



## EXPERIENCING SOMETHING NEW AT HYPER JAPAN

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UK-based blogger Ali Muskett aka Haikugirl tells us all about her impressions of HYPER JAPAN 2012 Spring and experiencing something new.

One of the things I loved about living in Japan was that it gave me the chance to try new things all the time. I would stumble upon a festival, be invited out to try new food, or visit places I had only ever seen in books. Japan is a country full of new experiences, but what if you haven't had a chance to go there yet? How can you experience Japan without actually getting on a plane? The answer is Hyper Japan.

At Hyper Japan Spring 2012 there were a myriad of opportunities for new experiences. Japanese culture is becoming increasingly popular in the UK, and you can easily buy sushi in your local supermarket and Hello Kitty on the High Street. But Hyper Japan brings you more than that. As well as sushi, you can try typical festival food such as takoyaki (grilled balls of batter and octopus) and okonomiyaki (a sort of Japanese pancake). In addition to Hello Kitty, there are characters such as Rilakkuma and My Melody which are less mainstream in the UK.



As someone who has lived in Japan, I admit that I did wonder if I would be able to find something new to try at Hyper Japan Spring 2012. While my friends were raving about the discovery of Japanese shaved ice (kakigori), I was thinking that I practically lived on it during the humid summers I spent in Japan. For some visitors to Hyper Japan, the site of a girl dressed in Lolita fashion, or a cartoon-like CosPlayer were eye-opening experiences. I, however, couldn't help remembering the weekends I spent photographing people in colourful outfits at Yoyogi Park in Tokyo.

It was nice to see, smell and taste familiar Japanese things, and to feel a sense of "natsukashi" ("that takes me back"), but I was worried that Hyper Japan wasn't the right place for me. Perhaps it was really only aimed at people who hadn't been to Japan yet, or who hadn't been there for long. Just as I was about to drown my sorrows in another cup of green tea, I saw an intriguing sign: Stick Okonomiyaki. Okonomiyaki I knew for sure, but okonomiyaki was a kind of floppy, sticky pancake – how could it be on a stick?! I approached the stall and discovered that they were indeed selling okonomiyaki on a stick. Somehow they had moulded the okonomiyaki mix into a rectangular shape, and speared it. What a wonderful invention!

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As I wandered off munching on my delicious new discovery, I observed the people around me. Young people trying on kimonos, spinning around in the unfamiliar fabric. A girl encouraging her boyfriend to try sushi for the first time. A kid explaining a computer game to his bemused father. Teenagers looking at manga-style art, obviously inspired. An older man listening to an enka performance and watching the shamisen player with the skilled eyes of a musician. A woman taking notes as she watched a cooking demonstration. Everyone discovering something new about Japanese culture.

Hyper Japan covers so many different aspects of Japanese culture that, even if you think you've been there and seen it all, the chances are you haven't. As I walked around the stalls at Hyper Japan with newly opened eyes, I came across all sorts of things that were new to me. One stall was selling beautiful "Ten Ten Balls", which help to relieve stress. Another was offering kanji henna tattoos – well, I'd never seen that before!

Sitting by the stage, I watched fashion shows and heard about the varieties of different street fashion in Japan (I didn't realise there were so many categories). There was also an interesting session with film director Miki Satoshi and actress Eri Fuse, whose films I had not seen before. Natsuko Aso sang songs I didn't know, and showed me how well-known Japanese pop music is becoming overseas (some fans knew all the moves!). I hadn't expected to learn anything new at Hyper Japan, but I did, and I came away armed with new films to watch and a better understanding of Japanese youth culture and fashion.

Whether you've lived in Japan half your life, or never been there at all, if you want to discover something new about Japanese culture, Hyper Japan is the place to go. Of course, at the end of the day there's nothing like the real thing, and I would always recommend visiting the country itself. The tourism stalls at Hyper Japan were buzzing with excited crowds, and I hope that the taste of Japan over the weekend at Hyper Japan was enough to persuade some people to book that trip they've always been meaning to take.

Author: Ali Muskett



Ali is a London-based blogger and Japanophile, who lived in Japan for three years. Her blog, Haikugirl's Japan, covers all aspects of Japanese culture from ancient traditions to modern pop culture. She's particularly interested in festivals, food, and really big Buddha statues. Since returning to the UK, Ali has been looking for Japanese culture in the UK to photograph and write about. As well as writing Haikugirl's Japan, Ali writes freelance articles for other publications. [Read her blog here.](#)

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