

Travel Back in Time with Japanese Historical Anime

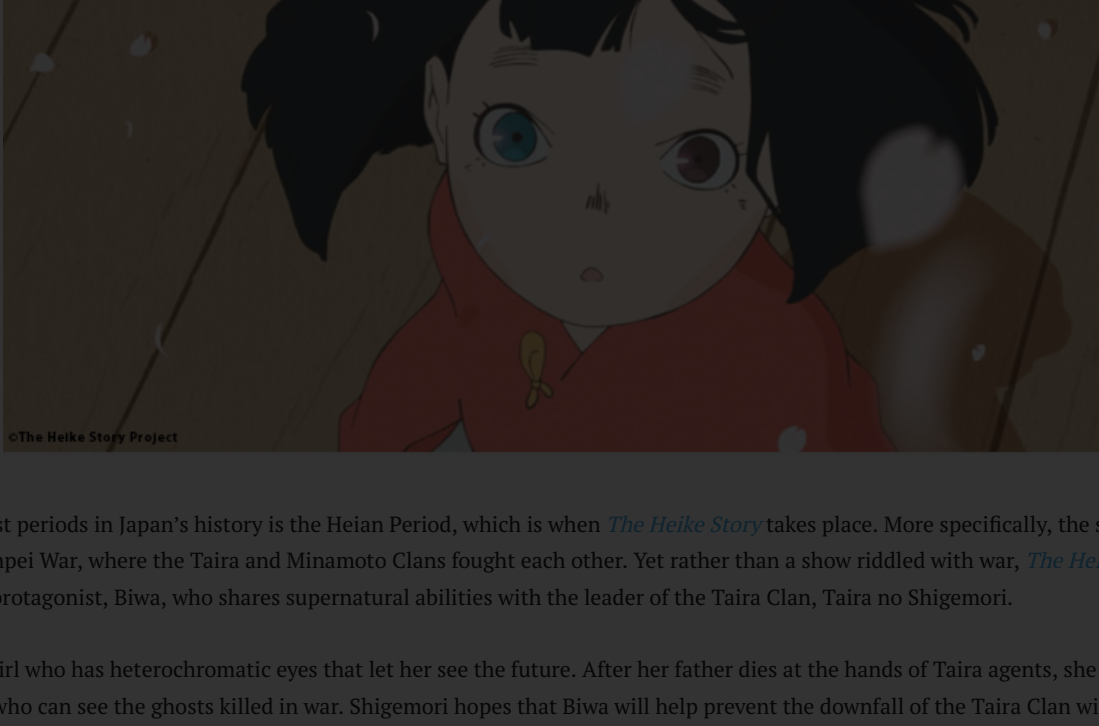
By [Deanna Nguyen](#) December 10, 2021

We've seen our share of isekai packed with fantasy lore and sci-fi shows with technologically advanced societies, but what about anime that allows us to travel to the past and vicariously experience a time period before we were around?

History buffs and anime fans alike will find plenty to love in historical anime about Japan, where stories take place throughout history, like the Edo Period and the Taisho Period. Some have more accurate depictions of their settings than others, but know that these shows are teeming with Japanese tradition, culture, language and historic events.

From the current season lineup of shows like *The Heike Story* and *Taisho Otome Fairy Tale* to classic fan favorites like *Samurai Champloo*, time travel with us to Japan's past with the anime below.

The Heike Story – Late Heian Period



The Heike Story (Funimation)

One of the earliest periods in Japan's history is the Heian Period, which is when *The Heike Story* takes place. More specifically, the story is set during the infamous Genpei War, where the Taira and Minamoto Clans fought each other. Yet rather than a show riddled with war, *The Heike Story* is more interested in its protagonist, Biwa, who shares supernatural abilities with the leader of the Taira Clan, Taira no Shigemori.

Biwa is a young girl who has heterochromatic eyes that let her see the future. After her father dies at the hands of Taira agents, she ends up living with Shigemori, who can see the ghosts killed in war. Shigemori hopes that Biwa will help prevent the downfall of the Taira Clan with her prophetic ability, while also chronicling the clan's internal and external affairs.

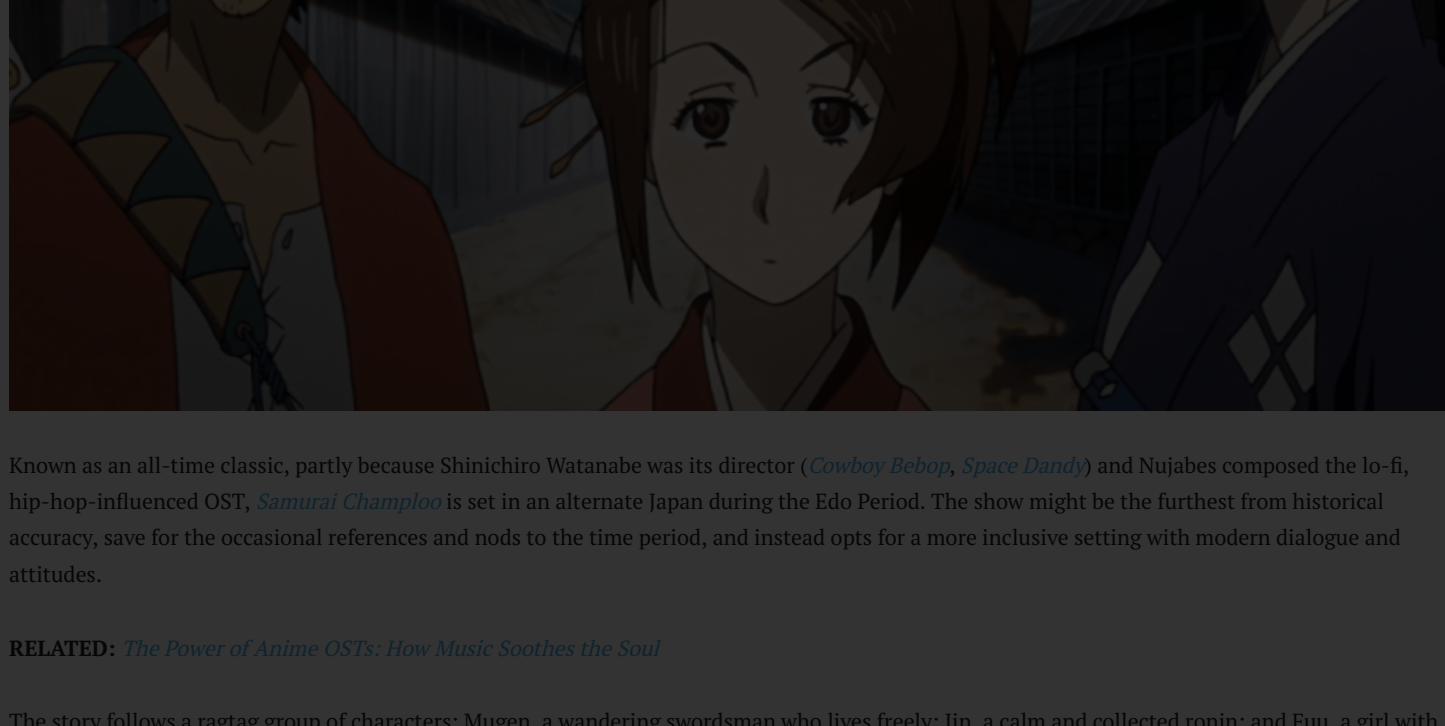
RELATED: [The Heike Story Unveils New Visual and Trailer for Japanese TV Broadcast](#)

The Heike Story is not a 1:1 depiction of the Taira Clan and Genpei War, given that the main characters possess supernatural abilities, but it's very interested in exploring Biwa's place during this time period. Biwa is biologically female, but wears clothes to appear like a boy in hopes of avoiding attention. She sees firsthand how the women around her are restricted to submissive roles, never allowed to speak up or act out. Biwa is an exception to the time period's gender roles.

If you're a fan of the incredible Naoko Yamada, then you'll love the story and art direction in *The Heike Story*.

Watch *The Heike Story* on Funimation!

Samurai Champloo – Edo Period



Known as an all-time classic, partly because Shinichiro Watanabe was its director (*Cowboy Bebop*, *Sword Gaijin*) and Nulabes composed the lo-fi, hip-hop-influenced OST, *Samurai Champloo* is set in an alternate Japan during the Edo Period. The show might be the furthest from historical accuracy, save for the occasional references and nods to the time period, and instead opts for a more inclusive setting with modern dialogue and attitudes.

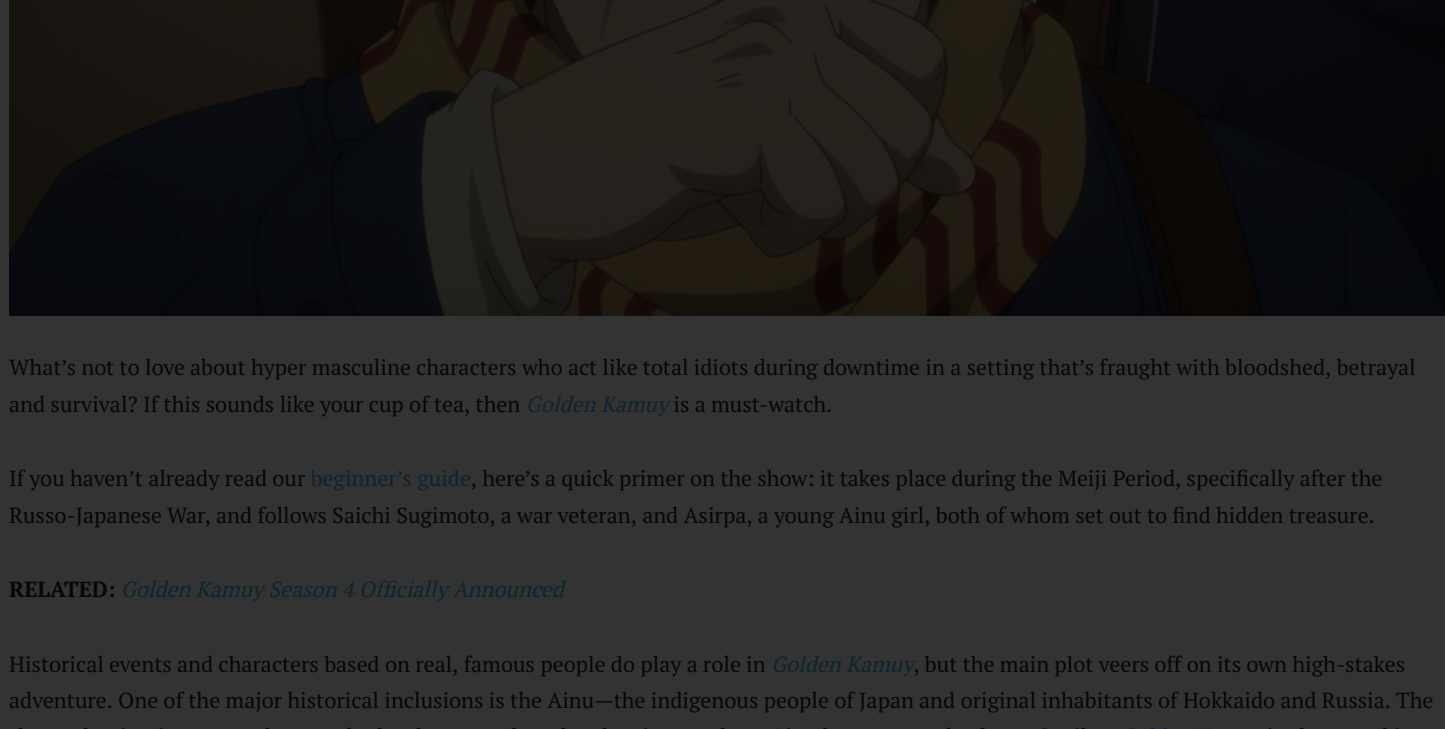
RELATED: [The Power of Anime OSTs: How Music Shapes the Soul](#)

The story follows a ragtag group of characters: Mugen, a wandering swordsman who lives freely; Jin, a calm and collected ronin; and Fuu, a girl with endless courage. After their chaotic first meeting, the three go on an adventure to find the sunflower samurai. Their distinctive, often dangerously immature personalities don't get in the way of their bonding friendship, as they share one common goal and help each other throughout the journey.

If you haven't watched *Samurai Champloo* yet, you're in for a treat! Fans of Watanabe's works and anything to do with hip-hop should add this to their watch list. While the Edo Period is depicted differently in the show, Watanabe envisioned a setting where strict samurai codes and a conforming society are replaced by themes of freedom, individuality and identity.

Watch *Samurai Champloo* on Funimation!

Golden Kamuy – Meiji Period



What's not to love about hyper-masculine characters who act like total idiots during downtime in a setting that's fraught with bloodshed, betrayal and survival? If this sounds like your cup of tea, then *Golden Kamuy* is a must-watch.

If you've already read our [beginner's guide](#), here's a quick primer on the show: It takes place during the Meiji Period, specifically after the Russo-Japanese War, and follows Saichi Sugimoto, a war veteran, and Asirpa, a young Ainu girl, both of whom set out to find hidden treasure.

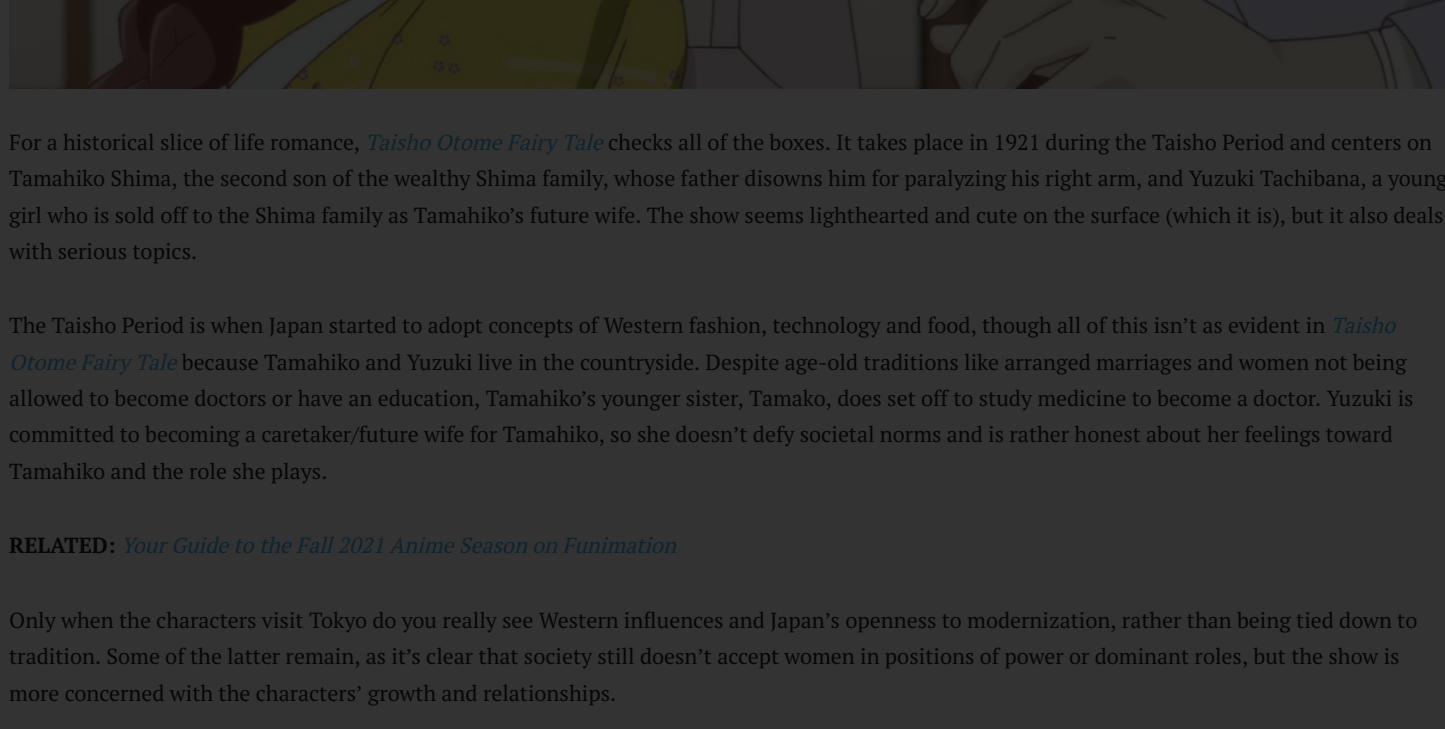
RELATED: [Golden Kamuy Season 2 Officially Announced!](#)

Historical events and characters based on real, famous people do play a role in *Golden Kamuy*, but the main plot veers off on its own high-stakes adventure. One of the major historical inclusions is the Ainu—the indigenous people of Japan and original inhabitants of Hokkaido and Russia. The show takes its time to teach not only the characters but also the viewers about Ainu language and culture. Spoiler: *Golden Kamuy* is also a cooking show!

The historical setting does push the characters into grim situations at times, but silly and often absurd moments happen throughout all three seasons of the show. It knows when to flip the switch from being a slapstick comedy to an intense drama drenched in gunshots and blood. In short, it's a treasure-hunting story but with frigid, brutal snowstorms as the backdrop rather than tropical oceans and sunshine.

Watch *Golden Kamuy* on Funimation!

Taisho Otome Fairy Tale – Taisho Period



For a historical slice of life romance, *Taisho Otome Fairy Tale* checks all of the boxes. It takes place in 1921 during the Taisho Period and centers on Tamahiko Shima, the second son of the wealthy Shima family, whose father disowns him for paralyzing his right arm, and Yuruki Tachibana, a young girl who is sold off to the Shima family as Tamahiko's future wife. The show seems lighthearted and cute on the surface (which it is), but it also deals with serious topics.

The Taisho Period is when Japan started to adopt concepts of Western fashion, technology and food, though all of this isn't as evident in *Taisho Otome Fairy Tale* because Tamahiko and Yuruki live in the country side. Despite age-old traditions like arranged marriages and women not being allowed to become doctors or have an education, Tamahiko's younger sister, Tamako, does set off to study medicine to become a doctor. Yuruki is committed to becoming a caretaker/future wife for Tamahiko, so she doesn't defy societal norms and is rather honest about her feelings toward Tamahiko and the role she plays.

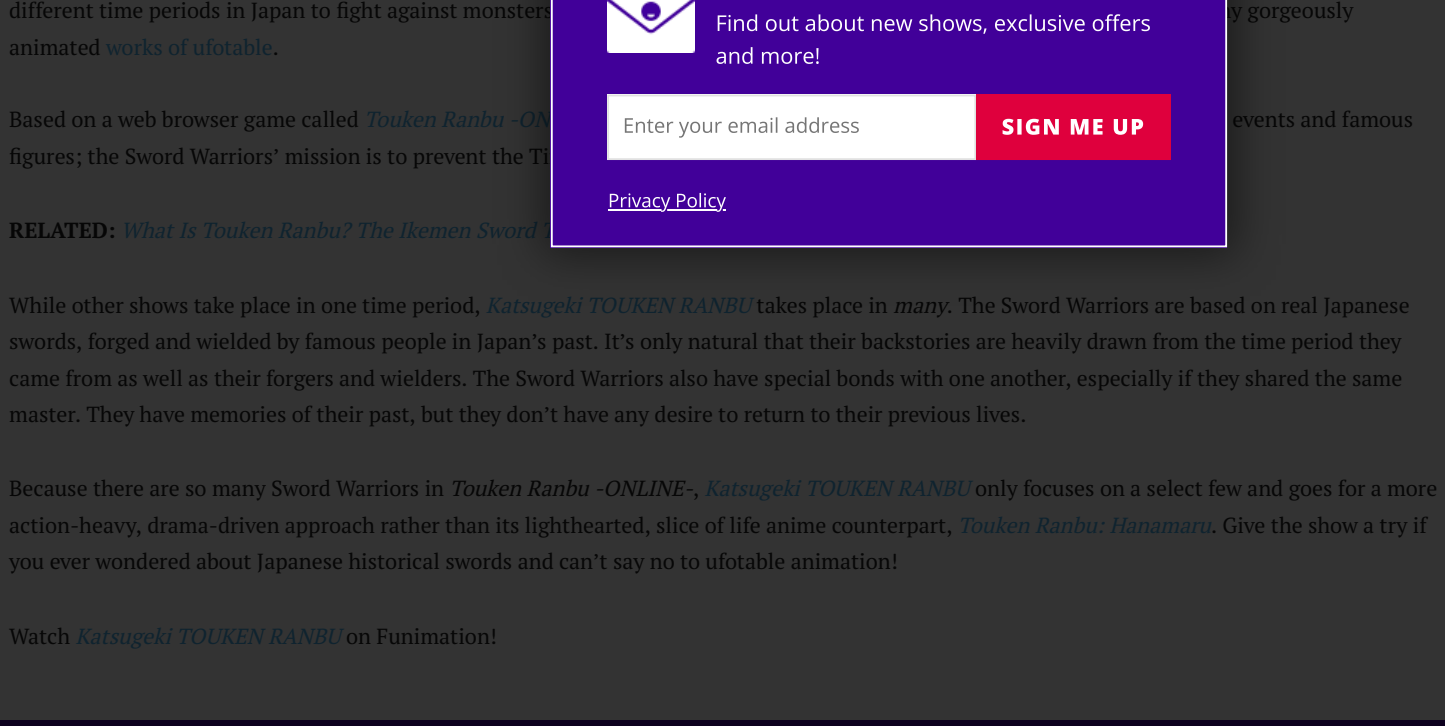
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Only when the characters visit Tokyo do you really see Western influences and Japan's openness to modernization, rather than being tied down to tradition. Some of the latter remain, as it's clear that society still doesn't accept women in positions of power or dominant roles, but the show is more concerned with the characters' growth and relationships.

Add *Taisho Otome Fairy Tale* to your watch list if you want to experience the Taisho Period through the lens of teenagers falling in love!

Watch *Taisho Otome Fairy Tale* on Funimation!

Katsugeki TOUKEN RANBU – Multiple Japanese Historical Periods



The idea of time travel in anime is nothing new, but when it comes to different time periods in Japan to fight against monstrous animated [series of villains](#).

Based on a web browser game called *Touken Ranbu*, the anime features the Sword Warriors' mission is to prevent the T

RELATED: [What Is Touken Ranbu? The Hidden Swa](#)

While other shows take place in one time period, *Katsugeki TOUKEN RANBU* takes place in many. The Sword Warriors are based on real Japanese swords, forged and wielded by famous people in Japan's past. It's only natural that their backstories are heavily drawn from the time period they came from as well as their forgers and wielders. The Sword Warriors also have special bonds with one another, especially if they shared the same master. They have memories of their past, but they don't have any desire to return to their previous lives.

Because there are so many Sword Warriors in *Touken Ranbu* (*ONE*), *Katsugeki TOUKEN RANBU* only focuses on a select few and goes for a more action-heavy, drama-driven approach rather than its lighthearted, slice of life anime counterpart, *Touken Ranbu: Hanamasa*. Give the show a try if you ever wondered about Japanese historical swords and can't say no to lovable animation!

Watch *Katsugeki TOUKEN RANBU* on Funimation!

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