

MAGAZINE

# ADVENTURE

とうきょう  
TOKYO

二週間  
2 WEEKS

TRIP TO JAPAN

3月  
MARCH

おおさか  
OSAKA

東京

きょうと  
KYOTO

京都

大阪



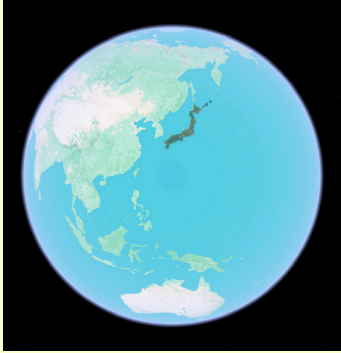
MATTさん



TYLERさん



GRADYさん



**Japanese Macaque  
aka Snow Monkey**  
(*Macaca fuscata*)

**Size:**

20–24 in (body length)

**Weight:**

15–25 lbs (females), 25–40  
lbs

**Habitat:**

Forested areas across Japan,  
from subtropical regions to  
snowy mountains

**Conservation Status:**

Least Concern



Japanese macaques, also known as snow monkeys, are furry, intelligent, and surprisingly human-like animals native to Japan. From the snowy mountain regions to the warmer temperate forests, these monkeys have adapted to nearly every climate Japan has to offer. Their thick fur and knack for finding hot springs make them hardy creatures, thriving in environments that seem almost uninhabitable for primates. They're not only skilled survivors but also social creatures, living in troops that follow a matriarchal hierarchy. In colder regions, they've been famously observed soaking in natural hot springs, a behavior unique to their species and one that adds to their charm.

Known for their resourcefulness, Japanese macaques use tools and have been observed washing food in rivers—behavior that showcases their intelligence. They communicate through a variety of vocalizations, body language, and facial expressions, giving them an almost human-like demeanor. They've also been the subject of numerous studies due to their fascinating cultural behaviors, such as passing down traditions within troops, like food washing or

specific grooming habits. These quirks make them one of the most unique primates in the animal kingdom.

At Arashiyama Monkey Park Iwatayama, we had the chance to see these monkeys up close in their natural habitat. Perched atop a hill overlooking Kyoto, this park is home to over 100 wild macaques roaming freely. Getting there requires a bit of a climb—nothing too extreme, but just enough to make you feel like you earned the experience.

While this blend of free-roaming monkeys and ticketed tourist activity did lean a bit too touristy, I can't help but think back to how close and approachable they were. Watching them interact with one another and their environment was both entertaining and enlightening, offering a glimpse into the life of one of Japan's most beloved wildlife species. The experience was a reminder of the delicate balance between nature and tourism, and how special it is to witness animals thriving in their natural habitat, even amidst human presence.

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# YOUR NEXT INSPIRATION TO TRAVEL

*...IS JUST A PAGE FLIP AWAY*

**I**MAGINE yourself on your dream ADVENTURE. Is it driving a mini-van to the Grand Canyon? Setting foot on the same islands of Charles Darwin? Or perhaps, is it sipping a cup of green tea in a quiet and tranquil Kyoto café in Japan surrounded by your closest friends? Whatever your dream trip looks like, the real question is: what's stopping you?

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# MY JOURNEY TO JAPAN



Tyler Morales, Matt Schiltz, and Grady Davis take a picture in an underground meat restaurant where they enjoy pitchers of a fruit inspired drink.

PHOTO BY A LOCAL JAPANESE MAN

## I NEVER HAD A DESIRE TO GO TO JAPAN

If anything, my view of Japan and Japanese culture was tainted from the horror stories told in our history classes about World War II and skewed by the *kawaii* (cute) culture prevalent in Japan and Korea recently. The destructive and horrific actions performed by the Japanese over 80 years ago combined with this new view of Japanese culture so heavily rooted in manga, anime, and cuteness drew zero interest from me.

So, to make it very clear, this trip idea halfway around the globe was not my idea in the slightest. In fact, it was the brainchild of my friend, Matt Schiltz. A self-proclaimed anime watcher and gamer, Japan, to him and countless others who share similar interests, seemed like a natural next destination.

To put into context a brief timeframe of my interest in Japan, growing up to age 24, there was a negative interest. Or, at best, an

indifference. However, it wasn't until the summer of 2022 where the idea of going to Japan was floated seriously between Matt, our friend Grady Davis, and myself. What I'm about to say is a bit hazy, but either way, what I know for certain is that my interest in Japan was growing. During that summer, I had started Duolingo to learn Japanese, but the reason why is unclear. I don't remember if it was my mom who randomly suggested learning Japanese as something new to learn, or if it was because we were planning a trip to Japan. Either way, my path to Japan had begun, and there was no going back.

Since the summer of 2022, up until our eventual trip to Japan in March of 2024, I stayed consistent with learning Japanese. The guise I used to convince myself was that I wanted to speak and understand the language. And while this is a fair reason to learn a language, it wasn't the only reason why I wanted to learn Japanese.

At first, doing Duolingo daily at the Bourgeois Pig, my local coffee shop in Lincoln Park, was a routine, a means to to understand the Japanese characters and phonetics. However, the more I learned, the more interested I became in Japanese culture. It is precisely this interest in Japan that prompted me to continue to use the guise of learning Japanese simply to speak and understand it. If I step back for a second to describe the state of people's interest in Japan, all of this will make sense.

\*\*\*

The Urban Dictionary defines weeb as: "A weeb is a person who is interested in anime and Japanese culture [and] Weebs are normal people who like anime and may have some merch". I am forced to bring up the term weeb because of the cringe, mocking, and nerdy connotation it attaches itself to anyone who shows even the slightest interest in Japanese culture.

I think everyone can think of someone they know who is just a little too interested in Japan. Here is my attempt at showcasing just that. A weeb is someone who might watch anime, read manga, participate in cosplay, dye their hair different colors, express a high interest in going to the motherland (Japan), speak in what can only be described as the character Ash from Pokémon, and maybe a bit of an outcast.

For me, none of what I just listed applied to me. The mere idea of being called a weeb or even being associated with a weeb was something I abhorred. How could an athletic, stoic, and non-anime watching 24 year old male be a weeb?

The months quickly ticked off and before I knew it, the new year had arrived, and March was soon approaching. My Japanese had progressed to the point where I could speak and understand simple sentences, and I was honestly proud of what I had accomplished. From looking at characters like, こんにちは, and being completely lost, I was able to read them as ko, ni, chi, wa, which, let's say it together, means HELLO! From what at first seemed like a cryptic and alien language a year and a half before, was something that I could work through and understand.

Perhaps then, from the tiny seed in the summer of 2022 where I took my first Duolingo lesson, to March 2024, that seed had grown into a plant with leaves and fruit. A byproduct of learning Japanese was, and I think back now how this would have to be the case, gaining an interest in Japan as a whole. And, if that makes me a weeb, so be it. I'm a weeb and I'm proud!

By learning any language and pairing it with being able to use what one learns in the country where it is spoken is truly a gift. I was lucky enough to experience that from not wanting anything to do with Japan to being in Japan in a matter of less than two years.

## WHAT THEY SAY IS TRUE

You shouldn't believe everything that you hear. When it comes to stereotypes from cultures around the world, using stereotypes can be an ignorant and lazy excuse to treat or think of people. They are often incomplete or simply not true at all. However, while stereotypes do not sync up one to one for many countries and cultures, Japan, in my experience, was almost to a tee of what

people talked about and what I assumed from the stereotypes in the US.

### *Japan is dense*

Japan is a big-small country. With a population of over 120 million packed into an area of 145 thousand square miles, it is the 11th most populous country, yet only the 62nd largest in land mass. What that means is that each person has roughly 854 square feet per mile, the 44th densest country. But, to help you create a mental image of Japan's land to population, imagine this:

A standard American football field is about 1.3 acres. If you divide Japan's land area by its population, each person would only have about 0.02 acres, which is roughly the size of a small office cubicle.

In contrast, whereas a single Japanese would have a cubicle size area, an American would have about 5.45 football fields!

So, what they say is true. Japan is an extremely dense country. It's vividly apparent in the tightly packed buildings that house millions in people, the tiny side streets with bars fit for five people max, and their utilization of space across the entire country. When land is limited, they are not in the business of wasting it.

### *Japan is polite and respectful*

Immediately upon arriving in Japan, I could sense how polite and respectful people were to one another.

On trains, passengers kept to themselves, laying their belongings neatly on their laps, legs facing forwards. It was quiet, almost silent at times. Talking was to a minimum, if at all.

They seemed to love lines, just for the sake of standing in a line. I vividly remember a massive line of Japanese people standing, but didn't know what for. When I asked someone in the queue, they said it was for a donut. I thought to myself that they better be in line either for a box of free donuts or they must be the best donuts in all of Japan. Unfortunately, I don't think that was the case. I'm not sure if it is a novelty to wait in a long queue for a delicacy or something else, but lines are not very American.

However, on a more serious note, for the most part, we were greeted and welcomed by some of the most caring and sweetest people we have ever met. The gift giving, while not shocking, was still a highlight. And the care we received in restaurants (I'll comment on those that did not welcome us later), shops, and public transportation was greatly appreciated and not something that I would expect from other countries.

### *Japan is clean and orderly*

Unlike the fecal ridden public bathrooms and trash filled streets of many large American cities, Tokyo, on the other hand, is hands down the gold standard of cleanliness. Upon first arriving in Tokyo at night and driving to our AirBnb, I couldn't help but notice the lack of trash on the ground. Paired with well paved roads with few, if not zero, potholes, Tokyo seemed to be having a great start for

public sanitation in my eyes.

Day two was something I can't forget. While walking around Ueno Park, Grady used the public bathroom on two separate occasions and each of them was a marvel. The first one was not only clean, but designated a plaque inside the restroom designating the engineering marvel local university students put into the restroom to make it clean and comfortable.

There is no lack of cleanliness and comfort especially when it comes to using the restroom. First of all, almost every toilet, public or private is a bidet. But, it's not just a bidet. Some restrooms come with multiple modes. Private mode plays music to mask the sound of human excrement leaving the body. There are multiple buttons for pressure, volume, and temperature to give the sitter the most pleasant of bottom or frontal sensations to rid the body of any waste products left behind. Quite simply, no rocks have been left unturned when it comes to the restroom experience.

These clean and orderly experiences are unlike any other experience I have experienced before. The rest of the world needs to take note of the Japanese in this regard.

Japan vending machines have everything

I must admit that I was surprised by the lack of the "anything" vending machine, but pleasantly surprised by the sheer quantity and availability of coffee and drink vending machines that seemed to be around every corner in Japan.

While we didn't find vending machines that would sell you anything, what we did find was an abundance of coffee and alcoholic vending machines. From what seemed to be around every street corner, there were coffee and beer vending machines offering hot and cold beverages for around 100–200 yen. In dollars, that means that drinks cost anywhere between 70 cents and a dollar fifty. Whenever we were in need of a quick pick me up or even wanted to warm our hands, a cold or hot can of coffee did the job for cheap and ease.

Another type of vending machine I saw was a ramen vending machine. This was inside a ramen shop and it allowed customers to order their favorite type of ramen and customize it with a smattering of toppings.

However, other than these two types of vending machines and the occasional snack or ice cream machine, my expectation of being able to purchase anything was put into check.

### *Japan is known for its longevity*

Every few years, a publication will showcase some variation of the world's longest living people. Sometimes National Geographic does a special in their magazine. Other times, it's a Netflix documentary. In either case, longevity, and the mysterious formula that produces healthy and elderly people seems to be a never ending interest in pop culture and research.

When these publications feature a country that produces the

longest living people, Japan is almost always at the top of that list. Japan has an average life span of 84.2 years, 81 for men and 87 for women. To put this in perspective, America has an average lifespan of 78 years, 76 for men and 80 for women.

Why the difference? Very simply, from what we saw, it's because the elderly are physically active, respected members in their local communities, and consume healthy food. They were seen commonly riding public transportation alone and running many of the coffee shops. Their involvement in the community, I think, plays a direct correlation to their longevity. I would be hard pressed to point out a nursing home. Additionally, much of the cuisine in Japan is rooted in eating vegetables and whole, unprocessed foods. This too must play a pivotal role in not only producing long living individuals, but individuals who live long and healthy lives too.

### *The Japanese are quiet*

One must be aware of the space they create and of the spaces they enter. While Americans can be big, boisterous, and loud, for the most part the Japanese are quiet and stay to themselves. This means that body awareness and presence must be taken very seriously in Japan, especially if a foreigner who is of a large body visits.

Because of their smaller stature, people naturally tend to fit into smaller spaces easier than larger people. This makes sense. However, when a larger bodied person enters the spaces of smaller stature people, their presence is known and vividly apparent. One must be respectful of this fact and be mindful of their body presence and how it flows amongst the sea of Japanese commuters during rush hour. If not, the larger bodied person may be that of a boulder tumbling through the sea, taking out everything in its way.

It isn't only the physical differences in Japanese and western people that are different. So too is their demeanor and vocal presence. It's quiet, almost too quiet and eerie at times. While the American might be on their phone in the train or talking with their friend, a Japanese person might be quietly listening to music on their phone or making no noise at all.

I say all of this to paint a picture of the large physical and audible differences between these cultures.

## **OVERALL**

In summary, Japan, almost paradoxically, didn't surprise me, but also was a definitive culture shock. Their clean, orderly, and respectful way of living were things I expected, but what I didn't expect was the shock of myself trying to fit in. I am not Japanese, and no matter how much Japanese I speak or cultural practices I exhibit, unlike America where immigrants can assimilate, there seems to be no assimilation process in Japan—only coexistence.

With that being said, welcome to the 7th edition of Adventure Magazine! いきましょ! Let's go!



# THE ROUTE

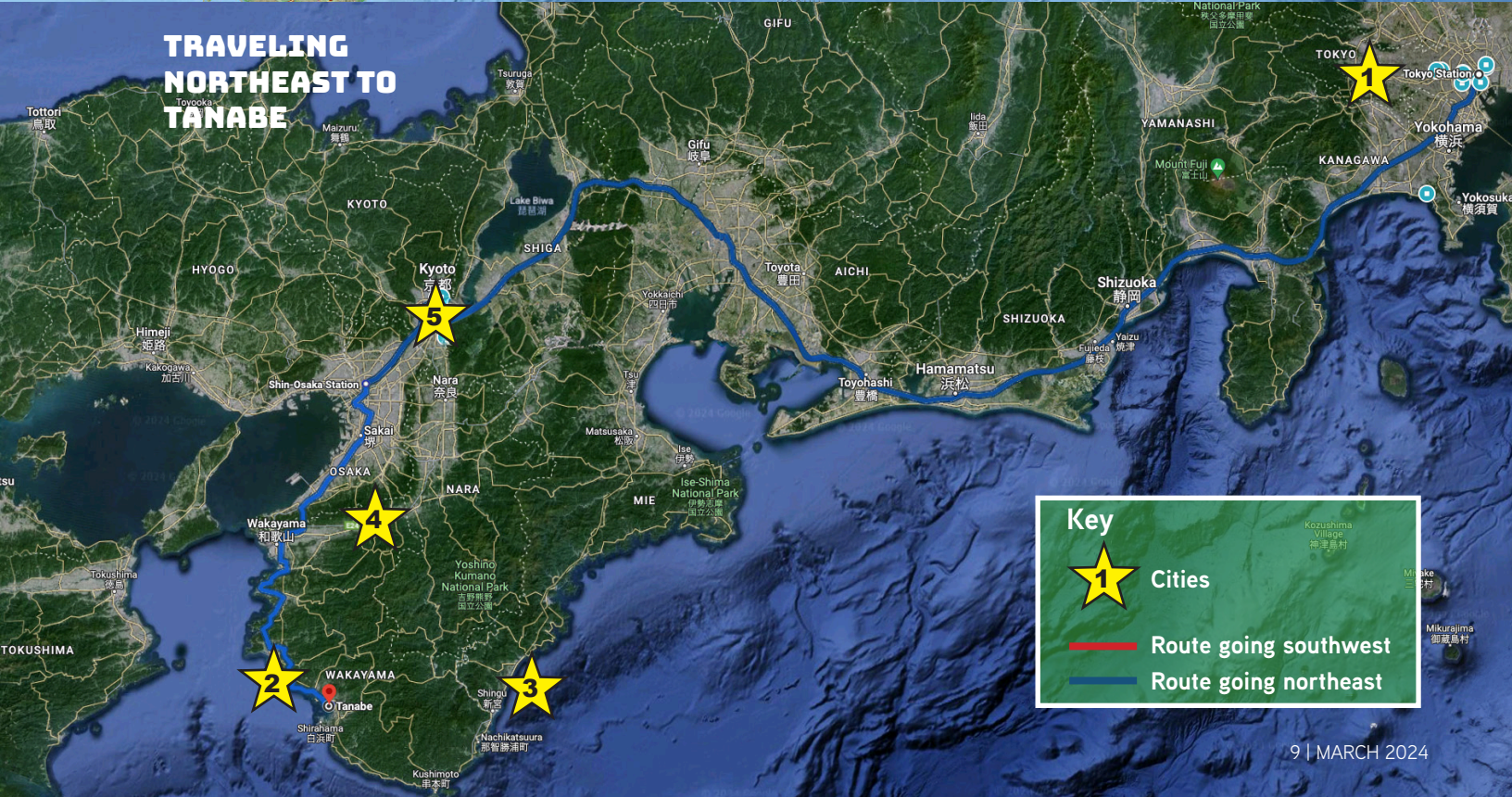
From plane to taxi to train, we covered a significant amount of ground in two weeks.

Starting in Tokyo we traveled southwest, passing Osaka and Kyoto, reaching the beginging of the Kumano Kodo trail.

After completing a 45+mile hike, we snake back up through the country on the Shinkansen making pit stops along the way.



**TRAVELING  
NORTHWEST TO  
TO TOKYO**



Key



Cities

Route going southwest

Route going northeast

# SPOTLIGHTS

## スポットライト

Meet Matt Schiltz and Grady Davis, two explorers and friends taking over Japan! Follow their journey, along with Tyler Morales, as they navigate through bustling city streets, tranquil countryside, and everything in between.

### ◆ MATT SCHILTZ ◆

「これは人生  
の冒険だ。」

"This is the adventure of a  
lifetime."



#### **Question: Why Japan?**

**Response:** The reason I suggested Japan for our trip is because I've heard about Japan my entire life. As Americans, we have a history with Japan, especially during World War II. Japan seemed like such a foreign culture to me. I've seen a lot about Japan's innovations and cultural unity, and I was fascinated by that. I wanted to experience it firsthand. It looked cool and was a place we had never been before. We've all spent time in South America and Europe, but Japan was a part of the world we hadn't explored. I wanted to see how they lived, and it turned out to be a very impressive culture.

#### **Question: What surprised you about Japan?**

**Response:** Some things that surprised me about Japan include their level of organization. I had some expectations that they were a very organized culture, and that was absolutely the case. The cultural unity within Japan is unlike any other culture I've experienced in my entire life.

Within the first three days in Tokyo, you could see the level of social cohesion they have compared to places like the United States or even Europe. They are very unified in their goals and the type of people they aspire to be.

Another impressive aspect of Japanese culture is the beautiful blend of the natural environment with their infrastructure. They create a harmony between the appearance and the vibes of their buildings and cities, while also maintaining natural spaces.

The most surprising thing for me was the fact that, despite hearing about Japan's declining birth rate, virtually every place we visited, except the Kumano Kodo, was full of children. This made me realize that if the Japanese people are directed towards a particular objective, they will achieve it quickly. I saw kids in every major metropolitan area we visited, which was quite surprising.

Matt Schiltz captured at the start of day 3 while hiking the Kumano Kodo Trail.

**PHOTO BY TYLER MORALES**

# ◆ GRADY DAVIS ◆

**Question: Why Japan?**

**Response:** Why not?

「冒険はどこまでも続く!」  
"The adventure continues endlessly!"

**Question: What surprised you about Japan?**

**Response:** Some things that surprised me about Japan include their level of organization. I had some expectations that they were a very organized culture, and that was absolutely the case. The cultural unity within Japan is unlike any other culture I've experienced in my entire life.

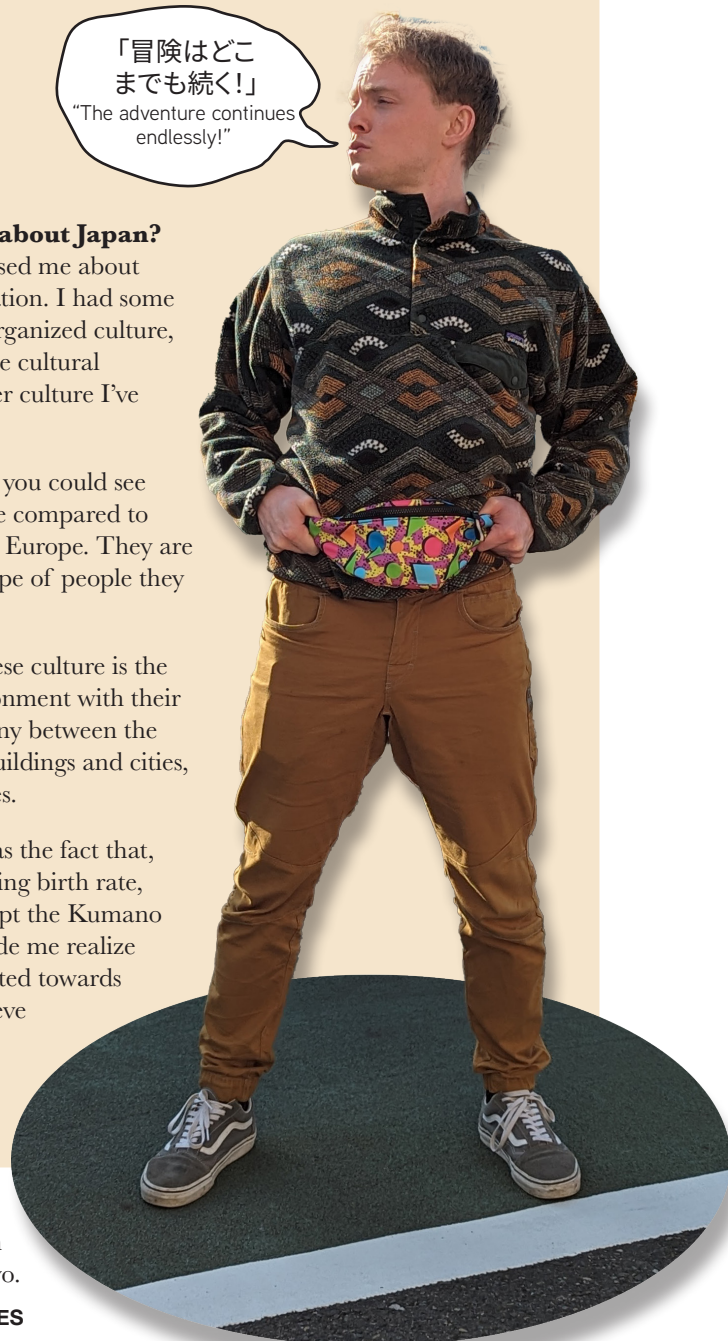
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As golden hour quickly approaches, Grady Davis stands triumphantly as he begins walking into an unknown neighborhood in Tokyo.

PHOTO BY TYLER MORALES



# 自販機

# THE VENDING MACHINES

Vending machines, or 自販機 (jihanki), stand on nearly every street corner, even in the countryside. Frequently stocked with products like coffee, tobacco, beer, and sometimes novelty items like ice cream, they are easily accessible for the busy salaryman and inexpensive. Vending machines serve as the people's on-the-go pick-me-up. While the coffee shop might be too far or too

expensive, vending machines offer a convenient way to maintain daily rituals.

If asked to count the number of times we bought a coffee or energy drink, we simply couldn't. On train platforms, inside stations, on busy and quiet streets, and around every corner, if you needed a quick boost of caffeine, you knew where to go.



A cigarette vending machine in the small mountain town of Nakahechi.

PHOTO BY TYLER MORALES



A pikachu themed vending machine sells a mix of hot and cold energy drinks and teas near The University of Tokyo.

PHOTO BY TYLER MORALES



じはんき

# 自販機

目利きが選ぶ、  
最高な  
ラインナップ！

An essential daily driver  
was BOSS コーヒー  
(ko-he). For less than  
a dollar, we had an  
immediate hit of caffeine  
reach our blood.

A Boss vending machine selling hot and cold coffee. It took a few days, but we eventually realized that the red button indicated hot drinks and the blue button indicated cold drinks.

PHOTO FROM GOOGLE STREET VIEW

# THE VENDING MACHINE LANDSCAPE

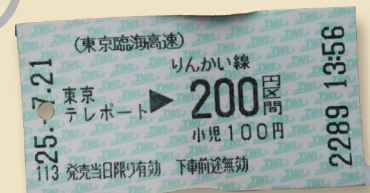
In Japan, convenience is king, and nowhere is this more evident than in the land of vending machines, or *jihanki*. These marvelous contraptions are as ubiquitous as they are varied, offering everything from a hot can of coffee to a quick snack on the go. Whether you're in the heart of Tokyo or the serene countryside, you'll find these machines ready to cater to your every need.

We indulged quite heavily in some of these categories. Most notably were the beverage and tickets section. Daily, we would consume the sweet, warm, and caffeinated coffee, teas, and energy drinks to fuel our long days of hiking and walking. Also, to get anywhere, we would buy train tickets in the form of little stubs that would get sucked into a slot and then relayed back to us as we entered the station.

## DISTRIBUTION OF VENDING MACHINES BY CATEGORY



**BEVERAGES**  
**84.1%**



**TICKETS**  
**2.4%**



**DAILY GOODS**  
**7.6%**



**FOOD**  
**3.1%**



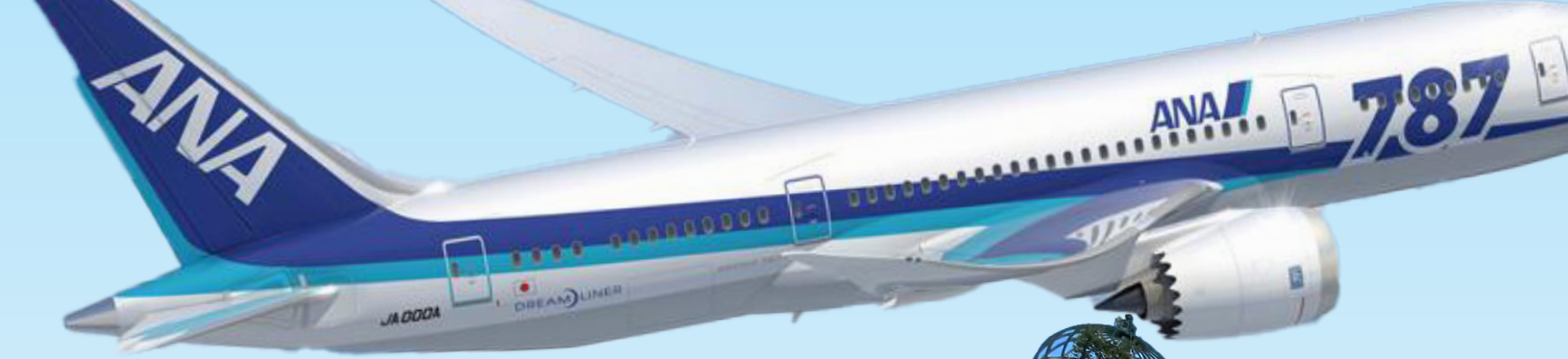
**CIGARETTES**  
**2.9%**

Tasty おいしい Yum!  
**美味しい**

# STORIES



TOKYO  
KUMANO KODO  
OSAKA  
KYOTO  
TOKYO PT2



# A TRIP OUT WEST TOKYO





いきましょう!

いきましょう!

HOTEL  
TOKYU STAY



藤地  
拳母館  
KEDOMO-DOKU

藤地  
拳母館  
KEDOMO-DOKU

藤地  
拳母館  
KEDOMO-DOKU



Sunagimo (砂肝)  
Chicken gizzards



Yakitori (焼き鳥)  
Grilled chicken on a stick



The end of Day 2 presents many new experiences. One of these experiences is drinking beer at an izakaya—small bar food served with alcohol.

PHOTO BY GRADY DAVIS

## A Trip to Japan

I am accompanied by my two friends, Grady Davis and Matt Schiltz, my international compatriots as we wait to board All Nippon Airways (ANA) at O'Hare International Airport. Up to this point, we rarely hear Japanese spoken. Other than the occasional film or song in Japanese, we haven't experienced Japanese firsthand. However, as we patiently wait to board, we hear our first spoken words of Japanese emanating over a loudspeaker from an ANA employee:

「シカゴから東京行きのフライトにご搭乗の皆様、ボーディングが始まります。搭乗券とパスポートをご準備ください。」

In English, this roughly translates to:

“Ladies and gentlemen boarding the flight from Chicago to Tokyo, we are now beginning the boarding process. Please have your boarding pass and passport ready.”

At this point, the realization that we will be in Japan the next day hits us (the time zone difference is fourteen hours. So, a twelve-hour flight means that we will arrive two hours before the current time. Weird, I know.) Japan seems truly tangible for the first time since booking our plane tickets months earlier.

Fast forward through the twelve-hour flight, and we are in TOKYO!

## Day 1: Asakusa 浅草

After going through customs, we quickly find a taxi and head to Asakusa 浅草. Sleep-deprived, it is sometime near midnight when we make it to our Airbnb. It's quiet, and not many people are outside. However, our emotions are running rampant, finally being in Japan. We drop off our bags and head into the streets, awaiting anything that comes our way.

Our first stop is a small dumpling shop. We are greeted by a warm glow of light that invites us past the cloth privacy partition that



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とまり木

In the heart of Shinjuku City, a bustling bar and nightlife district just 30 minutes from Tokyo, the narrow alleyways come alive at night with the glow of neon signs and traditional lanterns. This vibrant blend of modernity and tradition tempts tourists and drunken salarymen alike, who come to drink to their successes or numb the pain away. The famous Golden Gai area, known for its tightly packed bars and vibrant nightlife, epitomizes the Tokyo's nightlife charm.

PHOTO BY TYLER MORALES

separates the shop from the street. Once inside, an older Japanese gentleman, dressed in a clean white button-up shirt, black apron, and bow tie, hands us a menu. He could definitely tell that we were foreigners as he gave us an English menu. This will be a common theme throughout the trip. There's no hiding. The division between



Japanese and foreigners is as clear as black and white. There's no confusion or switching of sides between who's who.

We don't mind this. We're hungry and excited just to be here. We order a few different dumplings with sake and watch the man hand-make each dumpling in an Italian Marcato manual pasta maker. Carefully folding each dumpling, portioning the perfect amount of ingredients into each, we watch diligently as he starts to get to know us. It is at this point where another man, a few beers in and middle-aged, starts talking to us too.

Shifting our focus from the peaceful Legend of Zelda music playing in the background, to watching the bartender serve and prepare our food, to hearing the other customer sitting beside us give us recommendations in Tokyo, I can safely say that this was the perfect welcoming to Japan.

At once, we are handed our small plates of dumplings. Without hesitation, we feast. It's difficult to share this first encounter with handmade dumplings with you, the reader, but let me assure you that it's everything we could ask for during the midnight hour. With our stomachs filled with dumplings and sake, we part ways, but not before getting our photo taken for the shop attendant to add to his Instagram account. Surprisingly, he documents his encounters with tourists on social media. We say our farewells and carry on our way, leaving the realm of attentive food and drink consumption to the streets where our adventure continues.

Not wanting to end the night just yet, we stumble into a karaoke bar not far from the dumpling shop. We are greeted by a middle-aged woman and someone she called her mother, though we weren't sure. She seated us in the corner of the dimly lit room while a couple of tourists were already singing. Seemingly overly excited to see us, this woman, who we soon learn is from the Philippines, brings us each a beer and hands us a binder of songs to choose from.

But something didn't seem quite right.

*"After enjoying a late-night snack of delicious dumplings, we strolled down the empty streets, savoring the serene quietness of Tokyo at night. A faint noise from a nearby building caught our attention. It appeared to be a bar, so naturally, I opened the door to investigate.*

*The scent of cigarettes and cheap perfume immediately filled the air as we stepped into a karaoke bar. We stood out as foreigners, but it was exhilarating to feel like aliens in a completely unfamiliar setting*

*We were warmly greeted by the enthusiastic owner, a Filipino woman who seemed to be in her fifties or sixties. She treated us with great hospitality, showing a particular fondness for TMO, which was amusing to witness. Their unique dynamic added to the charm of the evening. We sang "My Way" by Frank Sinatra, a moment that encapsulated the spirit of our trip. We were determined to explore Japan on our own terms, free from the constraints of pre-planned itineraries from overpriced travel companies. This experience set the tone for our adventure, embracing the spontaneity and authenticity of our journey."*

—Matt Schiltz

After singing "My Way," we quickly pay for our beer before scurrying back to the street. Once outside, we are confused as we hear a voice trailing behind us. To our surprise, the woman who greeted us is chasing us. With a bag of nuts in one hand and snacks in the other, she uses her broken English to hand them to one of us while expressing her deep gratitude for having us come in and her hopeful desire to see us again.

It is without a second thought that we would not be coming back here again.

And with those two initial visits, one to a dumpling shop and another to a karaoke bar, we finish off the night roaming around Asakusa for a little bit longer before finding our way back to the Airbnb.

## Day 2: Wandering Tokyo

Day two starts with something we have never done before – waking up at 6 am. Because of jet lag and time zone differences, for the first time in all of our travels, we are actually up early in the morning. Without thinking too much about this at the moment, that granted us access to Tokyo at a time when most of the city is either still sleeping or not out yet. Tokyo is not an early morning city like many of the big cities in the US. Shops and cafes commonly open at 10 am or even 11 am.

However, this was not a problem. We made our first of many stops at a local convenience store, Lawson. Stocked up on caffeine and snacks, we begin our very long day of exploring.

### Ueno Park

First on our loose list of things to do is Ueno Park. Ueno Park (上野公園), Ueno Kōen) is a large public park located in the Ueno district of Taitō, Tokyo, Japan. Established in 1873 on former temple grounds, it is one of Japan's first public parks, inspired by Western practices during the early Meiji period. The park is home to several major museums and is famous for its cherry blossoms and hanami celebrations in spring. It attracts over ten million visitors annually, making it Japan's most popular city park.

At this point, it is not even 9 am yet, and parts of the park aren't even open yet! We wander the park, visiting temples and even see city workers preparing for the soon-to-come cherry blossoms. The weather is in that transition period between winter and spring. Paired with the coming of the cherry blossoms and the warmth in the air, there is so much anticipation during day two of our trip.

One of the first places to open is Ueno Zoo. Costing a couple of dollars a ticket for entry, we decide to spend the morning at the zoo. It's difficult to hype up a zoo, but here is my attempt. We saw some unique species like the poison dart frog. While the Giant Panda would have been a fun exhibit to stop in, it had an hour-long wait. Whereas the Japanese will gladly wait in lines without a problem, the three of us would not. So, we carried on our way and eventually found a species that was only native to Japan.

Standing anywhere between three and four feet tall, championing the same color head coverings signifying their social status within their local community, and accompanied by motherly figures leading them away from danger, packs that consisted of around seven could be spotted all around the zoo. Masked by cuteness and their inability to communicate effectively all the time, we soon came to learn what these fascinating creatures were – 子供たち, or in English, children. Yes! What I believe were the most fascinating and memorable parts of the zoo were the little kids. Unlike many American toddlers who scream and shout, disobey, and cause ruckus, the small Japanese children we encountered seemed to be the poster child of what a well-mannered child should be. Calm, cool, collected, and undeniably cute, they were an unforgettable experience.

After an already well-accomplished morning, we slow our pace down slightly to grab a quick bite of octopus and squid on a stick before heading on our first train experience.

### Train Adventures and Mitaka

We grab another quick snack of fami-chickies, a delectable and juicy fried chicken, and coffee from Lawson. With fuel in our stomachs, we are off again. The streets of Tokyo are unlike anything I've seen before. There are massive hoards of people of all ages walking to and from places. We're right in the middle of all this. We find ourselves at Ochanomizu Station (御茶ノ水駅) and try to understand the process of purchasing and using a train ticket.

After some time fiddling with the self-service machine and not really understanding how it worked or where we were headed, we decide to talk to the station attendant. With the little Japanese that I know, we were able to buy our tickets and pass through the gates. Unlike the trains in Chicago where physical tickets are tapped on the entry gate to open them, in Japan, you receive a small one-by-two-inch ticket to insert into the gate which will then open for you.

Once you go through, the ticket will shoot back up at the other side for you to retrieve. This is a crucial fact that we did not yet understand and which would soon be problematic.

Finally, we are on the train platform waiting for our train to come. While waiting, we make a few observations. First, passengers are orderly and stand in single file lines behind tracks awaiting their train. When the train does come, everybody waits patiently, letting passengers exit before going in. Clearly, this is something unusual in countries like the US and Europe. Second, at brief moments, I felt as if I were standing inside a Tokyo cyberpunk environment. Hundreds of thick black cables draped above us, hanging on the ceiling connecting all of the electrical units of the station together. While this might seem minor and easy to miss, at least for me, it seemed almost like a living beast on its own. The thick wrapping of even smaller cables snaked through the station and seemed like they were the vessels of a living beast. But, just as I was envisioning this fictional landscape, our train arrives and we get on our way.

In our usual fashion, our first attempt leads us in the opposite direction of where we were trying to go. Instead of going west, we were traveling east, back towards Tokyo. After noticing this first hiccup, we get off, switch platforms, and make it back on another train traveling west. Now, finally going where we are trying to go, but not really, we are headed west. As we get closer to the neighborhood we had planned on arriving, the train doesn't seem to be slowing down. Instead, as we get to our stop, the train simply continues on its path. We see what would have been our eventual neighborhood to explore pass by just as quickly as we pass it.



A little shaken up by our two mistakes on our first train trip, we decide to get off at a spot that Grady chooses. At this point, there are no plans, only going where the wind takes us. We arrived at a station in Mitaka, Tokyo. However, before making it out of the platform, we had our final train mishap of the day. Remember what I talked about earlier about the train tickets? What I didn't explain is that, unlike Chicago where a single ticket can get you anywhere for a single flat price, in Japan, you have to choose your



After wandering through the city streets, out of the corner of our eyes, we get a glimpse of the Studio Ghibli Museum! This was our entrance to Inokashira Park where the Cherry blossoms were just beginning to bloom.

#### PHOTOS BY TYLER MORALES

start and end routes to calculate a price. So, because we missed our stop from earlier, when we tried to insert our ticket to exit the gates, we were denied, given the “X”, locked inside the station.

Again, with our limited Japanese skills, we talk to the attendant, understand that we have to pay the difference in fare ticket price, and are allowed to pass through the gates. Free from the train station, we are in Mitaka, Tokyo. Still unaware of what exactly Grady saw in this neighborhood, Matt and I were in for a surprise. A short walk combined with some vending machine coffee, we are back to full stamina and on our way to who knows where.

We transition from bustling train station, city central and business-packed streets to a more residential part of the city. Here we get our first glimpse of how regular Japanese people live. Their houses are small and compact. Their cars are neatly parked in the covered driveway. And it’s quiet. Aside from the occasional person walking by, it’s just us three roaming through this residential area. Eventually, the residential landscape transitions back to a main road where we stop again at Lawson for some more snacks and coffee before being pleasantly surprised by what we were about to see.

I must remind you that at this point, myself and Matt are simply experiencing without any forethought of where to go and where

we are going. Trees and a wide-open park soon fill our viewpoint as we close in on what seems like a park. As we get closer and enter the park area, we see something that we had never expected to see. A bronze cast and gold painted sign reads, “Ghibli Museum, Mitaka (三鷹の森ジブリ美術館).” Not believing our eyes, we are standing at the mecca of the Studio Ghibli films. Home to a museum paying tribute to the studio’s films like “Spirited Away,” “My Neighbor Totoro,” “Kiki’s Delivery Service,” and many more, this stop was truly unexpected, yet such a welcomed surprise. To be at a dedicated location where the beloved Japanese animator, often referred to as the Walt Disney of the East, Hayao Miyazaki, could be appreciated, was a wild experience. While we were unable to go inside the museum because tickets were sold out two months prior, it was still an experience to be had as there was much more to explore in the surrounding area.

Surrounding the Studio Ghibli museum was an expansive park called Inokashira Park (都立井の頭恩賜公園). It was filled with cherry blossoms, a track, an outdoor gym, a baseball field, a forested walking trail, a waterfront trail, a zoo, and which also led towards Kichijōji (吉祥寺), a packed downtown district full of thrift shops, cafes, food, and nightlife. All in all, to say that missing access to the museum was a negative would be totally taken out of context.



Our walk within Inokashira Park leads us to a river with a Japanese style building. The surprises of what we find next continue to amaze us. All around this area, we see patrons walking and enjoying the remaining light of the early spring evening.

**PHOTO TYLER MORALES**



Left: Tyler stands sporting his free eye doctor sunglasses paired with an all black look.

**PHOTOS BY TYLER MORALES**

Below: Matt studies his sashimi options at the fish market. He is careful and diligent with his choice as he will share this meal with Tyler and Grady.

**PHOTOS BY GRADY DAVIS**

Right: An array of raw seafood and beef that is cooked to order. We of course had to try top of the line A5 Wagyu

**PHOTOS BY TYLER MORALES**



# 築地場外市場 Tsukiji Outer Market Price List

In March 2024  
150 円 = \$1

トラバガニ 無裁込 - Red King Crab. 7,500円 (yen)

WAGYU 串 Wagyu beef skewers. 3,000円 (yen)

✓ スワイガニ 無裁込 - Snow crab. 6,500円 (yen)

✓ エビ - Shrimp and cucumbers. 600円 (yen)



The undulating landscape design paired with the diversity of activities and proximity to a train station was an experience and location that feels uncommon elsewhere. At least in this one neighborhood, there was so much attention towards the visitor's experience and making them feel welcomed, entertained, and wowed. That was absolutely the case for us.

## Shinjuku

「次は新宿、新宿です。お出口は右側です。ご乗車ありがとうございました。」

These were the words we heard over the speaker before exiting the train to Shinjuku Station. This translates to, "Next is Shinjuku, Shinjuku. The exit is on the right. Thank you for riding with us." With that announcement, we follow the hordes of salarymen spilling out into the streets as they start their Friday drinking adventures, or rather, continue their binge drinking activities. We are not far from following either...

With the dark night skies illuminated by an endless sea of LED billboards, skyscrapers boasting advertisements for darts, karaoke, and other nightlife activities, it didn't seem like night at all. We make our way from the station, passing through the massive crosswalks delivering people from either side, transporting them into what seemed like a totally new realm. Once a drop in an ocean of people and skyscrapers, we find ourselves in winding and tight alleyways. Lit by lanterns, more LEDs, and the occasional vestigial neon sign, we scurry into an "izakaya" (居酒屋).

We are immediately ushered to three seats at the bar and we order

a beer sake combo drink. In what could only be described as what you would imagine a tight and cramped Japanese bar would look like, this was exactly that. There were tables to the right of the bar where friends and salarymen in suits drank their stress away and filled their stomachs with the allure of forgetfulness. On the other side of the bar, the food was being prepared. With a backdrop of pans and other kitchen equipment, this small bar made use of every inch of space. Further back, the tables and chairs switched to mats and cushions where customers would enjoy their libations and snacks sitting down. With a couple of drinks down and the leftover kebab sticks left on the small plates, we leave in search of our next destination.

The search brought us to an unexpected encounter with Matt Miller and his girlfriend. A friend of Christian Pudlo, both Michigan State graduates, Matt and his girlfriend were going to have a couple of days overlap with us in Tokyo, but we had no idea where they were or what they were doing. Only given a, "You might see them," from Christian before we left for Japan, there was no expectation that we would run into them.

*"A quick conversation at a New Year's Eve party turned into a one-in-fourteen-million chance encounter. At the end of last year, my girlfriend and I attended our friend Christian's New Year's Eve party in Chicago. While at the party, we met his roommates for the first time and learned that they were planning to go to Japan around the same time that we had planned a trip in March. While this was a funny coincidence, we did not check to see if our timelines matched up and made no plans to meet while we were in Japan."*

*A few months went by, and it was now time for my girlfriend and me to begin our adventure through Japan. Our itinerary consisted of stops in Tokyo, Mt. Fuji, Osaka, and Kyoto. On our second night in Tokyo, we were wandering*

## Shioyadaiki 汐屋だい稀

Menma (メンマ) – Fermented bamboo shoots

Chashu (チャーシュー) – Slices of braised pork belly

Ajitama (味玉) – Marinated soft-boiled eggs, usually with a slightly runny yolk

Naruto (なると) – A fish cake with the iconic pink swirl

Nori (海苔) – Sheets of dried seaweed, usually placed on the side



We sit at a bar for an opening party of a private event. The grapefruit like fruits, called Buntan, are the cocktails signature taste.

**PHOTO TYLER MORALES**



Meguro city proved to be a relaxed and non touristy Japanese town. Here, we rested and caught a baseball game of amateur adult baseball players.

PHOTO GRADY DAVIS

*around Shinjuku looking for a bar to stop in and have a drink. We were in Kabukicho, a part of Shinjuku known for its bright lights, bars, and massive crowds. We turned a corner off one of the busy streets and standing right in front of us were Christian's roommates. It took a moment for all of us to process what was happening. While walking around the largest city in the world, over 6000 miles from home, we somehow ran into some familiar faces.*

*We ended up grabbing a few drinks in the Golden Gai district and talked about the rest of our travel plans. We shared all of the cities we planned to visit next, and they shared details on a backpacking leg of their trip that they had planned. At the end of the night, we both went our separate ways. However, this chance encounter will forever be a great part of that trip, and it shows how nice it can be to see a familiar face in a place that is so new where you do not know anyone."*

—Matt Miller

In a country of over thirty million people and countless tourists, destinations, and places to be, the likelihood of us crossing paths seemed like a miracle. Either way, our group of five now took advantage of this meeting and decided to find another izakaya.

After more drinks and food, sharing our stories of Japan so far, the idea of us running into each other still seemed wild. However, due to our lack of sleep and the extremely long day, we all decide to go back to our accommodations and prepare for the next day. To where and to do what, we're not sure, but we do know that we will find something. We would not be disappointed.

### Day 3: The Art of the Unexpected

At this point, even though it's only day three, we have made a morning routine. It's wake up early around 6:30 am, head out the door and find the closest convenience store – Family Mart, Lawson, or 7-11. For those who don't know, these convenience stores, even

7-11, are nothing like those in the US. I'll explain later, but for now, just know that they are serving our every breakfast need to the utmost highest standards.

Again, coffee and onigiri in hand, we make our way to Chuo City for Tsukiji Outer Market. Tsukiji Outer Market, known as Japan's "Food Town," offers a blend of wholesale and retail shops along with numerous restaurants, featuring traditional Japanese foods and new culinary trends. Initially catering to professionals, the market now also provides high-end and ready-to-eat meals in smaller sizes for retail customers and visitors.



It was here where we got our exquisite taste of the high-end food culture in Japan. Some of these foods included, but were not limited to, A5 wagyu steak, sashimi, shrimp, and an assortment of other food delicacies. However, it was the wagyu steak that took the prize for first place. A5 Wagyu is the highest grade of Wagyu beef, signifying top-tier quality with superior marbling, tenderness, and flavor. It represents the pinnacle of excellence within the Wagyu family. That we had the opportunity to experience tasting A5 wagyu was truly rewarding and special. But, that makes times when there isn't A5 wagyu not as good.

At this point, it is just past 9 am, and having beaten the crowds, we have finished our time at the market before most people start rolling in. Before the market gets overcrowded with hungry tourists, we are back on the train to our next destination – Meguro City.

高知県  
Kochi, Japan

### 三代目矢野金光農園

3rd generation Farmer, Yano Kimono

Buntan, a specialty fruit of Kochi Prefecture, is produced in Tosa Miyanochi and has been cultivated since the early Showa period. The third-generation Yano Kinmitsu Farm focuses on delivering the highest quality buntan through careful selection and reduced pesticide practices, ensuring an exceptional balance of sweetness and acidity. They offer these fruits as gifts, individually packaged and inspected to guarantee quality, promoting a new value for buntan that prioritizes flavor over appearance.

the pomelo (Xin) fruit is the largest citrus fruit and principal ancestor of the grapefruit



The end of Day 2 presents many new experiences. One of these experiences is drinking beer at an izakaya—small bar food served with alcohol.

PHOTO TYLER MORALES

### Meguro City

The late morning and early afternoon hours consist of leisurely activities. We arrive at Meguro City and walk aimlessly around town, taking in this new section of Tokyo. Like the previous day, the areas directly around train stations are crowded and extremely dense with shopping, entertainment, and food. However, if you venture a few minutes out from this center point, you can get a lesser-treked viewpoint of the city. This was exactly what we did.

From aimlessly walking around more residential streets, the road opens up to another park where, for the first time, we see an amateur baseball game being played by adults, kids playing in the park, and a small rest area. After an eventful morning so far, we decide to lay down for a short nap and regain our energy. But, before long, our stomachs are growling again and all that's on our mind is ramen. Not knowing where we are exactly or where a ramen shop is, we head towards the closest train station as there will surely be a ramen

place there. And, without a miss, after arriving in close proximity to Toritsu-daigaku Station (都立大学駅), we find Shioyadaiki (汐屋 だい稀), a ramen restaurant.

Once inside, there is solo bar seating and table seating on either side of the narrow restaurant. Immediately to our left, there is a ramen machine. This is how we order. Again, being in Japan, all ingredients and the spelling of those ingredients are in Japanese. As a result, we pushed the buttons to the corresponding toppings and type of ramen that we thought worked well together. But, we were not exactly sure. It didn't matter because we knew that whatever we ordered, it was going to be good once they handed us bibs. It was at this point where we knew that we would be in good company to slurp away and be one with the ramen. That's exactly what we did.

My ramen was spicy. Heavy with pork, soft boiled eggs, seaweed, bamboo shoots, green onion, and other toppings, the only way

to describe this in justice is for you to experience it firsthand. Or, you could watch any Studio Ghibli ramen scene as they make the animated ramen look like the most delectable ramen ever made.

Bellies full of ramen, we head back outside and walk on a trail we find not far from the ramen shop. On this trail, we are getting passed by elderly men and women. I wonder to myself, how is an eighty-year-old woman passing twenty-four and twenty-five-year-old men? What are they doing to stay this energized? Whatever the case is, we enjoy a peaceful post-lunch ramen stroll on this trail, observing and taking in the day as it comes. With no rush or hurries other than to explore, we are content, but we know there is more.

### Pop-up Cocktail Event

After more roaming and a vanilla ice cream cone from none other than Lawson, we don't have a plan of what to do next. We are currently in Shinagawa City (品川区), one of the business districts of Tokyo. Up to this point, Shinagawa City seems to be most related to the Loop in Chicago. With no clear direction of where to go, we let our feet lead the way as our heads follow.

We arrive again at a hilly residential area a little further than the business district. At this point, we had two options: retreat and take the train back to find a bar or restaurant, or continue forward traversing this hilly section of the city. If you have been reading up to this point so far, I'm fairly sure you know which option we chose.

Before we know it, we are scaling a series of around a hundred steps up towards what seems to be a local high point in this neighborhood. After all three of us make it to the top, and still having no clue where to go next, we spot a unique building beside us. It seems to be a well-designed building overlooking the staircase we just climbed. I search on Google to try to decipher what it is, but all I can find is that it is some type of arts center. Already intrigued by its unique architecture and a couple of people inside, we hesitantly approach the front door and I ask the person there what it is. To our shock, the person is welcoming

and brings us inside.

What happens next is the true definition of why not having a plan sometimes is the best plan.

The building, named Nadoya•Shimizuyama, is a custom-designed building by a local architect made for the creative arts and events. The oak wood interior, heavy glass windows for walls,

and separation of rooms are some of the highlights. Once inside, there is a record player that is curated by a dedicated person, and for the main event, a fruit cocktail event. We eventually learn that this was an invite-only event; however, we were graciously invited to join and we get an almost private tasting of three cocktails infused with a grapefruit-like fruit. We each sit at the bar as the bartender prepares drinks. Thankfully, we have an interpreter that is able to translate what the owner of the fruit farm in collaboration with the cocktails was trying to tell us. The owner tells us a little bit about his farm and the event. "Buntan" (文旦) is a type of Japanese pomelo and it is the main feature at the event we are currently at called "The Little Adventure of Buntan." This is currently the event reception where there is Buntan cocktail tasting, free beer and wine, and music. It is truly a unique experience that no paid guide or visit Tokyo program could ever lead us to. It is these types of off-road paths that lead to these experiences.

When we are finished with the cocktails, we make our rounds talking to some of the guests at the reception. One such guest we talk to is a

Japanese businesswoman who expresses her deep disgust with the Chinese, noting that they spit everywhere. It is clear where some of the Japanese people stand in relation to the Chinese.

Without wanting to overstay our invitation, we find ourselves out as we retreat back to our little one-room Airbnb in Asakusa. It has been another eventful day packed with surprises. Let's see what tomorrow brings.



# ON PUBLIC RESTROOMS

“Day 1 in Japan, 6am. Visiting the Ueno Park toilet museum was the moment I knew we would be okay in Japan.

This excrement sentiment, defecation proclamation, almost brought me to tears. It showed they care about the little things, that people here do things with purpose and care. It set the tone for the trip.”

—Grady Davis

## **This is Ueno Toilet Museum**

This toilet is refurbished by the students from Tokyo University of the Arts as the “Ueno Toilet Museum Project”.

The toilet can be considered one of the many museums in Ueno Park.

The theme of the Toilet Museum is “Excretion and Environment”.

The “Excretion” of us human is easily associated with a dirty image.

However, In the Ueno Zoo, the animals’ excrement is examined by zookeepers every day, as the shape and colour of the excretion reflect the health condition of the animals. For the zookeepers, it is an important source of information.

Nevertheless, “Excretion” is not only the circulation that happens in the digestive system in the animals’ body but it is also connected to the next step in the food chain in nature and can be seen as a productive activity.

Our vision expands from the tiny digestive circulation in our body, to the gigantic circulation in the global environment.

On top of the tiny little change in your body, if there is also a change in your perspective after your visit. That is the goal of the Ueno Toilet Museum.



PHOTO GRADY DAVIS

A traditional Japanese squat toilet, also known as a “washiki” (和式) toilet, is commonly found in older public restrooms, while modern bidet toilets are now the norm.

Day 4

# Tokyo ➡ Kii-Tanabe



**Tsukemono (漬物)** Japanese pickles, which are usually served in a small dish as a palate cleanser

**Shredded Cabbage Salad**  
Shredded cabbage with a small portion of dressing

**Rice (ご飯)** A bowl of steamed white rice



**Karaage (唐揚げ)**  
Japanese-style fried chicken

**Nimono (煮物)** Simmered vegetables, possibly including burdock root (gobo), carrot, and konnyaku, served in a light broth.

**Miso Soup (味噌汁)** A traditional soup made from miso paste, tofu, and sometimes seaweed or green onions

Pit stop in Osaka for lunch

Only four days in and we are ready to start our four day hike! We leave the bustling city of Tokyo to a calmer and seaside town, Tanabe. Here, we spend the night and prepare for our longest day of hiking.



Japan's first-class option, offering more spacious seating, extra legroom, and additional amenities compared to regular cars. It provides a quieter, more comfortable environment, perfect for a luxurious and relaxing travel experience.



**Max Speed**

**177mph**

**The Japanese Bullet Train, also known as the Shinkansen (新幹線), is a marvel of both transportation and comfort.**

Upon first boarding the Shinkansen—mind you, we booked the Green Car, otherwise known as first class—we were not disappointed.

Grady sat next to a professional Japanese player, while Matt sat next to what seemed like an Asian celebrity. I sat next to a middle-aged man working on his thick and clunky laptop.

Before we knew it, we were moving and picking up speed rapidly. The trip from Tokyo to Osaka seemed to be over before it even got started! However, we did enjoy some niceties and marvels along the way.

The car attendant would bow upon entering each train car as a sign of respect before walking down the aisle, asking if we needed anything. Comfort was the utmost priority. Not knowing how things worked at first, it took some time to get acclimated to the luxurious seats, spacious accommodations, and the wide variety of food options available to order.

The train ride was quiet and peaceful—exactly what we needed before our hike the following day.

It wouldn't be long before we were back on the Shinkansen, heading back to Tokyo!



Days 5-8 5日目~8日目

# THE FOUR DAY HIKE THROUGH WAKAYAMA

Unlike anything they had done before, this four-day intensive thru-hike pushed the three adventurers to the brink of mental fatigue and physical exhaustion. From ill-equipped food rations to bleeding toes and Achilles tendinitis, nothing could dissuade them from their journey.

Day 1

15.46miles | 3,613ft

Day 2

6.15miles | 1,814ft



Kumano

## 熊野

# KUMANO



**Miles**

**45.42**

**Elevation Gain**

**13,704**

**Total Time (Hr)**

**26**

# 古道 KODO



An iconic storefront set against a moody, rainy backdrop caught Tyler's attention. Reminded of the quintessential LAWSON with Mt. Fuji in the background, he knew he had to capture this moment.

PHOTO TYLER MORALES



**W**e came here for one reason: to hike the Kumano Kodo trail.

The Kumano Kodo (熊野古道) is a network of ancient pilgrimage routes on Japan's Kii Peninsula, leading to the Three Grand Shrines of Kumano: Kumano Hongu Taisha (熊野本宮大社), Kumano Nachi Taisha (熊野那智大社), and Kumano Hayatama Taisha (熊野速玉大社). Used for over 1,000 years for Kumano worship, it was the largest sacred site in Japan during the Middle Ages. Although its prominence was later surpassed by Ise Shrine, it became part of the pilgrimages of the 33 sacred sites of the Kannon in western Japan. Designated as a World Heritage site in 2004, the Kumano Kodo remains a busy pilgrimage route today.

Over the next four days, we will traverse forests, mountain towns, endure rain, get lost, but also meet amazing people along the way as we trek through one of the most beautiful hikes I have ever been on. The coming days will be long, but rewarding. Through torment comes renewal, and I can confidently say that this adventure will stay with me for a very long time.

**Day 5: Japan | Day 1: Tanabe, Wakayama to Nakahechi, Wakayama**

We wake up just past 6 am. Today will be our longest day over the next four days of hiking.



Tyler stands atop a rock on the coastal shore of Kii-Tanabe, fully outfitted in Gore-Tex waterproof outerwear. Protected by traction-gripping Salomon running boots, easy-on-and-off REI rain pants, a tactical Arc'teryx outer shell, and a pair of complimentary sunglasses from his eye doctor, he is covered from head to toe.

PHOTO MATT SCHILTZ

**Grilled Fish (焼き魚, Yakizakana)**

Grilled mackerel with a light sauce, garnished with asparagus and roasted red pepper.



**Sashimi Salad (刺身サラダ)**

Fresh salad with sashimi slices, cherry tomatoes, mixed greens, and a light citrus dressing.



**Japanese Dessert (フルーツムース, Furūtsu Mūsu)**

Light fruit mousse topped with a strawberry and served with a heart-shaped cracker.



Galette Macrobiotic Restaurant was the only place that welcomed us after being turned away by several other restaurants, presumably for being tourists. At other spots, we were literally given the “X” with employees crossing their arms to indicate they were full—even though, when we peeked in, they appeared empty. At Galette, however, we were graciously served an absolutely stellar meal. With over eight courses, we left feeling full from our stomachs to our hearts.

**PHOTO BY GRADY DAVIS**

It is a cold start to the day. We proactively dress in layers to protect ourselves from the supposed freezing temperatures we might experience. However, this would soon prove to be a mistake for one of us.

Before we even start hiking, we are already at a crossroads. Do we board a bus and get dropped off at the official start of the trail, or do we instead start from our hostel in Tanabe and add an extra nine miles and multiple thousand feet of elevation gain to our trek? It should be very clear which option we chose.

Backpacks on, hiking boots strapped, we begin hiking at 7:20 am northeast to our next hostel. Throughout this first section of the hike, it feels like we are characters in a Studio Ghibli film. The sunrise is slowly rising above us. Men, women, and children are biking on narrow dirt roads beside us. And, there seems to

be an endless bounty of local farmers planting a variety of crops. It has been a truly magical experience, and we are only a mile or two into the hike.

The city roads with their traffic and multi-unit buildings start to diminish as smaller family residences fill our field of view. From what was a dense urban area is now a slow transition upwards to our eventual uphill trekking. Around four miles in, we finally depart the city as we are able to see the entire city below us. We have started climbing upwards, and there is no turning back now.

The pace is grueling. Each of us is carrying the entirety of our personal belongings on our backs. To say that this is an easy hike is misleading. Rather, it is exactly what we need.

At this point, we reach an extremely steep path marked with





### Staging in Kii-Tanabe: Traditional Japanese hostel

Rainy and gloomy, the sky blankets this coastal city, dampening our grand entrance before the hike. We make our way to our cozy hostel, ICHIE Cafe, where we are warmly welcomed by the sweet old ladies running the place and guided to our room.

This is a traditional Japanese bedroom. With tatami mats, futon bedding, sliding shoji doors, and a low wooden table, we're captivated by its simplicity and beauty.

I remember how cozy it felt. For all three of us to be in such close quarters before our four-day hike was a wonderful bonding experience and a fitting way to prepare.

Before heading to bed, we make a few stops, beginning with the hostel's own small cafe. Here, patrons can enjoy English-style teas and pastries. The three of us devoured Castella, a popular Japanese sponge cake known for its light, fluffy texture and mild sweetness. Paired with matcha ice cream and crispy cereal bits, this late afternoon treat was fantastic.

After indulging, we make our way to the coast to peer out at the ocean. However, an unexpected adventure was waiting for us.

While exploring the rocky terrain along the coast in the rain, Matt gazes off into the distance from a rock. As he decides to make his way back to Grady and me, he suddenly begins to slide, as if slipping on black ice. From our perspective, it almost looks like a scene from a comic book, as Matt narrowly avoids what could have been a disastrous fall. At that point, we decide to head back to our hostel to rest and prepare for the big days ahead.

wooden pillars that officially demarcates the Kumano Kodo trail. Now, we are confident that we are on the right path and that we have officially begun the trail.

### First encounter with a Tea House

Over the course of the next few miles, we keep climbing upwards, hiking along hairpin turns and paths until we come across a house or shop-like structure. Nobody is seen near or inside, but it is intriguing enough for us to stop and take a short rest.

Grady and I reach this point first, with Matt trailing not too far behind, and we explore the area. We notice a pond filled with koi fish, a little bridge, the house or hut, bathrooms, and a spectacular view of the city below us. Soon enough, Matt arrives, and so too does an elderly woman.

Wrinkled with age and standing no taller than five feet, a jovial Japanese woman appears before us. Stifled by our inability to properly communicate, our broken English and Japanese are enough to explain to her that we are hikers on the Kumano Kodo trail. What was lost in translation was most definitely gained in the simplicity of coming into contact with someone we might not have met otherwise. To be able to understand someone and communicate effectively is not hinged on verbal language. Instead, through our facial expressions, tone, and body language, we were still able to have a memorable encounter with this woman. I'm not sure if she'll remember us, but I do know that she will remain an elusive figure in my memory.



At the Chaya-no-baba's house, there is a beautiful pond with hearty koi fish. Maybe they're older than the tea woman.

**PHOTO TYLER MORALES**

It is just up the road where we come across a sign that reads:

### Mizunomi-chaya Teahouse Remains

Historically the Mizunomi-chaya teahouse was located here on Mizunomi-toge pass (altitude 370m), and was blessed with spring water. Next to the teahouse was a small shrine called Hirune-gongen. As worshipers enjoyed the view of the castle and Tanabe Bay, they often would nap, "hirune" in Japanese.

The hospitality of the teahouse was legendary. The Feudal Lord Tokugawa Yorinobu, who ruled this domain from Wakayama castle, received an oracle in the form of shapes of characters made by the trails of insects as they were eating, which read "Chaya-no-baba", or "teahouse elderly lady". His investigations into the divine message led him here, where pilgrims were excellently treated, and subsequently rewarded the lady of the teahouse.

Ando Tatewaki Naotsugu, the Lord of Tanabe, was so impressed by the welcoming dinner that he presented them with a special wooden cup engraved with his family emblem, a rare honorary gift.

What kind of reception could these charismatic hosts have given to be so well remembered?

Maybe we had all just met our Chaya-no-baba or teahouse elderly lady and didn't even realize it.

With more hiking to be had, we continue on our way.



Making his way up the mountainside, Tyler checks to see if a bakery is open. Unfortunately, it isn't, so he retreats back.

**PHOTO GRADY DAVIS**

## Bloody Matt

*Because of the supposed cold temperatures, our proactive approach to staying warm by layering up and using vending machine hot coffees for hand warmers, and then eventual drinks, we soon grew sweaty and warm. Now, that's not a problem. We undressed to light and more breathable clothes, however, for one of us, the damage had already been done.*

*The Kumano Kodo was unlike any hike I had ever experienced. It was exceptionally demanding, yet it stands as the most incredible hike of my life. The natural beauty of Japan felt almost otherworldly, as if I had stepped onto an alien planet.*

*When I began the trek, I assumed it would be cold, so I doubled up on socks to keep my feet warm. This proved to be a big mistake. For anyone reading this, do not wear two pairs of socks when hiking unless the temperature is below 20 degrees. Wearing two pairs of socks does two things:*

- 1. It keeps your feet warm.*
- 2. It binds your toes together, causing the nails to dig into each other.*

*The latter is far more problematic than the former.*

*Halfway through our first day of hiking, I felt a warm pain emanating from my feet. I knew something was wrong, but I*



Near the top of the mountain, we catch a glimpse of the town where we started. It's been quite a journey—and there's still a ways to go.

**PHOTO GRADY DAVIS**

*didn't realize the extent of the issue until we took a break upon entering a majestic forest. I removed my socks and discovered my feet covered in blood—a sight you never want to see on the first day of a 45-mile, four-day hike in a foreign land.*

*Two thoughts crossed my mind as I examined the damage my long pinky toenails had inflicted on my feet:*

- 1. I need to cut my toenails.*
- 2. Am I going to die of infection on this hike?*

*Fortunately, I had the foresight to pack some first aid supplies from my SAR kit. I used these to bandage my wounds before continuing on.— Matt Schiltz*

Officially, we start the hike. After nearly ten miles of hiking, we reached the point where we would have been dropped off if we had taken the bus from Tanabe. I'm glad we did not.

While what we had just hiked could have been skipped, it really was one of my favorite portions of the hike in general. Traversing from city to mountain town and even getting lost while losing Matt at times, that was all part of the experience. To not have that would have been a mistake. There was no mistake in not taking the bus.

Finally, at the true start of the Kumano Kodo trail, we are presented with one of many challenges. We walk up towards a large boulder with a narrow entrance and a sign that reads:



Only a few miles into the hike, Matt is seen bleeding not through one, but two socks. Perhaps this is the reason he is bleeding?

**PHOTO GRADY DAVIS**

## Tainai Kuguri Test of Faith

*Since the route was diverted to Shiomi Peak in the 16th century, the faithful on pilgrimage to Kumano stopped climbing Mt. Tsurugi-no-yama. However, locals have kept coming to Takijiri-oji Shrine every spring and autumn, climbing the mountain path with bamboo walking sticks in hand and descending into this cave to pray to a turtle-shaped monolith. Hiking through the cave is known as tainai kuguri, literally meaning “passing through the womb”. This is considered a test of faith. Superstition has it that women who make the journey through the cave will have smooth delivery.*

While not expecting to deliver any babies anytime soon, we confidently, bamboo stick in hand, contort our bodies through this passage. Going one at a time, first Grady, then me, and finally Matt, all three of us make it out. Scuffed with minor scratches and earth-covered pants, we continue on our way.

The sun has begun to fall. The sky has grown tired just as we have and is unable to illuminate the trail much more. We know that our time to reach our accommodations for the night is waning quickly. Not exactly sure how much further we have to travel, our minds were at the mercy of our darkest thoughts. But no, we couldn't think like that. With myself and Grady trudging along, making great time, but also unaware of where exactly we needed to go, our main concern was Matt.

Inflicted by his blister from earlier and the lack of proper nutrition, we feared he might not reach us until past dark. Once the darkness would eventually reign supreme over the sky, taking the place of our guiding star, the sun, who knows what spirits in the forest would foist their supernatural powers over Matt.

Suddenly, after reaching a high point, we come across a group of hikers, two male guides, and a middle-aged woman, from hours earlier. If we are meeting them on the trail at this point, how much further do we have left, we think to ourselves. They even say to us that they are lost and not sure where to go. Spooked, yet following the GPS map, we continue on past them, going up one more steep incline before reaching a vertical six-foot flag in Japanese. Unable to read it, we continue on for no more than a few paces forwards and come across a minimal-looking structure.

“We made it,” both Grady and I exclaim to ourselves in a superrelated tone. Immediately I called Matt and delivered the good news. I tell him how we made markers on the ground from fallen branches to hopefully guide him to us. In great spirits, we go inside our hostel, greeted by a fellow New Zealander hiker and retire for the evening at SEN.RETREAT TAKAHARA.

## The Night at Sen Retreat Takahara

Over sixteen miles and thirty-five hundred feet of total elevation gain over the course of an elapsed nine and a half hours with a lack of proper nutrition, we have finally made it to Sen Retreat Takahara.

Inside, we share the space with a New Zealand couple on holiday.

But, before doing anything else, we all shower, clean ourselves up and indulge in the little snacks we have left.

Even though we have made it this far in a very long day already, unfortunately, we have no availability of food. The closest town is a few miles away. And, even if we did walk, the town was closed. While we could have reserved meals to be provided to us by the accommodation, we did not book them. Thankfully, at the starting point of the second half of the trail, we picked up large instant ramen bowls and energy bars.

After boiling enough water for the three of our instant ramen bowls, robed up in Kimonos, we sit cross-legged at a traditional Japanese table to indulge ourselves in ramen. There is no better feeling than being washed and well-fed after a long day of hiking. And, right now, things couldn't have been better.

Aside from banter from the New Zealand couple, we also meet an Australian couple at the table.

## Day 6: Japan | Day 2: Nakahechi, Wakayama

Rested and pampered from a comfortable night of sleep, we are back out on the trail by 7:30 am.

In what will be our shortest day of these four days, we will traverse just over 6.1 miles and climb 1800 vertical feet in total. Lasting a little over two hours, it is a good recovery day from the day prior.

Leaving Sen Retreat behind, we almost immediately start hiking along a mountain, but not before grabbing our vending machine Boss coffees and taking in the amazing view of multiple mountain ranges from a scenic lookout.

As we make our way from this lookout, we snake our way upwards, past residential mountain housing, observing the lush and spring rain bring life to the small farms here. Taking our time because we are in no rush, we seize the opportunity today to take as many breaks as we want.

One of our first breaks occurs around the one-mile marker. While not a great distance so far, we have climbed a few hundred feet of elevation and are audibly out of breath. Now that we have entered a forested area, the tree coverings are keeping us cool, and the elevation profile has leveled out some. Looking to our left, we notice a small teepee that looks like someone used to live there, or still lives there. Moving on, we come across a small pond and decide to take a short break here to simply enjoy the scenery and tranquility in the middle of a Japanese forest.

We take this time to decompress, eat a snack, and drink some water. After resting for some time, we notice our fellow Australians pass us on the trail. When this happens, we figure it is time to get back on the path and continue forward. That's exactly what we do. So, with bamboo sticks in hand, we trek onwards.

The remaining miles of the hike are peaceful and relaxed. We don't rush, but we also can't help but keep a solid pace. As a result, we lose Matt again. He is in good hands though. Luckily,



After a grueling day of hiking, we finally arrive at our hostel. Here, we plop onto the tatami mats, put on our robes, and start preparing dinner. Luckily, each of us bought a large bowl of instant ramen before setting out. Without it, we'd have been left hungry, vulnerable to the scowls of our impatient stomachs.

PHOTO TYLER MORALES

our previous night's friends keep a watchful eye on him.

Around noon, Grady and I hit a road and decide to take a quick lunch break and wait for Matt to come out of the woods. Here, we get a front-row seat to tourists in Japan.

In a large coach bus, multiple of these passing through the trail daily, full of either Chinese or French tourists, the hordes of tourists spill out from the rambunctious bus into the peaceful forest. Taking up space in a rather small rest stop on the road, these people overflow the area. What would have been a relaxing and quiet experience turned chaotic very quickly. However, these tourists aren't here for long as they must get back on their bus to keep on schedule. Before long, it is just us and hikers again.

Soon enough, we see our Sen Retreat friends, but not Matt. They tell us that they saw him and that he was on his way. Relieved that he didn't have to fight any bears, we have peace of mind that he will arrive soon. And soon did he come.

"After a long uphill hike, we made it to our hostel for the night, a modern Japanese Airbnb with no staff. Sitting for dinner, we enjoyed the company of two pleasant middle aged couples - the

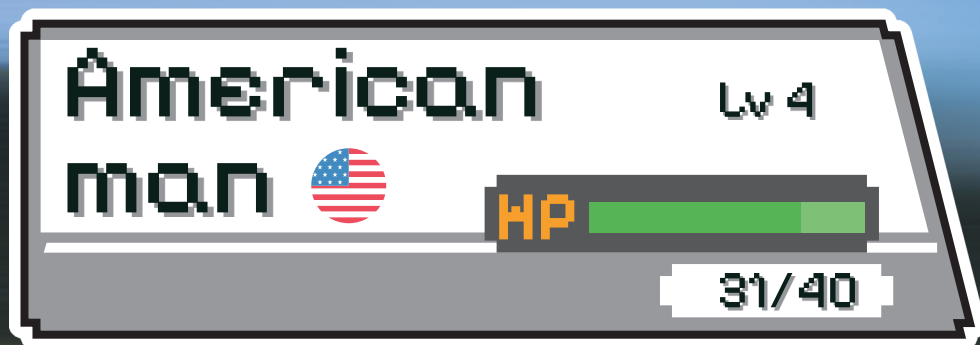
only other guests at the intimate Airbnb. One was made up of two British emigre's to Australia, the other a Kiwi and an English emigre. They were perfectly decent in every way and gave us portions of food for our breakfast the next day as we had come unprepared. We bonded over them having boys our age and my experience studying in Exeter and theirs visiting the US and summering in Ohio.

One of them 'called' Mark, a sharp dressed fellow, clever with a dry english wit, entered the dining room with a bow to us saying "eeriigatooo samiriii" he had us in stitches. Crisscrossed on our low oriental table we exchanged stories when the topic of the potential of bears on the trail came up. While uncommon, asiatic black bears are native to the area. Quiet until that point Schilt's head raised up from his ramen and he made an interjected that will live on in infamy:

"You could fight a black bear, you could take one"

The room silenced and all heads turned to him. Perhaps these comments would be taken lightheartedly by Matt's peers; my experience living amongst Brits indicated Schilt's flamboyance would not be forgiven. Tmo and I turned to him in shock, Mark zeroed in on his prey.

# Think YOU Can Fight A Black Bear?



The debate over whether a human can fight an Asian black bear highlights a mix of hopeful ingenuity and harsh reality. On one hand, humans possess unique advantages, such as intelligence, adaptability, and resourcefulness. Asian black bears, while immensely strong and capable of running up to 30 mph, are often more skittish than larger bear species like grizzlies, and can sometimes be scared off by loud noises, shouting, or clapping. Making oneself appear larger while yelling or banging objects together may intimidate the bear enough to make it retreat. However, these tactics are not foolproof, and a determined or cornered bear may still attack with its immense strength, 800–900 PSI bite force, and claws capable of tearing through bark,



What will  
you do?

FIGHT

YELL

RUN

HIDE

flesh, and bone. Bears' size, often weighing 400+ pounds and standing over six feet tall, combined with their natural instincts, makes them nearly impossible to fight directly. While adrenaline may give a human a temporary edge, and some survival stories involve targeting a bear's vulnerable areas like the nose or eyes, such encounters are incredibly rare and dangerous. Ultimately, surviving an encounter with an Asian black bear is less about physical strength and more about strategy—staying calm, making noise to deter the bear, appearing non-threatening, and retreating slowly when possible.





Asian 

Lv 20

Black Bear

HP

48/48

STATS			
	Adult Male	VS	Asian Black Bear 
	15-18 mph	SPEED	25 mph
	95 lbs <sup>1</sup>	POWER	800 PSI <sup>2</sup>
	5 ft 10 in	HEIGHT	6 ft 1 in
	180 lbs	WEIGHT	400 lbs

<sup>1</sup> Grip strength

<sup>2</sup> Bite strength



In the small town of Nakahechi, the group of three find themselves in a small thrift shop and store. Here, a group of three women welcome them warmly while serving them tea and snacks.

**PHOTO GRADY DAVIS**



#### **Above**

Upon completing the shortest leg of the hike, the three hikers arrive at their hostel for the remaining day. However, the hostel owner drives them into town to his recommendation for lunch. Seen above is their immaculate lunch containing grilled salmon, a house salad with ginger dressing, steamed rice, miso soup, pickled vegetables, and other local sides.

**PHOTO TYLER MORALES**

#### **Left**

Grady and Tyler pose in front a gate into the city central. Here, outfitted in rain gear, they brave the cold and wet for the shot.

**PHOTO TYLER MORALES**

This small, cozy room is where Tyler and Grady will sleep, while Matt takes the room next door. Adorned with traditional Japanese decor, the space features a samurai helmet (兜, Kabuto) flanked by ornamental katana (刀), a hanging scroll (掛け軸, Kakejiku) of a koi fish, and decorative ox horns resting on a wooden stand. The tatami mats and tokonoma alcove complete the aesthetic, making this the perfect place to unwind—or plot the next adventure?

PHOTO TYLER MORALES



自然を未来へ, or “nature to the future”, the school poster promotes conservation. Kappa, the character in the bottom left is a Japanese water creature symbolizing water conservation.

PHOTO TYLER MORALES



#### Left and below

After climbing the brutal initial incline of the trail at the start of day two, we take a moment to pause and soak in the surroundings. We do this by sitting beside a small pond, where we spend time writing and drawing.

PHOTOS TYLER MORALES



“Well you must be fierce! Do all Americans fight bears?” - Mark

“You could fight a bear mate?” - the kinder brit added giving Matt a chance to correct.

Face reddening Matt doubled down, “well yeah, I mean I could fight a black bear”.

Mark “You must be pretty tough mate, maybe we should keep you along on the walk to take care of any bear issues we might have”.

Five minutes later: “Hey mate I heard a noise outside it sounded like a bear, can you check it out”.

Then everybody pitched in on the ribbing.. for the next two days every time we encountered our new friends on the trail they had a new quip ready. Mark beamed when he spotted Tmo and me without

Schilt: “Hey mate, where is your friend? Bear got him?”. Next stop “He off fighting another bear?”. A mile later we ran into the other couple, they cheerfully pointed to a bear warning sign “Oh here is his chance!”, “Where is your mate, we need him nearby to keep us safe from these bears!”.

When we addressed Matt he tried backtracking and said he only said he could “scare a black bear” and not fight it, but even he knew that wasn’t true. All he could do now was face his em-bear-assment.” -Grady Davis

Now, stride in stride, six legs swinging in motion, we make our way to our accommodation for the night.

Exiting the forested path, we make our way into a small and secluded mountain town. Our Airbnb is on the main road, and when we arrive, we are promptly given a tour of the second-story hostel by the owner. He asks us if we would like to have dinner with him and any other hostel guests



that night before delivering us to a local lunch restaurant. Not knowing exactly what his dinner could be, we decide to agree. Our dinner plans have been made.

After the tour, we pack up in his car as he drives us a few minutes down the road to a wooden building. He says that this is a great spot and great value. Skeptical as anyone in the tourist industry looking for a kickback, we agree to eat here, but we have our reservations.

Reservations we should not have had. Once inside, the almost fully wood interior, clean and minimal, we are greeted by an elderly woman who is ready to take our order. From a set of salmon or beef bento boxes, I choose the salmon, while Matt and Grady choose the beef. We start with a few cups of green tea to help hydrate us as we wait for lunch.

What we thought might have been a touristy place, this was definitely a local spot. With only one other patron inside, an elderly Japanese gentleman, we got the sense that our food would be tasty.

With trays in hand, our sweet elderly waitress delivers us a beautifully arranged assortment of fish, salad, vegetables, rice, and miso soup to each of us. For the price of around \$10 a

person, we could not have been happier with the meal.

In an attempt to walk off this meal, we decide to explore the small town, grab groceries, and go thrift shopping. While the hike only took a couple of hours, that meant we had time to explore and relax.

What followed that evening before dinner was something that could not have been planned. While at the grocery store earlier, we picked out a handful of unique beers to have when we got back to the hostel. However, already hungry for a snack and something to drink, we decided to do a ranked beer tasting. Matt, the star of this segment, and star candy was in front of the camera wearing a towel as a robe as he discussed in great detail the qualities, similarities, and differences between the beers. This hour of beer tasting was the perfect chill, but entertaining activity to do before dinner.

7 pm soon comes and it is time for dinner. All three of us take the steps downstairs into the dining area of the hostel. Greeted by our new Australian hiker friend, an adult couple, and our host, we sit together around the table as he prepares us a traditional Japanese meal. A mix of rice, sour and salty vegetables, paired with Okonomiyaki (お好み焼き). It is a savory Japanese pancake that typically includes ingredients such as flour, eggs, shredded



The start of Day 2 of the Kumano Kodo Trail begins early in the morning, with the crisp wind waking them up. Yet, within minutes of hiking and a can of BOSS Coffee, they warm up while taking in the sights, noises, and sensations.

**PHOTO TYLER MORALES**

# 日本のビールの味わい

## A TASTE OF



### GREEN LABEL (4.5% ABV)

This beer is perfect for a laid-back day of drinking, offering a sweet and refreshing flavor that goes down easily—perhaps a little too easily. You could knock back five of these without a second thought, but beware of the sugar crash waiting for you the next morning. While it's delicious and earns a solid 9/10 when enjoyed on its own, it drops to a 6/10 if you're drinking in succession—high sugar content can take its toll.

**"Perfect day-drinking beer... in moderation."**

むむむ

ほっ

### TANREI PREMIUM DRAFT (5.5% ABV)

Described as the "OG version" of Kirin's Tanrei series, this 5.5% lager has a light and straightforward taste, earning it comparisons to a "Bud Light of Japan." The beer is smooth, crisp, and easy to drink—perfect for casual occasions like a sumo wrestling match, as Matt imagines. The can design is classic and inviting, evoking a sense of Japanese tradition. While the aroma is standard, the flavor is approachable, though perhaps a bit unremarkable.

### PEACH WINTER DESIGN (3% ABV)

Smelling like peaches and evoking memories of spiked Arizona tea, this drink hits you with a juicy, smooth sweetness. Light on carbonation, it's the kind of beverage you'd enjoy on a beach or during a casual day of drinking. The inviting can design, with its warm sunset vibes, perfectly matches the easygoing nature of this drink. While it's an 8/10 if you're sipping just one, the sweetness drags it down to a 6/10 if you're having a few.

**"Peachy, smooth, and dangerously sweet"**



by Matt Schiltz

# JAPANESE BEERS

With rain pouring outside and little else to do before dinner at 7 p.m., we ventured to the local grocery store to stock up on a variety of Japanese beers. Back at the hostel, we turned our rainy-day boredom into an impromptu beer tasting. One by one, we sipped, laughed, and reviewed, losing track of time in the process. By the time we finished, every can was empty—and we had almost missed dinner. Take a sip of beer while Matt guides you through his beer assessments.

## HOROYOI UME SODA (3% ABV)

This 3% alcohol fruit punch-flavored drink is intensely sweet and reminiscent of Hawaiian Punch. Its aroma and flavor are bold, delivering a soda-like experience with an alcoholic twist. The can design, like its counterparts, is inviting and colorful, adding to its appeal. While enjoyable in small doses, its sugary nature might make it overwhelming for some. A great choice for casual sipping, especially for those with a sweet tooth.

**"Fruity and sweet soda beer"**

## SUNTORY THE PREMIUM MALT'S (6% ABV)

This 6% beer surprises with a smooth, less bitter taste despite its higher alcohol content. It strikes a nice balance, offering a full-bodied flavor without being overwhelming. The can design stands out with its premium aesthetic, perfectly matching the beer's refined profile. A solid choice for those seeking a stronger beer that's still approachable. **Final rating: 8/10.**



**It tastes like an alcoholic soda**

## ASAHI SUPER DRY (5% ABV)

A straightforward and reliable beer, Asahi Super Dry offers a clean and slightly wheaty taste, though it lacks bold flavor. It's a step above many American beers, delivering a crisp, light profile that's easy to enjoy. While it might not be the most exciting choice, it's solid for casual drinking. **Final rating: 5/10—perfectly average and satisfying.**



**Perfectly in the middle of the road beer**



**最高**

The best!





cabbage, and other items like meat, seafood, or cheese. It's often topped with a variety of condiments, including okonomiyaki sauce, mayonnaise, bonito flakes, and seaweed flakes. Full and ready to sleep, we make our way back up to our rooms for another big day of hiking tomorrow.

**Day 7: Japan | Day 3: Nakahechi, Wakayama to Hongu, Wakayama**

Day three on the Kumano Kodo trail proved to be our most strenuous yet. Starting at 7:20 in the morning, we left our warm and cozy hostel and were immediately met with dense and ominous fog. Less than two hours in, the temperatures remained low, hovering around forty degrees Fahrenheit, and it began to snow. We started our ascent in the small town where we stayed, gradually transitioning to mountain roads.

I vividly remember the winding hairpin roads as we made our

Early in the morning of day three, a formidable fog rolls over the mountain town.

**PHOTO GRADY DAVIS**



Well rested, fed, and packed with a bento box, the three travelers are ready and to trek on for the next 14+ miles.

**PHOTO PASSERBYERS**

way up, with the wind gusting snowflakes around us as if we were inside a snow globe. In the distance, I saw a traditional Japanese structure. Paired with the snowfall, it felt like we were in a scene from a Japanese movie.

After navigating switchbacks that transitioned from road to trail, we finally reentered the dedicated Kumano Kodo trail. The foggy and snowy weather we had experienced for hours gave way to sunshine. However, covered in rain gear, Grady and I were drenched in sweat. After a grueling push to the base of a local high point, we took a short break to remove our rain gear and switch to more comfortable clothes. With our shells removed, we were ready for the fun part—the descent.

With an exciting downhill ahead, we decided to jog down. Keeping a mindful eye on fallen branches, tree roots, and hikers, we began our descent. Traversing downwards like two bowling balls with the agility of gazelles, we jumped, dodged, and

maneuvered ourselves like a single entity, united by the potential severity of making mistakes. We alternated organically between who was leading, calling out any impediments to our journey. “Hiker! Root! Rock!” For this short while, instead of fighting the uphill battle the slow and taxing mountains presented, we flowed with the grain of the terrain.

At a local low point, we caught our breaths and waited on stable ground. The rest of the route seemed to be flat, so we transitioned from jogging to a more reasonable power hike. With around five miles left and long past lunch, we caught up with the United Nations group—two men and a woman—and sat with them for lunch. By this point, the hike had been relatively dry. Besides a light sprinkle of rain, the weather had transitioned from fog to rain and snow to sunshine, and now, to rain. With the warmer temperatures of the late morning, rain began to fall again.

Delighted by the rain, I suited up in Gore-Tex rain gear and



At the end of a long and wet day, we finally sit down for a well deserved sushi dinner at 宮ずし.

**PHOTO GRADY DAVIS**

was ready to continue. After finishing our bento lunch boxes prepared by our previous host, we packed up, said goodbye to the UN group, and trekked towards the end. The cloud-covered skies and gentle downhill provided relief from the intense uphill earlier, but the temperatures had fallen as well.

With less than two miles to go, we entered a small town and found a local coffee shop run by two elderly Japanese women who were more than happy to serve patrons. We ordered cups of coffee to take a break, wait for Matt, and hopefully allow the rain to pass. Once again, the UN group caught up with us and they too sat down for coffee. Up to this point, many of the shop, store, and restaurant owners we encountered were elderly people, mostly women. This stark contrast to how the US treats and values the elderly was striking. Where the US primarily separates the elderly from society, Japan seems to integrate them into everyday life. It was beautiful to see elderly women serve us tea or help us around a shop, sometimes even offering a cup of tea and cookies over a chat.

After many more cups of coffee, we couldn't wait for Matt any

longer as the rain seemed persistent. We continued onwards to the Kumano Hongu Taisha (熊野本宮大社) grand shrine. However, before reaching the end of our day three hike, we noticed a side path to our left. Being wanderers, and myself having FOMO, we decided to take this side path.

What presented itself was a beautiful mountain view. The foggy blues and grays of the clouds mixed with the mountains were spectacular. Below, an open grassland was adorned with a large Japanese gate. After taking in the view, we returned to the trail and made our way into town.

Arriving at the shrine, numerous flags and stonework lined the path leading to the Hongu shrine. Despite the rain, many people were there. We wondered where Matt was. We knew he was behind us but couldn't contact him. We thought he might have taken the bus at the lunch stop. Right on cue, when we got cell service, I called Matt and found he was two blocks away, seated at a cafe. Glad to see Matt warm, charged, and in good spirits, he described his decision to take the bus into town:

"The low point for me was probably on day three. I realized my

At 宮ずし, a Sushi restaurant in Hongu, Japan

# Sushi vs. Sashimi

**Yellowtail** (Hamachi / ハマチ)  
Light pink fish with a buttery  
flavor and smooth texture.

**Sea Bream** (Tai / 鯛) –  
White and delicate with a  
clean, subtle taste.

**Squid** (Ika / イカ) – White  
and slightly translucent  
with a chewy texture.

**Salmon** (Sake / 鮭) – Bright  
orange fish with a rich, oily  
flavor and soft texture.

**Freshwater Eel** (Unagi  
/ 鰻) – Dark brown,  
glazed with sweet  
sauce, and served  
atop rice.

**Shrimp** (Ebi / 海老)  
Pink and white with a  
sweet flavor and firm  
bite.

**Ark Shell** (Akagai / 赤  
貝) Red clam with a  
briny flavor and chewy  
texture.

**Seared Beef** (Gyūniku  
/ 牛肉) Lightly seared  
beef topped with  
scallions, tender and  
savory.

**Sea Bream** (Tai / 鯛)  
Another piece of white  
sea bream, often  
included for balance on  
a platter.

**Tuna** (Maguro / 鮪)  
Deep red fish with a  
mild flavor and tender  
texture.

**Sea Urchin** (Uni / ウニ)  
Bright yellow-orange with  
a creamy texture and  
oceanic flavor.

**Lotus Root** (Renkon / 蓮  
根) Thinly sliced and  
pickled with a crunchy  
texture.

**Salmon Roe** (Ikura / イク  
ラ) Bright orange pearls  
with a burst of salty  
flavor.



Our omakase: a chef's selection of sashimi and sushi, featuring the items listed above.

Sashimi, or better known as, “get in my mouth as fast as possible, you sweet and savory tuna,” is the purest form of enjoying raw seafood. Unlike sushi, which pairs fish with vinegared rice to create a balanced bite, sashimi focuses solely on the delicate textures and flavors of the fish itself. Each slice is a testament to freshness and precision, offering an unadulterated taste of the sea. Sushi, on the other hand, is a more composed dish, where the rice acts as a foundation, complementing the fish with subtle acidity. While sushi is a harmonious blend of ingredients, sashimi is raw elegance at its finest.

On our plate, a chef-curated masterpiece from 宮ずし, we enjoyed a mix of sashimi and sushi. Delicate slices of tuna, salmon, and yellowtail sashimi were paired with vinegared rice for nigiri-style sushi featuring shrimp, eel, and even seared beef. Garnishes like pickled daikon, shiso leaves, and salmon roe added bursts of texture and flavor, completing this culinary journey. Together, the combination showcases the artistry and versatility of Japanese cuisine—whether you savor the simplicity of sashimi or the balance of sushi, every bite tells a story.

## コーヒー

Many cups of coffee were drunk while waiting in an outdoor cafe. We were served by what seemed to be 100 year old women.



## トイレ

Many cups of coffee were drunk while waiting in an outdoor cafe. We were served by what seemed to be 100 year old women.

As we leave the trail and enter the mountain town, we pass beautifully crafted traditional Japanese countryside homes. With their well-maintained gardens and pristine condition, I could easily imagine myself enjoying tea here. But for now, we must keep moving.

This colorful and playful sign carries a serious message beneath its cheerful cartoon dog and cat. Phrases like “No dog or cat feces or urine allowed!” and “Do not let dogs roam freely! Do not feed stray cats!” highlight the city’s emphasis on responsible pet ownership. While it may appear friendly at a first glance, it serves an important purpose in maintaining cleanliness and order.

## No feces or urine



## Pick up after your dog

This sign in Hongū Town addresses the issue of dog feces, emphasizing responsible pet ownership. It warns that uncollected dog poop is a nuisance and urges owners to take responsibility for cleaning up after their pets. The illustration of a sad dog adds a visual reminder to the message, making it clear that neglecting this duty is both a problem and inconsiderate to the community.

# FOUND OBJECTS & SIGNS





## Kumano Kodo signs ▶

This colorful sign welcomes travelers to the Kumano Kodo pilgrimage route. The top section highlights “Hongū Taisha” (Kumano Hongū Taisha Shrine) with a cheerful “Welcome!” (いらつしやいませ) and a friendly cartoon figure, marking the current location. The bottom section points toward two key waypoints, Mizunomi Ōji and Hosshinmon Ōji, with a speech bubble indicating they are 4 kilometers away. The playful illustrations of hikers encourage visitors to continue their journey along this spiritual and scenic trail.

## 紀伊山地の霊場と参詣道

Sacred Sites and Pilgrimage Routes in the Kii Mountain Range. Constantly, we are reminded of this trail, on and off the trail. ▶



## 消火栓

◀ A unique manhole cover captured my eye. This is a cover for a fire hydrant or water supply.



feet were bleeding again, and it was super cold and rainy. My phone was about to die, my AirPods were out of charge, and generally speaking, I didn’t want to put myself in a dangerous situation. So I decided to take the bus for the last four or five miles of the hike. It was probably the smart decision, given that I was bleeding a lot. That was the low point, but even then, it wasn’t really that much of a low point. Overall, the entire hike was beautiful and awesome.”

Reunited, the three of us made our way to the hostel, unpacked, showered, and prepared for the evening. Goodnight.

### Day 8: Japan | Day 4: Hongu, Wakayama to Shingu (Koguchi)

*“The high point of the hike for me was towards the end, which was the most difficult part personally. Timo and Grady were about half an hour ahead, so I was doing the last bit alone. On day four, right before we were about to end the hike, it was just sheer downhill through this town. I felt like I was in a movie, trying to walk as quickly as possible while my legs and feet were hurting. I remember reaching the street where the bus was going to come and seeing Timo and Grady at the end of the street walking. Despite my legs being dead, I was literally running at this point. I just raised my fist up like, “Holy shit, I made it.” That was probably the high point for me.”*

–Matt

Our last day of hiking was one of the most magical hikes I’ve ever done!

We began our day early, departing from our hostel around 7:30 a.m. to catch the bus that would take us to the final leg of the

Kumano Kodo Trail. Sitting alongside other travelers on the half-hour bus ride, the three of us quietly kept to ourselves, knowing this would be our final push until the resort awaiting us at Kii-Katsuura.

From the previous day, my Achilles tendon was in okay shape, but after enduring the painful rubbing from my hiking shoe, walking normally and comfortably was nearly impossible. Still, not finishing the hike was not an option. Resourcefully, I compacted old boxer briefs to create a makeshift heel lift that allowed me to hike the remaining 10 miles. While it was far from ideal (rest and new shoes would have been better), it was the only solution I had at my disposal to finish the hike.

Back on the trail promptly at 8:24 a.m., the three of us began a brutal initial incline. As determined as we were to tackle this sacred trail, it felt as if the energy of the mountains stared back into us. It was not going to be easy, and that was clear from the start.

We ascended the first section of the route, which consisted of steep stairs. Just as we thought we’d get a break, we were met with another grueling incline. For the first three miles, without exception, we climbed nearly 2,500 feet. Our legs, tired from the previous three days of hiking, began to show signs of fatigue. This section of the hike, which I can only compare to the Manitou Incline in Colorado Springs (2,000 feet over 1 mile), was one of the most challenging parts of the journey. Yet, what we would soon find at the summit was nothing short of breathtaking.

At the highest point of the Kumano Kodo trail, we were reminded of the beauty, mystery, and history that flows through this ancient path. Less than three miles from Koguchi, we came across a sign that recounted the experience of the famous poet Fujiwara

Teika (1162–1241), who walked this same section in 1201:

“This route is very rough and difficult; it is impossible to describe precisely how tough it is.”

It felt as if we had been transported to a new land—one filled with gently falling snowflakes and a light dusting of snow on the ground. The drastic change in temperature and scenery was magical. But just as suddenly as it appeared, it vanished as we began our descent back to sea level. The hard work of the past four days was finally leading us to the resort that awaited us. Now, it was time to enjoy the remaining hike. With plenty of daylight left, we were in high spirits as we made our way to the finish.

As we neared the end, we came across a dilapidated and seemingly abandoned children’s park. The sun was directly above us.

It was quiet, and only two other hikers passed us as we explored. This was one of those rare liminal

spaces—untouched by nature but not entirely in disrepair either. From a quick internet search, I learned it had been temporarily closed due to typhoon damage in 2019. Looking at pictures of children playing on the slides and ladders filled me with nostalgia for a time when playing outside brought pure and complete bliss. I sat with that thought, remembering my own days on playgrounds as a child. It was like a cloudy haze of memories that passed by as we moved past the park.

With no more than 15 minutes left to walk, our Kumano Kodo hike came to a close as we arrived at Nachi. The view opened up to a small mountain town filled with shops and restaurants for hikers. We stopped at a mochi shop and devoured some ice cream and soup.

It was difficult for me to comprehend that we had finished. Day after day had been a cycle of waking up, hiking, resting, and repeating. Now, it was all over. However, our activities weren’t quite finished. Even though Grady and I had completed the hike, Matt was a couple of hours behind, taking his time—no, enjoying his time—with his earbuds in, listening to podcasts.

In the meantime, the two of us



decided to grab some well-earned food at a local restaurant in town while we waited. And wait we did!

The sun began to set as the moon quietly prepared for her shift. At this point, we were fed and starting to worry if Matt would make it in time before the sun went down and the last bus left. With the clock ticking, time seemed to speed up, making Matt's arrival all the more crucial to getting to the resort. With less than ten minutes before the bus came, we finally received a call from Matt. We had had spotty reception and hadn't been able to contact him directly. But now, we heard his frantic voice as we told him, "Schiltz! You have less than five minutes to make it down for the bus! Hurry!!!" And hurry he did. We kept our eyes peeled on the mountain steps, but we only saw other hikers. Minutes turned to seconds, and we saw the bus pass by. Then, like a true Japanese warrior, bamboo stick in hand and face as determined as a warrior charging into battle, we saw Matt appear from the road beside us, panting and in excruciating pain as he nearly collapsed in front of us. In the red zone, we knew he had put every ounce of strength into making it to us on time. But it was too late. Seconds after he arrived, the bus passed us by.

Fully exhausted, Matt took a much-needed breather and walked with us to the bus station to check on the next bus. To our

amazement, the next bus was only about half an hour away. With this newfound time, we indulged in some snacks and waited to board.

Our time on the Kumano Kodo trail had come to a close, and it will take time to fully process this hike on a physical, mental, and spiritual level. Writing this now, almost exactly six months later, I am flooded with memories as I browse through our shared photo library and piece together the journey. Even though we were separated at times, I don't think that made much of a difference. Each of us had our own unique experiences shaped by our personal histories. What we share, however, is the ability to tell this story in the future. We'll all be able to share it with each other and anyone willing to listen. This was truly a memorable hike that will stay with us for a lifetime.



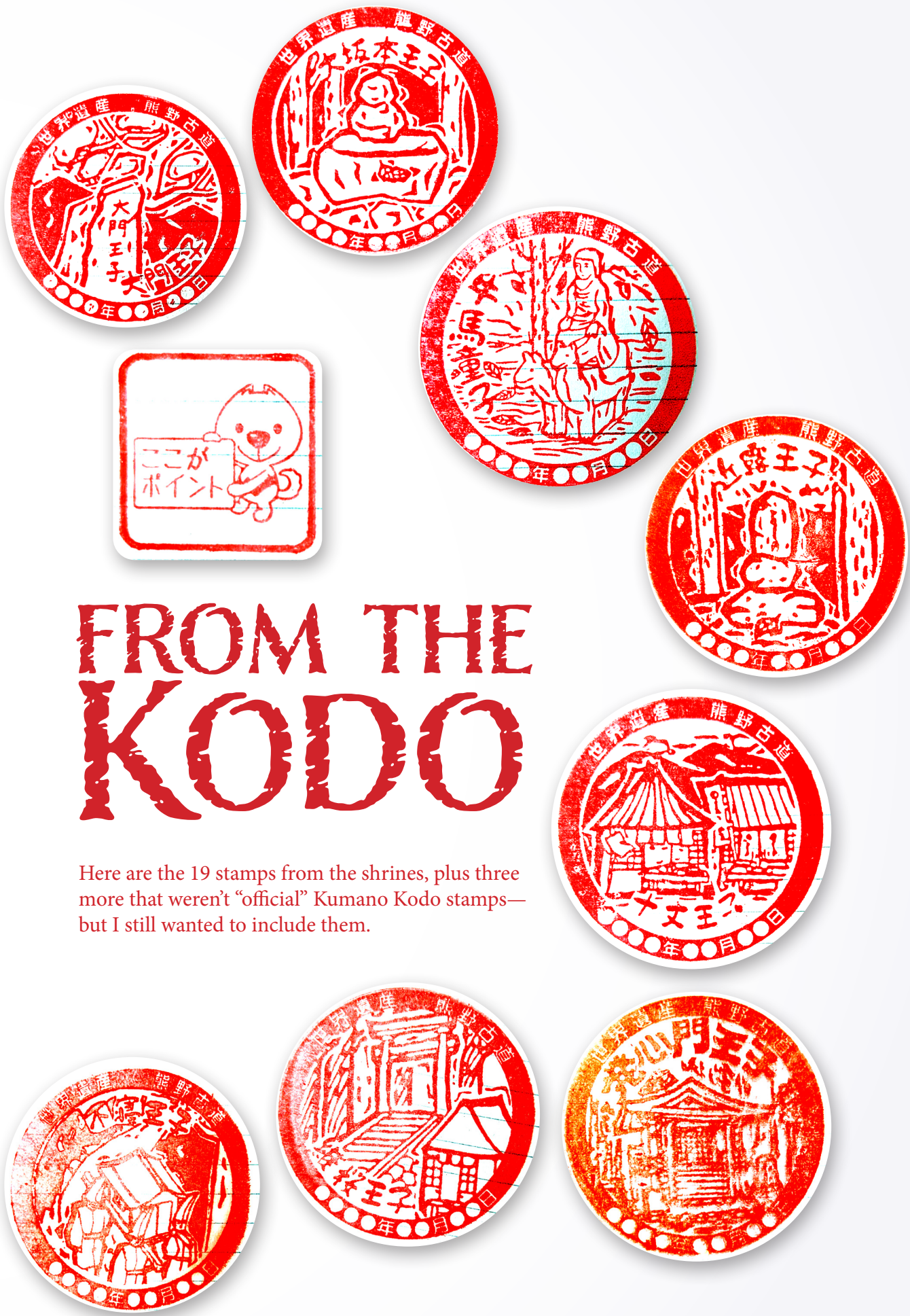


# STAMPS KUMANO



Little did I know, but the Kumano Kodo hike featured stamp collecting—and I was here for it! Along the trail, we found small wooden boxes containing ink stamps (御朱印, goshuin) that hikers could use to add to their collection. At each stop, I would dutifully take out my notebook and press a red ink stamp into its pages. To me, it felt like a real-world video game. I was collecting the “extras” in the game.





# FROM THE KODO

Here are the 19 stamps from the shrines, plus three more that weren't "official" Kumano Kodo stamps—but I still wanted to include them.



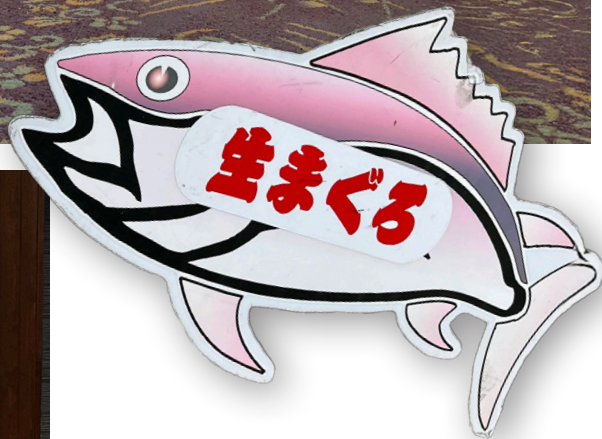
Dressed in our kimonos, complimentary from the resort, we make our way to the onsen. While it feels a little strange to wear them, everyone else is, so we decide to blend in—even though we are among the few gaijin!

**PHOTO TYLER MORALES**

Soda can suger boost during our hike

In a sudden change of climate, we are transported to a winter wonderland, full with a light pattering of snow and falling snow flakes. Grady and I take a moment to appreciate this beauty as we begin our descent into town.

**PHOTO TYLER MORALES**



Live Tuna fish is sold in Nachikatsuura



Matt relaxes while watching Japan's crown jewel, Shohei Ohtani, step up to bat. As soon as Ohtani appeared on the screen, many others—moms, the elderly, and fellow fans—gathered to watch.

**PHOTO GRADY DAVIS**

While waiting for Matt to finish the hike, myself and Grady explore the mountain town. We find a noodle shop. Here, I indulge in a warm bowl of Udon, thick Japanese noodles with a variety of toppings such as raw eggs, kamaboko, seaweed, green onions, and more. Yum!

PHOTO TYLER MORALES



Tyler stands with his bamboo walking stick as he walks down the many staircases that lead to the bus stop below.

PHOTO TYLER MORALES

We make it out of the trail and are welcomed by a grand presentation of this small mountain town. Adorned with temples, local restaurants, and the pure beauty of nature, we relish this final moment of the hike.

PHOTO TYLER MORALES



# The Soundtrack of Japan

Music has the ability to transport people through time. Hearing a song from a period in one's life can bring back memories that flow effortlessly into the mind. Even just thinking of a song or playlist gives me distinct memories in the form of mental images that flood my mind.

Because of this unique ability, let's revisit some songs that we either played or heard while walking through the streets, restaurants, and trails of Japan!



## TAMAGOTCHI

Tamagotchi, the iconic virtual pet created in Japan in the 1990s, brought a unique blend of nostalgia and innovation to handheld gaming. With its pixelated charm and constant need for attention, it taught an entire generation the joys and challenges of digital caretaking.



Early 2000s MP3 players like Winamp and iTunes brought music to life with bold, customizable UIs, inspired by Japan's sleek tech aesthetics. Neon equalizers, dynamic visualizers, and playful designs turned playlist curation into an art form.

## MATT'S PLAYLIST

**Secunda**  
Jeremy Soule

**The Wanderer**  
Dion

**Leaves from the vine**  
Samuel Kim

**Dragon Theme**  
The Legend of Zelda: Tears of the Kingdom



**My Way**  
Frank Sinatra

**Tsushima Suite**  
V. Seiiki

**Old Snake**  
Harry Gregson Williams

**Snake Eater**  
Cynthia Harrell

## GRADY'S PLAYLIST



みずいろの雨-NIGHT TEMPO  
JUST A JOKE SHOWA GROOVE MIX  
STAY WITH ME MIKI YURIE KOKUBU  
TONARI NO TOTORO VARIOUS ARTISTS  
踊り子 VAUNDY  
UNKO YOGAMI

## SONY

The compact disc (CD), introduced in the 1980s, revolutionized music with its sleek, portable format and superior audio quality. Developed jointly by Sony and Philips, it became the gold standard for music lovers worldwide, marking a shift from analog to digital sound.

Days 9-10

ōSAKA

1889

大阪

日本元気! 大阪元気!

Japan is energetic! Osaka is energetic!

March 22-23

3月22日-23日

Day shifted to night as the city of Osaka transformed to a seemingly cyberpunk atmosphere. The bustling building lights paired with the Tombori River walk and the warm glow of the sunset set the mood for what the night would entail.

PHOTO TYLER MORALES



Coming off our four-day hike in the southwest region of Japan (Wakayama, where we hiked the Kumano Kodo trail), we take the train back north to Osaka. It is here where the trail and nature life leave us, and the populous, bustling city life takes hold

Immediately after arriving in Osaka, we realize that we are in a city and must make a mandatory pit stop at none other than McDonald's.

Here in Japan, they don't play around with McDonald's. From the diligent staff cleaning used trays and helping customers to the respectful patrons eating quietly, to the beautifully crafted food and drinks inspired by Japanese cuisine—what's not to enjoy? To name a few tasty local items: the matcha latte, edamame and corn side, and the teriyaki burger were fantastic. However, we didn't come to Osaka for McDonald's, so we continued on our way to find our hostel.

In our pursuit of the hostel, we walked through many alleys and even came across a semi-indoor market that sold basically anything you could want—from all types of food to clothes and physical items. After getting lost here for some time, we finally located our hostel. With less commotion and congestion from the massive crowds, especially in this local market, we were finally able to plan the rest of the day and chill out for a bit.

However, before we plan, I think it's important to go on a quick tangent and talk about the differences between Osaka and Tokyo from the mind of Grady Davis.

"I think I'm turning Japanese. I really think so. Bowling is instinctual, chopsticks are natural extensions of my hands and



## Lost in translation?

Sometimes not everything gets translated correctly. Or maybe it does?

🤔 Did you know?

Japan accounts for 20% of all emoji usage

Here are the top 5

1. 😂
2. 😂❤️
3. ✨
4. 😍
5. 💩



With our newfound Japanese friends who led us to 酒味の蔵 and an izakaya, we indulged in their food recommendations and shared many laughs throughout the night.

**PHOTO TYLER MORALES**

English itself is becoming a graying memory. Even as I put pen to paper now I struggle not to revert to. 自分の考えを引き出すときの日本語. Seriously though, I have grown fond and accustomed to many aspects of Japanese life: heated musical toilets equipped with bidets, a complete sense of safety, and spectacular convenience store cuisine, perfectly grilled chicken thighs from Family Mart (Schiltz is partial to the Salmon rice balls).

Eating at a ‘Yakiniku’ (self cook barbecue) joint for the second in one day in Kichijōji, Tokyo, a fellow patron of ours, a little girl dining with her father got a call mid meal. She carefully got approval from her father, stood up, excused herself from the table and quietly walked outside to take the call so as not to bother any other patrons. We observed in shock as she finished her call and rejoined her father. Kids here are more mature than your average American. Is implementing the best aspects of Japanese life possible in the US? We began to believe so\*.

I hate crowds. My inner claustrophobic dreaded going to Tokyo. 38 million people, the same size as Connecticut and 10 times more crowded. Strangely though, wandering through Tokyo rarely felt cramped. People flow in a polite orderly fashion even at peak rush hour. Even taking the Chuo Line straight west an hour, the city seemed to never subside - no space wasted. The endless

neighborhoods that make up Tokyo are peaceful and unique. In Mitaka we found Inokashira park - completely idyllic: hosting a track, cherry blossoms and temple. In Kichijōji we discovered \$4 ramen and Japan’s love for the American style diner. In Asakusa we took a late night stroll through Sensō-ji, Tokyo’s oldest temple (finished in the year 645) while a bevy of adolescents took selfies close by.

After days of hiking through the storybook Wakayama mountains the frantic energy of Osaka’s was a shock. Its tight alley ways, crowded streets, and omnipresent video screens put us all on edge. Pushy street vendors, loud Japanese people, we quickly decided Osaka was the “bad boy” Japan. Osakans are known for being friendly and bold. We walked through a shopping mall that lasted over five blocks. It felt inescapable. Later that night we explored the bustling nightlife Osaka is known for. When I propositioned a group of drunk salarymen to join us for a beer one of them bowed and said “America” then walked up to me and gave me a hug. Awestruck by the endless hostess clubs, Matt was almost consumed by them, but that’s his story to tell. One day in Osaka was more than enough..”-Grady Davis

## Nightlife in Osaka

Nightfall quickly—but beautifully—descends upon us. The cyberpunk, 1980s electric glow from the mix of neon and LED lights reflecting on the river, combined with the deep oranges and reds of the sunset, is a sight I'll never forget. Yet, no sunset lasts forever, so we now enter a darkness illuminated by artificial lights.

The many corridors of Osaka make nightlife a huge draw for the city. Whether you're looking to stroll along the river in search of a restaurant, go shopping, or find a bar, there is no shortage of entertainment. And for us? Who knows where we might end up or what we might do?

We began the night walking down the Tombori River Walk, then visiting the first 2nd Street in Japan—a thrift shop. After perusing for some time, we found ourselves at an Irish pub where we ordered some beers and snacks. It is here, though—who would have thought—that the night of frivolity truly begins.

Deciding to ask the table next to us for nightlife recommendations, I tried out the little Japanese I knew, saying something along the lines of, “どこにお勧めしますか,” meaning, “What places do you recommend going to?” Armed with new information and a direction, we paid our tab and followed the lead.

Once outside, the night had fully transformed. Passing girls wearing bunny ears and young salarymen in suits, we got a raw and unfiltered view of Japan. We asked a salaryman where he recommended we go and if we could join him and his friends, but his friends seemed uneasy with us, so we moved on. Unfazed, we continued onward.

At this point, we were still making our way to the bars recommended by the Irish pub patrons. At every intersection, however, kyabakura girls tried to coax us into following them. For those unaware, kyabakura girls are hostess club promoters, often employed by establishments like hostess bars, cabaret clubs, or similar venues in entertainment districts such as Osaka's Dotonbori or Namba. Their job is to attract customers, typically men, to visit their venues for drinks and conversation with hostesses. And if there's any man who's been needing this, he's with us tonight.

Before Grady and I know it, Matt is quite literally whisked away, teleported up a series of stairs into an eight-story building. We won't see him again for exactly an hour.

In the meantime, Grady and I found ourselves at an izakaya, a small bar with high-quality bar food. At an izakaya, you won't find junk food like wings and fries. Instead, you'll be treated to snacks like yakitori (焼き鳥)—skewered, grilled chicken seasoned with tare (sweet soy sauce) or salt; karaage (唐揚げ)—Japanese-style fried chicken, juicy and marinated; and gyoza (餃子)—pan-fried

dumplings filled with meat and vegetables.

It is here that we had an interesting interaction of our own.

Sitting at the bar, we ordered drinks and snacks. Not long after, two girls around our age sat down beside us. Before we knew it, we were sharing snacks and chatting in broken English, Japanese, and through Google Translate. We learned that they were elementary school teachers from Nagoya, visiting Osaka for the weekend. Time flew as we enjoyed their company, and soon it was time to reunite with Matt. I sprinted outside to meet him at our designated spot, and the story he shared on our walk back was nothing short of sensational.

“As we ventured deeper into the entertainment district, we began noticing young Japanese women dressed in bunny-maid outfits stationed outside bars and on street corners. At first glance, one might assume they were prostitutes—and in many places, that might have been the case. But in Japan, these women serve a different, yet equally poignant purpose. They cater to a need born from the country's growing crisis of isolation, particularly among



Drinking ciders and bar snacks, we stage at an Irish bar as we plant the night. Little do we know what the night might entail. However, at this moment, we take in the lights in darkness.

PHOTO TYLER MORALES

young men. Bars and even criminal organizations have capitalized on this trend by hiring women to act as companions, offering not intimacy but conversation and connection.

Curious about this unique aspect of Osaka's culture, we decided to experience it firsthand. Or rather, my friends Grady and TMO decided I would be the guinea pig. They pooled their money to arrange for me to spend an hour with one of these bunny-maid companions. To be clear, there were no expectations of anything beyond conversation—we simply wanted to understand why this service had become so popular.

For an hour, I sat with the young woman, using Google Translate to bridge the language gap. She told me about her aspirations to travel, learn English, and meet people from around the world. It was clear that she valued this job for the opportunities it gave her to connect with foreigners like me. Our conversation was surprisingly innocent, and I walked away feeling grateful for the chance to learn

about her perspective.

When our time was up, I left the bar to reunite with Grady and TMO, who, true to form, had struck up a lively rapport with two friendly Japanese women. Together, we went for dinner, enjoying great food, drinks, and conversation. As the night wore on, I decided to head back to the Airbnb, leaving the others to continue their adventure.”— Matt Schiltz

Back together, all five of us at this point, we decide that we are hungry—or rather, that the girls we found are hungry—and find somewhere to eat.

After lemon sours, sushi, and miso soup, it is time for us to leave, and so too, mysteriously, do our newfound Japanese friends disappear into the streets of Osaka.

And just like that, from a relatively chill night in Osaka thrift shopping and wandering around, the night turned into a wild

experience almost instantaneously as we separated ourselves from Matt. I can't say for sure, but perhaps Matt and the bunny girl were the catalysts for this night? Or maybe could it have been the salarymen in suits? Or the two Japanese girls? Who is to say? Not me, nor you, or him, or her.

Miraculously, after multiple bars, izakayas, and the kyabakura club—and separating from Matt again after reconnecting—we find ourselves missing Matt once more. Now, Japan is a safe country, well, an extremely safe country, so Matt is in good hands. The only problem is that he has the key to our hostel. Where is Matt?

“On my slightly tipsy walk back, another bar caught my eye—not for the drinks, but for what I thought were more bunny-clad servers inside. Driven by curiosity, I stepped inside, only to be greeted by a deep, guttural “Konnichiwa” from one of the servers. In an instant, I realized this was not the kind of bar I had imagined. The shock of hearing that low, gravelly voice paired with the bunny outfit left me frozen in place, like prey realizing it had wandered into a predator's den. After what felt like an eternity, I carefully backed out of the bar without making eye contact and continued my journey home, equal parts bewildered and amused.” —Matt Schiltz

So, that's where he was!

Having to wearily entertain the idea of sleeping outside our hostel door and hoping Matt returns, within minutes of arriving, we see the wild and wonderful Matthew Schiltz appear just as mysteriously as he disappeared this evening. With that, we rest.

### **Rainy and dreary morning**

On day 10 in Japan, we awoke to a rainy, dreary morning—quintessentially Japanese. The



Walking down the river trail, almost every building is illuminated with ads or signs for stores. Ranging from karaoke to convenience stores and restaurants, there was always something to catch one's attention.

**PHOTO TYLER MORALES**



## McDonalds for Lunch

One of our first stops in Osaka was McDonald's. With a "Japanese" menu to choose from, we explored! The tray was filled with unique offerings like a creamy matcha latte, a caramel iced coffee, and hot black coffee, all served alongside edamame and corn salad, crispy fries, and colorful burgers, including the iconic teriyaki burger. A surprising fusion of familiar fast food with a distinctly Japanese twist.

## Rainy Days in Osaka

Equipped with two umbrellas from the kind elderly lady at the café, ponchos, and some rain gear, we march towards Osaka Station and head to a small coastal town. It's difficult to beat the charm of moody rainy days in Japan. Paired with glowing lights, water droplets on windows, and the humidity, it's hard not to find something to enjoy.



Yum!  
おいしい

light fixtures flickered as I turned on the bathroom and kitchen switches, filling the space with a faint static hum. Outside, street lamps illuminated the darkened streets, casting a warm glow in the misty rain.

Before leaving Osaka, we needed to eat. We found a medium-sized café run by a group of elderly Japanese women, a recurring theme in many cafés we visited. Inside, an older gentleman sat in a booth, cigarette in hand, nursing his coffee and reading a newspaper.

We ordered a morning set (モーニングセット)—a simple,

American-inspired breakfast of toast, salad, a hard-boiled egg, and coffee. These affordable meals, born from post-World War II café culture, were exactly what we needed. As we sipped coffee and chatted with the kind café owner, she surprised us with an unexpected gift—an umbrella to help us on our travels.

With full hearts and stomachs, we made our way to the train station, braving the rain on our journey to Tsuruga (敦賀市), a charming port city.



In a bustling shopping center, anything can be bought from fish to clothes. Packed on a rainy late morning, we make our way through, but nothing catches our eye.

PHOTO GRADY DAVIS



大阪名物  
特製  
たこ焼

8-11-13

Days 11-13  
京都  
Kyoto

March 23-26

3月23日-26日



This composite image contains snippets of Kyoto from the Fushimi Inari Taisha (the famed path of 1,000 torii gates), old Kyoto, and Shogunzuka Seiryuden Temple.

COMPOSITION BY TYLER MORALES

**I**t's eleven days in, and we are in Kyoto—the cultural capital of Japan!

We arrive in the evening by train and are quickly greeted by the warm glow of lantern-adorned streets and the quiet treading of water in the nearby canal. Beautifully nestled between labyrinth-style alleyways and streets, the three of us find our hostel.

Inside Ryokan Hostel Gion, we enter our private two-bunk room. We decide to rest up for our first day in Kyoto.

### Day 1

We wake and make our way to the Gionmachi Minamigawa, or Gion, district. Here, we pass through the shopping district

and enter the shrine section of an old Kyoto park. Wandering around, we explore the many shrines, bells, Buddhists, and even a “Beware of Wild Monkey” sign. Coming off our hike a few days prior, I didn’t think we would be doing more hiking, but here we are—back on a trail.

Trudging through slippery rocks and sloshing through mud, we hike through 東山, or Mt. Higashi. Finally, we reach a temple.

Later that day, we take a train to the famous 1,000 torii gates at Fushimi Inari Taisha. While this is an incredible piece of history, the sheer amount of tourists—including us—was astounding. The trail is regularly crowded with visitors walking through, taking pictures, and standing in awe. The literal busloads of people, many noticeably from China, are amazing to witness.



The other young tourists have been found. What seemed to be a quiet night in the hostel turned rambunctious. Gathering at an Irish pub, Grady and Matt seem to be at home, singing familiar songs.

PHOTO TYLER MORALES



# 將軍塚青龍殿大舞台

## Shogunzuka Seiryuden Temple

On a cloudy and misty late morning, we enter the old city of Kyoto. Making our way from temple to shrine, we come across a trailhead butting up against a cliff. The only suitable action for us is to hike this trail. So that's exactly what we do. Our shoes slipping on the wet rocks and mud, we trudge upwards to the summit, and to our amazement—or rather, what feels like a common occurrence for us at this point—we find a massive temple. Curious, we approach the temple, eager to explore its interior and exterior while learning a bit about its history.

According to legend, Seiryuden Temple, perched upon Mt. Higashiyama in eastern Kyoto, is where the story of this ancient city began. It was here, in the mid-eighth century, that Emperor Kammu stood on this very site to inspect the area for his proposed new

### Temple of Eternal Bliss grounds

Nestled in the heart of Kyoto's Higashiyama district, this map depicts the serene and historic grounds of Ch raku-ji, a Buddhist temple complex surrounded by a lush landscape of cherry blossoms, flowing streams, and intricately drawn paths and highlighted landmarks, it's clear that this temple isn't just another stop on a sightseeing tour—it's a sacred hub of history, spirituality, and breathtaking natural beauty. Each hall, pagoda, and shrine seems to hold a story, steeped in the pursuit of enlightenment and the enduring traditions of Japanese Buddhism.

Ch raku-ji is more than just a place of worship; it's a living connection to Kyoto's cultural and spiritual heritage.

Visitors come not only to pray and reflect but also

to immerse themselves in the seasonal beauty

that blankets the grounds. From the

pastel pink of cherry blossoms in spring

to the fiery reds of maple leaves in

autumn, every corner feels alive with the

rhythm of nature. Walking through this

temple complex, you can't help but feel

the weight of its purpose—a space for

honoring ancestors, preserving history,

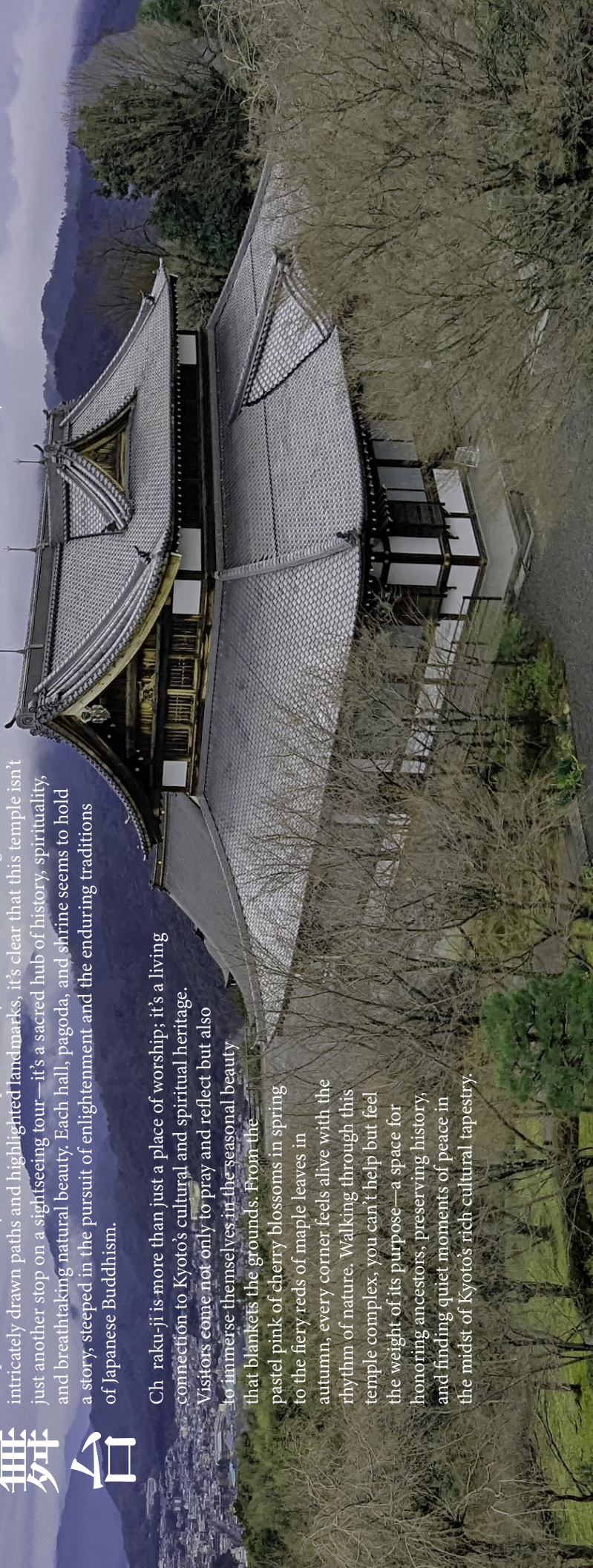
and finding quiet moments of peace in

the midst of Kyoto's rich cultural tapestry.

capital. Satisfied with the panoramic views of the fertile lands below, Kammu ordered the construction of Kyoto in 794. Fast-forward to modern times, and the addition of the sprawling observation deck in 2015 has made this relatively unknown spot a gem for travelers seeking unparalleled vistas of both Kyoto and beyond.

Walking outside toward the back of the temple, we are stunned by what we see. The newly completed massive patio overlooks Osaka to the southwest and Kyoto to the northwest. Seeing the incredible density of houses, businesses, and streets sprawled across these two cities is both humbling and surreal. With Kyoto's population of approximately 1.5 million and Osaka's soaring to over 2.7 million, the scale of humanity bustling below feels almost impossible to comprehend.

centuries-old structures. As we study the





Map of the Temple of Eternal Bliss grounds

“Walking along the Kamo River, we pass an oasis of wildlife where a heron calmly roams in the distance. A fitting encounter, considering Hayao Miyazaki’s latest film, *The Boy and The Heron*.”

**PHOTO GRADY DAVIS**





Lantern-adorned lights fill this quiet alleyway. Among a mix of restaurants and bars, there is no lack of places to visit.

PHOTO GRADY DAVIS

Hundreds of people are pouring into streets clearly not designed for this level of tourism. The amount of commerce and shops here seems to cater heavily to tourists, selling everything from ice cream to tea and gifts.

While I can appreciate the historical significance of these gates, their overwhelming popularity seems to be doing more harm than good, both for the local residents and the gates themselves.

With a strange feeling left in my mouth, we head back to our hostel and prepare for the night.

## The Irish Pub

“One of the things I love most about international travel is the incredible variety of cultural experiences it offers. Every country has its own energy, personality, and unique atmosphere, making each destination feel like a new adventure. Yet, amidst all this diversity, there’s one surprising constant: the Irish pub. These establishments are so universally present that they might as well have their own seat at the United Nations. Even in Japan, where I wouldn’t have expected it, the tradition holds strong.

In Osaka, we stumbled upon an Irish pub that felt like a slice of home. It had all the drinks, character, and charm you’d expect from any Irish pub, instantly transporting us back to the ones we grew up visiting around Chicago. The atmosphere was warm and welcoming, with the same lively energy that makes Irish pubs special no matter where you are in the world. While there, we struck up a conversation with a couple of young women who shared some fantastic recommendations for places to check out around town. It was a great experience that combined the comfort of familiarity with the excitement of discovery—just one more reminder of how international travel can surprise you in the best ways.”—Matt Schiltz  
**Day 2**

No longer waking up early from jet lag, we start our day and head out to Arashiyama Monkey Park Iwatayama by 11:30 a.m. Chilling our way through the final third of our trip and with the Kumano Kodo trail behind us, we deserve a slower pace. That’s exactly how it is from now on.

From bus to trolley to monkey park, we truly don’t know what to expect. Our only other experience with monkeys occurred six years ago in the Amazon. And, where we were supposed to see monkeys, we didn’t, and where we didn’t expect to see monkeys, we did. All of this is to say that we are going into the experience blind.

We purchase our tickets, pass the gates, and begin an ascent up stairs and gravel until we reach a high point. Topped with a monkey house and an upwards slope of land, about a hundred monkeys roam freely.

“Arashiyama Monkey Park Iwatayama: half tourist trap, half monkey exhibit with no fences - which I think all zoos should be.

The monkeys run around seemingly fearless of people, keeping an invisible three foot buffer that is rarely broken unless you feed them. Which, not sure if they did this with some strange ironic intent but the only cage is the ones they tourists go in and feed the monkeys from the outside, hence becoming the exhibit. Yep, I’ll pass on that.

Equally interesting to our little primate cousins was their relationship with the monkey wranglers staff. It reminded me of the pony wranglers in Assateague island but more militant.

How many wild animal wranglers are there? How do I get that job?

These monkey guards are stationed throughout the habitat, carefully watching the monkeys weave their way through hordes of tourists. They carefully guide them away when a wrestling match begins too close to the sightseers. Like The Rock getting tossed into the crowd in a WWE match, these wranglers dutifully break up the fight.

Overall, these are not actually wild monkeys, well, wild in the same way pigeons are or Assateague island horses. But monkeys are awesome and cool and seeing them run by you and jump over your head into cherry trees is well worth the trap. I personally think we should introduce them everywhere possible in the US. Why not?”—Grady Davis

Having had our fill of monkeys, we traverse back down and walk along a path by the river. Passing students on break, bikers, and other tourists, we eventually come across a house nestled a ways up in the nearby mountain range. Curious, the three of us walk up the stairs, find a bell, ring it, and proceed until we see a man at the entrance.

Seemingly unable to speak English, this very elderly man asks for a “donation” of some amount of yen to enter. We pay—cough, cough, donate—and enter.

This house overlooks the river and allows visitors to stroll around the property and sit, contemplate, and read an array of materials, including picture books and historical texts. While I read and viewed cultural books on Japan, Matt and Grady stared contemplatively, overlooking the river. To get a glimpse into what their minds were conjuring up, I’ll let them speak to you:



“One day, we followed a river to a temple nestled just outside one of Kyoto’s main tourist areas. The silence there was profound, broken only by the rhythmic clunk of a bamboo pipe filling and emptying with water—a soothing sound that seemed to amplify the serenity of the surroundings. It was clear this temple was designed for reflection, offering a sacred space to pause and simply be.

After the physically and emotionally demanding Kumano Kodo pilgrimage, this place felt like the perfect setting to process not only our journey through Japan but also the thoughts and feelings stirred by the experience. As I sat there, I found myself reflecting not just on the trip but also on life’s next steps—the challenges ahead and the paths still to be discovered. Being in such a meditative environment made those reflections feel clearer, more purposeful. It was a moment of stillness I’ll carry with me long after the trip.” – Matt Schiltz

### Restaurant: おむすびむすび

After finding tranquility, pureness, respect, and peace, we depart this unexpected side quest and make our way back to Kyoto.

However, on our journey back on the streetcar to the train, our stomachs alert us that hunger is nearing. Our brains heed the call and direct us, magically, towards a common house-like structure containing both an indoor restaurant and a family home. In this distributed café/home, we get an insider’s view of how the family operates both the business side of the restaurant and the family side.

Everyone seemed to have their well-defined role. The children played in the family room deeper in the house. Partially visible to us, we could hear them laughing and screaming as they played with physical toys and iPads.

The mother toiled away in the kitchen making our meal, while the grandmother sat quietly in a chair. And soon enough, as 5 p.m. came, the father hurriedly arrived, as if excited to get into the kitchen and help his wife.

When the food came, our hungry stomachs rejoiced while our mouths devoured our bento box-style meal. The centerpiece was a comforting soboro donburi—ground beef, fluffy scrambled eggs, and sautéed greens carefully arranged over a bed of steaming rice. Alongside, we were served a warm bowl of miso soup, rich with seaweed, tofu, and a delicate umami depth. Completing the set were small plates of hijiki seaweed salad and crisp pickled vegetables, each offering a burst of contrasting

flavors. This wasn’t just food—it was a glimpse into the rhythm of family life here, every bite seasoned with care and simplicity that makes meals like these unforgettable.

Aside from this uniquely intimate experience with the family and restaurant, the quality and craftsmanship of the interior, from décor to design to architecture, were exceptional. Influenced by modern architecture, the walls were beautifully natural wood, and the interior was well-made and sturdy. Playful art adorned the walls and shelving, promoting this idea of playful-seriousness. Inherently, a family living inside their restaurant creates situations that don’t normally occur in standalone restaurants. Perhaps, then, the customer is reminded to keep this idea in mind while eating. You enter their family home, and now, while still a stranger, you get a firsthand view of their life.



Anyways, after being dutifully satisfied, we exit with a bittersweet taste in our mouths. This seems to be a theme of the trip. Unexpected situations lead to bittersweet moments. While thankful we get to experience them, it is somewhat sad to see them go just as quickly.

### Uji

A few days prior, we met an Aussie. In that distinctive Aussie accent, she said, “You must go to Uji! If you like matcha, that is like the matcha capital of the world.”

And from that moment, I knew we had to visit.

Again, taking the extremely efficient, orderly, and clean trains, we arrive in Uji. Walking around, we can see the matcha farms sprawling over the gentle curves of the landscape.

Matcha-themed shops appeared on either side of

the streets. From matcha ice cream to snacks, tea, and tea ware, anything matcha-inspired could be bought here. But my goal wasn’t to go to any of these shops.

My goal was to go to one of the oldest matcha shops in the world. And that’s what we did. Once inside, there was an unlimited array of matcha products. After trying some matcha snacks, I bought some. But what I was really after was the pure ceremonial-grade matcha. It is this powdered form of green tea that I wanted. To get it from the source is amazing!

Tea’d up, we hop on the next train to Tokyo!

3 March 26-29  
3月23日  
26日

Days 13-16



東京に帰る  
BACK TO TOKYO



With our newfound Japanese friends who led us to 酒味の蔵 and an izakaya, we indulged in their food recommendations and shared many laughs throughout the night.

PHOTO BY TURTLE (カメ)

After twelve days, roughly 135 miles of walking, and countless calories of incredible food, we found ourselves back in Tokyo for the final three days of our trip. Returning to the city after everything we had seen and experienced felt profoundly different—almost as if we had come back transformed.

When we first arrived in Tokyo, we were novices, unfamiliar with the rhythms of Japanese culture. We had ideas of what to expect, of course, but those were just abstract notions, not grounded in real experience. By the time we returned, those initial uncertainties had been replaced with a sense of familiarity and understanding. Tokyo no longer felt like an enigma; instead, it welcomed us like an old friend.

Those last three days felt like a reunion with the city, one where we carried a newfound confidence. I remember the excitement I felt, ready to embrace whatever came our way—whether it was a new adventure, a chance encounter, or simply soaking in the vibrant energy of Tokyo one last time. It was a fitting conclusion to a journey that had changed us in ways we hadn't anticipated.

One such fleeting moment of that excitement as we arrived back in Tokyo was this slower pace of living. While closer to the heart of Tokyo, where we stayed before, we are in the outskirts of the main city center. Yes, while still very much city-like, it is nowhere near the skyscrapers and millions of people bustling along. Here, we could breathe easy.

## Night in Tokyo

We get off the train at Nishi in the dark and wet weather. Hazy lights fill the streets. Upon setting our backpacks in our Airbnb, we head over to a local bar, Perfect Beer Kitchen, to slow things down a bit.

Here, we take in our draft beers, served by the newly established owner, and talk about how his business is going. A few beers in, we decide to pivot and walk towards the congested businesses. Eventually, we walk inside a bar and are warmly greeted by both the bartender and a group of Japanese friends. In no time, we are talking with them, and quickly they become our guides throughout the night.

A high school teacher, Turtle, or カメ, is a late 20s Japanese man who quickly befriends us. Throughout the night, we talk about cultural differences between the US and Japan, rugby and lacrosse, English slang, and even sing "In Da Club" by 50 Cent.

This night back in Tokyo truly felt like a homecoming! Even though we were here only a week prior, this warm welcome from the locals was comforting.

## Day Time

By the next morning, we find a cafe, Komeda's Cafe, and eat. This is like every other cafe in Japan we've visited. It offers a simple, yet tasty morning set (モーニングセット). Each of us got the salad, hard-boiled egg, buttered toast, and coffee. Being the naturally

curious and adventurous men we are, we find ourselves in a conversation with our waitress. Satsuki, or さつき, is a 27-year-old Japanese woman also curious about many cultures—US being one of them.

Through our mix of broken Japanese, slowed and basic English, and Google Translate, Satsuki asked if we would like to meet up to have this discussion further. Shocked and excited, we agreed. We left with her phone number and met back up before we would leave.

Again, meeting locals here can be such a friendly and pleasant process. Whereas in the US, people are quick to judge others and seldom interact with strangers, the people here seem very friendly and amicable.

With more to see, we finish our meal, rest for a little, and then head to Shibuya for the Nintendo store.

“If there’s one view that truly makes you feel like you’re in Japan, it’s the sight of Shibuya at peak busy hours. Watching an ocean of people crossing the street at Shibuya Crossing was unlike anything I had ever seen. The energy of the place was electric, as if the city itself was alive, and I couldn’t help but feel swept up in its rhythm. The surrounding shops and malls buzzed with activity, and when night fell, the neon lights and towering screens transformed the area into something straight out of a cyberpunk world—or an anime brought to life.

One of the highlights of my time in Shibuya was visiting the Nintendo store. For me, Nintendo is more than just a company—it’s a cornerstone of my childhood. The Legend of Zelda, in particular, is one of my favorite gaming franchises of all time, a testament to the Japanese mastery of storytelling and innovation in gaming. Standing in the flagship Nintendo store in Tokyo felt surreal, like a dream come true for both my 10-year-old self and the 25-year-old me. It was a moment of pure joy and nostalgia, a reminder of how deeply Japanese creativity has shaped my life and countless others around the world” –Matt Schiltz.

The remainder of this day and our last two are quiet and slow. This is a much-needed deceleration from the past almost two weeks of hardcore travel.

For me, I find myself roaming the streets for anything that catches my eye. I first come across a thrift shop. Even though we are in Japan, most of the clothes are American or foreign-made. Rarely, except for brand-new clothes, were the clothes Japanese. While a disappointment, it was still an interesting experience to thrift in Japanese shops, where the thrifting culture seems to be more pervasive than in the US.

Following my search for clothes, I stumble upon a small paper shop. Staffed by an elderly Japanese woman, I say “おはよう” to greet her politely, and she reciprocates. I peruse the origami paper while trying to use as much Japanese as I can muster with the woman. After browsing for a while, I leave the store not only with a set of origami paper, but with a warm thumping in my heart.

My wandering continues and leads me to a coffee shop near our Airbnb. In an almost nondescript building, a coffee shop that opens at 11 a.m. somehow catches my eye. I walk inside and find an open space with tables, art, and a community bulletin board. At the counter to my right, I walk up and order a cappuccino. Again, this seems to be a theme—an elderly woman is at the counter while another elderly woman acts as the greeter and helps people order, find a seat, or even recommend an item.

Unlike coffee shops in the US, where the baristas are usually younger and hip counter-corporate coffee nerds, here, that seems to not be the case at all. In this extremely pleasant exchange, both the coffee and the conversation warm me. I leave with a contented stomach and a happy heart.

However, for others, what they find meaningful is unique to them.

“Kichijoji, Tokyo Eating at a ‘Yakiniku’ (self-cook barbecue) joint for the second time in a day. A fellow patron of ours, a little girl dining with her father, got a call mid meal. She carefully got approval from her father, stood up, excused herself from the table and quietly walked outside to take the call so as not to bother any other patrons. We observed in shock as she finished her call, returned and rejoined her father. Kids here are more mature than your average American. Is implementing the best aspects of Japanese life possible in the US? We began to believe so.”

–Grady Davis





At an izakaya we visited twice—and almost a third time, were it not for it being closed—Matt and Grady mentally prepare themselves for the meal we’re about to embark on. Plates full of meat, beer, and miso soup will soon fill us up..

**PHOTO BY TYLER MORALES**

For others, the encounters remain mysterious. “One of the more unexpected—and admittedly humorous—moments of our trip happened in Tokyo on what I believe was our third-to-last night there. After spending a few hours exploring local bars, we decided to stop by a nearby konbini to grab some ice cream before heading back to our Airbnb. TMO and I bought ours first and, feeling impatient to indulge, decided to start eating outside the konbini.

Now, it’s worth mentioning that eating in public in Japan is generally considered impolite. However, given the late hour and the absence of anyone around, we figured it wouldn’t be an issue. As we stood there enjoying our ice cream, seemingly out of nowhere, two Tokyo police officers appeared behind us and began asking for identification.

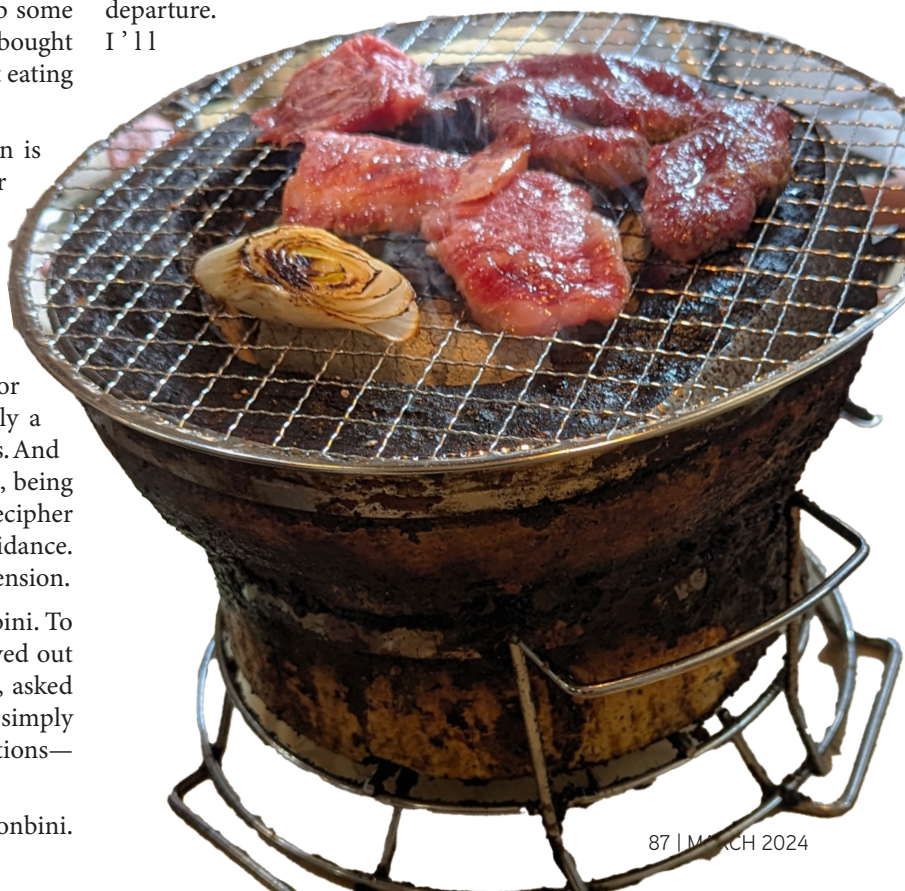
To say we were startled would be an understatement. Here’s four reasons why. First, because neither of us had seen or heard them approach. Second, because we were definitely a little tipsy. Third, because we didn’t have our passports on us. And fourth, because I had no idea what they were saying. TMO, being slightly more functional in Japanese than me, tried to decipher their questions while I helplessly looked to him for guidance. Alcohol, it turns out, does not enhance language comprehension.

Just as the tension was rising, Grady walked out of the konbini. To this day, I still have no idea why what happened next played out the way it did, but the officers immediately turned to him, asked if he was with us, and upon hearing him say “Yes,” they simply walked away. That was it. No further questions, no explanations—just a quiet departure.

Just as the tension was rising, Grady walked out of the konbini.

To this day, I still have no idea why things played out the way they did. The officers immediately turned to him, asked if he was with us, and, upon hearing him say “Yes,” they simply walked away. That was it—no further questions, no explanations, just a quiet departure.

I ’11



# Saying hello and goodbye :O

In a fitting last-day activity, we visit our new friend Satsuki at a cafe for coffee and snacks, then meet up with our old college buddy, Connor, before leaving for the airport. Meeting friends for the first time on the last day feels like a metaphor—connecting only to say goodbye.



## Meeting at Tokyo Station

"I'm getting on the blue line to Otemachi Station shortly. Just give me a call when y'all get to Tokyo station."

"Okay we are en route might take 20min"

"Alright, just lmk when y'all get here"

"Sorry man we're running late as hell"

Hahaha... classic Grady & TMO

"All good, I'm just walking around"

I decide to walk around a bit (everywhere in Tokyo is a sight to see in my mind), and I head into one of the random skyscrapers surrounding Tokyo station. The first floor looks to all be expensive boutique clothing, so I head downstairs and find my very first Natural Lawson's. I grab a blue Tully's coffee (the best) and

catch a nice caffeine buzz when...

"Arriving in 3min" "Rgr"

I exit the second (?) basement level of what, in America, we'd consider a mall, but in Tokyo is just another nondescript building taking up a whole city block. I walk north back towards Marunouchi square, hoping to intercept my long awaited friends as they get off their train and leave Tokyo Station. A little communication mix up and we end up across a busy intersection from each other. I see my old friends loaded down with massive backpacks, just maybe tourists on their way to Narita Airport (where I'll be headed in a few days).

"What's going on guys!" I shout as I walk across the crosswalk towards my friends.

—Connor Williams

## Komeda's Coffee & Satsuki

Since my childhood, I have always had a longing for overseas, and at the end of 2022, I decided to leave my six years of working life in Japan and pursue language studies abroad. To save money for this adventure, I worked three jobs starting in 2023, sometimes working seven days a week. During this time, I took up an early morning café job, but as I love working in customer service in restaurants, I found the café job a bit dull. One day, a group of three Americans came to the café, and they seemed so vibrant to me. However, since my English skills were lacking, I felt nervous and couldn't speak to them, even though I wanted to.



I thought that since they chose Japan out of all the countries to visit, I wanted them to have a great memory of my hometown. Even though I couldn't moment, I gave them my contact information, hoping that one day I could talk to them when we meet again. I was shy and didn't say much, but after they left, I found a tip they had left for me. It deeply moved me, and I still keep it as a good luck charm in my room in Australia.

On their return day, I invited them to a café in Japan. I wanted them to experience something uniquely Japanese, so I took them to a café with tatami mats, which is quite rare in Japan. That day, we mostly communicated through a translation app, but I remember we had a wonderful time talking about cultural differences, their trip to Japan, and my future plans for studying abroad. Despite the language barrier, it felt like we were able to communicate easily and have fun. Although we only had about two hours due to their flight time, I'm grateful they made the time to meet.

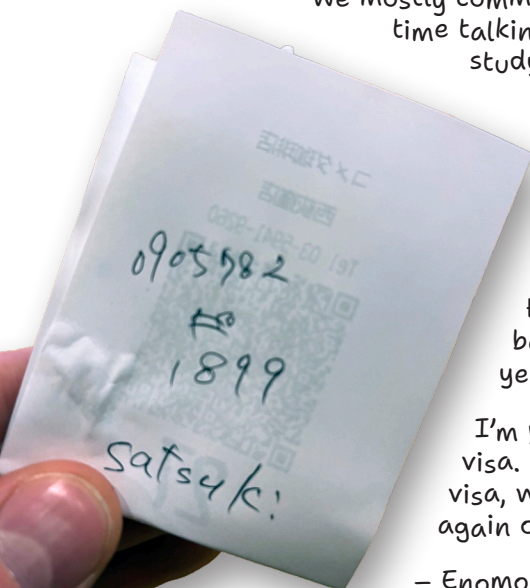
Now, after completing a three-month language program in Cebu, I'm living in Sydney, Australia, with friends from Australia, Hong Kong, and Japan. I work as a waiter at a Japanese restaurant. There are still many things I don't understand, and it's challenging to make native friends. However, I still think about them sometimes. Having friends in America and being able to occasionally contact them is something I never imagined two years ago.

I'm planning to move from Sydney to work on a farm to apply for a three-year visa. After that, I intend to study English in the UK using my working holiday visa, with the goal of eventually working for an airline. I hope to meet them again one day.

— Enomoto Satsuki



speaking to them at that





At an izakaya we visited twice—and almost a third time, were it not for it being closed—Matt and Grady mentally prepare themselves for the meal we’re about to embark on. Plates full of meat, beer, and miso soup will soon fill us up..

PHOTO BY TYLER MORALES

probably never know why Grady’s presence was the magic key to diffusing the situation, but I’m grateful it was. Truthfully, it would’ve been absolutely hilarious if I ended up in a Japanese detainment over late night ice cream.”

### The Last Day

Like all of our great trips, they must come to a close at some point. For us, that point has slowly crept up on us. Having done so much, the past two weeks seem to be both short and long at the same time.

It was short in that we were only here for two weeks. To get a more complete view of Japan, a longer-term stay would be required. It seemed long in the sense that we have been able to do and accomplish so much in such a short time frame. From hiking the Kumano Kodo trail to the many twenty-five-thousand-plus-step days in Tokyo, we definitely put our dent into sightseeing.

With one more day to kill, we have a few last orders of business.

Prior to leaving for Japan, I brought a lightweight red duffle bag to bring back gifts and souvenirs. With all the candy, snacks, cigarettes, ramen, and even a Nintendo Switch that we can fit in the duffle bag, we head out carrying this thirty-five-pound bag as we make our way back home.

With the red duffle bag in hand, we made arrangements to meet up with Satsuki before leaving. The three of us, wild and disheveled Americans, somehow reunite with our Japanese friend at the train station. After some initial small talk, we head to a local cafe that she recommends and share another pleasant conversation over coffee.

A unique aspect of this encounter is that we sat on the ground. Unlike many other modern coffee shops that cater to Western forms of seating, this local cafe seemed to value the traditional way of Japanese seating. It felt unique, and I’m glad that all four of us were able to share this moment with our limited Japanese language skills and reliance on Google Translate. I don’t think these were inhibitors, though. It is through body language and the expressions of confusion and approval on all of our faces that made

understanding each other simpler.

Not all the faces we encounter are new, like with Satsuki. Seeing a familiar face halfway around the world is never expected, but today, we reunite with our dear friend from Colorado State University—Connor Williams, an Infantry Officer in the United States Marine Corps.

To share this brief moment with Connor at a cafe outside our train station is memorable. To gain some insight into his experience in Okinawa in the Navy is something that we would not have gleaned otherwise. It’s great to simply see him in person again. Just as soon as we finish eating our lunch, we hurry away to catch our train to Narita International Airport.

All that’s left now is to make it to the airport and sit for fourteen hours. In our usual fashion, while simple on paper, simplicity is not on our side.

Cutting it close as we leave Connor behind to catch our train, we miss it by minutes. Frantic and anxious, the three of us hope that the next train comes soon. Even though it does, our train tickets cannot be used for this ride. This means we have no valid ticket to board the train. Needing to catch this train or risk missing our



After grabbing some late-night ice cream, Matt and I suddenly find ourselves being interrogated by two police officers. Seemingly just for eating ice cream on the sidewalk, we still aren't sure to this day why they approached us.

PHOTO BY GRADY DAVIS

flight, we do as any sane person would and board the train, hoping for the best.

In all these trials and tribulations, we survive. We make it to the airport with less time on hand but still cutting it close. There should be no last-minute hiccups, said no one ever. For some reason, Matt is left behind to figure out a ticket issue before he can enter the terminal. Grady and I are able to make it through.

With the fear of missing our flight, we run toward security. From waiting in line to getting my bag searched, we finally have enough time to breathe as we make it to our terminal. With a coffee and sandwich in hand, I prepare to head back home. My

assortment of new songs, Shazamed throughout the past two weeks, are hurriedly being saved to my Spotify playlist. Having some time to stretch before the fourteen-hour flight back, our boarding group is soon called.

Matane Nihon, またね日本🇯🇵

## Conclusion

From our initial arrival at Haneda Airport, red and blurry-eyed, to exploring the sleepy Tokyo streets, there was no telling what we would soon learn or experience. Japan welcomed us with endless possibilities, and we embraced every moment with wide-eyed curiosity.

Not all sightseeing took the form of pre-planned activities.

Some of the best memories from this trip were born out of spontaneity, those magical instances where we happened to be in the right place at the right time. Whether it was stumbling upon the special Buntan opening party in Tokyo, sharing a delightful lunch with a family in Kyoto, or savoring a French-Japanese fusion dinner the night before setting foot on the Kumano Kodo trail, these moments unfolded organically, without a guidebook



Nothing could prevent Matt from bringing his bamboo hiking stick back to Chicago. From having the flight attendants conduct a last-minute bag check for it right before takeoff to not being able to locate it at baggage claim, rest assured—Matt and his walking stick were finally reunited.

**PHOTO BY GRADY DAVIS**



or itinerary to lead us there. They came and went, fleeting yet unforgettable. No amount of planning could have prepared us for the serendipity we encountered.

Fast forward through hiking in Wakayama, late-night adventures in Osaka, temples in Kyoto, countless bowls of ramen, and fresh cuts of wagyu—our journey was as dynamic as it was fulfilling. Each city, each step, and each bite brought something new and unrepeatable.

Now, as I sit in my apartment, eight months to the day, trying to finish this magazine, I think about something my Japanese tea ceremony teacher, Kimiko Gunji, always says: Kokoro 心. It's a Japanese word that encompasses "mind," "heart," and "spirit." She reminds us, her students, to take five minutes a day for our kokoro. Five minutes is not a long time, but it feels long. And yet, it's necessary. Reflecting on this trip, I realize how important it is to take that time—not just to rest, but to truly let your experiences settle into your heart and spirit.

Perhaps it's this quiet, reflective time I'm taking now that allows me to fully process the journey.

And just like that, it's no longer konichiwa—it's welcome home.



JAPANESE  
FASHION

和服

If you're looking for  
avant-garde, innovative,  
and Western-challenging  
fashion, Japan is the  
place to be. Not only are  
they experimental, but  
they pull it off effortlessly!

IN THE  
WILD

# 自然の中で



OUR  
FASHION.

さくら

SUPREME  
ツイン



## TYLER

Blending streetwear and techwear, Tyler is ready for anything. Relaxing in the city? Prepared! A cold and rainy hike in the mountains? Ready to go! From head to toe, Tyler's waterproof outer shell keeps him dry, while his Under Armour base layers keep him warm. Without sacrificing form for function, Tyler brings to Japan both practicality and style.



SALAMON  
サロモン

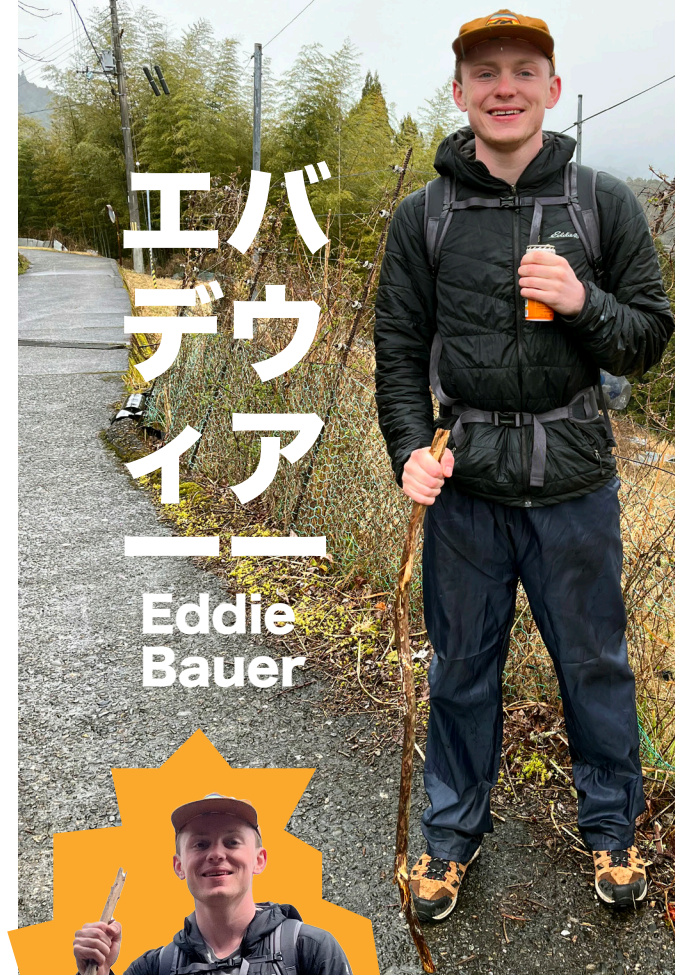
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Hiking  
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ハイキング



**GRADY**

Rugged and worn, Grady proves that it doesn't take much to build a versatile wardrobe. Utilizing a single backpack filled with airtight stuff sacks, he packs efficiently and effectively. Comfort, low-profile items, and the occasional splash of color are top of mind when selecting outfits for Japan.



**FROM THE  
STREETS.**



パ  
タ  
ゴ  
ニ  
ア

**Patagonia**



**AND THROUGH  
MOUNTAINS.**



**Rain rain go  
away 雨、雨、どこか行って!**

**ぬくぬく  
Snuggle snuggle**



## Kimono 着物



### MATT

Simple and functional, the breathable, warm and neutral colorways in Matt's clothing carries him through two weeks in Japan. From his Texar lightweight and rian proof long-sleeve, cozy blanket wrapped around him, and even a kimono, Matt knows just the thing to wear!





Argh!! Argh!!

VICTORY

You could fight a bear mate?

You guys, you're not going to believe this...

HAAAAA!!

## Japanese Word – Definition (Furigana | Romanji)

**7本1発行1** – Vol 7 Issue 1

ななほんいち はっこう | Nana hon ichi hakkou

**2024春** – Spring 2024

(に・ゼロ・に・よんはる | Ni zero ni yon haru)

**東京** – Tokyo (とうきょう)

**京都** Kyoto (きょうと)

**二週間** – 2 weeks (にしゅうかん | Ni shuu kan)

**3月** – March (さんがつ | San gatsu)

**大阪** – Osaka (おおさか)

**Mattさん** – Mr. Matt (Matto san)

**Tylerさん** – Mr. Tyler (Taira san)

**Gradyさん** – Mr. Grady (Guradi san)

**よこそ** – Welcome (Yokoso)

**こんにちは** – Hello (Konnchiwa)

**いきましょ** – Let's go (Ikimasho)

**スポットライト** – Spotlight (すぽっとらいと | Supotto raito)

**これは人生の冒険** – This the adventure of a lifetime

(これはじんせいのぼうけんだ | Kore wa jinsei no bouke)

**冒険はどこまでも続く** – The adventure continues endlessly (ぼうけんはどこまでもつづく | Bouken wa doko made)

**自販機** – The vending machine (じはんき | Jihanki)

**新しい出会い** – New encounters (あたらしいであい | Ararashii deai)

目利きが選ぶ、最高のラインナップ！

**美味しい** – Delecious, Tasty yum (おいしい | Oishi)

**うまい** – Delecious (うまい | Umai)

**砂肝** – Chicken gizzards (すなぎも | Sunagimo)

**焼き鳥** Japanese chicken skewers (やきとり | Yakitori)

**シカゴから東京行きのフライトに搭乗の皆様、ボーディングが始まります。搭乗券とパスポートをご準備ください** – Ladies and gentlemen boarding the flight from Chicago to Tokyo, we are now beginning the boarding process. Please have your boarding ticket and passport ready. (シカゴからとうきょうゆきのフライトにとうじょうのみなさま、ボーディングがはじまります。とうじょうけんとパスポートをごじゅんびください | Chikago kara Tokyuu yuki no furaito ni go toujou no minna sama, bodingu ga hajimarimasu. Toujouken to pasupooto wo gojunbi kudasai.)

**浅草** – Asakusa (あさくさAsakusa)

**24H営業年中無休** – Open 24/7 (にじゅうよんじかんえいぎょうねんじゅうむきゅう | Ni juu yon jikan eigyou nenjuu mukyuu)

**上野公園** – Ueno park (うえのこうえん | Ueno kouen)

**子供たち** – Children (こどもたち | Kodomotachi)

**御茶ノ水駅** – Ochanomizu station (おちやのみずえき | Ocha no mizu eki)

**三鷹の森ジブリ美術館** – Mitaka Ghibli Museum (みたかのもりジブリびじゅつかん | Mitaka no mori jiburi bijutukan)

**都立井の頭恩賜公園** – Inokashira Imperial Grant Park (とりつ いのかしら おんしこうえん | Toritsu inokashira onshi kouen)

**吉祥寺** –Kichijouji temple (きちじょうじ | Kichijouji)

**築地場外市場** – Tsukiji Outer Market (つきじじょうがいしじょう | Tsukiji jougai shijou)

**タラバガニ無裁込** – Red King Crab (タラバガニむさいこ Tarabagani musai komi)

**WAGYU串** – Wagyu beef skewers (わぎゅうくし | Wagyu kushi)

**スワイガニ対祭無裁込** – Sonmoiw crab (スワイガニたいさいむさいこみ | Suwagani taisai musai komi)

**エビー** – Shrimp (えび | Ebi)

**150円** (ひゃく・ご・じゅう・えん | Hyaku go juu en)

**円** – Japanese currency (えん | En)

**次は新宿、新宿です。お出口は右側です。ご乗車ありがとうございました** – Next is Shinjuku. The exit is on the right. Thank you for riding with us (つぎはしんじゅく、しんじゅくです。おでぐちはみぎがわです。ごじょうしゃありがとうございました | Tsugi wa Shinjuku, Shinjuku desu. Odeguchi wa migigawa desu. Gojousha arigatou gozaimashita.)

**汐屋だい稀** – Japanese Ramen noodle restaurant (しおやだいき | Shioyadaiki)

**メンマ** – Bamboo shoots (めんま | Menma)

**チャーシュー** – Sliced Stewed Pork (チャーシュー | Chashuu)

**味玉** – Seasoned egg (あじたま | Ajitama)

**なると** – Boiled fish paste (なると | Naruto)

**海苔** – Dried seaweed (のり | Nori)

**ラーメンや** – Ramen noodles restaurant (らめんや | Ramenya)

**高知県** – Kouchi Prefecture (こうちけん | Kouchi ken)

**三代目矢野金光農園** – Third generation Famer, Yano

**都立大学駅** – Toritsu university station (とりつだいがくえき | Toritsu daigaku eki)

**品川区** – Shinagawa city (しながわく | Shinagawa-ku)

**文旦** – Pomelo (ぶんだん | Buntan)

**和式** – Japanese style (わしき | Washiki)

**漬物** – Pickled vegetables (つけもの | Tsukemono)

**ご飯** – A bowl of steamed white rice (ごはん | Gohan)

**唐揚げ** – Japanese style fried chicken (からあげ | Karaage)

**煮物** – Simmered dish (にもの | Nimono)

**味噌汁** – Miso soup (みそしる | Miso shiru)

**新幹線** – The bullet train (しんかんせん | Shinkansen)

**5日目~8日目** – Days 5~8 (ごにちもく〜はちにちもく | Go nichu moku ~ Hachi nichu moku)

**熊野古道** – Kumanokodo Road (くまのこど | Kumano Kodo Mountain road to shrines)

**熊野** – Kumano (くまの | Kumano)

**古道** – Old Road (こどう | Kodou)

**熊野本宮大社** – Kumano Hongu Taisha Grand Shrine (くまのほんぐうたいしゃ | Kumono Hongu Taisha)

**熊野那智大社** Kumano Nachi Taisha Grand Shrine (くまのなちたいしゃ | Kumono Nachi Taisha)

**熊野速玉大社** – Khuamono Hayatama Taisha Grand Shrine (くまのはやたまたいしゃ | Kumono Hayatama Taisya)

**焼き魚** – Grilled fish (やきざかな | Yakizakana)

**刺身サラダ** – Salad is made with fresh vegetables and raw fish (さしみサラダ | Sashimi sarada)

**フルーツムース** – Fruit mousse (ふるーつむーす | Furu-tsu mu-su)

**近露** –Chikatsuya (ちかつゆ | Chika tsuyu)

**兜** – Kabuto, a decorative samurai helmet (かぶと | Kabuto)

**刀** – Katana Sword (かたな | Katana)

**掛け軸** – A hanging scroll (かけじく | Kakejiku)

**自然を未来へ** – Nature to the future (しぜんをみらいへ | Shizen wo mirai e)

**お好み焼き** – Japanese-style pancake (おこのみやき | Okonomiyaki)

**日本のビールの味わい** – A taste of Japanese beer (にほんのびーるのあじわい | Nihon no biiru no ajiwai)

**ふう** – Phew (ふう | Fu)

**むむむ** – Mmm (むむむ | Mumumu)

**ほっ** – Feel relieved (ほっ | Hott)

**最高** – The best (さいこう | Saikou)

**近露王子** – Chikatsuyu-oji. This is one of the many 'Oji' shrines along the Kumano (ちかつゆおうじ | Chikatsuyu oji)

**比曽原王子** – Hisohara ouji. This is one of the many 'Oji' shrines along the Kumano (ひそはらおうじ | Hisohara ouji)

**宮ずし** – Miya Sushi restaurant (みやずし | Miyazushi)

**ハマチ** – Yellowtail (はまち | Hamachi)

**鰻** – Eel (うなぎ | Unagi)

**海老** – Shrimp (えび | Ebi)

**赤貝** –Ark Shell (あかがい | Akagai)

**牛肉** – Beef (ぎゅうにく | Gyuuniku)

**鯛** – Sea Bream (たい | Tai)

**イカ** – Squid (いか | Ika)

**鮭** – Salmon (さけ | Sake)

**鮪** – Tuna (まぐろ | Maguro)

**ウニ** – Sea Urchin (うに | Uni)

**蓮根** – Lotus root (れんこん | Renkon)

**イクラ** – Salmon Roe (いくら | Ikura)

**コーヒー** – Coffee (こーひー | Koo Hii)

**トイレ** – Toilet (といれ | Toire)

**迷惑** – Caution/ Trouble (めいわく | Mei waku)

**困ります** – That's going to be a problem (こまります | Komari masu)

**犬のフン** – Dog feces (いぬのふん | Inu no fun)

**後始末は飼主が責任を持つように** – Owners are responsible for clean up after their pests (あとしまつはいぬしがせきにんをもつように | Atoshimatsu wa kainushi ga sekinin o motsu youni)

**本宮町** – Hongu Town (ほんぐうちょう | Honguu chou)

**犬や猫のふん・尿禁止** – No dog or cat feces or urine allowed (いぬやねこのふん・にようきんし | Inu ya neko no fun・nyou kin)

**田辺市** – Tanabe city (たなべし | Tanabe shi)

**いらっしゃいませ** – Welcome (irras shai mase)

**本宮大社** – Hongu shrine (ほんぐうたいしゃ | Honguu taisha)

**水呑王子** – Mizunomi Ouji (みずのみおうじ | Mizunomi Ouji)

**発心門王子** – Hosshin mon Ouji (ほっしんもんおうじ | Hosshin mon Ouji)

**紀伊山地の霊場と参詣道** – Sacred Sites and Pilgrimage Routes in the Kii Mountain Range (きいさんちのれいじょうとさんけいみち | Kii san no reijou to sankei michi)

**消火栓** – Fire hydrant (しょうかせん | Shou ka sen)

**御朱印** – Red ink stamp (ごしゅいん | Go shuu in)

**生まぐろ** – Live Tuna fish (なままぐろ | Nama Maguro)

**マグロの町の新名物** – Famous dish of town is Tuna (まぐろのまちのしんめいぶつ | Maguro no machi no shinmei butsu)

**まぐろうどん** – Tuna Noodles (Maguro | udon)

**座敷あります** – Tatami seating is available (ざしきうどんあります | Zashiki udon arimasu)

**元祖** – Traditional (がんそ | Ganso)

**そのちね** – Song name (Sono | chine)

**みずいろの雨** – Song name (みずいろのあめ | Mizuiro no ame)

**踊り子** – Dancer (おどりこ | Odori ko)

**日本元気** – Japan is energetic (にっぽんげんき | Tokyo genki)

**大阪元気** – Osaka is energetic (おおさかげんき | Osaka genki)

**3月22日ー23日** – March 22–23 (さんがつにじゅうににちーにじゅうさんにち | San gatsu ni jyu ni nichi - ni jyu san nichi)

**酒味の蔵** – Wine restaurant (しゅみのくら | Shuminokura)

**自分の考え引き出すときの日本語** – Express Your Thoughts in Japanese (じぶんのかんがえひきだすときのほんご | Jibun no kan ga e hiki dasu toki no ni hon go)

**どこにお勧めしますか** – What places do you recommend going to (どこにおすすめしますか | Doko ni o susume shi masu ka)

**餃子** – Chinese dumplings (ぎょうざ | Gyouza)

**おいしい** – Yum (Ooishi)

**モーニングセット** – Morning set (もーにんぐせっと | Mou nin gu setto)

**敦賀市** – Tsuruga city (つるがし | Tsuruga shi)

**特製** – Specially (とくせい | Tokusei)

**大阪名物** – Famous dish of Osaka (おおさかめいぶつ | Osaka mei butsu)

**たこ焼き** – Takoyaki is a snack made by putting octopus and condiments in flour dough and baking it in a ball shape (たこやき | Takoyaki)

**3月23日ー26日** – March 23–26 (さんがつ にじゅうさんにちーにじゅうろくにち | San gatsu ni jyu san nichi - ni jyu roku nichi)

**東山** – Mountain East (ひがしやま | Higashi yama)

**将軍塚青龍殿大舞台** – Seiryuden Temple (しょうぐんずかせいりゅうでんだいぶたい | Shogunzuka Seiryuden Daibutai Shogunzuka)

**客殿** – Customer room (きゃくでん | Kyaku den)

**長楽寺全景** – Temple of eternal bliss (ちょうらくてらぜんけい | Chouraku tera zenkei)

**カメ** – Turtle (かめ | Kame)

**さつき** – Japanese woman name (Satsuki)

**おはよう** – Good Morning (O hay ou )

**目指せ無料ドリンク** – Free drink (めざせむりょうどりんく | Mezase muryou dorinku)

**田中ダイス** – Tanaka dices (たなかだいす | Tanaka daisu)

**幸運にもゾロ目が出たら・・・無料** – Two of the same number after rolling two dice... Free (こううんにもぞろめが出たら・・・むりょう | Kouun ni mo zoro me ga de tara ... muryou)

**足した数字が偶数だったら・・・通常** – Get an even number from a dice roll...Normal (たしたすうじがぐうすうだったら・・・つうじよう | Tashita suji ga gu su dattara... tsujou )

**足足した数字が奇数だったら・・・強制メガ** – Get an odd number from a dice roll...Super mega (足したすうじがきすうだったら・・・きょうせいめが | Tashita suji ga ki su dattara... kyousei mega)

**警視庁** – Police (けいしちょう | Kei shi chou)

**またね日本** – See again, Japan (またねにほん | Matane Nihon)

**心** – Kokoro Heart, Spirit, Mind (こころ | kokoro)

**和服** – Japanese fashion (わふく | Wafuku)

**自然の中で** – In the wild (しぜんのなかで | Shizen no naka de)

**夫婦地蔵** – Fuufu (Spouse) Statue (ふうふじぞう | Fuufu jizou)

**雨、雨、どこか行って!** – Rain, rain, go away (あめ、あめ、どこかいぎって)

**着物** – Kimono (きもの)

In memory of Aunt Nene who was one of my  
biggest fans of the magazine

Printed on Friday, December 6th, 2024  
Created in the great city of Chicago, IL

\*\*\*

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Japanese Translator: Tram Lai

Thank you to the countless Japanese people who graciously helped us throughout our  
travels. Without all of you, this trip would not be what it was

Adventure Magazine | Japan Spring 2024

# 夫婦地蔵

A shrine, dedicated to Meoto Jizō, symbolizes protection and blessings for couples and families when traveling

MARCH 2024  
ADVENTURE  
MAGAZINE