

Tokyo Weekender

Volume 5, 2024

TW



THE VOICE OF TOKYO

Sawara: A Feast For The Senses

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beauty and incredible
cuisine in this quaint
town in Chiba

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Kozue Akimoto's commitment to style and self-expression

Becoming Lady Kiku

Yuka Kouri opens up
about her electrifying
role in *Shogun*



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Tokyo Weekender

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MEET THE TEAM

Introducing the team behind this month's issue



It's no easy job selecting just one highlight from what's been another incredible year here at TW. As we put the finishing touches to our final issue of the year, it's a great opportunity for all of us to reflect on all the amazing people and cool places that we've featured this year.

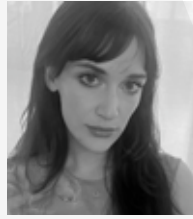
From a personal point of view, one of my favorite parts of the job is creating the cover story for each issue. Our intrepid team scours the city to bring you some of the most fascinating people Tokyo has to offer, from the talented author, model and housing renovator, Anton Wörmann (Vol. 1), to the mysterious bob-haired, school-uniformed dance crew, Avantgardey (Vol. 4).

We're also super fortunate to be able to travel to some amazing places. For this issue alone, we traveled from the charming preserved Edo-era streets of Sawara in Chiba to the subtropical paradise of Seven x Seven Ishigaki in Okinawa.

However, the highlight of my year has been getting the opportunity to work with the amazing team here at TW. Making each issue with some of the most talented and passionate creatives in Tokyo is always an absolute pleasure.

Wishing you all a wonderful new year. We're looking forward to bringing you the very best of what Tokyo has to offer in 2025.

Liam Ramshaw
Executive Director, TW Magazine

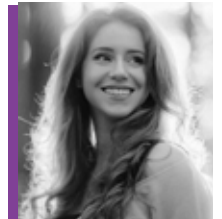


Callie, Senior Editor:

Getting to travel for work has been a highlight of my year. I've seen and experienced so many beautiful things ... primarily the two separate occasions in which Lisa and I were suddenly absorbed into drinking parties where all the other guests were rowdy ojisan in their late 70s.

Lisa, Digital Content Director:

Earlier this year, I finally experienced a spectacular fireworks festival in Atami! I love weekend trips to nearby prefectures such as Shizuoka, Chiba and Saitama.



Ben, Editorial Content Creator:

Sitting down with street photography great Lee Chapman to discuss life and art in a Shinjuku kissaten was great. It was an honor to tell his story.

Christian, Website Content Manager:

A few weeks back, I left the city and went camping up near Nikko. The weather and nature were phenomenal, making it a perfect detox from busy city life and a definite highlight of the year.



Eugenie, Editorial Content Creator:

Joining the TW team was definitely my highlight of the year! I especially loved learning about designer Yasu Michino's sources of inspiration and thoughts on Tokyo fashion [p.12].

Ynes, Editorial Content Creator:

The highlight of my year was undoubtedly my big move from Osaka to Tokyo and decorating my new place. Although my apartment isn't pet-friendly, I've made do by "adopting" a little maneki neko figurine from Gotokuji Temple [p.8].



Melissa, Editorial Content Creator:

The best part of this year has been being introduced to so many wonderfully creative and artsy people, especially lots of new fellow writers. Shout out to Natalie Jacobsen, whose debut novel, *Ghost Train*, came out this year [p.57]!


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RADAR



8

**Neighborhood:
Gotokuji**

This serene spot is home turf for the ever-lucky maneki neko.

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Gift ideas for the Tokyo lovers in your life.

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**Style:
Yudai Ono**

Still a student, this fashion maverick is making waves.

A Colorful History in Gotokuji

From famous cats to sumo wrestling, find it all in the middle of Tokyo

— Words and photos by Ben Cooke

One of Japan's most recognizable symbols is the maneki neko, or “beckoning cat,” as it's known in English. Although these feline fortune-bringers are common across Asia, few know that their origin story may begin right in the heart of Tokyo, amid the quiet neighborhood of Gotokuji.

Gotokuji is much more than the home of a famous cat figure, of course; in recent years, it's become a popular spot for those looking for a laid-back day of lush nature and good food. But it still maintains a deep connection to its history in a way that only Tokyo can.

The Beckoning Cat

The first stop for most people when visiting Gotokuji is the birthplace of the maneki neko, Gotokuji Temple. There are a few ways to get there, but perhaps the most scenic is via the Setagaya Line, a charming two-car tram that departs from the nearby Sangenjaya Station. From here, you'll weave your way along the rails, through densely packed residential areas, until reaching Miyanosaka Station, which is only a five-minute walk from the temple.



From the outside, Gotokuji Temple is unassuming. But as you pass by the neatly manicured gardens and through the shadow of a towering pagoda, you'll notice a sea of red and white maneki neko statues tucked away on one side of the temple grounds.

Why are they here? Though there are a few legends about the origin of the beckoning cat, the most famous holds that in the 1600s, a Japanese daimyo named Ii Naotaka and his convoy were passing by the temple, when suddenly a cat waved them inside. Shortly after, a violent storm arrived; Ii and his party would have been caught in it, had it not been for the invitation of the friendly feline. Enamored by this stroke of good fortune, Ii designated Gotokuji Temple as the family temple of the Ii clan, which resulted in great prosperity for the temple in the following years.

Shrines and Sumo

Another notable location in the neighborhood is Setagaya Hachimangu Shrine. Like Gotokuji Temple, it, too, has a unique claim to fame: a full-size sumo wrestling ring — known as a dohyo in Japanese — surrounded by walls of greenery.

The original shrine was built nearly 1,000 years ago, though the current shrine structure was most recently renovated in 1964. Today, the sumo ring is used as a focal point for the annual Setagaya Hachimangu Fall Festival, which takes place each September. During this festival, smaller portable shrines, known as mikoshi, are paraded through the surrounding streets, while at the shrine itself, sumo wrestlers participate in ritual matches.



In the area surrounding Gotokuji Station, the options are plentiful. For coffee, you've got the aptly named Amazing Coffee, which pairs nicely with the Scandinavian baked goods from Fikafabrikken, only meters down the street. If you're looking to sit down for a meal, Café Picon Ber offers a cozy atmosphere with outdoor seating and a menu of a la carte French cuisine.

Reasons To Revisit

Even once you've explored the main attractions of Gotokuji, there's a certain charm that makes it the kind of place worth coming back to. The quiet, the nature and the history combine to create a neighborhood that's simply nice to be in. Whether you're a tourist keen on getting to know the story behind Japan's most iconic cat, or a local looking for a break from the noise, Gotokuji has got all you could want and more.



In 1888, Ozaki's father had a house built for her in Minato ward. After being inherited by an English literature scholar in the wake of her death, the house was dismantled and then rebuilt in Gotokuji. Today known as The Former Residence of Theodora Ozaki, the house serves as a gallery for exhibitions of illustrated artworks and even includes a small café where you can enjoy coffee and cakes made by an in-house pastry chef.

Stay for Tea

In Gotokuji, you're never too far from something to eat or drink, with plenty of unique restaurants tucked away among the quaint backstreets. If you're closer to Gotokuji Temple, look no further than Bare Pizza Poco. Here, you'll find an extensive selection of pizzas and pasta that go down well with the pride of the drinks menu: the homemade lemon soda.

A Writer's Home

Born in London in 1870 to a Japanese father and a British mother, Theodora Ozaki spent much of her life traveling between England and Japan, which allowed her to master the native languages of both countries. As an adult, she began writing short stories and translating Japanese fairy tales into English, many of which were published to great acclaim during the early 1900s.



The sharp bite of winter creeps through Tokyo's streets, but the city is far from slowing down. From the flashy corners of Omotesando to the artisanal workshops hidden in Asakusa, Tokyo's holiday season is about more than just consumerism — it's about finding something that feels rare and thoughtful, something that speaks to the city's spirit. Whether you're shopping for a design lover, a foodie or a style connoisseur, this guide will help you uncover the perfect treasures, most of which are either made in Japan or exclusive to Tokyo.



The Season of

GIVING

Uncover Tokyo's best treasures for that special someone this holiday season

—
Words by Wakaba Oto

Asics Gel-Kayano 14

A popular retro sneaker that combines style and performance, the Asics Gel-Kayano 14 has become a must-have for both outdoor enthusiasts and those navigating the fashion-forward streets of Tokyo. Its technical design, built for long-lasting comfort, seamlessly fits the gorpcore trend, whether you're navigating a rugged hiking trail or simply modeling it for your urban streetwear look. [asics.com](https://www.asics.com)



N.Hoolywood Fingerless Gloves

Merge function and fashion with these sleek gloves from Japanese streetwear brand N.Hoolywood. Made with high-quality materials and a modern design, they're ideal for those who appreciate both warmth and street style. [n-hoolywood.com](https://www.n-hoolywood.com)

Kagami Crystal Whiskey Glass

These exquisite, handcrafted whiskey glasses from Kagami Crystal elevate the drinking experience. Whether you're shopping for a whiskey lover or a design enthusiast, they'll appreciate the elegance of this finely crafted glassware. kagami.jp/english/



Hender Scheme Pyramid Bag

Tokyo's Hender Scheme offers beautifully minimalist handbags that combine fashion and functionality. Crafted from high-quality, natural leather, each piece will develop a unique patina over time, making it personal to the wearer. Those who appreciate both practical and stylish accessories will surely delight at finding a Hender Scheme bag under the tree. online.henderscheme.com

Limited-Edition KitKat Flavors

For an iconic local treat, pick up some limited-edition KitKat flavors exclusive to Japan, such as sake or yuzu. These quirky yet delicious options make excellent stocking stuffers or tasty treats for anyone who appreciates a twist on a classic. nestle.jp/kitkat/products



Neighborhood Pub Towel Set

Inspired by classic pub towels, this set includes three distinct motifs, all crafted from soft, absorbent pile fabric. Each towel features a unique design, making them both functional and stylish additions to your home or gym bag. Anyone on your list who appreciates streetwear that extends beyond fashion will love these classic items that blend utility with Neighborhood's signature cool. neighborhood.jp



French Elegance

Meets

JAPANESE SIMPLICITY

A conversation with Franco-Japanese
handbag designer Yasu Michino

—
Words by Eugenie Shin







Photos by Pierre et Florent

After over a decade of experience at Parisian maisons, Japanese designer Yasu Michino founded his own independent leather goods brand, Michino, in 2014. The collection fuses French elegance with a Japanese sense of simplicity and specializes in sophisticated handbags for a cosmopolitan clientele. Featuring timeless silhouettes in classic shades, Michino bags are made in Florence, Italy, where the finest traditional craftsmanship turns leather from prestigious French tanneries into exquisite accessories.

Michino's vast experience as a luxury handbag designer includes tenures at Saint Laurent, Givenchy, Delvaux and Balenciaga. As a seasoned expert in leather fabrication, Yasu wanted to offer clients a more budget-friendly alternative to established designer brand handbags without compromising on high-quality materials and sophistication of design. He endeavors to create handbags that are understated, functional and chic for everyday versatility. We reached out to Michino, who filled us in on his thoughts about Tokyo and his sources of inspiration.

Tokyo fashion is ...

Eclectic. Tokyo has as many definitions of "fashion" as its vast population. The fascinating thing about the city's medley of aesthetics is its juxtaposition with a cultural inclination toward conformity. I believe that the people of Tokyo understand the importance of balancing the two: They can contribute to a sense of collective harmony when needed while also expressing their originality as individuals. Each individual possesses a unique interior world, and that is why you cannot judge a Tokyoite by the cover — this contrast colors Tokyo's dynamic fashion scene with styles at once polished and wild, understated and maximalist. I love it!

My favorite places in Tokyo are ...

Wall Aoyama, where you can get a drink while admiring a lush vertical garden wall by botanist Patrick Blanc, first comes to mind. The bar is a calming escape from the city. I also love the lobby restaurant of the Palace Hotel, facing the Imperial Palace Gardens — gorgeous! When I am looking for vintage art books and fashion magazines, I could spend hours at Komiyama Bookstore in Jimbocho [Tokyo's book neighborhood]. My favorite green space in Tokyo to walk around in is Shinjuku Gyoen. As for shopping, I always stop by Barneys New York in Ginza, the Tomorrowland Flagship in Shibuya and stores in Roppongi. I could go on forever about the city's hidden gems.

I am inspired by ...

Firstly, my travels. I try to travel as often as I can, immerse myself in a variety of cultures and interact with locals. I believe that there is much to learn from perspectives different from our own and that our own mindset can expand and shift unexpectedly as we wander. Exchanging ideas with my clients, who are often well versed and well traveled, also inspires my design process. Their individual styles, and their helpful comments or suggestions, are reflected in my pieces. Finally, I have always been fascinated by history — I like to draw inspiration from art history and biographies. I find that constant learning is crucial for creatives.



More Info

Find Yasu Michino's designs at michinoparis.com and on Instagram at [@michinoparis](https://www.instagram.com/michinoparis). Michino ships worldwide, and prices include shipping, import tax and duties.



Fashion Maverick Rising

Yudai Ono is dynamic,
determined and dreaming big

Photos by Solène Ballesta

Hailing from Hiroshima, up-and-coming fashion designer Yudai Ono takes inspiration from monsters, science fiction and the hidden corners of Japanese culture. His latest collection features dramatic, oversized coats inspired by kaiju monsters, blending fantasy with wearable fashion. Now in his final year at Central Saint Martins in London, where he specializes in womenswear, Ono is ready to disrupt an industry dominated by fast fashion and conventional design.



Confronting Capitalist Fashion

Ono's brand takes a decidedly unorthodox approach to the world of fashion, challenging the industry's focus on profit-driven mass production by embracing artistic individuality and sustainability. Fashion, he believes, should be an intersection of art and design, expanding possibilities and breaking boundaries. "My brand incorporates art into my work," he says. "I aim to expand the possibilities of fashion beyond the limits set by capitalism."

Using unconventional materials like plastic and metal to craft his garments, he defies the traditional notion that clothing must be made from fabric. These materials contribute to the rebellious nature of his designs by challenging expectations and adding an industrial, avant-garde aesthetic that makes each piece distinct and memorable.

Augmenting the visual impact of his creations are complex silhouettes and elaborate details, attributes that ensure his designs are difficult to copy. This approach is Ono's response to the prevalence of imitations in the fashion industry. "In such an environment, I aim to create highly expressive designs that are difficult to replicate," he explains.



Japanese Roots and Cultural Influences

Ono is deeply inspired by his Japanese heritage, drawing on anime, manga, video games and tokusatsu special effects to fuel his creativity. His designs evoke a sense of nostalgia for the fantastical elements of Japanese pop culture while simultaneously pushing the boundaries of what is possible in fashion.

But Ono's influences transcend these more obvious aspects of Japanese culture. He's also inspired by the more subtle aspects of Japanese culture that can be observed in everyday life — those quiet, almost hidden moments that make Japan unique. By bringing these elements into his designs, he adds layers of meaning that go beyond the visual.

Pushing Back Against Blandness

For Ono, the fashion industry is at a crossroads. He believes that the rise of the internet has pushed people toward uniform ideals and oversimplified categories of expression.

This shift, he argues, has eroded the ability to make well-informed aesthetic judgments, as people are increasingly influenced by homogenized online trends. To counter this watering down of ingenuity, Ono aims to incorporate sophisticated artistic expression into fashion design, ensuring his work is not only unique but also impossible to ignore.

“
I believe in the high potential of Tokyo's fashion scene and aim to revitalize it starting from here.

”
While Tokyo's fashion scene has a rich history of innovation and individuality, Ono has noticed a decline in recent years, largely due to gaps in fashion education. Prestigious institutions may focus on technical skills, while private schools promote individuality without effectively teaching the art of expression. This has led to a lack of designers capable of making a significant impact on the global stage. But Ono aspires to rectify this fading of fashion intelligence. "I believe in the high potential of Tokyo's fashion scene and aim to revitalize it starting from here," he says.

Fighting for the Future of Fashion

Ono's vision goes beyond his own brand; he aims to make the fashion industry a more vibrant and exciting place by fostering a community that nurtures the next generation of talent. Recognizing that many gifted individuals give up because the public's aesthetic sensibilities take time to catch up with their work, Ono has added teaching to his list of activities to help others navigate the industry. "In the future, I plan to establish a community where I can support talented individuals, launch media such as magazines and host competitions to further energize the fashion industry," Ono shares.

Yudai Ono is not just a designer; he is a visionary, determined to reshape the fashion landscape by injecting it with creativity, rebellion and authenticity. His work is a reminder that fashion is more than just clothes — it is a powerful form of expression, capable of challenging societal norms and inspiring change.

More Info

Discover Ono's designs on Instagram at [@yudaiyudaiono](https://www.instagram.com/yudaiyudaiono).



IN-DEPTH



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Polished Performance

Yuka Kouri rises to the challenge of portraying Kiku, *Shogun's* most accomplished courtesan.

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Capturing Wanderlust

Seeing the world through Yosigo's lens.

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Awash With Pigment

The world of versatile artist Midori Kawano is a perpetual prism of color.



Shogun's Rising Star

Yuka Kouri brought intrigue, elegance and depth to the role of Lady Kiku on *Shogun*, making the mysterious courtesan one of the show's most captivating characters. Here's how she brought Kiku to life.

Words by Matthew Hemon, photos by Solène Ballesta



Yuka Kouri was in the middle of filming for a commercial when her manager informed her that she had landed the role of Kiku in *Shogun*, a 10-part adaptation of James Clavell's 1975 classic novel of the same name, which brings to life Japan's violent feudal past. Her reaction to the news was one of disbelief. She had sent her audition tape three months prior, to radio silence, and didn't think she had any chance of getting the part.

"That was a two-minute tape that took me around 14 hours over two days to shoot," she says, laughing. "I had to do it in old-style Japanese and just couldn't get it right. After the first day, I told my manager we had to go again. In the end, I still wasn't satisfied, but we ran out of time. So, when I was told I got it, I was more surprised than overjoyed, thinking, *Why have they chosen me?* I assumed there must have been a mistake."

There wasn't. Justin Marks, who created the show with his wife, Rachel Kondo, later told Kouri that he was convinced she was the perfect candidate to play the mysterious and manipulative Kiku — Izu's most renowned and seductive courtesan — the moment he saw her on tape. While other actors were called for a second audition, she didn't need one: The decision had already been made. In October 2021, Kouri flew to Vancouver to start filming.

A Sense of Responsibility

"Sitting on the plane, I did feel pressure," recalls the Tokyo-born actress. "As an actor, there's always a sense of responsibility to get things right, but I felt it even more this time."

Kouri has been working in the entertainment industry for over a decade;

prior to becoming an actor, she spent a year working as a model, but the work wasn't as regular or as exciting as she'd hoped. She felt frustrated that she wasn't able to move around more at photo shoots. Acting, she felt, would give her more of a chance to express herself, so she decided to give it a try.

After appearing in a commercial for an online game, she made her television debut in the miniseries *Kazoku no Urajijo* (*Camouflage Family*). "I was so embarrassed by my performance, I could barely watch it," says Kouri. "I've definitely improved since then, but I'm never satisfied with my acting. At my previous agency, I didn't get many big roles, and my mentality was that it was my management's fault. I've since grown to realize that it's about what I

do, not my company. No excuses. During the pandemic, I watched a lot of movies and really started to properly think about what kind of actor I wanted to be."

The tide began to turn for Kouri after she appeared in a heartfelt online commercial for Tokyo Electric Power Company (TEPCO) in November 2020, playing a woman who needlessly doubts her fiancé's commitment as she

plans their wedding. Despite being less than four minutes long, it made a significant impact, garnering more than 7 million views. Directors and producers started getting in touch, which eventually led to bigger roles in movies, such as the romantic drama *Ai Nanoni* (*Love Nonetheless*) and *Fukudamura Jiken* (*September 1923*), a film about the Fukuda Village Incident, in which nine Japanese people were killed on suspicion of being ethnic Koreans during the Kanto Massacre. But *Shogun* would be the largest-scale project she'd ever worked on.

“There was great camaraderie between the cast and crew. I think that's one of the reasons the show's been such a success.”

Mastering Ancient Crafts

The second television adaptation of Clavell's novel, *Shogun* depicts the days leading up to one of the most seminal conflicts in Japanese history: the Battle of Sekigahara. It follows the journey of John Blackthorne, an English navigator shipwrecked in 17th-century Japan. Immersed in a foreign culture, he navigates intense political intrigue and complex samurai traditions, ultimately aligning with the ambitious daimyo Lord Toranaga, played by the internationally renowned actor Hiroyuki Sanada.

Readying herself for the role of Kiku — who plies her trade in the region of Izu, a domain under the influence of Lord Toranaga — involved a great deal of preparation and training. “Although Kiku’s a fictional character, she’s based on the highest-ranked courtesans from that period, who spent decades mastering their craft,” Kouri explains. “I had a short window to learn some of the skills required, like how to play the shamisen. Even things like walking with bent knees and standing up straight from a kneeling position were tricky.”

Kouri’s sense of pressure intensified when she arrived on set. “I’d never experienced anything as big as that before,” she says. “I was taken aback by the sheer number of people, and there were many big names as well.” She soon discovered that she had no reason to be nervous. During filming, she says, “it felt like everyone was equal. Sometimes, in a Japanese production, you almost have to bow down whenever the lead actor walks by. *Shogun* was nothing like that. There was



great camaraderie between the cast and crew. I think that’s one of the reasons the show’s been such a success.”

‘A Genuine Masterpiece’

After the show’s opening two episodes premiered in February — on FX and Hulu in the United States and Disney+ internationally — it became the most streamed program across all platforms, garnering more than 9 million views. It also earned rave reviews from critics, with *Time* magazine’s Judy Berman describing it as “a genuine masterpiece” and *The Guardian*’s Rebecca Nicholson calling it “good-looking, self-assured and often enthralling television.”

The program was also widely

praised for placing Japanese characters at the front and center rather than relegating them to supporting roles — as was the case with the original miniseries in 1980, which heavily centered the perspective of Jack Blackthorne. Marks and Kondo wanted to avoid the “white savior” trope and asked Sanada to double as a producer to ensure the drama upheld the right amount of authenticity.

In his producer capacity, one of the things Sanada did was insist that all Japanese characters be played by Japanese actors. “For years, Sanada has been helping to open doors for Japanese actors overseas,” Kouri explains. “He’s such an inspirational figure and was so passionate about this project. We

all were. Every cast member, aside from Sanada, auditioned for their role, so everyone was chosen on merit rather than being picked because of their name, as is often the case in Japan. As a result, I think the quality of the performances was high.

“You then also had this amazing script, stunning visuals and a brilliant director. It felt like everything came together perfectly.”

A Record-Breaking Night

At the Emmys in September, *Shogun* won 18 awards, a record for a single season of a television series. It was also the first majority non-English program to be named outstanding drama. Frederick Toye picked up an outstanding directing statuette, while Sanada and Anna Sawai — who plays Mariko, a noblewoman who serves as a translator and ally to Blackthorne — received outstanding lead actor and actress prizes. Kouri says she was in tears most of the night, particularly when her cast mates’ and director’s names were announced.



“
You had this amazing script,
stunning visuals and a brilliant
director. It felt like everything
came together perfectly.
”

“It felt like a dream,” she says, smiling. “I thought we’d be named the outstanding drama, but I still wasn’t ready for it when we were called. The whole night was amazing.” The other best moment, she says, was meeting Saoirse Ronan. “She told me she loved *Shogun*, and I was shocked she knew who I was. I’m a big fan of hers, especially films like *Lady Bird* and *Little Women*. I never imagined I would be in the same room as these kinds of big stars from overseas when I started out in the entertainment industry.”

It’s unlikely to be the last time that happens. When asked about her future, Kouri somewhat evasively says she has some “interesting projects” coming up. One that she can mention is a TV drama called *Heart Attack*, which follows a group of super-powered humans known as Variants.

“My ultimate ambition, though, is to appear in a superhero movie in Hollywood,” she says. “To feature in something like that and win an Emmy for myself — that would be the ultimate.”

More Info

Keep up with Kouri on Instagram at [@sugar_milk_cocoa](https://www.instagram.com/sugar_milk_cocoa).



SELF STYLED

Kozue Akimoto's commitment to herself

Interview by Alina Joan Ito, photos by Solène Ballesta

Blunt bangs, jet-black hair down to her waist, perfectly painted cherry-red lips and eyes winged by knife-sharp liner: Fashion model Kozue Akimoto's look is simple yet unmistakable. It's a look that's become something of a signature over her decade-plus in the industry, in a career that's spanned continents and mediums. She's graced the cover of *Vogue Japan*; she's appeared on TV and on runways, including one memorable stint at Paris Fashion Week; she's hosted her own radio program and authored two books ... the list goes on.

It's safe to say that Akimoto has become a major force in the Japanese fashion world. But what makes her so memorable isn't just her looks. In conversation with her, one is immediately struck by her assurance, with the sense

that this is someone with an unwavering commitment to her values and her personal style. Rather than entering the fashion world on its terms, Akimoto carved a place for herself, creating her own definition of what a model should be in the process.

“
I love my job
where I can think
about how to style,
express and just
be involved with
fashion.”

TW: How did you get into fashion? Where does your passion for fashion come from?

Kozue Akimoto: I've always loved clothes. When I was in elementary school, I would go to Harajuku alone, gripping onto my allowance. When I was in college, I did a few jobs at a salon, which led to being asked to do some shoots.

My current agency scouted me around that time and I began modeling. Quite simply, I like clothes — I love my job where I can think about how to style, express and just be involved with fashion.

“

It's important to face your strengths and weaknesses, figure out how to express yourself and understand yourself better than anyone else.

”

Did you face any obstacles getting started in the fashion industry?

I received some attention just by having a famous father [Akimoto is the second daughter of Chiyonofuji Mitsugu, the 58th grand sumo champion], but I felt strongly about wanting to pave my own way without depending on my parents. I struggled with the gap between my ideal and my reality.

I had some values I couldn't compromise, including having my own taste in fashion that differed from my job as a model, where you have to look good in everything. When I first started, I didn't have any work for two years and had a lot of time on my hands.

The fashion industry has a reputation for being intimidating. Were you ever intimidated or unsure of yourself as you were getting started?

I have never thought of it as being out of reach. Working with professionals and those who are referred to as legends makes me feel honored and highly motivated.

People describe you as an "It Girl." What do you think makes an It Girl?

I'm not really at the age to be called a "girl" anymore, but I think an It Girl is someone who always stays true to themselves and can express themselves well.

Hair&Makeup: Sada Ito for NARS Cosmetics
(SENSE OF HUMOUR)
Stylist: Yoko Miyake
Outfit: HEELAL
Instagram @heelal____



What makes you feel most like yourself?

When I'm wearing clothes I like and doing things I enjoy.

You've spent much of your adult life in fashion. How do you think fashion has changed since you first started?

The foundation has always stayed the same, but fashion has gotten more relaxed, in a good way.

Japan has a long history of craftsmanship. How do you find that reflected in Japanese fashion?

I'm not a craftsman myself, but a lot of foreign designers tell me how skilled

Japanese craftsmen are. As a Japanese person, I feel proud, but at the same time, I feel sad that we Japanese people have less knowledge compared to international designers.

I believe that excellent craftsmen, whether in Japan or abroad, should be paid considerably for their skills, and that traditional techniques shouldn't be allowed to die out.

What do you think are the best parts of Japanese fashion? How does it differ from the Western fashion world?

Personally, I really like the Japanese aesthetic of hiding. Overseas, looks are more bold, or show the body's curves more.



You've walked a lot of runways. Do you have a favorite?

Walking for Olympia Le-Tan's show at Paris Fashion Week is by far my favorite runway. Eight years ago, Olympia Le-Tan had a show with the theme of "Japonism," and I was asked to be a runway model for it. I met Olympia a few years before that show, but apparently, she thought, "The model who embodies Japan is Kozue!"

I'm short, so I never thought I would be able to walk for Paris Fashion Week. I was surprised, but it was such a joyful, special experience. I'm still good friends with Olympia.

Do you have any advice for people trying to make it as a model?

We live in a generation where it's not just supermodels that can become models. Diversity is welcomed, and a lot of people have the chance to be a model.

I've seen a lot of shows, but the models that catch my eye are people who know who they are, are confident and have power in their eyes. It's important to face your strengths and weaknesses, figure out how to express yourself and understand yourself better than anyone else.

More Info

Find Akimoto on Instagram at [@akimoto_kozue](https://www.instagram.com/akimoto_kozue).

YOSIGO

A Photographer's Traveling Dreamscape



San Sebastian native and photographer José Javier Serrano
brings his world to Japan



— Words by Alina Joan Ito

Swimming bodies in turquoise waters; perfectly geometric architecture with stark, pastel backgrounds; a series of street shots that are arresting on their own but, when viewed together, tell a story of its city. The work of photographer José Javier Serrano, better known as Yosigo, is instantly recognizable. It's widely replicated (but never faithfully imitated) across Instagram, where he's garnered fans and followers from all corners of the world.

It's easy to see why Serrano's work has resonated with so many people. His images are a result of the artist's global explorations, capturing a unique perspective of countries both familiar and foreign, instilling in

viewers a sense of wanderlust and evoking the vivid joys of travel. His latest exhibit, "Holiday Memories," is a compilation of striking, masterfully captured moments he's experienced on the road. After attracting over 400,000 visitors in Korea, it has arrived at Shibuya's Tokyu Plaza, much to the anticipation of his Japan-based fans.

The exhibition opens with the sort of photos that Serrano is best known for: vivid, geometric architectural shots carefully laid out together, creating visual bridges between foreign countries. From there, it's broken into countries, taking visitors on a world tour: the bath houses of Budapest, Mediterranean beachscapes, the amusement parks of America.

There's also a special section devoted to Japan, with photos that are dark and

dreamlike, sometimes appearing wreathed in mist. He photographs iconic symbols of the country — koi fish, izakaya, Tokyo Tower nestled among skyscrapers — but in a way that makes them feel unfamiliar, almost fantastical. It's clear that Serrano gained a lot of inspiration from his time in Tokyo, which makes it all the more meaningful that he was able to exhibit here.

The Observational Traveler

Serrano's moniker is apt: The Spanish phrase "Yo sigo" translates to "I follow" or "I continue," a fitting artist name for a wandering photographer. His current exhibition centers on travel and leisure — a theme that's been ever-present in his work, reflecting the town he was raised in. "I grew up in San Sebastian, which is quite touristic, and the first photos I ever took explored how we spend our free time," he reflects.

But just because his photos capture leisure doesn't mean they're meant to be taken idly — he takes leisure travel seriously as a subject. "I don't like to have a critical perspective about, nor romanticize, tourism," Serrano explains. "I think I just build my own imaginary visual world through my travels and seeing others traveling."



His nonjudgmental observation is apparent; his images are vibrant and bold, but there's an element of watchfulness underlying the colorful visuals. When he captures humans in his photos, the subjects are unposed and unaware of the camera, and his architectural works show perfect rows of apartments with sporadic signs of life, like laundry drying in the sun.

But Serrano's gaze is not one-sided; he sees his work as a dialogue with a specific place. "Each country ends up asking you for something," he says. He recalls his trip to the United States, traveling coast to coast. Initially, he experimented with abstract techniques, but he soon realized that wouldn't be the best way to express what he was perceiving. "The country brought to mind the American color photography of the 70s, something I am passionate about. The territory itself asked me for more formal photos, to be less pictorial and more realistic."

For Serrano, this shift in perception or plans is welcomed. "When the territory changes my initial idea, I feel that I am doing something

right. I'm actively feeling and reacting. That's almost more important than the photos themselves."

Greetings From Japan

Japan, too, asked something of Serrano. In contrast to the United States, which demanded to be documented in a stark, hyper-realistic style, Japan made the photographer feel drawn to abstraction. "Photographing Japan has influenced me a lot. I started to get interested in diffractions, blurred photos, shaky photos — different techniques that I've started applying to other projects."

Yosigo's images of this country are unlike most of his other photos. While he's typically known for his use of bright colors, Serrano



photographs Japan in darker, moodier tones than is customary for him. "Japan for me has a lot of mystery. There's a lot of light, but an element of dark that's indecipherable. I often feel like I'm dreaming there, not living it, and I think that shows in the photos."

He captures the landscape differently as well: Serrano's photography usually focuses on architecture and landscapes, and when he photographs people, it's often from far away. Interestingly, many of his images of Japan capture individual humans.

"More than individual photos, they're a set of photos that make up a larger image," he answers, when asked about this decision to shoot close-ups. "I usually don't give importance to the people in the places I photograph," but here it was different. He felt like he couldn't capture the world of Japan without turning his camera closely to the people inhabiting it.

"Holiday Memories" will wrap up in late December, but Serrano's adventures in Japan are far from over. "I want to spend more time in Tokyo," he says. "I'm developing a



couple of projects here, and eventually I'd love to work on a book about all this."

Serrano's worldview has caught the eyes and hearts of many, taking those who witness his photographs on a whimsical journey — but the whimsy belies their depth. Through his eyes, travel photography isn't merely about careful observation; it's about searching for the spirit of a place, and creating your own world around it.

More Info

Follow Serrano on Instagram at [@yosigo_yosigo](https://www.instagram.com/yosigo_yosigo).

“Japan for me has a lot of mystery. There's a lot of light, but an element of dark that's indecipherable.”



A woman with blonde hair styled in a bun, wearing a shiny, form-fitting purple long-sleeved top and matching gloves. She is lying on her side on a light-colored floor, looking towards the camera. Her right leg is raised and bent at the knee, with her foot pointing upwards. She is holding a large, multi-colored geometric sculpture made of translucent panels in shades of purple, blue, and yellow. The sculpture is positioned in front of her, partially obscuring her face. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

The Non-Stop, Colorful World of Midori Kawano

The prolific artist, product
designer and creative
director takes us inside her
technicolor world

—
Words by Kim Kahan

In August, I visited “Art Squiggle Yokohama 2024,” a fantastic exhibition in a warehouse on Yokohama Pier. The festival showcased a number of thought-provoking artists, but one piece in particular stood out: a large metal structure, isolated inside a huge black box, softly lit to alter viewers’ perceptions.

The structure, made of several interlocking squares and cubes, stood in a corner, bathed in a mixture of red, green and blue light. Illuminated from three different directions, with the exact color and intensity of each of these light sources in constant flux, the metallic surfaces became a site of ever-changing tone and shadow: hot pink, then violet, then pale blue. It’s a seemingly simple concept that opens a door for deeper exploration of the very process of perception — according to a description that accompanied the installation, each distinct hue only appears once in 45 days.

This piece, titled “Hue Moments,” is one of the latest works by the artist Midori Kawano. Over her nearly 20-year career, she’s delved into countless genres and

mediums, from club photography to music videos, from graphics and art direction to product and space design. But one thing that’s remained constant is her strong visual identity: Her oeuvre is dominated by a distinctive palette of bold colors and a heady dose of 80s nostalgia.

Kawano recently stopped by the TW office, a high-tech lamp she custom designed in tow, where we discussed the creative process, the joy of working between mediums and light as an expression of diversity.

Determination and Serendipity

Growing up in rural Yokohama, Kawano was fascinated by the act of perception from a young age. “I also spent a lot of time alone looking at the ceiling and thinking about the connection between the universe and the mind,” she says. After graduating high school in the early 2000s, she enrolled in an art university to study product design. “I liked physics, art and making things, and I wanted to show the relationship between the micro and macro universes,” she explains, “but I didn’t know how to make a living out of it.”

Somehow, she found a way. She began working as a freelancer on a dizzying variety of projects that firmly enmeshed her in Tokyo’s underground scene: club photography, VJing and graphic design for event flyers. But she was most drawn to music videos as a medium — something she credits to a trip to India taken during her college days.

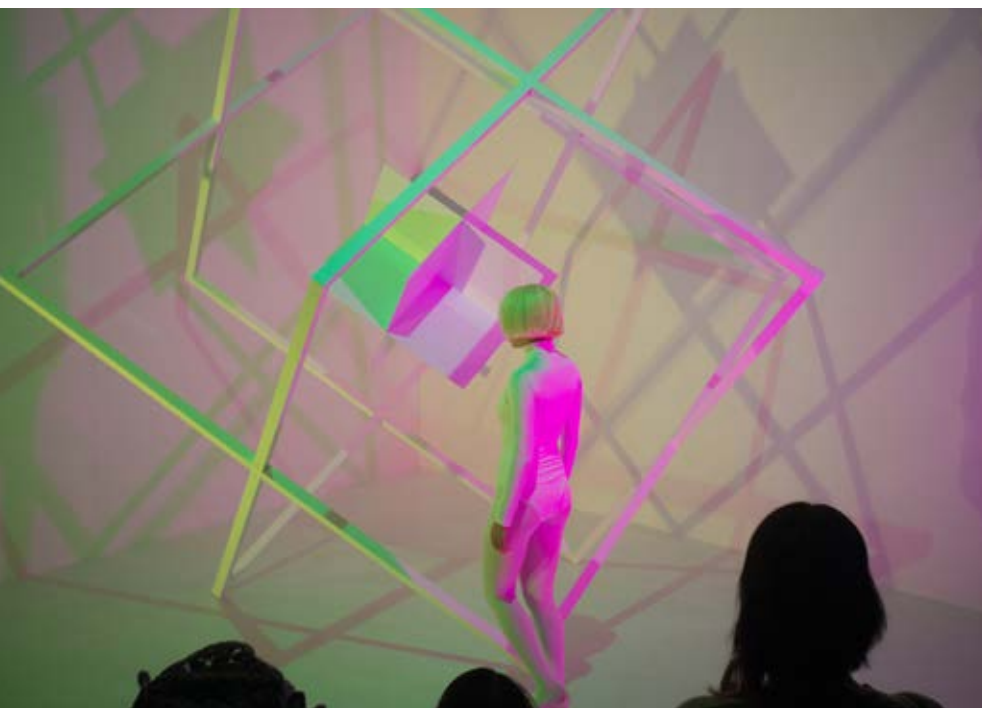
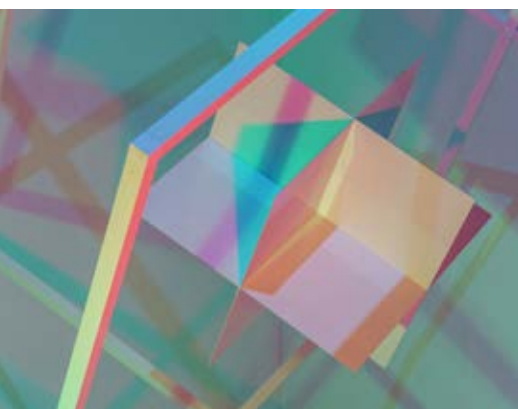
“I was traveling around, immersed in the sights and stimulation of India, and when I was moving from place to place, I listened to music on my Walkman,” she recalls. “Electronica, techno and traditional



Indian music soundtracked my travels ... That juxtaposition between the music and the environment stimulated my creative mindset, opening my mind to a world of endless possibilities. It made me want to create videos.”

She made a name for herself by producing trippy videos for a range of electronic artists, like Evisbeats and De De Mouse, the latter with whom she began collaborating regularly. This is where she truly started to hone her style. Take, for instance, the video for De De Mouse’s “Baby’s Star Jam,” which premiered in 2007. Kawano directed it, and the visuals are rife with motifs that continue to populate her works — symbols of Egyptology and astrology drift across the screen, laid over kaleidoscopic colors and juxtaposed with psychedelic imagery.

“A lot of my imagery is quite retro,” she muses. “At the time, not so many people were creating things like that, although I feel like it’s quite popular now.”





Top photo: Model: Aoi Yamada, Art Direction: Midori Kawano, Photographer: Akiko Isobe, Stylist: Chie Ninomiya, Hair & Make-up: Noboru Tomizawa, Location: Hotel New Akao



Kawano's passion for music is evident in much of her output, and it's led her down a wide variety of creative paths. She's designed album covers, art directed and produced visuals for artists like Tavito Nanao and Wednesday Campanella. She's also very interested in the female form and femininity.

Additionally, Kawano is a member of the creative team Ebizazen, a collective of models, photographers and hair and makeup artists, as an art director. They work together to create striking, surreal images, bizarre vignettes of life in an alternate world, bright with color and opulent materials; two years ago,

their surreal, opulent photos of avant-garde dancer Aoi Yamada ended up in *Vogue*.

"My interests change across mediums," Kawano says. She prefers to shift lanes before something gets popular. "When I switch mediums, it can deepen my depth of expression."

Changing and Evolving

Even though Kawano's output is protean, returning to past projects is not off the table. And as the shifting shades and shadows of "Hue Moments" can attest, her deep interest in the interplay between color and light has followed her throughout her career. In 2020, she released a product



“

I wanted to show the relationship between the micro and macro universes, but I didn't know how to make a living out of it.

”

that reifies this obsession: RGB_Light, an innovative lamp with three lightbulbs — one red, one green, one blue. It comes in a UFO shape, designed to be hung from the ceiling or another tall spot.

Utilizing the three primary colors of light, the lamp causes objects to cast technicolor shadows. With a smartphone app, you can manipulate the intensity and angle of each bulb, creating a custom vibrant silhouette in a variety of shades. Kawano originally designed the piece in 2005 for a school project, in a more primitive, college-student style (minus the smartphone, too, of course). "In college, I had often ended up with something that was just form, but no function — like lipstick packaging but not the lipstick."

She demonstrates the 2020 upgrade during the interview, and it's suitably impressive. Despite being such a simple concept — three different bulbs — its visual effect is striking. Even office pencils turn into items of wonder when placed below, emitting polychromatic shadows.

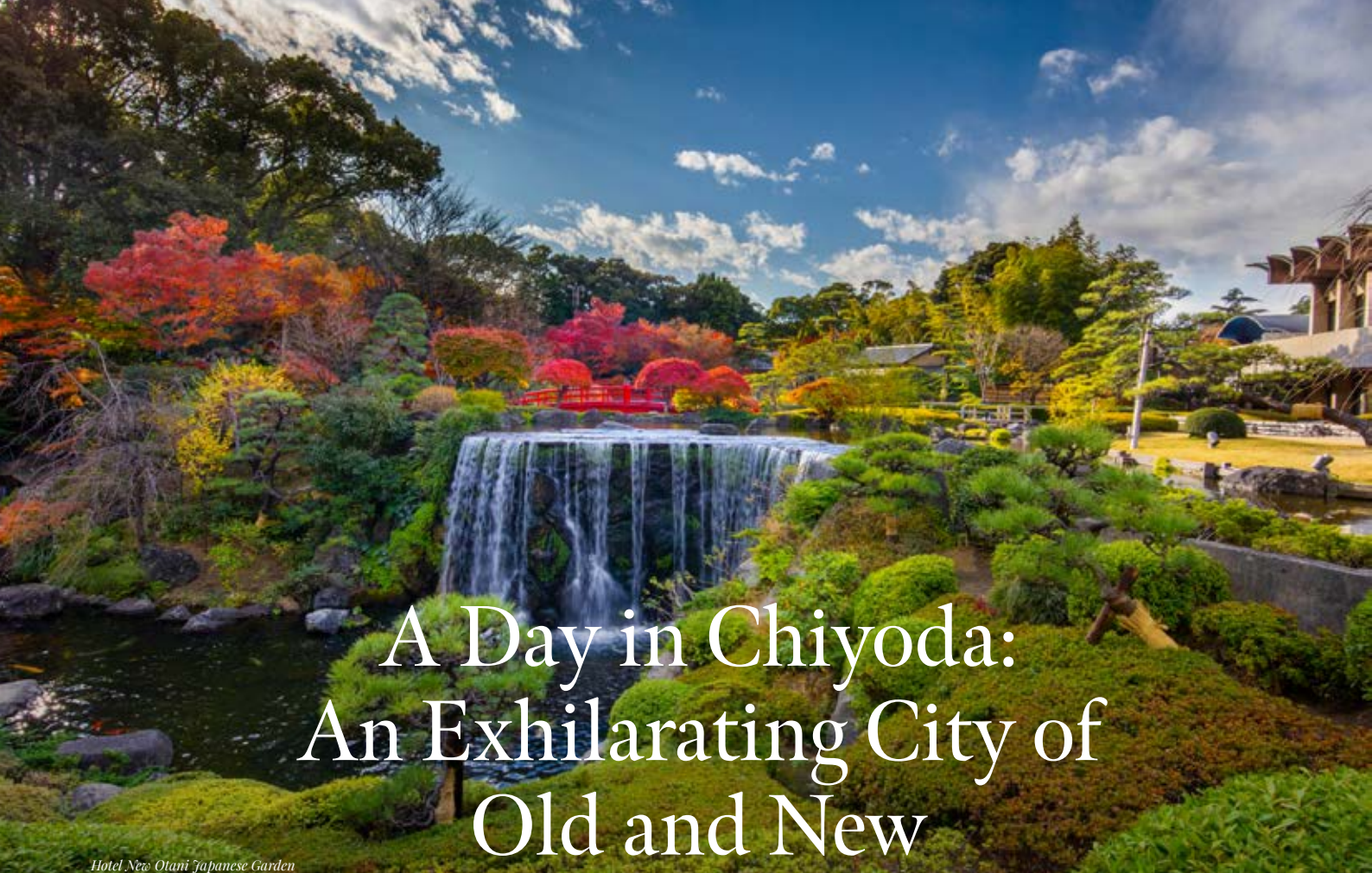
"Even though there had been over a decade between my designing it and exhibiting it, no one in the world had designed anything like it yet," Kawano says. "And during that time, my view of the light had changed. As an artwork, I had come to think of it as a visible expression of diversity. If there is only one light, the shadow will be black, but if there are two or more lights, the shadow will be colorful."

RGB_Light is available for purchase in Japan, and Kawano says she recently obtained a US patent and is looking to start marketing the product overseas. "In Japan, the houses and spaces are small, but in countries like the US, there is a lot of space to show the light off and use it to its full potential. It could be in an office entrance hall, a children's playroom, a music bar ..."

It's quintessential Kawano, to be constantly dreaming of the next thing — something bigger, something she has yet to try. One is left wondering if there is any medium that she hasn't explored and what will be next. "The vague dreams I had when I was young are taking shape," she tells TW. "I want to challenge myself more with big exhibitions like 'Art Squiggle.'" Her next move, perhaps?

More Info

To learn more about Kawano's work, visit md-k.net or follow her on Instagram at [@midori_kawano](https://www.instagram.com/midori_kawano).



Hotel New Otani Japanese Garden

A Day in Chiyoda: An Exhilarating City of Old and New

A 12-hour itinerary in one of Tokyo's most fascinating areas, filled with historic sights and hidden gems

Words by Alina Joan Ito

Chiyoda city is one of the most noteworthy areas of Tokyo, containing many of its iconic sights — from the sprawling grounds of the Imperial Palace to the electric streets of Akihabara. This neighborhood is full of historic landmarks, quirky hole-in-the-wall establishments and hyper-urban zones that give more than just a taste of the city's multifaceted identity.

Chiyoda city has so much to see that it might feel overwhelming. To help you manage it, we've created a curated itinerary for a perfect day of exploration. Follow along and uncover the delights that Chiyoda has to offer.

Breakfast and a Japanese Garden Stroll at Hotel New Otani Tokyo

Start your day at the luxurious Hotel New Otani Tokyo, a Tokyo landmark known for its exquisite hospitality and timeless decor. Even if you're not staying there, you can still stop by for breakfast. The hotel has four different options for morning dining, including both authentic Japanese breakfast and Western cuisine. The Garden

Lounge has a particularly beautiful view of the hotel's sprawling Japanese garden.

After breakfast, go on a digestive stroll through the famous garden. With 400 years of history, this serene oasis extends over 10 acres, featuring crimson bridges that pass over koi ponds, a stone garden and a

breathtaking waterfall. The garden is particularly stunning in spring during cherry blossom season and when its autumn foliage is at its peak, in November through early December — but it's peaceful any time of year, offering a nature-filled escape in the heart of the big city.



Scenic Shots at Hijiri-bashi Bridge and Kanda Myojin Shrine

Next, head toward Hijiri-bashi Bridge, a favorite location for photographers; it's known as one of the best train-viewing spots in Tokyo. Three different train lines converge here, so if you're lucky, you might catch sight of three trains passing at the same time, the elegant arches and calm waters of the Kanda River serving as the backdrop.

Just a short walk away is Kanda Myojin Shrine, a site with 1,300 years of history. This bright red shrine is dedicated to the deities of good fortune and prosperity, making it a popular spot for locals and tourists alike. There's also an internet-famous pony on shrine grounds, said to be a messenger of the gods. Kanda Myojin has several smaller shrines on its grounds, as well as a museum that frequently updates its exhibits, making for an impressive stop.



Lunch at Savoul

For lunch, make your way to Savoul (pronounced "Sabouru"), a quirky kissaten that feels more like a museum of organized chaos than a café. Stop by the original Savoul for a classic coffee and an egg sandwich, or go to Savoul 2 right next door to browse through a bigger lunch menu. Both locations are adorable, with intricate decorations that let guests explore the owner's fascinating worldview.



Relaxation at SaunaLab Kanda

After lunch, indulge in a little self-care at SaunaLab Kanda. Designed to feel like a mini Finland, this unique wellness facility takes its saunas seriously. From a "forest sauna" to an "ice sauna," SaunaLab Kanda has various temperature settings and atmospheres for guests to curate their sauna experience. After your sauna session, decompress in the lounge area, which is filled with real plants and ample seating areas for prime relaxation.

Basking in the Vibes at Akihabara's Pedestrian Zone

With renewed energy, head to Akihabara, famously known as Electric Town. This bustling area is a haven for anime, manga and gaming enthusiasts, offering countless shops and themed cafés. The Akihabara pedestrian zone is a lively area filled with shops showcasing the latest in electronics and pop culture. As you wander the vibrant streets, bask in the colorful signage and energetic atmosphere. If you want to try out one of Japan's famous themed cafés, Akihabara is the place to do it. Stop by one of the area's many maid cafés, where you can experience a quirky aspect of Japanese pop culture firsthand.

In addition to shops, you'll find a variety of restaurants and snack stalls. Don't miss trying a

popular local treat, like taiyaki (fish-shaped cake filled with sweet red bean paste) or perfectly chewy crepes.

Dinner With the Locals at Yurakucho Gado-shita

As the sun begins to set and your stomach starts to growl, make your way to Yurakucho Gado-shita, a bustling dining area beneath the train tracks at Yurakucho Station. This vibrant spot is known for its izakaya (Japanese pubs) and casual dining options. Gado-shita is charmingly lively and often filled with salarymen in the evening. The enticing aromas of freshly prepared food fill the streets and the sounds of beer glasses clinking are interspersed with the rush of a train passing overhead. Pair classic izakaya dishes like yakitori and sashimi with local beer and sake for a perfect way to unwind after a long day of exploration.



More Info

For more information about Chiyoda city, go to visit-chiyoda.tokyolenl.

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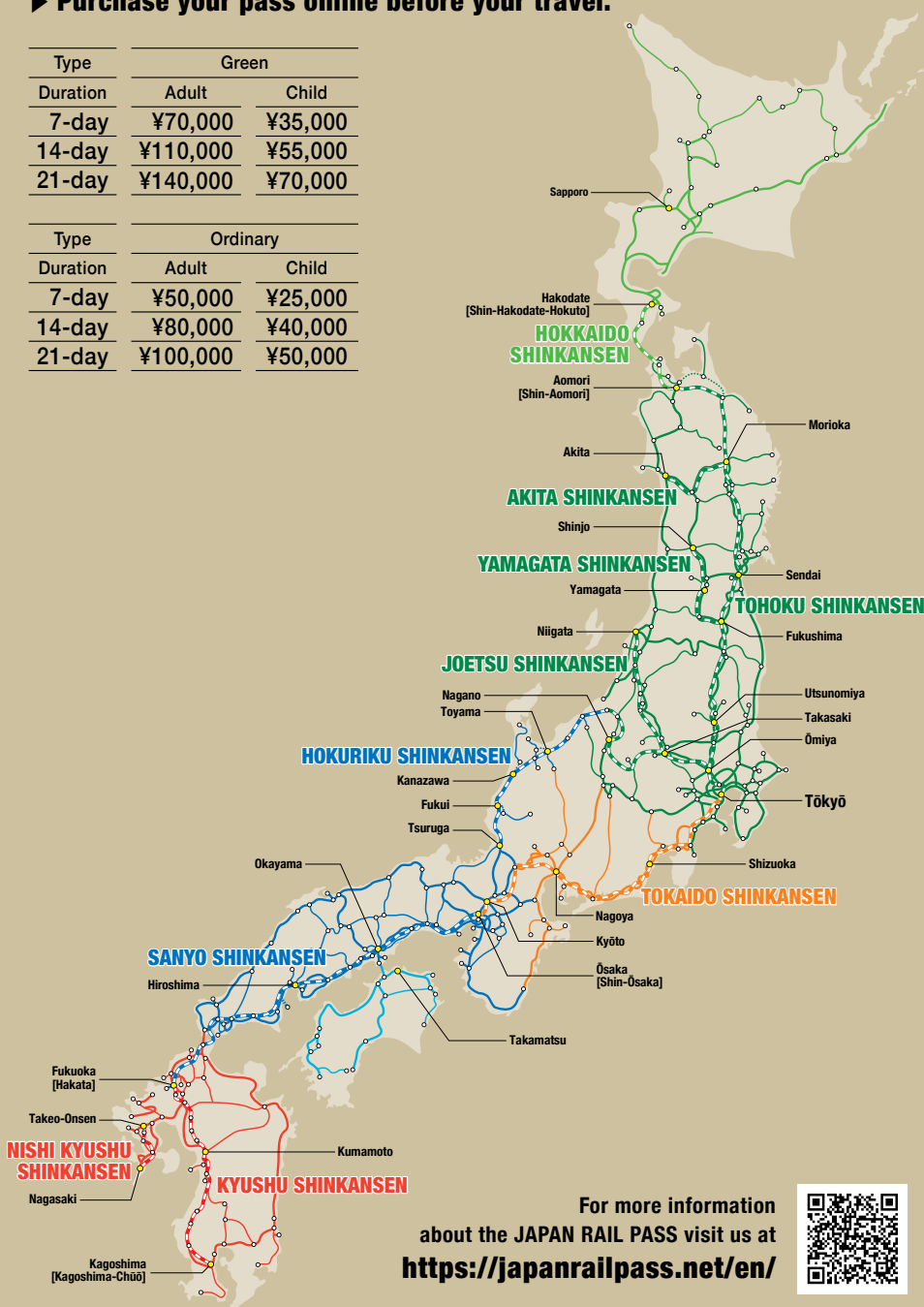
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* The route map is based on information as of April 2024 and is subject to change without notice.



TRAVEL



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Gourmet Delights

Exploring the Edo-era streets and epicurean eats of Sawara.

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Alpine Escape

Let Hôtel de L'Alpage envelop you in its luxurious embrace.

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Serenity in Nature

It's into the woods to recharge at Hakone Retreat.



Discovering Sawara: A Culinary Journey Through History

Immerse yourself in the timeless beauty of Sawara, a hidden riverside town in Chiba known for its beautifully preserved Edo-era streets, fascinating local traditions and rich gastronomic culture

—
Words by Lisa Wallin

Sawara, a charming and quaint town in Chiba Prefecture that served as a prominent trade hub in the Edo period, holds a deep connection to Japan's history — a connection reflected in its serene, beautifully preserved streets. Located along the Ono River, which flows into the Tone River — Japan's second longest — Sawara thrived due to its strategic link to the capital of Edo (modern-day Tokyo). Its significance in the past was so notable that it earned the nickname “Edo Masari,” which means “superior to Edo.”

Sawara also became known for its production of sake, soy sauce and other fermented goods — traditions that remain central to its identity today. This legacy of entrepreneurial spirit, along with a focus on innovation, continues to shape the town's character, drawing visitors eager to explore its pristine streets and evolving culinary scene.

A Stroll Through History: Quaint Street Shops and Townscape

The heart of Sawara's historical district offers a journey back in time, where many businesses are still operated by families that have been there for generations. Visitors can explore the stone streets lined with dozens of Edo-era buildings. Nakamura Shoten, originally established in 1874, now sells Japanese-style accessories and miscellaneous goods; Fukushima Gofukuten, which was founded in 1804, specializes in Japanese fabric accessories and small cloth goods. Uedaya Aramonoten is known for its fine selection of high-quality tools

from all over the country. Around town, other shops have been converted into cozy cafés and similar spaces, blending Sawara's rich past with contemporary charm.

Nipponia Sawara Merchant Town Hotel further deepens this connection to the past. Housed in restored buildings that once served as merchant homes, sake breweries and storehouses, the hotel allows guests to experience the atmosphere of old Sawara firsthand. Nipponia offers a singular experience that bridges the town's history with modern comfort.



MORE INFO: www.vmg.co.jp/en/hotels/sawara/



Sawara Grand Festival: Tradition in Full Bloom

Twice a year, the streets of Sawara come alive with the sights and sounds of the Sawara Grand Festival, one of the three major float festivals of Kanto with a history dating back about 300 years. The air fills with the rhythmic beat of taiko drums, the lively strains of traditional flutes and the cheers of locals in festive attire, and lanterns cast a warm glow over the scene. In July, the summer Gion Festival

is held to appease the deity of epidemics, while October's festival gives thanks to the god of the harvest.

During the festival, intricately decorated floats, each topped with towering figures that stand several meters tall, parade through the town. For those who miss the event, the Suigo Sawara Float Museum offers a taste of the festival's atmosphere year-round.

MORE INFO: www.city.katori.lg.jp/sightseeing/matsuri/index.html

Little Edo Sawara Boat Tour: A Journey Around Sawara's Treasure, the Ono River

The Little Edo Sawara Boat Tour offers a peaceful, 30-minute journey along the calm waters of the Ono River, which flows through the heart of Sawara. Starting near the former residence of Inoh Tadataka, the tour provides a different perspective of the town's historical district. As the shallow, motor-powered boat glides past drooping willows that sway gently toward the water, passengers are treated to views that cannot be seen from the streets alone.

The boat punters often share stories of Sawara's past, even singing the old folk song with the lyrics, "If you want to see Edo, come to Sawara, Sawara's superior to Edo." It's a playful nod to the town's rich history and the enduring pride of its residents — a sentiment that's hard not to catch as you drift along the river.

MORE INFO: www.kimera-sawara.co.jp/business/boat.html



Katori Jingu Shrine: A Place of Reverence

Katori Jingu Shrine, one of Japan's oldest Shinto shrines, is central to Sawara's initial history and prosperity. Said to have been established in 643 BC and dedicated to the god of swords and warfare, Futsunushi-no-Okami, the shrine attracted travelers and merchants, further encouraging Sawara as a center of trade. This spirit lives on along the street leading up to the shrine, which has several shops and eateries catering to visitors.

After exploring the precinct, stop by Ino Café. Known for its vintage espresso machine and relaxed atmosphere, it's an ideal spot to enjoy a coffee and reflect on the area's rich past.

MORE INFO: katori-jingu.or.jp

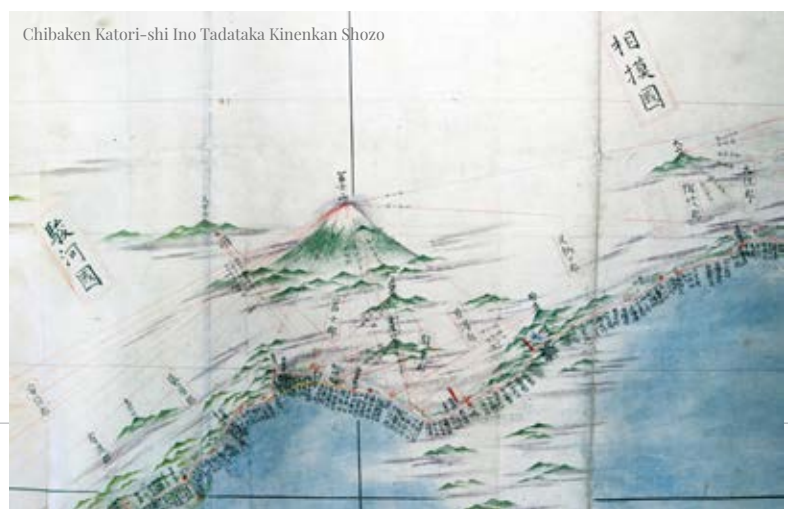
Inoh Tadataka: The Mapmaker's Legacy

A visit to the Inoh Tadataka Museum and his preserved home provides insight into one of Sawara's most celebrated figures. Inoh Tadataka (1745–1818) spent over 30 years in Sawara before embarking on his cartography career in his 50s. He then spent nearly 17 years completing 10 survey expeditions across Japan, walking tens of thousands of kilometers and amassing vast amounts of data. Although he passed away before his magnum opus was completed, his disciples carried on his work for him, and the finished

"Inoh Maps" were used throughout Japan for almost a century.

The museum, located across the river from his former residence, showcases the original Inoh Maps and his surveying tools, highlighting the precision and dedication that defined his work. Visitors can also explore his former home, including an earthen-walled storehouse, to see how his life in Sawara laid the foundation for his later achievements in mapping Japan.

MORE INFO: www.city.katori.lg.jp/sightseeing/museum/en/index.html



Sawara's Culinary and Artistic Pioneers

Sawara stands as a testament to Japan's rich cultural heritage, where the art of fermentation, traditional craftsmanship and deep-rooted history blend seamlessly. For three residents — each dedicated to preserving and revitalizing their hometown's essence — this town and its storied legacy serve as a wellspring of inspiration and pride.

Yoshihiro Baba at Babahonten Sake Brewery

As the current steward of Babahonten Sake Brewery, which has roots stretching back over 300 years, Yoshihiro Baba is not only a guardian of Sawara's sake-making heritage but also well versed in the town's history. His family's brewery preserves traditional brewing techniques while adapting to modern challenges, producing sake and mirin — a sweet rice wine often used in Japanese cooking — that reflect the terroir of the region. "In the town of Sawara, at one point, there were over 30 sake breweries," Baba recalls, "but now only a few remain."

Baba reflects on the role of sake and soy sauce breweries in fostering the town's culture. "The breweries were the original backers of the Sawara Grand Festival celebrations," he says. "Each neighborhood had its own sake or soy sauce brewery, which would contribute by providing sake and funding for the festivities. It was our way of giving back to the employees and for them to let off some steam." These festivals, with their extravagant floats and lively parades, were a symbol of the town's prosperity and unity.



During its peak, Sawara thrived as a center of sake production, with its location along the Tone River enabling easy transport of goods to Edo. "The river was the lifeline," Baba notes. "When the railroad came in the late Meiji period, it diminished the prosperity that came from water transport, and many breweries disappeared."

Visitors are welcome to explore the brewery's display building, which showcases historic brewing tools used from the Edo through the Showa eras, though entry to the brewery itself is by reservation only.

MORE INFO:

Babahonten Sake Brewery
I-614-1 Sawara, Katori city
babahonten.com





Chef Hidemi Amau at Le Un

At Le Un, Chef Hidemi Amau creates a distinctive culinary experience that combines French techniques with the rich, fermented flavors of Sawara. The Nipponia Sawara Merchant Town Hotel’s flagship restaurant, Le Un is housed in a renovated sake warehouse belonging to Babahonten Sake Brewery, and it retains its original charm with high ceilings, thick beams and sake barrel-shaped washi paper lanterns that reflect the building’s history.

Amau sources seasonal ingredients directly from local producers, aiming to create dishes that can only be experienced in Sawara. “I focus on bringing out the best in each ingredient, using the town’s fermentation culture to add depth,” he explains. His

cooking incorporates koji mold-based fermentation, a traditional method that highlights the flavors of Chiba’s varied produce. For instance, he replaces French cheese in some of his recipes with sake lees, creating a nuanced, umami-rich depth. “It’s about honoring what this place has to offer,” Amau adds, “and finding ways to make even humble ingredients shine.”

The dining experience extends beyond the plate, with the bar serving a mirin-based cocktail, another nod to the venue’s heritage as a mirin storage site. Cooking in a space once dedicated to sake-making has deepened Amau’s connection to the area’s traditions, turning Le Un into a bridge between Sawara’s past and present.



MORE INFO:

Le Un Sawara Shokamachi Hotel Nipponia, Kagura Building,
I-1708-2 Sawara, Katori city
www.nipponia-sawara.jp/restaurant

Masahiro Noguchi: Kirie Master

Masahiro Noguchi, a master of kirie (paper cutting), draws profound inspiration from Sawara’s historic streets and cultural landscape. His art, meticulously crafted from black and white paper, captures the town’s intricate wooden facades and river scenes, revealing his deep bond with the place. “You can see the difference when a local creates art based on the town,” Noguchi says.



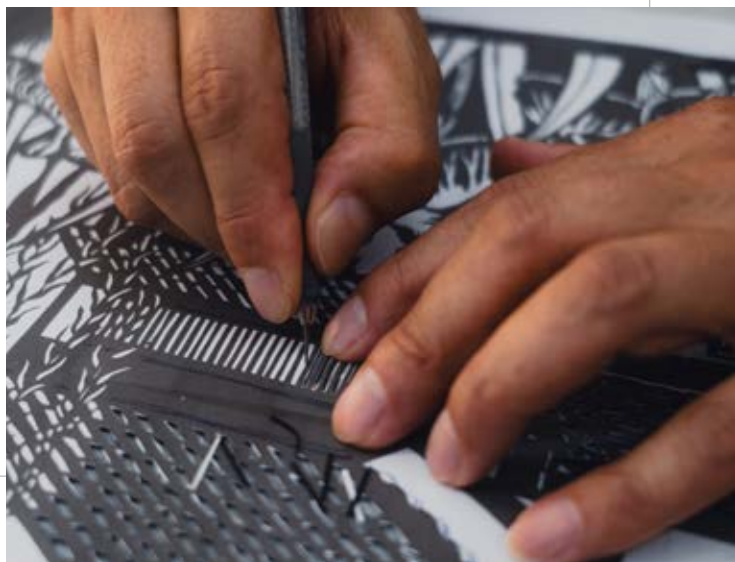
“The atmosphere — it’s a town that breathes with the past, yet thrives in the present,” he continues, highlighting the distinct energy of Sawara’s preserved townscape. “People are still living in these buildings, and it gives a feeling of life to the old streets.”

His creative process is deeply personal and painstakingly detailed. Noguchi describes the method: “I [create] a draft first, and I try to make sure everything stays connected — because if it’s not, the pieces will fall apart.” Working with precision, he cuts each piece using only a small knife, turning intricate sketches into layered compositions. Some of his larger works can take months, with every detail requiring focus and patience.

In addition to creating his intricate artworks, Noguchi occasionally holds workshops and exhibitions around Sawara, allowing visitors to experience the art of kirie firsthand. Visitors can stop by Noguchi’s studio to see his work up close and purchase prints. The studio is open from 9:30 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. and closed on Wednesdays.

MORE INFO:

Masahiro Noguchi’s Studio
I-606 Sawara, Katori city





Auberge de Manoir Kittei: A Garden Oasis for Gourmands

Auberge de Manoir Kittei offers a dining experience that beautifully blends the flavors of Japan and France, set against the backdrop of a stunning, 2,640-square-meter Japanese garden. The restaurant prides itself on its seasonal menu, which features fresh catches from the fishing port at Choshi and locally sourced ingredients. Here, dishes are as much a feast for the eyes as they are for the palate, with artful presentations that highlight the natural beauty of each ingredient.

Kittei's commitment to a playful spirit extends to every part of the experience, from its creative fusion of French and Japanese cuisine to its luxurious on-site accommodation, offering guests a chance to savor the tranquility of the garden overnight.

MORE INFO: www.kittei.co.jp/contents/homel/index.html

Gourmet Delights of Sawara

From cozy coffee shops that evoke the past to modern patisseries, the dining scene in Sawara and the surrounding areas offers a rich palette of flavors and experiences. Whether you're strolling through the town's historic streets or seeking a serene spot to enjoy local delicacies, these six destinations promise to make your visit unforgettable.



Inou Chujiro Shoten: Craft Beer and Cheese Delights

Inou Chujiro Shoten offers an impressive lineup of craft beers brewed on-site, complemented by a selection of freshly made cheeses. Its New England IPA, with notes of tropical fruit, is a popular choice among locals and visitors alike, while the seasonal beers keep the menu refreshing throughout the year. Try four of them at once with the very reasonable beer flight experience.

Pair your drink with a platter of the shop's signature burrata, mozzarella or ricotta cheese, and you have the ideal afternoon snack. With its scenic view of the Ono River, it's the perfect spot to unwind and enjoy the town's laid-back atmosphere.

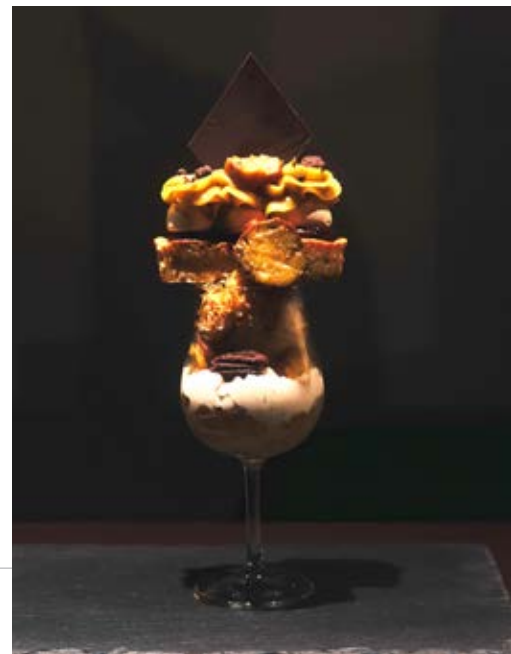
MORE INFO: kakewa.work/beer/

Kinmitsudo: A Sweet Potato Paradise

For those with a sweet tooth, Kinmitsudo is the go-to destination in Sawara. This shop is renowned for its Kin Mitsu Imo sweet potato parfaits, a layered creation crafted by skilled artisans using high-sugar sweet potato paste and handmade components. The parfait layers berries, chocolate, nuts, tea and apples for a truly unique experience. The special version of this parfait — aptly named Kin Mitsu Imo's Castle Parfait in honor of its towering turreted shape, and available only via reservation — elevates the experience. Two varieties of special salt accompany the parfait, enhancing its aroma and flavor.

Behind each parfait lies a dedication to the perfect balance of flavors, honed over years of sweet potato cultivation by the specialized sweet potato farm Ishida Nouen. Kinmitsudo's decor reflects Taisho-era romanticism, inviting you to slow down and savor each spoonful, making it the perfect spot to indulge after a day of exploring Sawara's historic streets. The café is run by farm staff and operates on weekends, open Friday, Saturday and Sunday from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., focusing on a "field to table" approach to hospitality.

MORE INFO: ishidanouen.com



Coffee Tamazawa: From Futons to Fresh Brews

Coffee Tamazawa is a café that bridges Sawara's storied past with its vibrant present. The Tamazawa family is one of the town's oldest merchant families, and has been involved in a variety of industries over the decades. The newest generation has transformed this space, once a futon store, into a haven for coffee aficionados. Its interior retains the charm of yesteryears, decorated with vintage items that gesture

toward the family's business legacy in the town, like a safe from the Meiji-era Tamazawa bank.

Beyond its historical allure, Coffee Tamazawa offers expertly brewed coffee, including a house blend, alongside indulgent sweets like the classic gateaux chocolate and seasonal specialties such as the marron Chantilly. Note: The café is only open on weekends and holidays.

MORE INFO: coffee-tamazawa.com



Nabedana Kozaki Brewery: A Legacy of Sake Brewing

Nabedana traces its roots back over 330 years. Founded in the Edo period, Nabedana originally brewed sake in Narita before expanding to multiple locations, including the Kozaki site, which was acquired in 1897. During World War II, when the state control of the economy became increasingly severe, the brewery consolidated its operations to Kozaki due to its ample space, access to high-quality rice and abundant water supply.

Today, the Kozaki location's on-site store is a must-visit, offering a wide range of the brewery's expertly crafted sakes, including exclusive aged varieties. Open daily, the store provides tastings, making it an ideal spot to discover the delectable flavors of Jinyu, Fudoh and other standout brews. For those curious about the brewing process, guided tours of the historic facilities are available with a reservation at least one week in advance; the tour fee includes a sake tasting, conducted after the tour.



MORE INFO: www.nabedana.co.jp/english.html



Michi no Eki Hako-no-Sato Kozaki: A Journey into Fermented Flavors

Close to Sawara, Michi no Eki Hako-no-Sato Kozaki is a must-visit for fermentation enthusiasts, offering a dedicated store filled with artisanal products from all over Japan. Here, you'll find a variety of rare variations of miso, soy sauce and pickles, each representing the rich culinary traditions of different regions of the country.

Adjacent to the fermentation store, the fresh market focuses on locally grown produce, providing visitors with seasonal fruits, vegetables and other fresh ingredients from the Kozaki area. The on-site restaurant ties it all together, serving up dishes that highlight these local flavors.

MORE INFO: www.hakkounosato.com

More Info

For more information, please go to visitchiba.jp.

To get to Sawara by train, take the JR Sobu Line from Tokyo Station to Narita Station. (This will take about 50 minutes on the Narita Express, but be mindful when boarding, as some Narita Express trains bypass Narita Station. On the regular train, it will take around 70–90 minutes, with a possible transfer at Chiba.) At Narita Station, change to a local Narita Line train and ride 30 more minutes to Sawara Station.

Alternatively, you can take an express bus from Tokyo Station to Sawara. The bus departs from the Yaesu Exit and takes around 90 minutes.

A Romantic Seaside Winter Getaway in Fukuoka

Fresh oysters, sparkling illuminations and cozy coastal charm await on the island of Kyushu

Words by Alina Joan Ito

When winter descends upon Japan, Fukuoka emerges as a unique getaway spot, blending the charm of seaside attractions with romantic seasonal illuminations. Despite its southern location, it offers a surprisingly cozy wintertime experience, regionally famous for its freshly caught oysters and sparkling light displays.

For those seeking a memorable winter escape — and refuge from cold, snowy destinations — Fukuoka provides a perfect combination of culinary delights and visual spectacles.

The Oyster-Lover's Dream: Kaki-goya

One of Fukuoka's standout winter attractions is its oyster huts, known locally as *kaki-goya*. Open from October to April, these seasonal establishments are the perfect way to enjoy the peak of oyster season. The charm of *kaki-goya* lies not only in the freshness of the seafood served there, but also in the unique dining experience of cooking it oneself over a charcoal grill.

Around the prefecture, particularly in areas like Itoshima and Munakata, visitors can find bustling *kaki-goya*, where diners grill their



own oysters right at their tables. This interactive approach allows diners to savor the delightful brininess of these local delicacies, caught fresh from nearby waters, while enjoying the local experience and picturesque seaside views. Itoshima has the “Oyster Shack Alley,” an entire street full of *kaki-goya* that are run directly by local fishermen serving their freshest catch. Munakata also boasts several popular huts, including Genkai Yokocho, a fishing port food stall village that transforms into a vibrant *kaki-goya* in the wintertime.

Fukuoka city itself is home to several fantastic *kaki-goya* as well. The city's seafood is renowned for its freshness and flavor, with oysters that are plump and rich, embodying the essence of Fukuoka's coastal bounty. Paired with a glass of hot sake, this culinary experience is a must-try during a winter visit to Fukuoka.





The City of Lights

Fukuoka doesn't see much snow, but as the sun sets, the city becomes a dazzling winter wonderland thanks to its illumination displays. The city lights up with a festival of colors, creating a romantic atmosphere that attracts couples and families alike.

Key spots to see illuminations in Fukuoka city include JR Hakata City and Fukuhaku Deai Bridge, where twinkling lights wrap around the modern architecture and an elaborate Christmas tree takes center stage. Canal City, a massive shopping and entertainment complex, features spectacular light shows synchronized with music as well as a "River of Light" that spans the canal's entire length.

It feels as though the whole city sparkles in winter. The two streets of Tenjin Chikagai, stretching approximately 590 meters, are transformed into an illuminated avenue of white trees, glowing with champagne-gold-themed lights. In Ohori Park, the famed Mizuki Bridge and Ukimi-dou gazebo are festooned with LED lights, which shimmer on the surface of the large pond at the park's center. Fukuoka Tower and Momochi Seaside Park also shine brightly during this season, providing perfect backdrops for photos and romantic strolls.

For a truly unique experience, head up to Fukutsu city in mid- to late February to see the "Path of Light" at Miyajidake Shrine. The shrine stands at the end of a long, straight road that leads directly from the sea; twice a year, the setting sun aligns perfectly with this path, causing it to glow spectacularly with golden light — all the way from the water to the shrine's steps and picturesque torii gates. This rare and mystical event is commemorated with a festival and makes for an unforgettable sight.

An Unexpected Winter Wonderland

With its charming combination of seaside attractions and stunning seasonal illuminations, Fukuoka is an exceptional place for a winter getaway. During this season, the city is infused with warmth and romance, from its cozy oyster huts to its glittering light displays. Whether you're planning a couple's outing or a family adventure, this is a lovely destination to escape the winter blues.



Warm Up With Comforting Cuisine

Among Fukuoka's signature dishes, there are plenty of hearty specialties that are perfect for cozying up with when it's chilly and dark outside. Shabu-shabu and the region's beloved mizutaki — a chicken-based hot pot dish cooked with locally sourced vegetables — both present perfect opportunities for gathering around the dinner table to experience the warmth of Japanese hospitality.

These dishes are on the menu year-round at Kojimachi Nadaman Fukuoka Bettei, a collaboration between the Fukuoka Prefectural Government and the restaurant brand Nadaman located right in the heart of Tokyo. In wintertime, though, they're particularly satisfying.

On the restaurant's specialty hot pot dish course menu, visitors can choose between sumptuous Itoshima pork or Hakata wagyu beef shabu-shabu, or mizutaki made from umami-rich Hakata jidori chicken, served alongside a host of delectable local dishes.

More Info

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



French Elegance Meets Alpine Tranquility

The Tateshina highlands, in Nagano Prefecture, transform into a snowy paradise in winter — and Hôtel de L'Alpage promises a perfect alpine retreat

—
Words by Callie Beusman



In the Heart of the Highlands

Within Japan, Tateshina is a beloved winter retreat: an untouched ivory expanse with numerous soothing onsen and snow-covered trails. It's less well known to international tourists, however, meaning that you can enjoy world-class snow and breathtaking nature here without the crowds. There are several ski resorts within a 30-to-60-minute drive from Hôtel de L'Alpage, making it an ideal home base from which to engage in winter sports and exploration. The hotel is even equipped with a dry room where guests can store their ski wear, skis or boards, and boots when they return from the slopes.

The hotel is also just 30 to 40 minutes by car from Lake Suwa, the largest lake in the Nagano area. The site of Suwa Taisha — one of Japan's oldest and most important Shinto shrines — it's long been steeped in deep spiritual and cultural significance. Information on the four main shrines that comprise the entire shrine complex is available at the reception area of the hotel, where staff who are knowledgeable about the local area will be more than happy to help you plan the perfect day trip. In recent years, this area has also become something of a pilgrimage spot for fans of the critically acclaimed anime film *Your Name*. Director Makoto Shinkai grew up in Nagano and based the film's central crater lake on Lake Suwa; some of the movie's most memorable scenes showcase its incredible beauty, tranquility and mystical atmosphere.



For centuries, the Tateshina highlands, located in the southeastern part of Nagano Prefecture, have been revered for their majesty. Surrounded by the Japanese Alps, they're rich in natural beauty, with lush forests that change dramatically with the seasons, alpine meadows, volcanic landscapes and picturesque lakes — not to mention an abundance of hot springs.

In the colder months, the highlands are transformed into a winter wonderland, with trees and mountains limned in soft, white snow, attracting visitors from all over the country and

the world with their alpine ambience. Nestled in the heart of this scenic locale is Hôtel de L'Alpage, a hidden gem with peerless service and world-class cuisine, meticulously designed to evoke a French mansion.

Located on the site of a former noble residence, the hotel effuses European elegance. It's renowned for its fine French food and wine, and for its remarkable architecture and interior design, but it also serves as a serene haven for taking in the scenic splendor of the area. Each of its rooms looks out onto the mountains, immersing visitors in a pristine snowy vista encircled by sublime cobalt peaks that press against the sky.



onto the snow; playing your favorite music from the Bang & Olufsen speakers in each room as you play cards or board games ...

Venturing beyond your room, you'll find a host of cozy and luxurious activities in the hotel. Curl up by the fireplace in the winter garden by the hotel's entrance, or borrow a book from the sensuous and refined library bar before decompressing with a glass of wine or a hot beverage; the library is stocked with rare books from hotel owner Hiroshige Tobe's personal collection, many of them focused on art and architecture. There are also a number of day-trip hot spring facilities within walking distance of the hotel should you want to spend the day in warm healing waters drawn from the earth, and the grounds around the hotel are lovely for taking brief walks.



The hotel's in-house restaurant, Le Jardin, serves sophisticated yet unpretentious French cuisine tailored to the season. Contemplate at the snow-covered grounds while enjoying a course meal of winter delicacies, paired with French wine selected from the hotel's vast wine cellar, before heading to the adjoining bar area for a delicate digestif or a cigar in the dedicated smoking space.

It's not difficult to see why the Tatেশina highlands are such a well-loved winter retreat, and Hôtel de L'Alpage is one of the most exquisite and comfortable places from which to enjoy their beauty. It offers a singular experience: French elegance in the heart of the Japanese countryside, with miles of untouched nature.

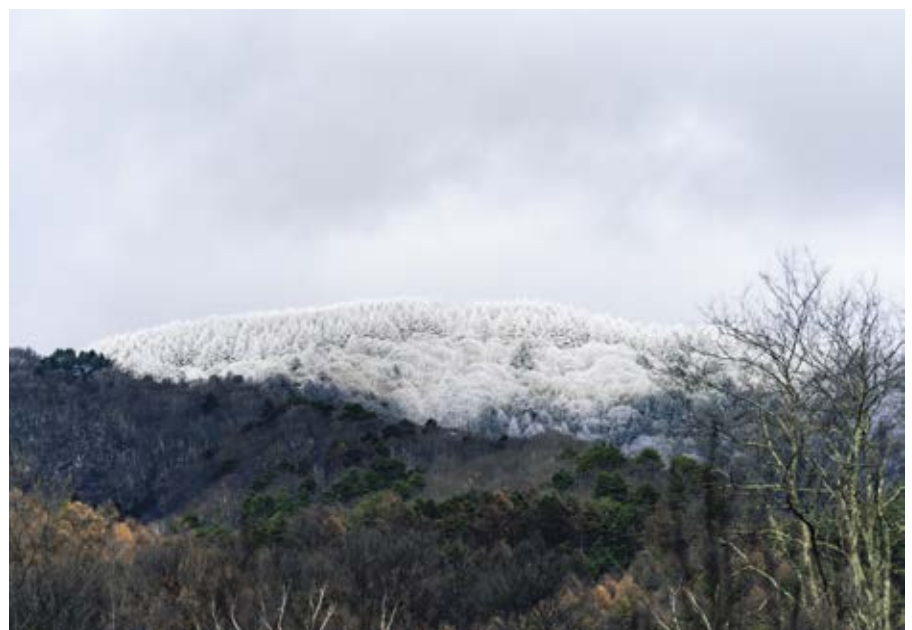
More Info

Hôtel de L'Alpage
4035-1820 Kitayama, Chino-shi, Nagano
T: 0266-67-2001 | W: hotelalpage.com



Cocooned in Luxury

Despite all that the Tatেশina highlands have to offer, some guests may prefer to spend the majority of their stay ensconced in Hôtel de L'Alpage, enjoying its varied amenities. This, too, is a wonderful way to enjoy the charms of the region: gazing out from the spacious and tastefully decorated rooms at the mountainous landscape and clear, starry night skies; rising early in the morning to bathe in a large, elegant tub that looks out





Soothing Waters and Forest Bathing

Step away from the chaos of everyday life at Hakone Retreat, an onsen escape in the mountains of Hakone

— Words by Matthew Hernon

An enchanting forest resort nestled in the mountains around Hakone, the aptly named Hakone Retreat offers a tranquil and rejuvenating escape from the cacophony of urban life. A nature immersion getaway, it's a place where time seems to pass more slowly as you lie back in your hot spring bath and listen to the harmonious symphony of chirping birds and rustling leaves.

Picturesque Wooden Hideaways

Hakone Retreat is spread over a vast area of land, with the accommodation split into two parts. Within the main Före building, there are 37 modern hotel rooms, designed

with a sense of understated luxury to make guests feel like they are in a Nordic resort. For an even more luxurious stay, guests can opt for one of the 18 private villas that are scattered around the forest, in a separate yet connected resort called Hakone Retreat Villa 1/F.

Blending seamlessly with the landscape, these picturesque wooden hideaways are all equipped with private open-air (or semi-open-air) hot spring baths, kitchens and fireplaces. Each one also has its own distinct style. Eleven of them, opened in 2016, were designed by renowned art director Tadmotsu Yagi. The other seven opened earlier this year. Kazuya Katagiri, who previously worked for Kengo Kuma & Associates, was tasked with designing the scenic properties.

I stayed in Suite 17 — one of the newer villas — where you can enjoy the natural light pouring in through a large, triangular window. It's a bright and airy space with carefully considered rustic accents. As with the other accommodation spaces at Hakone Retreat, there is no television or clock in

the room, as it's meant to be a space free from distractions, where guests can truly unwind. There is, however, an audio system with Bluetooth, allowing for a soundtrack of your choosing as you enjoy a long soak in the large bath.

On-Site Facilities

While it may be tempting to relax in the villa or room the whole time, Hakone Retreat has an abundance of on-site facilities that are worth exploring, including the relaxation area, Free Bird. For several hours in the late afternoon, guests can enjoy bottomless





wine or non-alcoholic beverages while taking in the surroundings from the patio (or from inside if it's chilly). There's also a mini library and plenty of games to keep children occupied.

Just across from Free Bird is Hakone Retreat's main hot spring bath, which is surrounded by untouched nature. The thick, milky water is said to boast several health benefits, such as healing properties for nerve pain and arteriosclerosis. For those staying in a villa, the water is the same as in the room, but sometimes it's nice to bathe in a different environment that has more open space.

For those who want to completely let go of any mental or physical fatigue they're feeling, a visit to Kōnoha Spa is recommended. The 100-minute signature program combines a holistic aromatherapy massage with a basic facial. There are plenty of other options on the menu as well, including a hot stone massage and Oriental reflexology.

Fine Dining in a Historic Setting

Those staying in the villas can enjoy a kaiseki course meal, featuring the freshest seasonal ingredients, at Hyoseki, a luxurious on-site Japanese restaurant. It's housed inside a historic building, which was originally opened



as a ryokan in 1914 and has served esteemed guests over the years, including Emperor Akihito.

My feast began with a gorgeously presented appetizer featuring hoozuki red bayberry, steamed duck loin and conger sushi. That was followed by soup and the most succulent sashimi imaginable. Also on the menu was grilled sweet fish, tender wagyu beef filet, a variety of vegetables and watermelon to finish.

Breakfast is served at Woodside Dining, a café inside a half-domed building with huge windows; those staying at Före can enjoy meals here as well. Although there's an extensive buffet and a wide selection of drinks, you can also request a sandwich. I opted for the signature BBLT (smoky bacon, burger, lettuce, tomato) on perfectly toasted

bread from the wood-fired oven. For those who fancy something lighter, there's a shop on site, and you can also order food from your villa.

Hiking and Sightseeing Nearby

Nestled in the forest, Hakone Retreat is an ideal setting for shinrin-yoku, or forest bathing. For more active guests, there are also various hiking routes nearby, such as the Sengoku-Hara Kojiri Nature Trail. For those who prefer cycling, rental bicycles are available at the resort.

In addition to its abundance of nature and hot spring baths, Hakone is, of course, also known for having a wide range of museums. Less than five minutes from the resort is the Hakone Venetian Glass Museum, displaying both modern and classical works in various forms, including vases, goblets, lamps and sculptures. There are several other museums nearby, too, such as the Pola Museum of Art, which boasts a collection of around 10,000 works, including pieces by Monet, Picasso and Fougita.



More Info

For more information on staying at Före, please see hakone-retreat.com/fore/en/.
For the villas, see hakone-retreat.com/villa/en/stay/.



Indulge Yourself

At Seven x Seven Ishigaki, guests can curate their own luxury experiences in a subtropical paradise

Words by Matthew Hemon

Luxury travel is constantly evolving, meaning those within the hospitality industry must constantly anticipate and adapt to the changing preferences of their guests. In recent years, there has been a shift in regard to visitors' expectations; it's no longer simply about one-size-fits-all extravagance, but rather personalized luxury that allows travelers to create their own journeys.

This is exactly what you can expect at Seven x Seven Ishigaki. Located on the outskirts of Ishigaki city, overlooking the stunning azure waters of the Pacific Ocean, it bills itself as “the world’s first self-hospitality hotel.”



Self-Hospitality

According to David Miskin, the creative force behind the Seven x Seven brand and design, self-hospitality gives guests far more freedom and privacy without sacrificing quality of service. “What we are doing is giving guests control of their own experience from start to finish,” he explains. “This begins from the digital self-check-in, which eliminates the need for formal front desk interactions. Through our app, guests can navigate the property, access amenities and make requests on their own terms.

“We’ve designed an environment that offers all the luxury and elegance you’d expect, but without the constant oversight that can sometimes make traditional luxury stays feel restrictive.”

In recent years, Miskin has seen luxury properties fail to adjust their approach to the needs of modern-day travelers. They've put "too much focus on controlling the touchpoint of every guest," he says, and this leaves guests feeling "over-supervised, while also limiting their ability to relax, explore and have fun."

At Seven x Seven, on-site staff members are always available should guests require their assistance, but otherwise, you'll hardly notice they are there. Once you've checked in digitally, you can spend time however you please — and there are plenty of options to keep visitors occupied within the hotel grounds. The resort has two impressive pools, both with their own whirlpool bath: a family pool on the ground floor that's available to all hotel guests, plus a rooftop infinity pool for those 20 and over.



"The former is designed to be large and welcoming, with two sections, one specifically for children," says Miskin. The latter allows for stunning panoramic views of the sea and coastline, and it has a swim-up bar, as well as a dedicated dining area where guests can enjoy cocktails, food and shisha.

In terms of amenities, Seven x Seven Ishigaki also boasts saunas and cold baths with beautiful design flourishes. One of the highlights is unquestionably its authentic Finnish sauna, where you can experience löyly — the hot steam that rises from a sauna stove when water is poured on the hot stones — directly from the mouth of a shisa, a mythological lion-dog statue with great significance in Okinawan culture.

When it comes to food and drink, Batida — a unique fusion restaurant that combines Italian, Spanish and Mexican influences — is well worth trying, as is Red, a chic underground bar and lounge that serves more than 200 types of gin.

Stunning Suites

For those looking to truly elevate their luxury experience, Seven x Seven Ishigaki has four suite options, each with stunning views and a large kitchen and dining space. For those wanting to go for a private swim, the pool suite is equipped with a sizable pool, as well as a private spa area where you can enjoy a sauna, cold plunge pool and a whirlpool bath.

The biggest of the suites is the penthouse on the 12th and 13th floors. It can accommodate up to eight people and comes with a minibar and wine cellar. It's an impressive space, but for Miskin, it's the suite with the swimming pool that appeals the most.

“If I were to stay one night at Seven x Seven, I would ideally book the pool suite, and I'd likely spend most of the day in my room,” he says. He notes that, since the room has a fully stocked kitchen, it's easy to prepare and enjoy one's own meals there. “Afterward, I'd enjoy the private pool, sauna, cold plunge and maybe even relax in the whirlpool bath. For dinner, I'd be more social and head to Batida. Later, I'd drop by Red Bar for drinks, play a round of billiards and maybe do some karaoke before returning to my room for an evening swim and a detox in my private sauna.”



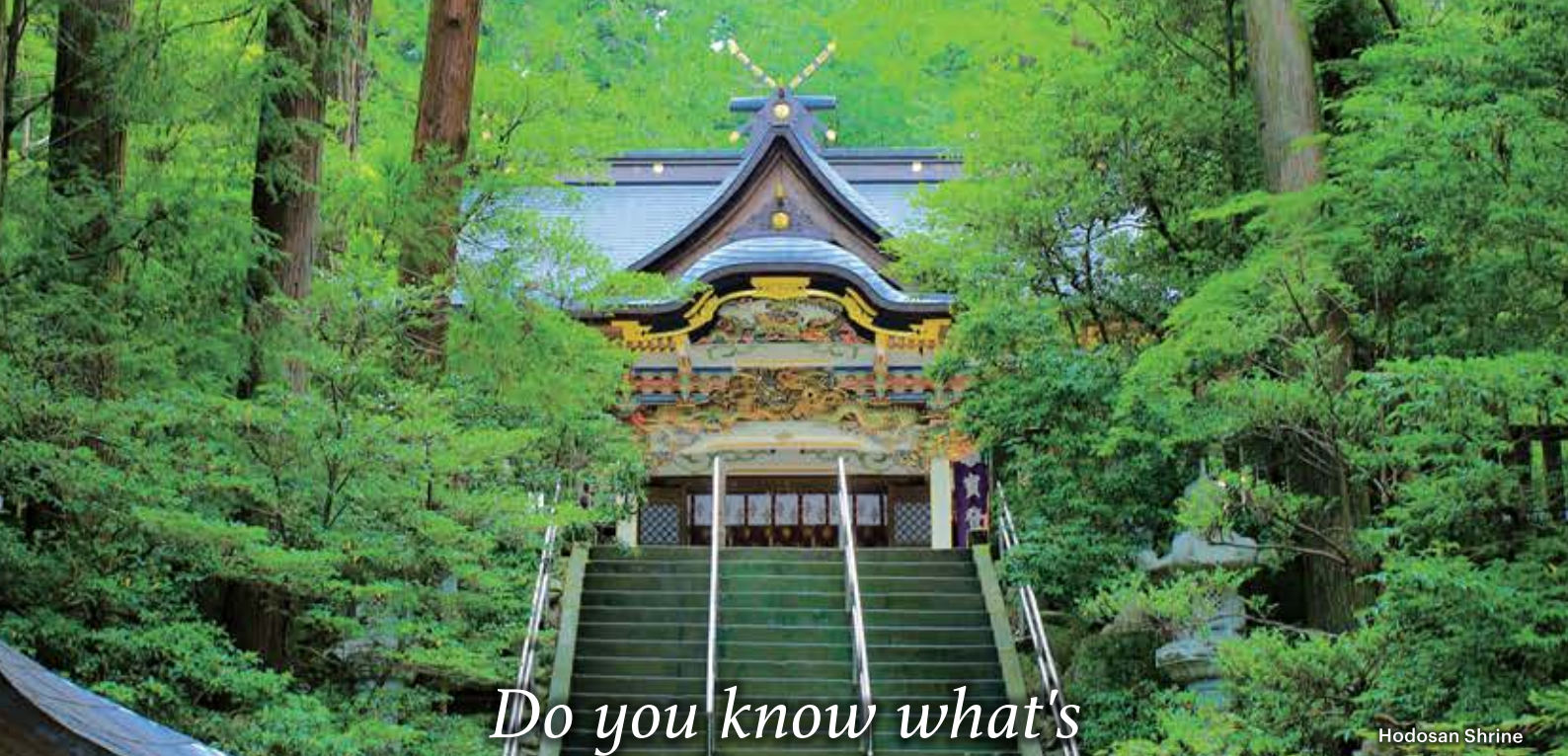
A Prime Location

A night or two in one of Seven x Seven's suites is certainly very appealing, though even for those who stay in one of the deluxe or standard rooms, it promises to be a memorable trip. Many guests will no doubt choose to spend their whole time at the hotel, making the most of all the facilities. Others, however, may want to explore outside. The resort, which is located 18 minutes by car from New Ishigaki Airport, is just a four-minute walk from the white sands of Maesato Beach.

The island's top tourist attractions are easily accessible by car, including the mystical Blue Cave, which is a popular spot for snorkeling, and Ishigaki Yaima Village, where century-old traditional houses have been carefully restored. Though Ishigaki is most well known for its pristine beaches, it's also lush with mangrove rivers and broad-leaf forests. It's a delightful place to tour around. The only problem is that you probably won't want to leave your hotel.

More Info

To book your stay at Seven x Seven Ishigaki, please visit sevenxseven.com/hotels/ishigaki.



Hodosan Shrine

Do you know what's

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We recommend an adventure to Saitama Prefecture, a charming place just north of Tokyo!
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Kawagoe - The Edo - Period Town



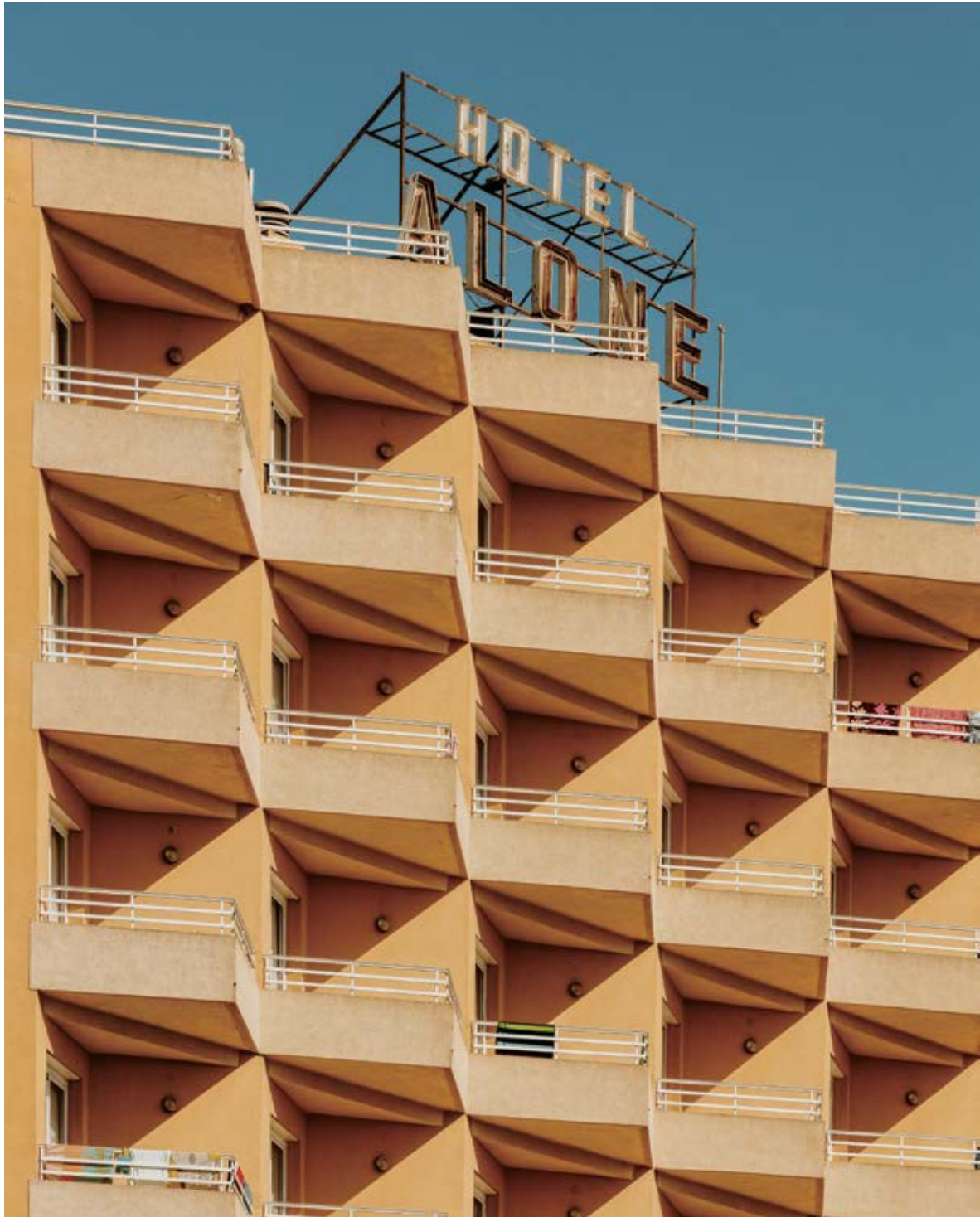
JUST NORTH OF TOKYO



Contact us : Saitama Tourism Support Desk +81-48-788-5336

※Business hours: Weekdays 9:00-17:30

GUIDE



Josigo "Benidorm, Spain" 2018.

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Art World

Our pick of the best exhibitions in the city.

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Perfect Days

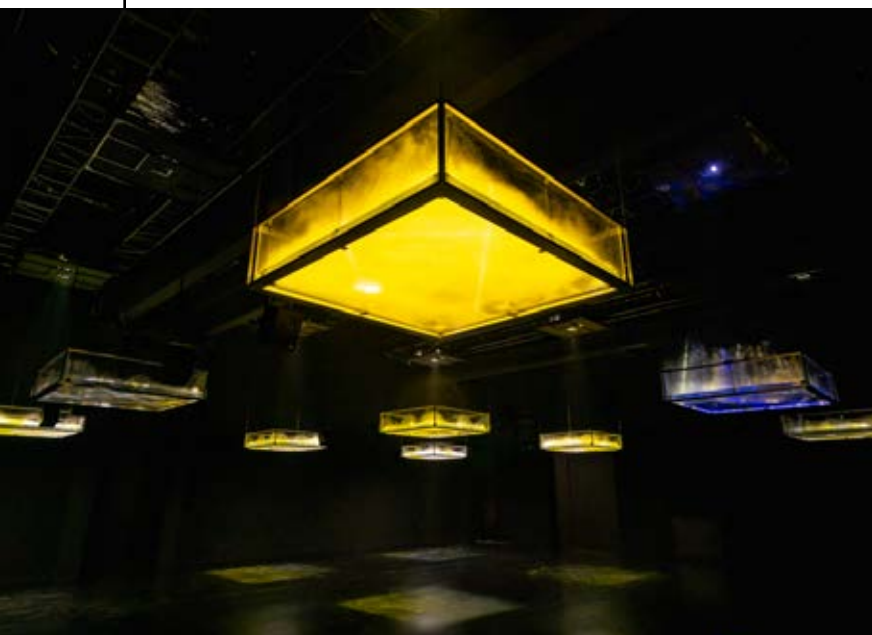
Two notable Tokyoites describe how they'd spend an ideal day in the city.

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Music

Must-listen albums according to Sapporo punk-jazz band The Hatch.

Ryuichi Sakamoto and Shiro Takatani "LIFE – fluid, invisible, inaudible..." 2007/2023. Installation view of "Ryuichi Sakamoto: Sound And Time" at M Woods, Chengdu, 2023. Image courtesy of M Woods.



'Ryuichi Sakamoto: Seeing Sound, Hearing Time' at the Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo

This tribute to the late composer Ryuichi Sakamoto takes the form of an immersive exhibition, leaning into Sakamoto's experimental approach toward sound and silence as inspiration. Visitors are invited to perceive sound as a spatial, almost tangible entity in this journey through his life's work, with installations, archival footage and enveloping soundscapes turning the gallery space into a unique sensory journey. This homage to an icon of Japanese music is sure to be both moving and thought-provoking. **Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo** From December 21, 2024, until March 30, 2025 mot-art-museum.jp/en/exhibitions/RS/

THE ART WORLD

Our pick of the city's best exhibitions

Words by Victoria Bennett and Melissa Boyce-Hurd

guide Art & Literature



Aka "A Momentary Goodnight / つかのまのおやすみ"

'Hello Kitty 50th Anniversary Exhibition' at the Tokyo National Museum

Observant Tokyoites will have noticed that Hello Kitty is *very* excited to celebrate her birthday this year. The Sanrio icon turned 50 on November 1, and there's seemingly no end to her appearances as she impressively maintains her decades-long relevance. As kawaii aesthetics gain popularity across the globe, the Tokyo National Museum offers cuteness enthusiasts the chance to learn more about the face that launched a thousand brand collaborations. **Tokyo National Museum** Until February 24, 2025 helloworldkittyexhibition.com



Mame "Hello Kitty 50th Anniversary"



‘Le Corbusier: Synthesis of the Arts 1930-1965’ at Panasonic Shiodome Museum of Art

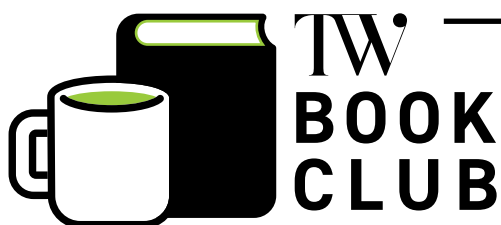
Step into the visionary world of emblematic artist-architect Le Corbusier at this comprehensive exhibition dedicated to his ambitious gesamtkunstwerk: the desire to unify art, design and architecture. While Le Corbusier is popularly known for his minimalist, concrete-laden architectural style, “Synthesis of the Arts” spotlights his more colorful and playful artistic vision as seen through his sculptures, tapestries and rare visual documentation — revealing a different side to the father of modernism. **Panasonic Shiodome Museum of Art** From January 11 until March 23, 2025 panasonic.co.jp/ew/museum/

‘Yosigo: Holiday Memories’ at Tokyu Plaza Shibuya

Dive into a world of dreamy sun-soaked summers and carefree travels through the work of Spanish photographer Yosigo. His signature style of cool, balanced architectural shots hypnotically captures the essence of adventure and wanderlust within the built environment. Read our interview with Yosigo on page 28 to discover how the photographer’s artistic approach has changed thanks to his experiences in Japan. **Tokyu Plaza Shibuya** Until December 26 yosigoexhibit-jpn.com/



Yosigo 'La Manga, Murcia, Spain'



Haven’t joined our online book club yet? Here’s what we’re reading next and where to find us

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.

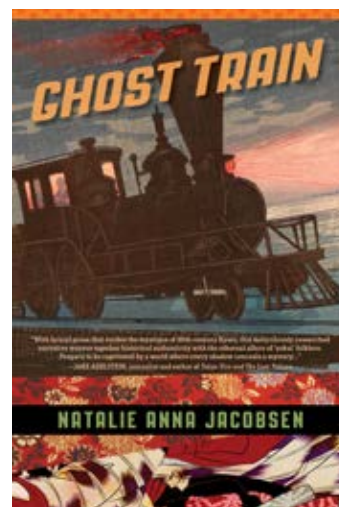
WHAT WE’RE READING NOW

Ghost Train

Released in October 2024, Natalie Jacobsen’s debut novel, *Ghost Train*, is set in 1877 Kyoto during the Meiji Restoration. The story follows Maru, the daughter of a samurai who has laid down his sword in support of the new emperor. As her father works away from Kyoto, Maru must hide her identity by working in a teahouse run by a harsh geiko. But to Maru, the emperor’s bright new promised world seems to be quickly falling apart. Meanwhile, fear is sweeping across Kyoto as young women begin to disappear. Maru must navigate a web of rumors, including unsettling claims

that the emperor’s revolutionary new train runs on blood.

Jacobsen’s intricate historical research and passion for Japanese folklore lend superbly to her vividly visual storytelling style. The reader is led through the moral and societal clashes of the technological revolution in Japan to a refreshingly unexpected and dramatic climax. Full of yurei and yokai, *Ghost Train* explores how radical change can bring fear and upheaval as well as progress, and is perfect for fans of historical fiction, dark fantasy and folk horror, as well as lovers of the paranormal.



Don’t forget to share your thoughts with us by tagging us at [@twbookclub](https://www.instagram.com/twbookclub) on Instagram and [@twbookclubjp](https://www.x.com/twbookclubjp) on X. You’ll also find us on Facebook at [facebook.com/twbookclub](https://www.facebook.com/twbookclub) and on Goodreads.

TV'social

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

By David Schneider



Farewell Reception hosted by former Swiss Ambassador to Japan Andreas Baum at Swiss Embassy in Tokyo. From left to right: Mr. Alessio Cazzetta, H.E. Mr. Andreas Baum, and Yumi Ito.

From left to right: Director Akkrom Isakov, Bakhodyr Jalolou, Masaya Kato, and Osamu Yamamoto at the Tokyo press conference for "Unbeatable: Road to Tokyo."



Celebrating the 214th Anniversary of the Independence of Chile at Meiji Kinenkan. Flanked by New Zealand Ambassador H.E. Mr. Hamish Cooper and his spouse, Chilean Ambassador to Japan H.E. Mr. Ricardo G. Rojas.

Celebrating the 214th Anniversary of the Independence of Chile at Meiji Kinenkan. From left to right: Spanish Ambassador to Japan, and guest of the Chilean Embassy.



Celebrating the 214th Anniversary of the Independence of Chile at Meiji Kinenkan. From left to right: Guest of the Chilean Embassy and Jamaican Ambassador to Japan, H.E. Ms. Shorna-Kay Richards.



Celebrating the 214th Anniversary of the Independence of Chile at Meiji Kinenkan. From left to right: Spanish Ambassador to Japan, H.E. Mr. Fidel Sendagorta, Ecuadorian Ambassador, H.E. Mr. César Montaña Huerta, and Argentine Ambassador, H.E. Mr. Rubén Eduardo Miguel Tempone.

Celebrating the 214th Anniversary of Chilean Independence at Meiji Kinenkan with members of the Commercial Section of the Embassy of Chile.



Celebrating the 214th Anniversary of the Independence of Chile at Meiji Kinenkan: Jordan Ambassador to Japan, H.E. Ms Lina Annab flanked by guests of the Chilean Embassy.

Celebrating the winners of the 2024 'Japan through Diplomats' Eyes' Photo Exhibition, held at Roppongi Hills Cafe under the patronage of Her Imperial Highness Princess Takamado. This year's first prize was awarded to Jackie Lou Ong, Attaché at the Embassy of the Republic of the Philippines.



Celebrating the winners of the 2024 'Japan through Diplomats' Eyes' Photo Exhibition, held at Roppongi Hills Cafe under the patronage of Her Imperial Highness Princess Takamado. From left: Belgian Ambassador H.E. Mr. Antoine Evrard and Guillermo Cervantes, spouse of the Ambassador.



Celebrating the winners of the 2024 'Japan through Diplomats' Eyes' Photo Exhibition, held at Roppongi Hills Cafe under the patronage of Her Imperial Highness Princess Takamado. From left to right: Georgian Ambassador H.E. Mr. Teimuraz Lezhava and Ambassador of the Republic of Honduras, H.E. Mr. Harold Burgos.

Celebrating the winners of the 2024 'Japan through Diplomats' Eyes' Photo Exhibition, held at Roppongi Hills Cafe under the patronage of Her Imperial Highness Princess Takamado. From left to right: Chairperson of this year's Executive Committee, Moroccan Ambassador H.E. Mr. Rachad Bouhlal, and New Zealand Ambassador H.E. Mr. Hamish Cooper.



Celebrating the winners of the 2024 'Japan through Diplomats' Eyes' Photo Exhibition, held at Roppongi Hills Cafe under the patronage of Her Imperial Highness Princess Takamado. From left: a member of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Mr. Bjoern Wallbrecht, spouse of a German diplomat.



At the special photography exhibition The Universe of Imagination at the Foreign Correspondents' Club of Japan in Marunouchi, hosted by photographer and designer Benjamin Lee. From left to right: Taiko drummer and Harlequin of 'Hope and Love,' Eva Kestner, and photographer Benjamin Lee.

Attending the fourth Eurasian Women's Forum: From left, HRH Princess Maha bint Mishari Abdulaziz Al Saud of Saudi Arabia and Keiko Kawashima, founder of K&A Associates.



Farewell Reception hosted by former German Ambassador to Japan, Clemens Von Goetze and Dr. Sonja von Goetze at their residence. From left, Carole Yoshida, H.E. Mr. Clemens von Goetze, his spouse Dr. Sonja von Goetze and Reiko Tojo.

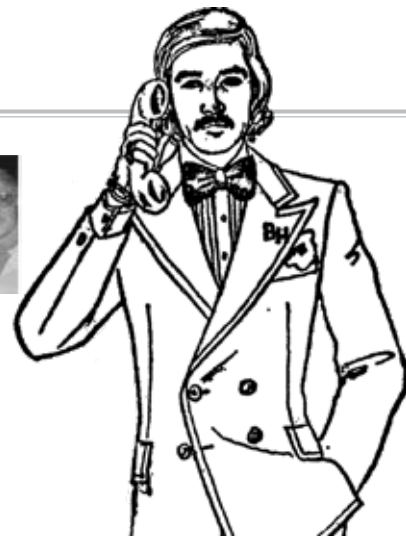
Bill Hersey's Partyline • Connecting Communities Since 1970 •

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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: David Miskin

David Miskin is a creative executive, brand strategist, space designer and luxury expert. Though he usually divides his time between Tokyo and New York City, Japan has recently become his base, as he's currently working on developing three hotel brands in the country, including Seven x Seven, Fav Lux and Fav. Here's what a perfect day in the city looks like for him:



Next up: No day in Tokyo is complete without a stop at **Wolfman Barber Shop** in Roppongi for a haircut and shape-up. Ren, my stylist, is incredibly detailed and always manages to fit me in. A quick trim and I'm set for the day ahead.

“

If we're talking about my perfect day, then a visit to one of Tokyo's many museums or art installations is a must.

”

I love seeking out inspiration, especially through modern art and Japanese culture. So if we're talking about my perfect day, then a visit to one of Tokyo's many museums or art installations is a must. I'm always on the lookout for the next great exhibit, and one of my favorites has been “Tiffany Wonder” at **Tokyo Node**. Last week, I visited the Terence Conran exhibition at **Tokyo Station Gallery**.

For lunch, I'd grab ramen, something I love doing on the rare days that I have downtime. I'm frequently at business lunches, but when time permits, I can't resist sneaking away to one of my secret ramen spots — but I'll keep those hidden for now!



To wrap up the day, I'd meet some friends for dinner. I often meet with my close friend Shinji Takei, the founder of **Bingo Sports**. He's always introducing me to unique, underground dinner spots; recently, he took me to **Kurogi**. Before dinner, we'll usually stop by his showroom to check out his latest collection of limited-edition collector automobiles. We've been connected for years since my time doing creative direction for **Lamborghini**.

That's a glimpse into my perfect day in Tokyo — a balance of work, relaxation, inspiration and good company that keeps me motivated and creatively fulfilled.

Tokyo's best-kept secret is ...

Soba Kappo Sato is an ultra-exclusive, reservation-only spot where dinner is elevated to an art form. With limited seating and an atmosphere of quiet elegance, it's a hidden gem for Tokyo's most discerning diners.

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

Narisawa in Minami-Aoyama. I've heard so much about Chef Yoshihiro Narisawa and his dedication to bringing nature to the plate.

More Info

Follow Miskin on Instagram at [@davidmiskin](#).

My perfect day in Tokyo is ...

I'm an early riser, likely due to juggling time zones between the East and West. No matter how much I try to sleep in, I'm always up early. My day usually begins with a walk to the kitchen for a fresh cup of coffee. I'm partial to **Dean & DeLuca** beans — one of the perks of living in Tokyo is that **Dean & DeLuca** still operates here, unlike in New York. As I enjoy my coffee, I catch up on messages and emails from the night before.

Next, I head to my private gym, **Med**, in Minami-Aoyama for an hour of training before getting ready for the rest of the day. After my workout, I'd stop by my favorite breakfast spot, **Clinton St. Baking Company**. The food and service are always excellent, and while there's usually a line, it's well worth the wait. My biggest challenge is choosing between the seasonal pancakes and the amazing sandwiches.

My Perfect Day: Robin Rastenberger

Robin Rastenberger is basically a nightlife Renaissance man — he’s a venue developer, creative director, soundscape artist, model and co-founder of the artist platform-slash-event Tokyo Love Hotels. Here’s his dream day in Tokyo:

My perfect day in Tokyo is ...

I would start my morning in Omotesando, at **Cafe Les Jeux Grenier**. This cozy, kissaten-esque take on a French café is perfect for a few productive hours. I’d order a coffee (stoically dripped to perfection), settle in with my laptop and dive into work. The atmosphere is relaxed but with enough occasional social encounters to keep me both focused and inspired. Smoking is allowed, too.

For lunch, I’d head to **Ohitsuzen Tanbo**, just a stone’s throw away. It’s a casual restaurant famous for its take on the traditional Japanese dish ochazuke. With premium ingredients and a motherly presentation, Tanbo turns what usually is a simple bowl of rice and tea into umami realness.

Next, I’d take a brief stroll over to **Space Banksia**, a charming community-based gallery and event space located in central Harajuku. It’s warm and welcoming, run by a family of four. We call it a Tokyo oasis; it’s a great place to take a break, experience a different side of the culture and meet like-minded creatives, inbounds and art enthusiasts from all over.

After finishing work, I’d head to **FunFan**, a lively Asian fusion restaurant in Nakameguro. The menu is full of bold, creative dishes that blend traditional Asian flavors with modern twists. From street food-inspired starters to inventive mains, the food caters to both locals and visitors.

Post-dinner drinks: **Antonic** in Nakameguro, a hidden gem that specializes in gin. They offer an all-you-can-drink



“
If you’re looking for a laid-back night with a solid menu and vibe that blends art and casual charm, MSB is a must-visit.
”

special, but with a twist: You would have to try a new gin with each order. The staff knows exactly what they are doing, and their extensive knowledge of gin has inspired me both in and out of work.

Then, I’d make a quick stop at **Tremolo**, a velvety and neon-dressed karaoke bar with friendly staff and fashion and entertainment industry-based clientele. Considering the introduction, it’s surprisingly unpretentious, and I always end up meeting someone interesting.

Finally, I’d end the evening at **HVEN**, a brutalist DJ bar, café and gallery in Nakameguro, one of the few venues in Tokyo focused solely on four-on-the-floor, with deep house-, techno- and electronica-heavy events held daily. Aside from good music, the bar menu caters to vegetarians and pescatarians, packing some proper flavor.

Then a cab ride home, and time for bed.

Tokyo’s best-kept secret is ...

Tucked away on a quiet side street of Shinjuku-sanchome, **MSB** is one of Tokyo’s hidden gems. This intimate bar offers more than just great drinks, with effortlessly chic decor and a clean-yet-grungy vibe giving off that “in the middle of Tokyo yet where are we?” vibe. The ambience is artsy and relaxed, with a welcoming atmosphere that invites you to stay for hours ... and I mean hours.

What truly sets MSB apart is its mama — a Japanese term for a bar’s proprietress — known as Sacchan to the regulars. She’s the heart and soul of the bar, offering a buoyant, friendly presence that makes you feel like you’re in a second home.

If you’re looking for a laid-back night with a solid menu and vibe that blends art and casual charm, MSB is a must-visit.



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

Kabi in Nakameguro has been on my radar for quite some time now, not just for its brand aesthetic but also because I’ve heard nothing but great reviews about its pairing courses and attention to detail. The Japanese minimalist design of the space seems to offer an intimate yet modern dining experience.

More Info

Follow Rastenberger on Instagram at [@robin.rastenberger](https://www.instagram.com/robin.rastenberger).





MUSIC

Members of the popular Sapporo punk-jazz band select their favorite albums

Words by Kim Kahan

An oft-accepted theory is that the best musicians are constantly evolving their sound. This is completely true when it comes to The Hatch, a band in flux. The Hatch began to build a name for itself around the mid-2010s, gaining clout for raucous shows in the band members' hometown of Sapporo, where they delivered post-hardcore and punk through a lens of fuzzy noise — and with the odd trombone toot. Its four members at the time — guitarist Ryoken Miyazaki, bassist Ryutaro Iwasaki, drummer Kento Yamazaki and frontman-slash-keys-slash-trombonist Midori Yamada — did not hold back. Yet in the five years between forming and releasing their debut album, *OpaqueAge*, in 2018, the band had started the shift from aggressive punk to something more soulful, albeit with a punky edge.

Then came the band's sophomore album, *Shape of Raw*

to Come, which TW named one of 2022's best albums. It set the band firmly on the path of individuality and saw the group compared to seminal bands like Death Grips. In 2024, the band added another new member, percussionist Souichiro Anzai. Though Anzai lacked musical experience, the band members liked his vibe. Anzai's added percussion, which The Hatch debuted at a recent live show, takes the band into polyrhythmic territory, with a good dose of soul to boot.

Yet despite lineup changes and evolutions in sound, the band retains its punk spirit, supporting young bands with The Justice, its influential all-day annual festival. The Justice has already spawned new bands like Glans, which went on to release on the same label as The Hatch. The latest edition, held in Sapporo, included artists like Lausbub and Kopy.

Find The Hatch on Linktree: linktr.ee/thehatchlinktree.

Five Albums To Add to Your Playlist

Pedra do Espia

by Itiberê Orquestra Familia

Band veteran, bassist and composer Itiberê Zwarg made this with other young musicians. Even as the odd time signatures, unique chord progressions and harmonies unfold one after another, the warm atmosphere keeps it relatable. This is the sort of music I want to create.



Could We Be More by Kokoroko

Along with the Snarky Puppy-like horn approach and the floating sensation coming from the chords, this album's Afrobeat and African rhythms are really legit, so you can learn about rhythm while listening, without realizing it. It's a fantastic album.

Diaspora Problems by Soul Glo

This album, coming as it does from one part of the current hardcore scene, stands out for its sheer amount of music information and its insanely high level of intensity. In spite of this, it's also very poppy. Soul Glo is a new-generation hardcore hero, redefining the standard for extreme alternative music!



Far Star by Gilad Hekselman

Guitarist Gilad Hekselman's alternative approach to jazz guitar is really memorable. From the opening whistle theme, it feels like we're setting off on a magnificent journey, coming and going from city to countryside to space, with its incredible, sultry guitar line. I wish I could play guitar like this. The final track feels like blasting straight into space.

Private Reasons by Bruno Pernadas

Pernadas is an institution of Portugal's contemporary music scene. His music traverses the borders of various genres, like jazz, pop, folk and classic, while creating a psyche rock, floating sensation. I listen to this all the time, as it feels like I'm traveling the world on a ferry that is gently rocking.



Events

It's party season, so get on and boogie down

Xiangyu: Enryo no Katamari

Tokyo's happiest singer is back with her own event, featuring key names from the Tokyo scene, including Gimgigam and Koichi Mitsuoka.

DATE: Dec 2

PRICE: ¥3,400

VENUE: Spotify O-Nest

INFO: shibuya-o.com/nest/schedule/
遠慮のかたまり/

Upper Fields Fest

Yoyogi vintage shop Delta hosts talks and music for its 20th anniversary. The lineup features heavyweights like Hakushi Hasegawa, Kaho Nakamura and former TW music page guests Mars89 and Ntski.

DATE: Dec 7-8

PRICE: ¥13,000

VENUE: OPRCT

INFO: breathbydelta.com/collections/upper-fields-fest

Waifu With Bashar Murad

Seminal queer collective Waifu invites Palestinian pop artist Bashar Murad and more to Studio Freedom for its biggest party yet.

DATE: Dec 20

PRICE: TBA

VENUE: Studio Freedom

INFO: [instagram.com/waifu_party](https://www.instagram.com/waifu_party)

Flows

After a spellbinding performance last year, the Nujabes Metaphorical Ensemble returns. The supporting bill includes acid jazz legend Mark Farina and famed Japanese producer-slash-DJ Powder.

DATE: Dec 29

PRICE: ¥8,800

VENUE: Yebisu The Garden Hall

INFO: flows-jp.com

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