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## Frenchman hunts for cool in Tokyo

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**CULTURE EXPORTS:** Global businesses eager to get a glimpse of what's in store for the future are sending their executives to hang out with the 'cool hunter'

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Loic Bizel leads visitors through alleys packed with wild-haired youngsters, makes his way into tiny boutiques tucked beneath stairwells and points out fatigue-inspired jackets, handpainted sneakers and plaid miniskirts.



Loic Bizel, a 32-year-old Frenchman, walks an alley packed with youngsters in Tokyo's Harajuku shopping district last month. Bizel is what's known in the trend-watching industry as a "cool hunter," a person whose mission is to keep abreast of the pulsating, ever-changing street fads of Japan and translate them into a language the rest of the world can understand.

Part tour guide and part business consultant, the 32-year-old Frenchman is a "cool" hunter, with a mission to uncover the ever-changing street fads of Japan and translate them into a language the rest of the world can understand.

"The people in the streets are very creative," Bizel said, pointing to a young man wearing baggy shorts on top of long pants, a look that's all the rage in Tokyo. "The search to be unique, to be different, creates style."

Bizel's expertise is in demand because Japan has shifted from being a powerhouse of manufacturing to an exporter of culture, including "manga" animation, gourmet sushi and now fashion tastes. Global businesses eager to get a glimpse of what's in store for the future are sending their executives here just to hang out with the cool hunter and absorb what's hip.

In Bizel's world, parodies of hip-hop clothes are mixed with school uniform slacks altered to sag. The stereotypical Japanese "salarymen," with their look-alike drab suits, are nowhere to be seen. And hair is dyed in so many shades you almost forget Japanese have black hair.

"Japan is advanced. What will happen 10 years from now is already in Japan," Bizel said.

Fake-fur trims, oversized sunglasses, dogs dressed to the T, chains and gemstones

PHOTO: AP

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