Consultation Center (Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare COVID-19 Call Center)**

Phone: 0120-761-770 (Toll-Free, Japanese only)      Operating hours: 9 am – 9 pm

**Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare Website (Japanese only)**

[https://www.mhlw.go.jp/stf/seisakunitsuite/bunya/0000121431\\_00222.html#h2\\_free8](https://www.mhlw.go.jp/stf/seisakunitsuite/bunya/0000121431_00222.html#h2_free8)

**Yamagata Prefecture Website (Japanese only)**

<https://www.pref.yamagata.jp/090016/kenfuku/kansensyou/covid19-vaccine.html>

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