

I led Madonna over to the dome. It was jam-packed with many more cats inside. But our relief on successfully escaping was short-lived as Madonna got swept away in the sea of cats.

"Meow!" I looked over to the direction her scream came from and was met with a shocking sight. For some reason in the center of the building there was some sort of arena. In that arena stood Madonna, and believe-it-or-not, a bull!

As I rushed to her rescue, an elderly cat sitting in the front rows leisurely said to me,

"Woah there, are you thinking of fighting that bull bare-handed? Here, put this on."

With the costume he also handed me a red piece of cloth.

"This is the Uwajima City Bull-fighting Arena. Usually it's bulls that fight each other here. But whatever...have a go if you like."

Thanking the old cat, I leapt into the arena, flapping the red cape and trying to hide Madonna with it.

The bull was all excited, raking at the ground with his hooves and snorting noisily.

When the bull leapt, I flapped the red cape at him, while Madonna and I stepped aside to dodge him.

"Ole!" "Yo, matador!" yelled the elderly cat.

*This scene is from the day 'Sad Fat Cat' Maru met his first love Madonna in Southern Ehime. For a long while I never ventured down south, but after checking out most of central and eastern Ehime, and of course after reading the 'Sad Fat Cat' book, I've become more adventurous. So for Golden Week I plan to go to Uwajima to watch the bullfighting, or as their site says - bull-sumo.*

*I had no idea there was a bull-fighting arena here in Ehime and always imagined I'd have to go to Spain if I ever wanted to see real bullfighting. I don't know what to expect and am really excited.*

*In Uwajima, there are tournaments 4 times a year. The rules are simple: the bulls fight each other with no time limit, and the one that backs down and flees is the loser.*

*Bullfighting here started way back in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century, when fishermen rescued a Dutch ship adrift in the Uwa Sea, and got 2 cows as a token of gratitude. Legend has it that this was how Uwajima's bull-fighting history began.*

かなしきデブ猫ちゃん



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Excerpts used with permission from Ehime Newspaper.

ON POINT JAPANESE

「ぎりぎり」の使い方  
(How to use "just barely")

**A : 日本語能力試験の結果、どうだった?**  
Nihongo nōryoku shiken no kekka, dōdatta?  
(Did you get your JLPT [Japanese Language Proficiency Test] results?)

**B : 合格点が 90点で、僕の点数は 91点。**  
Gōkakuten ga kyūjitten de, boku no tensū wa kyūjitten.  
(The passing score is 90 and I got 91.)  
**ぎりぎりで受かったよ。** Girigiri de ukatta yo.  
(I just barely passed.)

**A : 満点の 180点でも 91点でも合格は合格だ。**  
Manten no 180ten demo 91ten demo gōkaku wa gōkakuda.  
(180 points or 91, a pass is a pass.)  
**おめでとう。** Omedetō. (Congratulations!)

**A : 車、ちゃんと停められた?** Kuruma, chanto tomerareta?  
(Were you able to park your car OK?)

**B : うん。でもわたしの車 大きいから、駐車スペース ぎりぎりだった。**  
Un. Demo watashi no kuruma ōkikara, chūsha supēsu girigiri datta.  
(Yes, but my car is so big, so I just barely fit.)

**A : あの駐車場は狭いからね。**  
Ano chūshajō wa semai kara ne.  
(The parking lot is really small.)

**A : 電車、間に合った?** Densha, maniatta?  
(Did you catch the train?)

**B : ぎりぎりで飛び乗れた。あと 10秒 遅れてたら だめだった。**  
Girigiri de tobinoreta. Ato jūbyō okurete tara damedatta.  
(I just barely caught it. If I had been ten seconds later, I would have missed it.)

**A : 君が担当しているプロジェクト、大変そうだね。**  
Kimi ga tantō shiteiru purojekuto taihen sōda ne.  
(The project you are in charge of looks tough.)

**B : 人手不足の上に納期が早まって、もう精神的にぎりぎり。**  
Hitode busoku no ue ni nōki ga hayamatte, mō sēshinteki ni girigiri.  
(On top of the labor shortage, the delivery date was pushed forward. I am at my wit's end!)

**A : 無理して倒れる前に、上司に相談したほうがいいよ。**  
Murishite taoreru mae ni, jōshi ni sōdanshita hōga īyo.  
(Before you overwork yourself, you should talk to your boss about it.)

< by Niihama Nihongo no Kai >

NNK also provides Japanese lessons for foreigners living in Niihama. Feel free to contact us at:  
Niihama Kokusai Kōryū Kyōkai (Niihama International Center)  
Tel:0897-65-1579 E-mail:niihamashikokusai@gmail.com

What's New?

Niihama City

No.368 May 2026

Published by SGG Niihama



The illusion of preference: Urban and rural life  
Han Htoo Oo

Whenever I was asked whether I would prefer to live in a rural or an urban area, I would always choose the countryside. Since I lived in a large city in my country, I always wanted to escape from the crowded atmosphere of urban life.

When I received the email from the embassy informing me that I had to study in Tokyo for one year, I felt delighted because Tokyo has been one of my favorite cities. After arriving there, the first month was primarily a period of adaptation in terms of complex train networks, communication with local people, social systems, and regulations. However, I was fascinated by the well-organized systems, advanced infrastructure, city planning styles, and the impressive quality of life. During what is called the honeymoon period, I gradually began to enjoy the vibrant atmosphere of Tokyo. Our school also organized regular day trips to nature-friendly locations, where we could experience the rural atmosphere of Japan. During those moments, I felt energetic and relaxed thanks to the beauty of nature.

On the way back to school after these trips, I was usually leaning against the bus window and looking outside. As we passed through the toll gate indicating the entrance to Tokyo and the tall buildings came into my view, I realized that I was about to return to my usual city life that is full of crowded pedestrian streets, constant noise, and a stressful environment. That was when I began to feel increasingly annoyed with life in a large city. Spending weekends surrounded by buildings no longer appealed to me, and I started wishing to live somewhere closer to

the countryside. After 10 months of studying in the preparatory school, I was informed by the Kosen organization that I had been assigned to continue my studies at Niihama Kosen. Even though I knew almost nothing about Niihama or its geography, I felt extremely excited and eager to move to a new place.



When I finally arrived in Niihama, I was very delighted for the following reasons. I have always loved both mountains and the sea, and Niihama is geographically complete with both the sea to the north and mountainous valleys to the south. Although it is considered a rural area, it still has several supermarkets and essential facilities, making daily life surprisingly convenient. While many of my friends who moved to their Kosen often said they missed Tokyo, I hardly felt that way at first. I cycled around the town almost every day and enjoyed being surrounded by nature. As a result, I was able to focus more on my studies because there were fewer distractions compared to life in a big city.

However, after four or five months, summer vacation began, and I suddenly had a great deal of free time. That was when I started to feel nostalgic about Tokyo. Unlike Tokyo, this neighborhood has very few sightseeing spots and places to stroll around. Consequently, I realized the fact that nature can be refreshing when you encounter it occasionally while living in a big city, but if you get surrounded by nature every single day, it may gradually start to feel ordinary. Whenever I watched videos about Tokyo life on social media, I began to feel a strong desire to return to the city.

In conclusion, I realized that my feelings were partly an illusion. The countryside can be relaxing just because it provides relief from the stress of city life. However, once we spend a long time in a rural environment, this may make us long for the energy and excitement of the city again. This demonstrates a basic aspect of human psychology that people often fail to fully appreciate their present situation but idealize what they once had or what they do not currently experience. In the past, I disliked city life and longed for the countryside. However, I sometimes find myself wishing to return to the city once again.



## Traffic Tickets for Cyclists

(Nikkei Shimbun: April 1, 2026)

A new system for bicycle traffic tickets (called “blue tickets”) started on April 1. In this system, traffic tickets are issued for bicycle traffic violations. They impose fines for behaviors that might cause traffic accidents, including smartphone use while riding a bicycle or riding on the sidewalk. So far, police officers enforce the laws mainly by giving instructions and warnings to cyclists, but they do impose fines strictly on behaviors that are dangerous to others.

The traffic tickets system applies to people who are 16 years and older. If there is a safety issue, it is regarded as a violation. Fines range from 3,000 yen to 12,000 yen, depending on the behavior. If you pay by the deadline, you won't face criminal penalties. In more egregious cases like riding a bicycle while drunk, a red ticket (meaning criminal penalty) is issued.



Even if a violation is confirmed, traffic tickets aren't issued immediately. First, instructions and warnings by police officers are conducted. The purpose of this system is to spread awareness of traffic rules. If cyclists don't follow the instructions or warnings, blue tickets are issued.



On the other hand, blue tickets are immediately issued for very dangerous behavior which might cause serious accidents. If you ride a bicycle while using a smartphone, the fine is 12,000 yen. If you ride without a brake, the fine is 5,000 yen. If you ignore the stop bar at a railroad crossing, the fine is 7,000 yen.

Police officers pay especially close attention to cyclists during the morning rush or in the early evening before sunset when traffic accidents are likely to occur.

This newsletter is published by SGG, a volunteer group that helps foreigners living in and around Niihama. If you need any advice, information, or support, please contact SGG. SGG would welcome any suggestions, questions, or ideas for monthly articles.

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\* This month's editors are Kumata Kazuko & Oishi Taeko.



## May Events

☆ **5/1~5/31 Peony Flowers at Minetopia Besshi.**

40 different kinds (about 30,000 flowers in total) are in full bloom.

Enjoy Matcha tea at Senju-tē(千寿亭) 10:00-15:00 on **5/9 (Sat) & 5/10 (Sun)** / ¥500

Enjoy the bonito cooking show on the lawn 10:00-16:00 on **5/9 (Sat)** Free of charge.

Enjoy buying various food from food trucks, too.

☆ **~5/31(Sun) Marine Park**

Enjoy the display of 100 carp streamers.

**5/6(Wed) Curry Festival**

Enjoy buying a meal/drink from one 30 stalls (curry, crepes,



bread, coffee, sandwiches, fried chicken, smoothies, and more) open from 10:00-15:00 A variety of handmade goods and vintage clothing will be on sale too. You can also enjoy workshops and stage performances!

## Online Information in English from Niihama City

☆ **A Guide for Living in Niihama**



☆ **The Niihama Medical Institution Map**



☆ **Trash & Garbage Sorting Information**



☆ **What's New? in English**



☆ **Niihama Tourist Information**

<https://niihama.info/>



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(Nationwide service) multilingual



☆ **Yoriso Helpline for foreigners**

[TEL:0120-279-338](tel:0120-279-338) 10:00 am~10:00 pm

**Multilingual Your privacy will be protected.**