

CELEBRITY TRAVEL

# South America beckons musician

By Jae-Ha Kim  
Tribune Content Agency

In 1989, Shintaro Sakamoto was the frontman, vocalist and guitarist for the fledgling psychedelic rock band Yura Yura Teikoku. For their first real gig, they performed at a Tokyo venue called La.mama. "It was a daytime audition and if we passed, we'd be able to perform in the evening slot," Sakamoto told me from Tokyo. "I was 21 or 22 at the time. I had sung too much during the rehearsal the day before and ended up ruining my voice, so on the day of the show I could hardly sing at all. Needless to say, the performance was bad. And we, of course, failed the audition."

After the group's disbandment in 2010, the composer-producer formed his own label, Zelone Records, and released four solo albums. "Yoo-hoo," out now, is his fifth.

This interview with Sakamoto has been edited for clarity and length.

**Q: What would you like readers to know about "Yoo-hoo"?**

**A:** I produced the album with Soichiro Nakamura, who I have worked with many times, mixing and mastering. The album features my live band of AYA on bass, Yuta Suganuma on drums and percussion and Tetsu Nishiuchi on flute.

**Q: Does the music you hear in a particular city or country inspire your own work?**

**A:** The idea for the song "Tournament of Macho Men" came to me while I was traveling from Bangkok



Musician Shintaro Sakamoto said that travelling around France in his 20s affected him deeply. ZELONE RECORDS

to Chiang Mai in Thailand. It's not that I was directly influenced by Thai music, but I remember images popping into my mind as I walked around the cities. I shaped those ideas into a song after returning to Japan.

**Q: Did you write any of the songs on "Yoo-hoo," or any of your other albums, while you were on the road?**

**A:** I don't think I've ever written songs while on tour. I compose music when I'm alone at home. As for lyrics, I sometimes think about them while traveling, sitting in a car or plane, but I always finish them when I'm back home by myself.

**Q: Do you write your songs knowing that most international fans don't understand Japanese?**

**A:** Although I write lyrics in Japanese, I'm very particular about the sound and rhythm of the language, so I believe people can enjoy the songs even if they don't understand the meaning of the words. My music is influenced by all the different kinds of music I've listened to over the years.

**Q: Have you visited places for work that were so nice that you traveled back there later for a personal trip?**

**A:** I first visited Taiwan 20 years ago and liked it so much that I returned there privately soon after. It reminded me of Japan when I was a child. Even

though it was my first time there, it felt strangely nostalgic.

**Q: What was a trip you took as a child that stands out?**

**A:** When I was 15, I traveled from Nagano to a friend's house in Fukuoka. It was my first time riding a sleeper train alone, so the experience left a strong impression, with a mix of nervousness and excitement. It was a lot of fun.

**Q: What is your best and/or worst vacation memory?**

**A:** When I was young, I wasn't interested in traveling abroad, and I first went overseas around the age of 29. I traveled by bus through the south of France and ended up in Paris, and that trip was incredibly enjoyable. I feel like it changed my perspective on life. I have two worst memories from traveling. On both occasions, a friend I was traveling with was taken away by ambulance due to injury or illness. Fortunately, nothing serious happened.

**Q: What is a bucket-list venue that you have yet to perform in?**

**A:** I'm not sure about the venue, but since I've never been to South America, I'd love to go.

**Q: Where would you like to go that you have never been to before?**

**A:** Brazil, Portugal.

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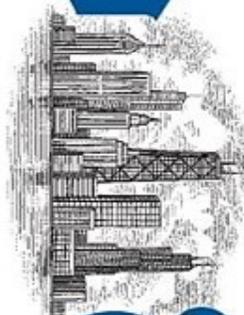


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