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# SUMMER 2024

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**J**ourney through time and Tokyo with our Summer Issue. Past and future collide as we meet visionaries transforming akiya houses, YouTubers embracing kimono tradition, and culinary guides spanning retro flavors to cutting-edge cuisine. Dive into exclusive interviews and a season of stories that transcend time, filling your summer in Japan with things to do, new places to explore and all that's happening in our incredible city.

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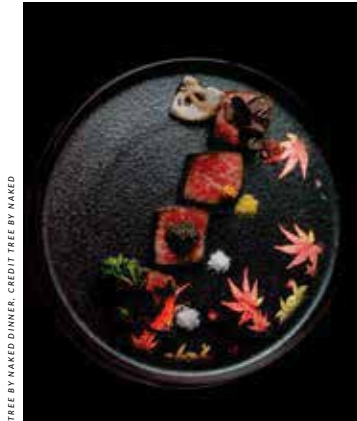
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TREE BY NAKED DINNER. CREDIT TREE BY NAKED



TREE BY NAKED. CREDIT TREE BY NAKED

Throughout 2024

## TREE by NAKED

Never has a meal been quite as immersive as that of TREE by NAKED in Yoyogi Park. The newly reopened restaurant spans three floors and serves a *taberu aato taiken* (edible art experience). The entire space, including the tables, is engulfed in digital artwork featuring VR technology, projection mapping, lighting, and music. The elaborate dishes, too, are works of art and interact with the digital art as they are placed before you. Indulge your senses for an eight-course meal featuring dishes like squid ink gnocchi and steak with truffle, or simply visit for a snack and a coffee on the bright and spacious upper floors.

Yoyogi Park, 1-10-2 Tomigaya, Shibuya-ku

¥¥



HILTON HOTEL BEER GARDEN DRINKS CREDIT SAN MADDICOTT

Until mid-September

## Summer Beer Garden at the Hilton Tokyo

Dine on Spanish cuisine over the sparkling skyscrapers of Shinjuku as you sip on a beer or a glass of wine. This summer-exclusive rooftop beer garden is inspired by Spanish food culture, featuring eight tapas-style dishes alongside 90 minutes of bottomless beer, wine, and cocktails curated for Spanish gin. Eat and drink the night away in the open evening air, tasting the flavors of Spain while looking over the Japanese city lights.

7F Rooftop Terrace at the Hilton Tokyo, 6-6-2 Nishi-Shinjuku, Shinjuku-ku

¥¥¥



M BAR CREDIT SHERATON MIYAKO HOTEL TOKYO

Until Aug 31

## Intelligent Cocktails at M Bar

Test your Japanese skills in a new type of drinking game at the Sheraton Miyako Hotel's M Bar. While sipping on your welcome drink, solve the bartender's riddles and collect the keywords. If you can work out the final keyword, the bartenders will deem you worthy of the "intelligent cocktail," rumored to be a different concoction depending on how your intelligence is perceived. The price includes a welcome drink, snacks, main cocktail, and clue-cracking experience. Or, simply visit for an elegant cocktail at the bar.

M Bar at The Sheraton Miyako Hotel, 1-1-50 Shirokanedai, Minato-ku

¥¥¥

Until Sep 1

## The Sodeisha Group: An Era Born Out of Avant-garde Ceramics

The Kikuchi Kanjitsu Memorial Tomo Museum is showcasing the unique ceramic stylings of the Sodeisha Group as the second half of a two-part exhibition. Sodeisha was formed in 1948 by Kyoto-based artists, and they went on to lead the postwar ceramic art scene in Japan. This second installment, beginning in July, focuses on their later work centered around figurative expression. This includes Yasuo Hayashi's "Hotcake" and Osamu Suzuki's "Horse." These are not your typical delicate teacups and plates, but creative forms of expression and imagined scenes brought to life.

Kikuchi Kanjitsu Memorial Tomo Museum, 4-1-35 Toranomom, Minato-ku

¥



THE SODEISHA GROUP CREDIT SUZUKI OSAMU, THORSETT1971, THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF MODERN ART, KYOTO. WAS.03D17.03H81.0CM

# ABOUT TOWN

Look to the future with light shows, modern art, and creative cocktails this summer.

BY CASSANDRA LORD

As the summer sun climbs high, Tokyo overflows with summer events. In this edition of About Town, we invite you to step into the future and embrace the cutting-edge creativity sprawling across the city. Whether dining amidst a fusion of digital art and haute cuisine or delving into avant-garde exhibitions that redefine traditional aesthetics, this summer promises a bounty of experiences that dazzle and inspire.



CREDIT: ANDRÉ BAUCHANT, THE FRUIT STALL, 1950, NAKANOSHIMA MUSEUM OF ART, OSAKA FROM TRIO, THEME "THE IMAGINARY GARDEN"

Until August 25

## Trio: Modern Art Collections from Paris, Tokyo and Osaka

The three cities of Paris, Tokyo and Osaka, each featuring its own unique culture and creativity, have come together for a summer exhibition in the National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo. Each city will display works from their respective modern art museums in a new experimental collection made up of 34 trios of artwork from each museum. The trios are selected from each museum based on a common thread, which may be its subject matter, motif, color palette, or something else entirely. The exhibition hopes to introduce a new way of looking at modern art and encourage fresh perspectives on the works of the 110 artists in the collection, including the likes of Henri Matisse and Yorozu Tetsugoro.

The National Museum of Modern Art, 3-1 Kitanomaru-koen, Chiyoda-ku

¥



Until Sep 6

## Calder: Un effet du Japonais

In the towering Azabudai Hills that opened just last year, the Azabudai Hills Gallery has made its debut with an exhibition of the modern art of Alexander Calder, an American creative known for his innovative mobiles and sculptures such as the 14-foot wide *Black Beast*. The exhibit, titled "Calder: Un effet du Japonais," explores the lasting effect of Japanese traditions and aesthetics on Calder's work from the 1930s to 1970s. Take in the unique designs, which range from mobiles to oil paintings. These include his abstract structure *Un effet du Japonais*, made with sheet metal and wire rods.

Azabudai Hills Gallery, Azabudai Hills Garden Plaza A MBF, 5-8-1 Toranomon, Minato-ku

Pricing TBC



Throughout 2024

## Performances at the New LaLa Arena Tokyo Bay

After opening in April this year, the new LaLa Arena is welcoming various performing artists to its spacious halls throughout the summer. Performances are set to include the musical stylings of Ryuji Imaichi and Aimyon, along with family-friendly shows like Disney on Ice's "Find Your Gift." The spacious arena was designed with the basketball home team of the Chiba Jets in mind, featuring a dynamic design reminiscent of a jet and its jet stream. Located around 40 minutes by train from Tokyo Station, the arena will hold music, entertainment and sports events alike.

LaLa Arena Tokyo Bay, 2-5-15 Hamacho, Funabashi, Chiba

Pricing TBC



# Time Travel Eats

Explore restaurants and cafes that take you back in time – or to your future self.

BY CASSANDRA LORD



COFFEE SAKAN SHU CREDIT, COURTESY OF SHU GROUP

## ¥ Coffee Sakan Shu

Cans of coffee and a quick cup of joe on the way to work do serve their purpose, but when you want to savor the process and take your time, a good old-fashioned coffee shop is just what you need. Coffee Sakan Shu offers that luxury alongside plush seats and relaxing music, with the pouring of their teas and coffees being a spectacle in itself. While there are a few meals like omurice, when it comes to food the highlights are their sweet treats, including green tea parfait and summer shaved *ice kakigori*.

2F, 33-1, Grand Tokyo Shibuya Bldg., Shibuya-ku

3 min. walk from Shibuya Station

[☑ coffee\\_sakan\\_shu\\_official](#)



CAFE TOMORROW CREDIT, CAFE TOMORROW

## ¥ Cafe Tomorrow

Forget the time of day, or the year entirely, at Café Tomorrow. Just a short walk from the busy scenes of Nakamise-dori, this quaint café up the stairs sends you through a time warp in a retro space bathed in warm lighting. Disregard the passage of time with the vintage wall clock, forever at just past noon, and then spend the afternoon away with a book from the shelf and a cup of coffee. From curry and pasta to toast and crepes, their *yoshoku* (Japanese western) menu has enough options for a short solo break, or a longer afternoon with friends.

1-29-3, Asakusa, Taito-ku

3 min. walk from Asakusa Station

[☑ kissatenjapan](#)



CANTINA SICILIANA GINZA CREDIT, GIOVANNI MAGDALINO.JPG

## ¥¥¥ Cantina Siciliana Ginza

While the glitz and glamor of Ginza can be overwhelming, that doesn't mean that there aren't smaller restaurants full of personality. Cantina Siciliana can be spotted by its bright pink walls and Sicilian flag just off Corridor Street. Consisting of Italian classics like Penne all'Arrabbiata and various antipasti, the menu is complemented by a wide range of wines, including an impressive 80 from its namesake of Sicily. Savor the Sicilian flavors, and let time pass you by in a comfortable atmosphere.

6-2-6 Ginza, Chuo-ku

7 min. walk from Ginza Station

[☑ cantinasicilianaginza](#)



### ¥¥¥ The Whales of August

Blink and you'll miss the wooden exterior of this classic cocktail bar amidst the skyscrapers of central Shibuya. But find it and you will be rewarded with a unique concept: elegant cocktails inspired by films. Make no mistake, these are not the watered-down "cocktails" you find at karaoke bars, but expertly crafted drinks to fit their theme. The menu consists of classic film names, with a code to tell you the alcohol base and style. Have an elegant Breakfast at Tiffany's sparkling wine or a giant iceberg in a bright blue Titanic cocktail, while immersing yourself in your favorite movies in a way you never thought possible.

28-13 Udagawacho, Shibuya-ku

2 min. walk from Shibuya Station

📍 [kujira.official](http://kujira.official)



### ¥¥ Rikyu

Escape the crowds of lost tourists at Starbucks and use this delightful retro coffee shop as an excuse to explore the neighborhood of Kitasenju. The area is full of unique and family-owned places to eat, one of which is the elegant stylings of Rikyu. The cute café is full of dark wooden tones reminiscent of a bygone era, with an impressive lineup of individual antique coffee and tea cups behind the counter. Their delicious two-tone yokan jelly comes with most hot drink orders, but they also have cute hot sandwiches, spaghetti, and homemade cheesecake so your elegant teacup doesn't get lonely.

2-20, Senju, Adachi-ku

4 min. walk from Kitasenju Station



### ¥¥¥ Tokyo Whisky Library

Finding your way to the Tokyo Whisky Library almost feels like you have stumbled upon a secret club in Omotesando. Its heavy dark doors open up to the sight of a chandelier and bookshelves, followed by rows of whisky bottles and comfy seating areas. Those walls hold 1,300 different types of whisky from around the world, from scotch and bourbon to Japanese and Irish whiskies. Whisky lover or not, their food is just as delicious, with meat, fish, and pasta, as well as an affordable 3-course lunch set with tea or coffee and warm bread.

2F, 5-5-24, Minamiaoyama, Minato-ku

2 min. walk from Omotesando Station

📍 [tokyowhiskylibrary](http://tokyowhiskylibrary)



### ¥¥ Jiyucho

Down an unassuming backstreet in Kuramae, you'll find what looks like a bookstore... or perhaps it's a café? In fact, it is something else entirely. Here, you can read with a cup of tea and just enjoy a quiet moment to yourself. Or, you can take the time to write a postcard to your future self. Take the prompt cards and answer questions about the day, and write your own freehand message to the future you. Sip your tea as you think, then seal it with a luxurious wax seal, and walk away with calm contemplation.

4 -11-2 Kuramae, Taito-ku

2 min. walk from Kuramae Station

📍 [jiyucho.tokyo](http://jiyucho.tokyo)



HAIKARA YOKOCHO, CREDIT FAINA GUREVICH .JPG

# Shibamata

## Tokyo's Retro Time Capsule

BY SLEIMAN AZIZI

Follow the  
tour with  
Google Maps



Complete with classic Edo-period temples, river-crossing services and shopping streets, Shibamata is still recognized as Tokyo's home of old-time charm and retro love. The Katsushika Ward district, bordering Tokyo and Chiba prefectures, holds some of the most cherished memories from the nation's post-war period. The love for all things Showa can be felt through the area's museums, stores and shopping precincts. With the fragrance of nostalgia wafting through the air, you'll be reminded that Shibamata really is the home of the good old days.



## Tora-san Memorial Museum: Memories of Japan's beloved TV series

Running from 1969 to 1995, the TV series *Otoko wa Tsurai yo* (It's Tough Being a Man) remains a huge hit with the baby boomer crowd. Centered on the daily troubles of Tora-san, a good-natured salesman struggling to find love and settle down, Tora-san traveled the country working but never stopped dreaming of when he could return to settle down in his hometown of, that's right, Shibamata. Tora-san's tribulations became a regular part of millions of viewers' lives, and are celebrated through the aptly named Tora-san Memorial Museum. The museum does a great job of appreciating the show's yesteryear charm, recreating scenes and displaying props and sets straight from the show.

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6-22-19 Shibamata, Katsushika-ku

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## Yamada Yoji Museum: A retro filmmaking titan

The director of the Tora-san TV series, Yamada Yoji, gets his own chance to bask in the glow of yesteryear with the Yamada Yoji Museum. Part of the same complex as the Tora-san Memorial Museum, this one is organized into numerous themes, beginning with Yamada's entrance into the world of TV and film; and continuing with an exploration of his famous career. The museum itself is not particularly large, but the curators haven't skimped on quality, as it packs in a huge amount of respect. And there's no CG, either. Instead, the museum is filled with classic film posters, and is replete with pre-digital film equipment, scripts and casting shots—retro filmmaking at its best.

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6-22-19 Shibamata, Katsushika-ku

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## Shibamata Toy Museum: Playing with yesterday

Calling the Shibamata Toy Museum a “museum” may be a tad ambitious. While it may not be a standard museum, as a throwback to days gone by, its name is a perfect fit. The collection is a labor of love: a delightful blast from the past, with a top floor filled to the absolute brim with Showa-period toys, dolls, characters, games and slot-car tracks. In fact, the entire establishment is a memory of real-life pre-digital goodies that are guaranteed to stir the hearts of anyone born before Atari 2600 entered the world. Pick up a ticket from the first floor, and head on up. Be careful though: the museum is a weekend retro retreat, opening its doors only on Saturdays and Sundays.

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7-3-12 Shibamata, Katsushika-ku

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## Haikara Yokocho: A taste of when time began

On the first floor of the Shibamata Toy Museum is a true kid in a candy store experience. Relieving the memories of Japan's classic *dagashiya* cheap candy stores, Haikara Yokocho is stocked with shelves full of sweet old-style delights and the childhood memories they recall. Make no mistake about it: if the retro pinball machines and old-style knick knacks here don't deliver the knockout memorial punch, then the sweets certainly will. Open every day, the store started as an exercise in flexing the old-time memory muscles; and has now become a classic must-visit spot for just about everyone making the trip out to Shibamata.

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7-3-12 Shibamata, Katsushika-ku

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## Cafe Sepia

Opened in 2013, Cafe Sepia is the home of quirky-flavored memories come back to life. Drawn from a childhood love of shojo girl comics, this cafe serves up a range of lovestruck fare that was considered all the rage back in the day, including retro classics like Napolitan pasta, omurice, pancakes and cream sodas. At first glance, it may seem tiny—but have another look. There are two floors overflowing with a feeling of those wistful teenage years, including special rooms designed as a young lady's Showa-period hangout, with retro wallpaper, furniture and posters. Rooms can even be hired out for special occasions, and special memories.

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7-4-11 Shibamata, Katsushika-ku

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# Tokyo Trends: 90s Fashion in Tokyo

BY HANNA MATSUMOTO

## 01 Androgynous Fashion

Japanese designer Yohji Yamamoto aimed to design clothing that anyone could wear, while also protecting the female body from the male gaze—known as the “cold wind”—through androgynous styles. In an interview with *The Talks*, his initial intention was to protect the human body through his designs. However, he realized that this was actually hiding women’s bodies. “This is about sexuality, protecting it.” His creation of androgynous clothing expanded the range of fashion beyond “male” and “female,” and into all genders and any sexualities. Long coats with accentuated waistlines and flowing maxi skirts were suddenly being rocked by all genders, as well as straight silhouettes. Following his Y’s line in the late 1970s, where his first ideas of androgynous clothing stirred, the 90s was a time when people wore whatever they wanted regardless of gender, rebelling against the societal norm of limiting expressions of sexuality and

## 02 Street Style

Rebellion against discrimination towards LGBTQ+ and women’s rights was symbolized through fashion that stretched beyond the socially deemed “ordinary”, strengthened further by the emergence of streetwear brands such as BAPE, Comme Des Garçons and UNDERCOVER. Self-expression through fashion brought about graphic tees displaying bold letters, often layered over baggy jeans or checkered pants. Following a rocky coming-of-age outline, the key was to play with textures, such as knit shirts over lace skirts, and printed shirts over printed pants, paired with platform shoes. Most importantly, these looks were accessorized with accent chains, necklaces, oversized beanies, and printed crossbody bags.

## 03 Trade of Influence

Fashion powerhouses such as Louis Vuitton and Ralph Lauren were of great influence throughout Tokyo, with popular styles characterized by items such as loafers and trench coats. Collared looks were just as popular as they are in today’s fashion scene, with outfits often accented through color. Mini skirts were adopted against a conservative society, aligning with Tokyo’s rapidly evolving modernization. The Western concept of modernization and Japanese philosophies of embracing imperfection instilled a sense of liberation in Tokyo’s fashion scene.

Tokyo at the end of the millennium encompassed an extensive array of fashion trends, from street style to colorful everyday clothes such as pops of yellow and orange beneath oversized blazers popularized by the 1991 mini-series *Tokyo Love Story*. Tokyo’s youth used fashion as a freedom of expression and subversiveness against LGBTQ+ discrimination.

It was a way to rebel against the structure of everyday life, and to embrace androgynous clothing—a

step towards a society more accepting of social change. Such was the power of this fashion movement, that 90s styles still define aspects of Tokyo’s contemporary fashion scene today. You can find the designs that were central to the 90s at KENZO, featuring graphic sweaters and statement button-ups. Comme Des Garçons and the famed red heart is just the surface of the 90s legend, holding staples such as statement platform shoes, distressed and imperfect sweaters and collared shirts.

## 04 Luxury of Color / “Hanae Mori: The Butterfly”

Olive green, beige and gray remained as staples from the 80s, but color was blooming in almost every style. Whether it meant a vibrant one-piece dress or pops of neon keychains swinging from rucksacks, color brought happiness into the lives of high schoolers and adults alike. Vivacious colors date back to the Heian period, when gender roles and social classes were defined by color. Noble women were strictly bound to the season’s colors such as deep pink, white and green for the summer, and men wore darker versions of the lower-ranking class. The 90s eradicated the need for division between colors. While a stereotype of Harajuku fashion is its unapologetic explosion of colors, the 90s typically saw more understated outfits accentuated by one or two vivid highlights of color through accessories like hair ornaments, leg warmers and jewelry. Hanae Mori, the first Asian designer, never shied away from the deepest and brightest of colors also found in 90s accessories, often embedding butterflies in her designs as symbols of “strength and vibrance.”

## 05 Designer Brands

World-renowned Japanese designers Yohji Yamamoto, Issey Miyake, Chitose Abe and Rei Kawakubo—just to name a few—were well-received nationally and globally because of their design philosophies. *Wabi sabi*, the Japanese art of embracing imperfection reached the hearts of European designers such as John Galliano, Dior and Givenchy. They were inspired by Kawakubo’s use of black and incorporated elements of the kimono into his Fall 1994 collection, and global fashion moguls incorporated this philosophy into runway and ready-to-wear styles. Monochrome outfits and the mixing of fabrics and silhouettes have only grown more profound in the contemporary scene we see today.

## 06 Slice of Life

White shirts tucked into either straight or wide-leg jeans dominated the everyday look, with the denim jacket being another fashion staple. The appreciation of everyday life’s simplicities and imperfections was already profound in this era. These sentiments were complemented by wonderfully casual items such as plaid and button-up shirts, which were worn by all walks of life across all of Japan.



BASED IN JAPAN:

# Would you Renovate an Akiya in Tokyo?

📷 @ANTON.INJAPAN



CREDIT MIKE SMITH

How Anton Wormann is Reviving Abandoned Houses with a Nod to Tradition

BY ARDEN KREUZER

The morning sun casts a warm glow over the quiet streets of Tokyo's Nakano Ward—a neighborhood characterized by old wooden homes and narrow roads. A small pathway off the main boulevard leads to where Stockholm-born YouTuber, renovator and model Anton Wormann stands proudly before his newest purchase: a 52-year-old abandoned house.

Wormann arrived in Japan in 2018 as a model but found himself tackling one of Japan's most pressing housing phenomena: the thousands of abandoned homes that litter the country. According to Japan's Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism, there are about 8.5 million abandoned houses (known as *akiya* in Japanese) throughout the archipelago.

What began as a passion project for Wormann

has unexpectedly captured people's attention both within Japan and around the globe. Since purchasing his first house in 2022, Wormann has amassed over two million combined followers across various social media platforms, chronicling his adventures in renovating abandoned homes. Additionally, he has written a book titled "Free Houses in Japan" available on Amazon, which serves as a guide to renovation in Japan.

## Merging Preservation with Renovation

For some, the words preservation and renovation are antonyms; but for Wormann, they go hand in hand.

As we cross the threshold into the house, a sense of renewal and revival fills the air. The inner workings of the walls lie open and exposed, revealing a contrast of dark, aged wood against the fresh

reinforcements Wormann has recently installed. He passionately describes the several types of wood that are the heart and soul of Japanese homes: *hinoki*, *sugi*, *akamatsu*, and more.

Combining traditional Japanese and Scandinavian elements, Wormann refers to his design philosophy as “Japandi”, characterized by natural light, warm wood, and light colors. He explains how this combination is also the result of his deeper commitment to preservation. “I preserve things that Japanese carpenters would never preserve. If there’s an old pillar, they’ll remove it and put up a new one just because it’s old. But I say unless it’s termite-ridden, damaged or rotten, let’s keep it!”

He continues, “In my last house, I kept the tatami rooms on the second floor and the original ceilings. I even kept some of the original lamps. Most of the work I do is on the first floor, all the plumbing, electricity and structural work. Having a sturdy first floor is essential.”

Houses are not the only things that Wormann builds, however. Fostering connections to the community is equally important, he explains, since buying a house is also buying into the neighborhood. His houses have connected him to the local culture and history.

Discovering that the majority of abandoned homes in Japan are purchased with the possessions of their former occupants, my inner scavenger quickly notes the bags of forgotten items on the dusty floor. A time capsule of a once vibrant past, Wormann reveals faded newspaper clippings, a weathered box of original Suntory tumblers and traditional ceramic dishes.

“I’ve found so much. Old collectible cards, really nice cutlery and bowls, a vinyl collection, chests, kimonos... I have a collection of 20,000 pictures from the 40s up until the 80s from previous owners” he tells me.

“I gave a few boxes to the leader of the *jichikai* (neighborhood association). The photos were from a local *omatsuri* 50 years ago. She was very happy. She even saw friends that she knew in the photos. I think these kinds of things are really important for building community.”

### Japan’s Preference for New

Wormann and I delved into some of the factors contributing to Japan’s akiya problem—the most obvious being the demographic changes due to the aging population and declining birthrate. As far as the lack of local interest in akiya, the reasons tend to be multifaceted and deeply rooted in culture.

While many Western nations tend to find charm in older homes, Japan’s vulnerability to earthquakes and tsunamis has fostered a strong preference for “new.” “In 1983, most of the new building regulations were passed regarding earthquake safety. This caused a lot of people to be afraid of moving into an older house,” Wormann explains.

Additionally, the introduction of new building codes established a pattern of constructing, demolishing, and rebuilding every 20-30 years. Even houses in good condition depreciate in value over this short period, simply due to a shared belief that they are not safe enough. Wormann elaborates on how this influences people’s perceptions of their homes: “They build houses but don’t maintain them. One of the houses on my street has a small water leak and is a bit damaged. Even though it looks fine and it’s only about six years old, you can tell it is not a well-built house. No one cares though, because it will be torn down in 20 years.”

The result is a huge gap in the perception of old and new between Japan and Western countries. “An old house in Japan could be five years old, but in New York, even the Upper East Side has houses that are 150 years old.”

### “Leave it to The Pros”

Yet Wormann highlights a paradox where this perception becomes irrelevant for certain buildings such as temples and shrines. “Japan has this worship of beauty and this dynamic culture. Look at these old beautiful temples that have been standing for hundreds and hundreds of years. It’s such a paradox, they’re maintaining these beautiful temples because they know if they take care of it, it will live longer. Some temples are 300 to 500 years old,” says Wormann.

He adds that Japan also has a strong culture of craftsmanship. Traditional carpentry practices such as *kumiki* are prevalent in temples. “Wood is cut at the joints so that it’s sort of like puzzle pieces that fit together without the need for nails,” he explains, having studied the art.

While admirable, Japan’s culture of excellence sometimes impedes experimentation. “[In Japan] if you’re not a pro at what you’re doing, you kind of stay out of it. Whereas in Europe and the U.S., we have a ‘jack of all trades’ mentality. We try. You work in finance, but on the weekends, you do the plumbing in your garden,” he notes.

Reflecting on his upbringing in a 120-year-old house in Stockholm, he emphasizes the value of experimentation. “My parents bought the house with all their money. And if you don’t have money, you have to do the work on your own. I have old pictures of me with a saw and hammer, building small forts with my sisters. We also have woodworking in school and we have IKEA, so I think creating things is in our culture. We grew up with the idea that it doesn’t have to be perfect as long as you enjoy what you’re doing,” he shares.

### Japan’s Complex Housing Market

One of my favorite aspects of Wormann’s renovations is his strategic use of windows and mirrors to maximize natural light. While Japanese housing is often associated with being very open and light, Wormann and I shared our disdain for the minimal windows seen in many modern Tokyo apartments.

Wormann elaborates, “If you follow the money, who makes money on houses in Japan? The real estate agents and construction companies. Some renovation companies are popping up but are still not common because there’s no real template in renovating like there is in rebuilding. Adding a window is hard. It requires skill to add a window and usually, the template is made with as little as possible to make a profit. Construction companies can build many houses in a short time and if they’re tearing down and rebuilding, they can calculate everything. It’s way more predictable. I think that’s part of Japanese society, predictability and avoiding risk.” This prioritization of profitability over aesthetics often results in the loss of a building’s character.

### Renovating Akiya as a Career Move

Wormann, who has successfully completed three houses, has no intention of selling them. He has invested approximately ¥10-20 million (around \$60,000–\$100,000 USD) in these properties, but recoups his investment through rental income. One of his properties is available on Airbnb for short-term stays, while the other two are leased out under long-term rental agreements. A single night at his Sangenjaya Airbnb costs about ¥69,000, and the property is nearly fully booked up to three months in advance.

Wormann often receives messages from people both inside and outside of Japan. While some want to emulate his success, others mainly seek to turn a quick profit. Wormann stresses, however, that genuine enthusiasm and commitment are crucial. “You have to be passionate about it, and you have to spend time in the area. If you’re interested, you bring value, and you’re not only in it for money, that’s when you win. That’s when everybody wins. There are so many people not living in Japan who just want to monetize this problem. I mean you can monetize it if you do it the right way, but it’s such a new thing. I think if you want to get into this, you have to be in Japan.”

For Wormann, this journey has entailed countless hours of research encompassing Japanese laws, building codes, real estate, interior design, traditional carpentry and more. He has cultivated relationships with his neighbors, mastered the Japanese language and inspired an entire community of renovators. It has become evident in my time with Wormann: this is his canvas.





# Baachan's Belated Back to High School

BY SHARNIE FENN



## An 85-Year-Old Grandma's First Day of Senior High School

On a serene spring morning, amid the falling cherry blossom petals, an 85-year-old woman named Etsuko Hayasaka —also my Japanese grandmother —departed her home with her customary “*ittekimasu!*” (“I’m off!”). On this particular day, however, her destination held a surprise far from ordinary.

It was an unusual sight; a silver-haired, elderly woman, dressed in a senior high school uniform. She was walking happily down the street, but what made the vision even more curious was the television crew following her, complete with two cameramen and a boom operator.

Hayasaka was part of a TV program called “*Debut-Sen TV*,” which is a show that gives ordinary people the opportunity to try something new for the first time in their lives. The show refers to it as someone’s ‘debut’, and documents their exciting journey. The show aired in May on the Japanese TV channel “*Nittere*,” and for those who missed it,

it’s now available on the streaming app, TVer.

Born into a post-World War II time, Hayasaka’s childhood was marked by hardships. Poverty was a constant companion; her mother and her six older siblings struggled to feed themselves. The family’s struggles were only compounded when Misao, Hayasaka’s mother, experienced a rapid decline in health. It unfortunately left her half-paralyzed when Hayasaka was only five years old. When her older siblings married and had to move out of the family home, the role of caretaker and homemaker fell onto Hayasaka’s young shoulders.

In the mornings and evenings before and after school, she dedicated herself to household chores —collecting firewood from nearby bushland, carrying buckets of water from the neighborhood well, and washing laundry in the shallows of a lake. She also attended to the needs of her immobile mother —guiding her around the home and aiding her in bathing and using the restroom.

When Hayasaka reached the age of 16, going to *koukou* (senior high school) was not a viable option due to her mother’s ill health requiring constant supervision and care. Hayasaka thus decided to quit school, and from then on she wondered restlessly about what high school life could have been like.

“I have been dreaming of going to senior high school for decades,” Hayasaka explains in her interview with *Metropolis*. “But I kept this dream to myself, because I didn’t want my mother to feel guilty or burden her with sadness. It is not her fault, and I do not regret quitting school because I got to spend so much more time with her. I am happy I was able to stay by my mother’s side.”

When the TV program caught wind of her strong desire to go to senior high school, they offered to enroll Etsuko as a student at Tokiwagi Gakuen —a senior high school located in Sendai which accommodates students between the ages of 15 to 18 —for one day. Of course, when she heard of the offer, Hayasaka leaped at the opportunity.

The morning of her big day, Hayasaka woke up at 3 am to make 50 servings of *ohagi* (rice cake covered in red bean paste) to hand out to her new teachers and classmates. After checking her school bag four times to ensure she had not forgotten any school supplies, Hayasaka began the 20-minute walk from Sendai Station to the grand entrance of Tokiwagi Gakuen, where she was welcomed by a beautiful, blossoming cherry blossom tree.

Cameras rolling, the team captured every moment of anticipation and excitement. Student Hayasaka remained unfazed by the camera’s presence; she was in awe, her mind far too preoccupied with other thoughts.

“As much as going to senior high school had

always been a dream of mine, I was equally worried as much as I was excited. After all, I am 85 years old, and I worried if I could keep up physically and mentally. I didn’t want to drag any of the students down. I was also worried whether I could become friends with everyone, and if we’d be able to find common ground.”

Despite Hayasaka’s initial worries, her 16-year-old classmates greeted her with open arms, their curiosity piqued by the sight of a senior citizen in their classroom. With a sense of camaraderie that transcended age, they embraced Hayasaka as one of their own, eager to share the joys of learning with a newfound, unexpected friend. As Hayasaka shared the reasons behind her delayed high school experience, it became a profound lesson for the students, who realized the privilege that many of them had taken for granted. Together, they rallied around Hayasaka, determined to make her day at school as fulfilling as possible.

Hayasaka immersed herself in the high school experience, partaking in a technology class where she learned how to type on a keyboard. She joined a physical education class where she obediently did 10 push-ups and 10 sit-ups, and even successfully landed a group jump rope. At lunch, she dragged her desk alongside other classmates’, and they opened up their bento boxes together, sharing their *okazu* (side dishes). Hayasaka even received a Certificate of Graduation as proof of her attendance and completion of her first day of senior high school, and she burst into joyful tears.

“I was so touched by everyone’s support and kindness. This experience was everything I had dreamt of and more. Not only did I get to wear a sailor uniform for the first time and go to senior high school, I also got to make real friends and connect with so many people, despite our age and generational gap. Senior high school isn’t just a place to learn and study. I know now it’s also a place to connect with others, share stories, help one another, learn about each other, and find unexpected friendships.”

When the school chime rang to signal the end of the school day, Hayasaka gathered under the cherry blossom tree along with her new classmates to snap her very first class photo. In the image, she holds up her graduation certificate proudly, and beams alongside her new friends.

In the span of a single day, Hayasaka had conquered not only the halls of academia—but also the barriers of time and lost dreams. In a society where age often dictates one’s limitations, she proved that dreams have no expiration date.

“I am living proof that it is never too late to pursue your dreams. You are never too old. You are never not enough.”



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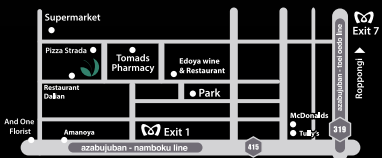
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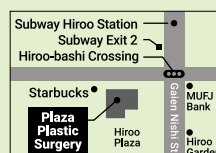


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Kimono Mom:

BY ARDEN KREUZER

# From Geisha to Global YouTube Sensation

*Metropolis Talks Tradition, Responsibility and Gender Roles in Japan with YouTube's Favorite Geisha*

Moe, also known as Kimono Mom, is a woman who embodies the essence of traditional Japanese culture. Simultaneously, she embraces the modernity of today's world. This geisha-turned-social media sensation captivates audiences with a blend of traditional elegance and contemporary motherhood. With nearly six million followers across Instagram and YouTube, Moe's journey from a young *maiko* (geisha trainee) in Kyoto to an influential content creator in Tokyo is a testament to her resilience and adaptability.

## Early Life as a Geisha

Moe left high school to pursue a career as a geisha at the age of 16, dedicating herself to rigorous training in Japan's cultural arts. "Growing up in Kyoto, I was inspired by the artisans and the people who shaped the city's culture. Becoming a geisha allowed me to immerse myself in Kyoto's heritage, which was a great honor," Moe reflects.

As a *maiko*, Moe's days were filled with rigorous training. "I would wake up early every morning to get ready in my kimono before starting my lessons. Mornings were dedicated to *Nihon buyo* (Japanese dance), shamisen (a traditional three-string instrument) and other traditional arts. Afternoons were devoted to cultural activities like *sado* (tea ceremony). Afterward, I would apply my makeup and get dressed in my formal kimono to attend the tea house."

## Redefining Freedom

Transitioning from six years of life as a geisha to married life in modern Tokyo was not easy for Moe. "After I left the geisha world, I married. But at the time, I felt lost. Having lost the title of *geiko-san* (geiko: the word for geisha used in Kyoto, san: honorific added to a name), I wondered, 'What am I?' That was the difficult part. As a housewife, people only referred to me as someone's wife, not by my name. I struggled with this because I didn't know how to present myself. I was always seen as my husband's wife, not as myself," Moe explains.

Her then-husband's conservative views compounded her feelings of entrapment. "He allowed me to attend cooking school but not to work outside the home. I started to feel trapped and longed for freedom, so I divorced him after three years," she says. But the freedom she longed for came with a price as she went out into the world independently for the first time.

Moe reflects on her challenges with independence, "I was no longer someone's wife and didn't know



CREDIT MIKE SMITH



who I was beyond being a geisha and a wife. Without a high school diploma and no regular job experience, finding a house and a job was stressful. I felt like I lacked common sense and didn't know how to live a normal life, but I did my best."

For Moe, freedom is intricately linked with responsibility—an underlying theme throughout her story. "I think freedom depends on how you define it. From my perspective, freedom equals responsibility. After getting a divorce from my first husband, I was free to do whatever I wanted. But at the same time, I didn't have anyone providing for me, so I had to do everything on my own. Freedom for me means taking responsibility for my own life," she explains. This view contrasts with Western perspectives, which often define freedom as a lack of responsibility.

### The Spirit of Culture is Passed Down Through Generations

Moe's appreciation for Japanese culture is deeply rooted in the way traditions are passed down rather than just the arts themselves. "Of course, I love kimono, but I also love the spirit of Japanese culture itself, especially the way traditions are passed down. Even though it's changing a bit, I love how older generations teach our traditions to younger generations. Most Japanese traditions, like the *sado* and *shodo* (Japanese calligraphy), are preserved this way."

In 2020, Moe started her YouTube channel, Kimono Mom, to share her love of Japanese culture and home cooking. Differing from the usual Japanese cuisine found in restaurants, Japanese home cooking includes comfort food dishes like *nikujaga* (Japanese beef stew) or *oyakodon* (chicken, egg and rice bowl).

Cooking for her family gave Moe a sense of clarity and acceptance about her own identity. "After I remarried and had a baby, cooking every meal became part of my daily routine. So, I began filming YouTube videos and cooking Japanese food with my daughter Sutan while wearing a kimono. The name 'Kimono Mom' represents my identity

as a geisha and as a mom," Moe explains.

Many of her recipes were passed down from her mother serving as a connection to Japanese culture.

"Knowing and reflecting on one's roots is essential for getting through tough times in life. For me, during my years as a geisha and through my struggles, my mom's cooking was a source of comfort and strength." Moe plans to continue this tradition by passing them down to Sutan as well. "My videos are a love letter to Sutan. She can watch them in the future and see how much she was loved and cared for."

### Motherhood and Entrepreneurship Go Hand-In-Hand

While traditional gender roles remain prevalent in Japan, the Kimono Mom channel shows that being a stay-at-home mom and an entrepreneur are not necessarily mutually exclusive. While Moe takes on both of these roles, she also points out that there is nothing wrong with moms who choose not to work. For Moe, the most important thing is that the person is doing what they want to do.

Moe explains, "My mom was a very traditional housewife who always stayed home to care for her children and husband. In Japan, we have a saying, 'three steps behind,' meaning wives walk three steps behind their husbands. Growing up, I didn't like that and often encouraged her to present herself more and go out. However, after becoming a mom, I came to respect the way she lived and how she sacrificed herself for the happiness of her child and husband. Although I wouldn't do it the same way, I respect her choice because it was what she wanted to do and what she believed in."

In her own family, Moe and her husband share responsibilities based on their day-to-day lives. "So, it's not about gender, really. In my family, when my husband is busy, I handle the cooking and housework. But if I am busy, he helps out. My family is a team, including Sutan," she says.



### Looking to the Future

With a 95% overseas viewership, Moe aspires to continue breaking down cultural barriers and sharing her roots with the world. Her followers often tell her that they watch her videos not just to learn about Japanese culture, but because it reminds them of their own mothers or inspires them to cook for their children.

The realization that people all over the world wanted to try her cooking inspired Moe to create UMAMI SAUCE, a substitute for the typical Japanese *dashi* (fish base) and *mirin* (rice wine) condiment, which caters to various dietary needs. "Followers have told me they wanted to make Japanese food but couldn't find the ingredients, or couldn't eat it because of their dietary restrictions. This inspired me to create my UMAMI SAUCE, which is vegan, gluten-free and non-alcoholic," she explains. "Everyone's voice is in that bottle."

Moe's UMAMI SAUCE has been met with enthusiasm, selling out online in the U.S. after just a few days. "Some people who bought my Umami Sauce were moved to tears, thanking me for making it. That was an eye-opening moment for me, and it became my mission. I am committed to delivering UMAMI SAUCE all over the world to everyone who's waiting for it," she says. The positive feedback and emotional thank-you messages have reinforced her mission to share Japanese home cooking with the world.

As another example of how freedom comes with responsibility, Moe is committed to seeing her goals through. Although balancing everything perfectly remains a challenge, she strives to do her best, often sacrificing sleep and rest to pursue her dreams.

Moe's story is a testament to the power of embracing both tradition and modernity, as well as freedom and responsibility. "When I started my YouTube channel, I promised myself that I wouldn't go halfway. So I need to see it all the way through."



# Samurai City

BY SLEIMAN AZIZI

## Take a Tour of Tokyo's Legendary Warriors

Layered between the civic surfaces of Tokyo's metropolitan landscapes lies a flood-soaked history of warfare, battle, pride and honor. Time capsules from a bygone age, scores of shrines and memorials across Tokyo are dedicated to those who stood at the center of this bloodshed. Ranging from vengeful spirits and secret protectors to aristocratic war heroes and luckless sword masters, the stories of these warriors are glimpses into Japan's warrior heritage and of a feudal time not so long ago.

Follow the tour  
with Google Maps



### 01 Taira no Masakado: The Headless Ghost

Perhaps Japan's most surreal ghost story is the tale of Taira no Masakado's vengeful head. A warrior who led a 10th-century rebellion against the Kyoto government, Masakado's early victories saw him declare himself the new Emperor. But his rebellion was soon defeated, and he himself was captured and beheaded. Then a strange thing happened: Masakado's head headed back to Kanto, where for centuries, local villagers grew concerned over an angry head flying through the streets at night. Admired he may have been, for taking it to the central government—nobody could ignore a mad spirit. As the years went by, the resting place of Masakado's dome became a place of nervous piety, a dedicated space to a resentful warrior only 20 meters from the C5 Exit of the Metro Chiyoda Line's Otemachi Station.

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1-2-1 Otemachi, Chiyoda-ku

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PHOTO BY ASANAGI, PUBLIC DOMAIN

### 02 Maresuke Nogi: The Last Samurai

Haunted by the excessive loss of his soldier's lives, General Nogi was refused permission by the Emperor to take his own life in atonement. The general, sometimes known as the last samurai, finally found the chance to expunge his guilt when he (and his wife Shizuko) chose to enact the classical samurai edict of *junshi* (ritual suicide) upon the passing of his master, the Meiji Emperor. A celebrated war hero at a time when Japan had just emerged from centuries of feudal isolation, Nogi's passing revealed him to be a man of fierce loyalty, and he soon became a figure of reverence. The immaculately kept grounds of Nogi Shrine, a short walk from Exit 1 of Nogizaka Station on the Metro Chiyoda Line, feature the very room where the general and his wife ended their lives in ritual fidelity.

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8-11-27 Akasaka, Minato-ku

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SENGAKUJI TEMPLE, CREDIT COWARD\_LION

### 03 The 47 Ronin: Tragic Avengers

A quiet Zen temple it may be, but Sengakuji—only a short moment or two from the A2 Exit of Sengakuji Station on the Toei Asakusa Line—is home to one of the most celebrated stories of feudal samurai loyalty. In the year 1702, 47 now masterless samurai had spent some 18 months hatching a secret plot to avenge their unjustly executed lord. The men were wildly successful, but, as expected, were soon taken into custody. Unsure how to deal with these rebellious heroes, whose actions both seemingly upheld the honor of their traditions and challenged the extent of the law, the authorities finally ordered the men—the youngest, Oishi Chikara, being 16 years old—to commit *seppuku* ritual suicide to end their lives, not as criminals to be hung; but instead as warriors honorable to the end.

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2-11-1 Takanawa, Minato-ku

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GBULGARI BAR- DRINKS, CREDIT BULGARI HOTEL OFFICIAL WEBSITE, JPEIG

### 04 Kondo Isami: The Wrong Side of Destiny

Leader of the pro-shogunate Shinsengumi police force, Kondo Isami was responsible for ferreting out and suppressing support for the Imperial Court. Fate, however, was not kind to the young warrior. Generational turmoil had hit Japan, and with the Tokugawa administration collapsing and the Imperial House soon to be restored to political power, Kondo's support for the shogunate had landed him on the wrong side of history. The gritty sword master, fourth-generation head of the Tennin Rishin school of swordsmanship, was captured soon after the final battle between the shogunate and Imperial forces in 1868. At the age of 34, Kondo lost his war to prevent change and was executed in Itabashi. His grave, along with a memorial to his Shinsengumi swordsmen, sits across the road from the East Exit of Itabashi Station on the JR Saikyo Line.

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7-8-10 Takinogawa, Kita-ku

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CREDITSAINENJI OFFICIAL WEBSITE

### 05 Hattori Hanzo: Ninja Guardian

It took the canny negotiating skills of Japan's most famous ninja leader to help Tokugawa Ieyasu survive long enough to finally unify Japan after centuries of civil war. Organizing safe passage through lands held by the dangerously skilled ninja clans of Iga, Hattori Hanzo was rewarded by Japan's future ruler with lands, income and position. Demon Hanzo, as he was also known, later retired from a life of combat and lived out his remaining few years as a Buddhist monk. A sign of his dignity and honor, Hanzo built Sainenji, a small temple in honor of a Tokugawa son whom he couldn't save from a tragic death. The temple, a short walk from Yotsuya Station on the JR Chuo Line, features the master ninja's battle helmet and the three-meter remains of his massive four-meter-long spear.

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2-9 Wakaba, Shinjuku-ku

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## From search to real estate success

**TURNING INVESTMENTS INTO PROFIT: AN INVESTOR'S EXPERIENCE WITH MR.LAND**

Mr. J, who wishes to remain anonymous, is an Irishman who has called Japan home for the past 18 years. He recently became a proud property owner with the help of Mr. LAND. Acquiring a fully tenanted investment property and signing the final papers was a rewarding moment for Mr. J, providing both a sense of accomplishment and reassurance.

*Metropolis* catches up with Mr. J to delve into his journey and glean valuable insights into investing in Japanese real estate.

**Metropolis: Why did you choose to invest in Japan over other countries, and how did you come across Mr. LAND?**

Mr. J: One of the main reasons I became interested in investing in the Japanese real estate market is due to concerns about the future of pension support here in Japan. I sought an alternative that could provide passive income both now and in retirement. Real estate has always intrigued me, because it offers consistent returns. Japan, in particular, is unique with its stable tenant base and strong rental market, which makes it an attractive option for investors seeking reliable income.

I came across Mr. LAND through a third-party introduction. In terms of picking a real estate agent, it's crucial to find one you feel comfortable with and trust. For me, Mr. LAND was that agent. They made the whole process smooth and transparent.

**M: What are your key criteria when selecting a property and how do you foresee the potential for growth and returns?**

Mr. J: When investing in a rental property, visiting the location and understanding why a tenant would choose to live in the area is important. Checking if the property has any

inherent risks associated with the area such as the property being in a designated flood zone. Understanding if there will be any future limitations if you decide to renovate or build a new property. Doing your due diligence to ensure the building is being well maintained, with documented maintenance records available. These are some of the key criteria I consider during my property selection process.

**M: What challenges did you face during the purchasing process, and how did Mr. LAND assist you in overcoming them?**

Mr. J: The purchasing process presented several challenges, such as navigating through the procedures in Japanese and finding the right financing options. Real estate terms and contracts can be complex, but Mr. LAND was there every step of the way to advise and clarify any questions. Despite my research, I found the steps involved in securing financing to be more rigorous than expected. Building trust and good relationships with banks is crucial, and Mr. LAND's established experience and referrals made a significant difference. Approaching banks without such referrals could put you at a disadvantage, whether you are from overseas or Japanese.

**M: In your opinion, what are the biggest misconceptions about investing in Japan?**

Mr. J: One of the biggest misconceptions I find is thinking you need to have permanent residency (PR) to get a loan. While PR is important, banks consider other criteria in an individual's profile, such as the ability to repay the loan, length of residency in Japan, job tenure, asset situation, and overall knowledge and experience in both real estate and general investment.


**BY METROPOLIS**

**M: How has your experience been investing in Japan, and what has been the most rewarding aspect of your investment here?**

Mr. J: Navigating the Japanese real estate market initially presented challenges and required patience, but overall, it was a rewarding experience. While investing requires significant research and learning, choosing the right partners makes the journey smoother and less overwhelming, reminding me that it is a valuable long-term investment. The standard of knowledge and expertise from Mr. LAND was impressive, providing comfort and confidence to investors like myself.

The most rewarding aspect of my investment in Japan is the security and reassurance it provides. Owning a property ensures a reliable income stream for my family, even in uncertain times. Additionally, diversifying my investments gives me peace of mind, knowing that I'm not putting all my eggs in one basket.

Mr. LAND is a real estate agency based in Tokyo, Japan with over 30 years of experience in the industry. Its Global Division specializes in helping international clients buy and sell real estate in Japan with full English-language support, and it prides itself in tailoring every transaction to meet the needs of each client. Message Mr. LAND anytime to discuss your real estate needs. They would love to hear from you.

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# Fresh Ink: Musashi Miyamoto

Miyamoto's life by the blade

Historical fiction is one of Japan's most popular literary genres, and that is in no small part due to the genius of Eiji Yoshikawa (1892-1962). Yoshikawa retold classics like *Tale of Genji* and *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* in his own accessible and dramatic style. He also wrote epic novels about key figures from Japanese history, including Edo Period magistrate Tadasuke Ooka, Sengoku Period warlord Yoshitaka Kuroda, and legendary swordsman Musashi Miyamoto. The latter, titled *Musashi Miyamoto*, follows the life and exploits of the warrior, known as a sword-saint of Japan with his unique double-bladed swordsmanship style and an influential philosophy in terms of both strategy and Buddhism.

The novel opens in the year 1600, Battle of Sekigahara. This is one of the most famed battles in the history of Japan. It resulted in the decisive victory of Tokugawa Ieyasu and the eastern clans against Hideyoshi Toyotomi and the western clans, leading to the establishment of the Edo Shogunate and the Japan we know today. There were as many as 40,000 deaths on this broad plain in between Nagoya and Kyoto; the Tokugawa victory was in part the result of treachery from Hideaki Kobayawaka, who defected to the Tokugawa side. There is no concrete historical proof that Miyamoto himself participated in this battle. Miyamoto, known as Takezo, was a 17-year-old youth from present-day Okayama and a seasoned duelist, but a greenhorn to the fields of war.

Yoshikawa evocatively describes this keystone moment in Japanese history from Takezo's perspective. The names—Kobayawaka, infamous traitor, Fukushima, a daunting commander under Tokugawa, Mitsunari Ishida, chief general of Toyotomi's force—are familiar and thrilling to Japanese readers. But readers regardless of cultural background can sense the terror of battle, the dawn of Miyamoto's life by the blade, and the urgency of this crucial moment, as Japanese history swivels in a new direction.

From *Musashi Miyamoto*

## Chapter One

These tremors of heaven and earth—what will they become?

At this point, the individual acts of humans are no more than the leaves on the single branch of a tree swaying in the autumn wind. Or at the least, that's how our acts have ended up.

Those were the thoughts of Takezo. He contemplated, lying in between the corpses, his body flat and still as a corpse itself.

*I've got to move, he thought. What else can I do?* But he didn't have the strength to even lift a finger. Takezo hadn't yet realized it himself, but there were two or three bullet holes lashing through his body.

It happened last night. To be precise, September 14th, on the fifth year of the Keicho Era. A deluge of rainfall crashed down on the plain of Sekigahara from dusk till dawn. The thunderous clouds had yet to melt away, even by noon today. From time to time, stray, ashen clouds wandered down from Mt. Ibuki or the Mino Mountains and burst into white showers over the wide plain, washing away the residue of the bloody battle.

The rain sloshed down onto Musashi's face and the faces of the surrounding corpses. His mouth was gaping open like a fish, and he lapped up the water droplets hanging from the bridge of his nose with his tongue.

*My last taste of water.* In the core of his paralyzed mind, Musashi sensed that his destiny was sealed.

His side had already lost the battle. Kobayawaka betrayed them along with the Eastern Army, a turning point that led to the total collapse of their forces, starting with the force led by Mitsunari Ishida, and continuing to those of Hideie Ukita, Yoshihiro Shimazu, Yukinaga Konishi. One could venture that in just half a day, the ruler of Japan had been decided. The fates of hundreds of thousands of compatriots, and the futures of innumerable offspring, invisible to the eye now, were being shaped second by second, minute after minute.

*I can't...* The hazy images of those he left behind—his only sister, the old folks of the village—flickered in his mind. He couldn't understand it, but somehow, he didn't feel sad. Is this really what death is like? But it was at that moment that, just ten paces away, among the pile of comrade's corpses, one seemingly dead body came to life, and raised its neck.

"Hey! Take!"

The call stirred Takezo from his state of near death and he looked around. It was Matahachi: Takezo's friend from the same village, who joined the same army for the same master, who came together with Takezo to this battlefield, the two of them burning with the youthful desire for glory. Both of them were seventeen years old. Takezo mustered up words as the rain fell on.

"Whoa. Mata."

"Take. So you're alive!"

It took all of Takezo's strength to belt out a response. "I may be alive, but it feels like I'm dead. Mata—don't you die, Mata. Don't die for nothing!"

"Damn it all! I'm not dying!"

Takezo heaved himself in the direction of his friend's voice through the mud. He gripped on to Matahachi's hand.

"Let's run," Takezo gasped. He pulled on Matahachi's arm, dragging himself closer, when all of the sudden, the earth that the two of them were using as their pillows began to shudder like a boiling kettle.

"Die, die, die! It's not over!"

A row of jet-black horseback soldiers were howling war cries as they swept over the center of the plain, charging towards the two young men.

Matahachi rose to catch a glimpse of the flag. "Look! It's Fukushima's troop!"

Panicking, Takezo snatched on to Matahachi's ankle and pulled him down.

"Are you crazy?" Matahachi shouted. "Do you want to die?!"

It happened in an instant.

The mud-drenched hooves of countless warhorses, twitching in unison like a springing loom, ridden by armored enemy knights wielding swords and pikes that they waved triumphantly in the air, leapt over Takezo's face, leapt straight over his head dug into the mud, and Takezo sprang up, and he started to sprint.

Takezo glanced back with his eyes strained open wide. He could see Matahachi face-down in the dirt, and the dauntless beasts rampaging the plain, hundreds of them.

BY ERIC MARGOLIS

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# Takaoka's Travels

A fantastical adventure from medieval Japan

BY ERIC MARGOLIS



There is no English-language author who could weave an authentic tale about a legendary Japanese prince's journey to the west. And no, not the European west—the west of Hindustan, or India, the birthplace of Buddhism. It was a place no Japanese person had ever reached, at least as of the year 865, when the novel *Takaoka's Travels* takes place. But that is the power of translation. Only through translation would it be possible to embark on a dreamy adventure through spacetime into the East at the height of the T'ang Dynasty (618-907 CE).

Written by Tatsuhiko Shibusawa and first published in 1987, and then translated by David Boyd, *Takaoka's Travels* celebrated its English-language release in May, 2024. It tells the story of Takaoka Shinno, a Japanese prince born at the dawn of the Heian Period (794-1185), when art and court culture flourished in the capital of Kyoto. Takaoka was disgraced from Kyoto after his father conspired against the emperor. He grew up to become a Buddhist monk, and later aspired to travel to India. And although he failed in his goal, he made it as far as Singapore, making him the first Japanese person to have traveled so far west. The first recorded Japanese visit to India wouldn't happen until the 16th century, 700 years later—so while Takaoka failed in his mission, he still achieved something pretty darn impressive.

But this novel is anything but an accurate account of Prince Takaoka's voyage. It's a series of fantasies, dreams, dreams of fantasies, and fantasies of dreams. Shibusawa eschews narrative logic, continuity, and even integrity, creating contradictions, loopholes, and startling visions of the fantastic and profound at every turn. Such rashness and boldness was typical of Shibusawa (b. 1928), who made his name by embracing the outrageous and obscene. He first emerged on the literary scene as a translator of French literature, most notably André Breton and Marquis de Sade. (He was actually convicted in Japanese courts for being too obscene in his translation of de Sade's *Juliette*.) He wrote *Takaoka's Travels* much later in life, but the novel's psychologically-tinged mysticism fits into his long career of essay-writing, which often focused on the demonic and the erotic—two motifs that are ever-present on Takaoka's journey.



Shibusawa carefully balances two contrasting poles: the travelogue of an adventure through medieval Asia, and a barrage of Freudian fantasy dream sequences. On the one hand, each chapter follows a particular segment or incident as Takaoka moves further west and closer to India, grounded in exotic but realistic cross-cultural encounters with history, geography, and diverse peoples. In the first chapter, "The Dugong," this means departing from the thriving port city of Guangzhou and encountering a young stowaway. On the other hand, each chapter involves a concoction of magical realism, dreams, and fantasy that defy all logic and explanation: in Chapter One, for example, a series of talking fantastic beasts of past and future lore.

The fun of the work comes from this two-sided aspect. Sometimes, I found myself captivated by the ornate kingdoms and curious customs of the various Southeast Asian lands Takaoka visits; at other times, I fell into the prince's elaborate dreams, each a series of absurdities where each attempts to outdo the previous. Shibusawa at times intentionally contradicts himself, or even deliberately points out when the events of his tale are impossible or simply don't make sense.

These postmodern devices can make the story feel dreamy to the point of flimsy at times, but they don't cut back on narrative depth. There is an ugly complex lurking beneath the story: namely, Takaoka's relationship as a boy with his father's consort, the alluring Kusuko, who is a master of the medical, pharmaceutical and erotic arts. This psychological, Freudian element is at the core of Takaoka's motivation for his journey, and makes it far from a classical Buddhist search for enlightenment. Shibusawa clouds the pursuit of nirvana with subconscious sexual urges, as many of the fantastic happenings are laced with sexuality and eroticism. But Shibusawa does not so much as contrast these two worlds as demonstrate their intricate interconnection. Any epic journey, even one across continents, is also a journey across the crooked contours of one's own psychology.

Accordingly, Takaoka is anything but a typical hero. He is a curious and lively character, with strange urges, who lives on a whim; this boundless curiosity allows him to encounter feathered women and petrified men alike. But he is self-absorbed and fickle, and the more profound depths of





this work reside in the clouded corners of his consciousness. Shibusawa spotlights uncomfortable links between lust and travel, enlightenment and narcissism. These disturb the traditional narrative of the spiritual quest, the classical journey that leads to self-discovery. They also disrupt any kind of simple Freudian description of the uncanny as coming from aspects of the subconscious. The worlds that Takaoka encounters are all their own, as much as a reader might be tempted to see them as direct reflections of the prince's repressed sexual urges.

An effective and confident translation by David Boyd captures Shibusawa's playful tone, with its grand echo of a classical journey laced with postmodern spunk. A great success of the translation is the way it manages to introduce countless unfamiliar places, objects, and mythologies to an English reader without overexplaining. (Although admittedly, I found myself sorely wanting a map to reference.)

Takaoka's *Travels* enables us to step into worlds we could scarcely imagine. Our journey to Hindustan, thus, is much like Prince Takaoka's, as we face one completely unfamiliar sight after another. We are left to either try to dissect and connect new wonders with our own lives, or simply navel-gaze in wonder and ignorance.

A viral *New Yorker* article, "The Case Against Travel", recently argued that travel is often a simple excuse to tell ourselves that we've changed, when in fact we really haven't. Shibusawa, in one sense, proves this pessimistic thesis: Does Takaoka really grow on his journey at all, despite it being the most epic in Japanese history? But at the same time, Shibusawa shows us the limitless and even magical possibilities of travel. A reader can see that Takaoka, not his travels, are the only thing to blame for him being stuck in himself and his past. We can therefore see that wonder truly just awaits on the high seas—albeit wonder that can only come partially from dreams that are all our own.



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# Storied history abounds in spiritual Chichibu

BY KIMBERLY HUGHES



While visits to locales steeped in historical heritage often require traveling across the archipelago, other destinations sit right in Tokyo's backyard. Lying in this latter category is Chichibu, located in far western Saitama Prefecture, which is accessible from Ikebukuro in just over an hour. A visit to this region, which is dotted with primeval forests, numerous spiritual landmarks, and a network of streets recounting a rich storied past, truly evokes the feeling of stepping back in time.

Chichibu was home to a thriving silk industry during the Edo era—although the local origins of the trade are said to extend back some 2,000 years—and there are structures remaining

today that evoke the trade's peak during the early 1900s (late Meiji through the early Showa periods). Kuromon-dori and the backstreets leading toward Kaitsugisho-dori are excellent strolling roads to feel this history, as they are flanked by buildings reminiscent of the local Chichibu Meisen silk textile wholesalers (with many today designated as National Tangible Cultural Properties).

One way to enjoy a visit to Chichibu is to include a stay at one of the local renovated *kominka* (folk homes) dating back to this period. Nipponia Chichibu and Machiju Kyakushitsu (the latter translating aptly as “accommodation all over town”) are both excellent options, operating several exceedingly stylish structures

that combine a historical feel with more modern touches. You'll pay for the privilege; but when the occasion calls for splashing cash on an out-of-town getaway, this is money well spent. It also includes perks, such as tickets to local saunas or free drinks at local watering holes.

A luxury overnight stay is not required to enjoy the townscape, however, which can be explored via rent-a-cycle or walking. Extending from Seibu Chichibu train station to the peaceful Chichibu Shrine is the retro Bamba street, which is lined with quirky shops and eateries. These include the delightful Italian-style fusion restaurant Cucina Salve, run by a local chef who grows the ingredients for his dishes and even crafts the tableware.

Bar lovers should not miss the nighttime scene, which includes numerous atmospheric offerings such as the British pub Highlander Inn and Bar Te Airigh. The globally famous Ichiro's malt whisky features at these spots. Brewed at the local Chichibu distillery, it is aged in rare *mizunara* oak casks crafted from the local forest.

Chichibu is surrounded by oak, beech and cedar trees, and its deep mountainous terrain has long been a site for *shugendo* (mountain asceticism). In addition, it is part of the 34 Kannon pilgrimage route of Buddhist temples. Spirituality also deeply permeates everyday life here more generally, as may be seen within the full calendar of local festivals—many centered around worship traditions. These include the 300-year-old *yomatsuri* (night festival) at Chichibu Shrine in early December, which features gigantesque illuminated floats and is one of the nation's most famous; and the summertime Funadama festival, with roots in both Buddhism and Shinto, where picturesque lanterns are sailed down the Arakawa River.

Additional options from among Chichibu's extensive menu of attractions include languid kayaking along the Nagatoro River; visiting one of the several local sake breweries; dipping in a restorative local onsen; or—for the daring—even a visit to a nearby abandoned village, such as Nichitsu or Take. There are also endless opportunities for seasonal activities such as gazing at *shidarezakura* (weeping cherry trees) at Seiun-ji Temple in spring, or at the fiery foliage alongside the Nakatsu Gorge in autumn.

This intriguing destination, in other words, reveals itself slowly. And to discover its timeless secrets, you may find that one visit is not enough.



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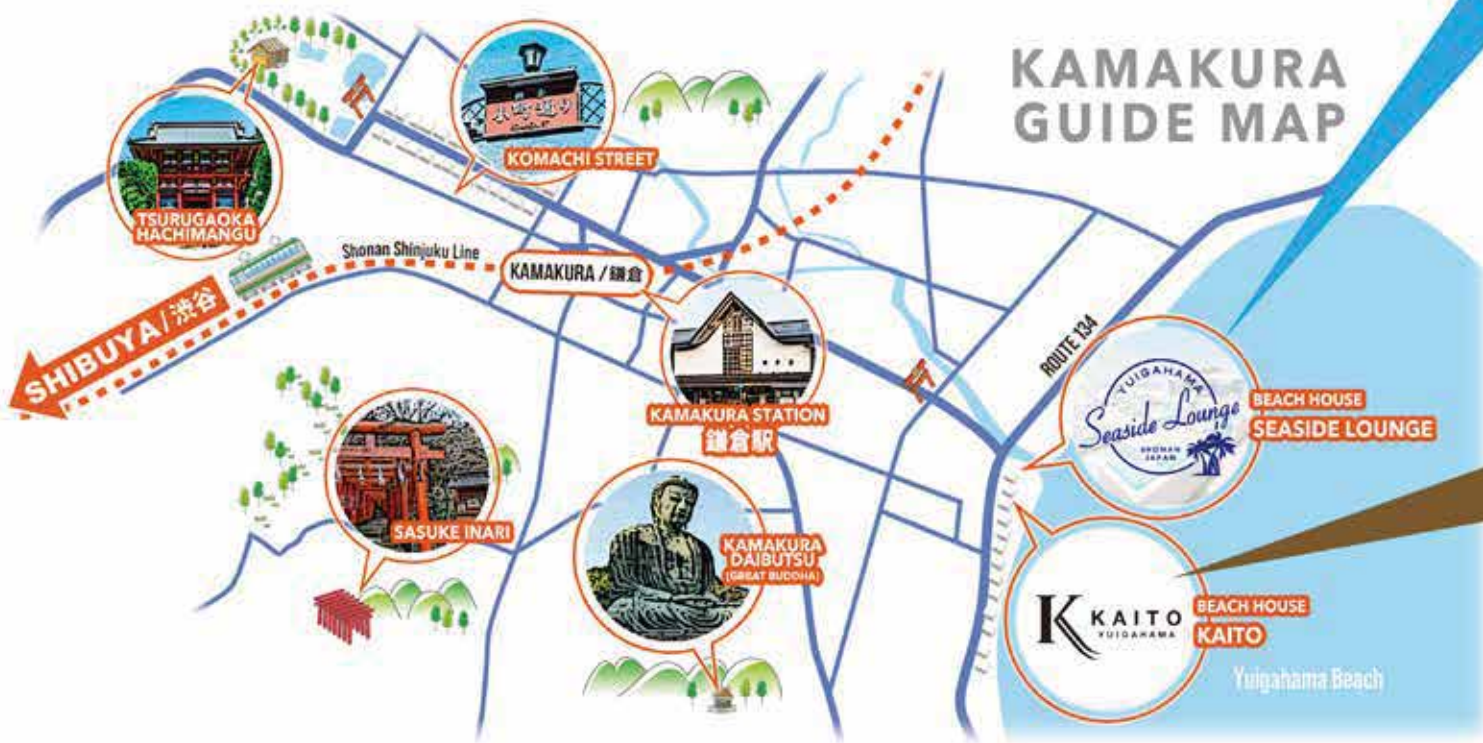
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# IT'S IN THE STARS

Your Horoscope for June – August 2024

BY CATHRYN MOE

♥ Love    ¥ Money    ♣ Luck

## ARIES

Mar 20–Apr 18 ♥♥♥♥ ¥¥¥ ♣♣



June brings money to feather investments. Ruler Mars moves to your house of income. Action offers results. Father's Day is yours to enjoy and remember. Venus transits to add beauty at home. July's Full Moon brings reflections of dreams for your career. Mercury goes retrograde in August. Don't let that stop you from plans for future travel and romance. It soon moves direct.

## GEMINI

May 20–Jun 20 ♥♥♥♥ ¥¥¥ ♣♣



Born in June? Happy Birthday! The New Moon is in your sign, blessing your deepest wishes. Venus, the Sun, Mercury and Jupiter in Gemini add joy to your days. Mars joins them in July. Things move quickly, no matter how hot it gets. Ruler Mercury gets to work, taking on projects at home. Don't be dismayed as it moves retrograde in August. It will soon go direct again!

## LEO

Jul 22–Aug 22 ♥♥♥ ¥¥¥ ♣♣♣♣



Summer highlights the efforts of Leos. June offers a gentle touch. Father's Day is a prime example. Mercury enters your sign in early July. Venus follows, then the Sun. Happy Birthday! The Leo New Moon in early August aligns your interests with loved ones. A joyous, abundant path arrives. Mercury goes retrograde but it's fine, moving direct before your summer ends.

## LIBRA

Sep 22–Oct 22 ♥♥♥♥ ¥¥ ♣♣♣♣



Feelings run deep as this summer begins. June is a month of reflection, family, and Father's Day. July picks up the pace. Mercury and Venus fluff and feather your connections. The Full Moon gets serious, saved by the Sun moving to your social sector of groups and interests. August gets tricky as Mercury goes retrograde. Then the Full Moon remembers it's your turn for romance.

## SAGITTARIUS

Nov 22–Dec 20 ♥♥♥ ¥¥¥ ♣♣



Your creativity moves fast, helping you fly through your summer. In June, the Sun, Venus, Mercury and Jupiter are in your relationship sector. You may want to accept invitations, finding your private space later. Late July, Mars joins in. Celebrations of all kinds bring fireworks to light up your skies. Mercury goes retrograde in August. Be sure to restate what is needed.

## AQUARIUS

Jan 19–Feb 17 ♥♥♥♥ ¥¥ ♣♣♣



Mercury transits to your fifth house of fun and romance in June. It joins Jupiter, the Sun, and Venus, making life luscious. The New Moon is in this sector. Want to start something new? Now's the time. Father's Day brings heartfelt moments. In July, Mars joins in for sports and children's activities. August offers patience in a long-term commitment as Mercury retrogrades.

## TAURUS

Apr 19–May 19 ♥♥♥ ¥¥¥ ♣♣♣



Mars enters Taurus in June. Results can be quick if you're enterprising. It approaches Uranus, which brings surprises. Watch your surroundings. Father's Day is one of family and memories. Mercury, Venus and the Sun influence life at home in July. They encourage decorating with love and confidence. The New Moon in this sector adds a cycle of fun to enjoy your August.

## CANCER

Jun 21–Jul 21 ♥♥♥ ¥¥¥ ♣♣♣♣



Whether in June or July, it's Happy Birthday to you! Venus, Mercury, and the Sun enter your sign in June. Be sure to gift yourself a bit of indulgence and dive into all the best moments. The New Moon is in your sign early July. You'll get projects moving, especially those that connect with your dreams. Mercury goes retrograde in August, but you're covered. There's time to enjoy.

## VIRGO

Aug 23–Sep 21 ♥♥♥♥ ¥¥ ♣♣♣



June brings a comfy balance. Venus, Mercury, and the Sun transit to see things your way. Father's Day offers moments of reflection. July continues its thoughtful cadence, with projects that match your interests. The Full Moon is romantic for Virgos. Your favorite events in August keep pace with your desires. Ruler Mercury goes retrograde, but you won't mind the results.

## SCORPIO

Oct 23–Nov 21 ♥♥♥♥ ¥¥¥ ♣♣♣



June can be a sweet month for Scorpios. Of course, it's all in how you play it. Mars transits to make relationships just plain sexy. The New Moon enhances your aura of sociable mystery. July takes off with a mind of its own. The Full Moon can help you nail down a contract. It's mature and serious. In August, Venus manages to cozy up with friends before Mercury goes retrograde.

## CAPRICORN

Dec 21–Jan 18 ♥♥ ¥¥¥ ♣♣♣



June works well for Capricorns. Venus, Mercury, and the Sun transit to energize an important relationship. In July, Ceres in your sign brings back-up to your efforts. The Full Moon in Capricorn helps you feel secure with choices you make. Long-distance plans for August? Travel may be tempting. Venus adds a touch of bliss and beauty. A note – Mercury will go retrograde.

## PISCES

Feb 18–Mar 19 ♥♥♥ ¥¥ ♣♣♣♣



Home life is lively in June. Mercury sparks up Jupiter, the Sun and Venus. The New Moon is in this sector. Time for a project or social gathering! Father's Day can be all-important. In July, Mars energizes whatever you have planned, especially if you're a homebody. August's activities include the spontaneity of acting on feelings with a logical touch. You may meet someone.

For weekly insights on love, money and luck, check [metropolisjapan.com/living/horoscope](http://metropolisjapan.com/living/horoscope)

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