

Manga, Mario, and now ninja: Japan's hopes for wooing tourism

By Yuri Kageyama
AP Business Writer

TOKYO — Japan is turning to those hooded samurai-era acrobatic spies known as ninja to woo tourism.

The Japan Ninja Council, a government-backed organization of scholars, tourism groups, and businesses, said it's starting a Ninja Academy to train people in the art of ninja and building a new museum in Tokyo devoted to ninja, which is set to open in 2018.

"The art of ninja is made up of various elements, such as combat, survival techniques, and astronomy," Jinichi Kawakami, known as "the last ninja" and a master of the Koga ninja school, told reporters at the Foreign Correspondents' Club of Japan. "We hope this will appeal to people all over the world."

The council, set up in 2015, has created an official logo for certified products and movies to nurture what it called the "ninja business" and it hopes to educate "ninja ambassadors" to promote the culture globally.

The first certified product is origami, or folding paper, for messages shaped like a *shuriken*, the star-shaped daggers ninja throw as weapons.

Hiroshi Mizohata, council vice president, who heads the Osaka Convention & Tourism Bureau, shrugged off questions about commercializing the tradition.

Dressed in a black ninja outfit, he



stressed that ninja fun is good for business and potentially a big part of the government's "Cool Japan" campaign, which includes animation, video games, food, and movies, especially leading up to the 2020 Tokyo Olympics.

The council put on a ninja-inspired martial-arts demonstration, in which a muscular actor used rope to ward off, choke, and disarm an attacker, and a woman dressed in a mini-ninja outfit did

flips to recorded rock music.

It also showed a guidebook in English highlighting several ninja-related places in Japan, such as castles where ninja had been employed, a gorge used for training by Sarutobi Sasuke, a legendary ninja, and a ninja-village theme park.

Tourism has been booming in Japan, with 24 million visitors from abroad last year, and those numbers are expected to grow.

TEMPTING TOURISTS. Members of Iga ninja group Ashura demonstrate a ninja-inspired martial art during a press conference held by the Japan Ninja Council at the Foreign Correspondents' Club of Japan in Tokyo. The Japan Ninja Council, a government-backed organization of scholars, tourism groups, and businesses, said it's starting a Ninja Academy to train people in the art of ninja and building a new museum in Tokyo devoted to ninja, which is set to open in 2018. (AP Photo/Shizuo Kambayashi)

Historically, ninja were hired by samurai as spies on enemies — hence their appearance in movies, eavesdropping from attics with summersaulting escapes from rooftops. Iga and Koga clan ninja were reputed to be the best. They have inspired countless novels, movies, and cartoons, including the *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*.

According to the council, ninja can stare at a burning candle without blinking, frequently massage their ears to stay nimble, and never gain weight above 130 pounds. Their diligence and perseverance, as well as their humble acceptance of anonymity, are integral parts of Japanese culture and should become a pillar export, the council argues.

Kawakami acknowledged that real ninja training is hard to pass down today, and said that's why he is called the last real ninja. But ninja have much to offer spiritually, such as the meditative focus they muster when clasp their hands in concentration in their trademark pose.

"It is also about respect to our ancestors," Kawakami said.

2016 Most Honored Elder Award Recipient

Marisa Newnam

Marisa Newnam was born November 25, 1944 in Manila, the Philippines to Dr. Florencio and Pacifica Price Barrios. She earned an Associates in Arts degree from Maryknoll College, then pursued a bachelor's degree in nursing from the University of Santo Tomas, graduating in 1966. After graduation, Marisa served in



the United States Air Force as a lieutenant in the Nurse Corps. She was assigned to Brookley Air Force Base in Mobile, Alabama, where she met her future husband, the dashing Lt. Albert Newnam. In 1968 they were assigned to Clark Air Force Base in the Philippines where Marisa resigned her commission when she became pregnant with their first child. The family later returned to the U.S. and Marisa pursued her career as a nurse. Before her retirement in 2000, Marisa worked at several facilities, including Houston Hospital Southwest, the Klamath Falls

Family Practice Clinic, and Kaiser Permanente in Salem. She and her husband have three children, Philip, Christina, and MaryAnn, and five grandchildren, Stryder, Emory, Malia, Anchor, and Ari. She currently volunteers extensively with the Salem Multicultural Institute, where she is a board member and cultural advisor, and is a great contributor to its World Beat Festival. In addition, she serves as an individual trustee for the Council of Filipino American Associations, is a member of the Filipino American National Historical Society, and a board member for the Marion Cultural Development Corporation. In her spare time, Marisa enjoys reading, travelling, dancing, teaching Philippine folk dances, and participating in cultural outreach.

The Asian Reporter Foundation is accepting nominations for its 2017 "Most Honored Elder" awards.

The recognition banquet will be held Thursday, April 20, 2017 at northeast Portland's TAO Event Center. Nomination forms and guidelines for eligibility are available for download at <www.ARFoundation.net>.

The nomination deadline is Wednesday, March 22, 2017 at 5:00pm.

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