Tokyo Weekender
TW
THE VOICE OF TOKYO
Volume 4, 2024

Exploring Japanese Identity

Filmmaker Ema Ryan Yamazaki's touching portraits of contemporary Japanese society

The Spirit of Dance

A rare performance of the ballet masterpiece *The Kabuki* is coming to Tokyo

AVANTGARDEY

The eccentric charms of the 17-member dance crew that's taking the world by storm

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MEET THE TEAM

Introducing the team behind this month's issue

Cover photo by Solène Ballesta



Liam, Executive Director: Hands down, my favorite part of this issue was working with the amazing Avantgardey to produce our stunning cover feature. Unfortunately, my request to join them on stage as an honorary member was politely declined due to my complete lack of timing and coordination.



Kiyomi, Producer: Coordinating the cover shoot of Avantgardey [p.20]! I was so impressed by their professionalism. Also it was such a fun shoot.



Ben, Digital Content Creator: Getting out among the lesser-appreciated area of Shinbashi for this issue's neighborhood guide [p.10] was a great reminder that there's always something new to be found in this city.



What was your favorite part of creating this latest issue?



Alina, Editorial Content Creator: My conversation with documentary filmmaker Ema Ryan Yamazaki [p.26] really helped me recontextualize what it means to be Japanese. The Japanese identity is something learned and nurtured, and I'm fascinated by the ongoing discussion of which Japanese values we should uphold and which ones no longer serve the nation.



Lisa, Digital Content Director: Meeting the very playful sushi master Hashida-san in Tsukishima [p.30] and eating some of the most sublime sushi of my life was absolutely one of my favorite experiences!



Kim, Features Writer: Even though I spend a lot of the year in Hokkaido, it was only recently that I visited Moerenuma Park [p.52]. It blew me away. I wish I'd gone earlier!



Victoria, Designer: Seeing the interesting exhibitions coming to Tokyo this autumn [p. 56]. I'll be celebrating the end of summer among the beautiful autumnal objects in the Nezu Museum!



Christian, Website Content Manager: The hot springs at Shikinejima look amazing [p.48]. This is going at the top of my onsen travel list.



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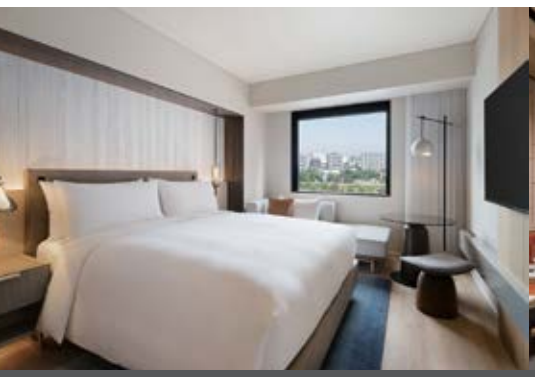
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RADAR



8

Trends: Beauty in Bloom

Turn your apartment into a floral oasis with these stylish vases.

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Neighborhood: Shinbashi

The hidden wonders of Tokyo's salaryman hub.

12

Style: Jinki Naomatsu

Bold and avant-garde creations that merge the fantastical and tangible.



Beauty in BLOOM

Fill your space with floral artwork with the help of these stylish, sculptural vases from the MoMA Design Store

Words by Wakaba Oto

Summer in Tokyo is a relentless barrage of heat, humidity and sensory overload. As we slog through the sweltering streets, there's an undeniable urge to escape into our cool, calm havens and inject some of that summer spirit into our living spaces — without the sweat. Here are our top picks for vases that will turn any apartment into an exotic-feeling garden.



Two Tone Mini Vase in Pink x Blue
Shinji Takaya's 2023 creation is small but mighty. This two-tone vase is perfect for single stems and fits easily in small spaces. Its modern design makes it a chic decor piece even without flowers. Moreover, it comes in a cute gift box, making it a great housewarming gift.



Self-Watering Wet Pots
Get your green thumb on with these Swedish self-watering pots. A terracotta planter sits inside a glass reservoir, ensuring plants get just the right amount of water. Perfect for mini cacti or medium-sized plants, they're both practical and stylish.



Pantone Yellow Vase

Bring in the sunshine with the Pantone Yellow vase, a true icon of color. Known for revolutionizing color standards with its Pantone Matching System in the 1950s, Pantone brings you this bright and bold accent piece. It's perfect for dramatic flower displays, storing brushes or adding a pop of cheer to any table or shelf.

Oorun Didun Glass Vase by Yinka Ilori

Designed by London-based artist Yinka Ilori, the Oorun Didun Vase is a vibrant piece that blends British and Nigerian influences. Made from textured glass in a shade of pale pink, it's playful and enchanting, recalling the innocent joy one gets from encountering the natural world.



Glass Pear Bud Vase

This quirky vase looks like a pear, complete with a yellow body and a green glass leaf — perfect for showcasing a single beautiful flower or just as an art piece. It's tiny, adorable and a conversation starter. Hand wash recommended.



The Hidden Wonders of Shinbashi

There's more to this bustling neighborhood than you think

Words by Ben Cooke, photos by Lisa Knight







At first glance, Shinbashi might not seem like the most exciting place. Filled with towering office buildings and izakaya, a big train station, an old department store and lots of salarymen, it sounds like any other part of central Tokyo. But as you spend time there, it quickly becomes clear that there's something more to this part of town. The air hums with energy; it's a neighborhood that takes the most simple yet quintessential elements of the city and weaves them together into something unexpected.

Corporate Coexistence

Take one step out of Shimbashi Station, and it's clear that there are a lot of deals being done in this part of the city. Like monoliths of glass and granite, office complexes occupy a lot of the airspace here. But perhaps the most fascinating part of this neighborhood is hiding in plain sight — within the walls of the New Shinbashi Building.

Located less than two minutes' walk from Shimbashi Station, New Shinbashi Building is somewhat unassuming from the outside. With a facade of cream-colored lattice, it's not entirely clear what awaits inside, but if I had to describe it in a single sentence, I would say: There's a little bit of everything.

On the basement level, you'll find a colorful underground maze of izakaya, tiny variety stores and kissaten. The most popular of these is Fuji Coffee, which offers a menu of coffee, cake and a simple yet undeniably effective butter toast. The remaining floors stretching up throughout New Shinbashi Building are a mix of everything from massage parlors and gaming arcades to camera shops and hole-in-the-wall antique





dealers selling everything from retro video games to Japanese railway memorabilia. Prepare to get lost in here, in the best way possible.

A Historical Hub

Depending on where you exit Shimbashi Station, you may notice a large locomotive parked in the courtyard outside. Long retired from running the railways, this train is an homage to the important history of Shimbashi Station, which was Tokyo's final stop on Japan's first railway line back in 1872.

But while the surrounding area has continued to grow and evolve in the century since, the history of this transportation hub has never been forgotten, and remains on display in the nearby Old Shimbashi Station, which is a faithful replica of the original train station that put Shinbashi on the map all those years ago. For those interested in a look into the early days of Japan's now world-famous railways, Old Shimbashi Station and the railway history exhibition inside are free to enter.

Going back even further, a few minutes' walk from Shimbashi Station is the uniquely brutalist Karasumori Shrine, the original iteration of which was constructed more than 1,000 years ago. Built by a Japanese aristocrat, Fujiwara no Hidesato, the shrine was originally designed to honor a white fox that supposedly visited him during prayer and offered guidance that aided in stopping an uprising against the central government led by samurai Taira no Masakado. Thankfully, things have calmed down a bit since then, and today the shrine is visited by those seeking peace and well-being.

Snacks and Train Tracks

Shinbashi maintains its long-standing relationship with the city's railway network by tucking some of its best bars and restaurants in and around the quaint spaces right beneath some of the capital's busiest train lines.

As is often the case in an area where a lot of people work, much of the food here is quick and easy, which is why ramen, yakitori and sushi restaurants take up most of the real estate. But that's not to say you can't find a unique bite to eat here and there, as is evidenced by places like Kaiju Sakaba, a kaiju-themed restaurant only a couple minutes' walk from Shimbashi Station. For the uninitiated, kaiju are massive monsters like Godzilla, who are typically known for racking up extensive damage bills throughout Japanese pop culture. At Kaiju Sakaba, these big beasts are the inspiration behind dungeon-like decor and a menu that includes a fried shrimp sandwich presented in the shape of a twin-tailed serpent, among others.

More Than a Feeling

Describing Shinbashi and visiting Shinbashi are two totally different propositions. Words can only do so much justice for a place where the charm emerges as the sum of many parts. There's something about the sound of shinkansen gliding by as smoke from an izakaya wafts into salaryman-filled streets that can't really be expressed — it can only be experienced.





Morimori_107

Local Style Profiles

Jinki Naomatsu

An emerging visionary in Japanese fashion, stylist Jinki Naomatsu embodies the avant-garde spirit of a new generation, redefining style with his surreal and futuristic creations

Compiled and photographed by Solène Ballesta



Tessey
SOEUR tokyo/
Xanadu Tokyo



(un)decided
Mikage Shin/Sakas PR

Jinki Naomatsu is a stylist and creative director based in Osaka renowned for his surreal and futuristic approach to fashion. His work encapsulates the bold, avant-garde spirit of the new generation of Japanese design, pushing boundaries with every creation. Naomatsu's innovative style has garnered attention and acclaim, with features in prestigious publications like *Crom Magazine* and collaborations with iconic brands such as Fred Perry.

Beyond his editorial and commercial success, Naomatsu channels his creativity into Sessilifolia, his handmade accessory store. Here, he crafts unique pieces using real animal bones, transforming them into striking, wearable art. Naomatsu's work is a testament to his ability to merge the fantastical with the tangible, making him a standout figure in the fashion world.

> "Fashion transcends mere clothing; it's a language of its own."

Tokyo Fashion is ...

a tapestry of chaos and independence. The streets are alive with people who step out in whatever outfit they desire. In this city, fashion transcends mere clothing; it's a language of its own, a powerful medium through which people express their inner worlds, mindsets and preferences without uttering a single word. I hope Tokyo remains in this state of vibrant, stylish chaos, forever teeming with diverse, bold fashion statements that push boundaries and inspire awe.



Hana Yagi

My top places to shop are ...

TAIAN: A hidden gem in my hometown of Toyonaka, Taian is a charming vintage shop in a renovated 100-year-old Japanese building. Its unique pieces from abroad blend traditional Japanese aesthetics with global eclecticism.

NIBUNNOICHI: In Osaka's America Mura, Nibunnoichi feels like a fashion museum. The store brims with rare, one-of-a-kind items, turning browsing into a treasure hunt.

TAU: Located in Osaka's Nakazakicho, Tau is known for its friendly, knowledgeable staff and an eclectic mix of vintage clothing.

I am inspired by ...

the worlds of games, anime and sci-fi movies, where both human and otherworldly characters come to life. These realms fuel my creativity, and I strive to weave their fantastical elements seamlessly into fashion. Each piece I create is a bridge between reality and imagination. Test shoots are my playground, offering the freedom to fully express my vision without constraints. These pieces are designed to be more than just fashion; they are experiences, inviting viewers to explore and interpret their own meanings.



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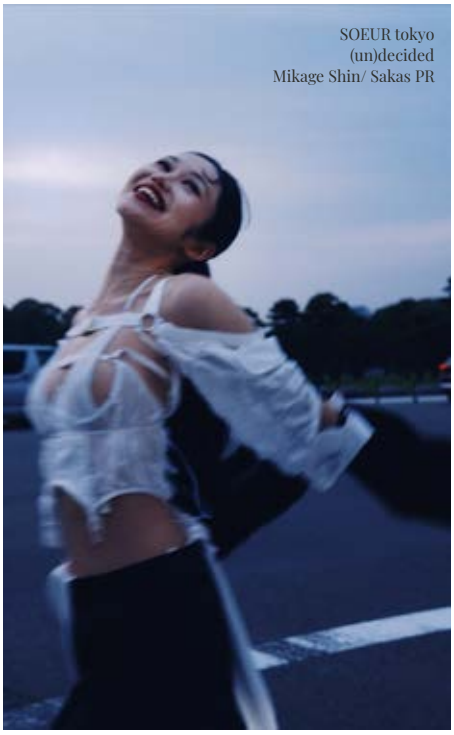
More Info

Discover Naomatsu's works on Instagram at *@tyoku_01aw*
and his jewelry at *@sessilifolia_jn*.



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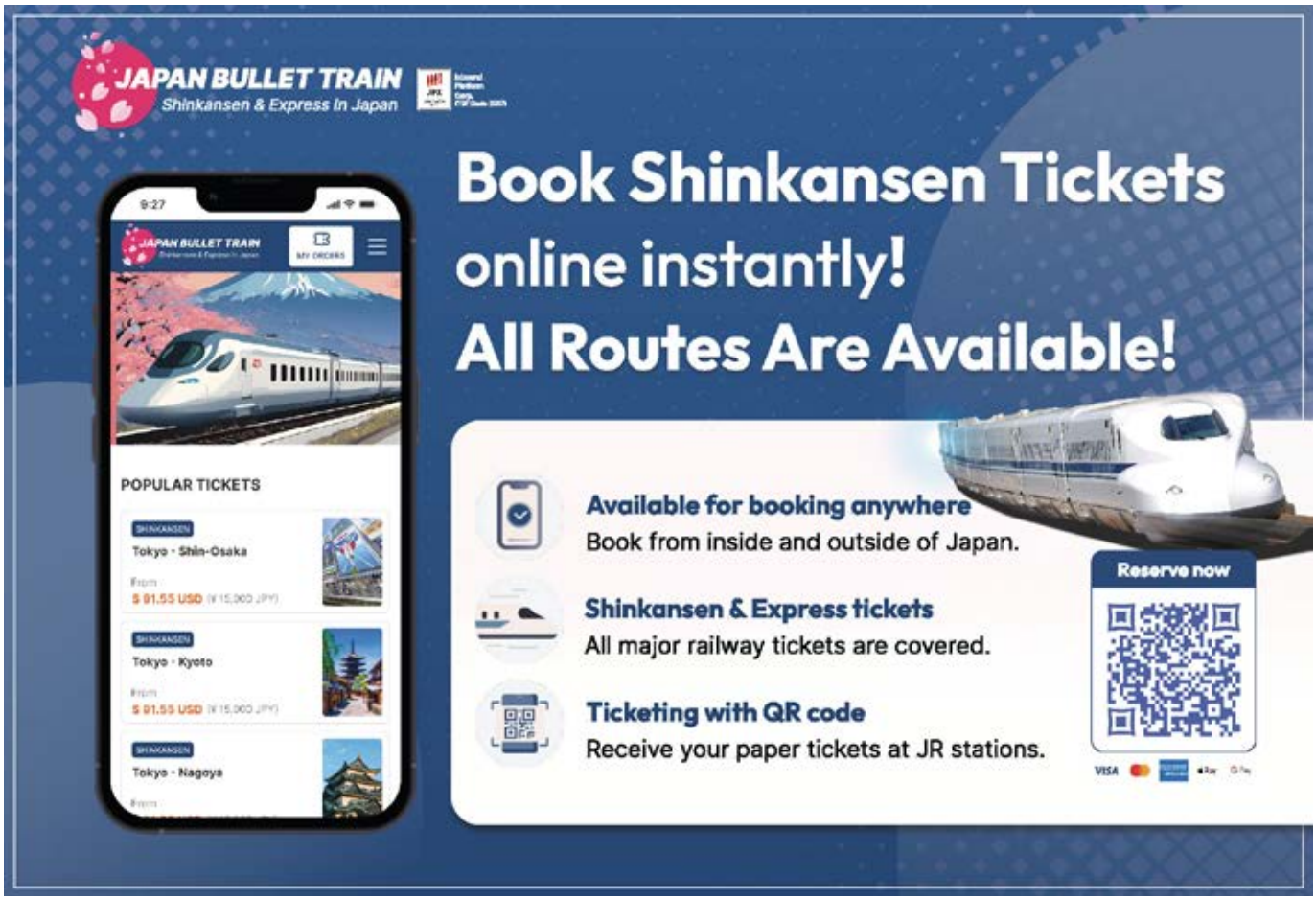


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IN-DEPTH



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In Perfect Sync

Chatting with all 17 members of the bob-haired, school uniform-clad dance crew.

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Omakase With Attitude

Kenjiro Hashida runs a sushi establishment like no other.

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Ballet's Love Letter to Japan

Inside the Tokyo Ballet's first domestic performance of *The Kabuki* in six years.



AVANTGARDEY

The mysterious bob-haired, school-uniformed dance crew is known for its costumes, eccentric performances and mind-blowing synchronization — now the group is ready for world domination

—

Words by Callie Beusman, photos by Solène Ballesta



The door to a small, underground studio in Tokyo swings open, and in files a procession of 17 women in identical garb: sleek, bobbed hair; navy, pinafore-style dresses over blouses with billowing sleeves; gleaming white ankle socks. Responding to the presence of an audience — a small camera crew, a director and myself — they switch into performance mode, smiling widely, shaking their heads rapidly and shuffling their feet as they pass through the door in single file, giving the impression of freshly wound wind-up dolls. At their tail is a woman clad in all white, walking normally.

This is Avantgardey, a dance crew known for eccentric, energetic and perfectly synchronized performances. Their names are Nona, Pani, Moca, Fuka, Seira, Nagano, Ayane, Oya, Sono, Harune, Miyuu, Macchan, Aimu, Kotone, Kohana, Chacha and Ui, and the 18th individual is Akane, their choreographer, producer and general creative mastermind. Since Avantgardey first formed in 2022, it's amassed global popularity, most notably through a widely appreciated stint on *America's Got Talent*, and garnered millions of followers on social media. These days, the group's schedule is packed with TV appearances, fan events and live performances throughout Asia. We have precisely an hour and a half to conduct a photo shoot with them — immediately after, they need to head out to prepare for a solo concert at Nakano Zero — but fortunately, the group functions like a well-oiled machine.

Akane was coming off another huge success at the time she assembled Avantgardey; in 2017, a routine she had choreographed for Osaka's Tomioka High School Dance Club, known as the Bubbly Dance, went immensely viral. Set to Yoko Oginome's "Dancing Hero (Eat You Up)," it featured a veritable army of teen dancers dressed in exaggerated 80s, bubble-era office lady fashion — sequined, shoulder-padded skirt suits, perplexingly architectural hairstyles, technicolor makeup — moving in perfect unison. For much of the dance, their expressions are too neutral, a precocious approximation of a high-functioning professional. Occasionally, though, a dancer will flash an exaggerated smile or a look of mock anguish at the crowd. To date, the Bubbly Dance video uploaded on Akane's YouTube channel has been viewed 118 million times.







Many of the dancers in Avantgardey are ex-members of the Tomioka High dance club, hand-picked by Akane; their high school uniform-esque costumes seem to hearken back to these roots. (Akane says she chose the style "because the contrast between the color navy blue and white arms is clear and looks great for dancing.") The group's mini-big break came in 2023, via the DJ Steve Aoki, who invited them to perform at one of his concerts. World fame arrived next, in the form of *AGT*, which averages about 10 million viewers per season. The group appeared on season 18, capturing the hearts of the panel of celebrity judges with their initial performance, set to the city pop classic "Cinderella Honeymoon" by Hiromi Iwasaki, followed by dances to Yoasobi's "Idol" and "Money, Money, Money" by ABBA.

Avantgardey made it all the way to the final round, but maybe the American public wasn't quite ready for something so intricate and unusual. Despite being a fan favorite, the group was eliminated in the finals. The ultimate winner of the season was a duo act: a man and his amazingly well-trained border collie.

With all the members gathered in one small room, one can't help but think: *Seventeen people is really a lot*. Somehow, though, the atmosphere never feels hectic or overwhelming. The members begin hitting a series of geometric group poses concocted by Akane on the spot, carefully calibrating the angles of their arms and legs and their distance from one another.

Despite her petite stature, Akane is an imposing figure, cloaked in a quiet yet palpable



air of authority. She's exacting: Between shots, she and another member of the production staff gently weave through the small forest of bewigged dancers, carefully adjusting their bangs, brushing aside errant hairs and ensuring that socks are properly pulled up. Nothing is left out of place.

After precisely an hour and a half, Avantgardey accomplishes a final pose, graciously presents us with branded stickers and immediately files out of the room, up the stairs and into a fleet of cars that will ferry the members to their next event. It happens so quickly, it's nearly disorienting.

> “Performing or dancing with a large group is certainly challenging, but it has 17 times the power compared to dancing alone.”



This intense coordination is to be expected, though. The hallmark of an Avantgardey performance is astonishing precision. Movements range dramatically in style and sensibility, graceful at times and nearly slapstick at others — they'll all swoop around the stage with the refined air of modern dancers before rapidly switching to a low, stooped-over stance, arms swaying like pendulums, and then suddenly one member is being thrown in the air while four others crawl on their hands and knees. They'll jitter around on tiptoe like a legion of haunted dolls or wobble in procession like baby quails following their mother, before breaking into a complex formation, undulating like an ocean wave.

Photo by Takashi Yamashita



Throughout, the members cycle through an array of exaggerated facial expressions, the sorts of faces you'd pull if a camera-wielding friend proclaimed, "Let's take a silly one!": duck-lipped pouts, crossed eyes with nostrils flared, eyes narrowed and mouths contorted into jokey lipsticked grimaces. One of their signature looks involves a hyperbolically blank expression, with the eyes held almost uncannily wide open. "During filming, our contact lenses often fall out," jokes Nona, who is particularly skilled at emoting and often takes a center position.

The expressions, I think, are the crux of Avantgardey's wide appeal. They create a unique tension, adding another dimension to the group's performances. Their dances overwhelm the viewer with their meticulous uniformity, subsuming individual dancers into a perfectly synced unit. This, on its own, is the sort of thing we've all seen before; *AGT* is awash with large and astonishing dance groups. The tongue-in-cheek comic flourishes are something new. They serve as an invitation to examine each dancer closely, thinking about them as an individual … but, then again, they're all painstakingly choreographed and practiced, too. Which makes the whole thing even more compelling — funny faces, timed perfectly, performed with utmost seriousness.

On *AGT*, the members said their dance is filled with Japanese spirit. What they mean by this isn't something as obvious as their clothes or movements or song choices. When asked how she defines "Japanese spirit," Akane gestures toward something more abstruse and profound. "I am not trying to express Japanese culture, but rather to express the subtlety and exquisiteness that is unique to Japan," she says.

Sono, one of the members who acts as an MC for the group during public appearances, expounds more on this idea. "The Japanese culture I want to share with the world is one that is incredibly delicate and attentive to detail. Japanese craftsmanship and art often showcase meticulous attention to fine details, and I feel that this is highly valued globally," she says. "As we create our performances, we also focus on precision, aligning our positions down to millimeters and matching the angles of our choreography. This attention to detail is a strength of Japanese culture that I want to convey to the world!"

Photo by Takashi Yamashita





Photo by Takashi Yamashita

Akane says she picked the members of Avantgardey because she recognized in each one a desire to express her own individuality and a drive to succeed. They might function like a machine, but they're not meant to act as mere cogs in it. "Even though we all have the same hairstyle and wear the same uniform, I encourage those interested in Avantgardey to recognize that each of us has our own individuality despite the similar appearance," she says. "I ask the members to self-produce and highlight their unique personalities."

This is most evident on their social media accounts — each member has her own, in addition to the group's official page — where different members showcase different talents, specialties and bits of their own making. Nona often goes viral for her videos of herself running in place, for instance, while Seira has a running gag of eating hot food to Michael Jackson music; Macchan likes filming and editing videos, so she uploads behind-the-scenes content and blooper reels. They also post shots from their practice room, K-pop dance covers and street-style photos of themselves out of costume; Miyuu, Moca and Pani are particularly fashionable.

What unites them all is a genuine love of performance, remarkable telegenic-ness, even (or perhaps especially) while making ridiculous facial expressions, and a goofy, charming affect. Their comradery is evident, even being around them for just a short amount of time. "Because there are so many of us, practice feels like being at school, which is a lot of fun," says Moca. "I spend most of the day with the members," notes Kotone.



Photo by Takashi Yamashita



> "Because there are so many of us, practice feels like being at school, which is a lot of fun."

If the group's current schedule is any indication, that's unlikely to change anytime soon. In the past few months, they've performed in Hong Kong and Taipei and collaborated with a parade of brands and noteworthy figures, including — to name a few — Suzuki, Cetaphil, Onitsuka Tiger, the filmmaker Stephen Chow, the Jabbawockeez, the city of Osaka, Crocs and Netflix Japan. Their ultimate goal, says Akane, is to perform in Las Vegas; along the way, they want to "leave a one-of-a-kind avant-garde impact that, once seen, will not be forgotten."

"Performing or dancing with a large group is certainly challenging, but it has 17 times the power compared to dancing alone," she says. "I believe that this large number of people coming together makes it possible to convey even more energy."

More Info

Check out Avantgardey on Instagram at *@avantgardey_* and on YouTube at *@avantgardey*.



A Japanese Education

Documentary filmmaker Ema Ryan Yamazaki's nuanced and moving exploration of Japanese identity

— *Words by Alina Joan Ito*

What makes someone Japanese? Ema Ryan Yamazaki's newest documentary, *The Making of a Japanese*, hinges on this question. The 99-minute film starts with 6-year-old Yutaro neatly placing his shoes at the entrance of his home and holding his breath while carrying a tray of plates to the table. He's practicing for his first day of Japanese elementary school, where he will be faced with challenges in and out of the classroom — including perfectly placing his shoes in his cubby. The film takes place over the course of an entire school year, starting with a whir of shiny new randoseru backpacks and tiny legs ushered to walk in a straight line under the anxious gaze of parents and faculty.

The Making of a Japanese carefully follows the intricacies of the Japanese public school system, with unprecedented access to the goings-on of daily life. "Our goal was to become part of the system," Yamazaki explains. "We were so seamlessly there that the kids and teachers got to the point where they would behave [in their usual way], regardless if we were there."

The film at once details the quotidian normalcy and strict intensity of Japanese elementary schools: the perfectly organized shoe boxes, an emphasis on responding with a perfectly clear "hai!" when called and keeping one's mask on at all times (the documentary was filmed during the height of the coronavirus pandemic). Key players color the landscape of school life, including wild child Yutaro; Ayame, a go-getting little girl chosen to play the cymbals for a school-wide assembly; and Endo-sensei, the sixth grade teacher who cracks an egg on his head to make a point about "breaking out of one's shell."





One of the most impactful scenes of *The Making of a Japanese* takes place when Ayame makes a mistake while practicing her cymbals. The teacher admonishes her in front of her classmates, and Ayame is overcome by a flood of tears. For the final rehearsal, she grows scared to perform for fear of being yelled at again, but through the encouragement of her peers and teachers, she manages to perform perfectly.

"The strictest teachers — they were my teachers, and I feel like I was Ayame," Yamazaki says. "I didn't understand at the time, but 20 years later, it's the foundation of my strength. It's harder to be a teacher who's stricter these days; it's much easier to just be everyone's friend. But what is education? I think a school needs all types of teachers, and I really want people to think about that balance of pushing and respecting students."

Making of a Film Director

For Yamazaki, a half-Japanese, half-English documentary filmmaker who grew up in the suburbs of the Kansai region and attended Japanese public school until the age of 12, the Japanese school system had a major influence on her life: "I kind of feel like if you've experienced Japanese elementary school, you're Japanese. Everything about myself I consider to be Japanese, I feel like I learned in those six years."

Yamazaki's biracial identity complicated her experience with the Japanese education system, as there were times she felt like an outsider in her own country. On one hand, she was a "very Japanese girl, with a very Japanese education, in the heart of the Japanese system." On the other, she was



> "The million-dollar question is, 'What should Japan keep about its traditional ways, and what should change be influenced by?'"

"always the only person around that had a foreign parent. I distinctly remember that I thought being able to speak English was a bad thing about myself," she recalls.

After graduating from elementary school, Yamazaki transferred to an international school with a less typically Japanese education style. Then, for college, she decided to move to New York in pursuit of her long-time dream of studying filmmaking. In the States, she experienced a bit of unexpected culture shock: She was praised for qualities in herself that she felt were just natural. "I would get constant compliments like, 'You work so hard, you're always on time, you're such a good team player.' And I would think, 'I'm just Japanese.'"

As Yamazaki made her way through New York University's Tisch program, her passions became clear to her. "I quickly realized all I wanted to do was documentary filmmaking, even though most of my school actually [specialized in] fiction films," she says. "I realized that I don't have any extraordinary stories in my head that I want to tell. It's just about using myself as a filtered perspective to share something that I find interesting."

After graduating, she worked in the film industry as an editor, but she found herself wanting more creative control. "I stayed in New York and edited documentaries that were on things like CNN and HBO. But when you're an editor, you don't have control of the stories you're telling, because it's someone else's idea. And as much as I enjoyed learning about these American stories, I was always playing catch-up. I wanted to see what it feels like to have control over [the narrative], and tell the stories that I want to tell."





> I knew I was witnessing a distinct moment of change.

Finding a Narrative

When Yamazaki made the leap to become a film director, her first feature film was, surprisingly, not about Japan at all. “I made a documentary about the authors of *Curious George*,” she says. “Growing up with him, I thought he was a Japanese monkey. I was like, ‘Oh, you guys had him too?’ It was one of the few universal things that I had in common with some of my friends.”

Yamazaki was immediately drawn in when she came across the story. “It turns out that *Curious George*'s authors were husband and wife. They were German Jews who fled on bicycles, carrying the first unpublished *Curious George* book with them. The love story and the way that they told their own story … the whole thing was so amazing. I assumed there was already a movie about it, but when I realized there was no movie, I was like, wow. I tried to keep the project a secret because I was just like, ‘Spielberg's going to do this.’”



After completing this first passion project, Yamazaki was eager to tell a story through which she could share her own perspective about Japan. “I was so tired of everything being about sushi or samurais or ninjas; it was such a limited view of Japan,” she says.

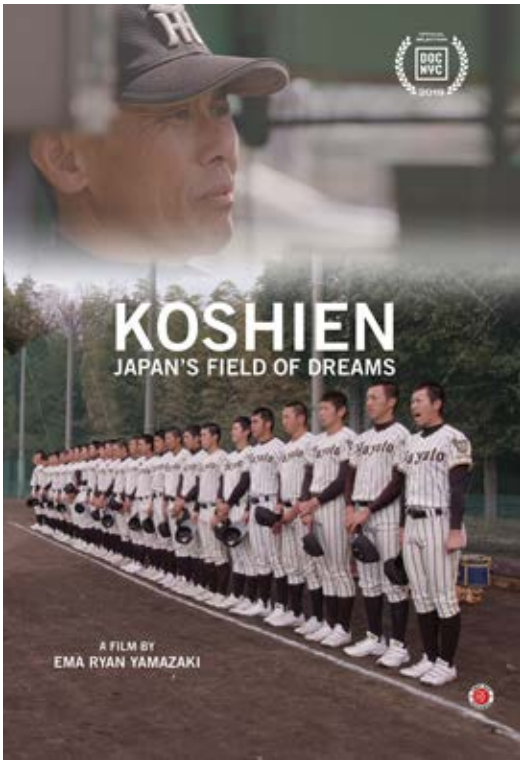
Living abroad had given her a new appreciation for her home country and drawn her attention to parts of Japanese culture she’d previously taken for granted. “In the nine years I was in New York, I had grown to see Japan in a totally different light. When you get to New York and you don't know when the next subway is showing up, and there's rats everywhere and it's really dirty, you're just like, ‘What? It's not a given that our trains show up on time?’”

Yamazaki wanted a way to document the country she grew up in — and not just the surface-level "what" Japan is like, but a deeper "how." For her second film, *Koshien: Japan's Field of Dreams*, she dug into a distinctly Japanese topic: the hyper-competitive world of high school baseball. This was her first time tackling the themes that reemerged in *The Making of a Japanese*; the documentary deftly investigated questions of uniformity vs. individualism and showed students both thriving and struggling in the rigid system.

A key scene comes toward the end of the film, when one of the coaches tells the students they no longer need to shave their heads to be part of the team. Though this may seem insignificant to an outsider, it actually represents a huge cultural shift. High school baseball in Japan is famous for its intense and vigorous training, and mandatory buzz cuts were the norm for decades, serving as a symbol of each player's dedication to the team. "I knew I was witnessing a distinct moment of change," says Yamazaki. Indeed, in the six years since that was filmed, the rate of shaved heads among Japanese high school baseball players dropped from 90% to 30%.





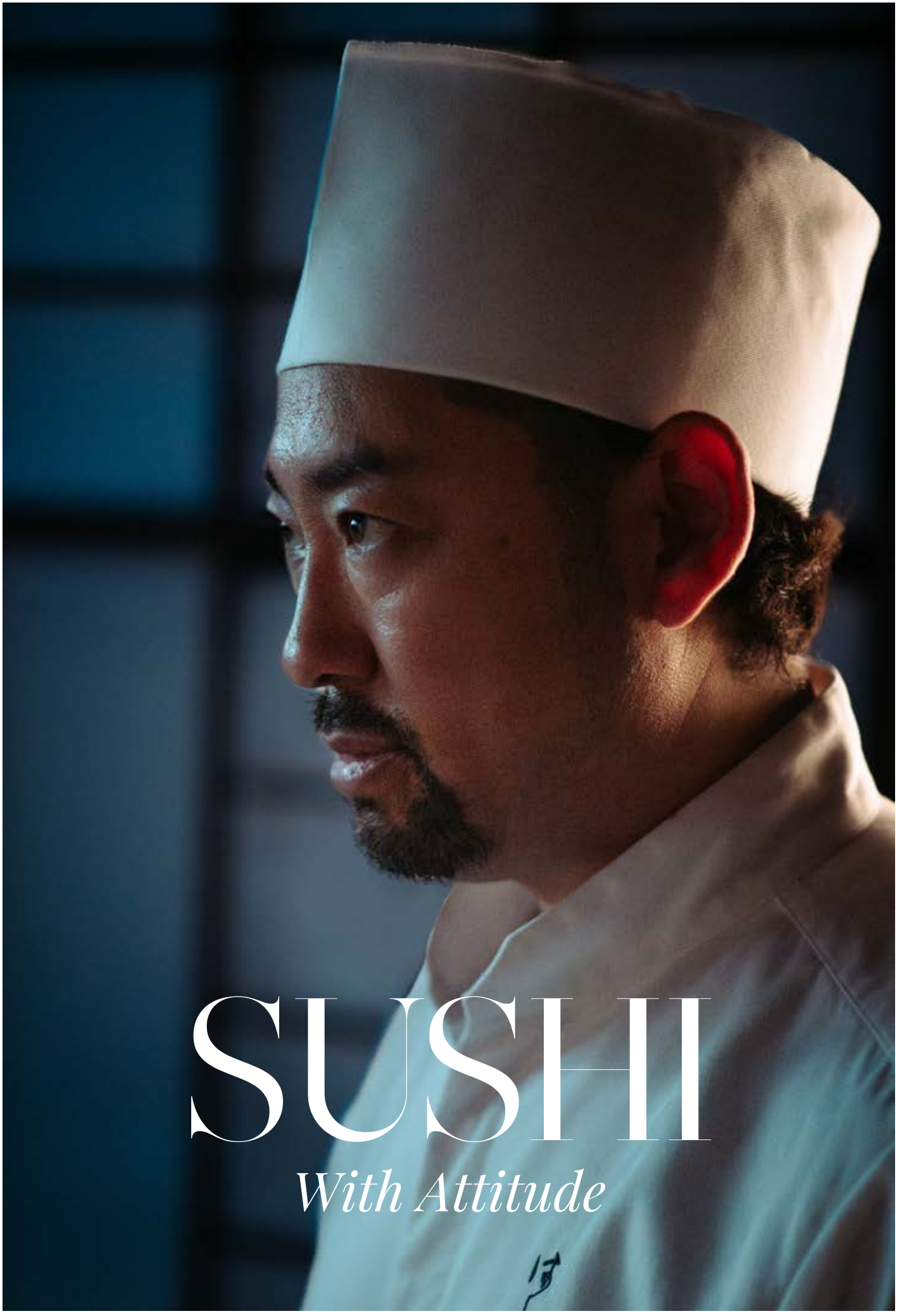


At the end of the day, Yamazaki isn't trying to advance a specific viewpoint or grand theory of Japanese society. She wants to show her subjects as they are, without judgment or presumption; the result is always complex and often incredibly moving. "I have theories about the system or whatever, but I like to tell human stories about human challenges and human triumphs and human struggles," she explains. "*The Making of a Japanese* is ultimately about how hard it is to be a first grader sometimes, or how hard it is to be a teacher, which is an impossible profession. I'm just trying to capture it in a way that more people can empathize with."

Through this empathy, she wants to get viewers to truly engage with complicated problems — to think about them as they play out in individual human lives, rather than criticizing systems in broad strokes. "The million-dollar question is, 'What should Japan keep about its traditional ways, and what should change be influenced by?' and I don't have the answers," Yamazaki says. "What I try to do in *The Making of a Japanese*, and all my films, is to get people to think about it. You can't have our trains running on time and also have a super individualistic, I-do-what-I-want society, so where do we want to land?"

More Info

The Making of a Japanese will be released in Japanese theaters in December 2024.


SUSHI
With Attitude



Omakase with the enigmatic sushi master Kenjiro Hashida is an unforgettable experience — both for the innovative, sumptuous dishes and the conversation

Words by Matthew Hernon, photos by Lisa Knight

Dining at an upscale sushi establishment in Tokyo can feel a little intimidating for the uninitiated. The setting is often intimate, and there's specific etiquette and flow to the meal, which can seem daunting, especially if you don't speak the language. Fortunately, there are a few high-end sushi restaurants with a more relaxed atmosphere. A standout among these is Hashida Tokyo in Kachidoki, which was opened by the legendary late sushi master Tokio Hashida in 1969. Renovated and reopened in 2022, it's now run by Tokio's enigmatic son Kenjiro, who is known for his culinary creativity and devil-may-care attitude.

"The food here is free," jokes Hashida shortly after I arrive. "Customers are just paying for the most expensive gachapon in Japan." He then hands me a coin for a vending machine stocked full of capsule balls; inside each of these is a chopstick rest, handcrafted by Hashida himself on his days off. "I also paint a lot," he says proudly. "My sister worries about me not sleeping, but I don't have time for that, as I'm so passionate about everything I do."

> "The food here is free, customers are just paying for the most expensive gachapon in Japan."

A Non-Conformist Itamae

Hashida is quite the character. Known affectionately as Hatch, he enjoys bantering with customers and listening to their stories. His dinner course is supposed to last around two hours, but sometimes it goes on well beyond that as he and his guests get lost in conversation. He's a non-conformist itamae (sushi master) who does things his own way and injects his playful side into his dishes. That's not to say he doesn't respect traditional methods. He does. He just wants to challenge himself by pushing boundaries and embracing innovation.

A typical day in the life of Hashida begins early. He'll usually head out to the market at around 6:30 a.m. with no concrete plan as to what he's going to purchase. In true Marie Kondo style, he only selects ingredients that spark joy in him after coming face-to-face with the fish and getting a feel for them. He'll also take the views of the vendors into consideration and, as a result, returns to the shop with different items each time. This means his omakase course changes regularly.

"Some customers don't like that," admits Hashida. "They come here for a second time and want to try what they had before, but then realize it's not on the menu. This is just the way I do things, though, and you can't please everyone all the time.

“For me, making sushi comes naturally. I've been surrounded by it my whole life and started helping my father at the restaurant when I was around 14. I learned from someone special, but that doesn't mean I should do exactly what he did. It is important to be creative and try things that are different; otherwise, every sushi restaurant would be the same."







An Artist With a Knife

While chatting away, Hashida prepares our first dish, which includes salmon roe, Kyoto tofu, mozuku seaweed, corn soup and Japanese ivory shells. The presentation is stunning, and it tastes even better than it appears. Watching him work his magic behind the counter is like a show in itself. He's an artist with a knife, yet he also seems a little disorganized. As a result, the place feels more chaotic than your typical sushi restaurant. That, though, is part of its charm — and when the food is served, everything is arranged to perfection.

Hashida’s easygoing attitude belies his expertise. A graduate of the prestigious L’Ecole Tsuji Tokyo (Tsuji Culinary Institute), he has garnered quite the reputation over the years, both in Japan and in Singapore, where he also runs a hugely successful restaurant. The two places attract a wide range of customers, including many celebrities and politicians. He says one of his most memorable guests was

Will Smith; Hashida's father apparently shocked him by pretending to shoot him with a replica gun from *Men in Black*.

While regaling us with stories from both restaurants, Hashida continues to deliver a procession of delectable dishes. From red rockfish and monkfish liver, to somen noodles with sardines, to sesame tofu and eggplant served on a lily pad, everything that comes out of the kitchen is ingenious. Other highlights include rich-tasting Hanasaki crab, which turns bright red like a flower when cooked, and some lightly grilled bonito. And that's just the appetizers.

Sumptuous Sushi

The sushi portion of the meal opens with some sweet-tasting kanpachi (greater amberjack), which, Hashida explains, is extremely rich in minerals and is best eaten in the summer months. The buri (yellowtail) that comes next is soft and chewy, while the hirame (flounder) is firm with a delicate flavor. Appearance-wise, it is the takabe (yellow-striped butterfish) that stands out the most and tastes as succulent as it looks. The tachiuo (beltfish) and uni (sea urchin) sushi requires a bit of effort to fit in one's mouth, but it is well worth it. And finally, there's some heavenly toro (fatty tuna) to round off the meal.









After I finish eating, Hashida gives me a tour of the place. The third floor, where he serves the omakase dinner, has a very traditional and classic feel to it, yet there are quirky pieces of art scattered around, including a limited-edition skateboard decorated by popular graffiti artist and painter Esow. The second floor is like an event space with a long counter. It's a stylish setting for small gatherings of around 10 to 15 people. We end our tour on the first floor, which has been recreated to reflect the ambience of the old Hashida restaurant. Lunch is served here on Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays, while dinner is served every day except for Sundays and Mondays. If you're lucky and Hashida gets started on his anecdotes, the course meal may go on much longer than expected.

More Info

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DANCING WITH THE STARS

A chat with Kyle Hanagami, one of the world's most sought-after choreographers

Words by Matthew Hernon

A Los Angeles-based choreographer and creative director, Kyle Hanagami has worked with some of the most high-profile musicians on the planet, including the likes of Britney Spears, Justin Bieber, Alicia Keys and Blackpink. Best known for his work on YouTube, he's recently been moving more into film and TV, and this year worked on the musical comedy *Mean Girls*.

So where did his passion for music come from? And what was it like working with Blackpink? We recently caught up with Hanagami to find out. Over the course of our conversation, we touched on his Japanese roots, how he got started as a dancer and the massive impact that choreography has had on pop culture.

> "I never want my name to be bigger than my talent."

How much of an influence did your Japanese background have on your upbringing?

Quite a lot. My grandmother, who was born and raised in Tokyo, would take me to temple every weekend and I would watch her do Japanese fan dancing. She also used to visit Japan once a year and would bring back games and videotapes of Hayao Miyazaki films before that part of pop culture became big in the States. I remember sitting with her as she translated video games from Japanese into English for me.

Do you visit Japan often?

Yes, at least once a year. I've been visiting since I was 16 and absolutely love the place. It wasn't until my first solo trip, though, that I really started to think, *This is where I'm from*. In Los Angeles, where I grew up, it's predominantly white, so culturally, I felt like an outsider and I experienced racism. Even though my time in Japan is always short, I feel I resonate with the people there more. My father didn't speak the language, but he raised me as a Japanese person.

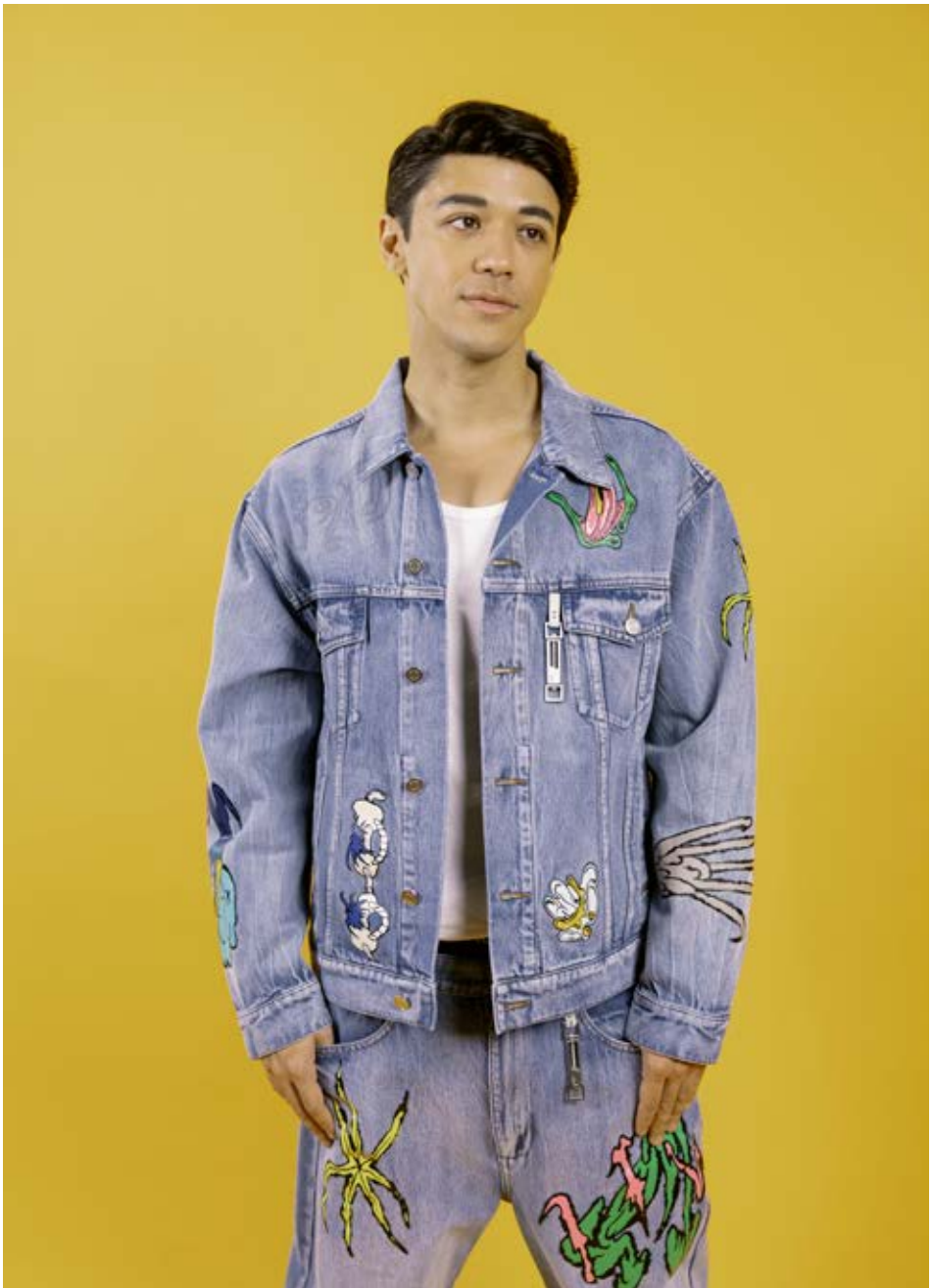
What are your thoughts on the Japanese dance scene?

My first time teaching dance in Japan was when I was 24 and what immediately blew me away was the students' commitment to the craft. These dancers were so talented and clean in the way they executed their moves. They took a lot of pride in what they were doing and understood foundational styles. It was very inspiring. So far, I've worked a lot more with K-pop artists, but one thing I'm focusing on currently is helping to bring J-pop artists into the mainstream. There's real potential there.

How did you get started as a dancer?

I began during my first year at the University of California, Berkeley. I majored in psychology and economics, but had become bored. My entire high school life had been spent studying, and I felt it was time to do something outside the classroom. Being in college, you have an opportunity to reinvent yourself and that's what I wanted to do. I'd always felt I had this creative spark inside me and dance seemed like the perfect art form to get that out and express myself in a way I never had before. Starting so late, though, I didn't learn the "right way" to do it. I had to figure it out on my own.





Was it always your intention to turn that hobby into a career?

Not at all. I was kind of dragged into it because of my following on social media. What's considered viral has constantly changed throughout the years. First it was 100,000 views, then 1 million, 10 million, and now I have videos with over 200 million. I began in the industry when I was around 23 after graduating from college. Agents had seen my clips on YouTube and signed me when I moved back to Los Angeles. I didn't realize what was happening at the time. I do remember thinking to myself, *I never want my name to be bigger than my talent*. That's something that has stayed with me throughout my career. I've always focused on honing my craft rather than worrying about how big I am.

How does it make you feel when you hear people say that they started dancing because of you?

Old. I mean, it's cool. I didn't have any dance influences growing up, so to be told that I inspired people is hard to get my head around. Going back 10 years, I started hearing those words from dancers here and there. Now it's A-list actors and singers as well as executives and people who run entertainment studios. I've received messages from Hollywood stars just after watching their movies. That's surreal. I certainly never expected anything like that when I started dancing.

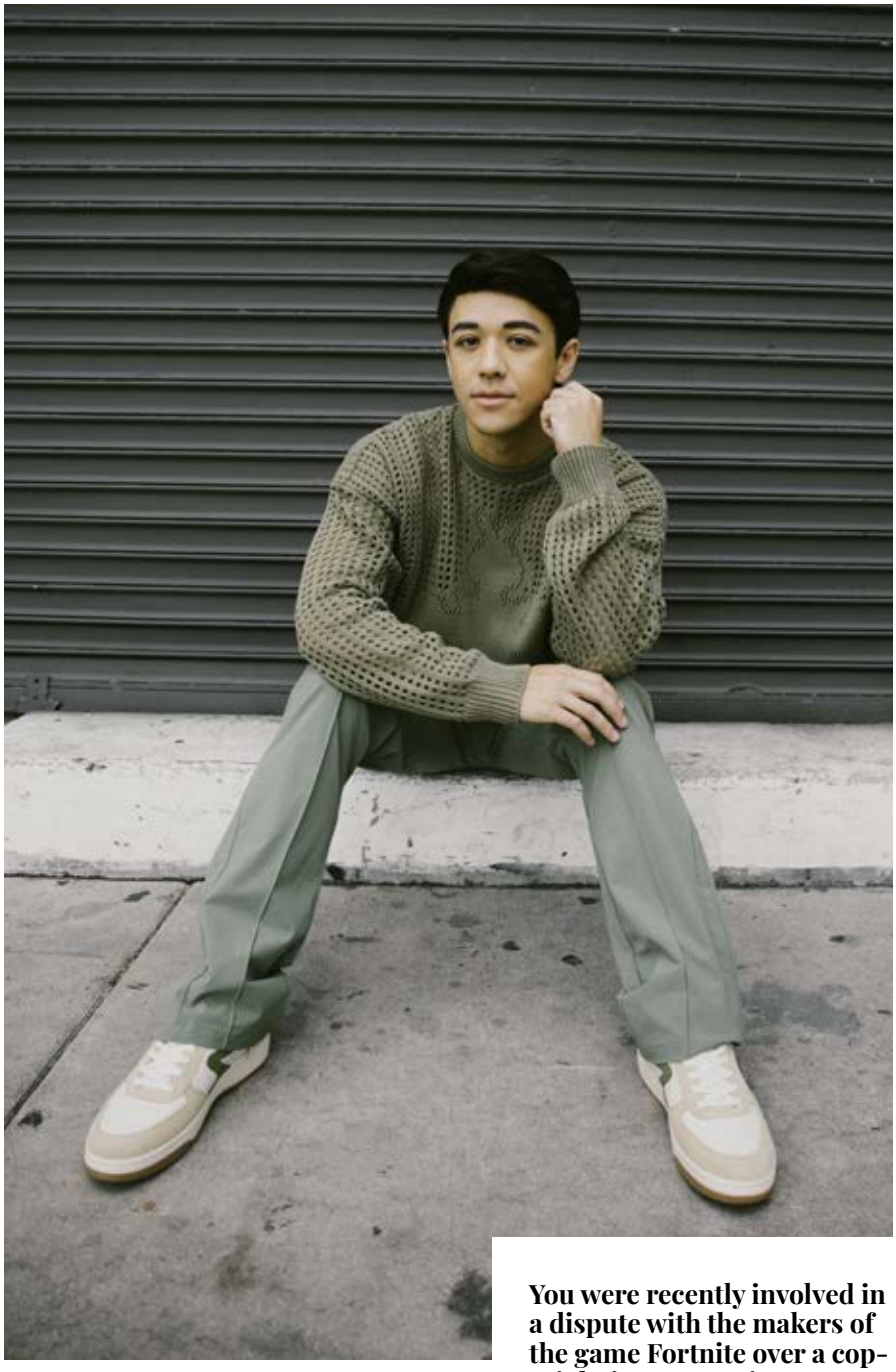
You've worked with some of the biggest musicians on the planet. Have you ever felt intimidated by anyone?

No, I wouldn't say I have. There was one time, though, when I turned down the opportunity to work with a major global artist. They approached me about touring with them around 10 years ago. I just felt I would've been thrown in at the deep end and didn't think I was prepared. It could have given me a foot up in the industry, as I wasn't as established then as I am now, but I don't think I would've done myself or the artist justice.

What was it like working with Blackpink?

They're incredibly talented and hardworking. When I first met them, they hadn't released a single song. Being able to help craft their career was like a dream for me. I'd gotten used to supporting artists like J.Lo and Alicia Keys, who were already established. With Blackpink, I was called in from the beginning. They each have their own individual qualities and I had so much fun bringing each of them to life in their own way on stage.

> "I've always focused on honing my craft rather than worrying about how big I am."





Can you tell us about your experience working on the set of *Mean Girls*?

It was a real eye-opener. Working with someone like Tina Fey was a dream. There aren't a lot of people I would call a genius, but she truly is. It's not just her undoubted talent, but also how kind she is to everyone. It was a privilege to be part of such a great project. I was also delighted to get the opportunity, as I'm looking to do more TV and film work as a choreographer and director. Ultimately, though, whether I'm doing a music video, movie or stage production, my aim is to identify and accentuate a dancer's strong points.

You were recently involved in a dispute with the makers of the game Fortnite over a copyright issue. How important is it for dancers to protect their work?

Very. And the situation is rapidly evolving. I really hope the world understands the value of creators and choreographers. Systemically, we've been taken advantage of, and it's bigger than any one court case or incident. It's about making sure people realize that choreography has a massive impact on pop culture, from the biggest trends of the year to the Wednesday Dance. It's a huge part of people's lives, but still feels undervalued.

More Info

Find Hanagami on Instagram at *@kylehanagami.*



Ballet's Love Letter to Japan Returns Home

The Tokyo Ballet is mounting a rare performance of Maurice Béjart's masterpiece *The Kabuki*, which tells the story of 47 ronin avenging their master's death

Words by Alina Joan Ito, photos by Kiyonori Hasegawa

Over 30 years ago, the world-renowned choreographer Maurice Béjart made history with his groundbreaking piece *The Kabuki*, a two-act spectacle that combines two long-standing traditions: ballet and kabuki. Based on one of kabuki's most important works, *Kanadehon Chushingura*, *The Kabuki* was exclusively created to be performed by the Tokyo Ballet, and it has become one of the most notable pieces in their repertoire.

Though internationally famous, *The Kabuki* isn't performed frequently — the Tokyo Ballet's last international tour took place five years ago. This is because it's an incredibly intricate production, with a significant number of dancers and complex choreography; the costumes and sets, too, are known for being elaborate and grand. But now, the show is back on home ground, with its first domestic performance in six years — the Tokyo Ballet will perform it three times at Ueno's Tokyo Bunka Kaikan in October. For those in Tokyo, it's a rare chance to see an exquisite composition, known to be one of Béjart's masterpieces.

"A show happens once and once only. Even with the same dancers, you never get the same show twice," says Dan Tsukamoto, a principal at the Tokyo Ballet. He's been portraying the dance's lead, Yuranosuke, for 14 years, traveling all over the globe in the process. There's something special, though, about returning to the place in which the piece originated and in which it's set.

Revenge of the 47 Ronin

The story of *The Kabuki* centers on a young man who travels back in time to the setting of *Kanadehon Chushingura*, an incredibly popular kabuki play that was performed for the first time in 1749. Though fictional, *Kanadehon Chushingura* has its roots in reality: It's based on the Ako incident of 1702, when 47 ronin (a word used to refer to a samurai without a lord) avenged their late master's wrongful death, resulting in all of them having to commit seppuku. Béjart translated this incident into ballet, creating a powerful military sequence with an astonishing 47 male dancers on stage simultaneously.

"It's rare to see male military dance at such a large scale in classical ballet, so I think it'll leave quite an impression," Tsukamoto says.





An Unlikely Marriage

While creating *The Kabuki*, Béjart worked closely with composer Toshiro Mayuzumi and the Tokyo Ballet. And though its costuming, set design and gestures all heavily pull from traditional Japanese dance theater, *The Kabuki* still maintains its identity as a ballet.

The Kabuki's choreography draws from nihon-buyo, a classical Japanese performing art that took inspiration from kabuki. In many ways, nihon-buyo and ballet seem like polar opposites; ballet emphasizes fluidity, with movements that are meant to seem smooth and effortless, whereas nihon-buyo utilizes stylized and dramatic gestures and poses. "In ballet, you have to pull your center of gravity up, open your hip joints and imagine being as lean and long as possible, but in [nihon-buyo], it's all the exact opposite, and you stay lower to the ground," explains Tsukamoto.

However, this piece merges the two seamlessly, infusing the art of ballet with new power, perspective and possibility. "I had to learn movements and gestures that I wasn't used to," Tsukamoto notes. "Holding a fan properly, the way to hold the knife when conducting the seppuku or suri-ashi (sliding one's feet on the ground) were movements I would never do in ballet."

Leading the Troops

Tsukamoto, who was first selected to play Yuranosuke at only 20 years old, has been playing this role for nearly half his life. In many ways, Tsukamoto has grown with Yuranosuke, both professionally and emotionally. When he took on the role, he was one of the youngest members of the company. "At first I was surprised — I never thought I could get such a big role so early in my career, and to be chosen to perform the world-famous Béjart's choreography that was made exclusively for the Tokyo Ballet was such an honor," he says. "I was happy, but there was even more pressure on whether I could perform well or the audience would accept me."

At first, he struggled with the leadership role. "I had no capacity to look at the people around me because I was at capacity just focusing on my own tasks," he recalls. "I received advice from a senpai to work hard so I can lead by example, [so I took] the lead boldly, with my back to them."

Fourteen years later, Tsukamoto has mastered the role of Yuranosuke, and become a brother-like figure in the Tokyo Ballet that his fellow dancers look up to. "Now, as a principal and mostly working with dancers younger than me, I'm able to pay attention to them. I take the lead, but I also dance in tandem with them to help them perform emotionally, as well as giving them a nudge if they need."

In many ways, Tsukamoto's growth parallels that of the character he plays. "Yuranosuke is not very strong at the beginning, but ultimately becomes confident enough to lead 46 men into battle. In performing Yuranosuke, I value his growth process, and I perform that in my acting — how I pause or deliver my gaze. The gaze of someone who's insecure and confident is very different; it's really detailed work, but I pay close attention to it."

The Aesthetics of Limits

Tsukamoto is humble and may not outwardly say it, but Yuranosuke is an almost unimaginably difficult role that pushes the limits of a dancer. "At the end of the first act, Yuranosuke has a solo where he decides to go to war, but this solo is seven and a half minutes long," Tsukamoto explains.

In classical ballet, even the longest of male solos are usually no more than three minutes, and even in contemporary productions, seven minutes is all but unheard of. Tsukamoto has his own theory of why Béjart decided to create a variation that was so physically taxing on the dancer. "Bejart's works often have a theme of 'the aesthetic of giving it all out and being at one's limit.' I entered the Tokyo Ballet after Béjart had already passed away, so I've never had the opportunity to meet him, but in those seven and a half minutes, I experience the limits of a dancer, as well as the beauty and strength that's found there."

Come as You Are

The Kabuki attracts a wide audience, including enthusiasts of history, traditional theater and classical ballet. However, Tsukamoto wants to reach guests who may be coming to the theater casually, too. "Some audiences new to ballet worry about whether they'll understand the story, but I don't really want people to do any review or studying before a performance," he says. "I want audiences to experience the moment, even if their takeaway is simply, 'That battle scene was powerful.' It would be amazing if people's interest in ballet could bloom from there."



More Info

The Kabuki will be performed in Tokyo from October 12–14, and once in Osaka on October 18. Purchase tickets online at *bit.ly/The-Kabuki*.



Ochanomizu

Right next to Akihabara, Ochanomizu is perfect for people interested in a different niche: musical instruments and snow sports. The streets of Ochanomizu are lined with instrument stores and ski and snowboard shops, used and new, all a short walk from the station. Ochanomizu also has a famous photo spot for train spotting. Many photographers patiently wait on Hijiri-bashi Bridge to try to capture the picturesque moment when trains cross the Kanda River, framed by Tokyo's iconic skyscrapers — if you time it just right, you can see the confluence of three different train lines under an azure sky.

Chiyoda City: The Heart of Tokyo

What to see, do and experience in one of the city's busiest and most intriguing areas

Words by Alina Joan Ito, photos by Lisa Knight

Even if you're not super familiar with the specifics of Tokyo's 23 wards, chances are you've been to Chiyoda, which encompasses everything from some of the busiest to some of the most quaint areas in Tokyo. Chiyoda city is home to the Imperial Palace, the electric anime district Akihabara, the book district Jimbocho and Tokyo Station — just to name a few.

Chiyoda city is like the beating heart of Tokyo; it also functions as a microcosm of the city, with rich cultural and historical significance and a plethora of things to do and see, ranging from temples and monuments to ultra-modern, high-tech shopping districts. Here are some of the highlights of the areas, including both must-see tourist attractions and hidden gems just slightly off the beaten path.

Akihabara

Akihabara — also known as Akiba or Electric Town — is a must-see for many visitors to Japan, especially for fans of anime, video games or electronics. Akihabara is (and this is said with utmost love) otaku central, packed with stores stocked full of anime and manga goods, maid cafés and game centers. Akiba is not just for those trying to get their hands on the newest figurine from a blockbuster anime, however. It's also a district known for electronics and computer-related goods; if you're in need of a camera, a mobile phone, home appliances or niche electronic parts, you're likely to find them in Electric Town.





Jimbocho

A short walk from Ochanomizu lies another district that's full of personality but more idyllic: Jimbocho. Known as Tokyo's center of used bookstores and publishing houses, Jimbocho is also widely loved for its antique shops and cafés. It's the perfect destination for old souls or people who have a soft spot for anything vintage. Spend a quiet afternoon perusing the rows of bookstores, surrounded by the musky-sweet scent of old books, and treat yourself to a refreshing iced coffee at a kissaten full of old-school charm.

Nagatacho

Nagatacho is the center of Japanese politics, housing several key government institutions and offices, including the National Diet Building, the Prime Minister's Official Residence and various government ministries and agencies; it's also notable for its proximity to Hie Shrine, one of Japan's major shrines, as well as to the Imperial Palace. There's enough to see in Nagatacho to keep a history buff buzzing with excitement for a whole day. The Imperial Palace gardens are also gorgeous for botanical enthusiasts, and the palace perimeters make an ideal 5-kilometer running circuit.





Yurakucho

Adjacent to the glamorous, high-end shopping district of Ginza, Yurakucho has a more approachable, relaxed atmosphere. One of Yurakucho's most interesting draws is its lively restaurant district, known in Japanese as Yurakucho Gado-shita, or "under the guardrail." The name refers to its unique location: beneath the elevated train tracks of the JR Yamanote Line. Extending from both sides of the station, bustling izakaya and eateries occupy virtually all of the free space beneath nearly 700 meters of track. Alongside this atmospheric dining area, you can find several skyscraping office buildings, shopping complexes and the Tokyo International Forum, a landmark known for its striking architecture, where conventions and events are held year-round.



Marunouchi

Marunouchi is probably the most picturesque business district in Tokyo. Sleek skyscrapers dot the area, interspersed with important landmarks like Tokyo Station, the Imperial Palace and Hibiya Park. Fans of architecture will have a field day admiring the buildings, but there's much more to do in the district. Marunouchi Naka-dori, the main avenue that stretches north-south across Marunouchi, is lined with eateries and designer shops, with ample outdoor seating and plenty of trees to provide shade. The iconic, red-brick Tokyo Station complex that borders the east side of the district is a tourist attraction in and of itself — the major station is more like a station-city, full of restaurants, stores and even a museum to explore during a quick transit or a dedicated afternoon.



More Info

For more information about Chiyoda city, go to *visit-chiyoda.tokyo/en/*.

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Sep. 16 – 29

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Tokyo Festival Information Center

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Come and enjoy a variety of festival-inspired events, specialty foods, and live performances at the Tokyo Metropolitan Theatre!

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Fukuoka's Magic Comes Alive in the Fall

With incandescent foliage, extraordinary festivals and rituals performed at centuries-old shrines, autumn in Fukuoka is an unforgettable time



— *Words by Callie Beusman*

Japan prides itself deeply on its four distinct seasons, and appreciating each is an act imbued with deep aesthetic and even spiritual resonance. Spring in Japan, with its delicate cherry blossoms, is world famous for being a time to commune with the natural world and contemplate the transience of life — but autumn, too, is rich with its own beauty and significance. Momijigari, or "autumn leaf hunting," which refers to appreciating the changing seasons and visiting places where the leaves have started to transform, is a popular pastime, and there are a variety of other seasonal activities to partake in, including festivals and temple visits, not to mention an abundance of autumn-specific cuisine.

With its rich local culture and varied landscapes, Fukuoka is a perfect place to savor Japanese fall, offering experiences that can't be had anywhere else — it's awash with unique momijigari spots, seasonal festivals and ceremonies that only take place this time of year. Here are some highlights from the prefecture:

Kamado Shrine, Dazaifu

Kamado Shrine is located on Mount Homan, long venerated as a sacred spot inhabited by gods; it consists of sanctuaries at the foot of the mountain and at the peak, and it's known as a particularly auspicious place for love and match-making prayers.

It's also renowned for its scenery, with a surfeit of sakura in the spring and a riot of radiant foliage in the fall. In autumn, around 300 deciduous trees leading up to the shrine, including ginkgos and maples, explode into red and orange hues. This tunnel of foliage is a popular sightseeing spot, and it's also the location of the annual Kamado Shrine Momiji Festival, which will take place on November 23 and 24 this year. There will also be an evening illumination event that highlights the resplendence of the leaves from November 16 to 30.

Hiraodai Limestone Plateau

A sprawling karst landscape that's been designated as a quasi-national park, Hiraodai Limestone Plateau has unconventional and otherworldly autumn scenery. The area is well known in Japan for its surreal beauty, with limestone formations jutting out of the verdant, mountainous landscape.

In the fall season, visitors can see a huge profusion of pampas grass swaying in the breeze; in the summer, this plant is lush and green, but once the season changes, it takes on shimmering silver and gold hues. The limestone plateau is an excellent place to take a hike or just take in the view; it also makes for one-of-a-kind photos — a lovely alternative to classic foliage hunting.







Akizuki Castle Town

Akizuki is famous for its 800-year-old castle town, overflowing with historic charm and often referred to as Chikuzen's Little Kyoto. Though the castle no longer exists, its picturesque ruins — stone walls, watchtowers, remnants of a moat and gates — create a striking scene. Among these, the Kuromon (black gate) stands out, especially during the fall. When the time is right, around 20 maple trees thronging the gate turn vibrant red, creating a remarkable contrast with the black structure. Additionally, during the foliage season in November, Akizuki's main street, Suginobaba-dori, is lined with stalls for visitors to enjoy.

A Luminous, Poetic Parade on Water

Held to commemorate the anniversary of poet Hakushu Kitahara's death on November 2, 1942, the Hakushu Festival and Parade on Water takes place annually from November 1 to 3. Kitahara is one of the most influential modern literary figures in Japan, known for his romantic poetry that often took everyday life as its subject — nostalgia, yearning for childhood, appreciation of nature.

The festival is an extraordinary, singular event that highlights both the poet's enduring legacy and the cultural heritage of Yanagawa, his beloved hometown, which is known for its canals. These are the site of the parade on water, one of the most unique and memorable aspects of the festival: Several dozen ships, lit up by lanterns, form a magnificent procession starting at dusk. At temporary stages constructed along their route, a variety of events will take place: Locals will perform traditional songs and recite from Kitahara's works, and there will also be Japanese drum and koto performances, plus performances by a high school brass band.

Mystical Dance With Centuries of History

Kagura dance, which can be literally translated as "god entertainment," is a sacred Shinto ritual that dates back to ancient times, often involving ornate, colorful costumes and masks; since it's a method of entertaining and honoring the gods, it's often performed around harvest times to pray for good fortune, purity and abundance.

The Keichiku area, in the northeastern part of Fukuoka Prefecture, is one of the most active areas in Japan for kagura dance. To this day, the region hosts over 200 performances annually. There are 30 active kagura groups in Keichiku, many of which perform Buzen kagura, a distinctive, graceful and dynamic style that's been passed down in the area for centuries and has been recognized as an Important Intangible Folk Cultural Property of Japan. For those who wish to witness firsthand the splendor of kagura dance in autumn, dozens of performances are held at shrines throughout Keichiku from September to December of each year. It's a rare and thrilling opportunity to experience firsthand local heritage and rituals with hundreds of years of history.





Fukuoka Ceramics

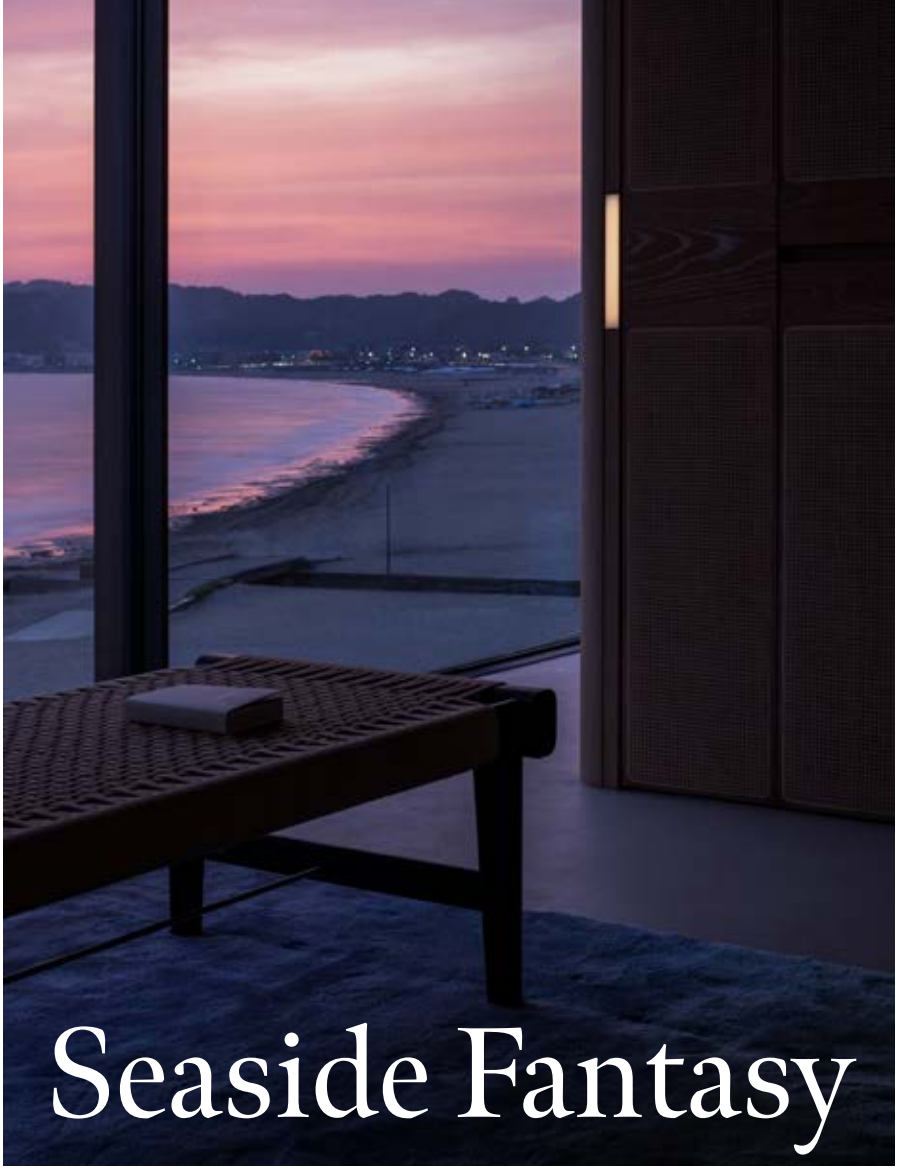
In addition to its festivals, food and history, Fukuoka is also known throughout Japan for its traditional crafts; the prefecture has several distinctive types of pottery, each with its own style and historical significance. Koishiwara ware, for instance, is known for its simple, rustic elegance, whereas Takatori ware is prized for its delicacy, with a thin, porcelain-like feel.

At Kojimachi Nadaman Fukuoka Bettei, a collaboration between the Fukuoka Prefectural Government and the restaurant brand Nadaman located in the heart of Tokyo, food and drinks are served in traditional Fukuoka wares, allowing visitors to directly encounter the region's cultural heritage.

For those who want to venture outside of the capital, the Minto Mura Festival is the largest pottery festival in the Koishiwara area, attracting ceramics enthusiasts from across the country. It's held twice a year, in spring and fall. This year's autumn festival will take place from Saturday, October 12 to Monday, October 14, and around 50 kilns from the region will be selling their finest goods, fired specially for the occasion, at discounted prices.

Kojimachi Nadaman Fukuoka Bettei
1-12-1 Kojimachi,
Chiyoda city, Tokyo
nadaman.co.jp

Minto Mura Festival
Koishiwara Pottery Traditional Industry Hall
730-9 Koishiwara, Toho Village, Asakura District, Fukuoka
toho.main.jp/akimura/



Seaside Fantasy

Run by lifestyle brand Sea Room Lynn, Lulla is an elegant villa with panoramic views of Zaimokuza Beach

—

Words by Matthew Hernon



Boasting imaginative interior design and panoramic views of the ocean from every room, Lulla is a newly opened rental villa in Kamakura that exudes elegance and charm. The three-story establishment is run by Sea Room Lynn, a lifestyle brand established a decade ago for "dignified women who love the sea and the city." Their clothes are known for being simple yet tasteful — two adjectives that could also be used to describe Lulla.

Sea Room Lynn founder Azusa Yamato came up with the idea for the villa during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic when an acquaintance showed her the location, a picturesque spot in front of Zaimokuza Beach in Kamakura. With people unable to travel overseas at the time, she felt it was the ideal setting for small groups of friends to gather to escape from the stresses and strains of everyday life.



Unity With the Sea

Yamato enlisted I In Inc., an internationally acclaimed Tokyo-based design firm, to come up with the layout for Lulla. The project was led by one of the company's founding partners, Hiromu Yuyama. He envisioned an expansive, open-concept living space lined with floor to ceiling windows to maximize the natural light, creating a sense of unity with the sea. The specially designed furniture — all made in Japan — was chosen to align with the soft and feminine aesthetics of the Sea Room Lynn brand.





"Our aim was to shape the lifestyle of Sea Room Lynn within the villa," says Yuyama. "The large windows on the west side were designed with a sense of scale, making it feel as if one could physically immerse oneself in the outside world. Looking out of the windows, you can see the waves flowing, birds drifting in the wind, people playing on the beach and mountains faintly visible in the distance. Everything was there for us to work with. It's a breathtaking location."

The entrance to Lulla is on the second floor, through a large titanium door. As you enter, you'll encounter a stylish spiral staircase with a central steel column. This is one of the few parts of the house that can't be seen from the outside, as Yuyama wanted to provide guests with a surprise. The living room, which features a large and extremely comfortable pink sofa, is on one side of the staircase, while on the other is a chic dining room with a long table in front of a calming pink onyx slab. Past the table, there are some exquisitely designed rattan doors that open up to a secret kitchen.

Rattan also features prominently in the central space of the third floor, where you'll find two open closets and a bench. This is the perfect spot to sit back with a glass of champagne and watch the sun disappearing into the ocean. In the morning, you can watch the sunrise from the bedroom, which has two double-sized beds and a huge TV. The view is even better from the villa's 2.4-meter-long bath, though.

Lulla makes for a romantic couple's getaway, though it does accommodate up to four people, so it should also prove popular for intimate gatherings such as birthday parties or pre-wedding celebrations. Small groups are likely to be particularly interested in the barrel-shaped sauna on the first floor. Made by domestic brand Burrow, it has the distinctive smooth and smoky aroma of Japanese cypress. There's also the rooftop terrace on the fourth floor, which is covered with special turf used by English Premier League club Chelsea FC. It's an idyllic spot for a barbecue or picnic.

Enjoying the Area

There are several trendy shops and cafés close to Lulla, as well as many sightseeing spots, including Komyoji, a centuries-old Jodo Buddhist temple with a rock garden and a picturesque lotus pond. Guests can



also make use of Ili Deli, a personal catering service that uses fresh local ingredients such as Kamakura vegetables and fish from Kotsubo Port in Zushi to create flexible dishes based on requests by clients. During my visit, the company's founder, Yukari Katsu, came up with a variety of exquisitely crafted plates, ranging from succulent shrimp to A5 wagyu beef, all of which had splashes of pink to complement the villa's color palette. The food was complemented by several glasses of wine from the popular store Shonan Wine Cellar, which is just a short walk away from Lulla.

Zaimokuza Beach can be quite lively in the summer months, as revelers make the most of the beach houses. It's a fun place to visit if you don't mind crowds of people. However, for those looking for a more tranquil experience by the sea, a night or two at Lulla is highly recommended.

More Info

To book a stay at Lulla, visit *lulla.jp*.



Treasure Island



Just south of Tokyo, the tiny island of Shikinejima is lush with seaside onsen and white sand beaches

Words by Wakaba Oto

The air here is thick with the scent of the ocean, briny and invigorating, mingling with the sharp, earthy aroma of sulfur rising from the hot springs. A jagged cliff juts dramatically from the coastline, its rugged silhouette etched starkly against the sky. The roughness of the rocks underfoot is a tactile reminder of the island's unspoiled beauty.

While Tokyo's bustling streets and towering skyscrapers are known worldwide, few are aware of the islands that lie just south of the metropolis. Shikinejima, a volcanic island in the Philippine Sea, is part of the Izu Archipelago administered by Tokyo. Despite being one of the smallest islands in the area, with a circumference of only 12 kilometers — small enough to walk around leisurely in just two to three hours — Shikinejima is a trove of natural wonders.



The island's size belies its rich offerings. Shikinejima is home to an array of natural hot springs, where the fusion of sea and geothermal activity creates mineral-rich pools nestled against the coast. These onsen are a testament to the island's volcanic origins, each one offering a distinct experience shaped by the interplay of natural forces.

Here's where to go on your next trip to the isle. (Please note that swimsuits are required in all outdoor hot springs.)

Jinata Onsen

At the bottom of a lengthy, rocky staircase lies Jinata Onsen. The path is lined with wildflowers in a riot of colors — pinks, purples and yellows — that stand out vividly against the ashy, white rocks that litter the ground. These are called kougaseki, or anti-fire rocks, a type of volcanic pumice that's native to just two places: the Izu Islands and Lipari, Italy.



The name Jinata Onsen is rich with meaning. Breaking down the kanji characters, “ji” means “ground” or “earth,” and “nata” means “hatchet.” The terrain surrounding this hot spring looks as though the earth has been cleaved by a hatchet, creating dramatic V-shaped valleys.

Jinata Onsen is fed by both hot springs and seawater. This creates a unique blend of water that varies in temperature and mineral content, depending on the tides and the time of day. At low tide, the iron-rich water that bubbles up into the seafront rock pools is scalding hot, and its heat is tempered as the tide comes in, mixing with the cooler seawater to create a comfortable bathing experience.



The water itself is a distinctive brownish-red hue, indicative of its iron sulfide content. This mineral-rich composition has earned Jinata Onsen the nickname "Internal Medicine Hot Spring" among locals. The waters are said to be effective for treating a range of ailments, including gastrointestinal diseases, neuralgia, rheumatism, cold sensitivity and gynecological disorders.

In the open-air bath ranking curated by Fuyuto Noguchi, a famed onsen sommelier, Jinata Onsen holds the top position in the eastern division. This recognition speaks volumes about its allure and the unique experience it offers to those who make the trek down the long staircase to its warm, welcoming waters.

Ashitsuki Onsen

Situated alongside Jinata Onsen, Ashitsuki Onsen is located right on the coastline of Shikinejima; rocky, volcanic formations create natural basins where the geothermal waters collect, their surfaces shimmering with heat. The onsen is known for its transparent waters, which make it stand out among other hot springs on the island.

The name Ashitsuki has its roots in local legend. It is said that long ago, a wounded sea lion — ashika in Japanese — found solace in this hot spring. Day after day, the sea lion would return to the rocky pools, immersing itself in the soothing, mineral-rich waters. The islanders, observing the animal’s remarkable recovery, soon realized the hot spring’s healing properties. From that time on, Ashitsuki Onsen became renowned for its effectiveness in treating cuts, abrasions and other skin ailments.





While Jinata Onsen is known as the "Internal Medicine Hot Spring," Ashitsuki Onsen has earned the moniker "Surgical Hot Spring," a reference to the belief that it can help heal external injuries. In times when medical facilities were scarce, the island's residents would come to Ashitsuki Onsen for healing.

In 1987, the area surrounding Ashitsuki Onsen was selected as one of the top 100 beaches in Japan with white sand and green pine trees. As one might expect from the award, this region, often referred to as Shikine Matsushima, boasts stunning vistas of pristine, sandy beaches and black pines, which contrast strikingly with the onsen speckled throughout.

As a free, open-air bath, Ashitsuki Onsen offers a unique experience where visitors can soak in the hot spring while enjoying the untamed beauty of the rocky coastline. Similar to Jinata Onsen, the water temperature at Ashitsuki varies with the tides, but it tends to be milder, allowing for more flexibility. If a particular rock pool feels too hot, simply move to another pool further out on the shore where the seawater has blended more thoroughly with the hot spring.

Matsugashita Miyabi-yu

As an artificial bathing area, Matsugashita Miyabi-yu blends the best of natural and human-made elements. It sources its waters directly from Jinata Onsen so that visitors can indulge in their soothing embrace without the constraints of tidal changes and limited bathing hours.

The facility is divided into two parts. One section mimics Jinata, with a series of rock pools nestled along the seashore, while the other features artificial pools with sea views. The former offers a raw, unfiltered hot spring experience, while the latter allows for stable, comfortable bathing, ensuring that visitors can soak to their heart's content at any time of day.

While Jinata Onsen is renowned for its healing waters, the trek down its lengthy, rocky staircase can be daunting, especially for older adults and young children. Matsugashita Miyabi-yu was created to offer a more accessible alternative. It is the only bathing facility of the three that is directly accessible by car, making it the most convenient choice for visitors of all ages. Since the spring quality at Matsugashita Miyabi-yu is nearly identical to that of Jinata Onsen, it boasts the same therapeutic effects, whether you're seeking relief from muscle pain or skin ailments, or are simply looking to unwind.

As the day wanes, the setting sun casts a golden glow over the rugged rocks of Shikinejima, turning them into natural sculptures of light and shadow. The sky transitions through a breathtaking palette of oranges and pinks, reflecting off the water and creating a mesmerizing display. As night falls and the sky darkens, a canopy of stars emerges, unobscured by city lights. The night sky here is a vast, glittering expanse, astonishingly clear. For viewers nestled among the rocks and the gentle lull of waves, it feels as though the stars themselves are descending from the heavens — and these onsen are some of the best viewing spots.





More Info

Shikinejima is accessible by high-speed ferry or large ship from Tokyo Takeshiba Pier, with travel times of three and 10 hours, respectively. There's also a 3.5-hour ferry from Shimoda. Alternatively, visitors can fly from Chofu Airport to Niijima in 35 minutes, followed by a 15-minute ferry ride to Shikinejima.

For more details, visit
shikinejima.tokyo/access.

Jinata Onsen:
shikinejima.tokyo/hotspring/jinata

Ashitsuki Onsen:
shikinejima.tokyo/hotspring/ashitsuki

Matsugashita Miyabi-yu:
shikinejima.tokyo/hotspring/matugashita





A Glittering Seaside Oasis in the City

The Kahala Hotel & Resort Yokohama redefines modern hospitality in the historic port metropolis

— Words by Matthew Hernon

Like its sister hotel, the world-famous Kahala Hotel & Resort in Oahu, the Kahala Hotel & Resort Yokohama was designed to effuse a sense of timeless luxury. The effect is immediate; entering the lobby is like immersing oneself in a world of opulence and comfort, an urban resort where time feels like it has stopped. Boasting expansive waterfront views, elegant rooms and a "crystal modern" style that envelops the whole hotel, it's a unique and elegant place to stay, blending a sense of tropical, ocean-side fantasy with Yokohama's sleek cityscape. Earlier this year, it received a Michelin Key, one of the top honors for hotels — a testament to its superior quality of service and design.

Blending In With the Environment

The building, which is located in the vibrant port district of Minato Mirai in Yokohama, stands out for its stunning and slightly unusual exterior design. Its blue glass facade curves slightly as it extends toward the sky, evoking an image of waves coming together — in line with Kahala's philosophy of a hotel "co-prospering with the land it is built on." The interior, too, is memorable and distinctive, with lush accents that contrast strikingly with the modern, geometric designs on the ceilings, floors and walls.



Photo courtesy of Yokohama Visitors Guide

Guests check in at the Sky Lobby on the 14th floor, where you'll also find the stylish Italian eatery Ristorante Ozio and the lavishly designed Kahala Lounge. Among the decorations, the extravagant Swarovski chandeliers — inspired by the Hawaiian feather helmets known as mahiole, which were symbols of the highest rank in Native Hawaiian society — are particularly eye-catching. In and around the lobby there are several nods to Hawaiian culture, including plumeria flowers, which are commonly associated with the islands.

Exquisite Refinement

There are 146 guest rooms and suites at the Kahala Hotel & Resort Yokohama, all of which are ultra-modern, elegant and extremely spacious — even the standard "Kahala Grand" rooms are over 47 square meters. The simple yet sophisticated black and white tones create a sense of refinement and luxury, enhanced by the Hawaiian artwork adorning the walls. There's also the view of Yokohama's skyline, which is breathtaking, especially when enjoyed from the room's large bath.

As spectacular as that view is, you won't want to spend your whole time at Kahala in your room; there are numerous other facilities spread through the building, most notably in the spa area on the third floor. Available to guests only, it features hot spring baths, saunas, treatment rooms, a pool and a gym. The highlight is arguably the infinity pool, which blends in seamlessly with the surrounding water garden. There's also a jacuzzi on the terrace that looks out to the colorful Cosmo Clock 21 Ferris wheel.

Added to all that, there's a plethora of first-class dining options — including the supremely elegant Japanese restaurant Hanagoyomi, which boasts an extensive selection of sake and wines, earning the Wine Spectator Best of Award of Excellence in 2024 — as well as a stylish lounge area where you can sit back and relax while listening to the tinkling of live piano. It's a perfect setting to indulge, unwind and lose track of time.



More Info

To book your stay at the Kahala Hotel & Resort Yokohama, visit *thekahala.jp/en/yokohama*.

Play Inside the Mind of a Genius

Tucked away in Sapporo, Moerenuma Park is one of the last works created by the legendary artist Isamu Noguchi — an organic sculpture sprawling over almost 200 hectares

Words by Kim Kahan



The rubbish mound is huge. Big enough to spot from afar, it looms over Sapporo, imposing and majestic and pyramid-like. Nothing about it appears rubbish mound-esque, though: The human-made mass is green, inviting and covered with lush grass. It's situated in the heart of Sapporo's Moerenuma Park, and to me, it perfectly distills the park's allure: finding beauty in the unexpected, melding the natural and artificial in ways that surprise and delight.



Moerenuma Park comes from the imagination of the acclaimed Japanese American sculptor Isamu Noguchi. Wandering around its vast space will reveal sculptures popping up in the most unexpected places — in the middle of forests, behind pyramids, inside the restrooms. Heck, the restrooms themselves feel like works of art. This is art as it should be, experienced with freedom from judgment, in a wide, open space.

The first time I visited Moerenuma Park was after I'd been traveling to Sapporo regularly for four years. All my local friends took the place for granted; it was never mentioned when I asked for recommendations or areas to check out. I discovered Moerenuma when a friend from Tokyo told me about it, and its understated brilliance blew my mind.

Noguchi was commissioned to design the park as part of a drive by Sapporo city to increase the number of green spaces in the area while reducing urban sprawl — a fitting partnership, as his work reflects a deep appreciation for the natural world, often blurring the lines between sculpture and landscape, traversing disciplines and materials, from trees to concrete. Noguchi strove to encourage human interaction with nature, creating spaces in which visitors are meant to freely explore and engage with their surroundings. Unbound by genre constraints, he is widely considered one of the top sculptors of the 20th century.

Noguchi — who passed away in 1988, shortly after finishing the plans — envisioned Moerenuma Park as a space where art and nature coexist in perfect harmony. Rather than simply placing his artworks around the area, he intended for the whole space to be an artwork.



A Majestic Mountain

When walking or biking around Moerenuma Park, which spans 189 hectares, its expansive geometric design elements are immediately discernible. At its center sits the large hexagonal hill, called Mount Moere.

Mount Moere is made of garbage — non-burnable garbage and construction waste soil, to be exact — and stands 62 meters tall. The park itself is built on the site of a former trash disposal plant. Endeavoring to turn the negative symbol of urbanization into something beautiful, Noguchi and Sapporo city officials worked together to create a hill upon which people could play. Now, it's a landmark where visitors can play, dog walk, sleep and even sled or ski in the winter.

Climb down the mountain to discover a world of surreality. Even though Noguchi was never tied to a specific artistic practice, the work he chose for the park is geometric and sensory. The sculptor's own philosophy sees everything as sculpture, and the park embodies this. At first, walking through the park reveals little out of the ordinary, but venture into the trees and you'll find a strange wonderland.

Alternative World

The park's Sakura Forest, which contains 1,900 cherry trees, hides an altogether different world. When I visited a few years ago, I came at nighttime, and the area was deserted and filled with crows. They cawed and shouted, claiming, "This is my land!" in their husky, scratchy voices. As dusk fell, and the children's play equipment scattered throughout the area sat empty, the woods took on an almost post-dystopian air, in a way that felt surprisingly magical — the ruins of a society reclaimed and made lush once more.



The play equipment Noguchi designed is unlike generic playground equipment. It twists and turns, like Play-Doh squeezed through a square tube, in shades of orange, blue and red. With the addition of crows hopping around their territory, it's an absurd sight. Following the path through the play equipment area, you'll find Slide Mountain, a large cone standing several meters tall, carved with two narrow, curved tracks. Climb to the top and slide down the twisting downward paths. As an adult, it looks terrifyingly high, but it's easy to see why children love it.

Fun in All Weather

In a typical Japanese fashion, the park is designed with seasonality in mind; surprisingly, given Sapporo's reputation as a winter wonderland, summer is one of its most popular times, bringing an influx of visitors. That's thanks to Moere Beach, a shallow, artificial pond thronged by promenades and paved with coral. Head over for splashing and paddling. Sapporo has many things, but it does lack somewhere shallow to kick water and be silly. Moere Beach is a fun, convenient solution.

In winter months, the park is blanketed in a pristine layer of snow, perfect for sledding or cross-country skiing; if you're more of an indoor type, you can keep warm inside Hidamari, a massive glass pyramid that serves as a symbol of the park, looking down upon the white wonderland below.

After strolling around the space, up its mountains, around its mounds, sliding around the play equipment, even cycling with the rental bikes, it's natural to want to learn more about the incredible sculptor who made this paradoxical park, and the pyramid is the perfect place. On the third floor of Hidamari, an archive dedicated to Noguchi documents his intent to build a fully interactive park, one that becomes a sculpture itself. It's clear that Noguchi's idea was one of happiness, a natural space full of children at all times of the day.







Visiting over 35 years later, you may well experience two contrasting sides of Moerenuma Park. The laughter-filled daylight hours, when children run around, playing in snow, sand or on the grass, and its darker side come dusk, when crows rule the world and cawing marks their mysterious territory. Both sides are worth marveling at.

More Info

For more information about Moerenuma Park, visit *moerenumapark.jp/english/*.

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Claude Monet "Water Lilies, Twilight Effect" 1897. © Musée Marmottan Monet / Studio Christian Baraja



'Monet: The Late Waterscapes' at The National Museum of Western Art

For over 30 years, Monet found profound inspiration in the sublime tranquility of his Giverny garden's water lily pond, transforming this scene of natural beauty into a series of immersive large-scale works regarded as his masterpiece. His interpretations of its shifting colors and ever-changing light redefined the essence of landscape painting and impressionism at large. This October sees a showcase of 50 carefully selected works by Monet brought together, with a focus on his iconic large-format panels, offering an enchanting dive into his vision of ephemeral beauty. **The National Museum of Western Art** From October 5 until February 11 *nmwa.go.jp*

THE ART WORLD

Our pick of the city's best exhibitions

Compiled by Victoria Bennett



Keiichi Tanaami 'Drama of Death and Rebirth' © Keiichi Tanaami / Courtesy of NANZUKA

'Keiichi Tanaami: Adventures in Memory' at The National Art Center, Tokyo

Keiichi Tanaami takes center stage for his first major retrospective this autumn, celebrating his 60-year career and signature "psychedelic death pop" style. From his early days as the first art director of the Japanese edition of *Playboy* to his role in the Japanese underground art scene, Tanaami's eclectic oeuvre spans paintings, collages, animations and installations, boasting an impressive lineup of brand collaborations — from Dior to Mattel — along the way. Often explicit, always bold; expect mind-melting graphics from this kaleidoscopic trailblazer of modern Japanese art. **National Art Center, Tokyo** Until November 11 *nact.jp*



Louise Bourgeois "Spider" 1997. Photo: Maximilian Geuter © The Easton Foundation /JASPAR and VAGA at ARS, NY

'Louise Bourgeois: I have been to hell and back. And let me tell you, it was wonderful' at Mori Art Museum

In the largest solo exhibition of Louise Bourgeois' work in Japan to date, Mori Art Museum presents around 100 works spanning the artist's prolific career. Exploring a theme of "family" which is present throughout Bourgeois' work, the curation weaves together her iconic spider sculptures with early paintings and poignant psychoanalytic writings through the lens of intimacy and emotion. Complemented by Jenny Holzer's immersive video installation and rare archival materials, this is a revealing showcase of one of modern art's most influential figures. **Mori Art Museum** From September 25 until January 19 *mori.art.museum*

'The Aesthetics of Summer and Autumn' at Nezu Museum

Reward yourself for making it through the summer heat with a visit to the Nezu Museum, as it explores the depiction of summer to fall throughout Japanese art history. While Heian-period poetry favored spring and autumn, Edo-period art often paired summer with autumn, reflecting a growing aesthetic appreciation of summer's vibrancy. Highlighting masterpieces by Suzuki Kiitsu and the Rimpa School's Tawaraya Sotatsu, this show gives viewers an opportunity to revel in the transition from peak summertime energy to the mellow hues of late fall, and enjoy a stroll through the museum's tranquil gardens afterward. **Nezu Museum** From September 14 until October 20 *nezu-muse.or.jp*





Suzuki Kiitsu "Mountain Streams in Summer and Autumn" c. 19th century. Important Cultural Property, Nezu Museum collection

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Join us as we dive into contemporary books that are either written by Japanese authors, are set in Japan or have some sort of connection with Japan.

WHAT WE'RE READING NOW

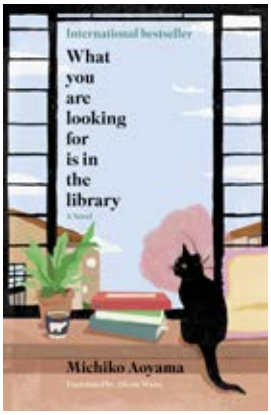
This autumn, dive into two captivating reads that celebrate the magic of stories and connections. Both novels offer engaging escapes and heartfelt reflections, ideal for cozy, introspective fall reading.

September

What You Are Looking For Is in the Library by Michiko Aoyama follows the intertwined lives of several characters connected through a local community library. From a dissatisfied retail assistant to a new mother and a dreaming accountant, their stories are guided by the library's enigmatic librarian, who seems to understand their deepest needs. This heartfelt and uplifting read, celebrated in Japan and shortlisted for the Japan Booksellers' Award, highlights the power of book recommendations and the magic of community connections.

October

Mami Suzuki: Private Eye by Simon Rowe follows Mami Suzuki, a hotel clerk and savvy private investigator in Kobe. Balancing her day job with her nighttime sleuthing, Suzuki tackles a series of cases, from theft and missing persons to mysterious deaths. Set against the diverse backdrops of Japan, her investigations reveal deeper truths about human nature and the complexities behind every misfortune.





Don't forget to share your thoughts with us by tagging us at ***@twbookclub*** on Instagram and ***@twbookclubjp*** on X (formerly Twitter). You'll also find us on Facebook at ***facebook.com/TWBookClub*** and on Goodreads.

TW Social

This month, we check in on the community to see what's going on in Tokyo's vibrant social scene

By David Schneider



Alex Ramirez establishes Japan Breeze — Asia's first Japanese team to participate in the Caribbean Series. At the official press conference at the Sheraton Yokohama: From right to left: Alex Ramirez and Mexican Pacific League representative Carlos Manrique.

Miss Universe Japan National Director Hiroko Mima and newly crowned Miss Universe Japan 2024 Kaya Chakrabortty at Yamano Hall in Shinjuku.





Celebrating Ecuador's National Day, also know as Día del Primer Grito de Independencia de Quito at Meiji Kinenkan: From left, Mr. Yasushi Noguchi, Director General of Latin American and the Caribbean Affairs Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the host, Ecuador Ambassador, H.E. Mr. César Montaño Huerta.

Katsura Sunshine, traditional Japanese rakugo comic storyteller, with THR Japan contributor Tom Kruse after a performance in Tokyo.





Celebrating Ecuadorian Independence Day at Meiji Kinenkan, US embassy, Deputy Chief of Mission Katherine Monahan and Jamaican Ambassador, H.E. Ms. Shorna-Kay Richards.



Formula 1 motorsports expert Antoine Malin bids farewell as he relocates to Dubai, celebrating his send-off at LEX Tokyo in Roppongi

Celebrating a grand reception on the occasion of "Russia Day" at the Russian Embassy in Tokyo. Russian Ambassador H.E. Mr. Nikolay Stanislavovich Nozdrev welcoming guests from Japan's and the international diplomatic corps.





Famed author Madeleine Umewaka and Joni Waka enjoying a special art IMPROTECH performance hosted by Centre Pompidou's Icram, Tokyo University of Arts & the ART foundation at the Hachimangu Shrine.

Chilean Ambassador H.E. Mr. Ricardo G. Rojas (center) hosted a dinner evening for friends and guests of the embassy. Attending were H.E. Mr. Diego Alejandro Dalton, Ambassador of El Salvador, H.E. Mr. César Montaño Huerta, Ambassador of Ecuador, and other guests of the Chilean Embassy.





Entertainer Steven A. Haynes, General Manager of Givenchy Beauty Japan Momo Kanayama, and Susumu Ishigami at the Givenchy Beauty Exhibition held at the Andaz Tokyo.



On the occasion of Japan and Türkiye celebrating the centenary of the establishment of diplomatic relations, Turkish Ambassador H.E. Mr. Korkut Güngen hosted a special jewelry exhibition thanks to Sultan Collection: Keio representative Katsumi Tsushiya , Amabassdor Güngen and Mehtap Sultan Gumusay Fukunishi, founder and President of Sultan Collection.

2023 winners Yukari (left), Elegant Class winner, and Yasue, Sophisticated Class winner, inspiring beauty pageants at the Today's Woman 2024 Finalist Beauty Camp held at LuvLEE in Miyashita Park.



Members of the Tokyo American Club Nihombashi and Azabudai branch for the annual cleaning and scrubbing of the Nihombashi Bridge.



Jane Aiko Yamano, Chairwoman of Yamano Beauty College and her spouse enjoying this year's Miss Universe Japan contest at Yamano Hall in Shinjuku.



Portugal Ambassador H.E. Mr. Vítor Sereno saying farewell to the 1st Secretary of the Portuguese Embassy, Tiago Maurício, who will relocate to Lisbon.





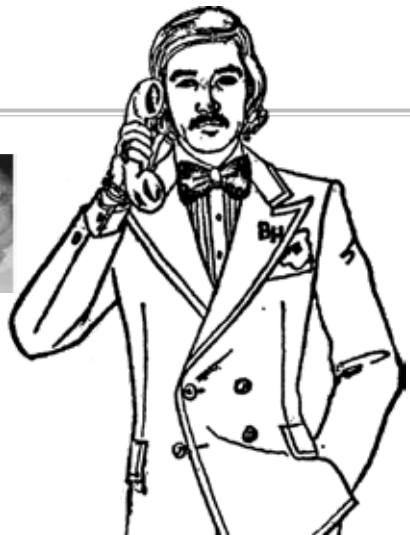
JAXA Astronaut Koichi Wakata, the first Japanese commander of the ISS, celebrating Japan-US friendship with US Ambassador H.E. Mr. Rahm Emanuel during this year's Independence Day festivities at the US Ambassador's Residence.

Bill Hersey's Partyline • *Connecting Communities Since 1970* •

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These pages are dedicated to the late Bill Hersey, Tokyo Weekender's original society columnist who wrote for the magazine from 1970 to 2018. Originally called "Bill's Party Line," the column featured visiting celebrities and local VIPs, and helped to connect expat communities within Tokyo, with Bill achieving legendary status amongst his peer group and our readers.

Perfect Days

Notable Tokyoites share how they'd spend a perfect day in the city

My Perfect Day: Mai Nambu

Mai Nambu is a Tokyo-based actress–slash–pro wrestling announcer–slash–influencer who was born and raised in Tokyo, though she's also lived abroad in Liverpool, Los Angeles and Canada. She appeared on the reality show *Love Transit* on Prime Video, and her current passion is fitness. Here's how a globe-trotting multi-hyphenate would spend her ideal day in Tokyo.



My perfect day in Tokyo is ...

I'd start my day with my daily walk with my dog, Hennessy, by the river at **Futako-Tamagawa Park**. Hennessy is an extremely introverted dog who loves watching his friends play.

Then, I'd go to train at this beautiful gym called **Rexer gym** with my gym buddy. It has every piece of equipment that you could possibly imagine. Also, most importantly, it has the best lighting for your obligatory gym selfies. After that, I'd move to a different gym, **B-Monster**, for cardio. People call me crazy, and I agree, but this place is FUN! It's basically a mixture of a boxing gym and a nightclub. After an intense 45-minute workout including warmups, shadow boxing and punching the bag, you will definitely feel like a beast.

For dinner, I'd take some friends to one of my favorite restaurants, **Kushitei** in Ebisu, which specializes in skewers made with seasonal ingredients. The omakase course is amazing, and they'll even accommodate you if there's anything you can't or don't like to eat. Alternatively, I'd try this newly opened French restaurant called **Cadran**, which is located in the center of Ginza and has a beautiful view of the Wako Clock Tower. Its champagne and oysters are a must-try!

> "People can be very wild and weird here. You name anything, there's a community for it."

On the first Saturday of the month, I go to Shibuya for the **lowrider gathering**, which always has incredible energy. Cars start coming around 10 to 11 p.m., and they usually cruise around the Shibuya crossing in front of Tower Records, showing off their customized rides. The lowrider scene out here is huge.

Then I'd finish off the night walking Hennessy, and making a quick stop at one of my favorite izakaya with some friends. I'd recommend my regular spot, but the owner isn't always necessarily super welcoming — but another place I really love is **Mitsubachi** in Jiyugaoka.





Tokyo has its own vibes. Yes, Japan is a very "structured" country; everything has its own order and there are processes that it always seems like you're supposed to follow. However, you can always find unique people, communities and places here — there's something for everyone. People can be very wild and weird here. You name anything, there's a community for it. You'll always find your safe place.

Tokyo's best-kept secret is ...

People can be spontaneous and wild! Japanese people can seem to be serious and shy most of the time, but once they open up, they're on a different level.

A place I've always wanted to try is ...

I'd been really wanting to go to this place called **Tableaux Lounge** in Daikanyama! Its live Cuban music never disappoints.

More Info

Follow Mai on Instagram at *@mainambu*.

My Perfect Day: Tiara

Tiara is a graphic designer and model based in Tokyo with a penchant for all things red. Given her keen aesthetic eye and incredible taste in food, wine and fashion, we felt she'd be able to curate an unforgettable day in Japan's glittering capital city.

My perfect day in Tokyo is ...

The actual perfect day for me doesn't involve waking up early — I'm a night owl, so I would get up around noon. I live around the Ikejiri-Ohashi area, so I'd start by walking to get coffee at a small, local coffee shop I love, **Bubbles Chill Coffee**. Then I'd get some bread at **Tolo Pan**, which is really close by. If I'm lucky, there will be no queue! I'd take my food to go and walk to **Sugekari Park** or **Setagaya Park**. Usually, I meet my partner, Luca, at the park, and we just chill for a bit, soaking up some sunshine.

Then I'd come back to my place and grab my bike, Marco. I love to bike around the city if the weather is good enough. I'd bike with Luca to the Yutenji area and stop by **Déracinés**. It's a wine shop, but sometimes it serves food, too. Its Taiwanese lu rou fan is pure magic. I'd eat that with a kombucha (or wine). There's also this awesome vintage furniture shop nearby called **Sein**. Window shopping there is like therapy for my design-loving soul. Its Italian pieces are total eye candy.

Next stop: Shimokitazawa for a shopping spree! **Bed** is my vintage go-to — I love its interior and its selections, but my wallet always ends up complaining. After burning through my cash (and energy), I'd head to **Drink & Mood Mou**, my chill spot. The owner, Moriura-san, is the man — he designed the whole place himself. And bonus points for the chess table! (Yes, you can play chess there, too.)

In the evening, on the way back home, I'd stop by **Mangosteen** to stock up on some bottles for my wine cellar at home; it's one of my favorite places for buying wine and craft beers to drink for special occasions. It actually brews its own craft beers. Its brewery is in Hokuto, Yamanashi.



> "The perfect end to the day? Good company, great food, nice music and maybe a little too much wine."





Time to swap the bike for the train. I'd head back to Ikejiri-Ohashi, park Marco and jump on the train to Nihonbashi. There's this place there that I usually go to, **Human Nature**, another cozy spot. It's a wine shop-slash-bar, but the real treat is when our friend Tim cooks. He makes incredible British-Italian fusion food, and his juicy pies are out of this world. Also, it's got these insane raw almonds from Torelli Agricoltore in Italy. I can't stop munching on them — it's dangerous.

There's also another craft beer bar just next door. Originally from Sweden, it's called **Omnipollos**. I'm in love with its design, labels and graphics; it's just so fun. The perfect end to the day? Good company, great food, nice music and maybe a little too much wine. And yes, I've definitely sprinted for the last train more than once.

Tokyo's best-kept secret is ...

Hop on a bike! It's super easy, as there are plenty of rental options available around town. Get lost in the city's vibrant energy, discover hidden gems and enjoy the fresh air. Plus, who can resist a refreshing drink from a vending machine while taking a breather in a park?

A place I've always wanted to try is ...

I've been a Tokyo local for so long but still haven't conquered the iconic Tokyo Tower. It's not really the height that freaks me out; it's more the whole red giant metal structure thing. (I have megalophobia.) Guess it's time to rip off the Band-Aid.

More Info

Follow Tiara on Instagram at *@TYRNBL* and on YouTube at *youtube.com/@tyrnbl*.



MUSIC

Abema TV Rapstar finalist Charlu shares her favorite albums

Words by Kim Kahan

Charlu caught my attention with her standout verses on the "gals remix" of Yuki Chiba's hit song "Team Tomodachi" in April, and I haven't stopped listening to her since. Digging deep into her repertoire — the 29-year-old has been rapping for a decade — draws up songs ranging from those boasting strength and resilience to others revealing the rapper's vulnerabilities.

Charlu cut her teeth in her teens. As the youngest member of a rap crew in Shibuya, she was bossed into holding the speaker for older performers as they battled in the street near Yoyogi Park. Fast-forward — past her debut album in 2020, which featured tracks like "Kanekaese" and "Wet Blanket" — and Charlu is now rolling with the major labels.

In a strikingly male-dominated industry, many of Charlu's lyrics are decidedly feminine. She addresses issues that women face head-on, rapping, for instance, about her experience being a mother — which is ironic considering she chose her stage name because of its close resemblance to a man's name (she initially went by the moniker "Charles").

With her fast flow and attack-style vocals, it's no wonder the rapper made it to the finals of Japan's premier rap battle, Abema TV's Rapstar. Particularly memorable moments of her time on the show include a journey around her hometown, which concluded with a hard-hitting rap, and the final round, which saw her pitted against rapper ID. Commanding the stage, Charlu threw back ID's disses concerning the absent father of her children, speed-rapping how proud she is to be succeeding as a single parent.

In the months following her runner-up accolade, she released tracks like "Giri" and "Perfect Night." We're looking forward to what Charlu does next.

Find Charlu's latest single, "Perfect Night," here: *tinyurl.com/rummyjy8*.

Five Albums To Add to Your Playlist

SOS by SZA

Even though "Snooze" is my favorite track, this album is one to listen to from start to finish. Even if you speak a different language, you can understand. It motivated me to want to do that myself and release an album of varied songs to make one piece of work that expresses the things I feel.





Colour Vision by Max

Before I knew it, I became addicted to *Colour Vision*, thanks to Max's lyrics and the melodies he makes. Even the visual conveys "pop"; the songs are catchy yet also have a certain depth. The lyrics talk a lot about life, but he reminds us to show our fun aspects and our brightness, too.

Planet Her by Doja Cat

I feel like this album has different sounds fighting each other! From "Kiss Me More," which is a song that the pop girlies can enjoy, to "Get Into It (Yuh)!" which has her spitting, this work has a lot of elements of Doja in it.





The Angel You Don't Know by Amaarae

I always loved Amaarae's emotional voice and melodies, but here she samples a lot of old Japanese sounds, which makes me like her even more. I was super surprised and inspired when I heard the theme song from the old NHK show *Jams the Housnail* in "Hellz Angels." It reminds me of my childhood.

COI by Coi Leray

I really like the flow of the first few tracks on *COI*, as she samples tracks she rates, like "Pump Up the Jam" and "The Message," that I like, too. Songs like "Make My Day" and "Players" are especially nostalgic. Including sounds that we grew up with and adding in her own personality make this into a rad piece of work by introducing teens and hip-hop fans in their 20s to these old sounds.



Events

Enjoy a range of musical performances across Tokyo and beyond.

Haru Nemuri

Don't miss your last chance to catch Japanese singer Haru Nemuri on home turf before she heads off on her US tour. Support comes from veteran Kobe band Mass of the Fermenting Dregs and more.

DATE: September 6
PRICE: ¥3,500
VENUE: WWW X
INFO: harunemuri.love

Ultra Japan

Japan's largest dance music festival descends on Odaiba Ultra Park for a weekend of revelry featuring the world's biggest EDM names, from Steve Aoki to Afrojack.

DATE: September 14–15
PRICE: ¥30,000
VENUE: Odaiba Ultra Park
INFO: ultrajapan.com/tickets-2024

Each Story

Each Story is back for a weekend campout in the forests of Nagano, with DJs and live acts from Japan and beyond playing calming music. Also featured: yoga workshops and natural food.

DATE: October 5–6
PRICE: ¥20,000
VENUE: Goko Farm Auto Camping Ground
INFO: facebook.com/eachstory.site

Ishinoko Festival

Ishinoko Festival, a delightful combination of music and food, returns to Ishikawa for its fourth edition. The lineup is yet to be released, but last year saw performers like NTsKi and E.O.U.

DATE: October 12–14
PRICE: ¥10,000
VENUE: Takigahara Farm
INFO: 2024.ishinoko.jp/

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