

Janjan Yokocho

(target: 250–500 ww, actual: 423)

Janjan Yokocho (“Janjan Alley”) is a long, narrow arcade in the southeast of the Shinsekai (“New World”) district lined with restaurants, cafes, shogi clubs, and other entertainment venues. The alley’s fortunes have risen and fallen over the years, but it is now celebrated for its retro charm, affordable dining and entertainment options, and classic South Osaka vibe.

Janjan Yokocho opened in 1921, when Shinsekai was a bustling entertainment district at the heart of “Great Osaka,” as the metropolis was then commonly called. Osaka’s economy was booming, the city was on track to becoming the largest and most prosperous in Japan, and its citizens were optimistic, open-minded, and eager to have fun. Even the word *janjan* reflects this atmosphere: it is onomatopoeia for the shamisen music played to attract patrons. The alley’s official name remains Nan’yo-dori Shotengai (“Southern Sun Commercial Arcade”), but it is virtually never used.

Janjan Yokocho, like the rest of Shinsekai, was all but destroyed by bombing during World War II. It continued to struggle into the 1950s, as depicted in Hayashi Fumiko’s unfinished novel *Meshi* (Food). During the 1960s, however, it gained a new lease on life as a popular dining destination for laborers working on the facilities for Osaka’s Expo ’70. The area was redeveloped in 1997, but care was taken to preserve the alley’s unique atmosphere, which had by then attracted attention from a new generation who appreciated its nostalgic charms.

Today, Janjan Yokocho is a time capsule of colorful signage, architecture, and design from decades past. Laborers and other local workers remain its core clientele, and many dining establishments offer “morning sets” that include a beer for patrons just coming off a night shift.

Kushikatsu, Mixed Juice, and Shogi

The iconic Janjan Yokocho food is surely *kushikatsu*, breaded and deep-fried meat and vegetable skewers, eaten with a dipping sauce. Yet all the classic Osaka delicacies can be found there, from *okonomiyaki* to local-style udon noodles that are softer and have a milder broth than the Tokyo version. The cafes also preserve their period charms,

including one that invented the beloved Osaka beverage “mixed juice.”

For those seeking entertainment, Janjan Yokocho is home to what claims to be “Japan’s narrowest video arcade” as well as nostalgic pleasures like shooting alleys. However, it is most famous for its game parlors specializing in go, mah-jongg, or shogi, the Japanese cousin of chess. More than a few professional shogi players got their start in the shogi parlors of Janjan Yokocho, and even today crowds gather outside the parlors to peer in through the windows at games in progress.