

Comedian stays extra to explore tour stops

By Jae-Ha Kim
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When comedian Atsuko Okatsuka was 8 years old, she thought her family was taking a two-month vacation to the United States.

"It was never supposed to be longer than that," Okatsuka, now 38, said in an interview from her Los Angeles home. "I wanted to go back (to Japan). When I realized I wasn't going back, (I started fixating) on little things I disliked. I remember just going off in elementary school suddenly and refusing to use the (pencil) erasers. My classmates and the teacher must have thought I was just this insane eraser police."

Okatsuka is kicking off the fall leg of her international Big Bowl tour.

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

Q: Was it challenging to make friends as a young immigrant?

A: Oh, yes. On the playground, there were these two girls I was playing with, and then two more people came and said, "Do you mind if we play with you?" and I said, "Sure, you can play with us," instead of "us." And then the people I was with laughed at me and made fun of me for getting it wrong. That made me go quiet for a long time, afraid to speak English again. I was still new to the language and had to learn these words I never wanted to learn. But it all worked out.

Q: Do you and your husband seek out warm vacation destinations or cold spots where you can go skiing?



Atsuko Okatsuka called throwing out the first pitch at a Chicago Cubs game a surprising experience. **LEE JAMESON**

A: You are very kind to think we are that physically active that we would even know how to put on ski shoes. I've seen people do it. My friends do it on Instagram. I watch them ski, but I've never actually done skiing myself. So we go where our tours take us. I live in Los Angeles, and I've been here since I was 8 years old. I am a weak person. My body is spoiled. I think it should be in 70-degree weather all the time, so I do prefer warm.

Q: Have you done anything that surprised even you?

A: I threw the first pitch or whatever at the Chicago Cubs game (in 2024). Can you believe it? Me? I have a dance background, so I can do some athletic stuff. I can aim and get it to the vicinity, so I got it to the plate, and they caught it.

Q: Where did you film the movie "Outcome"?

A: That was in Los Angeles. We filmed part of it at the El Capitan Theatre, which is very historic. I had been there previously and was the first female stand-up comedian to perform on that stage.

Q: What do you like to do when you have a little free time on tours?

A: We love city vibes, so it's not necessarily about

the weather. For example, on our European tour, we stayed a few more days in Paris, because that was our last stop, and we wanted to see more. Or with Barcelona, we tried to do a couple more days instead of skipping over to the next city. We really love walkable cities where we can really be among the locals there.

Q: Is there a restaurant where you ate something so delicious that you would go back right now if you could?

A: There is this place called Mukai in Shibuya (Tokyo) that I can't wait to go back to and eat there with Ryan, my husband. For some reason, it's really difficult to find good kaisendon in Los Angeles. It's kind of like chirashi with finely chopped raw seafood and roe piled on top of rice.

Q: How difficult is it to maintain the shape of your hair on the road?

A: I feel like it does have a life of its own. It grows back in different lengths every time. I have a particular friend who comes and cuts it every three weeks to a month. If I have to find someone new, sometimes stylists are intimidated about messing it up.

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