**UNIVERSITY OF NEW ORLEANS**

**English 2090/4391** Adam Karlin

**Nonfiction Travel Writing & Reading Travel Literature** 301-481-7289 UNO-Japan: Study at Dōshisha University, Summer 2022 Email: [akarlin@uno.edu](mailto:akarlin@uno.edu)

Class meets Period III (1:10 - 2:40 pm)

“Serendipity was my tour guide, assisted by caprice”  
― Pico Iyer

“A journey is a fragment of Hell.”

― Bruce Chatwin

**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

A study of creative travel literature, specifically travel literature that deals with Japan as a subject. Students will discuss how Japan has been conceptualized by foreigners, how Japanese react to these depictions, and means of describing place that avoid the pitfalls of essentializing or romanticization. We will also engage in a Travel Writing workshops, intended to assist aspiring writers to become better and more instinctive at their craft.

**COURSE GOALS AND OUTCOMES**

1. Understand the ways in which Japan has been depicted by non-Japanese authors, artists, and filmmakers.
2. Learn, and potentially develop, techniques associated with writing travel nonfiction, and by extension, literary nonfiction.
3. Interrogate concepts of place, setting, and the benefits and pitfalls of relativizing and essentializing a destination
4. Learn and practice the reading and writing skills critical to both digesting and producing place-related nonfiction writing.

**REQUIREMENTS TO ACHIEVE COURSE GOALS**

1. Participants will read assigned readings and engage in class discussions.
2. Participants will embark on field trips where they put best travel writing techniques into practice.
3. Participants will produce presentations and essays that demonstrate command of subject matter.
4. Participants will produce one piece of longform narrative travel writing (ideally 8-12 pages, but can be longer), and will participate in workshopping of their peers’ respective essays.
5. Participants will provide mindful critiques and line edited drafts, and give and receive constructive oral criticism in workshop discussions.

**PARTICIPANT LEARNING OUTCOMES**

1. Participants will become more thoughtful readers of writing on place, particularly writing that depicts a foreign culture.
2. Participants will become more skillful creative writers.
3. Participants will become more resourceful reporters, observers, and tourists (and learn there is nothing wrong with being a tourist!).
4. Participants will become better constructive critics of their own writing and the writing of their peers.

**READINGS**

I will provide all of the below readings via Moodle. Many of these pieces are essays written for a commercial audience, while others are chapter length excerpts of selected travel memoirs.

* 1. *A Supposedly Fun Thing I’ll Never Do Again*, by David Foster Wallace
  2. *Standing By*, by David Sedaris
  3. *The Songlines* & *In Patagonia* (excerpts), by Bruce Chatwin
  4. *Land of the Rising Cliché*, Makoto Rich, New York Times
  5. *A Cook’s Tour* (excerpts), by Tony Bourdain
  6. *The Lady & the Monk* (excerpts), by Pico Ayer
  7. *A Beginner’s Guide to Japan* (excerpts), by Pico Ayer
  8. *Japan: An Attempt at Interpretation* (excerpts), by Lafcadio Hearn
  9. Lonely Planet guidebooks, (excerpts)

# *Oishinbo: Japanese Cuisine, Vol. 1: A la Carte* (excerpts), by Tetsu Kariya

* 1. *Old Kyoto* (excerpts), by Diane Durston
  2. *The Sarashina Diary*, by Anonymous
  3. Selected poetry by Basho

**FILM**

This class covers cultural depictions of Japan, and to this end I would like you to watch *Lost in Translation* and *Tampopo* during (or before) our first week of online class.

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

**Assignments:** One work of travel writing, approximately 8-12 pages, but can be longer. This essay should be written as a long-form piece of creative nonfiction, and incorporate research about a previously unknown subject, and ideally, quotes from outside of the author’s voice. The essays should also cover the destination we are studying in (i.e. Japan). With this said, because we have a limited time as a class, I will need essay submissions by the end of our first week. These first week essays *only* must still be travel-oriented pieces, but they may be written on places you have visited in the past.

**Flash travel piece(s):**  Following group excursions with myself (see below), class field trips, or their own weekend adventures, students will be asked to produce a flash piece of travel writing (500 words maximum), to be shared with the class on Mondays. These pieces will serve to sharpen students’ command of descriptive language and may serve as a template for your longer essay. You may also opt, no more than twice during the semester, to write a guidebook entry in place of a flash essay that includes destination reviews and practicality details (opening hours, contact information, etc.).

**Final Exam**: A final in class exam will consist of an essay question that will demonstrate understanding of class readings and presentations.

**Excursions:** I have listed optional excursions to different destinations in and around Kyoto. These destinations link to a weekly theme related to travel writing (i.e. writing about culture, food writing, etc.). These trips will also serve as inspiration for your Monday flash writing exercises. With that said, I understand you are in Japan for a limited time and may well have your own list of places you want to visit. Go for it! You will still be expected to write a flash travel piece about wherever you traveled over the week for Monday’s class (‘places you travel to’ is a broad term that could include, say, ‘Tokyo’ or ‘my neighborhood *izakaya*’). Feel free to write about program-wide field trips as well. The excursions I have chosen will serve as an introduction to that week’s travel writing theme (i.e. food, nature, etc.).

**Workshop protocol**: An ideal workshop is an environment where participants can anticipate growth as a writer and be assured of a safe and respectable atmosphere for constructive critique. Oral and written criticism of a peer’s work must aim for both honesty and civility. When addressing each other’s work, we will critique elements of craft and content, not the character of the author. Bear in mind that it is equally valuable for a writer to know what is working in a piece, alongside knowledge of what may need some attention. Ultimately, our purpose is to become better writers, not compete with each other.

**Critiques:** Written critiques are one of the fundamental cornerstones of workshop. All participants will bring two typed critiques for each piece of submitted writing, barring flash/guidebook work. These typed critiques must be a minimum double-spaced page in length. One critique goes to me, the other to the writer, who should also receive a notated, line-edited hard copies of their draft after we’ve discussed it in workshop.

**Participation:** Participants are expected to regularly and punctually attend class. All assigned drafts and critiques must be completed before class convenes. Courteous participation in oral discussion is both a class requirement and another cornerstone of a successful workshop.

**Class Format**: Primarily discussion. On Mondays we will discuss the places we have visited over the weekend and have open class flash readings associated with those destinations. These will be followed by presentations.

**Presentations:** Once during the semester, groups will make a presentation and lead a discussion on one of the assigned readings. Your presentation should last roughly 20 minutes (feel free to go over, but try not to go under), and I ask that you bring copies of the presentation to share with classmates. These presentations should demonstrate your knowledge of the assigned readings and understanding of core class concepts.

**Attendance and punctuality:** Participants are expected to be consistently present and on time. Unexcused absences and lateness will adversely affect a participant’s grade. Please contact me, preferably well beforehand, about any circumstance that will cause you to be tardy or absent.

**Conferences:** I’d love to discuss your work. I will make myself available each week to provide one on one critiques to whomever has submitted pieces that week.

**ADDITIONAL ASSIGNMENT FOR ENG 4391 ONLY**

**Final paper:** A final term paper on a topic selected by the student, and approved by the professor, that demonstrates an understanding of class concepts and readings. This paper should cite scholarly articles and measure no less than 10 pages.

**Evaluation (2090):**

* **Critiques (10%)**
* **Presentation (10%)**
* **Participation (20%)**
* **Final exam (20%)**
* **Draft of nonfiction (40%)**

**Evaluation (4391):**

* **Critiques (10%)**
* **Presentation (10%)**
* **Participation (10%)**
* **Final exam (10%)**
* **Term paper (20%)**
* **Draft of nonfiction (40%)**

**Grading for English 2090/4391:**

90-100% = A

80-89% = B

70-79% = C

60-69% = D

< 60% = F

**Accommodations:** It is University policy to provide, on a flexible and individualized basis, reasonable accommodations to students who have disabilities that may affect their ability to participate in course activities or to meet course requirements. Students with disabilities should contact the Office of Disability Services as well as their instructors to discuss their individual needs for accommodations. For more information, please go to http://www.ods.uno.edu.

**Academic integrity**: Academic integrity is fundamental to the process of learning and evaluating academic performance. Academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, the following: cheating, plagiarism, tampering with academic records and examinations, falsifying identity, and being an accessory to acts of academic dishonesty. Refer to the Student Code of Conduct for further information. The Code is available online at http://www.studentaffairs.uno.edu.

**TENTATIVE CLASS SCHEDULE**

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Week** | **Monday 月** | **Tuesday 火** | **Wednesday 水** | **Thursday 木** |
| **1 (Pre-departure)** | Meet online. Discuss your background and interest in Japan, as well as stereotypes you may associate with the country. | Discuss:  *Lost in Translation* and *Land of the Rising Cliché* | Discuss:  *Tampopo* | Overview of  workshop protocol. Conduct a sample critique. |
| **2 Excursion:**  **Fly to Japan!**  **Or take a boat. Whatever is clever.**  **Theme: Arriving & Preparing** | Orientation party | *Standing By*, by David Sedaris | *Lonely Planet: Japan* | *A Supposedly Fun Thing I’ll Never Do Again*, by David Foster Wallace  First round of creative essays due |
| **3 Suggested Excursion: Fushimi Inari Taisha**  **Theme: The temple of culture** | Read flash writing  Presentation: *A Beginner’s Guide to Japan*, by Pico Ayer | Presentation: *The Lady & the Monk*, by Pico Ayer | Workshop | Second round of creative essays due  Workshop |
| **4 Suggested excursion: Nishiki Market**  **Theme: Food writing** | Read flash writing  Presentation: *A Cook’s Tour*, by Tony Bourdain | Presentation: *Oishinbo*, by Tetsu Kariya | Workshop | Third round of creative essays due  Workshop |
| **5 Suggested excursion:**  **Samurai & Ninja Museum**  **Theme: Essentializing old Japan** | Read flash writing  Presentation:  *Japan: An Attempt At Interpretation*, by Lafcadio Hearn | Presentation:  *Old Kyoto*, by Diane Durston | Workshop | Fourth round of creative essays due  Workshop |
| **6 Suggested excursion:**  **Kameoko or Mt Hiei**  **Theme: Nature writing** | Read flash writing  Presentation: Bruce Chatwin’s writing | Presentation:  *The Sarashina Diary*, by Anonymous, and Basho poems | Final discussions | Final exam |