



Tune in Tokyo: The Gaijin Diaries

Tim Anderson

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Everyone wants to escape their boring, stagnant lives full of inertia and regret. But so few people actually have the bravery to run – run away from everything and selflessly seek out personal fulfillment on the other side of the world where they don't understand anything and won't be expected to. The world is full of cowards. Tim Anderson was pushing thirty and working a string of dead-end jobs when he made the spontaneous decision to pack his bags and move to Japan. It was a gutsy move, especially for a tall, white, gay Southerner who didn't speak a lick of Japanese. But his life desperately needed a shot of adrenaline, and what better way to get one than to leave behind his boyfriend, his cat, and his Siouxsie and the Banshees box set to move to “a tiny, overcrowded island heaving with clever, sensibly proportioned people who make him look fat”? In Tokyo, Tim became a “gaijin,” an outsider whose stumbling progression through Japanese culture is minutely chronicled in these sixteen hilarious stories. Despite the steep learning curve and the seemingly constant humiliation, the gaijin from North Carolina gradually begins to find his way. Whether playing drums on the fly in an otherwise all-Japanese noise band or attempting to keep his English classroom clean when it's invaded by an older female student with a dirty mind, Tim comes to realize that living a meaningful life is about expecting the unexpected...right when he least expects it.

Tune in Tokyo: The Gaijin Diaries Details

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Jess says

I unreservedly adored every page.

His wit is sharp, his jokes pointed and his language filthy. Just how I like it. I can only say I wish it had been longer.

Perhaps it was because the narrator/protagonist/author is so amazingly much like me. Substitute his being a gay man for my being a straight woman, and this book could just as well have been about me if I finally packed up and headed to Japan to teach English (as I often fantasize about doing.) I've done my stints abroad, and know the sort of things that strike you when you are in a completely new culture. Heck, I even currently wait tables and dust off my college diploma, play the viola and enjoy the club scene from time to time. We have similar natures, histories, senses of humor and impulses. Perhaps this biases me unfairly toward loving this book.

But I really think almost anyone with a fun-loving, slightly perverse nature, and any sort of culture-curiosity can enjoy this. Most especially those who have been to Japan or have felt the bite of the Japanese Bug. The author lands himself in Tokyo, unable to speak a lick of Japanese, and falls head over drug-addled heels in love with the quirky people that are the Japanese.

I would especially recommend this book as a pre- or post-trip to Japan read especially.

Glenda says

I borrowed this memoir through the Kindle free lending library. I'm so glad I did not pay for this piece of nonfiction.

Tim Anderson's memoir promised a recounting of his time teaching English in Japan. Unfortunately, the memoir is uneven with the author undecided about what he wants these recollections to be--an inspirational and humorous look at teaching English as a second language or a rant about drinking, porn-viewing, partying, drug usage, and looking for mister right.

Teachers have enough of an image problem without one of us describing his substance abuse and constant benders. Anderson should have stuck to the teaching stories and left the partying to memoirists like Stephen Tyler.

Kevin says

Sigh. It's time's like this that I need Goodreads to change its rating system. I did not like this book, but I can't rate it one star (I rate the DaVinci code that, for reference, and nothing else deserves that rating, except maybe Mark Twain). Sooooo I gave it two stars, but don't let Goodreads fool you, this book is NOT "Ok".

So, it turns out Japan is crazy-fucked-up-interesting! And somehow the author makes me fall asleep when relaying the stories that should, by any reasonable metric, be interesting. I guess part of the problem is that I

wanted stories ABOUT Japan, and what I got were stories that took place IN Japan. Most of the things I read could have taken place in any reasonably large American city.

The other problem with this book is that the author is formulaic. He describes a series of events, beginning calmly and slowly building a crescendo of outlandish metaphors and exaggerations. By the end of the chapter, you feel like you are reading an Oatmeal Valentines card... I'll pause while you click the below link for reference:

<http://theoatmeal.com/horrible2>

... Harry Potter plots have more variation. Sad but true.

Hope says

Anyone who has spent an extended time in Japan can find humor in this book. There are a few sections that ring true as absolutely real and you almost find yourself relieved by the fact that someone finds a few things just as messed up as you do.

However, if you look at it as someone who has been around the area for a long time you wonder why he is hung up on some very trivial things that and specific sub-culture aspects that anyone who has been here for a while hardly notices.

Tara says

Review:

It's not often I read non-fiction, and when I do it's mainly on the subject of Japan. Previously, it's generally been histories, but when this one went onto the Kindle daily deal, I couldn't resist it – even if it took months for me to finally get to reading it! I have to admit, the main appeal for me is the fact I'd love to do something like this myself one day, having already learned a lot of Japanese whilst in school, and really wanting to travel whilst I can!

This book did make me laugh out loud – I liked the way that Tim Anderson manages to capture the differences between the Japanese way of life and that of the Western world. He manages to introduce things – like the social gaffes made by foreigners in a funny, but very realistic, way! I also love the way he talks so passionately about his time in Japan, and how frank and honest he is about things, even those he wasn't so keen on!

The only thing about this book I would give as a warning is that there are a lot of references to drug and alcohol use, so if you aren't comfortable with either or both of those things, this won't be the book for you. There's also a lot of reference to the fact that the author is gay, and the fact is mentioned throughout. This didn't bother me personally, but there are a lot of comments on Goodreads about that fact – and that some people felt it was overstated.

Overall, I loved the subject matter of the book, and found Tim Anderson to be an enjoyable narrator, even though some of the humour didn't quite do it for me. A very nice memoir of a few months in modern Japan, and a nice reference for anyone considering doing the same thing!

Overall rating: 3/5

Writing: 4/5

Originality: n/a

Characters: n/a

My Enjoyment: 3/5

Cicely says

This is a most colorful rendition of a Tokyo experience than any I've ever read. Tim Anderson makes you feel, not as if he is selling Tokyo, but as if he is immersing you in his experience in a new world. I found myself laughing at the top of my lungs before I finished the prologue. If he were to write his memoirs, I would snatch it up in a heartbeat. Not because he's famous, but merely for the anticipation of the colorful descriptions.

Allison says

Generally amusing account of an American man teaching English in Japan. A little reminiscent of Sedaris' habit of self-deprecation, but not derivative. Gets good humor out of cultural differences without overtly mocking. I enjoyed it as a light read.

Vanessa says

I love reading about Japan and the Japanese culture. I find it fascinating beautiful and elegant. However this book managed to capture none of this and was more about drugs, clubs and sex. Such a disappointment.

John says

I had seen this book mentioned on Andrew Sullivan's blog a while ago, forgotten about it, and then recently saw it on my library's New Books shelf, so thought I'd check it out.

Gay American underemployed fellow (phi beta kappa from UNC isn't exactly chopped liver) decides to chuck it all for a job teaching ESL in Japan. Well, he does remind us that he's gay, but there's little about the gay Japanese "scene" until a chapter late in the book. Unfortunately, that's about when references to drug use begin to escalate ... ho hum. He's funny, but by the end the humor seemed forced to me. Moreover, Tim doesn't explain that he isn't single until late in the book either. Actually, he doesn't explain his relationship with Jimmy much at all; he's abruptly introduced as a "given" and the chapter runs with his visit. Recommended, though I wouldn't blame folks who say they couldn't finish it.

UPDATE FEBRUARY 2017

I decided to listen to the audio edition, not recalling the details of the story, so it was "new" for me. This time I wasn't as taken with the drugs, as I was how . . . ummmm . . . flamboyant the narration made him seem,

which made it tough to read the book in more than small doses. There are many funny episodes, such as having a crazy lady "act out" seated at the next restaurant table, but a fair amount of the time it's a bit self-absorbed. The audio experience may be more like hearing Tim relate the episodes himself; however, I'm not sure folks with a low tolerance for drama queens (to be blunt about it) could manage that format.

Marilyn says

Interesting diary of the author's two years spent teaching English in Tokyo. This probably won't really appeal to anyone who hasn't spent some time there but nevertheless, a funny take on life as a foreigner in that great city.

Randee says

I had read the author's book, 'Sweet Tooth' and had enjoyed it, so when I discovered he had written a book about his experience living in Japan, I knew I had to read it immediately. I am interested in Japan and the Japan experience, impressions of living in Japan and almost any kind of travel writing. Especially Japan, however. Mr. Anderson went to Japan to teach English to students of all varieties and fell in love with the country. Most people do. I enjoyed his observations and stories about his students, cultural differences experiences. Just as I liked him in 'Sweet Tooth', I liked him here as well and hope he continues to write about his life.

JanBreesmom says

I received 'Tune in Tokyo: The Gaijin Diaries' by Tim Anderson as a First Reads Giveaway from Goodreads.com. I found this book both informational and enjoyable. Informational in his explanations of the changes he made to acclimate himself to the foreign culture of Japan and enjoyable in his humor in sharing these things.

I recommend this book to people looking for a change, mulling over the possibilities. I recommend it to anyone who enjoys reading of travel. I also recommend it to people who enjoy reading a book with real humor, having a sense the absurd in life.

Marsha says

I loved Anderson's account of his two years in modern day Tokyo. First of all, his sense of humor is wonderful. I felt like I was right there in Japan with him. Anderson went to Japan to teach English. At first he taught English through school classes. Later, he did some independent contracting. He taught some children who had lived in America for a few years so unlike the adult students at the schools, they were not impressed by Anderson, as they had already been exposed to American culture (TV, movies, language and schools). So Anderson was challenged in trying to get the children to do their studies.

Anderson gets into a discussion about how the Japanese women are attracted to men who were not Japanese. Anderson noticed that no matter how nerdy or ugly a guy might be, he still would attract beautiful Japanese

women. Anderson concluded that perhaps the women also were looking for “free” English lessons. One female student liked Anderson, but he was a homosexual, so he had to distract her and finally she became interested in another American. Anderson was happy the other man came to his rescue to “save the gay.”

I enjoyed Anderson’s tales of trying to teach the Japanese English and his own task in trying to learn Japanese. Much of his teaching was in trying to have his Japanese students have a conversation in English. They discussed almost anything and everything, from the mundane to challenging or inappropriate. For instance, he recalls one class wherein he had a student who liked to get a reaction out of other students in the class by bringing up such topics as the fact that when she and her husband got married, they agreed not to “fart” in front of each other. Then of course, the students asked Anderson to explain what “fart,” meant, which was an awkward situation for Anderson to be in.

Anderson defines a gaijin as a foreigner or a pest, and a fat alien who gets stared at on trains. The Japanese do, in fact, tend to stare at non-Japanese on trains, and they do think Americans in particular are mostly fat and strange. Anderson is tall so he stands out, however, he wrote that he lost 28 pounds while living in Tokyo.

Anderson goes on to write about some of the culture and food. Anderson plays the viola and joins a band. He writes about the friendships he made with some of his roommates and other teachers. He also wrote about one roommate who only lasted a short time before being dismissed from teaching as he was often in a drunken stoper, which just proves as I have myself experienced, that often most people have at least one scary roommate story to share.

Anderson wrote about his American boyfriend Jimmy’s visit to Tokyo. Jimmy, who is very matter-of-fact type of guy and tells it like it is, was often misunderstood in Japan where politeness is generally a necessity. However, it was because of Anderson’s association with Jimmy that finally, after two years, he decides to return to America and to his relationship.

karenbee says

The entire time I read *Tune in Tokyo*, I was wondering why I wasn't enjoying it more. It would have made a good blog, probably, and I can see it working as a series of email updates to friends, but as a book it's disjointed and feels repetitive.

Really, I think the main problem here is that I don't click with Anderson's style. He makes sweeping generalizations and uses strange turns of phrase ("Yasuko's eyelids dim") and talks about drinking and recreational drug use but somehow makes both boring. It just all made me want to roll my eyes a lot! And then I felt mean because he seems like a decent enough dude underneath it all, but comes off as self-involved and spoiled in *Tune in Tokyo*. That's probably a hazard that comes with publishing something that IS essentially a diary, after all.

If you enjoy Anderson's sense of humor and voice (maybe try the Kindle sample first?), you'll probably enjoy this book, as long as you don't go into it expecting a travel memoir: this is a book about Anderson, not about Japan.

TOTALLY IRRELEVANT FAVORITE TYPO: "Stationary" instead of "stationery," more than once. This is always one of my favorite typos, but it made me giggle more than usual when Anderson discussed a washi paper store . . . "For me, it's a big pile of 'meh,' but those who are into stationary had better fasten their seatbelts."

Joseph Frankmor says

This was a really hilarious adventure through Japan. I couldn't stop reading and giggling. My personal favorite bit was the Empress of Ginza chapter, but the whole book is excellent. Definitely would recommend it.
