

FGL Community Newsletter



WINTER 2024

Sleigh bells ring, are you listening? The weather outside is frightful, but the snow is so delightful. Since we've no place to go, get a cup of hot chocolate, sit in front of the fire and find out what the FGL community has been up to this season!



FGL
COMMUNITY
TOHOKU UNIVERSITY

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The FGL Winter 2024 Playlist

Koharu Miyoshi

Maximilian Fernaldy

This December we asked the FGL community what songs come to their minds when they think about winter. They came up with all sorts of tracks, from Christmas staples by Mariah Carey and Michael Bublé, to the haunting words of Joni Mitchell's River. But not everyone associates this time of year with Christmas, so there were also some welcome surprises like Tony Christie's (Is This The Way To) Amarillo or the very danceable L'estate sta finendo by Righeira, offering a nice upbeat mix-up to the otherwise toned-down vibe of the playlist. At any rate, give our winter soundtrack a listen through and tell us what you think of our taste.

#	Cover art	Title	Album	Added by	#	Cover art	Title	Album	Added by
1		Christmas (Baby Please Come Home) Mariah Carey	Merry Christmas	Max	10		I Wish It Would Snow Dave Barnes	I Wish It Would Snow	Adriel
2		White Christmas Aaron Neville	Aaron Neville's Soulful Christmas	Koharu	11		Winter Wonderland - Spotify Singles Holiday Laufey	Spotify Singles Holiday	Sid
3		River Joni Mitchell	Blue	Adriel	12		Jingle Bell Rock Jim Boothe, Joe Beal, Jo Beal, Inge Sunde, Noteservice Wind Ensemble	Reet Petite - New Music for Flexible Instrumentation	Sathya
4		O Tannenbaum Vince Guaraldi Trio	A Charlie Brown Christmas (2012 Remaster)	Max	13		Anyone Who Knows What Love Is Irma Thomas	Take A Look	Ian
5		Holly Holly Christmas Michael Bublé	Christmas (Deluxe Special Edition)	Sathya	14		Last Christmas Wham!	LAST CHRISTMAS	Sathya
6		(Is This The Way To) Amarillo Tony Christie	With Loving Feeling	Ian	15		L'estate sta finendo Righeira	The Best Righeira	Ian
7		Feliz Navidad José Feliciano	The Definite Best	Sathya	16		Fairytale of New York (feat. Kirsty MacColl) The Pogues, Kirsty MacColl	Fairytale of New York (feat. Kirsty MacColl)	Adriel
8		Winter Wonderland Chet Baker Quartet, Russ Freeman	Chet Baker Quartet Featuring Russ Freeman	Kamila	17		It's Beginning to Look a Lot Like Christmas Alexander Thoma	When the World Was Young	Sathya
9		Blue Christmas Elvis Presley	Elvis' Christmas Album	Sathya	18		Would That I Hozier	Wasteland, Baby!	Max

Listen to the playlist [here](#).

Ask Senpai: Trishit Banerjee

Avin Sharma

Alicia Adrian

Could you give us a brief introduction?

I'm Trishit Banerjee, originally from India, and I joined FGL in 2015. My journey to Japan started in 2014 through an exchange program called "Genesis," where I got to visit Tokyo. Afterward, I decided to return for higher studies, which wasn't common for Indian students at the time. I chose Tohoku University for its chemistry program and completed my bachelor's, master's, and Ph.D., graduating in 2024.

How was your experience in FGL like?

When I joined at 17, I wasn't sure if what I was experiencing was cultural differences or just part of growing up. I was the only Indian in my year and hadn't interacted with people from other countries before. FGL gave me a strong community—living in Sanjo dorms, we helped and celebrated with each other. I avoided sticking only to the Indian community because I wanted to explore other cultures. Outside campus, though, using Japanese was necessary, which was a challenge at first. I was also involved in *The Sentinel* newsletter and TUFSA, where we organized events and took part in volunteer work. These experiences helped me connect with both local and international communities.

What inspired you to take on your latest project with F-ATRAs (Futaba-gun Area Tourism Research Association)?

In 2017, I became a student ambassador for tourism recovery after the 2011 disaster. That's when I fell in love with Fukushima's nature and people. Even after the program ended, I wanted to stay connected to the region. Joining F-ATRAs allowed me to work on town development and tourism in Futaba, applying my research skills in new ways.

What are the key goals of F-ATRAs?

F-ATRAs focuses on rebuilding communities by emphasizing tourism and community engagement rather than just infrastructure. Our goal is to bring people back to Futaba and shift its image beyond its association with the nuclear disaster.

And what was the reason behind choosing Futaba?

My colleague Yamane-san inspired me with his dedication to his wife's hometown of Futaba. Our main office is based there, and it's a place that holds a lot of potential for revitalization.

What challenges have you faced, and how did you address them?

It can be summed up into two kinds. One, working on just one particular area. We're just a company of 3 people, and I'm an 'outsider'. You don't know what exactly locals want, and there's no definitive textbook to build a town. So, you're not sure how to do it right. This group is also a business. Even if it's good for society, it might not be good business. You also make sure that the money earned is also shared with locals. The second one: As foreign students, it might be easy to enter Japan, but there aren't many options in career, well, maybe except for coding. If you take a PhD, there are even less career choices. Tohoku University is a local university, unlike Tokyo which is very urban. There aren't any options to vote in the local area. So many smart people come from Tohoku University, but Tohoku cannot create opportunities for career for these people. That's why in F-ATRA, our founder is open to new ideas, which makes it easier to work with. If this can be expanded to international students in Tohoku, it would be nice.

Can you share a memorable moment?

Recently, we invited Indian students to Tokyo. Five students came from a small town in India, and most of them had never even rode on a plane. They go through programs that had them solve social problems, etc. The population in Futaba is very small, even when compared to (small Indian town). Like FGL students who are connected to many parts of the world, this program makes you see many of the global aspects.

What advice would you give to FGL students?

Try everything. Attend events, explore new interests, and step out of your comfort zone. You don't need to stick strictly to your degree—you can gain skills and apply them in different ways. University life is the perfect time to figure out what excites you and what doesn't. "Don't wait for opportunities to come to you. Create them. And most importantly, enjoy the process—you never know what you'll discover."

Stargazing in Winter

Chanisa Prompattanapakdee

Stargazing in winter

Winter skies are particularly stunning, with fewer clouds and less water vapor to obscure the stars. This article will explore winter constellations, Sendai's unique stargazing experience, meteor showers, and some fun facts about Orion and his celestial companions.

Winter constellations

Are there really "winter constellations"? Technically, we can see most stars in a 12-hour span from 6 p.m. to 6 a.m., except those close to the Sun. Constellations visible at midnight are often categorized as "winter" or "summer" constellations, but if you stay up all night, you'll see both. Apps like Stellarium or Star Charts can help you locate them during your stargazing sessions.

Why stargaze in Sendai?

Sendai, located at 38°N latitude, offers a unique stargazing experience. The angle of familiar stars shifts noticeably compared to other locations, making the same constellations feel new. Moreover, despite being a city, Sendai retains a balance with nature. If you're at UH Aobayama, you have one of the best spots for stargazing, away from light pollution. I once saw three shooting stars in just a minute from my window—it's a magical experience. Although winter's meteor showers have passed, spring and summer bring new opportunities:

Name	Peak Dates	Location
Lyrids	Apr 22-23	Between Lyra and Hercules
Eta Aquarids	May 5-6	Around the head of Aquarius
Perseids	Aug 12-13	Centered near Perseus

Orion and Friends

Orion, one of the brightest and most famous constellations, is easily recognized by its "belt" of three bright stars. His loyal companions, two dogs (Canis Major and Canis Minor), complete the Winter Triangle: Betelgeuse, Sirius, and Procyon. Opposite them lies Scorpius, Orion's ancient foe.

Hidden within the Winter Triangle is Monoceros, the unicorn constellation. Though dim, Monoceros is home to several fascinating stellar objects, making it a treasure trove for those willing to explore.

Happy stargazing!

Winter Foods

Koharu Miyoshi

When the skies become cloudier and the temperature begins to drop, what foods do you find yourself craving? If you find yourself looking for warm, often soup-rich foods, you're in luck here in Japan. Though easily overlooked by tourists, Japan actually has a range of winter foods that are sure to keep you warm even in Sendai's cold temperatures.



Oden. (Jun Seita, Flickr)

First and foremost is my personal favorite: *oden*. You may have noticed this dish being sold at Lawson. Ingredients such as fish cakes, *daikon* radish, hard-boiled eggs and chicken are simmered in a rich *dashi* broth. Unlike other hot-pot-like dishes, the ingredients in *oden* are typically cut in large sizes. Many Japanese people also add *karashi* (Japanese mustard) or *yuzu* paste as seasoning. *Oden* has a relatively mild and simple flavor, is very filling thanks to the size of the ingredients, and can also be made without meat. I would recommend it as an easy and accessible winter food.

The next and probably most well-known winter food in Japan is *nabe*, or Japanese hot-pot. The most standard *nabe* uses *dashi* broth and includes *Napa* cabbage, Japanese mushrooms, green onions, and meat, but there are many different types of *nabe* with different broths and meats. Sendai is known for *seri nabe*, made with Japanese parsley. *Seri nabe* originated in Miyagi Prefecture thanks to Natori city's high production of Japanese parsley and uses the whole parsley plant, from the roots to the leaves. Other popular *nabe* variations are *motsu nabe*, which is rooted in Fukuoka and uses pork or beef offal; *chanko nabe*, which came from the sumo houses of Tokyo; and *kiritanpo nabe* from Akita, with sticky rice shaped into hollow

tubes. There are also regional *nabe* variations with fish as the main protein, such as Hokkaido's *ishikari nabe*, which uses salmon, and Yamaguchi's *tecchiri nabe*, which uses pufferfish. I even noticed a small izakaya near Ōmachi Nishi-kōen Station that served *kuma nabe*— *nabe* with bear meat. Once you've finished eating the *nabe*, you can add *udon* noodles to the remaining broth to round out the meal.

One of my favorite things about hot-pot dishes in Japan is that they are very easy to make and can be made in large portions. Most supermarkets sell broth packets for a variety of *nabe*, and the ingredients require minimal preparation. Just heat up your broth, toss in your vegetables and meat, and leave the lid on until everything cooks; it's that easy.

Other common winter foods in Japan include sweets such as *yaki-imo*, *oshiruko*, and various kinds of *mochi*. *Yaki-imo* is simply baked Japanese sweet potato, and *oshiruko* is a dessert soup made with *azuki* beans and *shiratama dango*, which are small *mochi*-like balls made with special *shiratama* rice flour. In my opinion, these sweets taste best when you buy them piping hot from a vendor at the morning market. I also recommend looking for fresh seasonal seafood and fruits at the supermarket or at morning markets to appreciate the flavor of Japan's winter right from the source.



Oshiruko with *shiratama*. (Tomomarusan, Wikimedia Commons)

As the spring break approaches and we enter the last months of winter, a *nabe* party or a trip to the morning markets in Sendai or Natori may be just what you need to wind down after final exams. Nothing warms you up in winter in Japan as much as a walk through snowy streets with a piping hot *yaki-imo* in your hands and coming home to friends and the scent of *nabe* filling your house, so call up your friends, make a shopping list, and don't forget to borrow the largest pot you can find for the most fulfilling *nabe* experience.

Thank you for reading the Winter 2024 issue of the FGL Community Newsletter! See you next season!