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In N.Y., a Yen for Japanese Shops

By JOANN GREGO
Special to The Washington Post

With its large Japanese expat population and thousands of Japanese American residents, New York has long offered sushi restaurants and karaoke bars. More recently, the popularity of high-end design and funky pop culture from the Land of the Rising Sun and the Sinking Yen has brought a variety of Japanese-based retailers to town. Several can be found nowhere else in the United States, and they emphasize the wabi-sabi (an aesthetic that emphasizes impermanence and simplicity) and the cheap just as often as they do the Zen and the rarefied.

One such case is Muji, which opened its third free-standing store, in Chelsea, during the Thanksgiving weekend. Muji's largest branch, though, beckons calmly across the street from the chaotic Port Authority Bus Terminal. There, on the ground floor of Renzo Piano's supremely climbable New York Times Building, the Tokyo chain's entire cache of "no-label quality goods" awaits in a sea of white, beige and gray. Your booty might include lovely bone china teapots (\$31) and handy bamboo baskets (\$15), but the real treat lies in the super-necessities. Pick up toothbrushes, shower squeegees, notebooks and cotton swabs wrapped in brown paper. All are under \$5 and bear their original Japanese-language-inflected packaging.

A few blocks away, a bigger and fresher Kinokuniya bookstore has opened, replacing a 26-year-old Rockefeller Center outlet. Its first floor features enough English-language books (covering kimono to kitsch, Mishima to Murakami) to satisfy all manner of Japanophiles. Downstairs, gift items such as stuffed bears made from vintage obi and racks and racks of washi, or Japanese decorative paper, are available. Head for the third floor to check out the vast selection of Japanese-language works and to pick up a bento box lunch at Cafe Zaiya. In winter, the postcard view of ice skaters



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Mont Blanc chestnut cream pastry, offered only at this time of the year.

For more sophisticated desserts, try Kyotofu, the first American outpost of a cafe that draws lines of customers in Tokyo's chichi Roppongi Hills shopping complex. Its vaguely space-age vibe of padded white leather banquettes belies the serene pleasures

squeeze in two older staples on the Japanese circuit. The high-end department store Takashimaya (it includes a tea room, an art gallery and an exquisite flower shop) is a treat for the eyes, if not the pocketbook. Those on a budget can indulge by buying a bar of Japanese soap or a box of loose tea, which will be just as generously

swathed in tissue paper and ribbon as the pearl necklaces and silk scarves found elsewhere in the store. A few blocks away, Minamoto Kitchoan has

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ilk leads to St. i Street) and a smattering s, pubs and in the past est, though akaya, New e. Lined with

lovingly lit cedar-plank shelves, this small shop showcases the elegant bottles as an art form, while its emphasis on tastings and information respects the brew as an exact science. Sampling is encouraged, and a visit here is a perfect way to put a finishing touch on your Japanese shopping tour of New York. Kampai!

ESCAPE KEYS

WHERE TO STAY: In midtown Manhattan, the recently redesigned, and very sleek, Japanese-owned Kitano (66 Park Ave., 212-885-7000, www.kitano.com) offers a real Japanese experience. The Family Weekend packages (complimentary breakfast; rubber duck, cookies and milk for the kids; no extra-bed fee; maximum two adults, two children in one room) are \$340 a night, plus taxes. Regular January rates start at \$279 per room per night.

WHAT TO DO: If you stay overnight, you'll have time to take a \$3 (one way) shuttle from Port Authority Bus Terminal (625 Eighth Ave., Gate 51, South Building) to Mitsuwa Marketplace (595 River Rd., Edgewater, N.J., 201-941-9113, www.mitsuwanj.com; click on "English"), the Japanese-themed mall on the Jersey side of the Hudson. Open daily (generally 9:30 a.m.-9 p.m.), this complex features a huge supermarket plus Japanese specialty stores that sell just about everything, including toiletries, toys, tableware, even auto accessories. There's also an extensive food court, and 10 restaurants and cafes.

FOR MORE INFORMATION: Muji (620 Eighth Ave., 212-382-2300; 455 Broadway, 212-334-2002; and 16 W. 19th St., 212-414-9024; www.muji.us). Kinokuniya (1073 Ave. of the Americas, 212-869-1700, www.kinokuniya.com). Cafe Zaiya (18 E. 41st St., 212-779-0600; 69 Cooper Sq., 212-253-9700; and inside Kinokuniya; zaiyany.com). Book Off (14 E. 41st St., 212-685-1410, www.bookoff.co.jp/en/info/kaigai02.html). Kyotofu (705 Ninth Ave., 212-974-6012; 144 W. 18th St., 646-336-8188, www.kyotofu-nyc.com). Takashimaya New York (693 Fifth Ave., 212-350-0100 or 800-753-2038, www.takashimaya-ny.com). Minamoto Kitchoan (608 Fifth Ave., 212-489-3747, www.kitchoan.com). Uniqlo (546 Broadway, 917-237-8811, www.uniqlo.com/us/store). A Bathing Ape (91 Greene St., 212-925-0222, www.bape.com/#/shop). Sakaya (324 E. Ninth St., 212-505-7253, www.sakayanyc.com).

— J.G.

» **Coming Sunday**
The Long Weekend retreats across Virginia, in Travel.