



# **Goldilocks Goes to Japan**

and other legends gone awry

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The miso soup is too salty, the straw cushion too stiff and the futon too hard...

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## **Introduction**

This book is a compilation of essays that have previously run in The Japan Times under the title 'Japan Lite.' As an American living in Japan since 1993, I have witnessed many changes in the people and culture, and these I have documented in the following essays.

If you have been to Japan, you will find many of these stories familiar but with some surprising twists. If you are unfamiliar with Japan and its culture, you are about to learn an enormous amount about Japan and the Far East by merely reading for fun. My motto has always been "Laugh and learn!"

I moved to Japan while doing my teacher training for an MA in Teaching English as a Second Language at Wright State University in Dayton, Ohio. But at the end of my 6-month teaching practicum, there were still many things to learn about Japan. Even now, after so many years, it seems that every day I learn something new about the culture.

After five years living in a medium-size city in Western Japan, I moved to a small island in the middle of Japan's Seto Inland Sea to live among traditional Japanese people and to experience the real Japan as known to me from books and movies. The life on the island where I chose to live, and where I still live, is a life that has changed little in the past 50 to 100 years. The island's 400-year-old "bon" dance is performed regularly and Shinto ceremonies such as the annual sending off of the "bad insects" to the sea god, are still performed by the local people. These ceremonies are performed according to tradition, and not for the purpose of tourists or TV.

In the essays that follow, I invite you to take a look at Japan from a variety of perspectives: the traditional and the modern, the local and the global, the good and the bad. You will find the essays follow no consistent format, but rather each was selected for the way in which it offers a different perspective on Japan. There is even something extra thrown in for our Japanese readers.

If at the end of the book, you find yourself still curious about Japan and the complexities of the culture, I invite you to subscribe to my weekly 'Japan Lite' column that appears every Saturday in The Japan Times. You'll find this information on the last page of the book. Subscription is free, and will keep you up-to-date on all things Japanese.

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## Goldilocks Goes to Japan

*Many Western fairy tales have been translated into Japanese. Little Red Riding Hood and The Tortoise and the Hare, for example, are very familiar in Japan. Goldilocks and the Three Bears, however, is not so well-known. Have you ever wondered what would happen if Goldilocks went to Japan?*

Once upon a time, three Japanese bears lived in a bamboo forest in Nagano prefecture. One day, after Mama bear made breakfast, she suggested they all go to the park for *radio taiso* morning exercises. So Mama bear, Papa bear and their son, Taro-bear, left the house.

At that time, a tourist named Goldilocks was walking through the forest. She had lost her way. The door of the bears' house was open, so she went inside.

In the kitchen, she saw breakfast sitting on the table. "I'm so hungry," said Goldilocks. She picked up the chopsticks and dipped the ends into the first bowl of miso soup and tasted it. "This soup is too salty!" she said. She dipped the chopsticks into the second bowl of soup. "This soup is good but it's impossible to eat with chopsticks!" She said. She looked over at the last, and largest breakfast. "This Star Bucks caffe Verona with croissant is just right!" she said, and ate the whole thing.

Goldilocks looked around the room for a Lazy-Boy chair to sit on. But there were no chairs.

"A house with no chairs?" she said. "How strange!" She saw some cushions on the floor. She sat on the first one, which was made of straw. "This cushion is not comfortable at all!" she said.

She sat on the second cushion. It was made of cotton and had "Hello Kitty" on it. "This cushion is good but there is no back support." she said. Then she noticed something sitting on the floor that looked like a chair with no legs. She sat on it and leaned back. "This pseudo-chair is just right!" She said. But just then, the aluminum frame creaked and broke.

Goldilocks was feeling a little tired so she looked for a place to lie down. She found a room with two futons in it.

"No beds?" she said. "How strange!" She tried the first futon but her feet stuck out the end. "This futon is too short," she said. She tried the second futon. "This futon has a pillow as hard as uncooked rice." She opened the shoji door leading to the next room. She saw a large bed and lay down on it. "This bed and this pillow are just right!"

Soon, the bears returned from their stretching exercises and sat down to breakfast. "Someone has been eating my miso soup!" said Papa bear, noticing the dirty chopsticks. "Someone's been eating mine too," said Mama bear, her chopsticks speared with small pieces of tofu. "My Starbuck's caffe Verona and croissant are gone!" exclaimed Taro-bear.

They went into the living room. "Someone's been sitting on my cushion!" said Papa bear, noticing his straw cushion tossed into the corner. "Someone's been sitting in mine too!" said Mama bear. "And someone's been sitting in my pseudo-chair!" said Taro-bear. "Look! It's broken!"

Mama Bear and Papa Bear went into the bedroom. "Someone's been sleeping in our futons!" they said.

"Eeeek! A foreigner!" yelled Taro-bear from his bedroom. "And she still has her shoes on!"

The scream awoke Goldilocks, who was now looking into the surprised faces of Mama bear, Papa bear and the biggest bear of all, teen-aged Taro bear." When she saw Taro-bear, she squealed with delight, "I like your Beckham haircut!"

The three bears all had a good laugh.

Goldilocks explained she was just a lost tourist and meant no harm. The three bears, thrilled to practice their English, helped Goldilocks find her way out of the forest and back to her hotel.

As they parted, the bears had tears in their eyes. "Samishii, na?" they said. "Goldie Rocks, please come back for another homestay next year."

