

niponica is published in Japanese and six other languages (Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian, and Spanish) to introduce to the world the people and culture of Japan today. The title *niponica* is derived from "Nippon," the Japanese word for Japan.



Cover: Original illustration by KASICO, a graphic artist who leads Japan's pop culture scene. The composition refers to recurrence, how trends revive and live on. Details are in the interview with KASICO on page 17.

Special Feature

Japan's Cutting-Edge Pop

The sweeping presence of Japan's pop culture changes daily.
Kawaii and Cool are not only unique but also
offer a glimpse of Japanese tradition and style
as they cast their own spell that continues to enchant the world.

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The Place to Meet J-Pop Culture

Experience a blast of J-Pop culture
on that street in that city

ポップ
POP
ぽっふ

It's like a toy chest bursting with color—
Let's have fun and open it!

Colorful and Bright
HARAJUKU

KAWAII

A monster that swallows
everything whole



KAWAII MONSTER CAFE HARAJUKU is a restaurant presenting Harajuku Kawaii culture to the world. When you walk in, the first thing you notice is SWEETS GO ROUND, a merry-go-round in the shape of a cake. "MONSTER GIRLS," iconic Harajuku-styled young women, are happy to show you around. (Photo: Diamond Dining Co., Ltd.)

GRAFFITI

Street Art Bursting with Life



On the street
TENNOZU

ROBOTS

Shiny and Splendid Technology Entertainment



Crazy
SHINJUKU

OTAFUKU

Mythic Muse Bringing Good Fortune



Artist in Hotel
SHIODOME

P.6, above: Tennozu Isle is a waterside area surrounded by canals. On Bond Street, a former warehouse district, you'll be greeted by stylish pop street art painted as wall murals. (Photo: Ishihara Hideki)

P.6, left: At Park Hotel Tokyo, in Shiodome, the Artist in Hotel project presents an entire guest-room decorated by an artist. (Photo: Park Hotel Tokyo © Artist Room Otafuku Face / AKI KONDO)

P.7, above: Robot Restaurant, in Shinjuku's Kabukicho district, presents enjoyably innovative and state-of-the-art entertainment via an interesting collaboration of robots and humans. (Photo: Robot Restaurant)

P.7, below: Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennale is the region's largest international art festival and is hosted there by Tokamachi City, Tsunan Town, Niigata Prefecture. Kusama's *Tsumari in Bloom* is one of many sculptures on permanent display, her personal favorite of all the outdoor works by this artist greatly acclaimed in Japan and internationally. (Photo: Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennale Executive Committee / photo by Osamu Nakamura)

KUSAMA YAYOI

Pop Art in the Wind



Art Field
ECHIGO-TSUMARI



KABUKI ZUKAN ("Kabuki Picture Scroll") Vol. 2 (of two) Japan Edo Period, 17th century
The woman actor Izumo no Okuni's *kabuki odori* became instantly popular with many followers, like the court lady dancing in the middle depicted in the picture scroll.
The Tokugawa Art Museum © The Tokugawa Art Museum Image Archives / DNPartcom

Kabukimono

A New Style for JAPAN POP Artists

Japan's entertainment culture greatly respects old tradition yet thrives on professionals whose vision confronts convention and offers a singular perspective on performance.

Early in the Edo period (1603–1867), a woman actor named Izumo no Okuni wore masculine attire instead of the usual feminine outfit for *yayako odori* (girl's dance)—complete with short and long swords—to perform a new dance in Kyoto. She was indeed what could be called "*Kabukimono*." Her outstanding performance in an unusually flashy costume shocked and impressed the citizens of Kyoto and led to the renowned theater art known today as *Kabuki*.

Japan is a country that not only has nourished commoner culture in the Edo period and later but also welcomes a new set of values. This kind of historical background is what lies behind the continual emergence into the world spotlight of new types of Japanese pop artists.

"Kabukimono" in Brief

The word refers to a trend from around the end of the Age of Civil Wars to the early Edo period (late 1590s to 1640s), popular in the big cities of Edo (former name of Tokyo) and Kyoto. These performers were basically outsider artists in unique outfits who flouted convention. Their approach brought a singular twist to traditional aesthetics and values, a new turn that found favor among common people.



© Amuse Inc., Photo by Dana Distortion

BABYMETAL

Powerful heavy metal with a roaring bass is matched by SU-METAL's clear ringing voice, along with YUIMETAL and MOAMETAL, to form BABYMETAL, a trio known for sweet yet edgy dance performance and a unique groove. Their innovative fusion of J-POP and heavy metal continues to engage pop and heavy metal fans from Japan and around the world. Their live act is no exception to BABYMETAL's groundbreaking style and philosophy, wherein the spirit of *Kitsune sama*, an incarnation of the fox deity that is the god of metal, enters the performers and inspires them to make their trademark fox sign with fingers.



© Taku Fujii

BABYMETAL Profile

Formed in 2010 as a trio, SU-METAL (center), YUIMETAL (left), and MOAMETAL (right) deliver a unique style of charming girl vocals melded with a heavy metal sound, accompanied by dance moves—a first in heavy metal—never failing to enthrall everyone who sees them on stage. The year 2014 saw them hit it big with their debut album "*BABYMETAL*" on the Billboard chart. Released in April 2016, their second album, "*METAL RESISTANCE*," was in the Billboard Top 40, the first in 53 years for Japanese artists. In the same month BABYMETAL performed a solo concert at U.K.'s famed Wembley Arena, a first for Japanese musicians. In September of that year, they played a solo concert for two days at Tokyo Dome and drew 110,000 concertgoers.

WagakkiBand

和楽器バンド



© MEME TOKYO / TOY'S FACTORY

DEMPAGUMI. inc

Eclectic as a tipped-over toy chest, each of DEMPAGUMI.inc's six members is a full-fledged *otaku*—someone extremely devoted to manga, anime, video games, or cosplay—of different genres and claims her own worldview via social networks. Their live performances, with the stance of different, unique characters vying with each other, original lyrics and dancing, unite fans as one and are terrifically uplifting. Their musical style has remained the same since their debut album, featuring “Dempa” songs, electronica jammed fully with word-packed lyrics. Some of their most characteristic performance styles include a chaotic music that changes drastically in fast beats and in shouting back and forth to one another.

DEMPAGUMI.inc Profile

Six-person group formed by Furukawa Mirin, Aizawa Risa, Yumemi Nemu, Naruse Eimi, Mogami Moga, and Fujisaki Ayane. The group collaborates with various creators, including Tokyo Collection and designer Mikio Sakabe. They get much attention not only in Japan but also abroad, participating in fashion events in Taipei and Jakarta, for example. In 2013, DEMPAGUMI.inc appeared at JAPAN EXPO in France representing Japan and, from April 2014 to March 2015, were appointed PR Ambassadors for Culture City of East Asia 2014, Yokohama. In 2015, they went on a world tour, in December 2016 released the first best-of album “WWDBEST~Dempa Ryoko!~,” and in January 2017 did arena tours in Japan at Makuhari Event Hall, World Hall in Kobe, and Nippon Budokan.



© MEME TOKYO / TOY'S FACTORY



© Avex Music Creative Inc.

WagakkiBand

WagakkiBand breathes new life into traditional Japanese sounds by fusing them with Western rock. Playing rock music on instruments like *wadaiko* (“Japanese drums”), *koto* (a long zither of 13 strings), *shakuhachi* (bamboo flute), and *Tsugaru jamisen* (three-stringed instrument of Tsugaru region) creates a lively melody that recalls Japanese festivals and has a fresh sound even to young Japanese. Their popularity took off when they created vocaloid songs* and fused the sound with Japanese instruments. This puts them in high demand. Part of their appeal comes from vivid costumes straight out of a 3D video game and a dynamic stage presence. The band tours aggressively overseas, and in March 2016 they had their first solo concert in New York, followed by a headline tour in North America in July. They continue to capture worldwide attention with their impressive originality.

* Songs created with the voice synthesizer developed by a Japanese musical instrument maker.

WagakkiBand Profile

A rock entertainment band fusing *shi-gin* (chanting traditional poems), Japanese instruments, and Western rock. Their video uploads featuring vocaloid covers gained immediate attention, which led to a mainstream debut in April 2014 with album “Vocalo Zanmai.” The album’s “Senbon Zakura” got over 52 million hits on YouTube and countless comments from around the world. The big band members are Suzuhana Yuko (vocal), Ibukuro Kiyoshi (*koto*), Kaminaga Daisuke (*shakuhachi*), Ninagawa Beni (*Tsugaru jamisen*), Kurona (*wadaiko*), Machiya (guitar), Asa (bass), and Wasabi (drums). Their second album, “Yasou emaki,” released in 2015, reached number one on the Oricon Chart and won the Planning prize of Japan Record Award. And their long-awaited third album, “Shikisai” was released in March 2017.



Photo by KEIKO TANABE (TAMARUYA)

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Text: Tsuchida Takashi Photos: Suzuki Takuya and ©2016 WCS Inc.

Cosplay: A Universal Language

"Cosplay": A combination of "costume" and "play"

International Players Gather in Nagoya



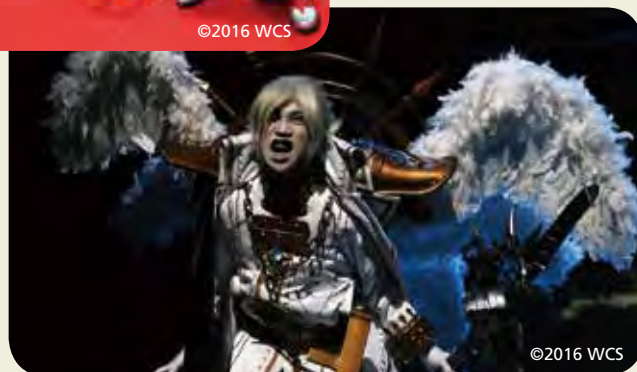
©2016 WCS

“I didn’t feel the language barrier at all. It’s awesome to connect with people from around the world about your favorite characters!”

The joys of manga, anime and games aren’t limited to reading, watching, or playing. They give birth also to the joy of “cosplay,” in which avid fans impersonate their favorite characters. Nagoya’s World Cosplay Summit (WCS) began in 2003 as a giant expo for “cosplayers” from all over the world.

“It’s about how entertaining and appealing you can be onstage, as well as the fun in pursuing the original nuance and aesthetics!”

The 2016 WCS, which attracted over 320,000 people, was a great party that involved rental of an entire theme park for a photo session bonanza and a red carpet event attended by the governor and the mayor, as well as a fun parade that welcomed



©2016 WCS

1st place

Indonesia
“Trinity Blood”



©2016 WCS

“We’re overjoyed! What got us the win was probably the trick portion, which took many trial-and-error attempts.”

2nd place

Denmark
“The Angel of Elhamburg”
(Elhamburg no Tenshi)



©2016 WCS

“All accessories and details are exactly the same as in the original. We hand-sewed each and every single bead.”

3rd place

France
“Love Live! School Idol Festival”



©2016 WCS

“We love this anime because the friendship of two main characters is wonderful!”

“I was very impressed with the high quality that exceeds ordinary cosplay.”

spontaneous walk-ins by cosplayers. This year again, Nagoya citizens showed wonderful hospitality to the crowd of international cosplayers.

The climax, as always, was none other than the World Cosplay Championship: the battle of all battles of finalists from participant countries and regions. This isn’t your average costume party—participants must pair up for a 2.5-minute skit impersonating characters from Japanese manga, anime, games, or SFX films. In 2016 there were 30 participating countries and regions. A new addition was the large onstage screen, which added an exciting touch to the performances.

The championship evaluates according to costume and performance quality. This means that technical and artistic aspects of costumes are taken into account as well as how accurately the original characters are portrayed onstage.

Grand Champions for 2016 were Indonesian cosplayers for their presentation of light novel “Trinity Blood.” Judges and audience were highly impressed with their costumes, entertaining magic tricks when the woman seemed split in half, and the man flew at the end of their performance.

“All cosplayers representing their respective countries and regions were very friendly,” the champions said, “and we became like one big family throughout the event.” Cosplay has earned international status much like a universal language. It’s wonderful how this universality comes through when participants share a mutual understanding through their characters without understanding each other’s language. Everyone seemed to agree the high point was making friends through cosplay with people the world over.



Smart Footwear Orphe
The performer with sneakers of light-emitting soles draws light.

Pop Culture Technology NEWS



WEARABLE ONE OK ROCK
Image of how vibrating music feels when wearing a speakers-installed jacket.



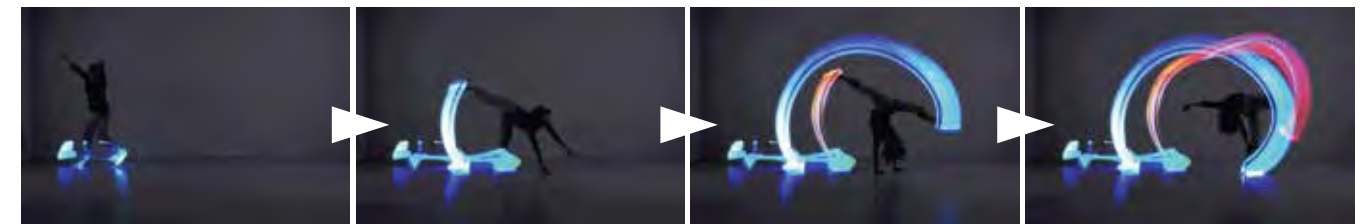
PlayStation®VR
Wearing a head-mounted display, you're in a Virtual Reality (VR) world of 3D.

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Next-Generation Entertainment Expands from Cutting-Edge Technologies

From carrying to wearing,
these devices connect and expand the scope of dance, music and gaming.
They not only make pop culture more fun
but also create a new, cutting-edge world.

1. Orphe Smart Shoes with Soles of Light



The trajectory of light drawn by a performer wearing Orphe. Colors and movement change with the music, giving stimulation to the view and generating new expressions.

Not your average light-up sneakers, Orphe smart footwear links up with smartphone applications.

The soles with about 100 full-color LEDs offer a rich array of light effects. By acquiring real-time movement data with installed multiple motion sensors and connecting to the data via smartphone, various light colors and patterns can be set and sounds played from external speakers in accordance with the movement.

At a concert of famous Japanese idol group AKB48, members wore Orphe and danced. In addition, popular band Suiyobi no Campanella (Wednesday Campanella) and world-famous dancer Kent Mori all use Orphe in their performances and dance events. Orphe footwear collaboration projects, like an installation at the 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art, Kanazawa, are expanding.

Orphe has been on sale since September 2016. Orphe developer Kikukawa Yuya's vision of "artistic expression from the everyday" has become a reality.



A Word with the Developer

Kikukawa Yuya

President, no new folk studio Inc.



Orphe footwear may look like ordinary sneakers, but in fact it's a wearable computer with functions like lighting, musical instruments, and a controller. By making new software development tools available and open to the public, I believe new forms of expression will be born and will spread to many people while linking up with fashion elements.

2. Rez Infinite A New World Created by Sight and Sound



Area X, a new stage introduced in Rez Infinite. Players experience the uniquely beautiful 3D space and floating sensation that only VR can give.

In December 2016, Rez Infinite, created by game designer Mizuguchi Tetsuya, won Best VR Game at the world's largest gaming industry awards, The Game Awards 2016. Best VR Game was a new prize category established in 2016. VR* is "virtual reality." Through VR games, players enter and experience a virtual world by wearing a head-mounted display (see photo, page 14, below right).

Rez Infinite is a musical shooter game that is compatible with the PlayStation®VR VR system and that syncs with the world's most popular home game console, PlayStation®4.

2. Rez Infinite

As players eliminate viruses that are the game's enemies, sound effects play and turn into music. Visual effects also happen in response to the music and change creating fresh storylines. This synergy between music and visual effects gives players a new kind of sense experience through sight and sound.

* Virtual reality (VR) is next-generation technology first developed in the latter half of the 1960s. The name generally refers to technology that creates alternate realities: a computer draws a 3D space and uses stereophonic sound to reproduce sound coming from all directions within a 360-degree circumference. Wearable head-mounted displays are essential to experiencing a VR world, and advances in this technology are accelerating its widespread use.

A Word with the Developer

Mizuguchi Tetsuya
Creator and Game Designer

Humans have used a variety of methods to convey images: speech, drawing, gesture. But these only convey part of the total image. VR is the first medium to combine multiple methods of communication—sight, hearing, touch—to create a singular representation. You might say that, with VR technology, communication takes a great leap forward.



3. WEARABLE ONE OK ROCK

Music You Can Wear



The technology of two jackets loaded with a total of 20 audio speakers made its first appearance at a special event announcing a new song by ONE OK ROCK, a Japanese rock band who tour worldwide. Put on a WEARABLE ONE OK ROCK jacket and the speakers operate together to play music to your entire body. It's a new and completely different music experience from listening just with your ears. At present there are only two jackets in existence,

with audio design for both created by Ochiai Yoichi as "modern magician" media artist. He focused not only on improving the sound quality by fine tuning frequency and acoustic pressure but also on how the jackets feel when worn, and so he made the speakers as light as possible.



ONE OK ROCK (left to right)
RYOTA (bass), TORU (guitar), TAKA (vocal) and
TOMOYA (drums)

A Word with the Developer

Ochiai Yoichi
Assistant Professor, University of Tsukuba

Recently, virtual reality, touch technology or haptics, and how we feel via our senses are very hot topics for research. It's been more than a century since Edison invented the first device for music playback. The evolution itself is fascinating. And now, for the first time, optics and haptics together allow us to wear music as visual fashion—as well as experience how it feels with our bodies. In short, creating speakers with great sound that are light enough to wear is a perennial challenge for any engineer, so I was very excited to work on this project.



Photo: Shinto Takeshi

COVER ARTIST + KASICO + INTERVIEW

From *Ukiyo-e* to *Sushi* to VR—Japanese Pop Is Tough

Artist KASICO is front and center in Japan's pop culture scene. Featured on the cover of this issue is a previously unpublished work.

"To visually express the fast-changing pop scene here in Japan, I drew the colors and motifs I feel at present in the world of traditional beauty symbolized by *ukiyo-e*. Such fusion is, to me, the essence of 'Nippon' (Japan)."

KASICO goes on to say that Japanese pop culture is, in both a positive and a negative sense, "something quite messy." He also considers this aspect unique to Japan and what distinguishes its pop culture from others.

"Buzzes happen every which way, making it impossible for we Japanese to thoroughly follow them all. In other words, ours is one huge pop culture molded as a cornucopia of many diverse elements—some from overseas and others from Japan, all coming together in a spectacular well-rounded form. That's what makes our scene truly remarkable."

Japanese pop is never skewed, and there are small buzzes constantly arising across the scene. While this may reflect the Japanese mentality of uniformity and conformity, there are also movements that



operate in contrast to the general order, moving toward a more individual approach. Shy or not shy? This duality is another facet of the reality of Japan's pop culture that KASICO addresses.

"What's important is to be pop. And 'pop' equals staying power. By simplifying designs, we can make our form of expression tougher. In Japan, new trends crop up one after another, and most burn out—fast.

The survivors are the tough ones with staying power. That's why Japanese pop culture is well received around the world."



Original illustration "Recurrence"

KASICO

Art director / graphic artist. Branches out in 2013 after working for a design firm. Focusing on music, ads and creative direction for girl culture, he shines overall in straightforward expression incorporating graphics, movies, animation, and textile design. Operates a new type of visual fashion website, Graphic Girl, featuring portrait photos and GIF animation.
<http://kasico.jp/> (Japanese)



An opening movie of TV program



A key visual of HARAJUKU KAWAII!! WEEK 2015



In Brief: Wake Up, Girls!

Wake Up, Girls! is a voice-actor group derived from the idol anime, *Wake Up, Girls!* The anime depicts seven girls living in Sendai who work hard together as Wake Up, Girls! with the aim of becoming the top idol group. The cast of seven voice actors performs the anime characters (Yoshioka Mayu, Eino Airi, Tanaka Minami, Aoyama Yoshino, Yamashita Nanami, Okuno Kaya, and Takagi Miyu) in the real world as a real voice-actor group adopting the name of the fictional Wake Up, Girls!

P. 18, left: A key visual of anime *Wake Up, Girls!* A new story is scheduled to be broadcast in 2017.

P. 18, above right: The shop owner of long-established Japanese sweet shop Kumagai-ya with over 300-year history and numerous awards. The shop sells collaboration items with *Wake Up, Girls!*

P. 18, below right: Sendai Station's pedestrian deck. Sendai Station is a gateway to Sendai City, the largest city in the Tohoku region. (Photo: Aflo)

P. 19, above: Voice-actor group Wake Up, Girls!

P. 19, below: The fictional venue where Wake Up, Girls! held a regular concert is a famous live house in Sendai.

©Green Leaves / Wake Up, Girls! 2 Production Committee
©Green Leaves / Wake Up, Girls! 3 Production Committee

Between Reality and Fiction

Anime Pilgrimage to a Special Place in the Heart

Text by Kakizaki Shundo

Fans of the idol-themed anime *Wake Up, Girls!* see the town of Sendai, a present-day city in Tohoku, the northern region of Japan, as something of a fictional world. This uncommon work, fusing anime and reality, injects the city as much as possible into the storyline. The long-established Japanese sweet shop Kumagai-ya, located on Kimachi-dori Street, becomes the family home of Hayashida Airi, a main character. Both the fictional shop interior/exterior and Airi's father, the shop

owner, look identical to their real counterparts. In fact, Kumagai-ya's owner laughs about being asked often by fans visiting the shop whether Airi is at home.

One of the pleasures of such pilgrimage is to cross the line between reality and fiction. Traveling to cities, mountains, and forests where fictional anime and manga stories are set, fans relish being present in the real views and landscapes while internally reconnecting with the fictional world of their favorite work.

Take a pedestrian deck in Sendai, for example: the suspended walkway connects shopping facilities with the railroad station. Its neatly laid-out floor tiles and gently arched handrails must have evoked an extremely urban, futuristic feel when first completed; after many years, however, the walkway has become so much a part of people's ordinary lives that no one notices it. But anime works set in real towns and cities lightly cast a veil over daily scenes experienced by residents. Once you perceive the deck, your mind's eye sees a beautiful girl—carefully conjured by the anime creator—as she runs off before your very eyes. And now, when you place your hand on the rail where hers had been, it feels warm to the touch. The commonplace scene is regarded now in a new light, with a fresh story given new meaning.

Wake Up, Girls! gives new life to Sendai: its fans search for their favorite idol characters at Kimachi-dori Street, live houses, and Jozenji-dori Street. The Sendai they perceive is seen in their mind's eye. The ordinary morphs into fiction. Anime backdrops and settings across Japan continue to teach us that the border—if there is any—between reality and fiction is easily transcended.

Kakizaki Shundo

Producer of tours to places used as anime settings. Seichi Kaigi Co., Ltd. president. Publishes *Seichi Kaigi* magazine covering pilgrimages and content tourism. Kakizaki plans local events including Anitamasai (Anime/Manga Festival in Saitama) as well as develops unique regional goods. Main publication includes *Seichi Junrei Anime Manga 12-kasho Meguri* (2005) (pilgrimage: touring 12 anime/manga sites).



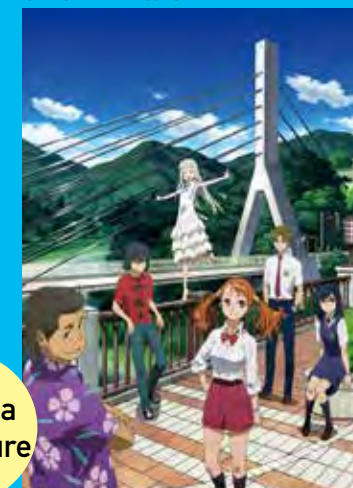


Miyagi
Prefecture

“Wake Up, Girls!”
Sendai

Idol animation that took on the ambitious challenge of merging reality with the anime realm. Step foot into the city of Sendai and you enter the world of *Wake Up, Girls!* (Photo: PIXTA)

©ANO HANA PROJECT



Saitama
Prefecture

“Anohana: The Flower We Saw That Day”
Chichibu

An ensemble cast anime based in the city of Chichibu. Fans flock there to appreciate the street sights and nature as well as the Old Chichibu Bridge triggering an anime pilgrimage to the place.

Ishikawa
Prefecture

“Hanasaku Iroha
~Blossoms for Tomorrow”
Kanazawa

The story features three girls who work at a hot springs inn. The *Bonbori* (paper lantern) Festival in the story has been made a reality mainly by the Yuwaku Onsen Tourism Association and is now a popular local event in Yuwaku Hot Springs. (Photo: Railstation.net)



Tottori
Prefecture

“Case Closed”
Hokuei Town

Birthplace of Aoyama Goshō, author of “Case Closed” (*Meitantei Conan*). Goshō Aoyama Manga Factory opened in 2007.



Tokyo

“Kochira Katsushika-ku Kameari
Koen-mae Hashutsujo”
Katsushika

Katsushika is where daring police officer Ryotsu Kankichi gets posted. Bronze statues of him and other characters, found throughout the town, welcome the visiting fans.



Kochi
Prefecture

“POPIN Q”
Nakatoso Town

Youth story depicting a girl's growth through dancing. The heroine, Kominato Isumi, living in Nakatoso Town runs to Kure Fishing Port when overwhelmed with emotion, shouting with all her might. (Photo: PIXTA)



Shiga
Prefecture

“Chihayafuru”
Otsu

A high school student's story about competitive *karuta* (poem card game) and young love. Omi Jingu Shrine, fictional venue for the competition, is now a pilgrimage site for fans.

Shiga
Prefecture

“Gin no Saji Silver Spoon”
Obihiro

Anime depicting the life of a boy who is an agricultural high school student. One of the film's locations is Hokkaido's Tokachi area, the only place in Japan to see Ban'ei Horse Racing, in which horses pull heavy sleds as they compete for strength and speed.

Hokkaido



Manga and Anime Site Map

Anime and manga stories are often based on a real city or town. It's natural to want to visit the setting of a story you like, so here's a map that might be handy for visiting the places of your favorite manga and anime.



“Yuri!!! on ICE”
Karatsu

Sports anime series about men's figure skating. Karatsu and Karatsu Castle, Saga Prefecture, are the models for the anime's Hasetsu-cho and Hasetsu Castle.

©Hasetsu Townspeople / Yuri!!! on ICE PROJECT

Saga
Prefecture



©T/PQP 2016

Crepes

Photos: Ishihara Hideki and Marion, Co., Ltd.

Marion Crepes became Japan's pioneer crepe vendor when they first opened their shop in Harajuku's Takeshita Street in 1977. Back then, the hip thing for youngsters to do on weekends was stroll Takeshita Street and take in Harajuku's pedestrian paradise overflowing with street performers while snacking on a crepe purchased at the shop's wagon. Harajuku today is a Japanese fashion culture hub popular with young Japanese and tourists from abroad.

The crepe, which originated in France's Brittany region, was imported to Japan and has since evolved into a street food that's completely different from its French counterpart. The more simple French standard varieties, such as butter and sugar, or chocolate, are probably present somewhere on the Japanese crepe menu, said to count over 100 different varieties. The most popular choice in Japan, however, has been and always will be Banana Chocolate Cream.

Before crepes came to Japan, the most popular desserts in cafes and restaurants were parfaits and pancakes loaded with various sweet toppings. This trend crossed naturally into crepes, and common crepe fillings soon included whipped cream and ice cream. More recent filling varieties include sweet adzuki bean paste and cheese-cake, as well as the more savory, light-meal crepes filled with hamburger patties or tuna and cheese.

It's as though the evolution of food culture in Japan over the past 40 years has been condensed into this cool street food. The Japanese crepe—wrapped and rolled in a cone shape—has grown into a respectable staple in the country's pop food realm.



Top left: A woman goes window-shopping with crepe in hand in this distinctive scene of Harajuku's Takeshita Street.

Top right: Rich and greatly varied selection of crepes on display. Be sure to try the select menu of seasonal items that beguiles you with its bevy of choices.

Below: The popular menu items of Banana Chocolate Cream (background) and Strawberry Chocolate Cheesecake Cream (foreground) are served in a cone shape after baking.



Seen Through Anime Film “Your Name.”

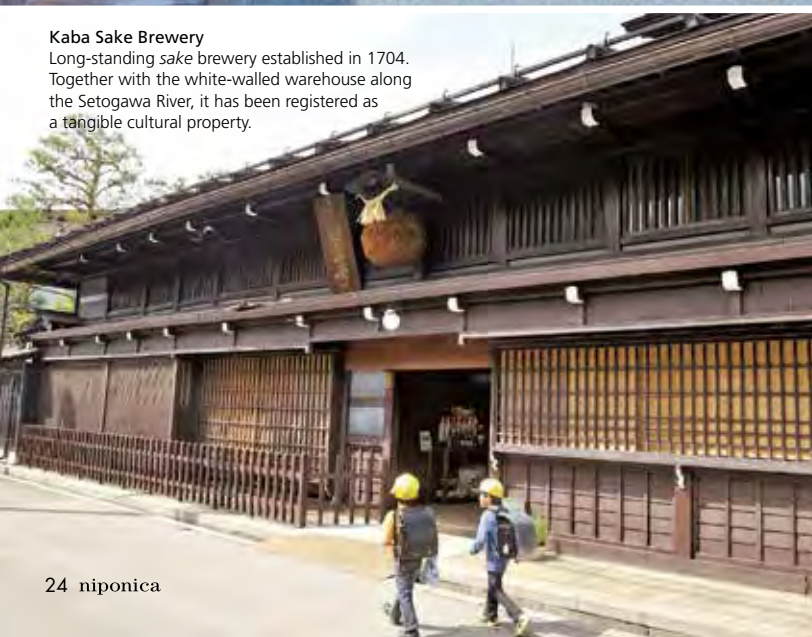
Hida Takayama

Mountains surround the Hida region, in northern Gifu Prefecture, at the center of Japan. This beautiful region, which offers fine walks in nature and into Japan's past, is experiencing renewed interest as a tourist destination and fun place to stroll because of a hit animation film set there.



Sanmachi Nationally Recognized Important Historical Building Preservation Area
An old merchant street, part of the area registered as Japan's Important Preservation District for Groups of Traditional Building. Hop on a rickshaw for a fun bouncy ride. (Photo: Aflo)

Kaba Sake Brewery
Long-standing sake brewery established in 1704. Together with the white-walled warehouse along the Setogawa River, it has been registered as a tangible cultural property.



Furukawa Festival's Okoshi Daiko (Rousing Drum)
The sound of the great drum can be heard late into the night on April 19.



In 2016, the animated film “Your Name.” (*Kimi no Na wa.*) suddenly put Hida City in the spotlight for anime devotees. The plot begins with a strange incident in which a high school boy living in Tokyo, named Taki, and a high school girl named Mitsuha, in the fictional town of Itomori, somehow switch bodies back and forth. They realize this and begin to communicate, eventually becoming attracted to one another. They attempt to meet but never quite make it. The bittersweet storyline brought tears to women and men, young and old.

Though a fictional town, Itomori is modeled here and there on Hida City landscapes. Soon after the movie's release, fans streamed to Hida City to walk the various scenic spots made familiar by Taki and Mitsuha in the romance fantasy.

After leaving Tokyo on the bullet train, Taki connects to a local line at Nagoya. The first station

where he alights is modeled after Hida Furukawa Station, gateway to Hida City. He stops to do

research at a library modeled after the Hida Municipal Library. Then, searching for Mitsuha's town of Itomori, he passes a shrine based on Ketawakamiya Shrine, famous for its Furukawa Festival, inscribed on December 1, 2016, into the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage list. The festival is one of Japan's Three Great “Naked Festivals” and is held April 19–20 every year. Several hundred men clad only in cotton loincloths carry pallets bearing Okoshi Daiko drums through the streets—quite a spectacle.

Though Mitsuha is depicted as being tired of country life and dreaming of city life in Tokyo, city moviegoers find the vast nature and leisurely pace of life in Hida greatly appealing. It is somehow reminiscent of old Japan, and perhaps that nostalgia is what triggers many to travel there.



Ketawakamiya Shrine In the scene in which Taki asks locals for directions, the stairs seen in the background are modeled after Ketawakamiya Shrine.



© 2016 “Your Name.” Film Committee



Hida Furukawa Station The view from the railway bridge on the north side of the station is of the landscape shown in the movie.



Hida Municipal Library* The library where Taki did research about Itomori, a fictional town, was modeled after the Hida Municipal Library.

*A permit acquired at the front desk is required to take photos inside the Hida Municipal Library. Photography is allowed only between the hours of 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. When taking photos, please respect others' privacy.





Takayama Autumn Festival (Hachiman Festival)
Annual autumn festival by Sakurayama Hachimangu Shrine featuring a traditional parade of 11 floats. (Photo: Takayama City)

From Hida Furukawa, a 20-minute train ride gets you to Takayama Station, where you get off for Hida Takayama and the first thing that comes into view in the surrounding sightseeing area is the old streetscapes. This old castle town evolved around Takayama Castle, built by Lord Kanamori Nagachika in the early 17th century.

In two Nationally Recognized Important Historical Building Preservation Areas, central tourist destinations, the ambience of the Edo period (1603–1867) remains today. A classic tourist itinerary would include moving out of the way of sightseeing rickshaws while snacking on local delicacies like Hida-Gyu Kushi (Hida beef on a skewer) and Mitarashi Dango (small skewered rice-flour balls glazed with soy sauce). The latter are close to a light meal and differ from the more nationally known Mitarashi Dango, which is covered in a sweet soy sauce and enjoyed as a snack. Other pleasures here include tasting *sake* at a local brewery and buying a charming baby monkey doll souvenir known as Sarubobo doll. In “Your Name.,” a cloth of Sarubobo print pattern was used to wrap a *bento* lunch box.

Takayama Jinya is located along Miyagawa River, which flows through the city. During the Tokugawa

Shogunate (1603–1867), there were 60 or so government outposts across the country, but this riverside site is the only one remaining today. It offers the best view of Nakabashi Bridge over Miyagawa River. As spring usually comes later in the year for Hida, there is a large window of opportunity to view cherry blossoms cascading over the bridge. Morning markets, open daily from morning to noon, are a must-see. Be sure to set your alarm early to experience Miyagawa Morning Market and Jinya-mae Morning Market, both considered as one of Japan’s Three Great Morning Markets.

Takayama’s spring celebration of Sanno Festival showcases 12 majestic floats on April 14–15. For Hachiman Festival, the autumn fete, ornate floats with wind-up dolls parade through the streets into the nights of October 9–10.

With spring’s cherry blossom tinting, summer’s bright green leaves, autumn’s vivid foliage, and winter’s deep snow, Hida Takayama reveals the seasonal beauty of its townscape like a picture postcard.



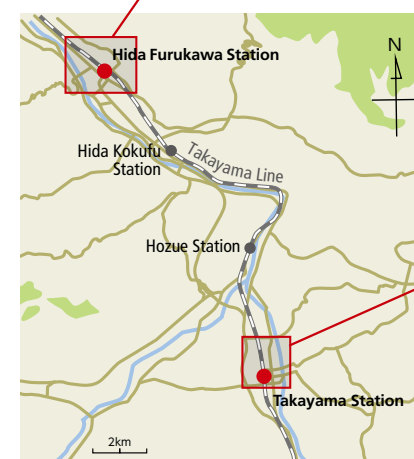
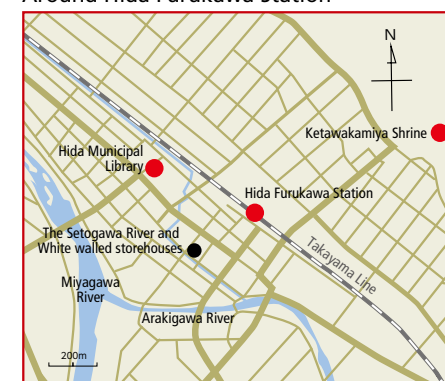
Takayama Jinya
The building used by Lord Kanamori of Takayama Castle as his villa became Takayama Jinya after Hida came under Edo government control.



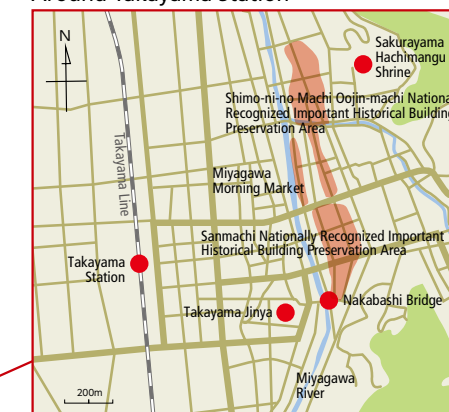
Left: Nakabashi Bridge
One of Takayama’s trademarks that crosses the Miyagawa River running through central Takayama. The red bridge and blooming cherry blossoms in spring create a beautiful view.

Right: Miyagawa Morning Market
Today as in the past, the market is an indispensable people’s kitchen, which has everything from fresh vegetables and fruit to handmade goods like pickles and miso to folk craft. Stalls are lined up along the Miyagawa River, making it an easy browse.

Around Hida Furukawa Station



Around Takayama Station



Getting There

The ride on JR Hokuriku Shinkansen from Tokyo to Toyama is about 2 hours, 15 minutes. From there an express line to Hida Furukawa Station takes about 1 hour, 15 minutes. About 15 minutes on the JR Takayama Line takes you to Takayama Station.

For More Info

● **Hida City**
TEL: (+81) 0577-73-2111
<https://www.hida-kankou.jp/kanko/foreign/en/>

● **Takayama City**
TEL: (+81) 0577-32-3333
<http://www.hida.jp/english/>



Above right: Sarubobo Doll
A doll that has been made in the Hida region since olden times. It’s considered a charm to ward off evil as well as to bring good health and safe birth. The name means “baby monkey” in local dialect and is said to have been so named because of its likeness in color and shape.

Below left: Hida-Gyu Kushi
A local treat that allows visitors to sample the Gifu specialty of Hida Beef. (Photo: PIXTA)

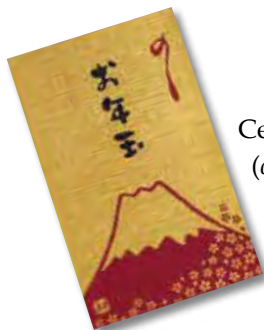
Below right: Mitarashi Dango
The pleasantly smoky aroma of soy sauce is quite appetizing. (Photo: PIXTA)



Pochi Bukuro:

A Small Pouch Weds Big Hearts

Photos by Kusu Seiko



Celebrating the new year in Japan (*oshogatsu*) is one of the most important events in the ritual calendar. The climactic moment eagerly awaited by all children is when parents with deliberation hand them gift money (*otoshidama*) in a small envelope or pouch (*otoshidama bukuro*). Giving presents at New Year's goes back to the 14th century, when "otoshidama" was not monetary, but these days this form of gifting refers to money given to children and younger relatives during the New Year holidays. The envelope with "otoshidama" (お年玉) written on front was originally used to enclose gratuities of appreciation for geisha or traditional Japanese female entertainers and similar staff and employees.

In Japan, people are averse to openly giving or receiving cash, and since olden times there's

the custom of giving *ohineri* (paper wrapped and twisted around coins) as tips and celebratory gifts. Eventually this paper evolved into an envelope to retain the coins; thus originated the name of *pochi bukuro*: "pochi" means "a little bit," and it's said the name came about through the giver's feelings of modesty.

A custom remaining to this day is presenting *oiri bukuro* envelopes to congratulate event and performance staffers—like those for sumo matches and kabuki plays—on a huge attendance. In recent years, the envelopes are available in a wide variety of designs, from fun and colorful to classical, and are used not only to gift money but also to enclose message cards for casual exchanges.

