

Inside Luigi Mangione's Missing Months

From beers at a Bangkok bar to a climb up Mount Omine in Japan, The Times traced the pivotal months before Mr. Mangione was charged with killing UnitedHealthcare's C.E.O.

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Luigi Mangione stayed in a small guesthouse in the village of Tenkawa, Japan, in May 2024. Noriko Hayashi for The New York Times

Deep within the lush mountains of Japan, among the thousands of peaks that form a sprawling peninsula on the country's main island, stands a sacred mountain that has been a sanctuary for spiritual pilgrims for over a thousand years.

Since the seventh century, Mount Omine's towering trees and burbling streams have greeted Japanese men on spiritual pilgrimage. Devoted practitioners of Shugendo, a fusion of Buddhism and mountain worship, go there to climb a treacherous ridge, an endeavor they believe can help them attain supernatural powers.

In pre-modern Japan, lore has it, ninja assassins disguised themselves as Shugendo practitioners to evade the shogun's restrictions — and there is still a belief that approaching the mountain in search of spiritual direction without proper training can make a person susceptible to manipulation by dark forces. The video game *Assassin's Creed Shadows* follows a samurai as he travels to Mount Omine. But few foreign travelers make the actual journey to its misty peaks.

On May 6, 2024 — his 26th birthday — an American man checked into a small guesthouse in the village of Tenkawa, the entry point to this legendary mountain. He introduced himself as Luigi Mangione, a backpacker from the United States.

With his curly brown hair, Mr. Mangione stood out as the only non-Japanese guest. He arrived prepared to soak in the springs, write and “Zen out,” as he told a friend at the time.



The gate at the trailhead to Mount Omine.

Seven months later, on Dec. 4, 2024, a man who prosecutors say was Mr. Mangione traveled to Midtown Manhattan, pulled out a 3-D-printed nine-millimeter pistol, and fired it at the C.E.O. of one of America’s largest health insurance companies, United-Healthcare. The chief executive, Brian Thompson, died on the sidewalk, and his killer escaped by bicycle into the quiet Midtown morning.

Mr. Mangione was arrested five days later while eating a hash brown and browsing on his laptop at a McDonald’s in Pennsylvania. The police said they found what they called a manifesto decrying America’s system of for-profit health care and the “parasites” of the insurance industry. A journal detailing plans for the assassination was also found in Mr. Mangione’s possession, according to prosecutors.

Now facing state and federal murder charges, Mr. Mangione, 27, who has pleaded not guilty, is arguably the most scrutinized defendant to emerge from the recent spate of politically motivated violence in the United States.

While the essentials of his life story — valedictorian at his elite private high school in Maryland, computer science student at the University of Pennsylvania, data engineer

in Hawaii — are now relatively well known, his whereabouts and actions in the months leading up to Mr. Thompson’s murder have largely remained a mystery. Some family and friends have said they were unable to reach him starting shortly after he returned from his backpacking trip to Asia, a trip that now appears to have been pivotal for him.



Mr. Mangione is facing an array of state and federal charges, including capital murder. Jefferson Siegel for The New York Times

The New York Times was able to unearth new details about that period, including the trip to the mountains in Japan, where Mr. Mangione joined generations of people who have sought out, in those remote expanses, an opportunity for solitude and reflection.

Interviews with fellow travelers and local residents, along with a review of Mr. Mangione’s writings and communications, suggest a shift from seeking human connection and community to isolating himself, and becoming increasingly preoccupied with how to make a statement about injustice.

“I finally feel confident about what I will do,” Mr. Mangione wrote in his journal shortly after he returned to the United States. “I don’t feel any doubt about whether it’s right/justified.”

‘Going to Zen Out’

Mr. Mangione had grown up in a Baltimore suburb, part of a well-known local family whose business ventures included country clubs and a chain of nursing homes. He graduated from the prestigious all-boys Gilman School in 2016 and enrolled at the University of Pennsylvania, where he earned both a bachelor’s and master’s degree related to computer engineering. He excelled academically, and friends described him as intelligent, thoughtful and considerate. But he also had what he described as brain fog that affected his grades and mental focus, according to his social media posts in college.

He had also endured longstanding back pain from a spinal condition that worsened after a surfing incident, according to his social media posts.

But in July 2023, he underwent surgery that was an unexpected success. By Day 7, he wrote later that summer, he was on “literally zero pain meds.”

The surgery cleared the way for his sprawling tour of Asia in early 2024, during which he carried nothing but a backpack. “Without luggage there is a very real sense of traveling as an adventurer, rather than as a tourist,” he wrote in a Reddit post that April.

The map shows the village of Tenkawa, and Mount Omine, in southeastern Japan, not far from Osaka. It also locates Mumbai, India, and Bangkok, Thailand.

At first, like many young backpackers, he drank and made friends with strangers along the way. While in Tokyo in February, he met a Japanese professional poker player at dinner and joined his group for a meal. The next month, he went to Thailand and met two American expatriates at the Stumble Inn in Bangkok, a pub on a neon-drenched street known for raucous nightlife.

<https://youtube.com/shorts/s68H2-su4vE?feature=share>

Mr. Mangione hung out with friends on Bangkok’s Soi Cowboy, a neon-drenched street known for raucous nightlife. Video by Lauren DeCicca

One of the men, Christian Sacchini, who had grown up in Texas and moved to Thailand to play professional soccer, said he had settled down at the pub with another friend when he spotted a man about his own age two seats over. The man piped up when he heard them speaking English, introducing himself as Luigi and telling them about his Maryland roots and his current living situation in Hawaii. Eventually, he was showing them pictures of himself near a volcano and discussing Pokémon and video games, Mr. Sacchini said.

The three men chatted for two or three hours over several rounds of beers. When Mr. Sacchini said that he believed his soccer-playing days were numbered and that he



By The New York Times

was interested in pursuing computer science, Mr. Mangione urged him to specialize in artificial intelligence, which he said was “going to change the world.”

Mr. Sacchini recalled that they also talked about the high cost of health care in the United States and how “effed up” the system was back home. Mr. Mangione was shocked by how little an M.R.I. scan cost in Thailand, he said.

“He couldn’t believe it,” Mr. Sacchini said.

After finishing up their beers, the three Americans bounced around the heavily touristed area, checking out a few tattoo shops to ask about prices, Mr. Sacchini said.

During their time together, Mr. Sacchini’s friend, who asked not to be identified because he did not want to be publicly associated with Mr. Mangione, was wearing a GoPro camera strapped to his chest to document his travels. One still image from the footage, reviewed by The Times, shows Mr. Mangione standing in a brightly lit marijuana dispensary, wearing a thin necklace and a Billabong T-shirt.

In a series of WhatsApp messages sent later to the friend with the camera, Mr. Mangione recounted some wild nights he had spent out on the town. He lost his phone in a taxi at one point. On another night, he wrote, he had been beaten up by seven “ladyboys,” a commonly used local term for transgender women that can be seen as derogatory. He attached a photo of his scratched-up arm.

Although Mr. Mangione and his new friend planned to travel on to Vietnam, he instead decided to return to Japan.

At one point he texted a photo from Osaka and made a joke about trying to pay a supposed Yakuza boss for a prostitute with “pornstar pokemon” cards instead of Japanese yen.

But by the end of the month, Mr. Mangione apparently yearned for a slower, more deliberate pace.

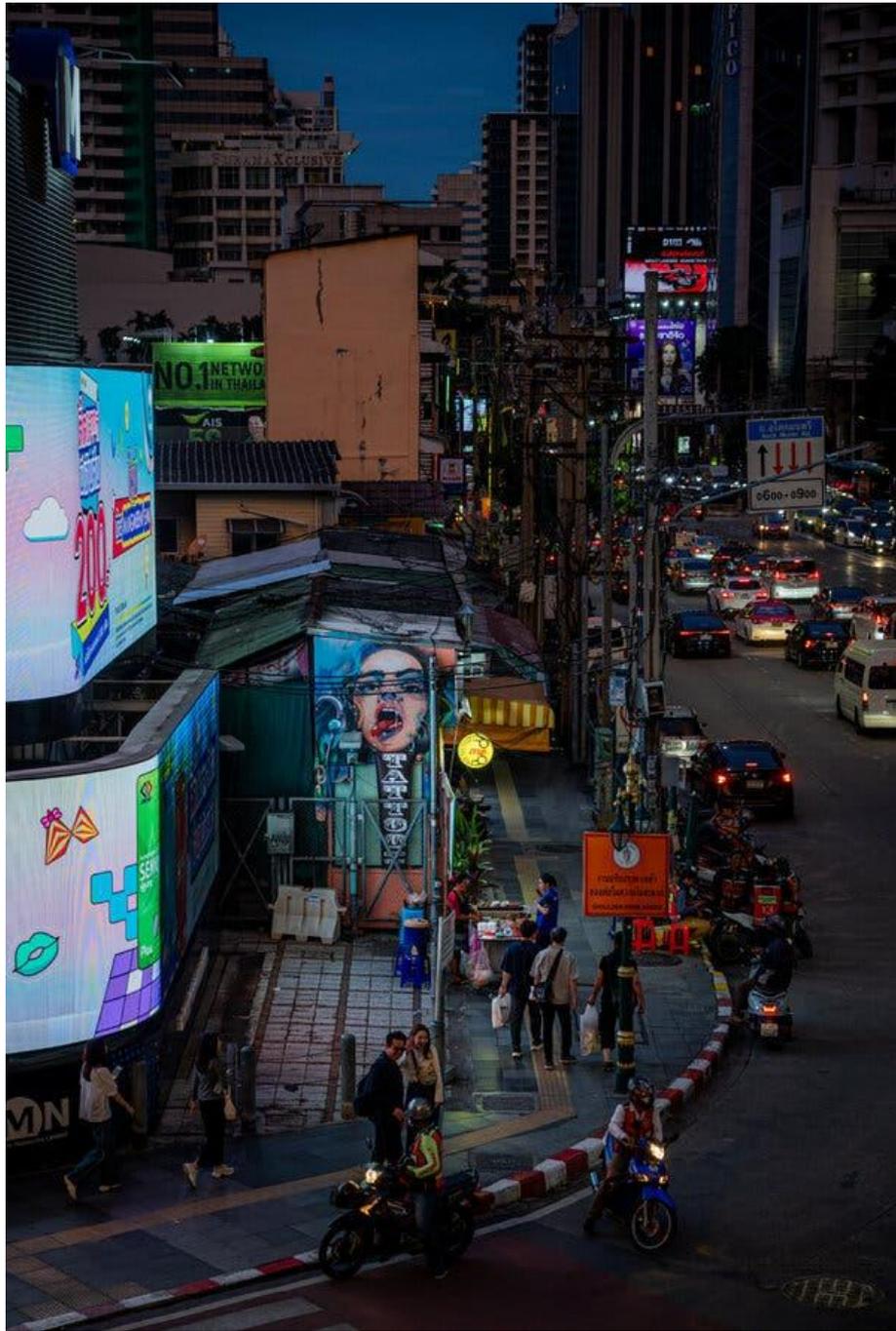
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The trees and streams in Tenkawa have greeted Japanese men on spiritual pilgrimage since the seventh century.

On April 21, Mr. Mangione sent a voice memo to the friend saying that he was in the Nara Mountains, where Mount Omine is located. Vietnam sounded fun, he said, but it was not what he needed after the “chaos” of Thailand.

“I think I want to stay here for like maybe a month and just like meditate, just hot spring and do some writing,” he said.

Mr. Mangione had recently paid for a subscription to The Prism, a Substack newsletter by the British writer Gurwinder Bhogal, which included the opportunity to have a private video call.



In a series of WhatsApp messages sent to a friend, Mr. Mangione recounted some wild nights he had since spent out on the town in Bangkok. Lauren DeCicca for The New York Times

During their two-hour call, Mr. Bhogal said, Mr. Mangione requested that the host start having group video calls because he was eager to find a community of like-minded people who valued what Mr. Bhogal described as “rationality, agency and self-improvement.” In other words, Mr. Bhogal said, they would be people who prioritized logic and self-control, and who wanted to pool their resources to achieve the greatest positive impact. The people Mr. Mangione was surrounded with weren’t on his wavelength, Mr. Bhogal recalled him saying. However, Mr. Bhogal said, Mr. Mangione never talked about engaging in violence.

The next day, Mr. Mangione checked into the guesthouse in Tenkawa. He wrote on a check-in card that he was an engineer and listed his Honolulu address. In the voice memo to his friend from Bangkok two weeks before, he had described the area as “beautiful, man.”

“There’s like, these tiny, little villages here, just kind of, like, on the side of the cliffs; I’ll send a photo, super lush, like, there’s this beautiful river that cuts through the gorge,” he said. “I’m just going to Zen out and do some, do some Buddha.”

From Mount Omine to Mumbai

In the seventh century, the Shugendo founder En No Gyoja often trekked through mountains in the Nara region of Japan. But his climb to the top of Mount Omine was different: He said he encountered a god.

“Because of the encounter, he designated this a holy mountain among other mountains he climbed,” said Etsuo Okada, the head monk at Ryusen-Ji Temple, which was founded around that time at the foot of the religious route. Since then, the temple has been where pilgrims have stopped to pray and receive blessings before or after they embark on the formidable multiple-peak climb that became seen as a test of courage.

Most Shugendo practitioners come in order to remove themselves from the complications of modern life and appreciate the holiness of the mountain, Mr. Okada said, a quest that is inherently nonviolent.

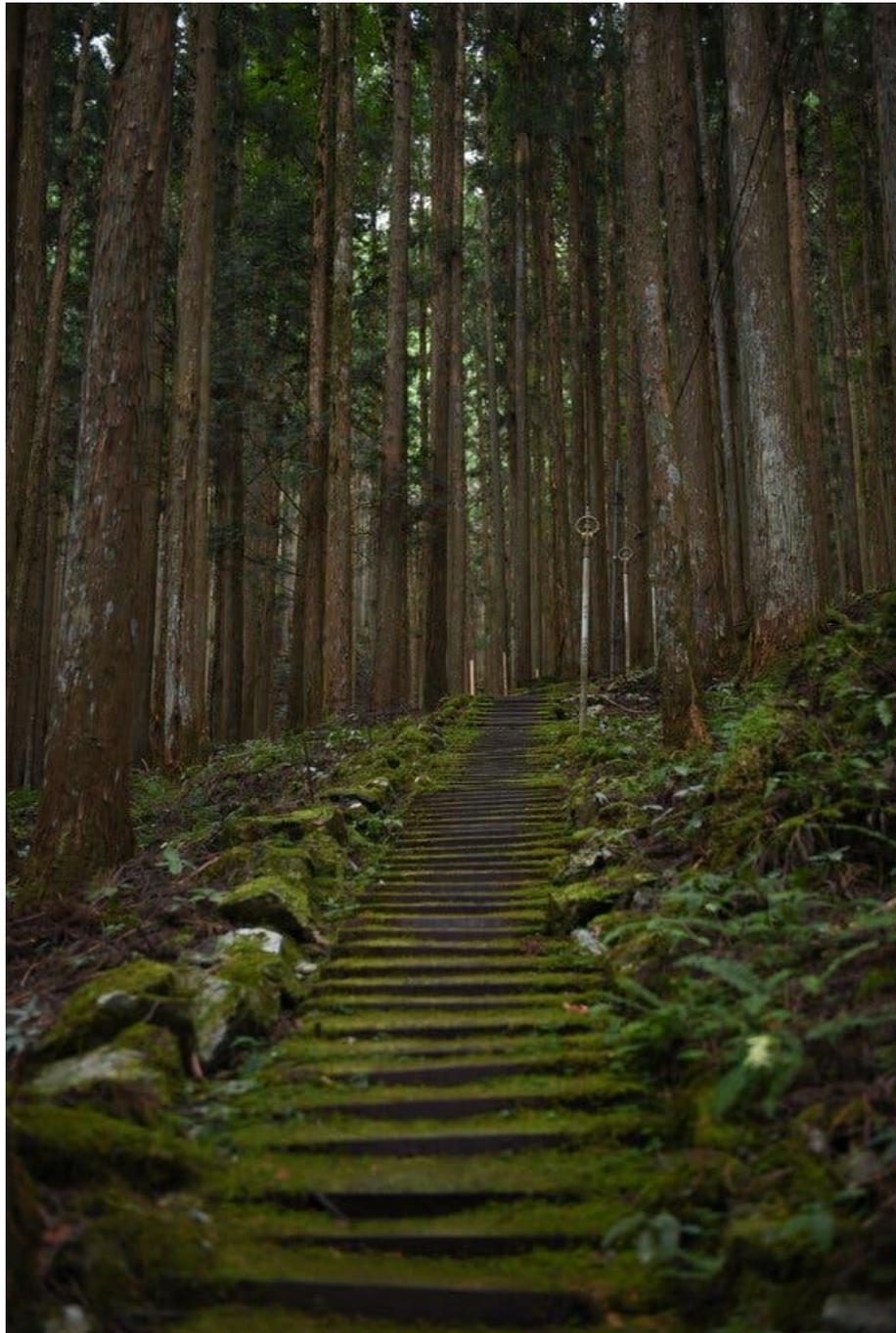
However, many outsiders see it primarily as a way to test their physical limits and work through inner turmoil. This is a fundamental misunderstanding, Mr. Okada said.

In a text he sent from Mount Omine, Mr. Mangione mentioned the tests of courage, although it is unclear whether he embarked on the full set of climbs, and also talked about the longstanding prohibition on women climbers, which the mountain has retained, even as it has gained UNESCO World Heritage designation.

David Caprara, an American journalist who lives in the area and also formally practices Shugendo, said Mr. Mangione would have encountered formidable challenges, depending on which peaks he tried to climb. Mr. Caprara said that entering the mountains without proper guidance can be perilous and goes against local customs.

“There’s been five times in my life where I knew I was going to die,” Mr. Caprara said. “And I’d say half of them were probably in these mountains.”

The guesthouse where Mr. Mangione stayed is a small building converted from the village’s post office into a bare-bones lodge with four rooms. When Mr. Mangione booked online, there was only a room with a bunk bed left, known as the Hunter room,



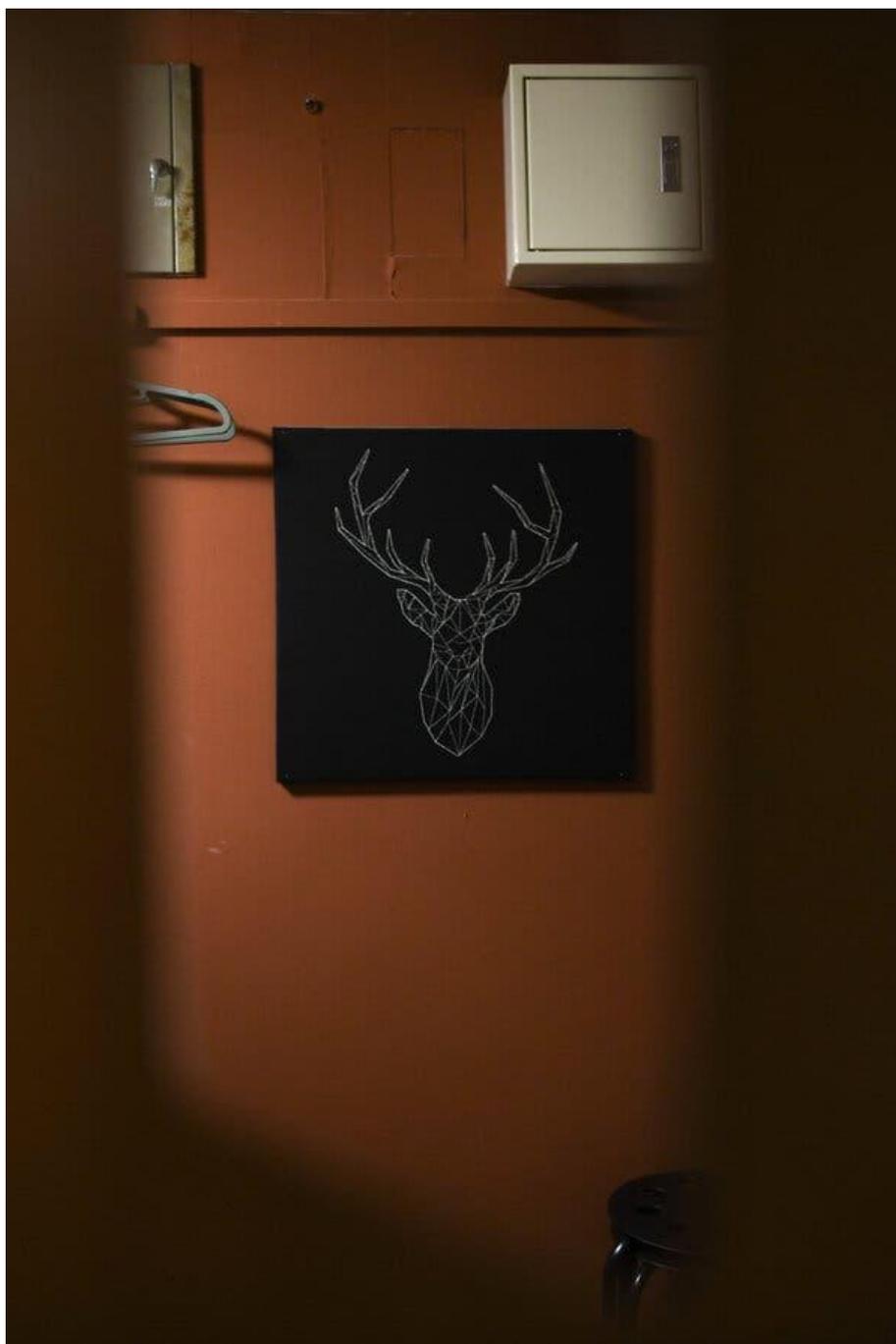
Tenkawa is located in the Nara Mountains.



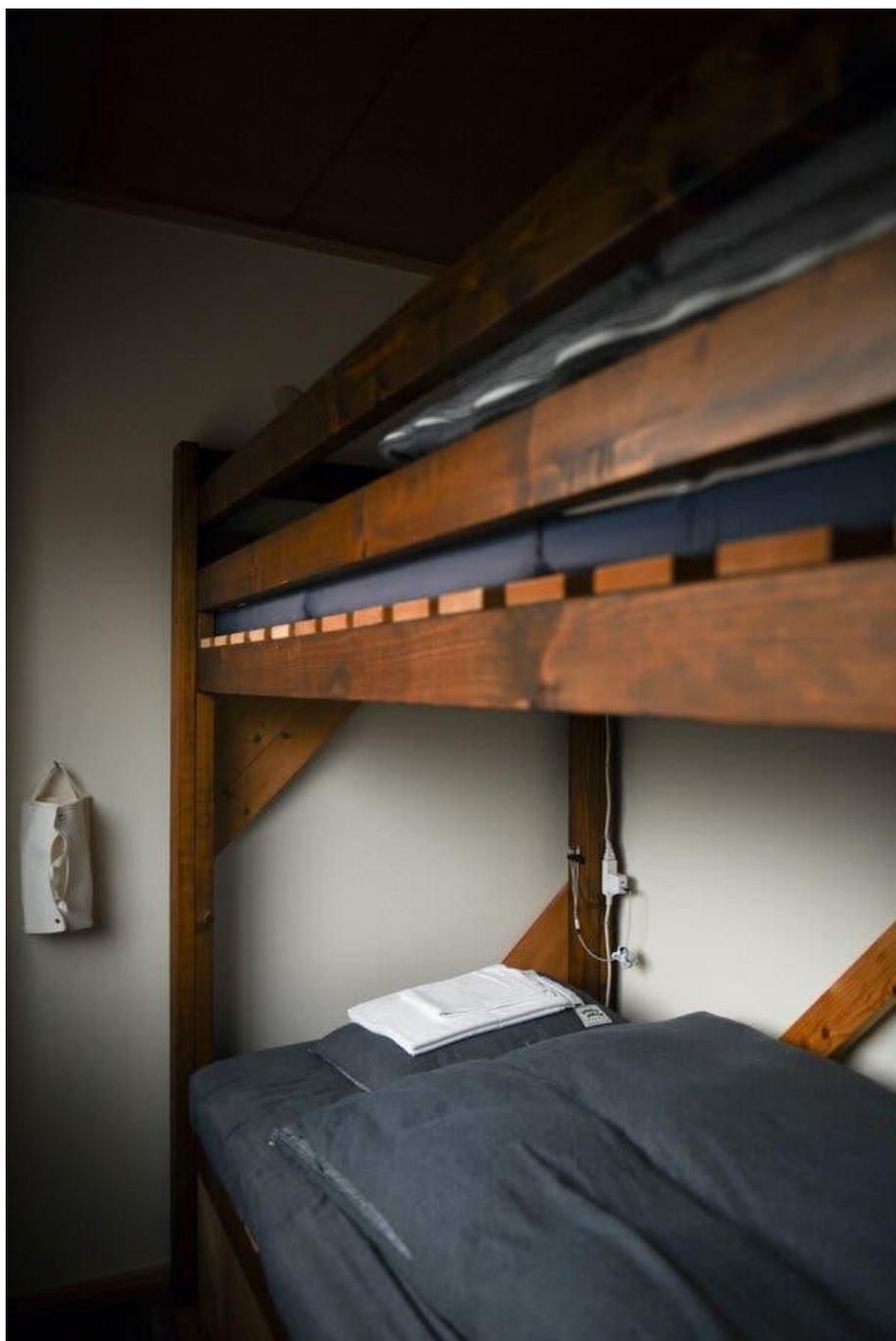
A shrine in Tenkawa.



Etsuou Okada, the head monk at Ryusen-Ji Temple, which was founded in the seventh century.



Mr. Mangione spent six days staying in the “Hunter” room at the guesthouse in Tenkawa.



The inn's owner said Mr. Mangione left his room completely spotless and took out his own trash.

which overlooks cedar-capped mountains and a roaring river, said Juntaro Mihara, the inn's owner. He spent six days at the guesthouse.

Unlike other guests, Mr. Mangione said, Mr. Mangione left his room completely spotless and took out his own trash.

"If asked who would be the most impressive and tidiest guest ever in my business record, I'll answer it's him," Mr. Mihara said.



In Japan, Mr. Mangione wrote on a guesthouse check-in card that he was an engineer and listed his Honolulu address.

While other guests in the inn's tiny wooden bar scrolled their phones or laptops, Mr. Mangione spent his time quietly sipping on a beer and writing in his journal or reading a book, Mr. Mihara recalled.

"He didn't use any digital devices," Mr. Mihara said. "He was quiet, and only had minimum necessary conversations with other guests or he maybe didn't talk with anyone."

Mr. Mangione was considered by friends to have a philosophical mind and an intellectual curiosity about a wide variety of subjects. According to interviews and his own writings, he read widely and expressed interest in a range of structural problems: corporate greed, the negative effects of social media, the impact of falling birthrates on society.

He appeared to feel strongly about the health care system in America, though it's not at all clear that this was a result of the back pain he had struggled with or his own interactions with the medical establishment. He was never insured by UnitedHealthcare, according to the company, and no evidence has emerged of any personal disputes over insurance coverage.



Juntaro Mihara owns the inn in Tenkawa where Mr. Mangione stayed.

After his time at Mount Omine, Mr. Mangione flew to Mumbai, a city 4,000 miles away. There, he met with a writer named Jash Dholani, who is best known for distilling concepts from classical books. They met in late May, according to Mr. Dholani.

Mr. Dholani once went on X to post 14 insights from the writings of Ted Kaczynski, the American mathematician known as the Unabomber, whose nearly 20-year bombing campaign resulted in three deaths and 23 injuries. He called Mr. Kaczynski a “philosopher terrorist” whose manifesto “attacks modern civilization like nothing else before or since.” (He later deleted the post.)

In a statement, Mr. Dholani said they met after Mr. Mangione had tried to buy 400 copies of his self-published book, which encourages readers to embrace risk. The purchase transaction was flagged by the bank and rejected, Mr. Dholani said.

Mr. Dholani told The Times that he advocates “creative risk in pursuit of beauty” and is always clear that harming anyone is never the solution.

Among Mr. Mangione's many interests, one through line is clear: a fascination with Mr. Kaczynski.

In conversations with others, in a journal entry and in a social media post, Mr. Mangione wrote and spoke of his interest in Mr. Kaczynski, who believed that modern-day technology was harmful for individual freedom, as well as the natural environment, and had led to widespread human suffering.

He once noted that Mr. Kaczynski was "rightfully imprisoned" for his violent acts, but that it was impossible to ignore "how prescient many of his predictions about modern society turned out."

'The Target Is Insurance'

By July, Mr. Mangione had returned from his backpacking trip and was in the United States, temporarily settled in San Francisco. It is not clear whether he took a job there, but he got a fake ID with an issue date of June 18.

He had stopped posting on his known X and Reddit accounts. His last posts, in May and early June, not long after he was on Mount Omine, were about the negative impact of social media. He also stopped responding to messages from some family and friends, and his mother filed a missing person's report with the police in San Francisco in November.

In his writings from those months, he was ruminating over how to fight what he saw as injustice. He wrote in his journal that he was sleeping poorly and feeling "foggy." And yet he appeared to be zeroing in on something.

"I finally feel confident about what I will do," he wrote in an entry in August. "The details are finally coming together. And I don't feel any doubt about whether it's right/justified. I'm glad — in a way — that I've procrastinated, bc it allowed me to learn more about UHC."

"The target is insurance," he wrote. "It checks every box."

He noted that he had decided not to pursue another course that he referred to as "KMD."

"KMD would've been an unjustified catastrophe that would be perceived mostly as sick, but more importantly unhelpful," he wrote. "Would do nothing to spread awareness/improve people's lives."

It is unclear what Mr. Mangione meant by "KMD." His lawyers would not comment on it, and he himself did not elaborate.

In the next journal entry filed in court by the prosecution, on Oct. 22, Mr. Mangione invoked Mr. Kaczynski.

The problem with most revolutionary acts was that the message was lost on the general public, he wrote. Because Mr. Kaczynski had killed innocent people, he was seen by many people as a serial killer and his ideas were dismissed.

"He crosses the line from revolutionary anarchist to terrorist — the worst thing a person can be," Mr. Mangione wrote. "This is the problem with most militants that rebel against — often real — injustices; they commit an atrocity, either whose horror outweighs the impact of their message, or whose distance from their message prevents

normies from connecting the dots. Consequently, the revolutionary idea becomes associated with extremism, incoherence, or evil — an idea that no reasonable member of society could approve of.”



Brian Thompson, UnitedHealthcare’s chief executive, was gunned down outside a hotel where the insurance company was holding an investor conference.

Karsten Moran for The New York Times

The eventual target of the shooting, Mr. Thompson, lived in a suburb of Minneapolis with his family. He had been chief executive of UnitedHealthcare’s insurance division since 2021, overseeing a period that brought in immense profits — and criticism from lawmakers and regulators who said the company systematically denied authorization for health care coverage.

Colleagues described Mr. Thompson himself as open and approachable.

In his journal, Mr. Mangione wrote about the event that was bringing Mr. Thompson to New York, a conference for UnitedHealthcare investors on Dec. 4 at a Hilton Hotel on West 54th Street.

An Excerpt From Luigi Mangione’s Writings

What do you do? You wack the CEO at the annual parasitic bean-counter convention. It’s targeted, precise and doesn’t risk innocents.

Full document: Read more pages from the journal found in Mr. Mangione's possession.

"This investor conference is a true windfall," he wrote in the October entry. "It embodies everything wrong with our health system, and — most importantly — the message becomes self evident."

Prosecutors have said that Mr. Mangione "meticulously" planned the shooting — he tracked Mr. Thompson's movements and staked out the hotel in the days before the killing. On Dec. 4, he arrived outside the hotel — masked — and waited until Mr. Thompson walked by, they said.

As Mr. Thompson walked toward the hotel's entrance, a man in a hoodie emerged from between parked cars, leveled a handgun affixed with a silencer and fired. Mr. Thompson was left bleeding on the sidewalk, a trail of shell casings next to him. The words "delay" and "depose" were written on some of the casings, as well as "den," which prosecutors took to mean "deny."

Five days after the shooting, Mr. Mangione's monthslong journey came to an abrupt end at the McDonald's in Altoona, Pa.

Federal prosecutors announced they were seeking the death penalty. Mr. Mangione, prosecutors with the New York district attorney's office said in court filings, "killed a man in cold blood" and "patted himself on the back for his evil act." For Mr. Mangione, they said, Mr. Thompson and UnitedHealthcare "were simply symbols of the health care industry and what defendant considered a deadly greed-fueled cartel."

Mr. Mangione's lawyers, who along with their client did not comment for this article, countered in court papers that statements painting him as a left-wing extremist have been "false, prejudicial, and part of a greater political narrative that has no place in any criminal case, especially one where the death penalty is at stake."

But in Tenkawa, few people have heard of the killing of Mr. Thompson, or of the young man who had sought respite there just months prior.

Life in the village of roughly 1,000 people continues, centered on the daily rituals of life and religion. Mr. Mihara, the inn's owner, roasts fresh coffee beans every morning for his burgeoning side business. Priests beat drums in shrines as they express gratitude to the gods. And the few foreign visitors who make the trip continue to trickle in, looking for relaxation, spiritual guidance, or maybe something else.

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The Ted K Archive

The New York Times
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traced the pivotal months before Mr. Mangione was charged with killing
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<www.nytimes.com/2025/10/21/us/luigi-mangione-asia-trip.html>

Photographs and Video by Noriko Hayashi.

Hurubie Meko and Hisako Ueno reported from Tenkawa, Japan. Katie J.M. Baker
and Nicholas Bogel-Burroughs reported from New York.

Leer en español

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