

SOCIAL JUSTICE TOUR OF SAN JOSE JAPANTOWN

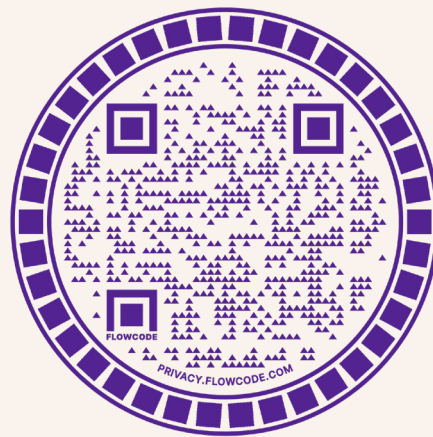
Dive into San Jose Japantown's rich history!

Did you know that it was built on the shoulders of past Chinatowns destroyed by arson? Before WWII, there were 43 Japantowns in the U.S. Today, there are only 3 Japantowns left: Los Angeles, San Francisco, and San Jose. Explore one of the last remaining Japantowns today.

CLICK OR SCAN BELOW TO ACCESS OTHER WAYS TO EXPERIENCE THE TOUR:



Google Earth Tour

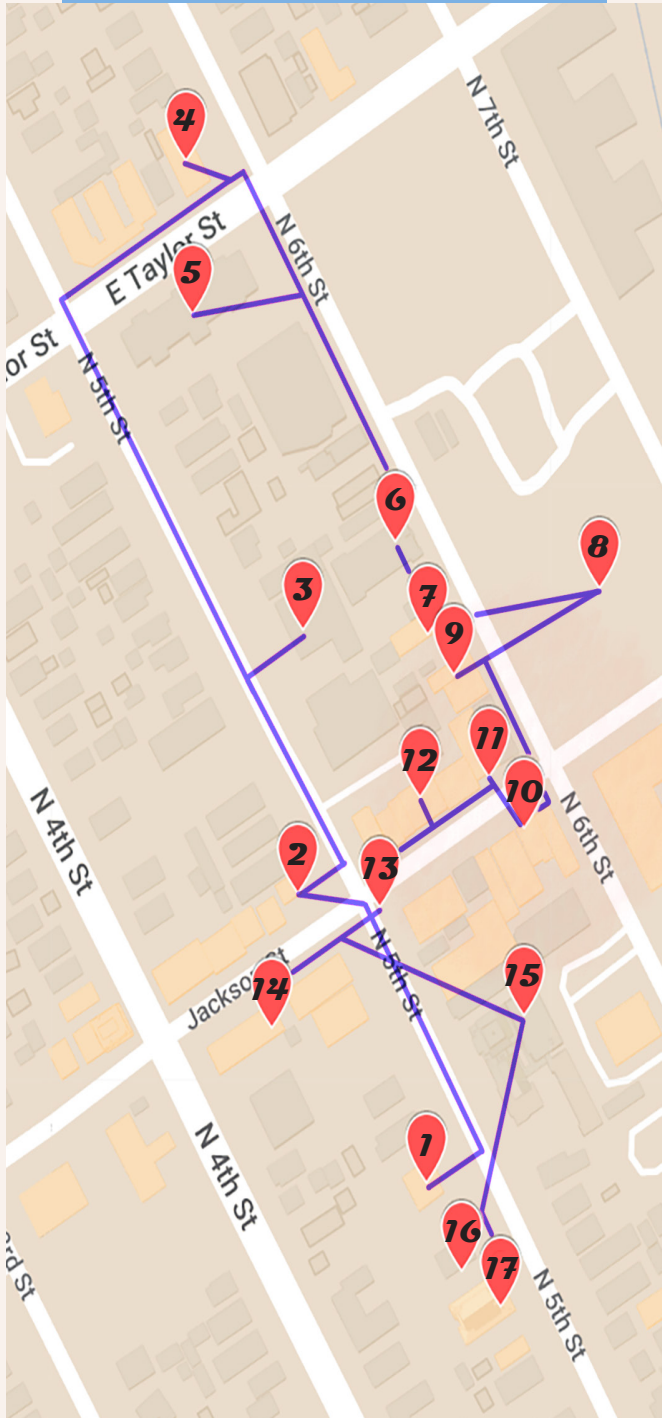


Tour Website

Our Japantown's unique charm is a result of Chinese, Japanese, Filipino, and African American ethnic enclaves coming together to create a neighborhood based on mutual respect and acceptance, as racist laws and redlining impacted their people. On this tour, you will be immersed in a vibrant community that thrives amidst adversity so intertwined in San Jose's history that you just can't miss it!

Location: between 1st and 9th Streets and between E. Taylor and E. Empire Streets in San Jose

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INTRODUCTION

- 1887: The City of San Jose approved an order declaring Chinatown a public nuisance. Less than 2 months later, arsonists burned the Market Street Chinatown to the ground. The City of San Jose did not formally apologize for the arson until September 28, 2021.
- That same year, John Heinlen, a German landowner who faced anti-German discrimination himself, felt sorry for the Chinese and leased 5 acres of his land to Chinese people, creating the Heinlenville Chinatown. Today, this is the site of Japantown.

This guide has some references to “A Short Intro to the History of San Jose Japantown for the Hidden Histories Team”, by Curt Fukuda. Citations will be noted with a small footnote under the description.

[565 North 5th Street](#)

7 ISSEI MEMORIAL BUILDING (IMB)

- 1910: Built as the Kuwabara Hospital, the building is named after Dr. Taisuke Kuwabara, who served the Japanese community. In the past, as the Japanese doctors were not licensed in the U.S., the hospital had to be overseen by Dr. Beattie, an American doctor.
- After WWII, it was used as a hostel by the Japanese American Citizens League (JACL) for Japanese returning from concentration camps and posted job listings.
- Today, the JACL owns and manages the IMB. It serves as an incubator for non-profit start-ups and is a designated City Historic Landmark.



Top: Kuwabara Hospital in construction (Photo courtesy of JAMsj).
Bottom: Issei Memorial Building today.

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2 ROY'S STATION COFFEE & TEAS

[197 Jackson Street](#)

- Bill Yasukawa and Doug Omori opened a gas station in 1938.
- The Murotsune family took over the business and Roy Murotsune operated Roy's gas station for 50 years after being released from one of the concentration camps.
- The next generation converted it into a neighborhood coffee shop in 2009, keeping the retro aesthetic.



Left: Bill & Doug's Gas Station (Photo courtesy of the Murotsune family). Right: Roy's Station Coffee & Teas today.

3 SAN JOSE BUDDHIST CHURCH BETSUIN

640 North 5th Street

- 1937: San Jose Buddhist Church was built (started in a home in 1902).
- 1908: formed the Buddhist Women's Association – gave first generation "Issei" women a greater voice in the church.
- Stored belongings of incarcerated families; and after WWII, served as a hostel for homeless concentration camp returnees.
- Today: conducts Buddhist services and hosts Lotus Preschool, community gatherings, and festivals.



Top: Construction of the San Jose Buddhist Church temple (Photo courtesy of JAMsj).

Bottom left: Temple garden.

Bottom right: Temple exterior.



245 Taylor Street

4 SANTO MARKET

Opened in 1946, Asian specialty grocery store for Hawaiian, Japanese, and Chinese cuisine.
Food recommendation: Poke Bowl.

5 FUJI TOWERS

The Japanese American community worked with HUD to help build low-income senior housing and ensure that 1st generation Japanese seniors could live in Japantown.



690 North 5th Street

6 PRAYER GARDEN CHURCH

651 North 6th Street

- 1943: Prayer Garden Church was founded as a progressive church by Milton Mathus.
- During the first decade, there was a multicultural congregation (Black, Hispanic, Chinese, Caucasian).
- 1960s: it became a mainly African American congregation. It is the oldest non-Asian church in Japantown.



Prayer Garden Church in 1945 vs. present day

7 FILIPINO COMMUNITY CENTER

Mid-1920s: "Pinoytown" grew in the area of Japantown, when the 1924 Immigration Act cut off the immigration of Japanese and Filipinos became the next big group of Asian immigrants to fill the agricultural labor force and move to the area.

[635 North 6th Street](#)



Left: Luth Bioria and Rogelio Cavings at the center (Photo courtesy of Robert Fulton, San Jose Mercury News).
Right: The Filipino Community Center in present day.



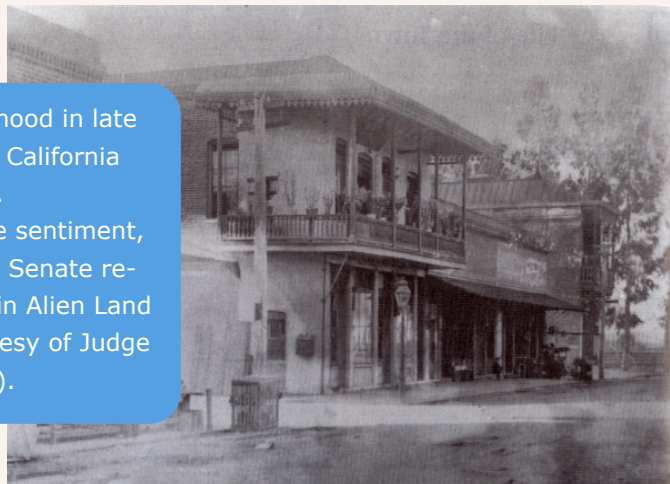
8 HEINLENVILLE PARK

- After the Market Street Chinatown was burned by arsonists, in 1887, John Heinlen built a new Chinatown out of brick to resist arson. A locked fence and security guards around the community protected the Chinese and ironically, helped shield them against the 1918 Spanish Flu Pandemic.
- When the Chinese Exclusion Act stopped Chinese immigration, Japanese, then later Filipino immigrant laborers, filled the gap from the lack of Chinese and settled around [Heinlenville Chinatown](#).
- 1931: The Chinese were evicted from Heinlenville Chinatown after John Heinlen died and his estate declared bankruptcy. The number of Chinese residents in Heinlenville had declined due to the Exclusion Act, redlining, Alien Land Laws, and other anti-Chinese legislation.
- The Japanese American community wanted the park to be named after John Heinlen to reflect the origins of Japantown and not erase the existence of Heinlenville Chinatown.

[620 North 6th Street](#)

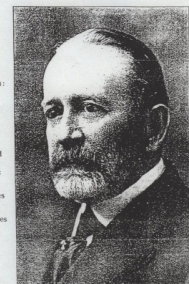
Left: Heinlenville neighborhood in late 1800s (Photo courtesy of California History Center).

Right: Strong anti-Japanese sentiment, as exemplified by this U.S. Senate re-election poster, manifested in Alien Land laws and more (Photo courtesy of Judge Mark Thomas Jr.).



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Save Our State from
Oriental Aggression



Japanese
Population:
1910
41,000
1920
100,000

Acres
Controlled
by
Japanese:
1909
83,000 acres
1920
188,000 acres

Japanese
birth-rate
in 18
agricultural
counties:
12.3 per cent
of all births

In rural
Los Angeles
county:
33.4 per cent

In rural
Sacramento
county:
49.7 per cent

Keep California White

RE-ELECT

JAMES D. PHELAN
UNITED STATES SENATOR

9 J-TOWN PIZZA

625 North 6th Street

Located in a building from 1890 that became Ken Ying Low restaurant, the oldest restaurant in Japantown/Chinatown. It was the popular site of many Japanese American weddings and funeral banquets in the olden days.

Right: J-Town Pizza in present day.



10 PAU HANA SHAVED ICE

Delicious Hawaiian-style Shaved Ice.

Recommendations: lychee, passionfruit, and mango (especially with fresh mochi).



248 Jackson Street

11 KOGURA GIFTS 231 Jackson Street

Opened 1934 as a radio store, it is now a Japanese gift store operated by descendants of the same family.



12 SHUEI-DO MANJU SHOP 217 Jackson Street

- One of the last Japantown manju shops in California, pre-order or stop in the morning for more variety.
- Sells 700-2,000 manju daily.

Right: Shuei-Do's special Sakura Mochi.



Corner of 5th and Jackston Street



Top Left and Right: Nikkei Lantern and Issei Voices, respectively.

13 JAPANTOWN LANDMARKS

- The bend in the pole of the Nikkei Lantern, marked "1942", symbolizes the impact that World War II's forced removal and incarceration of Japanese Americans had on the Japantown community.
- Granite bench (Issei voices) captures the sayings of the 1st generation along with a timeline of Japantown. This is one of many benches called "**Ikoi no ba**" — translates to "a place to rest."

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“RONIN’S HIDEOUT” MURAL[170 Jackson Street](#) | Empty Lot by JT Express

- Symbolizes a Ronin that was a samurai without a lord or master during the feudal period of Japan. A samurai became masterless upon the death of his master or after the loss of his master’s favor. The word ronin means wave man. It is an idiom for a wandering man.
- Painted by Matthew and Rozanne Ortiz of Wooden Wave.

[566 North 5th Street](#)

Left: Members of the church in 1913
(Photo courtesy of Wesley United Methodist Church).

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WESLEY UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

When the Japanese first arrived, they faced rejection like other immigrants. However, there were some Americans that welcomed the Japanese. The Methodist Church was one of them. This is why some Japanese Americans became Methodists.

[545 North 5th Street](#)

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NORMAN MINETA’S HOUSE

- 1st Japanese American mayor of a major city on the mainland, 1st Asian person to be in two United States’ presidential cabinets.
- Driving force behind passage of H.R. 442, which became the [Civil Liberties Act of 1988](#), a law that officially apologized for and redressed the injustices endured by Japanese Americans during World War II.



Right: Congressman Mineta speaking at Nikkei Matsuri event in Japantown in 1987 (Photo courtesy of Curt Fukuda).

[535 North 5th Street](#)

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JAPANESE AMERICAN MUSEUM OF SAN JOSE (JAMSJ)

Visit the [Japanese American Museum](#) to learn more! See exhibits on those who resisted the WWII incarceration, fought for electoral representation, and more.

Left: Japanese American Museum of San Jose.

**Thank you
for taking
our tour!**



Avery, Evelyn, and Austin in front of the Issei Memorial Building.

Acknowledgements

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Our historians and civil rights activists