

wagazasshi

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The Ryoma boom in 2010

waggazashi

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Give yourself a pat on the back: we've cleared the first ten years of the new millennium. Can you believe we're already heading into a new decade? New Year's is one of the two biggest holidays in Japan (the other being Obon in the summer), so special care is taken in regards to festivities at this time of the year. It's a much more drawn-out affair than popping some bubbly and cheering after the countdown, though, so we recommend you read up on our guide on page 8 so you do New Year's right!

In terms of 2010, though, Nagasaki prefecture had a great year. After all, it was the year of Sakamoto Ryoma: NHK's annual Taiga drama was none other than "Ryomaden," and it didn't hurt that the title role was played by Nagasaki native, singer/actor Masaharu Fukuyama. Check out our look back on the "Ryoma Boom" in Nagasaki on page 6.

While the Ryoma Boom might be over, Nagasaki's biggest and most famous festival is right around the corner in February: the Nagasaki Lantern Festival. It's an all-out, two-week celebration of the Lunar New Year, with performers from China dancing and doing flips under a thousand lanterns strung downtown (see page 10 for more information). We can't think of a better reason to escape your *kotatsu* and kill off those winter blues.

— **Emily Koh**

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Photo: Joe Van Acker



Event of the month Nagasaki Lantern Festival

Nagasaki City, February 3 – 17

This celebration of the Lunar New Year is one of Nagasaki's most famous and biggest events. In addition to the warm glow of the lanterns strung downtown, be sure to catch the various performances, from the dragon dance to daring acrobats. Our pick: don't miss the man with a hundred masks. That's all we'll say.

City of Light 2010

Huis Ten Bosch, November 1 – February 28

There's still holiday cheer to be had at Huis Ten Bosch in what's been dubbed "the greatest illumination in the Orient." More than seven million spheres of light bathe this Dutch-inspired theme park in a colorful glow.

Shimabara Winter Night Fantasia

Shimabara, December 1 – January 8

Couples can clasp a padlock at the Romantic Arch in the "Couple Zone," and look for heart and clover-shaped stones together to strengthen their love. Don't fear, as it's family-friendly too, with both an "Animal Zone" and "Character Zone" to amuse younger visitors.

Hatsunohide (First Sunrise of the New Year)

Nagasaki City, January 1

If you have yet to visit Mt. Inasa—ranked as one of the three greatest night views in Japan—there's no better time than on the first day of the year—right at sunrise. The ropeway lift to the summit, which is 333 meters up, begins at 6 a.m. only on this day. Start the year off right.

Shimabara Castle Hina Doll Display

Shimabara, January 21

This is a great time to take a walk around Shimabara City, as many small shops and homes have put their hina doll collections on display.

Nomozaki Daffodil Festival

Nagasaki City, late January

Thousands of daffodils are in full bloom this time of the year in Nomozaki.

Chosen as one of the top 100 "fragrant sceneries" in 2009, swing by on a Sunday to receive complimentary bowls of *tonjiru* (pork miso soup).

99 Islands Oyster Festival

Saikai City, every weekend in February

Round up some friends and head to Saikai Pearl Sea Resort to grill some oysters and chow down on other fresh Nagasaki seafood in this annual gourmet event.

Hetomato

Goto Island, January 16

Single ladies watch out! In this unique event, you'll find yourselves thrown onto a giant straw shoe and carried around town. ■

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THE RYOMA BOOM



Kim Durinick examines the national preoccupation with Ryoma Sakamoto in 2010

Nearly 143 years after his assassination, Ryoma Sakamoto has become the face of Japan in 2010. Though he has always been one of Japan's best-loved historical figures, this year in particular he appeared on just about everything, from beer cans to Nagasaki's commuter train, the Sea Side Liner. This nation-wide craze for everything Ryoma Sakamoto has been labeled the "Ryoma Boom."

Much of this is a result of NHK's 2010 TV series, "Ryoma Den" (*The Legend of Ryoma*). This series was a huge success in Japan and is now set to air in Taiwan with the possibility of also being aired in Korea, Vietnam and Thailand.

"Ryoma Den" reenacts the story of Ryoma Sakamoto's life as a low-ranking samurai and a leader of the Meiji Restoration. At that time, Japan was a feudal society emerging from over 200 years of isolation, so most Japanese knew little of the world outside of Japan. Ryoma studied about western concepts such as democracy, the Bill of Rights and stock corporations under well-traveled naval officer Katsu Kaishu. Inspired by the teachings of democracy and the idea of a socially equitable society, Ryoma sought to incorporate these ideals into Japanese society.

Eventually, he helped forge an alliance between two of Japan's most powerful military rivals, the Satsuma and Choshu Clans. He also set up Japan's first modern corporation - Kaientai - a private navy and shipping company based out of Nagasaki. He used the company to provide the Satsuma-Choshu military alliance with weapons. This powerful alliance pressured the shogunate to peacefully accept Ryoma's progressive "eight point plan," which laid out what was necessary to have a stable and socially equitable Japan following 700 years of feudal rule.

Although he was assassinated before he could see the impact of his work on Ja-

pan, Ryoma's influence is still felt in everyday Japanese society. He has always been considered one of Japan's greatest heroes. Since the airing of "Ryoma Den," the popularity of all things and places associated with Ryoma have skyrocketed and places such as Kochi, Kagoshima and Nagasaki have become unusually popular tourist destinations. Whereas Kochi (Ryoma's birthplace, formerly known as Tosa) has always relied on its Ryoma connection for tourism, this is a unique opportunity for places like Kagoshima and Nagasaki to establish themselves as noteworthy travel destinations in the future.

Nagasaki has received special attention not only because a large portion of the show was filmed in the prefecture, but also because its star, the very popular singer-actor Masaharu Fukuyama, is originally from Nagasaki. In the first half of this year, Nagasaki had 2.3 times more tourists than it received in the same time period last year, and some popular tourism spots had already been visited by over 25 million people.

While the "Ryoma Boom" has brought a high number of visitors here this year, tourists in Nagasaki are sure to discover and enjoy other local treasures. The quaint pottery town of Hasami, local delicacies like Kawatana manju, and the beautiful view from the onsen in Iojima could help maintain Nagasaki's newfound popularity. Nagasaki has Ryoma to thank for raising its profile, but when his popularity fades, its traditional specialties will remain. ■

Oshōgatsu: New Year the Japanese way

Genevieve Seah offers some tips on celebrating the New Year Japanese-style

Photo: Masayoshi Sekimura

That Japanese people love holiday celebrations and festivals is a well-known fact. It is said that you can always find some sort of celebration going on somewhere in Japan. None, however, is as important as New Year's Day (*oshōgatsu*). It is the celebration of the arrival of another year, just as it is in many other cultures. However, New Year celebrations in Japan are not the one-day, food-gorging, alcohol-binging party event that many of us are familiar with. Instead, it's a month-long process, beginning as early as mid-December and ending as late as January 11th.

Susuharai

The Japanese believe that at the time of the New Year, a god visits each household and provides for an abundant harvest in the coming year. In preparation for the god's arrival, the house is purified by thorough cleaning (*susuharai*) and sanctified by decorations of pine branches, bamboo and straw ropes. Until

the Taisho Period, December 13th was recognized as a day to perform *susuharai*. Today, the cleaning is not as extensive as it was in the past and many households begin cleaning on New Year's Eve instead.

Kagami mochi

In addition to the purification of the house, food is prepared and displayed to welcome the god. Mirror rice cakes (*kagamimochi*) are arranged one on top of another, each smaller than the one below it. The name stems from the religious significance of mirrors in Shinto – gods are thought to reside within them. Since the god of the New Year is also known as the god of grain, rice cakes are especially appropriate offerings and serve as a reminder that the god is present throughout the celebration.

Osechiryori

If rice cake is too bland for you, worry not. The culinary highlight of the New Year celebration is *osechiryōri*; special

New Year goodies packed into fifty three or five-tiered lacquer boxes (*jubako*). *Osechiryōri* was originally a way for Japanese families to survive the first several days of the New Year, when stores throughout Japan were closed. It can be imagined that the amount of food sitting in the tiered boxes must be formidable. However, *osechiryōri* is more than just a sumptuous three-day feast. Each dish and ingredient carries a special symbolic significance. For example, herring roe is eaten in the hope of having many children, as represented by the great number of small fish eggs. Black beans are included because black has traditionally been considered to be a charm to ward off demons. Yellow chestnuts are associated with gold and therefore represent wealth.

Matsunouchi & hatsumode

With all the hard work done, there is nothing to do but relax and enjoy the next eleven days. The first seven days of the New Year's holiday proper is referred to as *matsunouchi*. "Matsu" means pine tree, and it refers to the decorations of pine and bamboo that are removed on January 7th. This period is the time for *hatsumōde*, the first visit of the year to a temple or shrine to pray for good luck during the coming year. It is common to see men and women clad in their best kimono. Many people prefer to make this visit on the midnight of New Year's Eve when masses converge on famous shrines and temples. Meiji Jingu (one of the most famous shrines in Japan) attracts an average of 3.5 million people for *hatsumōde* during the first three days.

The crowds may be overwhelming, but the experience of jostling amongst men and women clad in vibrant kimono in the winter cold and listening to bells chime at midnight could be one of your best Japanese cultural experiences ever.

Nanakusagayu

On the seventh and last day of New Year's holiday proper, the stomach is finally given a rest from all the festive feasting. On the morning of January 7th, also known as Seven Herb Festival (*nanakusa no sekku*), a rice porridge (*nanakusagayu*) containing seven kinds of herbs thought to be especially beneficial to health is eaten with prayers for good health.

Kagamibiraki

But wait, the celebrations are not yet over. There is one last thing to do... well, one last kind of food to eat, to be exact. On January 11th, the mirror rice cakes used in the New Year's celebrations (surely you don't think that they are solely for display purposes!) are put into a soup called *zoni* or made into *shiruko* – sweetened azuki bean soup with roasted rice cakes. It is taboo to cut the rice cakes since they were first offered to the god of the New Year, so they are broken instead. This occasion is called *kagamibiraki* and it marks the formal end of the New Year season.

What are you doing this New Year's Day? Why not take a break from your usual celebration style and experience a Japanese New Year instead? I hope you can stomach it! 

Nagasaki Lantern Festival: *A lantern at the end of the tunnel*

After the festive holiday season, February seems bleak by comparison, but **Joe Van Acker** shows us how it's lit up (literally) by one of Nagasaki's biggest festivals

Winters can be tough, but each month has its own charms. December has "the holidays" and vacation time. January gives us a chance for a fresh start (at least chronologically). As for February, well... February has Valentine's Day which, as we all know, was made up by Hallmark. Fortunately, there is a lantern at the end of the tunnel: the Nagasaki Lantern Festival. February's dull gray yields to the warm glow of approximately 15,000 lanterns lining the streets of Nagasaki for this two-week celebration of the Chinese New Year.

Though Nagasaki's Chinese population has been ringing in the New Year for centuries, the festival wasn't made official until 1994. Since then, it has been embraced by the entire city and is expanding each year. Nagasaki's Chinatown (長崎新地 *Nagasaki Shinchi*) is clearly the epicenter of the festival and is the best place to soak in the sights, sounds and smells. Minato Park (湊公園), Chuo Park (中央公園) and Hamanomachi (浜の町) are the three most popular spots to bask in the glow, but there are plenty of events and attractions peppered

throughout the area.

The Nagasaki Lantern Festival provides several once-a-year attractions. The Chinese Lion Dance (中国獅子舞), Dragon Dance (龍踊り) and Chinese Acrobats (中国雜技) amplify the usual Chinatown buzz to a roar. Each of these performances is held multiple times in different places, so there's no need to choose one over the other. There are also dozens of other events starting in the afternoon each day. The star attractions are, of course, the lanterns themselves, which come in a remarkable number of shapes and sizes. From tall, menacing men with flowing beards and animals of the zodiac, to more traditional lantern shapes (round or rectangular), the creativity and skill of the lanterns' craftsmen are readily apparent. While the lanterns are impressive during the day, their beauty and charm are magnified by nightfall. However, night-time patrons must be prepared to push their way through the hordes of amateur photographers and other festival-philes in the evening. Braving the crowds is definitely worth it, as the bright lights and eclectic performances combine to imbue visitors with

the understanding that this is a special event.

The festival also offers visitors an excuse to enjoy what many consider to be China's greatest contribution: food. Gyoza (餃子), ramen (ラーメン) and champon (ちゃんぽん) are always available throughout Nagasaki, but kakuni manju (角煮まんじゅう)—steamed buns stuffed with braised pork—and ebichiriman (エビチリまん)—another variety of steamed-bun, filled with spicy, fried shrimp—can be more difficult to track down. Luckily, this is not the case in Chinatown. There is no shortage of food at the festival but a lot of restaurants will have longer-than-usual wait times, making street food a justified indulgence.

The 2011 Lantern Festival runs from February 3rd to February 17th, allowing for multiple visits if one is so inclined. Nagasaki Shinchi is the oldest of the three great Chinatowns in Japan and this event reveals all the things that separate it from the rest. Nagasaki prides itself on its international history, and the Lantern Festival serves as a beautiful reminder of Nagasaki's role as Japan's gateway to the world. ■

Official site:

www.nagasaki-lantern.com

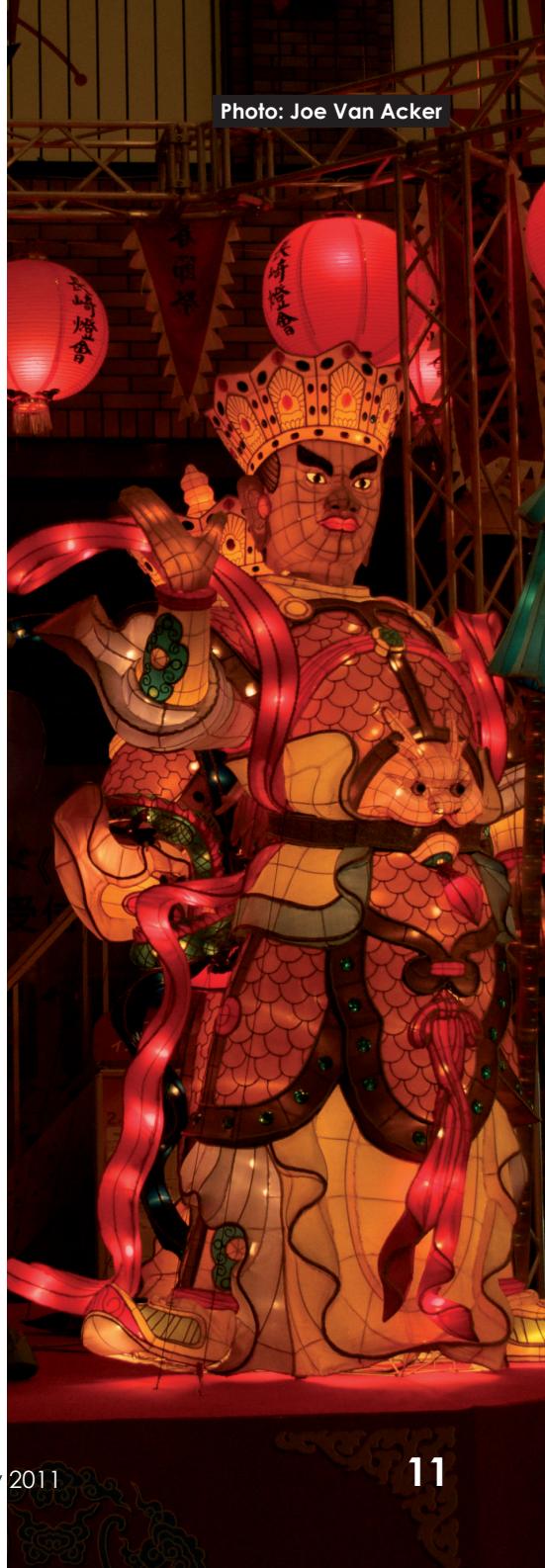
Map:

www.nagasaki-lantern.com/contents/guidance/images/map.pdf

Schedule:

www.nagasaki-lantern.com/contents/events/2011schedule.pdf

Photo: Joe Van Acker



Japan travel notes: Kyoto's kitchen



Emily Koh takes you on a tour of Kyoto's iconic culinary stage: Nishiki Market

Photo: Emily Koh

Spanning 400 meters in length, Nishiki Market provides a veritable gastronomic walking tour of Kyoto food. Over a hundred shops cram each side of the arcade, many of which have been around for centuries and are therefore known as *shinise* shops. Nishiki Market originally started out as a fish market in the 16th century Edo period before evolving into the open-air marketplace it's known as today. And to its credit, it remains remarkably clean and odor-free, resembling less an Asian fish market and more of a prototype for *depachika*, Japan's famous department store food basements, with its sensory overload of smells and flavors.

There is no shortage of variety here;

from fresh seafood caught from Lake Biwa, barrels of pickled vegetables, and so many variations of tofu that it will send your head spinning, Nishiki has it all. Hunks of snapping turtle meat lay side-by-side with a cluster of milky blowfish, a specialty of Kyoto. It's the perfect way to acquaint yourself with the Kyoto diet, which pays heed to seasonal flavors so that everything is fresh.

Walking from one end to the other while leisurely sampling everything—and this may be one of the few places in Japan where you *can* eat and walk at the same time—will take you about an hour. Go hungry, heed the fact that your eyes are bigger than your stomach, and be sure to hit up our recommendations.

Aritsugu (有次)

Aritsugu is a renowned name in hand-crafted knives. They've been in Nishiki Market for over 400 years, and even used to supply the Imperial Palace. Tip-toe carefully into the shop, where there are thousands of high-quality knives for all your chopping needs (you can get your name engraved on one as well!), and check out the bowls and cutlery, some of which retail over ¥30,000!

Tanaka Keiran (田中鶏卵)

The taste of *tamagoyaki*, or egg custard, depends largely on household preference and region. Tanaka Keiran's tend to lean to the savory side, with a pure "eggy" flavor. Buy one of the individual skewers—you'll be surprised at how tender and almost creamy these are.

Uchida (うちだ)

Pickled local vegetables, called *kyo-tsukemono* (京漬け物) are quintessential Kyoto cuisine, and the market is in no shortage of mounds of daikon, turnips and other vegetables with a salty crunch.

Fuka (麩嘉).

Fu, or wheat gluten, is rarely seen in Western cooking but remains a staple in Japanese food. Fuka sells them in dried form in boxes, which you can reconstitute in hot water, or directly in miso soup or *suimono* (clear soup). Don't miss their *fuka manju*, which uses the *fu* as the wrapper for a red bean paste filling instead of mochi.

Mochitsukiya (もちつき屋)

Mamemochi are chewy rice cakes filled

with *anko* (red bean paste), like regular *daifuku* (mochi rice cakes), but studded with black beans. They are a Kyoto specialty. You can buy them individually or in a box here. Unlike commercially sold versions, these *mamemochi* are the perfect balance of sweet and salty. For a souvenir, pick up their *mochi* loaves, which come pre-sliced and with beans (no red bean paste).

Konnamonja (こんなもんじゃ)

It's hard to miss the big crowd of people around the corner of this shop. Queue up with them and buy a bag of soymilk donuts, piping hot and fresh off the production line. Chow 'em down before they cool off — these mini donut rings are fluffy and ethereally light, with just a touch of sweetness. It'll change your opinion about soymilk donuts forever.

Terakoya Honpo (寺子屋本舗)

This shop specializes in traditional Japanese rice crackers known as *senbei*, but the thing to try here is their *nure okaki*, which are softened *senbei* on skewers, which make them chewy, not crunchy. They come in a variety of flavors – salty, sweet, with *nori* (seaweed) or mayo. ■

How to get there:

The easiest way to get to Kyoto is to take a plane from Nagasaki Airport to Osaka Itami Airport. From there, catch either a shuttle bus or JR to Kyoto. Nishiki Market is on Nishiki Street (錦通), one block north to Shijo Street (四条通) and west of Teramachi Street (寺町通).

East Asian cinema primer

Who's who and what's what?

Part 1

Looking to expand your film repertoire? Let **Brendan Thornton** take you inside the East Asian film scene, with its eclectic style culled from a rich history

Coming from the Hollywood entertainment machine and getting your first taste of Japanese cinema can be a big step. Going from Japan and branching out to China and Korea can be downright intimidating. Over the next three issues, I will be your guide to the most important facts about Japanese, Chinese and Korean cinema, which actors and actresses you need to be following, and which movies you need to be watching. We will start our cinematic tour with China, move to Korea in the next issue, and conclude with Japan.

China

Background

Chinese cinema has come a long way from its pre-1900 naissance in Shanghai. Many films in Chinese history had political or social undertones which only became more prevalent after the

Communist Revolution. As the number of movies used for propaganda rose, so did the number of Chinese audience members, going from 47 million in 1949 to 415 million in 1959. Chinese movies started getting overseas exposure with the rise of the "Fifth Generation" – a group of Beijing Film Academy graduate filmmakers. Most notable among this group were Zhang Yimou and Chen Kaige, who went on to produce famous works such as *Raise the Red Lantern* (1991) and *Farewell My Concubine* (1993.) Celebrated actress Gong Li also rose to prominence during this period as she starred in many of these films.

The Sixth Generation of Chinese filmmakers developed under the overhanging clouds of state censorship. Sixth generation films are marked by low budgets and neorealist themes, which some critics say is reflective of the younger



Chinese generation's disenfranchisement with a heavy-handed government and rapid urbanization. Most famous among the Sixth Generation filmmakers are Wang Xiaoshuai and Lou Ye and their works *Beijing Bicycle* (2001) and *Suzhou River* (2000), respectively.

Modern Chinese cinema is marked by three distinct markets: the mainland, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. Each market has its own storied history and large share of cinematic gems and acting talent.

Who's Who

The Five Tigers (無綫五虎將): A group of five Hong Kong actors, the most famous and successful ones out of the group being Andy Lau and Tony Leung. Lau and Leung branched out into mainland Chinese cinema and have acted together in several films.

The Four Dan Actresses (四小花旦):

If you haven't caught on, the Chinese enjoy their unique group appellations. This group of actresses is made up of Xu Jinglei, Zhang Ziyi, Zhao Wei and Zhou Xun. Each actress commands great name recognition and star power throughout East Asian cinema.

What's What

In the Mood for Love (pictured): If you need an introduction to the art of director Wong Kar Wai, look no further. A slow-burning, sumptuously filmed tale of two estranged spouses from different couples who find comfort and friendship with each other – a friendship that is tested with a shocking revelation.

Farewell My Concubine: Chen Kaige's epic tale of two male performers in the Peking Opera and the woman who comes between them. □

My two yen: Reviews



Out

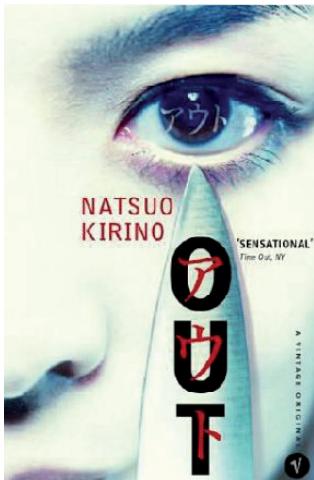
Natsuo Kirino
Vintage Books

OUT CENTERS AROUND four working class women struggling with their own personal issues at home. Yayoi: an attractive lady struggling to keep her husband from a hostess girl. Yoshie: a hard-working woman struggling to make ends meet while tending to her bed-ridden mother-in-law and bringing up a teenage daughter. Kuniko: a selfish and pretentious woman running herself down to the ground with debt. Masako: a hardy woman stranded in a family where relationships have all but disappeared.

All four women have one thing in common: they want out. When one of them is tipped over the edge, these four women fall into a web of murder, lured by the scent of money. What will become of these four characters? Will they come out of this deed unscathed? Will it cost them their freedom? Or their lives?

This psychological thriller – winner of

Japan's Grand Prix for crime fiction – is so dark, so edgy and so gruesome, it will leave you wanting more. The plot moves along like a movie, but Kirino eloquently illustrates the raw intense ness of human emotions. It will leave you disturbed as the author examines how far people can go when pushed. Kirino delves straight into the minds of different characters and allows readers to get right into the shoes of these ordinary people.



Out will undoubtedly make most people cringe: Kirino puts so much detail into illustrating the gruesome imagery that it will make you shudder. Yet she also has a great insight into the human mind, which she demonstrates throughout the story. At the same time, she challenges the stereotypical view of Japanese women in society through these four leading ladies. It's a gutsy book, guaranteed to leave readers simultaneously impressed and disturbed. **Michelle Cheng** ■



Dog Hill Café

2303-1 Konegoto-go, Higashi Sonogi-machi
0957-46-0256
11:00 - 19:30

NESTLED ON TOP OF a hill just off the border between Kawatana and Higashisonogi is the family-owned and operated Dog Hill Café. Overlooking Omura Bay, it offers front row seats to some of the best scenery in Nagasaki, particularly at sunset. As the name suggests, the place is filled with dogs (mostly corgis) just waiting to be played with, and you are more than welcome to bring your own to frolic while you dine.

While the furry dinner companions and impressive vistas set Dog Hill Café apart from other coffee shops, the food is what will keep you coming back. The menu caters to both Japanese and Western tastes with a variety of satisfying dishes (starting from ¥800 - ¥1600). It also gives you an opportunity to practice those handy katakana reading skills. Among my personal favorites on the menu are the Avocado Gratin and Carbonara Pasta. The One Plate Lunch is also a popular choice. The best items on the menu,

however, are the carefully crafted (and handmade!) frappuccinos. Starting at ¥600, these concoctions are a bit pricey but worth every yen.

The staff is extremely friendly and attentive. In spite of hosting somewhere between 20-30 dogs, the place is surprisingly clean. At times, you may encounter a yellow puddle or find the need to talk over a small chorus of yelps, but it's only because this restaurant's canine inhabitants are always excited that you've stopped by. They are well-behaved while you are eating and wait patiently or nap at your feet. The atmosphere is complete with chime instrumental versions of popular J-pop melodies.

It's highly recommended to call ahead if the weather is bad, as the restaurant tends to close early on rainy days. Sunday afternoons also can be quite busy, so get there early or be prepared to wait.
Ashleigh Allen □



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For more information visit:
www.mikes-sasebo.com



Located near Sasebo Station
near the entrance to the arcade