

# THE TATTOO

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## The wonders of Japan

By **TEAGUE NEAL**  
The Tattoo

Spending two weeks in Japan as part of a foreign exchange program - getting to know the people, the food and the gadgets - turned out to be the most memorable time of my life.

Perched in the Pacific more than 6,400 miles from my home outside Toronto, Canada, is the cutting edge, creative and congenial country of Japan.

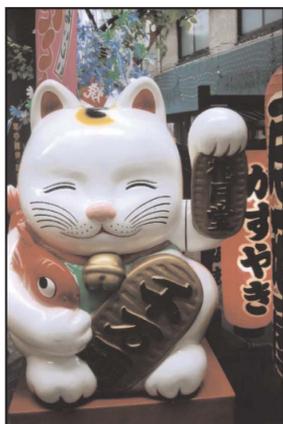
Japan is an enchanting country filled with thousands of years of history. The island nation also features the latest creations and technology alongside stunningly beautiful historical Japanese and Asian architecture.

### Cultural exchange was trip of a lifetime

I discovered Japan as part of a student exchange between Oakville, Canada and Neyagawa, Japan. Neyagawa and Oakville are one of many sister city pairings designed to promote peace, cultural understanding and enduring friendship between countries on either side of the globe. U.S. President Dwight D. Eisenhower initiated the cultural exchange in 1956.

While in Neyagawa, I was paired with Keisuke Yamashita, a 16-year-old boy. He took me to school with him and I lived with his family during my stay.

When it comes to technology, the Japanese are second to none.



Jonathan Lee / The Tattoo

A "good luck cat" like many that can be seen near shrines in Osaka, Japan.

### Even the bathroom has cool gadgets

Within the walls of a Japanese household, even something as simple as a toilet has creative and environmentally-friendly embellishments.

Bathrooms in Japan may have two separate rooms. One has nothing but an incredible masterpiece of a toilet. Jutting out from the left side of the toilet bowl is a large computer with about a dozen colored buttons.

On my first night in the land of the rising sun, my host family pointed out to me what the pink button did.

"This button here is the anal cleaner," they said with a straight face. I never actually tried that one.

Other buttons triggered innovations such as a temperature-controlled warmer or heater to get the seat feeling



Teague Neal / The Tattoo

The Kondo (main hall) of Yakushiji Temple originally built in the year 697, a worldwide heritage site in Nara, Japan.



Teague Neal / The Tattoo

Kinkaku-ji (Golden Pavilion) or Rokuon-ji Temple, former home of aristocrat Kintsune Sionji in Kyoto, Japan.

just right. A regular bidet or a vigorous one are among other selections.

Once you've flushed the toilet and enjoyed some features of the toilet's computer, you grab the container of soap off the sink that is integrated into the top of the toilet bowl. Mere seconds following the final flushing noises, a curved tap spews a steady stream of water into a small hand-washing basin that's part of the toilet. In this way, the Japanese use the extra water that we in North America simply would put to waste.

Bathing is equally innovative.

After enjoying a quick and delicious noodle bowl, it's time to prepare your bath. But you don't have to go to the bathroom to do it - simply go to the wall-mounted computer device and dial in your desired water depth and temperature.

While the machines are doing the work, you can continue to relax or work until an automated voice comes through the speaker telling you that your bath will be ready in five minutes.

When it's ready, you hike down to the combination shower and bathroom.

Naturally, the shower has a digital display with controls for the time, temperature and amount of hot water.

After the shower, you open the slatted tub cover to a perfectly prepared bath and the relaxation begins.

Since you've just showered and shampooed, you won't need any soap in the tub. Afterward, following Japanese custom, you'll leave the bath water in the tub for the whole family to use when you are finished.

The bathing room doubles as a laundry room, with a single washer/dryer machine. This is a washer that cleans the clothes and stops for a couple seconds to transform to a dryer before drying them. Thus, you can slip into your toasty right-from-the-dryer pajamas after you've finished your nightly bathing.

A bath is a nice way to relax following your evening meal, which is cooked in a pan on the table in the one common room in the house.

### Cooking is a family activity

A large electric circular pan is placed in the middle of the



Tattoo photo

Keisuke Yamashita, Teague Neal and Tomoyo Yamashita standing in front of the ancient Buddhist Byodoin Temple constructed in 1053 in Kyoto, Japan.

table, which is about a foot off the floor. The family sits on cushions around the table.

Everyone cooks their own food as the meal progresses, tossing enormous shrimp, strips of fresh beef, chicken and a host of veggies into the pan and flipping it all with long, wide cooking chopsticks.

Even Keisuke's nine-year-old sister was cooking away. His parents replenished the food supplies as the cooking continued for about half an hour.

Once the food is prepared, you have a selection of sauces for dipping. It's an absolute blast! Though the Japanese rarely drink during meal times, the table always has cups and two pitchers, one filled with cold Chinese red tea and one with slightly milder, cold Japanese green tea.

### Black squid ink ice cream

Getting an ice cream in Japan is an exotic experience.

Visiting the ancient town of Iwakuni, which is halfway between Hiroshima and Osaka, I went to an open air ice cream counter and was surprised at the flavors for sale.

There was green tea, black tea, asparagus, banana, apple and green mango ice cream. I opted for purple sweet potato ice cream, which is made from fine potato flakes that are truly purple.

I loved its nutty and smooth flavor.

When I later learned that there are places in Japan that sell black squid ink ice cream, I vowed to track it down next time I'm there.

At a picnic one day on my visit, I gulped down aloe vera juice. Keisuke told me that the same plant that we North Americans use to heal cuts is also really good for your health.

New in Japanese grocery stores is the option of having perishables such as meat, whole octopi and squid showered with dry ice to help keep them cold until you get home.

Japan is a fascinating mix of the ancient and modern - next to the skyscrapers on the narrow roads in the middle of downtown Osaka, there are rice fields and bamboo forests.

At crosswalks, a traditional Japanese folk song that literally means "to go" plays when it's safe to cross.

A similar tune plays just before a subway or train leaves, but sometimes there's no waiting for the tune - during rush hour, uniformed professional pushers with white gloves shove riders into the trains.

All this and more is why people fly across the globe to experience the beauty and excitement of Japan.

Sayonara!

## Eclectic city by the sea

By **COURTNEY COUGHLIN**  
The Tattoo

From the Ralph Lauren mom with her Lily Pulitzer daughter strolling down Bellevue Avenue to a weather-beaten old sailor sitting in a bar on Thames Street, from the townies thumping an acoustic guitar on the cliffs of Second beach to the Bulgarian tourists kicking around a soccer ball on First beach speaking in foreign tongues - these are the characters that populate Newport, Rhode Island, summer after summer without fail.

Though small, the island contains a diverse collection of people and possibilities. Whatever one might find in his hometown, he will find his opposite in Newport, as well as his separated-at-birth twin.

Upon arrival in Newport this past summer, the first thing that struck me was the sweet fragrance of honeysuckle, jasmine, and ocean breezes coming in off the shore. Around almost every corner, an ocean view seemed to peek out at me and beckon me into its waters.

There are two beaches in Newport, as far as I'm concerned - although it is an island, so in effect, it is surrounded by beaches. They are formally named Easton's Beach and Sachuest, but everyone knows them as First and Second beaches.

Both are long stretches of sugary-fine sand and brisk New England waters with attractions even a non-beach fan could love, such as a carousel and aquarium at First beach, or "surfer's end" of Second beach, populated primarily by eye candy in wetsuits.

On the beach, I found myself in the company of radical liberals, reluctant conservatives, families creating memories together and loners searching to escape the past. I met teens from California looking for a new haunt, and teens from Louisiana who had, in the words of Simon and Garfunkel, "gone to look for America."

While admittedly not all youths have the freedom to wander the world on their own, multitudes strolled the beach alone or with friends, just far enough from their mothers' beach blankets. Throughout the evenings, clans of adolescents met up at pizza joints across the island or lounged together looking at the yachts and sailboats on the wharf lining America's Cup Avenue, a place also known for hazy afternoon boutiques and open-late delis, cafes, and bars.

Two things have made Newport famous: sailing and mansions. A former naval base, the island is also home to the America's Cup races, and teens with sailors who can be distinguished by their Australian accents, white uniforms, or deeply tanned faces.

The mansions, built mostly in the pre-income tax, early 20th century, contain room upon room of entertainment in the form of vintage clothing, antique kitchenware, old-fashioned toy soldiers and dollhouses, marble bathrooms, and even a topiary garden.

Newport is the Island of Misfits, full of people who learn to feel at home on the little piece of land whether they stay for a week-end or a summer.

As far as I can see, there is no Newport-type, nor is there any one person I could imagine who wouldn't appreciate its vibrant sunsets, bustling downtown, and friendly New England atmosphere.

Far enough from my Connecticut home to feel like vacation, but close enough to feel comfortable, Newport provided the ultimate summer spot and temporary home for me.

## Newport is the Island of Misfits

## Brinley's circus a gem

By **TEAGUE NEAL**  
The Tattoo

Have the sudden urge to visit a full-fledged circus but feel that you have seen it all?

Walk into late circus tycoon P.T. Barnum's final masterpiece: a museum in downtown Bridgeport, Connecticut and prepare to feel the allure and excitement of the circus.

The Barnum Museum houses two miniature circuses carved by the skilled hands of Bill Brinley over many years.

Brinley's masterpiece emulates a five-ring historic circus complete with tiny rhinos, acrobats, sideshows and much more. The immense model even includes an area showing where vast amounts of fresh bread were baked to keep the elephants healthy.

Looking at it carefully teaches tidbits about the circus that otherwise never come to most visitors' attention.

Brinley's creation has proven to be popular and is a must-see at the museum.

One of the two miniature circuses will remain at the museum until at least the end of 2005 and perhaps longer. The other is on display permanently.

But the Barnum Museum holds much more than a couple of circus models.

In addition to the early circus history on display, there's also much to learn about the famed showman P.T. Barnum, who turns out to have been a multi-faceted fellow who served as politician, developer, promoter and more.

The solid old museum, constructed in 1896, has three floors of material to see. Go along with a tour guide for wide-ranging background stories and information or just meander through on your own.

It generally follows the course of Barnum's life and also shows off a great deal about the history of Bridgeport.

One exhibit is a model of Barnum's original workplace, a general store that employed him in 1828 in Bethel, Conn.

After that, there are posters, newspaper advertisements, pictures and objects that show how Barnum rose to fame with his American Museum just off Broadway in New York, where the "very first live rhino" brought to the United

States once drew crowds, according to Deb Rose, director education and guest services.

One nifty sight is the mermaid that Barnum made from a monkey head and sections of a fish, one of several practical joke pieces that he conned patrons with generations ago.

Also there for the viewing are Tom Thumb's tiny shoes, carriage and other trinkets.

Other highlights include seeing replicas of the parlor and gentlemen's lounge from different mansions that Barnum owned in Bridgeport.

These have beautiful Asian murals, pottery, antiques, stained glass, sculpture and models of wooden globes that give a glimpse into what life was like back then if you had plenty of money.

A 2,500-year-old Egyptian mummy named Pha Ib, pretty well preserved, greets you on the third floor.

Beyond is a large section about the industrial revolution of Bridgeport.

What is unique to this museum is that it shows the impact that Barnum's circus and industry in Bridgeport had on the world.

For instance, Barnum's 12,000-pound African elephant that Barnum bought from a London zoo was named Jumbo - which became a household word for something quite large.

In the display on Bridgeport's history, the origins of the popular Frisbee become clear.

The museum has a couple original pie plates from Frisbie Pies, the now defunct pie bakery from New Haven, Conn.

The story goes that the company would give a couple cents back to customers if they brought back the metal plate after finishing their pie, Rose said.

Students at Yale University didn't much care about the refunds so they kept the pie tins and began throwing them around on the New Haven Green, Rose said, yelling "Frisbie!" to warn anyone in the way of the flying plate.

Frisbies became Frisbees when a game company couldn't convince the bakery to let it use the original name, Rose said.

At the end of a tour, visitors will come away with a new knowledge and excitement for the contributions to the globe that both Barnum and Bridgeport made.

## The Barnum Museum

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