

waggazzashi
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Island in the sun
Fukue in focus

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wagazashi

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As expected, these last few blustery winter months have been draining. If you're like me, you probably found yourself wallowing in seasonal depression before you even realized it. Perhaps you've surrendered to the oven-like enclave of your kotatsu, effectively putting the kibosh on any productivity whatsoever?

Which isn't to say I wasn't without entertainment. The warm glow of the TV screen informed me faithfully everyday about the legal woes of Japan's K-Pop flavor of the month, girl group KARA. Korean pop groups are exploding on Japanese music charts these days. If you're feeling lost among the catchy beats and highly-stylized dance moves, you're in for a treat: we've got the 101 on Japan's top K-Pop players (p 15).

On the other hand, if you'd rather embrace the last days of nippy weather, check out our last-minute guide to skiing and snowboarding in northern Japan (p 8). Just because you're in Kyushu doesn't mean you have to relinquish a true winter sports experience!

But if you're like me, you're probably already dreaming of sunlight and warmth...in which case you should check out the unabashed love letter to the Goto Islands (p 10), which will have you counting down the days to summer.

Lucky for us, the end of February brought us some unexpectedly warm days. Could spring be around the corner...?

Emily Koh, Editor-in-chief

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Photo: Fumiko Nakamura

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Photo: Tristan Penver

The unluckiest man in the world

Double standards in Japan?

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Event of the month

Huis Ten Bosch Tulip Festival

Huis Ten Bosch, early March – early April

Celebrate the arrival of spring with the tulips brightening Huis Ten Bosch from the winter drab. Don't miss the flower carpets!

Events

Kite Flying Festival Nagasaki City, April 3

Beautiful kites aren't enough for you? You're in luck. This festival isn't all about aesthetics. Competitors attempt to cut their opponent's kite strings in an impressive display of skill and dexterity at Tohakkei Park.

Whirlpool Viewing Saikai, throughout April

The famed whirlpools beneath this bridge appear so often during early April each year that locals actually organize viewing parties.

Obama Onsen Festival / Kyushu Fireworks Competition Unzen, early April

In addition to the fantastic *onsen* of Obama, the festival features a parade, beauty pageant and karaoke competition. Don't miss the exciting fireworks competition that takes place on April 2.

Sakura Festival: Sugar Road / Omura Sweets Festival Omura, April 3

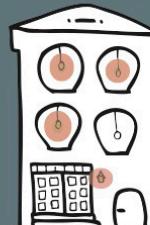
This event at Omura Park combines flowers in full bloom with sweets from local Japanese and Western-style shops.

Earth Day Sasebo, April 24

Come together to collaborate on ways we can protect the earth. Check out yoga, bracelet making and delicious food for both meat lovers and vegetarians alike—all served on an eco-friendly plate, of course. ■

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Joe Van Acker on the recent QI controversy and the need for open discussion of tragedy



The unluckiest man in the world

Photo: Ed Uthman

British comedian Stephen Fry found himself in some hot water as a result of the comments he and others made on his BBC quiz show "QI" ("Quite Interesting").

The controversy surrounds statements made about Tsutomu Yamaguchi, the only man officially recognized by the Japanese government as having survived the atomic bombings of both Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Yamaguchi was in Hiroshima on business when the first bomb fell. He then traveled back to his native Nagasaki by train, only to relive the ordeal as the second bomb dropped. While filming his show, Fry referred to Yamaguchi as "either the unluckiest

or luckiest" man in the world, and his guests made a few remarks that might have been made "in bad taste," but were not particularly inflammatory.

Despite being fairly innocuous by Western standards, these statements have aroused the ire of a number of people, including some Japanese politicians. Tomihisa Taue, the current mayor of Nagasaki, has suggested that British people "lack understanding" of the effects of atomic bombs, and requested that the BBC air a documentary about victims of the bombings. (Similarly in 2007, Taue demanded that Defense Minister Fumio Kyuma withdraw remarks suggesting

that the 1945 bombings “couldn’t be helped.” Mr. Kyuma eventually resigned from his post.) Foreign Minister Seiji Maehara has publicly stated his “extreme displeasure” and “strong anger” regarding the BBC episode. The Japanese Embassy in London lodged a formal complaint against the BBC, prompting a quick apology from the network as well as the show’s producers.

But is this outrage justified? Japan, too, is guilty of insensitivity toward other groups. Whether it stems from a man in blackface portraying Barack Obama or Don Quixote stocking “Heil Hitler” costumes, Japan is as capable of causing offense as any other country. Does this mean that various Japanese actors, producers and politicians should feel compelled to apologize humbly and effusively for commenting the grave sin of “offending”? What satisfaction would that bring? Who would benefit from this act of contrition?

The QI imbroglio seems to be a clear case of misunderstanding and miscommunication. To native English speakers, it’s obvious that the presenters of “QI” weren’t suggesting that the use of atomic weapons is funny. They weren’t making light of tens of thousands of people being incinerated where they stood, of radiation poisoning and skin grafts, or any of the terrible

consequences of an atomic explosion. The very point of the discussion (and of the jokes) was that this was a truly horrific experience for Mr. Yamaguchi and for everyone else affected by the bombings. A fundamental disconnect exists between the intent of the presenters and the interpretation of those who have taken offense. The idea that a comedy show has engendered such furor and resentment suggests that more open discourse is necessary.

Just because a subject evokes sadness or anger doesn’t mean that it must hereby be considered inviolable. Taboos don’t foster understanding or education; they foster awkward pauses and uncomfortable silences. Disasters, catastrophes and intentionally-inflicted outrages merit

conversation. If that conversation tends toward the absurd, then so be it. Sarcasm and satire allows us to focus on the misery we inflict upon each other in a meaningful way without merely expressing indignation or regret.

In an ironic twist of fate, Fry was forced to cancel a recently-planned trip to Japan as a result of the fallout from the “QI” debacle. He had planned to film an episode for his five-part series “Planet Word,” focusing on understanding the development, intricacies and general efficacy of language. Sounds like a good idea. ■

The great winter escape

Tristan Penver shows us that Japan boasts ski facilities to rival anywhere else in the world

Photo: Kikuko Nakayama



Ask anyone to name the best countries and regions for skiing and snowboarding, and the usual suspects are inevitably listed: the U.S.A. (Vail Aspen), Canada (Whistler), and Europe (Chamonix, Tignes, Val d'Isere). Few people realize that Japan thoroughly deserves an inclusion in that list as well. With over 600 resorts, it's the global leader of ski facilities by numbers alone. Perhaps more surprising is that Forbes Traveler listed Niseko United, Japan's biggest and most popular ski resort, as the second

snowiest ski resort in the world.

It seems the secret is getting out. Japan is increasingly becoming recognized among the international ski and snowboard community as "the next big place." Excellent transportation infrastructure, friendly locals, great food and natural hot springs are all contributors to the country's rising popularity as a ski destination. In

addition, Japanese resorts are often cheaper than more established resorts elsewhere.

Where to go?

Ski resorts in Japan are concentrated in two areas of the country. The first are the Japanese Alps, with a huge variety of resorts clustered in and around Nagano Prefecture. Nagano, as you may recall, hosted the 1998 Winter Olympics, and winter sports are built into this area's DNA. The most well-known resort in this region is **Shiga Kogen**, a huge area that is comprised of 21 interconnected ski fields. It has also attracted attention for the Japanese macaques (or snow monkeys) that hang out in the *onsen* of the Snow Monkey Park nearby, much to the delight of tourists. Alternatives include the quieter and more traditional resort of **Nozawa Onsen** or **Happo One**, which was used as a competition venue in the Olympics.

The second area is the northern island of Hokkaido, which is known for its frigid climates and large volumes of snow. Best known among the resorts here—and probably in all of Japan—is **Niseko United**, a large conglomeration of four individual resorts, situated about a two-hour bus ride outside of Sapporo. Niseko is probably the most commercial and westernized ski resort in Japan. Its popularity has skyrocketed in recent years, boosting

its reputation overseas, and plays host to vast numbers of Western tourists, especially Australians. If you're looking for a resort that strongly features traditional Japanese culture, it's best to look elsewhere. Of course, most of the skiers and snowboarders here are more focused on the extraordinary amounts of powder snow which the resort is famous for. **Furano**, which is less developed and crowded, lies further north in central Hokkaido, but also receives a ridiculous abundance of the fine, white snow.

Worth a mention as well is night-skiing. Some of the bigger resorts like Shiga Kogen and Niseko offer skiing under lights, which come on at around 5 p.m. Not only does this lengthen the amount of time available

for skiing (a leg-destroying 12 hours a day) but it also provides a completely different ambiance from skiing during the daytime. It's definitely worth doing at least once.

When to go?

Individual resorts vary, but the Japanese ski season generally runs from late-November to late-April. A popular option is to include a ski trip to Niseko with a visit to the annual Sapporo Snow Festival, which occurs in February each year. There are still a few weeks left to take advantage of the cold weather, so pack up your gear and head north before spring comes around! ■

Rumours of paradise

Robin McGeough promises that Fukue island is a place where there's more comfort in being lost than found

The island of Fukue is best traveled not with a map, not with insight but rather a rumor. Like a trail of lost pearls stringing off Kyushu, rumors become the Goto Islands.

Much of Goto's fame comes remarkably not from its Shangri La-inspired beauty, but rather from its austere position as a refugee for many of Japan's "hidden Christians." Waves of Christians sought asylum

amidst decades of worship under the cover of candlelight, while evading persecution from the Tokugawa shogunate in the 1600s. Rumors kept them hidden—but alas, rumors also gave them away.

Nowadays, Fukue is an island still clutching, no longer to religious salvation, but rather to the rumor that it

might no longer exist. With the island's loss of the Japan Ironman triathlon, the dwindling number of festivalgoers, and the haunting rise of foreclosed schools, it seems as if the island is destined to fall from rumor to myth in the matter of a hundred years.

“ Paradise needs nothing more than a good mixtape, a pack of cigarettes and time ”

But Fukue ain't dead yet! Paradise needs nothing more than a good mixtape, a pack of cigarettes, and time.

Oh, and a car. Without access to the luxuries our mainland compatriots enjoy—movie theaters, nightclubs or Roman orgies—we islanders have had to concoct our own fun. We get our kicks from the road. Driving routes planned from rumors passed down of abandoned villages, private beaches and

staggering sea vistas are proof that an invigorating blood still flows through Fukue's concrete arteries, spreading to the far reaches of the island. Any amount of time spent lost on Fukue is enough to engulf the driver in the gamble of stumbling upon a new gem or dead end. It's about taking the long way and letting the island find you. Hairpin turns up forgotten mountain roads leave those looking for nothing—but open for anything—astounded and rewarded with sweeping views of Fukue's erupting coastline.

One such rumor found its way to me in the form of a Google map with penciled-in details of back roads and fishermen trails on my desk one morning from my school's secretary.

It was directions to what she professed as the best road on the island. Careening through streets wide enough only for an *obaachan* with her elbows out, I finally emerged from the matchbox houses and found reason to the rumor. Endless kilometers of road, delicately (perilously at times) lined the crashing coastlines of Fukue's more tumultuous northern side. Harrowing waves broke and clambered up the black sea coast as if trying to claw their way out from the deep.

Broken Social Scene on my iPod setting the tone, I crawled across the coast,

clambering out to finagle with my camera amidst gusts of sea breezes to capture a moment in the middle of my own fleeting history on the island. Perhaps it's the amount of the TV show "Lost" I've watched (writer's note: FAR TOO MUCH) but I can completely sympathize with 'The Others' now: when an untouched island paradise has given way to you, keeping it a rumor is your best case scenario.

Sadly, inner beauty is not the same as marketable beauty. Fukue is playing hardball against thousands of other

destinations to glean your hard-earned yen vacation days among the flash and glamour of other Japanese vacationing hot spots. Compared to places like Okinawa, Fukue

draws only a trickle of the deserved flood of tourists to the island. Fukue's relative anonymity, however, gives way to opportunities to embrace those brief yet exceptional experiences born from taking a chance on a rumor.

Cook, Cabot, Columbus: they all ventured abroad on rumors to find, to conquer, to discover—but Fukue is the antipode. Fukue is where you come to get lost and forego the map; to give way to the island's power to discover what you would think is an impossible paradise in Japan. ■



Getting married in Japan

Have you ever been invited to a Japanese wedding? Let **Audrey Akcasu** prepare you for what to expect.

A brief history

In ancient Japan, the common marriage practice was called *muko-iri*, where the man married into the woman's family. A man would visit the home of the woman of his choice, and if the family found him suitable, he would be invited to a *tokoro-arawashi* ceremony, where he would be offered *mochi*. However, the woman would not be accepted into the man's house until she gave birth to a child or the man's parents died. Until then, the man visited the wife nightly and offered his labor to her family.

Starting in the 14th century, the practice of *yome-iri* came into favor, in which the woman was married into the man's family. At this time, marriage was used to keep peace between feudal lords. Thus, a matchmaker (*nakodo*) became very important to make the arrangements.

After World War II, women were granted more freedom in marriage, but even today, some marriages are arranged (*omiai*) by a professional *nakodo*, acting as a go between, although the final decision is made by the couple. However, *ren'ai kekkon*, or love marriages, are most common.

Shinzenshiki

Once the couple is engaged, the real

work begins with the ceremony itself. Over the years many couples have moved away from traditional Shinto wedding ceremonies in favor of Christian or contemporary ones. This trend is said to have been popularized in the '80s by two ceremonies: the wedding of Princess Diana to Prince Charles and secondly, the televised wedding of Japanese idol Momoe Yamaguchi.

The traditional Shinto ceremony (*shinzenshiki*) is very expensive, which is one reason for the shift away from them. Held at a Shinto shrine, the bride's face is painted white to show her maidenhood to the gods, and she is dressed in traditional white kimono (*shiromuku*) to signify purity.

The bride also wears a rectangular hat called *tsunokakushi*, which is designed to cover her "horns" (*tsuno*) of jealousy, ego and selfishness, while showing her acceptance of a life as an obedient, gentle wife.

Some highlights of the ceremony include *sansankudo*, where the bride and groom exchange 9 cups of *sake* to signify their union. The families also drink *sake* to show the entwining of the two families. The Shinto priest performs a purification ceremony with branches from the *sakaki* (sacred tree) to honor the gods and ask for blessings.

Western-Style Weddings

A contemporary-style wedding combines the traditions of the Shinto ceremony with a Western-styled reception, *kekkon hiroen*. If you get invited to a wedding, you'll probably only attend the reception, but still be prepared for a full event. Contemporary weddings often take place at hotels, which often have Shinto shrines.

The reception usually begins with a grand entrance of the bride and groom in the back of the room. The bride often arrives wearing a colored kimono, *irouchikake*. After the *kanpai*, guests enjoy a full-course meal while entertained by wedding vow exchanges, speeches and performances by coworkers and friends, and sometimes videos documenting the lives of the newly betrothed. As the reception progresses, the bride will sneak out every now and again for a costume change, starting with a Western-style wedding dress and followed later by various colorful gowns.

The couple will often pay respect to all of the guests by lighting a candle at each table with a long candle of their own. There is also the ceremonious cutting of the wedding cake, although if dessert is provided with the meal, this cake may be made of plastic and just for show.

The reception usually rounds off with the bride and groom presenting their parents with gifts of flowers and a speech, and the bride is formally given over the groom's family. 

Invitation Checklist

If you want to seem well-mannered, here are some things to keep in mind:

- ✓ On the invitation, cross-off the *sama*, (様) written by your name, to show modesty, typically done by two diagonal lines. Also, circle your intention and cross off the other option, again with two lines. Finally, guests often write a short message on the back, such as "Thanks for the invitation."
- ✓ At Japanese weddings, guests give money, not home-goods. The common amount to give is about ¥30,000, but it depends on your relationship to the couple. Give an odd number of unwrinkled new bills in a fancy wedding envelope, *shuugibukuro* (the one with bows and red trim). On the inside envelope write your name, address and amount you're giving. On the outside envelope, write only your name. This is given at the check-in table at the wedding, where you also receive the seating chart.
- ✓ Seating arrangements are set and based on the relationship to the couple; the closer you are, the further back in the room you'll be seated.



The new *Hallyu* wave

Lindsey Alcock on the K-pop artists that are currently taking Japan by storm

Glancing at the Japanese music charts recently, you may have noticed an invasion of sorts. No longer are the previously unrivaled giants of the industry, such as the ubiquitous Johnny's Entertainment (a parent group of hugely successful boy bands like Arashi and SMAP) and the battalion-like AKB48 dominating the top spots. Rather, the current best-selling artists in Japan have a distinctly Korean

flavor to them. This, my friends, is the start of the new *Hallyu*, or Korean, Wave.

Japan's love of all things Korean, from food to cosmetics, isn't a new thing. Middle-aged women drove a demand for Korean TV dramas, food and music through the roof in the late 1990s and early 2000s, with the poster boy being actor Bae Yong Joon of the hit series, "Winter Sonata." But its followers were of a relatively small demographic, with most avid fans being women in their 30s and above.

But the New Hallyu Wave's fans

have diversified and encompass everyone from teenage girls to office co-workers—and it has much to do with the makeup of the new faces of Korean entertainment in Japan. What's different this time around is that most of the new stars are of a decidedly younger generation—which explains the new generation of fans. While Korean dramas are still increasing in popularity, the focus this time is on the catchy beats of K-Pop, brought over by slews of young men and women who not only sing but bust out impressive dance skills on stage.

With what seems like everyone buying into the fever, the question is: Who holds the top spots in Japan right now?

TVXQ

A group known by many names—Tohoshinki, Dong Bang Shin Ki or Tong—TVXQ started as a five-member a cappella group and is considered to be one of the kings of K-Pop. They hold two Guinness World Records: Largest Fan Club (boasting more than 800,000 in Korea, 200,000+ in Japan, and 200,000+ worldwide) and Highest First Week of Sales of a Foreign Artist. Recently split over contract issues (three members now perform as JYJ while the remaining two carry on as TVXQ), their disbandment has hit fans hard, with factions being formed.

SNSD (SoNyeo Shidæ / Girls' Generation / Shoujo Jidai 少女時代)

Despite having only released four singles so far in Japan, SNSD can claim to

have had considerable success, playing to huge crowds of over 22,000 fans at their first Japanese showcases. The turnout was so surprising that two extra concerts were organized to cater to the demand. Specializing in overt pop and cute dance moves, SNSD belong to SM Entertainment, the record company originally responsible for TVXQ, as well as the similarly popular boy groups Super Junior and SHINee.

BIG BANG

Having somewhat usurped TVXQ as the current kings of K-Pop, BIG BANG are one of the first groups who helped usher in the K-Pop boom in Japan. The five-member pop/hip-hop group was formed through a televised look into record company trainees. They performed at the Summer Sonic music festival and received nine awards in Japan in 2009–2010, including two MTV Japan Music Video Awards. Though Big Bang have currently stopped promotions in Japan in anticipation for their “comeback” in Korea, they remain a contender for first place.

2PM

The new kids on the block, 2PM recently celebrated their second anniversary. Debuting in Japan with little promotion in December 2010, it was surprising, to say the least, when their first showcase pulled in crowds of over 25,000 fans. Known as “beastly” idols, this six-member group relies on thumping beats, acrobatics and muscle power to attract mainly female fans. 2PM is also the most international of the groups listed here,



(from top) BIG BANG, CN Blue,
KARA, 2PM and TVXQ
(previous page) SNSD

with one Thai-American and one Korean-American. The international feel of the group, and the fact that two members speak fluent English, helps this group appeal to a large crowd.

KARA

Often referred affectionately as the “Best Five,” KARA shot unexpectedly into the spotlight after releasing their hit single, “Mister.” Originally released in Korean, the song was recently translated into Japanese, prompting the “butt shake” dance craze to hit Japan just as it had in Korea. The Japanese release of “Mister” also surprisingly pushed former favorites SNSD into second place on the Oricon music charts. KARA, like TVXQ before them, are currently embroiled in a contract struggle with their record company, putting an unfortunate shadow on what has been so far a promising career in Japan.

FT Island and CN Blue

The only two bands who play their own instruments on our list, FT Island and CN Blue are both contracted under the same record label. Specializing in a blend of pop-rock played by fresh-faced youths, these groups are gaining fans fast in Japan and the rest of Asia. CN Blue recently released their third Japanese single, while “big brother” band FT Island finished up promotions for their second album and sixth single in Japan. Vocalists from both groups have also been involved in the hugely popular drama series “You’re Beautiful,” which aired on Japanese TV as “Ikemen Desu ne.” ■



East Asian cinema primer

Who's who and what's what? **Part 2**

Continuing along our cinematic tour of East Asia,
Brendan Thornton looks at the best of South Korea film

South Korea

Background

Korean cinema has struggled to overcome many disruptive events throughout its history, namely the Japanese occupation and the Korean War. The period between 1955 and 1973 is marked as the “Golden Age of Korean Cinema.” It was during this time that hallmark Korean films like Kim Ki-young’s *The Housemaid* (1960) and Yu Hyun-mok’s *Aimless Bullet* (1961) were made. *The Housemaid*, in particular, is arguably said to be the greatest Korean film ever produced.

After the Japanese occupation and Korean War, government interference put an ever-increasing handicap on the South Korean movie industry. This led to Holly-

wood films taking prominence in theaters as time went on – a prominence that still exists today. It was not until the late 1990s that domestic films began to displace Hollywood films in popularity. The first film to do this was *Shiri* (1999), a story about a North Korean spy preparing a coup in Seoul. It went on to sell a record-breaking two million tickets in Seoul alone, surpassing Hollywood box office hits like *Titanic*, *The Matrix* and *Star Wars*. Since then, South Korea has proceeded to produce blockbusters each year, which see great success both inside and outside the country.

“ After the Japanese occupation and Korean War, government interference put an ever-increasing handicap on the South Korean movie industry ”

Who's Who

Jeon Do-yeon: Heralded as “The Queen of Cannes” for her Best Actress win for *Secret Sunshine* in 2007 at Cannes, Jeon most recently appeared in a remake of *The Housemaid* (2010).

Choi Min-sik: Described by some as “the greatest Korean actor Hollywood will never have the pleasure of using”, Choi shot to international stardom in the film *Oldboy*.

Song Kang-ho: Renowned for a powerful presence on screen, Song is known along with Choi Min-sik as one of the best modern Korean actors.

What's What

The Vengeance Trilogy:

Comprised of *Sympathy for Mr. Vengeance*, *Oldboy*, and *Sympathy for*

Lady Vengeance, this star-studded trilogy is the greatest and most famous example of director Park Chan-wook’s unmistakable style.

Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter...and Spring:

On one end of the spectrum of director Kim Ki-duk’s films is extreme violence. On the other end you will find the quiet grace and beauty of *Spring*. Chronicling the life of a Buddhist monk as he travels through the seasons from childhood to old age, this film is regarded as a masterpiece of modern Korean cinema. ■

My two yen: Reviews



Trico Café

104-4 Higashihonmachi, Omura
0957-56-8413
10:00 - 20:00

BEEN IN JAPAN FOR a while and craving a sandwich on warm, crusty French bread? How about a bowl of soup on the side? Trico Café, only steps away from Omura Station, is the place to go.

Open since September 2010, it's quite possibly the tiniest café in the world with a whopping four seats, but most people order their food to-go anyway. If you don't feel like taking your food home and the two tables are taken, there are not only some benches outside, but also a nice park just across the street with a clock tower that puts on a five-minute show every hour.

The menu is a little small, but there is still a lot of variety, and everything is delicious. As the months have passed, the menu has gotten bigger too. There are seven types of sandwiches, ranging

from a BLT (with Japanese-style bacon) to salmon and cream cheese, and even roasted duck. You have the choice of a toasted baguette or tortilla wrap, one of five sauces and a variety of extra toppings. When the cold weather came around, the owner started making a daily soup, which has yet to disappoint.

Trico Café also offers an array of coffee and tea drinks, as well as homemade dry ginger ale and yuzu soda.



While the soup and sandwiches are great, the place is very popular with students for the French toast. Served as a dessert, these French toast sticks are served with your choice of syrup.

To top it off, the owner is a really nice, cool young guy and if it's not busy he's usually up for a nice conversation. Best of all, nothing on the menu is over ¥450!

Audrey Akcasu



Aozora Shokudou (あおぞら食堂)

423-4 Hasuwamen, Saza-cho, Kitamatsuura-gun

0956-76-9677

12:00 - 25:00 (Sun - Thurs) / 12:00 - 26:00 (Fri/Sat)

HIDDEN AWAY ALONG a small side road, Aozora Shokudo is easy to miss. Even from the outside, this place seems pretty unassuming; a simple wooden building with a few potted plants outside. For those that bother to venture inside, a pleasant surprise awaits.

Aozora has a wonderfully quirky charm that doesn't fail to pull you in. The décor gives off a delightfully beachy atmosphere; the wooden beams, frond-leaved plants and hammock hanging lazily in the middle of the room almost convince you the ocean is just outside the door. The staff does nothing to dispel this image, looking

like a couple of hippies who just rolled in off the beach. They are incredibly friendly and laid back, always happy to chat to those sitting at their long counter or to give a recommendation. They even like to play an eclectic selection of classic movies and surfing documentaries on a projector along the back wall.

But don't let this relaxed atmosphere let you think that they are anything less than serious when it comes to food. The menu at Aozora is mainly Western-style

food. However, among the Caesar salads and Margherita pizzas you will find hints of Japan sneaking their way in, with ikasumi (squid ink) pasta, omurice and shiratama kinako (glutinous rice balls with soy bean powder) parfaits all making an appearance. I've yet to be disappointed by anything I've eaten there. The flavors are beautifully balanced, the ingredients always fresh, and they'll often make small changes to dishes to accommodate seasonal produce. My favorite at the moment is the prosciutto, which you can watch them carve from a whole leg of ham on the workbench behind them.



Probably my least favourite thing about Aozora is the seating charge, but it includes an entrée, and ensures you'll feel perfectly comfortable taking your time to linger long after the meal is done. And on the upside, the Aozora point card is an incredibly good value: a mere 10 stamps and you get a free lunch. At an average of only ¥800 for a main meal, that works out to be great deal. So if you ever find yourself in Saza looking for something to eat, I highly recommend Aozora. **Katrina Cordery**

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write for us

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Submitting articles

- Send your article within the body of an e-mail, as well as an attached Word or text document.
- If you have a specific layout in mind, type your ideas in the e-mail body.
- The e-mail subject must include article category, title, submitter's real name ([Category] – [Title] – [Full name]; for example, Culture – The Significance of Sakura – John Doe).
- Any images or graphics to be included must be attached separately.

Article categories

- **Lifestyle:** Columns, lists, restaurant reviews (200-300 words)
- **Arts/Entertainment:** Music, games, movies, events (200-400 words)
- **Culture:** Topics dealing with life in Japan, Japanese customs (200-400 words)
- **Language Study:** Japanese study (200-400 words)
- **Travel & Maps:** Generally around Japan or Asia area (200-400 words)
- **Features:** Main articles (600-800 words)

Submitting documents

- Name documents using this format: [Category] – [Title] – [ddmmyyyy]
- Please note that article layout may be altered.

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- Name files using this format: [Article Title] – [Image Subject]
- All images should be sent as e-mail attachments (please do not paste into documents).
- Images should be no smaller than 1 megapixel resolution (c. 1024x768)
- Larger images are more likely to be printed, so the bigger the better.
- You must obtain a written release form containing identifiable persons.
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Notes

- Any references should be clearly stated within the document (copyright issues).
- Expletives and inappropriate language will be edited.
- Overly offensive articles will not be published (the writer will be informed of such and allowed the opportunity to edit his/her article.)
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