



around the nation

Japanese 'Gun Tourists' Flock to Hawaiian Ranges

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Day to Day

Japan's strict gun laws are spawning an unlikely tourist industry. Luke Burbank reports on Hawaii's shopping mall firing ranges and the Japanese tourists who flock to them.

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MADELEINE BRAND, host:

I'm Madeleine Brand, and this is DAY TO DAY.

As winter's icy grip tightens around much of the United States, those with enough money or frequent-flier miles might want to escape to place like Honolulu. The area is famed for its beaches and sunsets, but there's another draw for many tourists, especially those from Japan: the chance to fire off high-caliber weapons. NPR's Luke Burbank has the story.

LUKE BURBANK reporting:

A word to those who have never fired a handgun before. If your first time involves a gun range located inside a Waikiki shopping mall and an uberpowerful .44-Magnum called the raging bull, this is not what you want to hear from your instructor about how he got hired.

Mr. IVAN NUEDA(ph): The thing was, I didn't know anything about guns, right? And then so when the general manager interviewed me, she goes, 'What do you know about guns?' I was, like, 'Just that you don't point it at anybody.' And then she said, 'Congratulations, you got the job.'

BURBANK: It's not that Ivan Nueda didn't have experience working in the mall. It's just that it was at a nearby snowboarding shop. For the last seven years, though, he's been working here at the Royal Hawaiian Shooting Club, where his fluency in Japanese comes in handy. The club is one of Waikiki's many shopping mall gun ranges. They're easy to find. Walk down any street and someone's trying to hand you a pamphlet featuring scantily clad women holding large firearms. The ads are aimed at Japanese tourists, who are mostly prohibited from gun ownership in their own country, tourists like Masuake Noritake(ph) and his young wife who traveled here from Tokyo.

Mr. MASUAKE NORITAKE: (Japanese spoken)

Mr. NUEDA: They came here for shopping, but within--since they're here, you know...

BURBANK: Since they're at the mall anyway, they might as well...

Mr. NUEDA: Yeah, why not shoot a gun, you know? OK.

BURBANK: Noritake was still clutching the paper targets he'd been shooting at. Amazingly, he'd hit dead center almost every time, even though he'd never actually held a gun before today.

Mr. NORITAKE: (Japanese spoken)

Mr. NUEDA: He says this is his first time and he doesn't understand why he shot so good. He's kind of surprised himself that he did so well.

BURBANK: All the guns are chained down to make sure nobody gets any ideas about heading out into the mall with one. Paper targets

hang some 50 feet away in front of a thick rubber backstop. Inspired by Noritake's success, I figured I'd take a shot myself, but my instructor had a word of warning when I put my hand too close to the chamber of the .44-Magnum.

Mr. NUEDA: If you hold here while you shoot, your hand's gone. Guaranteed. The power of the heat and everything escaping off of the side here is strong enough to cut you open. I've seen it happen. I mean, you'll live...

BURBANK: With those reassuring words, it was time for me to take a shot with the gun made famous by Clint Eastwood in the "Dirty Harry" movies.

Can I just pull the trigger at any point?

Mr. NUEDA: Yeah. Whenever you're ready.

(Soundbite of gunshot)

BURBANK: Oh, my God. That really just about knocked me over. How does Clint Eastwood do that with one hand?

Mr. NUEDA: That's the myth of movies, right?

BURBANK: After a few more shots, we reeled the target back in to see how I'd done.

Mr. NUEDA: There were six bullets. You nailed five.

BURBANK: One, two, three, four, five. So one of them went to Denver or something.

Mr. NUEDA: It went astray.

BURBANK: OK.

Thankfully, the rubber backstop had done its job. Masuake Noritake from Tokyo was still there admiring his sharpshooting skills. He said he and his wife were planning to come back the next day. Before that, though, they had lots of shopping to do and, if there was time, actually visit the beach. Luke Burbank, NPR News.

BRAND: DAY TO DAY turns in a moment. I'm Madeleine Brand.

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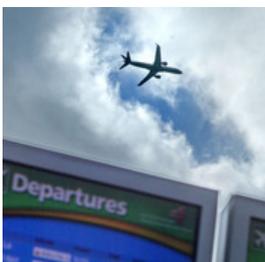
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