

Art & Culture

The unique culture of Japanese convenient stores

By Laura Studarus*

The true star of the Akutagawa Prize-winning novel Convenience Store Woman is the convenience store itself. But what is it that makes these shops so magical?



CHARLY TRIBALLEAU/AFP/BBC.COM

In Sayaka Murata's award-winning novel, Convenience Store Woman, the true star of the story is the store itself.

In her popular novel, Convenience Store Woman, Japanese author Sayaka Murata tells the story of Keiko Furukura, a worker at an unnamed convenience store who is struggling to find a place in a traditional society due to her status as an unmarried 36-year-old with a blue-collar job.

However, the true star of the unorthodox character's story is her workplace, described as a tiny ecosystem, aimed not only at providing consumers nourishment, but also infusing their lives with new sources of joy, BBC.com reported.

"A convenience store is not merely a place where customers come to buy practical necessities," said Furukura in the novel's opening pages. "It has to be somewhere they can enjoy and take pleasure in discovering things they like."

Although I read the Akutagawa Prize-winning novel before my trip to Japan, the description above struck me as overly romantic. However, as someone who has made the mistake of equating fast food with low quality, I was surprised to find that Japanese convenience stores, such as 7-Eleven, Family Mart and Lawson (the three companies that claim the lion's share of the Japanese market), served as an introduction to local tastes, leading me to skip the basic crisps I'd usually grab at home in favor of sampling flavors like mayonnaise, umami (a fruit in the plum family) and soy sauce. I also found myself considering freshly made onigiri rice balls, grab-and-go udon noodles and traditional buns with flavors like pizza, sweet bean and pumpkin cream. It might not have been as utopic as Murata led me to believe, but even as a foreigner who needed help counting her change, the variety of the goods and the ease of finding a cheap lunch left a lasting impression.

Karen Gardiner, a Scottish writer now based in the United States, lived in Tokyo for two years, beginning in 2005. As a temporary expat, she shared the joy I found in the country's convenience stores (or 'konbini' as they're referred to in Japan). Any nearby store became a regular part of her routine.

"I'd only buy food from an American convenience store if I was really desperate—actually, I went into a 7-Eleven [in Baltimore, US] a few weeks ago when desperate and still didn't buy anything," she said. "They seem quite grim, like stuff has been sitting there for ages. I think someone visiting the US from Japan would be quite disappointed if they walked into a store here... I'd eat [in Japan] when I was out or on the way to or from work, or just needed a quick egg sandwich or onigiri."

* The article by Laura Studarus, a freelance travel writer and photographer, was first published by BBC.

Imam Khomeini Int'l University cooperates with French education center

The dean of the Faculty of Architecture and Urban Development of Imam Khomeini International University emphasized that this faculty, in collaboration with the Malacca High School of Paris, will hold the summer school based on traditional Qazvin gardens.

Fariborz Karimi added on Monday that Qazvin summer school brings together 30 participants from different countries with diverse disciplines to portray the future of the historic belt of productive gardens surrounding the city of Qazvin.

He added based on field research, conferences and teamwork with local stakeholders, students should propose a design based on the natural landscape valuation and the hydrological characteristics of the area as well as the potential environmental conditions associated with the rapid growth of the city.

"Part of the summer school programs includes two-day trips around the Qazvin area, as well as a five-day trip to explore attractive areas related to water architecture in Iran. These cities include Yazd, one of the UNESCO World Heritage Sites along the hydraulic system of the city's canals, as well as Isfahan as one of the ancient capitals of ancient Iran.

He said the school's programs, which will begin on August 27 and end on September 7, will include scientific lectures and conferences, workshops, field visits from and around Qazvin.

IRAN DAILY

Add.: Iran Cultural & Press Institute, #208 Khorramshahr Avenue Tehran/Iran

Iran Daily has no responsibility whatsoever for the advertisements and promotional material printed in the newspaper.

» License Holder: Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA)
 » Managing Director: Sadreddin Mousavi
 » Editor-in-Chief: Kambakhsh Khalaji
 » Editorial Dept. Tel: +98 21 88755761-2
 » Editorial Dept. Fax: +98 21 88761809
 » Subscription Dept. Tel: +98 21 88748900
 » ICPI Publisher: +98 21 88548992, 5
 » Advertising Dept. Tel & Email: +98 21 88500617- irandaily@iranagahiha.com
 » Website: www.iran-daily.com
 » Email: newspaper.iran-daily.com
 » Printing House: irandaily@icpi.ir
 Iran Cultural & Press Institute

EU eyeing further cultural ties with Iran: Danish envoy

European Union is willing to broaden its cultural relations with Iran, Danish ambassador to Iran said on Tuesday.

Danny Annan, the Danish ambassador to Iran, who is visiting the northwestern city of Tabriz on the occasion of European Film Week, said, "Compared with the previous year, the number of viewers and the cities participating in the event are up by 25 percent which shows the significance EU and affiliated countries attach to the close cultural relation with Iranian

people," IRNA reported. This year is the third consecutive year the event is being held in Iran.

The diplomat emphasized the importance of cooperation between various cultures to develop international understanding, adding that cultural bridges between Iran and Europe were created through collected resources and experiences of 20 European countries.

Referring to workshops being held by Cypriot, Dutch, Swedish and Swiss filmmakers during the week, Annan

expressed hope that the activities would lead to joint production with Iranian counterparts.

The long history of successful cinema of Iran, including the works of prominent filmmakers such as Kiarostami and Farhadi, serve as good source for understanding the life and concerns of people from another culture, the Denmark ambassador said.

The European Film Week kicked off in Tabriz on Saturday June 8 and six other Iranian cities.



IRNA

Katale Khor cave, hidden paradise in Zanjan's mountains



By: Zahra Mirzafarjouyan

Katale Khor cave is one of the most breathtaking caves in Iran which is located in Zanjan Province. The Katale Khor cave has been chosen as the first cave in terms of its crystals and cave formation, beauty and its numerous layers.

Iran has many caves, some of which are unique and special. There are many natural wonders in these caves; including magnificent stalactite and many million-year-old fossils. One of these beautiful caves in Zanjan city is katale khor cave. It is 150km south of Zanjan, off the Soltaniyeh-Hamadan road near Garmab.

The cave dates back to Jurassic period (120 million

years ago) and it had a lot of natural and artificial changes during this period. It was discovered about 67 years ago by a group of Iranian caveys. One of the Zanjan members of the group named Seyyed Asadullah Jamali has registered this cave.

In some western parts of Iran, "Katale" is referred to low altitude mountains and the appellation of this cave is probably due to its existence in one of these mountains. Khor has Avestan root which means Sun. Therefore, Katale Khor means "mount of Sun".

At first, caveys had to crawl to enter the cave 700 meters. This cave was residence of ancient people so that bones of about 80 people are still preserved. Then

the region was excavated and a route was created for walking. Researchers found a strange route in this cave which shows Katale Khor is connected to Ali Sadr Cave in Hamedan Province, at distance of 100km.

Katale Khor and Ali Sadr Cave are roughly homogeneous and created at the same time, but there are two main differences: the Ali Sadr Cave is water cave where you sit in a boat and watch the view but Katale Khor is almost dry.

The second distinction of this cave with Ali Sadr Cave is that Katale Khor's limes are purer which makes it more transparent. Lime stalactites and stalagmites, as well as huge halls and corridors which are mainly dry

have added to the beauty of the cave.

One of the features that made this cave one of the unique caves in the world is that the cave has 7 floors but so far only 3 floors have been discovered and there are waterfalls on its different floors. The stalactites in this cave are beautifully shaped and some of them are named after those shapes. Parts of the most famous parts in this cave are bride and groom, marriage cloth, sleeping lion, hound, lion paw and elephant's foot.

There are two visiting routes inside the cave: 3km open to the public and another 4km available only for experienced caveys. Tourists can visit 2850 meters of the cave in the first floor and visitor are asked to stop touching the stalactites and stalagmites to avoid devastating.

The best season to visit Katale Khor cave is in spring and summer. Visiting this cave will take half a day.

This report was first published by MNA.



MNA

Weather



49 23

Ahvaz



36 13

Borujerd



31 22

Rasht



33 16

Kerman



34 14

Arak



36 [^] 23 _v 23

Tehran



22 13

Bishkek



27 20

Istanbul



32 17

Amman



31 18

Minsk



29 10

Moscow