

# Kumoricon 2007 heats up “anime mania”

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The Asian Reporter

If you were a ninja, demon beast, space pirate, magical girl, or all of the above, downtown Vancouver was the spot to be this past Labor Day weekend.

More than 3,000 “fanimes” — fans of anime — converged for Kumoricon 2007 at the Hilton Vancouver Hotel to share in all things Japanese animation: gaming, *manga*, cosplay, anime music videos, and more.

Kumoricon underscores the increasing popularity of one of Japan’s most well-known pop culture exports. According to the Japan External Trade Organization, the U.S. market for anime is worth approximately \$4.35 billion. *The Wall Street Journal* reports that annual manga sales in North America have more than doubled since 2002, totalling \$200 million in 2006.

In its fifth year, Kumoricon, based on the Japanese word for “cloudy,” is anything but. Cosplay — costume play — is the big draw at any anime convention, and fans delivered. Hot summer weather in the mid-80s didn’t stop hardcore fans from donning kimono, lots of frills, cat ears, leather ninja masks, and pink, purple, and blue anime hair to show their love for their favorite anime and videogame characters.

The celebration spilled over into Esther Short Park, across the street from the Hilton — that’s where most of the photo shoots took place.

“My friends convinced me to come,” said Kevin Lau, a resident of Lynnwood, Washington, a first-timer at Kumoricon. He appreciates the show for its great people-watching. “I was expecting a much smaller show because of the venue. The costumes people came up with have been great. Real creative.”

Naruto-mania was alive and well at Kumoricon. Scores of fans dressed up as Naruto, Sasuke, Sakura, Kakashi Sensei, and other characters from the popular series. For Kaetlin Varner, 13, Kumoricon 2007 was a place to share her love for anime with classmates from the Vancouver School of Arts and Academics. A budding anime artist and avid gamer, Varner appreciates being able to attend the convention with her friends.

“The game room was great,” said Varner, who dressed up as Deidara from the *Naruto* series. “We were also in a cosplay skit for about 40 seconds. They brought us in before the show started because they needed a bunch of people dressed as members of Akatsuki to go after Sasuke.”

Mom Cathy and daughter Emily Ansurlian dressed in kimono throughout the convention, albeit for different reasons. “I came as Kagura from the *Inuyasha* series. I like the way she looks,” said 12-year-old Emily.

“Emily convinced me that I really should dress up, so I’m wearing *my* kimono,” said Cathy. She and Emily enjoyed spending time with friends in the manga reading



**FAN-TASTIC.** More than 3,000 “fanimes” — fans of anime — gathered at Kumoricon 2007 over the Labor Day weekend. Pictured above, Kumoricon attendees dress up as *Naruto* characters (L-R) *Naruto*, *Sakura*, and *Sasuke*. In the background is *Kakashi Sensei*. At right is a fan posing as the *Devil Jin* character from the *Tekken 5* video game. (AR Photos/Maileen Hamto)

room and attending various workshops.

“We learned how to make cat ears,” she laughed.

“Being in the exhibitor area was great. We met members of the band A-Key Kyo. We’ve been fans since we saw them at Sakura Festival at Uwajimaya earlier this year,” said Cathy.

It wasn’t all just fun and games for anime fans. Cathy and Emily were among those who bid on charity auction items. More than \$2,500 was raised to benefit p:ear, a nonprofit that seeks to affirm personal worth among homeless youth in Portland through arts and education.

Fan-made anime music videos drew hundreds of people to the AMV Contest on the first day of Kumoricon 2007. Special guests included voice actors Sean Schimmel, best-known as the voice of Goku in the “*Dragon Ball*” series, as well as Kirk Thornton, known for his range in playing Jin in “*Samurai Champloo*,” Saidoh in “*Bleach*,” and Tazuna in “*Naruto*.” The dance/rock band The Slants and J-popsters A-Key Kyo headlined the two concerts for the weekend.

Featuring the latest video games available on various systems, the game room was open 18 hours per day. Gamers were glued to the screen, serious about their task while burning major calories. The “Dance Dance Revolution” tournament attracted the best of the best in foot-and-eye coordination. If Jimi Hendrix were alive



today, he’d surely be proud of 13-year-olds who rocked out at the “Guitar Hero II” tournament.

Also a big draw: the karaoke room featuring the most popular J-rock and J-pop titles, a vast majority of which are in Japanese.

Attendees who needed quiet time away from people-watching and gaming retreated to the Fanfiction room to

draw their creations or read new manga in the reading room. The J-rock video room and anime viewing rooms featured some of the most cutting-edge Japanese media creations.

Valerie Allen, a volunteer at Kumoricon since the convention’s sophomore year in 2004, explained her interest in anime. “I was one those teenagers who stumbled upon *Sailor Moon* and became a fan,” she said. “I soon learned that so much of it is edited for American audiences.” As she learned more about the real intent of the creators of the show, she got more hooked on anime.

A native of Michigan, Allen says she was pleased to move to the West Coast, where she can share her passion for anime with other fans. “It was really hard to get anime back in Michigan. It’s a lot more popular out here.”

Kim Sun, one of the exhibitors for Seattle-based Anime Kingdom, shared the lowdown on the best-selling items during the convention. “A lot of people are getting into ‘Haruhi,’ a new Japanese anime,” she said. The theme from the show, “The Melancholy of Haruhi Suzumiya,” featuring schoolgirls dancing to the upbeat “Hare Hare Yukai” (loose translation: Sunny Sunny Happiness) has been a YouTube sensation.

“Kirby” and “Neon Genesis Evangelion” merchandise are still “pretty popular,” said Sun.

“This was a lot of fun,” said Varner. “I’m definitely going again next year, and make Kumoricon an annual tradition.”

Next year’s Kumoricon is scheduled for Labor Day weekend, and will be held at the Lloyd Center Doubletree Hotel. The convention has grown each year, and organizers expect Kumoricon 2008 will draw even more fans, said Jeff Tyrrell, Kumoricon’s publicity director. “It’s a big social event, and it’s exciting to see Kumoricon grow every year.”

To learn more about Kumoricon, visit <[www.kumoricon.org](http://www.kumoricon.org)>.

*Carmilla Hamto contributed to this report.*