



# ON THE ROAD IN JAPAN: APRIL 2008

IAN HUGHES





## THE INTRO

Here's where we begin debunking the notion that *Hughesy* is, or was, travel-averse.

I'm not suggesting there wasn't apprehension.

Looking at a couple of weeks in an environment with no prospect of immediate escape if you don't like what's going down you're bound to feel uneasy, but from the moment we touched down at *KIX* I had a great time.

I would head back quite happily at any opportunity, despite the possibility of earthquakes, *tsunamis* and aftershocks.





## THE ITINERARY

Tuesday 1 April: ***Bowen > Townsville***

Wednesday 2 April: ***Townsville > Cairns***

Thursday, 3 April ***Cairns > Kansai International > Kōbe***

Friday 4 April: ***Kōbe > Osaka > Kōbe***

Saturday 5 April: ***Kōbe > Himeji > Kōbe***

Sunday 6 April: ***Kōbe > Kyoto > Kōbe***

Monday 7 April: ***Kōbe > Kyoto > Kanazawa***



Tuesday 8 April: ***Kanazawa > Toyama > Takayama***

Wednesday 9 April: ***Takayama > Nagoya***

Thursday 10 April: ***Nagoya > Hakone***

Friday 11 April: ***Hakone > Tokyo > Kitakami***

Saturday 12 April: ***Kitakami***

Sunday 13 April: ***Kitakami > Tokyo > Kōbe***

Monday 14 April: ***Kōbe***

Tuesday 15 April: ***Kōbe > Kyoto***

Wednesday 16 April: ***Kyoto > Nara***

Thursday 17 April: ***Nara > Kōbe***

Friday 18 April: ***Kōbe > Kansai International***

Saturday 19 April: ***Brisbane > Gold Coast***





## BOWEN > TOWNSVILLE > CAIRNS

*Tuesday, 1 April 2008*

Heading out of downtown **Bowen** just after lunchtime, the journey to **Townsville** passed uneventfully, accompanied by selections from the *Latin* playlist on the *iPod*.

Once we'd booked into the **Aitkenvale Motel**, it was time to head off to the **Lolly Shop** for a couple of **Campbell's Rutherglen Tokay** to use as gifts in **Japan**. We also needed a couple of bottles to accompany dinner at **The Golfer's** bijou establishment (a **Campbell's Bobbie Burns Shiraz** and a **McWilliams' Mount Pleasant Phillip**).

Arriving at **The Golfer's** residence, we settled back and feasted in not-quite-baronial style with our genial host, the **Dalby Doyle** and **Miss Behaviour** - roast lamb with the usual trimmings and the obligatory mint sauce.

From the time we arrived on the doorstep until the **Muscat** went into circulation several hours later, the conversation covered a predictably wide range of topics from primary school cricket to



overseas travel via excursions into the cooking techniques of celebrity chefs and other arcane ephemera.

Periodic telephonic interruptions allowed the *Doylamo* to dispense culinary tips regarding the correct ingredients for a successful batch of scones to serve at the morning tea break for the monthly board meeting of a leading *Australian cultural organization*.

As usual, where the *Doylamo* is concerned, as soon as you think you've heard him expound on every conceivable subject from his considerable range of expertise he pulls another rabbit out of the hat.

No kidding. *Doylie's* baking tips. Wonders will never cease.

The *Bobbie Burns Shiraz* was acclaimed as the wine of the night though the consensus was that the *Mount Pleasant Phillip* was not too shabby either.

A phone call the next morning to organize a transfer from the motel to *Townsville Airport* attracted background interjections of *Hope the ninjas get ya!*

And since you're reading this, it should be obvious that the *Doylamo's* desires remained essentially unfulfilled.



**Wednesday, 2 April 2008**

Once we'd alighted from *The Golfer's* Taxi and checked in at the *Townsville Terminal*, there was the usual delay while we awaited the *boarding call* for *QantasLink Flight 2300*.

Having avoided weighing myself down while packing (supervised by someone who ensured there was no risk of incurring excess baggage charges) my suggestion that I was going to wander across to the newsagent's stand induced a momentary look of concern.

After all, *Someone* knows from bitter experience the drastic consequences that tend to follow letting *Hughesy* loose in a book shop.

In a magnificent display of self-restraint, I managed to spend a whole ten minutes in the area without spending a red cent. This amazing development occurred despite the presence of the *April* edition of *The Monthly*, which I thought might be interesting reading on the Flight Over, a new *Peter Corris Cliff Hardy* novel and various *Detective Inspector Rebus* yarns that needed to find a niche on *Hughesy's* bookshelves.

As I explained when I had finished browsing and returned to where *The Supervisor* sat, I'd packed a book to re-read while we were away. *Joe Boyd's* *White Bicycles* would also provide me with something to write about while we're in transit on the *Shinkansen* (assuming there's nothing interesting in the scenic department outside).

A *Cliff Hardy, Rebus, Inspector Montalbano* or *Aurelio Zen* is something I'm likely to knock over in twenty-four hours or so and I'd then have to lug the thing around.

While I was tempted to buy something else to read it was better to stick with the *Boyd* and meditation on the musical matters he discusses.

There's also the matter of a significant addition to *Brownie points* resulting from the aforementioned display of self-restraint.

There was still plenty of time that needed killing, so I wandered over to the coffee shop to check out the brunch options.

We were likely to get a sandwich or something on the flight, but something concrete in the craw was preferable to the vague possibilities associated with or something.

In the event, or something was an apple.

Call me a *Philistine* if you will, but I've never really been a coffee shop *aficionado*.

*One cup of Industrial Strength Moccona* in the morning keeps me going all day, thank you very much.



While I have been known to opt for the *Coffee Club Big Breakfast*, I don't usually pay much attention to what's on offer at the coffee shop. A couple of beers and a pizza has, up to the present, been the preferred option.

This time, however, it was too early for a strong drink, the pizza option was on the other side of security, and I went to investigate what was on offer at **Aromas** without expecting anything much.

The sight of a couple of interesting variations on the standard meat pie (*Chicken & Leek* and *Madras Beef Curry* were two that attracted my attention) prompted me to place an order.

'**Er Indoors** joined me for an orange juice and sampled a small portion of the Chicken & Leek variety, which I'd pronounced *good*, and she considered *not too bad*.

Having sighted the beer options available at the same venue, it looks like *Bye Bye Eagle Boys*.

And not before time.

And since **Madam** has pronounced the Chicken & Leek acceptable, maybe next time I can try the spicier option.

The 45-minute flight from passed without any excitement whatsoever apart from **Madam's** sighting of *Palm Island*, which she identified by the presence of an airstrip, and *Orpheus Island*, an upmarket tourist destination that had featured from time to time on TV.

By the time we were level with *Hinchinbrook Island* the aircraft was passing through fairly dense cloud, and once we were above that further sight-seeing became an academic issue.

We'd opted to overnight in **Cairns** rather than an early transfer from **Townsville** the next morning, and our overnight accommodation at *Queens Court* was close enough to walk downtown for afternoon shopping, stroll back to the room for a rest and then set off again towards the Esplanade for dinner.

We've enjoyed eating at *Villa Romana* in **Melbourne's Lygon Street** and on our last visit I'd spotted a reference to a *Cairns branch of the operation*, so the venue for dinner was a no-brainer, particularly when the prospect of *Spaghetti alla Scoglio* loomed on the horizon.

We arrived shortly after five-thirty, half way through the *20% off food only* window. From the menu, we opted for a loaf of bread with roast garlic, pesto and olive oil as an opener, the *Scoglio* as a shared main and were able to go as far as squeezing in a *risotto* to fill in any remaining gaps in the gullet.

We washed the meal down with glasses of **Nugan Estate King Valley Pinot Grigio** and **Wirra Wirra Sauvignon Blanc** which hit the spot nicely.

A brief stroll back to Queens Court got us there just in time for the seven o'clock news and an hour later we were pushing up Z's in anticipation of our overseas odyssey.





## CAIRNS > KOBE

***Thursday, 3 April 2008***

Six o'clock saw us surging into action, and by half-past we were showered, shaved (at least I was) but not shampooed and ready for the Continental breakfast downstairs.

It's hardly a scientific approach, but checking the levels of the spreads available for the morning toast revealed a preference for orange marmalade with, believe it or not, [Vegemite](#) sneaking into second place ahead of strawberry jam.

Peanut butter finished a distant (and, in my humble opinion quite understandable) last.

A survey of adjacent tables showed a similar level of depletion in the stocks of ***Vegemite***, scotching any suspicions that the table we were occupying had already attracted an unusual number of ***Australian chauvinists*** eager to indulge in leftover brewers' yeast.

This posed an interesting question to ponder while waiting for a ***boarding call*** for the flight to ***Japan***.

I assumed supplies started at around the same level when the bistro opened for breakfast.

Presumably, the sole employee in sight filled the receptacles to the top each morning as part of her duties. I couldn't see that there was all that much she would need to do apart from that.

I felt that it was also fairly safe to assume that there wouldn't have been too many dinkum Aussies in the crowd that had passed through the breakfast area before us.

More than likely, the previous clients would have been backpackers or tourists grabbing a bite to eat before heading off on a day tour of the Daintree or a white-water rafting expedition in the mountains between *Cairns* and *Tully*.

Anyone partaking in these pastimes might be looking at *maximising their Australian experience*, but observations of overseas reactions to *Vegemite* suggests that, for most foreign visitors, once is more than enough.

So what happened to all the *Vegemite*?

I had visions of overseas visitors surreptitiously sneaking sachets of the substance into their pockets, intending to smuggle them back home as evidence of the *Australian lack of sophisticated taste*.

*And, Muriel, can you imagine? They spread THIS on their morning toast! What strange people...*

It gave me something to ponder while we were waiting.

By seven-thirty, we were on our way to *the airport* and *Hughesy's* first encounter with the vagaries of international travel.

Arriving at the *International Terminal*, I was mildly bemused by the lack of activity.

A few people were being checked in, a tour guide was marshalling a group of *Japanese tourists* outside the *check-in area*, and there were a couple of terminals occupied by staff waiting for the arrival of customers.

*No waiting, no delay.*

*'Er Indoors*, being quite the experienced traveller, must have been looking forward with considerable amusement to watching the fun as *Hughesy* tackled the various administrative procedures before embarkation.

That was more than likely her motivation for allowing me to hand over my passport first.

And everything went smoothly.

Once the *Japanese passport* came into play, matters became somewhat more complicated.



Our operator required assistance, first from the terminal next door, and then a supervisor appeared on the scene, followed by further assistance from higher up the echelon.

In the end it was, we gathered, some minor glitch or typographical error - a zero entered as letter O or some such.

Several years ago I took great joy in describing my version of what happened when a lone traveller on her way back to **Japan** left an unattended bag in the midst of a **Japanese tour group** while she made use of the conveniences. She returned to find the group had moved on, and an unattended bag was the subject of serious scrutiny from the security staff.

However we've been warned about the inadvisability of joking about security issues in areas like **check-in counters**, so I was forced to give the flick pass to such potential rib-ticklers as *That's funny. It should have worked. Surely the ink's dry by now.*

Once we were passed that little hurdle, it was a case of up the stairs, round the corner and through Immigration where my previously pristine passport received its first exit stamp.

There was still ninety minutes to kill before boarding, and the area was almost totally deserted when we walked through Security and **'Er Indoors** once again attracted the attention of the guy with the little wand that scans you for traces of explosives.

Over the last dozen times, when we've passed through a security set-up I've walked straight past the individual in question while the strike rate where **'Er Indoors** is concerned is something like 50%.

Lack of crowds meant that we were the only customers in sight when we walked into the duty-free store, making a predictable beeline for the wine department.

It wasn't as if we were necessarily looking to buy anything. There were three bottles of **Rutherglen Tokay** tucked away as presents, and I didn't fancy the prospect of lugging extra weight around as we made our way around the **Land of the Rising Sun**.

On the other hand, I thought it would be interesting to see what was on offer.

While I suspected **the usual Aussie wine icons** would feature prominently, I suspected that we might encounter a couple of items that you wouldn't normally be able to find at your local liquor outlet.

When we visit the **Lolly Shop**, we are usually looking to restock the wine rack with value for money wines, and when we do venture into the quality section, we tend to head towards areas where we'll find something from a winery we've visited.

I have no idea if **Jacob's Creek Steingarten Riesling** is widely available or if it's a label that has somehow managed to slip past without attracting my attention.

The **Steingarten** vineyard was something I remembered reading about back in the mid-seventies when I was just starting to get interested in wine, Steingarten being a relatively high-altitude vineyard with a gravelly soil (**Steingarten** translates as *stone garden*) which had been developed and planted to produce something approaching a German-style Riesling.

*Interesting*, I thought, and proceeded with further investigations.

Since the first night in **Kōbe**'s accommodation was a 4.5-star establishment with water views, I started to think perhaps a nice bottle of red might be a suitable way of celebrating our arrival as we looked out over **Kōbe**'s harbour.

A bottle of **Steingarten** in the backpack wouldn't be that much extra weight.

I'd run across references to **Heathcote** as one of the emerging wine regions in Victoria but hadn't (as far as I can recall, and **Hughesy**'s memory can be a most unreliable conveyance) tasted anything from there. I selected a **Brown Brothers Heathcote Shiraz**.

From the *Limited release* label, it wasn't a wine I'd be likely to run into at the local bottle-o.

From there I found myself a comfortable seat and devoted myself to writing up the previous twenty-four hours while **'Er Indoors** indulged herself with a wander around the shopping options.

Once the call came, boarding went smoothly, but some difficulty in the luggage compartment downstairs meant that the load needed re-stowing, delaying our departure by half an hour or so.

While we were taking stock of this development, an announcement - first in **English**, then in **Japanese** - advised the temperature on the ground at **Kansai** was a far-from-comfortable eight degrees Celsius. Obviously, the majority of the passengers, being **Japanese**, either tend to zone out while the **English** version of such announcements goes across, preferring to wait till they can get the information in their preferred tongue or else they just don't understand **English**.

If that sounds like I'm being uncharitable, the **English** announcement had concluded, **'Er Indoors** and I had finished discussing the need to adjust our luggage to counter extremes of temperature when the **Japanese** version of the same information went across, resulting in a noticeable shudder from the majority of the plane's population.

Looking back on it, we decided the announcement was a tactical move to provide those on board with something to talk about, or if travelling alone to occupy their minds while the rearrangements were happening down below.

Once we were in the air, there was nothing for it but to sit back and try to find something to occupy the mind over the flight's seven and a half hour duration.

Under normal circumstances, I'd have a book to read and with the **iPod** supplying a suitable soundtrack that would be quite sufficient.



But since I was carrying one book that needed to last me for a bit over two weeks, the time from take-off to touch-down was spent toggling between various modes.

*Customs* paperwork, reading, writing the *Travelogue*, eating, meditating on various subjects, listening to the *iPod* - and despite predictions from certain quarters, I found enough variety to prevent the time from dragging unduly.

Once a wave of excitement went through the group of homeward-bound home-stay students in front of us as land came into sight we were able to spend the rest of the flight trying to figure out exactly where we were.

That wasn't as easy as you might think, given the haze that covered most of the visible countryside. We were looking towards the afternoon sun, which didn't help matters much, but as we approached ever closer to *Kansai International* (*KIX* in *Airport Code* - *KAN* was probably allocated to *Kansas City*) 'Er *Indoors* spotted more and more familiar landmarks until eventually we were over *Osaka Bay* on final approach.

Once we landed, a lengthy taxi took us around three sides of the terminal to the disembarkation point. The air bridge delivered us into the building and, by the straightforward approach of following those in front of us we ended up on the monorail that carried us down to the inevitable encounter with *Customs and Immigration*

Among *Hughesy's* circle of acquaintances, it's frequently been noted that when you wander into the local *Post Office* to find yourself on the end of a very long queue, by the time you've made your way to the counter and concluded your business you almost invariably discover that the previously lengthy queue is now totally non-existent.

In most cases, apart from the *Post Office* staff, you tend to find you're the only person in the building.

I had no idea the same principle applied in *international airports*.

Arriving in the *Immigration Hall*, 'Er *Indoors* (of course) headed for the *Japanese-passport-holders'* section, where her entry to her homeland proceeded without incident. Then she settled down to wait for *Yours Truly*.

For my part, I attached myself to the end of a queue comprising, at a rough guess, several hundred people. Part of the problem was the fact that our flight was half an hour late. Had it been on time, I guess I would have found myself in front of many of the people who were now in front of me.

As the serpentine line inched towards the processing area, we passed large notices advising that, as of late last year, all foreigners entering *Japan* needed to be fingerprinted and photographed.

In some cases, the procedure seemed to take a couple of seconds, but by the time I found myself second in line from the processing point and was looking forward to whatever lay on the other side of the barriers the guy in front of me seemed to encounter all sorts of obstacles.

If I didn't spend five minutes waiting for the opportunity to move into another spot presented itself it certainly felt like five minutes.

Over forty-five minutes or so standing in line it seemed there only had been a single international flight arrive. I watched as a handful of passengers who'd arrived after me disappeared towards the baggage carousel while I waited for a vacancy to allow me to shift to another line.

Eventually, I found my way through another processing point, headed down, collected the luggage and passed straight through the rest of the process in no time flat.

Faced with revealed form one would have expected further delays from *the airport* to the hotel, but we arrived at the shuttle bus departure point with about five minutes to spare. Since the rush hour was well and truly past the scheduled sixty-five minute trip to downtown *Kōbe* took more or less the advertised time span.

*'Er Indoors*, for some reason, decided to install us on the port side of the bus, generously allowing me the window seat. That meant the first half of the journey had us passing dock-lands, skirting industrial estates and crossing waterways on the port side while the other side looked over the fairyland twinkle of a major conurbation.

In fact, it was some forty minutes after we started when I spotted the first obvious residential building on our side of the bus.

I was just reflecting that one dockland/industrial area around the world must look just like any other one when you removed the neon signs (and the neon signs were conspicuous by their absence at the time) when a voice from beside me said:

*Look over there - that's Osaka Castle.*

At which time I sent an important email to myself.

*Self. Next time we take this trip we sit on the starboard side of the bus.*

Alighting from the bus at *Sannomiya*, *Kōbe*'s main rail terminal and the hub of a number of transport options it took us a few minutes to locate the departure point for the next shuttle bus, which would transfer us to the *Meriken Park Oriental Hotel*.

Since the next bus was due in about five minutes, that gave us time for a brief debate about the night's eating arrangements.



There were a couple of options close at hand, but I felt that if we went for a look, we might well miss the bus and face a half hour wait.

In any case, after a substantial meal the previous night and snacks on the plane (*beef rendang* and a pastrami sandwich, both of which were considerably better than my limited experiences with airline food suggested they were likely to be) it wouldn't do us all that much harm if we failed to find an acceptable snack option at the hotel.

And if we were going to go hungry there was a bottle of *Heathcote Shiraz* to deaden the pangs.

Once the shuttle had delivered us to the hotel, we were checked in, offered an impressive explanation of the breakfast options and handed over to a porter, who conducted us to our room.

Arriving outside the door, our friendly porter embarked on a lengthy demonstration of the correct use of the key card.

That might have been understandable if the explanation was in *English* and directed towards a hairy foreigner, but it was in *Japanese*, directed at '*Er Indoors* who'd been privileged to receive a similar, somewhat shorter, explanation downstairs.

It seemed somewhat pointless, except as an exercise in repeated bi-directional courtesies.

Once inside the room, he proceeded to repeat at length the explanation of the breakfast options we'd already received at the *check-in counter*, before graciously withdrawing.

Throughout this process, I was left alone to ponder that this guy bore a remarkable resemblance in the mannerism department to a certain ex-pupil known in *Year Four* circles as *Harry Houdini*.

When I mentioned this resemblance to '*Er Indoors*, the look I received in return suggested further significant evidence had been added to the prosecution brief in the case of *The Crown versus Hughesy's Sanity*.

After a few minutes taking in the view across the harbour, a chance encounter with the room service menu revealed the availability of various reasonably-priced snacks. So we ventured downstairs and ended up with a *club sandwich* and a *fruit parfait* which provided the stomach lining we needed when we attacked the *Shiraz*, which we'd left quietly breathing upstairs.

And very nice it was, too.

*Lights Out* was some time after eleven, but with a midday checkout and the prospect of a substantial buffet breakfast in the morning, the lateness of the hour was never going to be an issue.



## KOBE > OSAKA > KOBE

***Friday, 4 April 2008***

When I'm safely ensconced in *The Little House of Concrete* one of the problems that recur in the day to day cycle is the relatively early rise.

Except in exceptional circumstances, when the sun rises, so does *Hughesy*.

Not that I'm averse to sleeping in.

The lack of blackout curtains in the bedroom means it's difficult to remain asleep once the roseate glow of morning sunlight starts to seep into the room, assuming you're in a state of consciousness higher than totally comatose.

Which means when I awoke fully refreshed to find the room in darkness at eight a.m. I was impressed.

*Hughesy's* hotel ratings have tended to deal with the presence of abundant hot water (an important criterion).



But if I had to specify one thing that raises hotel accommodation into the top bracket (at least in my book) it's the possibility of sleeping in until the body tells you that it doesn't want to sleep in anymore.

And I found that to be the case in almost every hotel we stayed in over the next fortnight.

Having completed the morning preliminaries, just after nine we wandered into the larger of the two restaurants offering breakfast for my first encounter with the *Japanese Viking* (which is, essentially, a much easier way of spelling *Smorgasbord*).

After a light supper the previous night, faced with the prospect of taking on enough fuel to keep us going until dinner time that evening, I attacked the range of delicacies on offer with alacrity.

One plate of more-or-less-*Western-style* breakfast, a plate of the *Japanese* version, a return to the *Western* side and an omelette.

The final selection stemmed from an urge to relieve a chef without anything to do at his station, you understand, rather than any inclination towards gluttony. '*Er Indoors* suggested two individuals rostered onto the scrambled eggs/omelette detail looked bored. *Hughesy* did something about it.

Bookmakers fielding in the *What're the first two things Hughesy adds to the plate when he reaches the buffet stakes* would have lost heavily.

The first things added to the plate?

*Cod roe spaghetti and parmesan cheese.*

The alert reader will possibly have noted I previously referred to more-or-less-*Western-style* breakfast.

Once we'd eaten, packed and checked out, we emerged into the outside world to find conditions were much colder than anticipated. That prompted several extra layers of clothing added while we awaited the arrival of the shuttle bus.

Back at *Sannomiya*, I had my first encounter with a subway system designed to move the maximum number of people with the greatest possible efficiency.

For a start, lines indicate where the doors will be when the train stops.

So, if you anticipate wanting a seat for your journey, you not only join the queue at one of the clearly marked boarding points. You can always decide to wait for the next train, assuming you can afford the time, should the queue be too long this time around.

That should, of course, place you at the front of the queue.

Once the train arrives, passengers alighting from the train leave through the middle of the doorway, passengers boarding do so from the sides.

Aboard the train, we were headed, together with the totality of our luggage for *The Mother's* apartment out in the dormitory suburbs at *Myodani*, where the quantity of luggage meant that we took a taxi from the station to the apartment rather than catching a bus.

*'Er indoors* had carefully worked out the logistical arrangements. What we needed for the next day and a half would fit in my backpack.

After that we'd be lugging one piece of luggage for the following week or so, replacing it with an overnight bag for the final *Kōbe > Kyoto > Nara > Kōbe* leg.

Everything surplus to our immediate requirements would remain with *The Mother* at *Myodani*.

Once the luggage had been sorted out, a bus took us back to the station, where we diverted towards an electrical store to pick up an improved set of ear pieces for the *iPod* and a 2 GB memory card for the camera.

From there, we headed back downtown to the evening's accommodation at the *Urban Hotel*.

On the way, I learnt another important lesson.

When leaving the station, make sure you choose the correct exit.

There were plenty of them, but only one matched the map *Madam* had printed off the internet, and it wasn't the one we chose.

That was a significant issue since the hotel was discreetly tucked away on a side street and took quite a deal of finding.

But, on arrival, we found a spacious room that would do very nicely.

A perfunctory attempt to find the establishment through a *Google* search while completing this entry failed to return an *English*-language result, which is why the reader won't find a web-site link.

Once we'd showered and changed it was back to the subway so we could head over to *Osaka* for our appointment with the *Office Manager* and the *Cereal Queen*.

We left the hotel, turned right (we'd come in on the left-hand side) walked around the block and found, lo and behold, the exit we should have taken an hour or so earlier.

In other circumstances, I might have been tempted to pause for a browse the bookshops that line the entrance to that section of the station complex.

Having plenty of time on our hands before seven o'clock, *'Er Indoors* decided it was advisable to stop off along the way for a spot of cherry-blossom appreciation.





It wasn't till we were off the train and heading along the banks of the stream that I started to realise why cherry blossom time was such a big deal.

You can't tell from the photos since I positioned myself to photograph flowers rather than crowds, but we arrived just before five o'clock.

There was a sizeable crowd already on hand, and while we went for a wander, the crowd grew.

To a certain casual hairy foreign observer, it seemed what we were seeing was as much about social interaction, an excuse to get together with friends and relatives to eat, drink and enjoy the scenery, as it was about the aesthetics of the cherry blossoms.





As the crowd built up, we decided to leave them to it, resume the journey to *Osaka* and arrive at the rendezvous with plenty of time to spare.

The meeting point was *Kinokuniya Bookstore* at the entrance to *Umeda Station*.

That's where the complications set in.

For a start, there isn't one entrance to the largest bookstore I've ever seen.

There are at least two, on either side of the concourse that formed the conduit for thousands of people heading downtown from the suburbs in search of their *Friday* night entertainment and further thousands of people heading in the opposite direction.

We had enough time on our hands to sneak inside the bookshop, where I found an *Inspector Rebus* novel ([\*Resurrection Men\*](#), just in case you're interested) brand new for eight-hundred and something yen (around eight Oz dollars).



It served to point out, yet again, that *Australian readers* are paying through the nose for their literary entertainment. I weakened and bought it.

Back outside we were faced with a difficult choice.

If we placed ourselves outside either entrance to the bookshop, there was no way we could keep an eye on the other one. And if we tried to place ourselves in the middle we'd more than likely be swept away by the rushing tide of humanity and wouldn't have been able to monitor either side effectively.

Around us, people were talking animatedly into mobile phones as they attempted to establish the whereabouts of the people they were supposed to be meeting. We decided to alternate between the two sides and put our faith in digital technology.

In the end, we didn't need to.

I had a height advantage over *'Er Indoors* and knew we were looking for two people arriving from opposite directions, one slightly above average *Japanese* height, one slightly below.

I sighted them before they'd finished ringing *The Mother's mobile*, which had been entrusted to *'Er Indoors* for the duration of our stay.

From there it was a case of finding the selected eatery, which wasn't quite where our guide thought it was, necessitating the use of digital technology as an aid to navigation.

Once we'd arrived at *Kitchen Stadium* (I'm not kidding, that's what it's called, and I gather the *Iron Chef* is far enough back in *Japanese TV history* to have removed threats of legal action for copyright infringement) it was time for the ritual exchange of gifts.

*'Er Indoors* had bought packets of dried mango for gift-giving purposes. *Office Manager* was thrilled to receive some while the *Cereal Queen* went into rapture at the sight of a packet of *Just Right*.

Your actual common or garden breakfast cereal is a rare commodity in the *Land of the Rising Sun*. When that was done, we settled down to exchange news, eat and drink.

*Kitchen Stadium* is a New York style restaurant and bar serving pasta, pizzas, rice, steak, chicken, seafood and vegetable dishes prepared in an open kitchen easily visible from the booth where we were sitting.

The four of us worked our way through a multitude of tastes though the task of splitting some platters four ways presented a slight problem.

Still, you don't *always* want to try *absolutely* everything.

One dish arrived with an accompanying bottle of **Tabasco**, and when the waiter learned that I was partial to a spot of hot sauce, he returned bearing a range of bottles from **Belize**.

Very nice, but extremely hot and a perfect example of why **Hughesy's** taste buds don't detect delicate or subtle flavours.

Still, my appreciation of the sauces on offer was rewarded with a sample of an incendiary number from **Okinawa**, home to our friendly waiter and the group sitting at the table next to ours.

They were chain-smoking, celebrating of a win in the grand final of the nationwide **High School baseball championship** that we'd spotted on various TV screens in the course of our afternoon's travels.

**Hughesy's** photo albums from the **Australia** filming in **Bowen** also attracted a deal of interest from two girls who'd spent six months helping out *'Er Indoors* and **Bowen High's Japanese teacher**.

Our train back to **Kosoku Kōbe** was crowded when we boarded just after ten o'clock, which made finding seats a matter of good luck rather than good management.

The population had thinned considerably by the time we arrived, well and truly ready for another good night's sleep.

That wasn't looming on the immediate horizon since the convenient entrance to the station we'd discovered had been closed, presumably, around the time the book stalls had closed.

However, earlier attempts to locate the hotel had left us with some knowledge of the neighbourhood and, once we'd found our way out of the station, the task of navigating back to the accommodation wasn't all that difficult.

Much easier than it would have been if we'd selected the right exit in the afternoon.

In other words, *what you lose on the roundabout you make up for on the hurdy-gurdy*.





## KOBE > HIMEJI > KOBE

***Saturday, 5 April 2008***

Since we had swapped the suitcases for a backpack the day before, there was no need to do anything about the luggage once we'd checked out of the *Urban Hotel* the next morning and prepared to head for *Himeji*.

Since we'd eaten well the night before also meant there was no immediate need for breakfast, so it was a case of straight onto the train and off for further *sakura*-viewing.



We managed to find two seats opposite a *Cub Scout troop* on their way somewhere, prompting *Hughesy* to reflect that nine-year-old boys tend to be much the same the world over.

Having finished work two-and-a-bit years ago, I don't remember much about *Year Four school excursions*, but the behaviours I was watching on the seats across the aisle looked uncannily familiar.

Once we reached *Himeji* crowds heading down the avenue from the station to the castle should have warned us that things were about to become crowded.

I didn't realise how many people use *sakura* and a sunny *Saturday* as an excuse for a day out.

Subsequent information suggests a figure somewhere more than seventy thousand.

We took a break to grab breakfast at a noodle outlet, and a successful attempt at using chopsticks.

That's an achievement I was, for some inexplicable reason, unable to repeat.

Nourished, we felt ready to join the queues forming at the entrance to the castle grounds.







Alarm bells should well and truly have been ringing at this point, but once we'd passed into the extensive grounds within the castle's outer walls the presence of vast areas of blue tarps under the trees and musical entertainment in the background suggested it mightn't be too bad once we'd paid the admission fee and passed into the castle proper.

The castle dates back to 1609 and is considered *Japan's* most spectacular structure of its kind, largely because it has survived for four hundred years without falling victim to fire, earthquake or enemy action.

*James Bond* fans will recognize it as the secret *ninja* training school and rocket centre from ***You Only Live Twice***. *Tom Cruise* wandered through artificial snow and the castle grounds in ***The Last Samurai***.

Inside, we followed the tour path through the ***West Bailey***, past a long store house where rice and salt were stockpiled in case the castle was besieged and into the main ***donjon***, noting the population density seemed to be increasing gradually.





Once we'd started the ascent to the upper levels of the main structure we found the reason.

While there was a steady stream of people being admitted to the grounds and embarking on the walk through the buildings, this was reduced to a single line as they attempted to reach the upper levels of the castle.

Faced with an almighty squeeze and, more than likely, a lengthy wait, we bailed out of the tour as soon as the opportunity arose and headed for the tranquility of the gardens next door.

*Himeji Kokoen* was constructed as recently as **1992** to commemorate the centenary of the local municipality, and while they may have been there for less than twenty years, nine separate gardens in the complex look like they're much older.





While the gardens might have been better with autumn leaves, they were quite spectacular, and while plenty of people passed through, relatively uncrowded compared to the crush in the castle next door.

From the gardens, we had to hurry to meet up with *Minnie*, *one of Madam's* High School friends, who presented '*Er Indoors*' with a piece of work that's gracing the living room as I write.

There wasn't too much time for them to catch up on old times.

We had to find our way back to the station, stop off at *Myodani* to pack the suitcase that would carry clothes for the next (week-long) stage of the trip, return to downtown *Kōbe*, check in, change and meet up with two more of *Madam's* High School friends by six-thirty.

Which didn't leave us a whole lot of time to catch our breath.

Once we'd alighted at *Sannomiya*, it was a matter of moving as fast as possible.



We checked in, changed, and then made a brief subway journey got us to the rendezvous on time.

I'd been warned the couple we were meeting knew their way around **Kōbe**'s restaurants, but I wasn't expecting the high-class **Chinese** establishment where I found myself sipping beer and wondering how we were going to work the ordering.

In the long run, we entrusted ourselves to the chefs and were rewarded with a succession of tasting plates covering a range of tastes and textures, though I must admit that the jellyfish starter had a texture that I, for one, wouldn't have expected.

*Jellyfish*, you may be surprised to learn, *is*, if *not quite crunchy*, much firmer in texture than I would have expected.

Comments about **Hughesy**'s liking for a splash of **chilli** produced one extra-hot dish featuring a dried **chilli** that, it was suggested, I might prefer to avoid sampling.

The dish itself was wonderfully warm and faced with the lone dried **chilli** that remained on the plate I abandoned any thought of discretion.

I certainly needed the two beers that were necessary to quell the flames, but it was very tasty.

As previously indicated, **Hughesy**'s taste buds don't do *subtle* but throw a bit of **chilli** their way...

And the witnesses seemed impressed.

Once the meal was over we faced a ten-minute walk back to the hotel, so we bade farewell to **our hosts** for the night and headed back to recharge the batteries before the next day's excursion to **Kyoto**.



## KOBE > KYOTO > KOBE

***Sunday, 6 April 2008***

Reflecting on the previous day's adventures, and bearing in mind this was the only hotel where we were booked in for two nights I decided to lighten the load in the backpack.

I placed the bottle of *Steingarten* in the fridge before we shut the door and set off for *Sannomiya* en route to *Kyoto* where, on a sunny *sakura* season *Sunday*, one could go, so I was informed, *to look at the people*.

Even after the *Himeji* episode, I didn't appreciate just how many people were likely to be involved.

Prior experience also suggested breakfast might be a good idea so when we reached the station, we found a suitable eatery and placed our orders.

I thought a hot dog might be a non-controversial selection and was bemused when it arrived accompanied by a salad and a dab of mashed potato.





By the way, it's surprising how often mashed potato turned up over the next twelve days.

We managed to snare seats on the train out of **Sannomiya**, but we had to change trains *en route*, and the second train must have been packed to the gunwales when it left **Osaka**, so we were forced to stand for the second leg.

Once we'd arrived, '**Er Indoors**' announced her knowledge of the local geography left something to be desired, and we needed a map.

That resulted in a search for information that seemed to take an hour and involved enough changes of direction to leave me completely disoriented.

Even if I'd known where we'd started.





Which, of course, I didn't.

Once we had a map we wandered out in search of a bus and found queues meandering away from close to a dozen points. Buses appeared, in what seemed totally random order, from time to time, so we attached ourselves to what we thought was the right queue (it wasn't) and settled down to wait.

Close by, some out-of-towners managed to attract the attention of one of the officials wandering around the area.

While I had no idea what the conversation was about it was enough to direct us towards a completely different location where we would find a more appropriate and marginally less crowded alternative that would deliver us to a point close to our main objectives, *Ginkakuji* temple and the *Philosopher's Path*.

The bus delivered us to the foot of the road leading to *Ginkakuji* (and one end of the *Philosopher's Path*), and we joined the throng headed uphill.





*Ginkakuji*, the *Temple of the Silver Pavilion*, at the foot of the mountains east of *Kyoto* was built in the fifteenth century as a place of solitude for *Shōgun Ashikaga Yoshimasa*.

The main building was going to match his grandfather's *Kinkakuji* (*Golden Pavilion*).

Plans to cover it in silver were delayed by the *Ōnin War*, which ravaged *Kyoto*, and were abandoned after *Yoshimasa*'s death in 1490.

The villa was converted into a *Zen* temple and trees, plants and mosses from all over *Japan* were planted in gardens designed by the landscape gardener *Soami*.





We didn't get into the main building, which is being renovated, but I was totally blown away from the time we walked through the entrance, where magnificent high hedges line both sides of the approach to the temple.

Inside the courtyard, the first thing you run across is the *Ginshaden* (*Sea of Silver Sand*), with a smooth cone of sand that represents *Mount Fuji*.

From there, following the pathway, you eventually end up looking back over the city of *Kyoto*.

The notes in my journal read *don't write, just show pictures* though I can't leave the subject without mentioning that I particularly loved the moss.

Until that day, if I thought of moss at all, it was something you find on rocks in pools and damp environments, attractive if you like that sort of thing, but nothing to write home about.

I emerged with totally unrealistic ambitions to incorporate moss into the grounds around *The Little House of Concrete*.





But, in the end, it was all about the sand.

Heading back downhill, we stopped for ice creams and set off on the *Philosopher's Path*.

It's a thirty-minute walk beside a canal, with heritage buildings, tea shops and art stalls beside the path, and a constant flow of people in both directions.

Put that way it doesn't sound all that fantastic, but add the cherry blossom, which is the reason most people are there, and you've got something else entirely.

Eventually, the crush got to us.

We bailed out before the trail finished, and wandered downhill towards the city centre through quiet streets lined with old-style houses.

Eventually, we ended up at a very impressive shrine, but we'd had enough of crowds, thank you very much.



Working our way back towards downtown **Kyoto**, we crossed a bridge and dived into alleys lined with bars, restaurants and dens of iniquity.

With a couple of hours' walk under the belt, having landed on a major thoroughfare, we stopped for lunch (a hamburger plate and tuna cream *spaghetti*) which was enough, as it turned out, to keep us going for the rest of the day.

Back at **Kawaramachi Station**, we decided we'd had enough for the time being, boarded a train and managed to find a seat.

That might seem a minor detail, but it was enough to persuade us to travel all the way to **Osaka** rather than change trains as we had in the morning. That would give us a better chance of a seat on a **Kōbe**-bound train and be assured of a seat.

It had been that sort of day.

Back in **Kōbe**, we decided we hadn't quite got the full value out of the three-day **Kansai passes**, so we took a ride on the **Portliner Monorail** out to **Kōbe Airport** and back, which gave us a mariners' eye view of the city.

Once we'd finished that little jaunt, it was time to organize the next stage of the odyssey.

First up, we had to convert a couple of **Japan Rail Pass vouchers** into actual tickets, and with that accomplished we were able to book ourselves onto the **Shinkansen** from **Kōbe** to **Kyoto** and the slower train that would carry us from **Kyoto** to **Kanazawa**.

To be quite honest, I'd more or less had enough by the time we got back to the hotel, located in the downtown business district, which meant dining options in the immediate neighbourhood were few and far between.

Instead, I opted for a takeaway snack, a couple of beers from a convenient vending machine and the chilled bottle of **Steingarten** while bringing my travel notes up to date as **'Er Indoors** slipped in and out of the room to monitor the progress of a load of washing.

The **Steingarten** with its lemon/lime characters on the nose and palate provided a wonderful wind-down after what had been a rather wearing, and at times quite chaotic, day.

Several days later I heard **Madam** use a word that sounded like **Kyotic** to describe the day's events, adding a new word to our personal dictionaries.

**Kyotic:** (adjective) *State of utter chaos as experienced in Kyoto on a sunny **Sakura** Sunday.*





2

# THE RAIL PASS





## KOBE > KYOTO > KANAZAWA

***Monday, 7 April 2008***

It was a case of rise and shine relatively early for the first day of the *Japan Rail Pass* big travel week. *'Er Indoors* checked out, a process entirely devoid of human influence on the business end and we were heading off in search of the subway station that would begin the day's journey.

I hadn't actually seen the crowding that people associate with rush hour *Japanese subway travel* up to this point. You know what I mean, those images of *solidly built railway staff on hand to push a few extra passengers into a sardine-packed carriage*.



*Solidly built people pushers* were conspicuous by their absence when we arrived on the platform, joining a dozen people waiting for the next train.

The arrival of the train, however, suggested they'd been needed further up the line.

The carriages were packed, and it was difficult to make our way towards the carriage against a flood tide of black-suited salary-men.

Once the previously packed compartments had emptied, we found ourselves almost alone in a strangely deserted carriage.

Of course, we were headed out of the city centre, towards **ShinKōbe** Station, which is, like many of the **Shinkansen** depots, located slightly away from the main commercial and business area of **Kōbe**.

We arrived with plenty of time to spare, which allowed us to enjoy a leisurely breakfast before it was time to board the 8:25 service to **Kyoto**.







Having grown where trains operate much less frequently I'd been warned that the 8:25 train means the one that actually leaves at 8:25.

That one will arrive, more or less at eight-twenty-three and a half, being a completely different conveyance to the 8:22 which leaves the same platform for a completely different destination.

I'd become accustomed to guidelines on commuter platforms, but ***Shinkansen*** stations have barriers with gaps where the doors will open. Amazingly, that's exactly where they do open, and you've got about a minute and a half (if that) to get on board and locate your seat before you're off.

There are three levels of service on the ***Tokaido/Sanyo Shinkansen*** lines. The fastest, ***Nozomi*** (*hope* or *wish*) are express affairs, stopping at a handful of stations.

They aren't covered by the ***Rail Pass***. That's a pity since they cover the 515 kilometres between ***Tokyo*** and ***Osaka*** in two and a half hours.

The intermediate ***Hikari*** (*light* or *ray*) services stop at a few more stations, usually to allow the faster ***Nozomi*** to pass.

The slowest ***Kodama*** (*echo*) services stop at all stations allowing faster services to pass through.



Once aboard *Hikari 364 Thunderbird 7* (impressive name, or what?) the first section of the journey took us through a tunnel, emerging onto a viaduct comfortably above the surrounding conurbation. Faced with obstacles like hills, *Shinkansen* services go *through* rather than *over* them.

If the obstacle is a built up area, the solution is to go *over* rather than *through*.

Despite the elevation, however, there wasn't a lot to see because of the barriers on either side of the track. There was, predictably, even less when we met with trains heading in the opposite direction.

I did, however, manage to recognize the river we crossed on the outskirts of *Osaka*, which we reached a quarter of an hour after leaving *Kōbe*.

While we were travelling much faster than I'd become accustomed to on the commuter services, things seemed much less blurred as we went past, presumably because the buildings were below us rather than flashing past at eye-level.

And very peaceful travelling it was, sitting back in airline-style seats with the sort of leg room you might get in business class (if you're lucky) with something pleasant to listen to:

*five minutes out of Kyoto on Shinkansen*

*timeless rice paddies amidst scattered timber houses*

*john fahey steamboat gwine 'round the bend*

*on iPod.*

Fourteen minutes after *Osaka*, we were disembarking in *Kyoto*.

The next service would carry us on to *Kanazawa*, wasn't *Shinkansen*-flash but was comfortable enough, with comparable leg room.

Once we'd boarded, I watched as a supervisor (I assume the guard was at the rear) performed some arcane bi-directional ritual to indicate our departure.

Underway I realized what I'd been missing all morning.

There was none of that click-clack *Australian rail commuters* experience as the wheels cross the gaps between one section of rail and the next.

Mind you, if they did exist, at *Shinkansen*-speed, they'd probably sound *more like machine-gun fire*, which probably explains why they don't (*exist, that is*).

On the way out of *Kyoto*, we ran into the patchwork landscape I'd noticed before, a quilt of factories, houses, light and heavy industry, an occasional farmlet, and the odd timeless graveyard.



Interestingly, almost every stream we crossed seemed to have been carefully channelled, and as I looked back over the previous couple of days I couldn't remember seeing a stream with banks that weren't lined with bricks, stone or concrete.

I was also bemused by the fact that many seemingly old, traditional houses were sporting *reverse cycle air-conditioning units* and even *satellite dishes*.

As we moved into forested slopes above farmland, the villages became scattered pockets between flooded paddy fields. By ten-thirty, we had glimpses of mountains away to the right, more or less in the direction we were headed the following day.

As we neared **Kanazawa**, we'd passed through the central *cordillera*, and it seemed considerably cooler than on the other side of the divide.

I guessed the weather on this side was influenced by colder air emanating from the depths of **continental Asia** whereas the eastern coast was, I suspected, influenced by a warmer ocean current, much as the **Gulf Stream** moderates temperatures along the **eastern coast of North America** as far north as **Newfoundland**.

It may have been the haze I'd noted throughout the past few days, but the air looked colder, particularly as I gazed off towards the mountains where we were headed tomorrow.

Once we'd arrived and found our way out of the station, we had a slight problem finding the hotel, passing the street where it was located and thinking it was a lane-way too insignificant to feature on the street map.

But eventually we realized we'd gone way too far, backtracked, found it, deposited the suitcase and headed off in search of lunch before we set off seeing the sights.

Between the hotel and the station complex, the **Forus shopping centre** featured a floor of restaurants, so it seemed the right place to direct our attention. After completing a circuit of the floor in question, we opted for the **G&O (Gumbo & Oyster) Bar**.

It was around this time that I realized that **Madam** wasn't kidding when she said you could find any style of food in **Japan** if you knew where to look.

I wouldn't, however, have thought of setting out in search of **Louisiana cooking** in **Kanazawa**.

**'Er Indoors** selected a set menu with a variety of New Orleans-style treats, which she reported was *good* while I ordered a couple of **oysters natural** and a bowl of **seafood gumbo**.

It obviously pays to be a foreigner eating early.





When the oysters arrived, there were four of them, plump, juicy and wonderful. The bowl of *gumbo* also went down well, washed down with a glass of good *Chablis*.

Suitably fortified we set off to locate the tour bus that does a clockwise circuit around twenty sites of interest, skipping the first couple of sites before alighting at the stop closest to the *geisha quarter*.

As it turned out, we'd misheard the bus driver's directions. We should have headed left along the river bank rather than turning left straight off the bus and turning right at the *sushi bar*.

Instead, we headed along the river and turned left just after we'd spotted a couple using a camera, a tripod and a timed delay to get a photo of the two of them against a background of cherry blossom.





I took a couple of photos from the same spot before the guy with the tripod asked us whether we'd like a photo of the two of us against the same backdrop they'd used.

We accepted, passed over the camera and the reader can see the result.

By this time, we realized we'd taken a wrong turn, but knew where the *geisha quarter* had to be, and headed off in that direction.

A very helpful old gentleman also helped to put us on the right track.

We stopped at a building set up as an *information centre* and based on the information received there we retraced our steps to a place where we could tour a recreated *geisha house*.

The camera battery decided to pack it in as soon as we walked through the door, so we didn't walk away with a complete photographic record of an establishment set up the way things would have been.





Anyone with a mind to sample *geisha entertainment* might be interested to learn there are still eight houses in the quarter offering the traditional treats, but be warned - it doesn't come cheaply.

A ninety-minute session would set you back \$US 1500...

From there, we headed to the bus stop, boarded the next bus and headed off to *Kanazawa Castle* and more *sakura*.

No sooner had we alighted than the rain, which had been threatening for a while, decided to do a bit more than *threaten*.

So we walked through the drizzle, managing to complete a loop around *Kenrokuen* before deciding that enough was enough and heading back to the hotel to check in, rest and recharge the camera.

We figured with a break of an hour or so we could head off on the second-last bus for the day, get a couple of photos and catch the final bus back to base.

We emerged from the warm and dry hotel to find that conditions were cold, drizzly and miserable. When we'd boarded the bus earlier in the afternoon, it had been crowded.

Now, three or four hours later, it was, practically deserted.





Since we knew where we were going, we were looking forward to snapping a couple of photos of the *sakura* in front of the castle before doing a quick lap of the garden.

But as soon as we embarked on the exercise, the camera decided to inform us there was no more space on the memory card, which was just as well since we only just managed to catch the last bus back.

At the station, we booked our seats for the next stage of the trip, then headed back to *Forus* for dinner.

We opted for a *Korean* eatery that wasn't quite what the doctor ordered, and eventually returned to the warmth of the hotel hoping things would turn out better on the morrow.





## KANAZAWA > TAKAYAMA

***Tuesday, 8 April 2008***

A week into the trip and starting Day Two of the Rail Pass Week, a 7:09 departure from ***Kanazawa*** precluded thoughts of breakfast before heading to the station.

On the way out of the city, on a bleak morning that presented no chance to see whether recent precipitation had managed to clear the ever-present haze, there were obvious signs of recent and fairly substantial rainfall, which, given our experiences of the day before was hardly earth-shattering news.

***Kanazawa*** has a well-deserved reputation for wet weather.





After we'd left the outskirts of the city, we passed through an agrarian landscape, with a misty haze covering the forested hilltops.

Suited salary-men boarded the train at some stations, and I couldn't help noticing that there were upmarket homes scattered through the villages.

Conditions made it difficult to see the snow that I was sure capped the mountains away to our right. As we moved away from the coast the land on the left-hand side started to rise, though again, it wasn't possible to get a clear view of the peaks.

At *Toyama*, we had difficulty finding *Platform 3*, which wasn't well signposted, but eventually discovered the next leg of the journey involved an upmarket version of the old-fashioned rail motor.

When we took our seats in the first carriage, it was obvious, given picture windows that gave a generous view to the front and both sides that we were travelling a particularly scenic route.





The misty conditions were far from ideal for sightseeing but gave a feeling of travelling in an enclosed world as we headed past streams boosted by recent rainfall.

Despite the rain, many trees held cherry-blossom, which suggested steady drizzle rather than the sort of downpour that would knock the flowers off the branches.

We climbed into the mountains as the mist closed in more tightly, and pylons suggested nearby hydroelectric stations as we passed through some tunnels, skirting sudden canyons and waterfalls.

A lengthy stop at *Inotani*, where I looked out over mist and forest-clad mountains, evoked images of hermits and *Zen* poets in the mist.





Moving on through **Sugihara**, we passed into an area where there were patches of snow on slopes not far above the line.

By this point, we were following the river valley, almost at river level with the highway on the other side of the stream protected by a roof supported by lines of pillars.

As we rolled through **Sakakami**, I gave up on writing in the journal because scribbling the odd observation was getting in the way of enjoying the scenery.

Approaching **Takayama**, the houses looked to be of much the same construction as those further down. They'd have to be very well insulated if the occupants were going to make it through harsh winters.





My suspicions about temperatures were confirmed as we alighted in *Takayama* just after nine o'clock in conditions colder than a mother-in-law's kiss.

We deposited the suitcase at the hotel, then headed back to the station to catch the bus to the *Hida Folk Village*, where we spent a couple of hours wandering through buildings that had been rescued from river valleys flooded to provide water for hydroelectric schemes.

The houses weren't all that old, not going back much beyond the middle of the eighteenth century, and came from a variety of sources, representing a range of occupations and social classes.

There were farmhouses with upper storeys devoted to the raising of silkworms, a priest's home, a village head man's house where the walls could be removed to make a room large enough for meetings, and a woodcutter's hut as well as a way-station from a main road.

And one building erected as a residence for a wealthy landowner.





Casual onlookers might be inclined to get sniffy and dismiss the place as a tourist trap, but it looks like a genuine attempt to preserve aspects of the area's traditional lifestyle, with streams of melt-water flowing downhill to power water mills.

Here and there patches of snow remained in hollows protected from the springtime sun.

Each building, for example, was heated, if that's the right word to use for a few burning coals in the living area, by fire rather than electricity.

I couldn't help wondering how the occupants coped with temperatures that reached below minus twenty with two metres of snow on the roof.





It is not, however, the sort of place to take kids who can't tie up their shoelaces since venturing inside almost every building involves removing the footwear.

In hindsight, I wished I'd invested in a pair of Velcro-equipped joggers.

Two hours of wandering on an empty stomach meant that we weren't going to wait till we got back to town to eat.

Outside, we found a restaurant serving noodles with *char siu pork*. I washed it down with half a litre of *Asahi* before we headed back to the bus stop for the return trip to town.

Having just missed one bus, we thought the next one that pulled up might deliver us to downtown *Takayama*, and it turned out that it was the next bus back to the station.

There was one minor technicality. It wouldn't be setting out on that route for another twenty minutes since it had to complete a different loop around the town's attractions.





The driver, thankfully, decided that although we were going to be heading back in twenty minutes, we might as well board the bus now, rather than stand around for the intervening period.

Which is what we did.

Once we'd returned to the station precinct, it was still too early to book into the hotel.

We took a stroll to *Takayama Jinya*, the government official's residence and administrative centre from the *Edo Period* and a very interesting place it turned out to be, although there wasn't a great deal of information available in *English*. The *English-speaking guide* was unavailable that day.

We were, however, there at the same time as a group of *Japanese* with an own-language guide.



From the audience reaction, if the *English-speaker* is half as good as the *Japanese* counterpart, his guests would be in for an entertaining time.

From *Takayama Jinya*, we headed across the river to the *Sanmachi Traditional Buildings Preservation* area and old private houses.

Unfortunately, straight after we arrived, the camera decided it had had enough for the moment, prompting us to use the current visit as a preliminary reconnaissance and to wander back in the morning with a recharged camera for a few photographic memories.

Back at the hotel, we took it easy until dinner time, when we faced a minor dilemma.

*Takayama* is famous for *Hida beef*, and we decided that was the preferred option for the evening meal. The only problem was deciding which particular venue to choose.

We took a wander around the area west of the hotel, found a couple of possibilities, and eventually chose *Yamatake-Shōten*, the one closest to home.







Although it didn't seem like it straight away, it was an inspired choice, a retail outlet for a beef-raising operation with a sideline offering a cook-it-yourself service.

Once we'd selected the parcel of beef we'd like for dinner, we picked out a range of vegetables to accompany it and moved over to our table, where hot coals had been placed under the metal grill in the middle of the table.

The proprietor got us started on the cooking process, then left us to it with a bottle of *2006 Cotes du Rhone* to keep us occupied while we cooked our dinner piece by piece. Definitely delicious.

The beef, however, would never pick up *a heart smart tick in Australia* and definitely wouldn't appeal to anyone fanatical about *trimming the fat off their steak*.

We were finishing off the bottle when the proprietor returned to check everything was under control.

It was.

Other customers were conspicuous by their absence, so he stayed to talk to *'Er Indoors* (his *English* being effectively non-existent).

He's obviously someone with pride in his hometown and its culture and proceeded to bring out and unroll posters about the forthcoming *Takayama Festival* the following week.



Although I was an uninvolved bystander unable to catch the commentary the next ten minutes or so were one of the absolute highlights of the fortnight.

Each poster had been rolled and unrolled countless times and showed signs of wear and tear.

Someone who was doing this sort of thing for a living, or as a regular part of his business would have gone out, gathered a collection of these posters, had them laminated and would have worked up a *PowerPoint presentation he could leave running on a laptop while he attended to more pressing matters.*

*Our host*, on the other hand, excused himself while he attended to other matters, returning after each interruption to talk about something he obviously takes great pride in.

One interruption involved getting a *young Spanish couple* at the next table started on the cook-it-yourself caper, attempting to communicate with them in extremely limited *English* (I presumed his *Spanish* is about as good as mine, which is non-existent) while commenting over his shoulder to *'Er Indoors* in *Japanese*. Amazing.

After that, there was nothing for it but to stroll the fifty metres back to the hotel, pick up a couple of cans of beer from a vending machine and retire for the night.







## TAKAYAMA > NAGOYA

***Wednesday, 9 April 2008***

At breakfast, I was surprised to notice the people sitting at the next table were the *Chinese* couple with the tripod from *Monday* afternoon in *Kanazawa*. At the time, we thought they were from *Hong Kong*, but as we exchanged pleasantries we learned they were, in fact, from *Melbourne*.

They'd spent most of the last fortnight based in *Osaka*, heading out to wherever the cherry-blossom was good each day. They were doing a loop through the mountains before heading home.

*It is, as has frequently been remarked, a small world.*

And it seems to be shrinking.

Given our relatively loose schedule for the rest of the day we took our time packing and checking out, and still had two and a half hours to kill before catching the train for the next leg of the trip.

Having missed some serious photographic opportunities the day before, we retraced yesterday's route in reverse, taking our time





as we strolled through the morning markets and doing a little *saké*-sampling.

We ended up outside *Takayama Jinya*, where I overheard a couple of Americans discussing the lack of an *English-speaking guide* to the building in front of them, which they assumed to be a *temple or something*.

I did my best to encourage them to venture in, *despite the lack of English content*, but they remained unconvinced.

I wandered away wondering why you'd set out to walk around a strange town without a map to guide you.

It wasn't as if there's a lack of *English-language material* in *Takayama*. When we arrived, I'd been surprised to discover tourist information came in *Japanese, English, French* and *Italian*.

At least it gave me something to think about as we headed back to reclaim the suitcase and set off for the 11:35 train to *Nagoya*.

Seated further back than the day before we didn't have quite the same view to the front.





That's not to say the views to the side were disappointing. We passed through forests and paddy fields, climbing back into the mountains and crossing the divide between the westward-flowing *Miya River* and the eastern-bound *Hida*. We linked up with the *Hida* at *Kugano*, surrounded by forested slopes before moving downstream through the fringing forest, past hydro schemes and mountain villages with the highway on our right-hand side.

As we headed towards the lower reaches, we passed sections of bare-branched forest amid swathes of green foliage.

At first glance, it seemed these were belts of dead vegetation, but closer glimpses suggested they were deciduous trees amidst hardier evergreens and hadn't redeveloped their foliage so early in the spring.





We stopped at **Nagisa** to let a train headed in the opposite direction pass.

While we were there, lunch arrived in an **eki-bento** (*station box*) of **Hida Gyumeshi** (*beef, rice and vegetables*). The handy pamphlet on the train said these came from **Nagoya**.

I assumed the pause to let the other train, which came from **Nagoya**, pass along the single line might have something to do with loading lunch.

In any case, I enjoyed the box of lunch and the **Kirin Lager** I used to wash it down.

Eating kept us occupied as far as **Gero**, one of **Japan's Top Three Hot Spring Resorts**, where boarding passengers filled most of the vacant seats.





It's a popular destination with a history stretching back a thousand years.

We were also back among the *sakura*, conspicuously absent higher up in the mountains.

Passing through forested hills *Neil Young's Be The Rain*, with its call to arms in the fight to defend wilderness in *Alaska*, turned up on the *iPod* playlist; a neat piece of serendipity.

By the time it had ended we were down on the river flats, travelling round sweeping curves beside what looked like a broad stream but was, in fact, a dam with the train on one side and the highway on the other.

As we came out onto the river flats, we started to pass low green mounded rows of a crop that I guessed was tea, as the track moved away from the stream.

Twenty minutes out of *Nagoya*, we were up above ground level as we headed into *Gifu*, heading back out of the station in reverse



as we headed back to ground level with our backs to the driver, who I guessed had either swapped ends on the rail motor or been replaced.

With a bit over a quarter of an hour till we reached our destination, I thought that was unlikely.

Following the usual routine, once we'd alighted it was a case of straight to the hotel though this time we were late enough to check in before heading back to the station to meet up with the first of our two appointments for the day.

It was just under two years ago that *'Er Indoors* and I had headed off to *the Whitsunday Coast airport* to pick up an assistant teacher, a slightly surreal experience as a city girl from *Nagoya* got her *first taste of rural Australia*.

Three months later three members of her family had come to visit her, and we'd met her mother and two sisters on *Hamilton Island*.

Now, outside the store where she worked before coming to *Australia* (quite upmarket it was too, as far as I could tell) we met up with her mother and one of the sisters, who whisked us up to the 14th floor for a panoramic view southwards across the city towards *Nagoya Castle*.

From there we went on to the tea rooms on the 52nd floor of the *Marriott Hotel*, where we spent two hours chatting, with the flow dominated by *'Er Indoors* and *The Matriarch*, with occasional comments from *The Daughter* and *Yours Truly*.

My sporadic attempts at humour produced polite laughter all round though I was unsure whether the majority of the audience actually got the joke.

We finished with the ritual exchange of gifts as I reflected that the reason the suitcase never got any lighter was because everything you brought with you as a gift was invariably replaced by whatever they've given you in return.

We headed back to the hotel for a short rest before dinner.

With the batteries recharged we headed down to the lobby to meet up with three more of *Madam's* old high school and university chums, then headed across to the station complex again in search of a dinner venue.

The first option, a nice-looking *brasserie*, was ruled out through an inability to handle a party of five, so we ended up in an eating and drinking establishment where we worked our way through another interesting variety of small platters with a wide-ranging conversation before drawing stumps around ten.





## NAGOYA > HAKONE

***Thursday, 10 April 2008***

The next morning we awoke to be confronted by bleak drizzly weather. When '*Er Indoors*' checked the weather forecast of *The Mother's Mobile*, it wasn't promising.

Seemingly, indoors was the place to be for the next twenty-four hours or so, with rain and wind forecast for *Odawara*, where'd we be alighting from the *Shinkansen* on a day where the planned agenda included a lot of walking.



We discussed matters over breakfast, as you do, and headed upstairs to tackle the increasingly difficult task of fitting everything into the suitcase, adding items acquired since yesterday morning.

We managed to stay dry by taking the underground route to the station, arriving in plenty of time in spite of an initial mild case of panic.

On the platform, I started to realise how many *Shinkansen* services run every day along the *Tokaido* corridor. The track next door to our platform had trains departing for *Tokyo* at 9:10, 9:19 and 9:27. Our train, also to *Tokyo* (though we were disembarking at *Odawara*) left at 9:22.

In other words, four trains to the same destination leaving in the space of just under twenty minutes.

When we'd booked the day's seats we'd been told that there were no window seats available (we'd landed *Car 12 Seats 13 B&C*) but, as it turned out, there was no one in *13A*. No one arrived to claim it, so we managed to end up with the window seat since the train was travelling express from *Nagoya* to *Odawara*.

That solved a slight luggage problem on a crowded train.

While there are the predictable overhead racks for hand luggage, on *Shinkansen* there isn't a designated space for large luggage. That's hardly surprising.

Making those provisions would create space constraints in other ways.

Once the handy places most people use to stow such items have been filled there isn't much choice but to squeeze the item into the space between your legs and the seat in front of you.

Fortunately, they've allowed plenty of leg room.

I moved to *13A*, *Madam* occupied *13B*, and the suitcase had the whole space in front of *13C* to itself.

Despite the acquisition of the window seat, there wasn't much to see in a landscape misty wet with rain, so I devoted the time to writing up the previous day's leg of the journey.

Outside, the landscape was pretty much as it had been the last time we were on the coastal plain though I noticed some structures that seemed to be greenhouses.

Surprisingly, there also seemed to be a little more forest than usual. Before we moved back into the familiar urban sprawl we reached the bridge across the brackish *Hamana Lake*, a drowned river valley with its mouth blocked by sand banks.

There were, predictably, plenty of *Shinkansen* headed in the other direction.

One minute you're looking across the landscape, then there's a jolt against the window as a silver and blue blur obscures the view, which reappears almost before you've had time to blink.



We were seated on the starboard side of the train, but away to the left, we had views across to the **South Alps** on the left as *'Er Indoors* scanned that side hoping for a glimpse of **Mount Fuji**.

Though spring had well and truly sprung on the lowlands, there was plenty of snow on the peaks.

We passed tea plantings on slopes where rice cultivation would have been out of the question, as well as on flat ground.

It was probably a case of totally-misguided optimism, but it seemed that the weather away to our right was lifting though there was still heavy cloud over the mountains away to our left.

Still, there was plenty to ponder. Passing through an urban area, I was surprised to see what looked like a cathedral towering above the surroundings. That might have been in **Shizuoka** though it's impossible to tell for sure.

There are very few stations on this section of the **Shinkansen** line and, even if there were, from a train travelling at express speed, you're flat out reading the signs as you whiz past.

The other standout, apart from the odd cathedral-like structure, was the increasing number of tunnels as we headed towards **Atami**, a coastal hot spring resort that has been attracting travellers since the 8th century.

We'd just alighted from the train in **Odawara** and were looking for the most appropriate exit when a southbound **Shinkansen** rocketed through the station, showing how fast 200 kilometres per hour is when you're standing nearby.

It was literally a case of *now you see it; now you don't*.

*'Er Indoors* lead us off the platform thirty seconds later, single-mindedly heading off in search of the window where she could pick up a pair of **two-day Hakone passes** and leaving *Yours Truly* struggling down a flight of stairs juggling the suitcase.

About half way down I felt a twinge in my right leg, which didn't help the mobility on a day when we'd planned on doing plenty of walking.

Once we'd bought the passes, we caught a local train, which carried us to **Hakone-Yumoto**, and a bus to the **Quatre Saisons Hotel** at **Tonosawa**.

The bus dropped us off in a car park a hundred metres down the road from the hotel, leaving us with a rather scary walk along the side of a narrow winding road with traffic passing in both directions.

It was about eleven when we dropped the luggage off and walked back to the bus stop in the rain as cars rolled past in alarming proximity. I don't mind sharing the road with the odd car, but I'd prefer to have the cars passing by somewhere beyond an arm's reach.



Back in *Hakone-Yumoto*, we caught the train to *Gora*, an amazing zigzag ride that had switch-backs galore as we headed up into the mountains. The views on a fine, sunny day would have been spectacular, but the journey through the misty drizzle created a mood of primeval mystery.

From *Gora*, we took the cable car up the hill to *Sounzan*, just missing the chance to investigate a Swiss restaurant just down the road from the station.

The next stage of the quest involved the *Hakone rope-way* that would end up depositing us on the shores of *Lake Ashi*. We decided to stop for lunch at a rope-way station, *Owakudani*, one of the top spots for viewing *Mount Fuji*.

A glance at the accompanying photo shows we had *as much chance of viewing the mountain as a wheelchair-bound double amputee has of taking out the triple jump gold medal at the Olympics*.

Our plans, in other words, were never going to get off the ground.

On the other hand, it was lunchtime, and while *Madam* fancied a fried sweet potato from the lobby. I leaned in favour towards a *Japanese curry* from the restaurant upstairs, so I set off in solo mode to find my own lunch, a thousand-yen note in hand.

Seated in the restaurant, I learned that I could have the curry *by itself* for ¥850 or *with egg* for 950.







Opting for the egg, I ended up with a plate of curry and rice with a black-shelled soft boiled egg that I peeled and incorporated into the curry and rice mixture.

I don't know if that's the way it's supposed to go, but, lacking any expert guidance regarding the correct protocol, that was what I did.

Downstairs, informing *'Er Indoors* about my action, I was bemused to learn consumption of the *seven-year egg* had added seven years to my life span.

She pointed to handy packs of five similar eggs, but I decided that an extra thirty-five years on *Hughesy's* life span would probably be *too much for the superannuation fund* to handle.

An extra seven would have to do.

Back on the rope-way, we set off once again into the mist, finishing at *Togendai* on *Lake Ashi*, where we boarded what appeared to be *a replica of a pirate ship* for a sight-seeing cruise to *Moto-Hakone*.

The cruise supposedly offers one of the best *Fuji*-viewing options, but we were flat out seeing past the shores of the lake and, from *Moto-Hakone* it was impossible to see the other end of the lake, let alone any majestic mountain that might be lurking above it.



In ***Moto-Hakone*** we decided discretion and a chance to get warm was the better part of valour, so we boarded a bus that would take us straight back to the hotel, braved the traffic between the bus stop and the front door, and checked in.

When we entered the room I'd, not to put too fine a point on it, just about had enough for the day.

Then we opened the curtains, and the view that greeted us was spectacular.

The hotel is situated right on a bend in the stream that flows down to ***Hakone-Yumoto*** and, from the rooms on the stream side you have views up and down the steep-sided, heavily-forested river valley.

I would have been quite happy to spend the next hour or so sitting and gazing out the window at the views while the camera battery recovered from the day's ordeal.

***'Er Indoors***, on the other hand, was adamant that I take a trip downstairs to the ***onsen***, the hot-spring spa that was the reason the hotel existed.

It was difficult to argue with the notion that it would be good for the muscle that had been troubling my right leg.

On the other hand, the cleansing procedures yiy needed to carry out before you take the dip into the waters were intimidating, to say the least.

Eventually, I decided that I may as well surrender to the inevitable and traipsed off downstairs.

Under different circumstances, I could have spent longer soaking in the warm water, which does wonders for tired muscles, but the siren song of the view from an upstairs window proved much stronger than the solitary enjoyment of a giant-sized bathtub.

That pleasure could have been interrupted at any time by the arrival of other guests, so I emerged after ten minutes.

All up the ***onsen***-visit had taken twenty minutes out of premium canyon-gazing time.

I had barely settled back into a relaxed gaze across the stream before a phone call informed us that our evening meal - four or five courses in the ***classic French style*** - awaited us in the restaurant.

A bottle of ***Cuvee Quatre Saisons*** disappointed on first taste but improved considerably:

(a) with breathing (as a red wine should), or

(b) as the level lowered.

I tend to ascribe the improvement to the effects of oxygen on the contents of the bottle rather than the effects of the contents of the bottle on the drinker, but your mileage might vary.



Back upstairs, *'Er Indoors* attended to various administrative matters while I looked out across the dark stream with the *iPod* and a can of *Asahi Super Dry* for company.







## HAKONE > TOKYO > KITAKAMI

### ***Friday, 11 April 2008***

A nudge in the ribs summoned me back into consciousness around 5:10 the following morning. *'Er Indoors* was quite keen for the two of us to make an early morning visit to the *onsen*.

A check revealed the facilities were closed for maintenance from 5:30 to 6:00, so we spent a few minutes discussing *Fuji*-viewing options.

Our train to the *Deep North* was due to leave *Tokyo* after three in the afternoon, and our only other commitment was a lunchtime appointment with *The Interpreter*.

That effectively gave us the whole morning to mount an attempt to glimpse the mountain.

Eventually, we decided a repeat of the *train > cable > ropeway routine* was preferable to a bus trip to *Moto-Hakone*, which would be likely to prove fruitless if the weather was cloudy.

If the weather improved, even if we didn't see *Fuji* we'd see views we'd been unable to enjoy yesterday.



Since we could save some time if we caught the train from the station at **Tonosawa** that gave me an excuse, after I was back from the **onsen**, to go for a walk and attempt to locate a station we knew had to be located higher up on the slope on the other side of the stream.

Since there were two suspension bridges across the stream, one on either side of the hotel, I guessed one or both must lead to the station, Theoretically, I should be able to complete a circuit, crossing one bridge on the way to the station, and crossing the other one on the return journey.

I planned to confirm my hunches by inquiring at **Reception**, but the area was deserted when I passed through, so I was left to trust my own instincts.

Which, of course, turned out to be totally wrong.

I turned left, on an anticlockwise loop around the route I'd visualised, crossed the downstream bridge and encountered a private residence without an obvious path towards the station.

If **The Casual Reader** is wondering how come **Hughesy** was so certain there was a station there, yesterday's train had stopped at a station clearly labelled **Tonosawa**, and I'd glimpsed a train from my stream-gazing position in the room in the evening.







*Fine, I thought. It's the other bridge. Should have gone that way, since I saw cars crossing yesterday afternoon.*

Heading to the upstream bridge took me past the hotel.

I checked **Reception** on the way, in the hope of gaining guidance, but the area seemed deserted, so I carried on over the bridge and followed the road from there.

The road took me to another small hotel, and there seemed to be a path that looped around behind the buildings, so I followed that.

Side tracks branched off the main path, but I figured that the route to the station would be fairly well-trodden.

I followed what looked like the best option, which gradually became less and less promising.

In fact, the further I went, the more it seemed that no one apart from the odd adventurous foreigner used the track at all.

Backtracking, I tried various paths that branched off my main track, but each of those seemed to lead to a section of pipe I assumed was associated with the spa business.



Back at the hotel, I found someone at **Reception** and was told I should turn left once I'd passed through the front door and *left again at a group of vending machines*.

At the downstream bridge, there were no vending machines, so I followed the road downhill, crossed the bridge that took the main road over the stream, and found the machines.

They were situated close to a sign bearing the words **Tonosawa station** and an arrow.

*Fine, I thought. Shouldn't be too far.*

Unfortunately after a couple of hundred metres, I was faced with a multitude of paths with signs in **Japanese** and unintelligible to large hairy **non-Japanese-speaking** foreigners.

Had I received the same directions when I started out I might have been inclined to explore just a tad further, but thoughts of breakfast prompted me to head back to the hotel.

The best option seemed to involve a bus back to **Hakone-Yumoto** and catching the train from there.







Breakfast involved a ***croissant***, juice, and a plate with scrambled eggs, sausages, a hash brown salad and a serve of pasta with mayonnaise, as well as the predictable tea or coffee.

Once we'd finished eating, packing and checking out we headed back to the bus stop and caught the bus to ***Hakone-Yumoto***, where we missed the train by a matter of seconds.

*Never mind, we thought, the next one goes at 9:03 and the weather seems to be improving all the time, and we should be up at the cable railway before ten.*

The train ride was disappointing after the previous day's misty mystery. If we were experiencing it for the first time I'm sure the reaction would have been different.





Once we were on the rope-way we started to realise that the *Fuji*-viewing prospects were virtually nil, though we were able to get a good view of the sulphurous hell of *Owakudani* on the way.

When we reached yesterday's lunch stop, we headed off in the direction in which, as far as we could make out, *Mount Fuji* must lie.

Since all we could see was a massive bank of white cloud, *Madam* ventured into a souvenir shop to verify that we were heading in the right direction.

She was informed that we were in the right place for a good view of the mountain *but not today*.

In that case, there was nothing for it but to head back down the rope-way and cable car and catch the train to a spot where we could link up with a bus.



That would take us to the hotel, where we could reclaim the luggage, cut our losses and take a taxi back to the station.

A local train should deliver us to *Odawara* in time to take our seats on the 12:35 service to *Tokyo*.

As we headed away from *Hakone*, I reflected on our friend *Triple-F* (*Frockster, Former-Fishmongrel*)'s frequent suggestions that, should we decide to visit the *Land of the Rising Sun*, it was imperative that we plant a *Bowen* mango tree on top of *Mount Fuji*.

As *'Er Indoors* scanned the scenery on our left, these words came back to haunt me in the wake of an unsuccessful day-and-a-half's attempted *Fuji*-viewing.

It was obvious these sacrilegious sentiments had come to the attention of deities guarding the mountain.

As a result, they'd decided to mask the peak behind a veil of cloud for the duration of our visit.

As the train left *Hakone*, we looked back. The cloud was slowly lifting.



駅構内禁煙

No Smoking

請勿在車站裡吸煙。

역 구내는 금연구역입니다.



不審物を発見した際は、お手をふれずに  
駅係員・乗務員までご連絡ください。

Do not touch doubtful things

發現可疑物品時，請不要觸摸，立即告知車站職員或乘務員。

의심스러운 물건을 발견하셨을 경우에는 다치지 마시고 먼저 역의 직원 혹은 승무원한테 연락 주십시오.



火薬類多量のマッチ揮発油、その他法令に定められた  
危険品を車内に持ち込むことはできません。

No Open Flame

禁止攜帶火藥類・大量火柴・汽油及其他法令所定の危険品上車。

화약류, 대량의 성냥, 휘발유 및 기타 법령에 규정된 위험물을 가지고 차에 오르는 것은 안됩니다.



It seemed the deities had been mollified, though from where we sat on the *Shinkansen* the summit remained shrouded by cloud, so I turned my thoughts to prospects for the next stage of the trip rather than dwelling on the past.

As we headed towards *Yokohama* and *Tokyo*, we moved into a belt of urban development, but as we pulled into *ShinYokohama*, I was surprised by the amount of greenery close to the station.

It was hardly surprising to find it was impossible to tell where *Yokohama* ended, and *Tokyo* started.

Just after one o'clock the train pulled into *Tokyo*, and we set off in search of *The Interpreter*.

Once contact was established, I found myself on the wrong side of a stream of students on an excursion as *'Er Indoors* threatened to turn a corner and disappear from view.

With disaster narrowly averted, we set off to find lunch, eventually settling for pizza before spending about an hour discussing language-related matters and wordplay in general.

I'd been bemused by the *Do not Touch Doubtful Things* signs we'd sighted around *Hakone* and had amused myself trying to figure out which of an object's properties would render it *doubtful*.

Discussion of such issues with someone whose job involves instantaneous translation from *English* into *Japanese* and *vice versa* was an interesting way to pass the time, particularly when we touched on the matter of a cake shop I'd seen references to on the internet.

It was called, believe it or not, *Pumpkin Poo*.

By 3:40 we were back on the bullet train bound for *Bashō* country.

A lengthy tunnel took us to *Ueno station*, where I sighted the new *double-decker Shinkansen* before we plunged into another tunnel.

We emerged looking out over the sprawl of *Tokyo's* northern suburbs and had hardly gone any distance before two overalled females moved through the carriage collecting rubbish, something I found odd. We'd been kept waiting on the platform while the train was cleaned before departure.

Or do travellers bring their rubbish on board with them?

After we'd passed *Omiya*, we encountered farmland once again, though there was still plenty of medium-density housing.

And in the middle of one urbanised belt, sighting *Hotel Valentine* I couldn't help wondering what sort of establishment it might be.



There's every possibility the establishment in question could attract the majority of its business from the honeymoon trade. Of course, there are some other possible explanations, and the name could originate from somewhere right over on the other side of the further reaches of left field.

The blinds on the western side of the train had been drawn to keep out the afternoon sun, and I was glad to have something to look at as we passed patches of forest interspersed with urban areas.

About ten minutes past *Utsomiya* we were finally in more or less open country stretching away to the eastern horizon as we gradually moved into serious forest in between villages and farmlands.

We passed through lengthy tunnels as the land became hillier and banks of dull grey cloud started to develop overhead.

Glancing across, someone on the port side of the carriage had raised their sunshade.

I caught sight of snow-capped mountains.

The mountains away to the east must have been considerably lower or under the influence of warmer conditions near the coast since there was no snow to be seen in that direction.

We also noticed that we were moving back into areas of cherry-blossom, and on the edge of *Sendai*, I caught sight of one of the few freight trains I'd spotted since I'd first boarded a train in *Japan*.

The high-speed commuter lines are obviously separated from the corridors that carry the quantities of freight that an economy the size of *Japan's* must generate.

We arrived in *Kitakami*, our base for the next thirty-six hours comfortably after dark and immediately settled into the routine of booking the next leg of the trip.

That took some time since *Sunday's* travel involves two changes of train on the long haul back to base in *Kōbe*.

An additional complication reared its head as *'Er Indoors* requested a starboard-side window seat on the final leg, a final attempt to catch a glimpse of *Mount Fuji* in the wake of *Triple-F's fantasising*.

The only available reserved seats were in the smoking section of the train, so we decided to cut our losses and declined.

While these negotiations were in train, someone I guessed was *our host* for the next day and a half arrived, mobile in hand, obviously looking for someone.

Having established that she was looking for us, we all waited till negotiations had been concluded and the tickets processed before greetings had been exchanged and then headed off for my first encounter with a modern *Japanese house*.





Apart from visits to *The Mother's apartment*, which is some forty years old, I'd only seen the external aspect of the *Japanese house*.

We arrived outside a small two-storey house occupying a small block and guarded by a small hairy dachshund named *Kotaro*.

Inside, the canine was transformed from watchdog to lapdog as he attempted to protect the property through an attempt to lick all and sundry to death.

The new nickname of *Grog Dog* seemed like the way to go when faced with a creature that is obviously a *major league Licker*.

With the preliminary pleasantries done, we sat down to supper, and talked till ten, while a small brown dog embarked a strategy of *subjugation by dissolution*.





## KITAKAMI AND ENVIRONS

***Saturday, 12 April 2008***

Don't let anyone try to tell you that it's impossible to get a good night's sleep on a *futon*.

Not the *futon* they'll sell you in your local downtown furniture store, *one with four legs, a metal frame and a basic mattress* - I'm talking the *mattress on the floor* routine with a good layer of insulation over the top to keep out the *Kitakami* chill.

I slept like a log (and probably sawed a few) before rising ultra-fashionably late on a day when the first item on the agenda was attending to *the laundry*.





Once we'd arranged the washing on the upstairs balcony, the thoughts turned to sightseeing.

It was around eleven when two *Japanese* women, one large hairy foreigner and one small hairy dog found themselves *en route* to the gorge at *Genbi* where we would, I was informed, be having *flying dumplings* - which I assumed would be lunch.

I wasn't too sure what was in store since I'd heard a variety of pronunciations, *flying*, *frying*, *dumplings* and *dungo*.

And I was kept in suspense since, immediately after parking we plunged into the *Sahara Glass Hall*, a store selling glass objects in multitudinous forms.

This, I gathered, was a stratagem to avoid paying for parking.

Having established our status as at-least-potential-customers, the *Grog Dog* was retrieved from the car, and we set off for the gorge, which was a short stroll away.

A bridge took us over the stream, and a right-hand turn had us headed directly towards flying dumpling territory.



I had assumed *flying dumplings* were not, as the name suggested, something resembling a food fight, and '*Er Indoors*' suspected we were headed somewhere we would be throwing items, possibly as some sort of ritual.

Neither of us was any the wiser when *our host* knelt down, placed some money in a small basket and used a wooden mallet to tap a wooden object (twice).

The basket, attached to a device resembling the flying fox familiar to *Boy Scouts* the world over, then zoomed across the river to a small shelter high on the opposite bank, returning a matter of moments later filled with a double serve of *dumplings and green tea*.

The dumplings were *dungo*, a dough made from rice flour and water, rolled into a ball, boiled, grilled and served, three to a stick, dunked in sweet sticky soy sauce, red bean paste with sugar and soy sauce with mirin.

I found them an acquired taste and one which I have, to date, failed to acquire, but the *green tea* went down well in the conditions.







Back in the car, we headed across country, past a *Buddha's* face etched into a stone cliff on the way to *Motsuji*, a temple complex near *Mount Toyama*.

The main feature is a garden from the *Heian Period (794 - 1192)*. The site dates back to *850* and grew to an enormous complex with five hundred dormitories for monks spread around forty places of worship before fires destroyed the original buildings.

One building, *Jogyoda Hall*, was reconstructed in *1732*, but most of the buildings on the site are much more recent.

The fires did not destroy the *Pure Land Garden*, the real centre-piece of the site and is the venue for various festivals and ritual observances in *January* and *May* each year.

From *Motsuji*, we planned to go for lunch, then head to the nearby *Golden Buddha*, but drizzle set in while we were eating.

The *Buddha*-visit, which would have involved an uphill walk through the forest was a late scratching from the program.





Instead, we took our time driving through the sort of countryside I'd been looking at as our train whizzed past.

Back in *Kitakami*, we found the washing, given the prevailing weather conditions, had hardly dried at all.

After rearranging *the laundry* in more favourable drying conditions,

I fled to the warmth of the *futon* for a power nap while the girls, who hadn't seen each other for something like a dozen years, continued catching up on old times in the warmth of the living area.



I wandered back downstairs around five, spending an hour working on the *Travelogue* as the others flicked through photo albums, warm and comfortable in the radiated output of the electric heater while the temperature outside plunged well into the single-figure range.

It was warm enough in the living room, but venturing away from the heated area reinforced my sense of wonder at how the people who occupied the wooden buildings we'd seen at *Takayama* managed to survive the sub-zero winters.

Around six, there was movement at the station, and various costume adjustments were made while a taxi was ordered.

It must have been peak hour, or maybe we didn't peek out often enough (there was no way we were going to stand outside for any longer than was necessary) because it required a second call and a further wait before the cab arrived.

Hadori, a *yakiniku* place in the downtown entertainment quarter, is a small operation with the feel of a local/neighbourhood eatery, though I was assured that there were probably other people sitting around the eight or nine tables who'd travelled at least as far (a ¥900 cab fare) as we had.

We sat down at a table with a gas-fired grill in the middle, and plates of meat and related products varying in price according to quality were delivered for us to cook to our liking.

The recipe from there ran something like this:

*Dip cooked portions in soy sauce before wrapping them in lettuce leaves (**chilli** optional).*

*Accompany the lettuce parcels with rice and wash the lot down with copious quantities of draught beer.*

In short, my kind of place...

After dinner, while we could have walked home, bearing in mind that you can't see approaching rain after dark, wiser heads prevailed, and we decided that a cab was the drier and warmer option.

Once I decided to call it a night, I managed another good night's sleep on the *futon*.

I suspect this was largely due to the human equivalent of hibernation.

Once under the covers, it seemed the body shut down completely and, despite having consumed large quantities of high-quality amber fluid I didn't emerge from the warmth until absolutely necessary, which was well over nine hours later.





## KITAKAMI > TOKYO > KOBE

***Sunday, 13 April 2008***

After surfacing shortly after seven, we had enough time for a shower and a leisurely breakfast before packing and preparing for the long haul back to home base in *Kōbe*.

When I looked outside, the weather offered a pleasant contrast to the day before, being fine and sunny rather than cold and overcast.

That prompted an ill-considered and overoptimistic decision.

We consigned the warmest clothing to the suitcase, although we did consider wearing it to the station, then switching it to the backpack.

If we'd risen half an hour later, what came next might not have been a problem.

Once packed, we had about half an hour of spare time between when we finished packing and the optimum time for arriving on the platform at the station.





*Our host* suggested a detour to enjoy some *sakura* since there was a nice spot more or less on the way to the station and the flowers were just starting to appear.

Of course, we hadn't stuck our noses outside at this point.

Still, it *seemed* like a warm sunny day.

The astute reader can guess what came next.

First up, it was much colder than anticipated.

Second, once we'd reached the spot on the banks of the *Kitakami River*, preparations for the cherry blossom festivities were well underway.

Although optimum viewing time would be much later in the week, snow-capped peaks to the west were a spectacular sight, so we just had to leave the warmth of the car and take a stroll to the optimum (and, predictably furthest) spot for a photographic memory of the sight.

Once we'd made it back to the car, reached the station, bid farewell to *Our Host* and *Grog Dog*, and climbed the stairs to the platform it was only a matter of a few minutes before the train arrived, and we were on our way again.

Once again we found ourselves on the starboard side of the train, and since this time we were headed in the opposite direction that gave us a good view of the mountains to the west.



As the **Shinkansen** rocketed along we reached the places we'd visited the previous day in less than half the time the road trip had taken. By the time we passed **Kurikoma-Kōgen** the mountains had receded, and we were travelling over wide plains with extensive farmland and some hills.

The train we'd boarded in **Kitakami** was a local **Shinkansen**, stopping at all stations, and with a long haul ahead of us, we were going to change to a limited express at **Sendai**.

That was a prospect that evoked visions of a frantic rush up and down escalators, of mistaken platforms and all sorts of potential disasters.

The reality?

We alighted, walked no more than twenty metres, and we were standing at the relevant embarkation point for the next train which was due in about seven minutes.

The weather had become bleak and overcast after blue skies further north, and the platform at **Sendai** was colder than **Kitakami**, which we'd left an hour and a half earlier and had been *quite cold enough, thank you very much*.

After **Sendai**, the mountains (or reasonably large hills) were much closer to the line, and in some places we passed virtual oceans of **sakura** though the trees were not yet totally in bloom.

At the same time, the weather closed in, bringing drizzly rain, weather that in the hills around **Hakone** had seemed mystic and mysterious, but in the lowlands was merely dreary and dismal.

I noted with interest that in some areas we passed through where there weren't too many buildings over two storeys high the landscape was dominated by *towering net-like structures*. It turned out they surrounded the golf driving ranges, protecting innocent passers-by from flying golf balls.

Once we'd alighted in **Tokyo** we ran into the couple we were meeting for lunch, more by good luck than good management, wandered off for a decent **Italian** lunch at **Papa Milano**, beside the station, and returned for the final **Shinkansen** leg to **Kōbe**.

The major question was the possibility of sighting **Mount Fuji**, and we had thoughts of trying our luck and seeing if we could grab a starboard side window seat in one of the non-reserved carriages.

That would have involved queuing in conditions that were even colder than we'd experienced further north at **Kitakami** and **Sendai**, so we took the soft option, standing in the heated waiting room on the platform while the cleaners prepared the train for departure.

We had seats 15B&C in car 14, with 15A vacant, but, given the number of passengers it seemed highly unlikely our luck would last.



The spare seat remained vacant when we pulled into **Shinagawa**, and as we left the **Tokyo** high-rise behind, looking away to the right, there was no sign of any mountains whatsoever away to the west.

At **Yokohama**, the vacant seat was occupied, and **Madam's** interest was sparked as mountains came into view to the west, but the conditions limited visibility as we sped past **Odawara** and into **Atami**.

The mountain gods, it seemed, had still not relented.

As we continued southwards the weather improved as we passed what could have been (judging by the angle of the lower slopes) the bottom of **Mount Fuji**, though the top was shrouded in the sort of mist that meant we couldn't be sure.

*Never mind, we told ourselves. Gives us something to look forward to next time.*

Back in **Kōbe**, we made our way to the **Crowne Plaza Hotel**, conveniently situated right next door to **ShinKōbe**, checked in and headed into the neighbouring shopping complex for dinner before heading back to the room.

Free access to the internet from within the room (in most other places you had to stand at a terminal in the lobby) gave me a leisurely opportunity to clear some of the backlog of email that had accumulated since we'd left home.





3

# THE LAST BIT





## KŌBE

***Monday, 14 April 2008***

After the previous day's long haul, *Madam's* detailed research paid off big time with a leisurely morning, a midday checkout time and no appointments until the evening.

I kept plugging away at the email mountain, a slow process since most of it was only accessible through *Telstra webmail*, which is hardly the speediest of conveyances.

From the 28th floor of the hotel, which is on the western edge of downtown *Kōbe*, we had a view away across the long narrow city wedged between mountains to the west and the *Inland Sea*.



Once the preliminaries were complete, and the suitcase packed, it was time for *a brief review of options* for the next hour or two.

This amounted to a choice between going straight to lunch at the *German bakery* or working up an appetite by taking a stroll around the *interesting houses* in an area beside the hotel (on the southern side, our outlook was to the north) which was, however, a bit hilly.

Bearing the jobs that needed to be carried out later on in the day in mind, I thought walking up hill and down dale would take up time that could be more profitably spent getting these activities out of the way, so my preference was an early lunch.

Once we left the hotel and surveyed the topography, I was sure I'd pulled the right rein.

The slopes leading to the interesting houses, while not *quite* vertical were not all that far off it.

*Freundlieb* is located in a converted church on a quiet back street a short walk away from the hotel.

There is a downstairs retail section we walked straight past, and a stylish cafe on the first floor.

We ordered the *Monday sandwich special* for 'Er Indoors (soup, salmon and vegetable sandwich, drink and ice cream for ¥1080) and a *roast beef sandwich* (¥1600) for me.

If I'd been on the ball I could have ordered a half bottle of *Valpolicella* to go with it, but the sun wasn't quite over the yardarm, so I opted for a *cappuccino* instead.

Both meals were substantial enough for a satisfying brunch though *Madam* claimed she had difficulty tasting the *salmon* in hers.

With brunch out of the way, we rolled back to the hotel, collected the luggage from the cloak room and boarded the subway, *Myodani*-bound. A quick taxi transfer took us to *The Mother's* place.

A quick report on our activities over the previous week preceded a rearrangement of luggage for the next couple of days (*Kōbe > Kyoto > Nara > Kōbe*).

Having arrived with two large suitcases, we'd transferred to one (mine) for the *Kōbe > Kanazawa > Takayama > Nagoya > Hakone > Kitakami > Kōbe* leg we'd just completed.

Figuring we only needed a couple of changes of clothes for the next three days we packed what we thought we'd need into a smaller overnight bag.

The casual observer might be puzzled by frequent relocations, particularly when we were staying in *Kōbe*.

So, initially, was I. Once we were on the ground, however, things made a bit more sense.



The first night in **Kōbe** had been somewhere to crash after the flight, a place with a good view, an easy transfer from the **airport shuttle** to the hotel, and, most importantly, a **smorgasbord** breakfast.

Those factors were irrelevant for the rest of the stay, and the location on the edge of the harbour was a little out of the way.

And **'Er Indoors** had found a good deal for one night.

The second place had been chosen for ease of transfer to and from the train to **Osaka**, remembering our return was probably going to be rather late.

The third spot gave easy access to trains to **Kyoto** (both the local service that delivered us into the *Kyotic* cherry blossom **Sunday** and the **Shinkansen** that was the first leg of the big loop journey.

Back in **Kōbe**, we'd stayed next door to **ShinKōbe** for **Sunday** night, close to somewhere we could eat and more or less on the way to **The Mother's** place.

Where we were headed for the night might have been a fair step from **Sannomiya** but offered a substantial **Viking** breakfast that we thought would fit in with the following day's travel plans (in other words we probably wouldn't need to eat until the evening).

Once we'd booked in for the night, it was off to meet **Gomi-san** and **Sakai-san** (or so we thought, a late email *en route* to the rendezvous advised that **Sakai-san** was a late scratching). Once we'd arrived at the building, it was a case of into the lift, up to the 28th floor, and negotiating the important matter of **free drinks** for the night.

Actually, the use of the term **free drinks** is misleading.

There was a one-off charge (¥1200 for males, ¥900 for females), but a bloke who can't knock over **twelve Australian dollars' worth of grog** in three and a half hours doesn't qualify as a serious drinker.

Faced with a choice of beer, **saké**, basic spirits and wine we stuck with the wine, where there was a selection of four reds and four whites (**Rosemount Estate Jigsaw** labels included).

Out of the **Italian and Californian wines**, there was nothing to match what we'd come to expect around the **Rosemount Jigsaw** price point.

Dinner was another **Viking** affair, and while it wasn't the greatest spread I've ever seen, there was plenty to eat and quite good value for money.

Having eaten, we sat chewing the fat and savouring the **Sangiovese** that we'd agreed was the pick of the non-Oz wines on offer until the management called *Time*. At that point, predictably, we drew stumps and decanted ourselves into the darkness.





## KOBE > KYOTO

***Tuesday, 15 April 2008***

Two weeks down, one week (more or less) to go.

We headed downstairs to the *Viking* breakfast just after eight, bright-eyed, bushy-tailed, and in need of substantial nutrition to carry us through a walking-oriented day.

And, if the range of goodies didn't match what we'd encountered at our previous *Viking* breakfast at the start of the sojourn, the quality was, we thought, better.



From there it was a hike to *Sannomiya* and an hour's train journey to the outskirts of *Kyoto* (*Hankyu Arashiyama* station).

We placed the baggage in a coin locker, wandered over the river through the cherry-blossoms and caught a bus into the hills, with a basic plan to walk back downhill from *Toriimoto*.

The first part of the walk took us along a *traditional Japanese street* lined with houses before we stopped in at *Kyoto Municipal Preservation Museum of Saga Toriimoto's Streets and Structures*, an impressive title for an impressive little establishment.

The museum is a reconstruction of a *Meiji Era* townhouse, with photographs and an interesting model of the district as it was in the early twentieth century. But we got the most benefit out of talking to the attendant, who was keen to point out details we mightn't have noticed.

*Toriimoto* is spectacular in autumn, and, with tree-covered hills surrounding the area, it would be a fantastic spectacle.







But we were there in spring, and, unless they'd been pointed out to us, would probably have walked straight past the tiny and delicate maple flowers if they had not been brought to our attention.

We eventually found ourselves at *Gioji* temple, and wandered through the garden, marvelling at the translucent beauty of newly formed leaves as the morning sun filtered through the canopy over our heads.

It's the sort of scene you just don't experience in areas where all the trees are evergreens.

The effect was utterly magical, and, again I was fascinated by the mosses that covered the ground under the trees.





The sight was almost enough to make me want to relocate somewhere temperature and rainfall would encourage the development of moss in the garden.

From *Gioji*, we went on to *Nisonin*, which dates back to the first half of the ninth century.

The main hall was reconstructed in 1521 after being destroyed by fire.

From there we strolled along the bamboo path.

Our final stop for the day's temple tour was *Tenryuji*, a *World Heritage* site dating back to **1339**.

Most of the buildings on the site are more recent due to destruction associated with internal conflicts over the years.

Although fire destroyed the buildings several times over, the landscape garden, one of the oldest of its kind, dates back to the founding abbot, who designed the layout.





We took our time walking around the garden, stopping for a rest at the bamboo grove near the ***North Entrance***, and strolling back through the cherry-blossom.

By this stage, we were just about templed-out, so it was back to the station, retrieve the luggage, and *Ho!* for the night's accommodation, which turned out to be an economy room with an economy-sized bathtub to match.

Right at the time when a lengthy soak in a warm bath would have been wonderfully restorative.

And it was important to rest up before the evening, when we would catch up with ***The Sponge*** and ***Lighting Dude***, two members of a theatre troupe that had passed through ***Bowen*** about eighteen months ago.





They were doing an *Arts Council* gig around the district's schools on their way to the *Pacific Edge Arts Conference* in Mackay.

We'd caught up with *The Interpreter* in *Tokyo*, and prior experience suggested the evening would be a rather fluid affair.

A flurry of e-mails established the plan for the night.

*Meet at Karasuma Station and then head somewhere to eat, and, what is more important, drink.*

*The Sponge* is as the nickname suggests, partial to a drink.

And so, of course, am I.



Once at the station, we found two familiar faces along with a third member of the troupe who'd been enlisted for the night because she was *a good drinker* and knew her way around value-for-money eating and drinking establishments in downtown **Kyoto**.

We stood around chatting for a while waiting for the final member of the party to arrive.

Once she had, we set off on a route march that turned to the left and headed into a basement just as I was about to ask why we'd set off on a lengthy excursion *without a compass and a cut lunch*.

We removed the shoes, placed them in a locker, and were ushered into an alcove where we set about organising copious quantities of food and drink.

Beer seemed to be the logical starter, and there was a discussion (in **Japanese**) about appropriate sizes of drinking vessels.

**Sponge**, having spent a day on the promotional trail, was not in a mood to drink out of a tooth glass. He uttered what sounded like **Dynamo**, but I heard it as **Dynamite**.

And, given the size of the thirst, nothing less than **Dynamite** would suffice.

When the first round arrived, I discovered **Dynamo** denoted a vessel containing substantially more than a pint glass.

For the next couple of hours, **Hughesy** and **The Sponge** washed down another array of assorted dishes, nothing in the high-class-gourmet category, but good solid blotting paper to soak up copious draughts of **Dynamite** before changing to **saké**.

Along the way, we discovered **Lighting Dude** needed a change of nickname, due to an aversion to flying. He was now to be known as **Chicken**.

It didn't, however, stop there. Before much more time had elapsed, we learnt he was also one of the very few people in **Japan** who *doesn't own a mobile phone*.

In fact, there are probably two people in the whole of the country who don't own one of the ubiquitous devices and they both work in the administrative section of a certain children's theatre company.

Which explains why he is now known as **Double Chicken**.

As **Hughesy** and **The Sponge** demolished the **Dynamite** the third member of the troupe kept up, decided beer lacked *oomph* and switched to **Shōchū**, earning the title of **Double Sponge** due to her capacity for strong drink.

She also expressed a desire to visit **Australia** to demolish large quantities of steak.





Later, I switched to *saké*. *The Sponge* is an expert on the subject, with an interest in smaller regional producers.

On a future visit he's supposed to act as the guide on an intensive *saké*-appreciation course.

It was some time after ten-thirty when we paid the bill (a reasonable ¥1500 per head to cover food and drink for six people, including three very thirsty ones) and set off for the station to see the others off on their way home before wandering back to the hotel feeling no pain whatsoever.





## KYOTO > NARA

***Wednesday, 16 April 2008***

After the previous night's excesses, a basic breakfast was all we needed before setting off once again on the temple circuit.

Alarm, bells should have been ringing when we walked out of the hotel and boarded a bus heading towards our initial destination since there were an inordinate number of high school students out on the streets when (just before nine o'clock) they should have been in class.





Our first stop, *Rokuonji* (Deer Garden temple), but usually referred to as *Kinkakuji* (Golden Pavilion temple) dates back to the late fourteenth-century.

In keeping with its reputation, the *Golden Pavilion* was spectacular but, on a day when half the High Schools in *Japan* seemed to have to organized a cultural awareness excursion, extremely crowded.

We started our tour beside the *Mirror Pool* where the crowd meant hundreds of digital cameras were pointed at the three-storey structure with its gold-leaf covering.

From there, we made our way through the strolling garden that makes up the rest of the temple grounds, past the pond of *Anmintaku* enjoying the foliage along the way.





Outside, we followed the road down to *Ryoanji* temple, thinking, by the lack of high school students on the ground, we might just have given them the slip, but as we neared the temple, there they were in swarms again.

The best way to experience *The Temple of the Peaceful Dragon* would involve a lengthy gaze at the temple's famous dry landscape rock garden, with its fifteen boulders placed on a sea of raked gravel and dating back to the late 1400s.

And, in the best of all possible worlds visitors would have the time and space to verify for themselves that the stones have been placed so that only fourteen are visible at one time.

The sheer weight of numbers in a confined space limited most people around us to a couple of hurried photos to remind themselves of the visit.





Away from the rock garden, on the other hand, there was room to move, and we took our time walking around spectacular picture gardens, with masses of *sakura* over the moss-covered ground.

Outside, we followed the road to *Ninnaji* temple but, faced with another swarm of school-kids and a *sakura* display that didn't look as impressive as what we'd just experienced, decided we'd head downtown for lunch.

A definite case of total sensory overload, though the crowds didn't help.

In the city, we found a cafe near the hotel that reminded *Madam* of the places she used to visit in her student days.

Perusing the menu, I decided to go for something called *taco rice*, which turned out to be a *chilli con carne* remarkably similar to the one I throw together whenever I get the chance while *Madam* opted for *spaghetti with vongole*.

With lunch out of the way, we collected the luggage, walked back to the station and caught the train to *Nara*.





Once we'd arrived and checked in, we could have headed out for a stroll but decided to take it easy in the room until our dinner appointment with *The Sister* and family.

I'd just finished running a hot bath when a phone call advised *Madam* that *Her Sister* and *The Niece* had arrived downstairs, so I took my time in a soaking bath and left them with the opportunity to chat without having to worry about amusing a *large hairy non-Japanese-speaking foreigner*.

Out of the bath, with those considerations in mind I took my time heading downstairs.

I'd made it downstairs just before six so, once the preliminary pleasantries had been completed there was nothing for it but to head off towards the restaurant where we'd be dining that evening.



After the now-familiar shoe-removal ritual upon arrival, we were ushered to a private dining room to be joined shortly afterwards by *The Brother-in-Law*, a very busy middle-level executive who simplified what could well have been a lengthy ordering process by glancing at the list of the restaurant's *Top Ten dishes* and ordering the first six.

The *roast beef* was particularly good and, in a moment of weakness I was persuaded to try the *Korean-style raw tuna*, which wasn't bad either. In fact, the whole six dishes were all excellent, it was just a matter of those two sticking in the memory.

I enjoyed a good *Spanish Tempranillo* as we discussed *Australian real estate prices* and other matters of interest before the walk back to the hotel, where we didn't quite manage the usual good night's sleep in a very cramped room where the bed was only accessible from one side.





## NARA > KOBE

***Thursday, 17 April 2008***

When we headed downstairs in the morning, we were surprised to find the breakfast room contained a higher foreigner quotient than we'd become used to sighting.

That gave us something to discuss once the final run-through of the plans for the day had been completed.

I suspect the phenomenon had something to do with the fact that the hotel was part of a ***Western-style*** chain (***Comfort Inn***) rather than one of the privately owned ***Japanese business hotels*** we'd previously booked.

It was difficult, given the overall level of ambient background noise to detect where all these westerners had come from.

The couple at the next table were definitely speaking ***French***, and there was a young ***American*** woman on the other side of the room expressing very definite opinions about the relative virtues of the different sight-seeing options on offer around ***Nara*** in a voice that carried right round the room.





Don't get me wrong.

There's a possibility that *Miss America* had qualifications that entitled her to express the forthright opinions she was putting forward.

But as I listened I couldn't help contrasting her attitude with the older *Americans* we'd passed during our wanderings around the picture garden at *Ryoanji*.

Their expressions of joy, pleasure and wonder made me half-inclined to approach them to inquire if they'd been to *Torii moto* (our destination the day before) and suggest a trip there would probably be something they'd find enjoyable.

But, for some reason I didn't, and as I listened (not that I had much choice in the matter) to the advice being dispensed from the other side of the room I was glad, in a way, I hadn't foisted my *ultra-novice opinions* on an unsuspecting audience.

The reader might suggest I'm doing exactly that right here, but anyone who has read this far can hardly be described as *an unsuspecting audience*.





With the now-familiar *we're leaving the hotel* ritual (pack, check out, cloakroom ticket) negotiated, we headed to **Todaiji** temple, the home of the eighth-century **Vairocana Buddha**. Once we'd boarded the bus, numbers of vaguely familiar-looking students in school uniforms suggested a repeat of the **Kyoto** crowd scenes was on the cards.

That is more or less how things panned out once we joined the throng moving through the drizzle down the tree-lined avenue towards the temple.

Along the way, we encountered the first of the famous **Nara** deer.

I found myself, for some reason, humming a bastardised version of Tiny Tim's minor hit (*Tiptoe through the deer poop with me*) as I watched an attendant sweeping up the detritus while some teenagers tried to work out a strategy to deal with demands for food from a particularly insistent deer.





Inside the complex, we headed towards the *Great Buddha Hall*, which, 57 metres across, 50 metres back and 49 metres high, is the *largest wooden structure in the world*.

Impressive figures.

All the more impressive when you learn the structure is 33% smaller than the eighth-century version. It was rebuilt after the first and second incarnations were destroyed by fire in **1180** and **1567**.

Inside the building, the fifteen-metre *Buddha*, which had almost bankrupted *Japan's* economy by the time it was completed in **751** takes your breath away as it towers over you, surrounded by smaller statues of other *Buddhist figures*.





Outside we took an extended ramble around the complex with structures dating back as far as the seventh century before moving through *Nara Park* to the nearby *Kasuga Grand Shrine*.

By the time we finished, we'd had close to three hours of temple and shrine-viewing, so we headed back to the city centre, where we found a teppan-style eatery for lunch.

*Madam* had a pancake, and I settled for beef noodles, both cooked on an iron hot plate in the middle of the table.

We were seated on the *Western-style* right-hand side while opposite us people sat at low *Japanese style no shoes* tables.

From there, we passed through alleys lined with small shops, becoming more than a little disoriented as we attempted to find our way back to the hotel to reclaim the baggage.

It took us an hour to make our way back to *Kōbe*, with the last leg a very fast limited express after a change of train in *Osaka*.

Arriving at the *Okura Hotel*, we opted for a rest before the night's appointment with *Diamond Chef* and *Drinker Dude*.





We caught a shuttle back to *Sannomiya*, and *Madam* headed off to replenish the finances at the *Post Office* while I went for a browse in *Tower Records* hoping I'd find the new album by the reformed, but sadly Stanshall-less *Bonzo Dog Band*.

As she headed off towards the *Post Office*, *Madam* expressed the opinion that I was highly unlikely to find what I was looking for because it was *far too obscure* an item for a *Japanese music emporium* to have in stock.

As it turned out, the Bonzos album was nowhere to be found. But a brief browse through what was on offer revealed (I'm not making this up) the equally-obscure *Doctor Strangely Strange*, the first album by the *J. Geils Band* and an album by *Ed Sanders* called *Beer Cans On The Moon*. I seem to recall the latter met an almost universal thumbs down when released in *1973*.

Given the time for a careful survey, I would have managed to uncover even more weird and wonderful obscurities.

As it was, however, the browsing was interrupted by the arrival of '*Er Indoors* who announced the night's dinner and drinking companions were waiting for us under the railway.

That set us off at a fair clip towards the area in question, and when the rendezvous had been made, we plunged into the maze of alleys and side streets that make up the downtown eating and drinking quarter.



Arriving at an almost inconspicuous *Chinese* restaurant, *Diamond Chef* looked after the order while the rest of us directed our attention to beer, fortunately available in *Dynamo*-sized glasses.

What followed was a range of dishes, all of them excellent, including the without-a-doubt-best *lemon chicken* I've had in a long time (actually the only *lemon chicken* I've had this century but much better than any version I'd encountered previously).

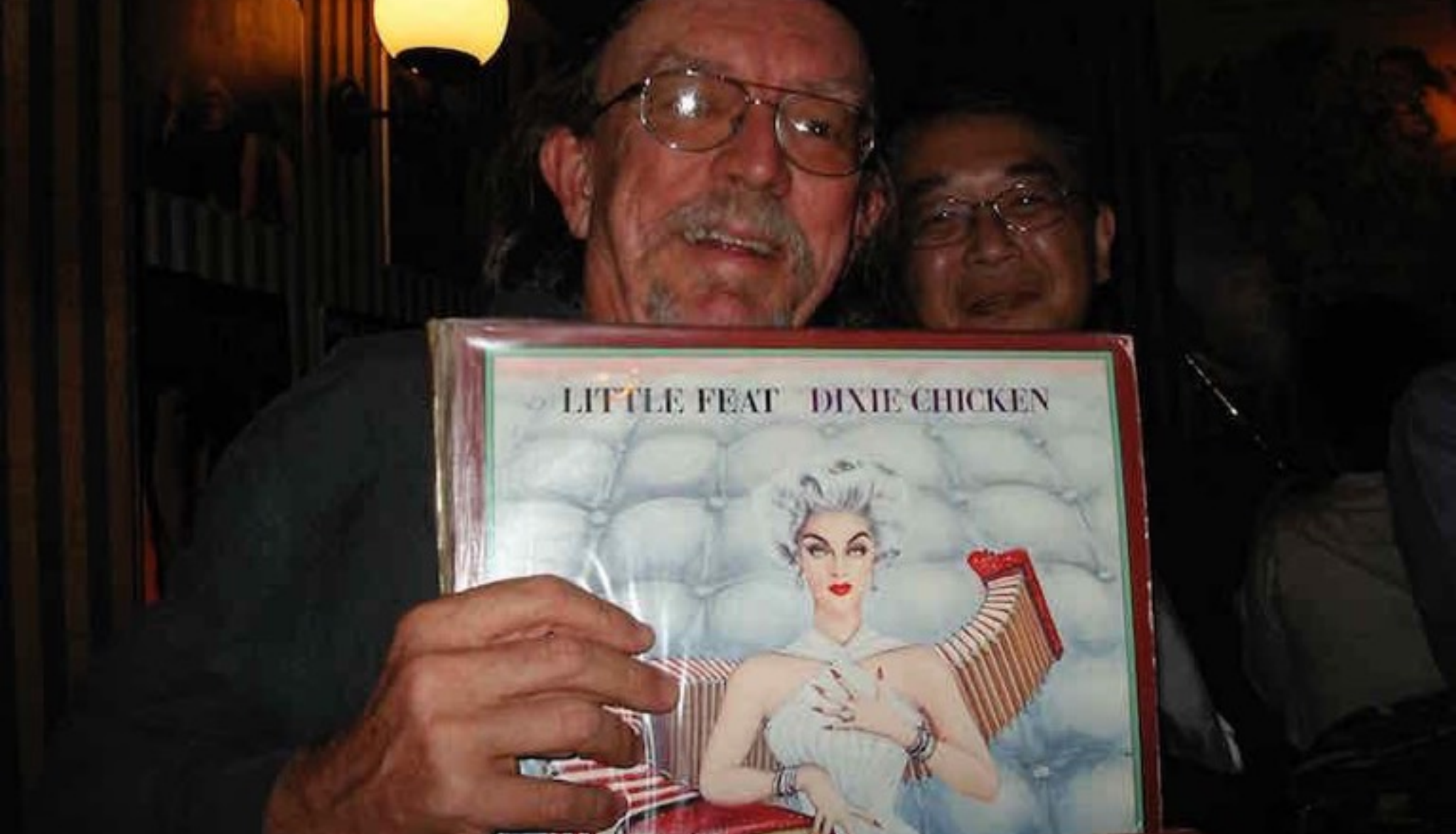
Interestingly, when the first platter of appetisers arrived, and I'd had the presence of jellyfish pointed out, once I'd sampled one of the surprisingly-crunchy little morsels no one seemed inclined to partake in any of the remaining supply.

I'll be happy to avoid jellyfish in the future, but another item on the same platter, a *pickled cucumber*, was easily the best preparation of that particular vegetable I've encountered.

Once dinner was out of the way, it was back to the side streets and back alleys on the way to *Piccolo*, an interesting bar that had been described as *somewhere I would love*.







The only identification in an obscure back alley is an illuminated sign. A narrow staircase with a U-turn midway leads to an ultra-small cramped area with seats for no more than a dozen drinkers and a total capacity of about twenty.

There's almost as much room behind the bar as on the drinkers' side, but I guess that amount of space is needed to provide access to the shelves of vinyl LPs that the bartender, an obvious survivor of late-60s or early 70s time warp, will play on request.

My request for Little Feat produced copies of ***Dixie Chicken*** and ***The Last Record Album***, and we even managed to get a couple of tracks in before the Feat were superseded by other requests.

After we were well and truly settled in, having scored four seats at the bar, ***Diamond Chef*** and ***Drinker Dude*** were keen to learn my rating of the place.

My response?

*I came all the way from Australia to drink at this bar.*

Which was, more or less, true.

We managed to drink and talk till well after eleven. By that time the last shuttle bus back to the hotel had well and truly left, so we were forced to catch a cab back so we could crash for the last time on this venture onto ***Japanese soil***.





## KOBE > SOUTHPORT

***Friday, 18 April 2008***

When I awoke just after 7:30 without any daylight seeping into the room it took a few moments to register that we were well into our last day of the overseas portion of the trip.

Not that this had anything to do with the events of the previous evening, you understand.

Absence of daylight when I woke up was something I'd noticed everywhere we stayed.

Curtain or shutter arrangements guaranteed unless you set an alarm you were not going to be aroused before you were well and truly ready.

We had intended to head downtown for breakfast (a free shuttle bus encourages things like that), but a glance out of the window prompted a revision to the planned activities for the day.

It was raining, and while we could probably have stayed dry if we stuck to *Plan A*, we decided to opt for a leisurely morning, a late



checkout, lunch and a spot of shopping before we headed out to *Myodani* to pack and wait for the shuttle service that would ferry us to *the airport*.

Poking my nose out the door, I discovered that the morning *English language paper* had arrived, and I settled down for a chance to catch up on events in the world at large.

We'd managed to avoid news bulletins for the last two weeks, and anything we had heard was in *Japanese* (which meant, of course, *that it was Greek to me. Thank-you William Shakespeare*).

You wouldn't expect much *Australian news* in the *International Herald Tribune*, in association with the *Asahi Shimbun*, but a front-page article with the headline *Australian drought dooms rice farms* dealt with the international ramifications of the collapse of *Australia's rice production*.

After I'd taken my time over the paper, there was time for a long soaking bath while *Madam* took a phone call from *The Sister* before we packed and checked out just after eleven.

That allowed us to take the 11:15 shuttle to *Sannomiya*, where an early lunch seemed to be a good idea.

*'Er Indoors* had spotted references to a couple of possible options, including an Indian curry house somewhere nearby. We'd initially planned to head in that direction, but she mentioned a nice bread place as an alternative before making a major strategic mistake.

I'd completely forgotten the existence of a *Kōbe* equivalent of the *Gumbo & Oyster Bar* where we'd had lunch in *Kanazawa*, but when she pointed out that it not only existed but happened to be located right in this very building decision was easy.

The order, once we'd arrived and been seated, was equally straightforward. Oysters and *gumbo* for *Hughesy*, the lady's set for *Madam* plus the obligatory glass of *Chablis* to go with the oysters.

Unfortunately, the oysters arrived as ordered rather than the double helping we'd had in *Kanazawa*. But they were big, plump and excellent *au naturel* with a touch of *chilli* and tomato sauce.

I enjoyed the *gumbo*, and *Madam's* set (salad, a platter of Cajun/Creole nibbles including *ceviche*, seafood pasta and a slice of chocolate cake) looked as good as the few morsels I managed to sample tasted.

If I had a complaint, it would have concerned lack of *New Orleans music* in the background.

But you can't have everything, and it would be unreasonable to expect it.

Both the *Kanazawa* and *Kōbe* establishments are part of a nation-wide chain, so I have a feeling I'll be revisiting *G&O* from time to time over the next few years.





After lunch, I headed to ***Tower Records*** to pick up a couple of items I'd spotted, then headed across to buy ***Madam's*** new suitcase and a book about translation matters then it was down to the subway and off to ***Myodani***.

A visit to the electrical store for a digital camera was the next item on the agenda, and I sat with the luggage and geriatric ***Japanese*** while ***Madam*** completed the purchase.

From there, we caught a cab to ***The Mother's*** and got stuck into the final packing, which was straightforward as far as I was concerned.

Clean clothes in the upper compartment, everything else except for the things I needed for the flight down below.

***Madam's*** procedure was more complicated.

While she continued packing, I got out of the way, wrote up the notebook and finished the half bottle of ***Brown Brothers Patricia Noble Riesling 2000*** that had been sitting in the fridge for the past three or four years (and very nice it was, too).

Once the packing was out of the way, there was nothing to do but sit back and wait for the taxi shuttle that was due to collect us at 4:50. It arrived on time, giving us just under two hours to enjoy the views as the driver navigated his way through various pickup points and eventually deposited us outside the departures section of ***Kansai International***.



Checking in involved a lengthy queue since two flights were scheduled to depart simultaneously, one to *Cairns*, the other to *Brisbane* and *Sydney* - and both seemed to be rather heavily booked.

Then, once the luggage was off our hands, it was a matter of killing two hours before boarding.

The first bit was fairly straightforward.

A stroll through the duty-free shopping, a survey of the meal options and a decision that *Madam* would head for the *sushi/sashimi* outlet while I wolfed down some pasta with a glass of red.

Since we had eaten, there was not much else to do but head for Departure Lounge 6 and settle down to wait for boarding. Both of us had something to read, and I had the *iPod*, so the wait didn't present any major problem.

For some reason, the *initial boarding call* was in *English* rather than *Japanese*, which gave us a head-start on most of our fellow passengers.

Not that it did anything to expedite our departure, but, at least, we were seated with hand luggage safely stowed well before the majority of passengers made their way onto the aircraft.





The flight itself was relatively uneventful, and sunrise saw us tracking down *Australia's east coast* with *'Er Indoors* in the window seat trying to catch a glimpse of *Bowen* once I'd pointed out that we'd be passing fairly close. Admittedly close is a relative term when you're travelling at 38000 feet.

She claimed to have been successful though our position over the wing made it difficult for someone sitting one seat away from the window to verify the sighting.

We were on the ground in Brisbane on schedule when the fun and games, such as they were, began.

Unknown to the majority of those on Flight *JQ 1*, during the descent into Brisbane, the auxiliary power supply decided to pack it in. Not that anyone would have noticed since it was the kind of incident that didn't pose any problem (as far as I could gather) while we were in the air. In fact, if the pilot hadn't brought the matter to our attention as the aircraft taxied to the terminal, I doubt than anyone other than the aircrew would have been any the wiser.

Unfortunately, the failure meant that, once the engines were turned off the aircraft would be plunged into darkness unless they could arrange for some other source of electrical power.





Which, in turn, meant the engines wouldn't be switched off in a hurry, and that, in turn, meant no one was going anywhere anytime soon.

No sooner had they made alternative arrangements than another gremlin appeared in the system. There was a problem, believe it or not, opening the doors, which meant that everyone who had stood up when the engines were switched off stayed standing for quite some time.

Eventually, of course, they succeeded in opening a door, and we filed off through the front doors hoping that nothing else would go wrong.

Then, for some reason possibly related to the previous difficulties, unloading the baggage seemed to take an inordinate length of time, but eventually, some operator flicked a switch, and the conveyor belt surged into action.

Eventually, our baggage emerged, and we were free to head through *Immigration and Customs* and make transit arrangements to get us to the Gold Coast for rest and recuperation before heading home.





# AKITA SHINKANSEN

The Akita *Shinkansen* line serves the Kantō and Tōhoku regions, linking Tokyo and Akita, the capital of Akita prefecture with hourly services. Akita *Shinkansen Komachi* trains have all-reserved seating and stop at Ueno, Omiya, Sendai, Morioka on the Tohoku *Shinkansen* line, travelling at speeds of up to 320 km/h.

Up to Morioka, trains come in two sections, an Aomori-bound *Hayate* and a 7-car *Komachi* which turns off the Tohoku line for the rest of the run to Akita. From Morioka to Ōmagari uses the Tazawako Line, then the Ōu Main Line from Ōmagari to Akita. Since neither line was engineered specifically for *Shinkansen* services, the maximum speed is significantly reduced (to 130 km/h). Stations on the latter section of the route are Shizukuishi, Tazawako, Kakunodate, Omagari, and Akita. Trains reverse direction at Omagari as they change from the Tazawako Line to the Ōu Line.

The trip from Tokyo takes four hours, costs about ¥17,000 and is fully covered by both the Japan Rail Pass and JR East Pass. Since all seats require reservations there's a chance of getting in the wrong half of the train in Tokyo.

Route details and maps: <http://www.jreast.co.jp/e/routemaps/akitashinkansen.html>

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## Related Glossary Terms

**Chūō Shinkansen, Hokuriku Shinkansen, Jōetsu Shinkansen, Kyushu Shinkansen, Nagano Shinkansen, Sanyō Shinkansen, Shinkansen, Shinkansen (History), Tōhoku Shinkansen, Tōkaidō Shinkansen**

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**Index**

Find Term



# ASHINOKO LAKE

The scenic Lake Ashi, often referred to as Hakone Lake but formally Ashinoko Lake, in Hakone lies along the southwest wall of the caldera of Mount Hakone formed after the volcano erupted 3000 years ago. The name means "lake of reeds."

A popular tourist destination, the lake is known for views of Mt. Fuji and pleasure boats that traverse the lake, providing views of the surrounding mountains and the floating torii of the Hakone Shrine. The Hakone Detached Palace Garden delivers the best panoramas across the lake with Mount Fuji in the background but clouds and poor visibility often block the view. Visibility tends to be better during the colder seasons in the early morning and late evening.

But even if you can't catch a good view of Mount Fuji, the cruises on the lake link to the Hakone Ropeway, which will take the visitor from Togendai on the northern end of the lake across The Great Boiling Valley to Sounzan. The Hakone Tozan Cable Car funicular railway in turn connects to the Hakone Tozan Line mountain railway which delivers you to Odawara.

Hakone Sightseeing Boats and Izuhakone Sightseeing Boats both operate cruises between Moto-Hakone and Hakone-machi at the lake's southern shores and Togendai and Kojima. A round-trip cruise from takes roughly 30 minutes and the Hakone Free Pass is only valid on the passenger ship shaped Hakone Sightseeing Boats.

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## Related Glossary Terms

**Hakone, Mount Fuji**



# CHŪŌ SHINKANSEN

Construction work on the *maglev* Chūō *Shinkansen* was due to commence in autumn 2014, with 86% of the initial 286 km route running through (as in under) the Japanese Alps from Tokyo's Shinagawa Station to Nagoya. The line will extend the existing Yamanashi research track and should connect the two cities in less than half the time taken by services on the Tokaido line, with trains running at speeds of up to 505 km/h.

That section is slated to open in 2027 with the next section to Osaka completed by 2045. The journey to ShinOsaka should take sixty-seven minutes (currently a minimum of two hours and nineteen minutes). The project is expected to cost ¥9 trillion, but the economic impact of reduced travel time between Tokyo and Osaka has been estimated at between ¥5 and ¥17 trillion over the line's first fifty years of operation.

The project is as an alternative to the Tokaido *Shinkansen*, where tight schedules leave little room to add extra services, and there's a need for cover if that line is blocked by a natural disaster. With the underground sections passing through soft bedrock earthquakes are an issue, but JR Tokai claims tremors will not affect levitating trains and shocks are supposedly less severe when you're underground. Plans include forty-seven emergency exits from the tunnels, spaced about 5 kilometres apart in urban areas, with high-strength concrete and bolts attached to bedrock bolstering resistance to tremors. Still, the Chuo *Shinkansen* will run across several active fault lines.

There are other concerns. Excavations will produce over 62 million cubic metres of material that will need to be disposed of, environmental geologists suggest tunnelling will affect the above-ground environment and maglev technology requires much more electric power (35,000 kilowatts compared to 10,000 kilowatts for a single run on the Tokaido *Shinkansen*). Concerns with possible noise pollution will see above-ground sections of the line covered by concrete hoods, but JR Tokai will consider allowing open views of Mount Fuji and the Southern Japan Alps from the scenic Kofu basin in Yamanashi Prefecture.

The initial 18.4 kilometre test track between Ōtsuki and Tsuru in Yamanashi Prefecture was extended by 25 kilometres in June 2013. JR Tokai is considering opening services from a station in Kōfu on a 6 kilometre extension of the existing track to carry tourists visiting Japan for the 2020 Olympics to experience the train ride through the Yamanashi mountains.

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## Related Glossary Terms

**Akita Shinkansen, Hokuriku Shinkansen, Jōetsu Shinkansen, Kyushu Shinkansen, Maglev Trains, Nagano Shinkansen, Sanyō Shinkansen, Shinkansen, Shinkansen (History), Tōhoku Shinkansen, Tōkaidō Shinkansen**



# EKI-BENTŌ

Google *eki-bentō* (as I did, looking for material for this note) and you'll find any number of links to commercial operations, restaurants and the like. That's because *eki-bentō* represents a subset of a much larger entity (*bentō*, the single portion meal, usually rice, fish or meat with pickled or cooked vegetables in a box-shaped container) sold at railway stations (*eki*) or on trains. If you're at an airport and want something to sustain you on the flight it will be *sora-bentō*, and you'll have the same problem with Google.

Produced in a number of styles and packaged in a variety of containers from mass-produced disposable packages to hand-crafted lacquerware. *Bentō* boxes are, essentially, convenience food. The word originates from a Chinese Southern Song Dynasty (twelfth and thirteenth century) slang term that translates as *convenient*. The earliest forms of *bentō* can be traced back to the late Kamakura Period, when cooked rice was dried (*hoshi-ii* or *dried meal*) eaten in that form or reconstituted by boiling in water.

Wooden boxes with the contents eaten at a tea party date back to the sixteenth century Azuchi-Momoyama Period. Edo Period travellers and sightseers often carried a *koshibentō* of *onigiri* rice balls wrapped in bamboo leaves or stored in a bamboo box. Theatre-goers consumed makuno-uchi bentō between acts of *Noh* and *Kabuki* performances and similar packages were prepared for *Hanami* (cherry blossom viewing) or special occasions such as *Hinamatsuri* (Doll's Day or Girls' Day).

*Eki-bentō* date back to the In the Meiji Period, with the earliest version (two *onigiri* and a serving of daikon wrapped in bamboo leaves) possibly sold at Utsunomiya station on 16 July 1885. Schools did not supply lunch teachers and students took *bentō* to school, a practice that lasted until schools started providing lunches after World War Two. Aluminium *bentō* boxes became popular during the Taishō period since they were easy to clean and looked classy.

Contemporary *bentō* may take the form of a home-prepared lunch box, but the term usually refers to commercially prepared boxes sold in convenience stores, specialised takeaway outlets such as the Hokka Hokka Tei and Hotto Motto franchise chains, railway stations, and even department stores. Varieties of bentō include:

- Chūka bentō* (Chinese appetisers or snacks);
- Hayaben* (*early bentō*), eaten before lunch with another lunch afterwards;
- Hinomaru bentō*, plain white rice with *umeboshi* (*Japanese salt plums*, pickled *ume* fruit) in the centre in an arrangement that resembles the *Hinomaru* or Japanese flag;
- Hokaben*, freshly cooked hot rice served with freshly prepared side dishes sold at takeaway *bentō* shops;
- Kamameshi bentō* sold at stations in Nagano prefecture, cooked and served in a clay pot with the pot as a souvenir;
- Kyaraben* (*character bentō*) decorated to look like characters from *anime*, *manga*, or video games;
- Makunouchi bentō* with rice, pickled fruit, broiled salmon etc;
- Noriben*, with *nori* (seaweed) dipped in soy sauce with cooked rice;
- Oekakiben* arranged to look like people, animals, buildings, flowers and plants;
- Saké bentō* (broiled salmon);
- Shidashi bentō* prepared in a restaurant and served at funerals or social gatherings;
- Shōkadō bentō* in a traditional black-lacquered box, the inspiration for IBM's ThinkPad;
- Tori bentō* (cooked chicken with rice).

## Related Glossary Terms

Drag related terms here



# GEISHA

When I sighted a distinctively clothed woman in Kyoto's Gion district and placed a mental tick in the box beside *geisha*, I was immediately wrong on at least two fronts. First, I was in Kyoto, where they're *geiko* in Kansai dialect. Second, the white make-up, elaborate *kimono* and hairdo that form the popular image of *geisha*, usually signifies a *maiko*, or apprentice (alternatively *hangyoku*, or *half-jewel* since they are paid at half the rate of a full *geisha*). Fully fledged geisha only wear the characteristic makeup for special performances.

Regardless of the label we are talking about traditional entertainers who act as hostesses. during meals, banquets and special occasions The word *geisha* is drawn from two *kanji*, *gei* (art) and *sha* (person or doer) so an accurate translation would be *performing artist*, one whose skills covered a range of traditional Japanese arts including music, dance and games, trained to make guests feel at ease with interesting conversation, drinking games and artistic performances.

The *maiko* apprenticeship does not appear to be strictly necessary, since women over the age of twenty-one are deemed too old to go through it, but it seems a year's training (formal or informal) is the minimum needed before a *maiko* or *geisha* can make their debut in the community. Completing the apprenticeship, however, is said to yield greater prestige later a *geisha's* career.

While modern labour laws prohibit girls from beginning an apprenticeship until they are eighteen (though fifteen-year-old girls can become full-time *maiko* in Kyoto) the training process used to start much earlier, progressing through stages as *shikomi* (servant) and *minarai* (watching apprentice) as they developed communication and hospitality skills and techniques.

Elements that combined to develop the *geisha* culture started to coalesce after the imperial court moved to Kyoto in 794. By 1617, there were designated walled-in pleasure quarters (*yūkaku*) that offered sex, along with accomplished performers who entertained customers with dancing, singing, music, poetry and calligraphy.

The early *geisha* who appeared around the eighteenth century were men who entertained customers while they waited to see the courtesans (*oiran*). The female equivalent of the original *geisha* were teenage *Ôdôri ko* (dancing girls) in unlicensed districts that sprang up all over Japan, unrestricted by the strict etiquette associated with the pleasure quarters. Many such areas developed close to shrines and temples, and offered refreshments and entertainment to pilgrims. As teahouses became regulated, the services they were allowed to offer were defined and became ritualised.

The first known female *geisha* was a singer from Fukagawa, who appeared around 1750, the first of a number of women who worked as entertainers rather than prostitutes, often alongside male *geisha*. They were forbidden from sexual activity ith the customers, which would have encroached on the business of the *oiran*. As the courtesans dealt with sexual matters, *geisha* created their own niche as artists and cultured female companions.

The distinction blurred after World War Two, when prostitutes began dressing in *kimono* and imitating the *geisha's* appearance to attract customers from American servicemen, referring to themselves as *geisha girls*. Since their clients could not tell the difference between the legitimate *geisha* and the fancy dress imitations, *geisha girl* became a general term for prostitutes, bar hostesses and streetwalkers.

Today, *geisha* still live in *geisha* houses (*okiya*) in "flower towns" (*hanamachi*), during their apprenticeship, though successful *geisha* may choose to live independently. They are hired to attend parties and gatherings in *ochaya* (tea houses) or traditional Japanese restaurants (*ryôtei*), with the venue providing the *tatami* room where the entertainment takes place. Food and performers are ordered in. Traditionally, *ochaya* were exclusive venues that did not bill guests at the end of the night, but ran a tab that covered all costs (down to taxi rides) and billed the client's bank account every month.

Changing times have modified the standard practice. Tourists and other interested parties can now, apparently, book *geiko* dinners through travel agencies and hotels. The customer can expect (again, apparently) around ¥50,000 for each *maiko* or *geiko* and somewhere between ¥10,000 and ¥30,000 per head for the meal. Since the entertainers probably won't speak English or any other foreign language, interpreters are an additional expense. The highlight of the evening will be a seasonal dance, accompanied by a *shamisen* played by second *geiko*, so the bill will probably start around the ¥100,000 mark.

## Related Glossary Terms

Hanamachi, Shamisen



# GERO

The *onsen* town of Gero on the banks of the Hida River in Gifu Prefecture is the centre of a larger entity, the city of Gero, established in 2004 by merging of the former town of Gero with the towns of Hagiwara, Kanayama and Osaka, and the village of Maze, all of them from Mashita District. As a result, the city has eight railway stations (Hida-Kanayama, Yakeishi, Gero, Zenshōji, Hida-Hagiwara, Jōro, Hida-Miyada and Hida-Osaka) along a stretch of JR Central's Takayama Main Line.

Located between Nagoya and Takayama, Gero is about forty-five minutes by limited express or an hour on a local service from Takayama, which makes it a possible alternative during the Takayama Festival, when accommodation is at a premium in Takayama. From Nagoya, it's about 90 minutes on the JR Wide View Hida limited express. Those trips are fully covered by the Japan Rail Pass.

One of Japan's Three Famous Springs (along with Kusatsu in Gunma Prefecture and Hyogo Prefecture's Arima) as listed by Confucian poet Hayashi Razan, not to be confused with the Three Great Springs or Three Old Springs (see [http://wikitravel.org/en/Japan's\\_Top\\_3](http://wikitravel.org/en/Japan's_Top_3)) the town has been drawing in visitors since the Engi Era (901-923) and while tourism is the city's major industry, attracting more than a million Japanese visitors every year, forestry and agriculture play significant roles in the local economy.

Predictably, there are many hotels and *ryokan*, most of them on the northern side of the river (the train station lies to the south of it) and most including their own bathing facilities, and there are a number of inexpensive, convenient *onsen* near railway stations, residential areas, and shopping centres along the valley, as well as three public bath houses in the town itself. The southern end of the Gero Bridge has a large (free) *rotenburo* (open-air bath) if you don't mind bathing in full view of people crossing the bridge.

Visitors can sample three baths of any of about thirty participating ryokan by purchasing a *Yumeguri Tegata* spa pass, a wooden amulet sold all over Gero at the tourist information office, ryokan, souvenir shops and convenience stores which is valid for six months.

There are also numerous free foot baths, which may offer welcome relief after a hard day's walk. The mountainous backdrop attracts sightseers in both *sakura* and coloured leaves seasons, and the hillside Onsenji Temple for a view across the city and Hida River.

Another attraction is Gassho Village Open Air Museum, located just above town with steep roofed houses *gasshozukuri* farmhouses, traditional folk art and a museum of *komainu* (guard dog statues used at shrines).

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## Related Glossary Terms

Drag related terms here



## GIFU

Located on the northern edge of the Nōbi Plain in southern Gifu Prefecture. Gifu prospered as a castle town during the Kamakura Period and serves as the prefectural capital. The Nagara River runs through the city from the northeast to the southwest and much of the city lies on the river's flood plain and is consequently susceptible to flooding when typhoons or heavy thunderstorms affect the area. Dykes and levees help control the excess water. The rich soil of the river valley is prime farmland

The city played an important role in Japan's history because of its location in the centre of the country. *Control Gifu and you control Japan* was the catchphrase during the Sengoku period, when various warlords attempted to unite and control Japan.

The region had been under the control of the Toki clan until 1542, when Saitō Dōsan took control of Mino Province and built the first incarnation of Gifu Castle atop Mount Kinka. Dōsan's daughter Nōhime married Oda Nobunaga, who unified half of Japan under his rule. After consulting with a Buddhist priest, Nobunaga renamed the castle, the surrounding Mino Province and the mountain in 1567.

Gifu continued to flourish as a post station along the *Nakasendō* highway connecting the capital at with Kyoto via central Honshū (modern-day Saitama, Gunma, Nagano, Gifu and Shiga prefectures). The local economy also benefited from its location at the centre of Nobunaga's sphere of influence.

Gifu was officially established as a city on 1 July 1889, a small city that grew as Japan industrialised despite earthquake damage (the Mino-Owari earthquake on 28 October 1891). The city's first industry was textiles, and it rivalled Tokyo and Osaka as a leading fashion centre.

During Japan's military buildup in the 1930s, the city became an industrial centre, aided by nearby Kakamigahara's status as the country's aeronautical centre. During World War Two, Gifu was the home of paper-based fire balloons that were supposed to use the jet stream to traverse the Pacific Ocean and bring terror to the continental United States. The city's status as an industrial centre made it a firebombing target, culminating in the Gifu Air Raid of 9 July 9, 1945.

Gifu remained prosperous in the post-war years. While the fashion industry declined, the city's industrial facilities support automotive plants and heavy industry in Aichi Prefecture. A construction boom has improved the economy and the city serves as a satellite of Nagoya.

JR Central's Tokaidō Main Line connects Gifu with Tokyo (around two and a half hours) and Nagoya (twenty-five minutes). The city is just over an hour from Kyoto and Osaka. Limited Express trains on the JR Takayama Line run from Gifu to Gero and Takayama. There are also JR connections via Maibara to Kanazawa and Toyama and a rail link to Chōbu Centrair International Airport. An alternative link to Nagoya is the private Meitetsu Railway, which also services Kakamigahara and Takehana from Meitetsu Gifu Station.

In addition to modern industries, the city also has a range of traditional products, including fans, lanterns and umbrellas, *Mino washi* paper and foods created from the *ayu* sweetfish (river trout), which have been caught using cormorants for more than 1,300 years.

Cormorant fishing is a tourist attraction, with visitors watching six fishing masters from boats or the banks of the river most nights until nine o'clock between 11 May and 15 October each year. Visitors who have watched the spectacle include haiku poet Matsuo Bashō and Charlie Chaplin.

The Nagara River is the venue for two firework festivals, sponsored by rival newspapers, which attract large crowds to the river's banks. The ***Chunichi Shimbun*** Nagara River All-Japan Fireworks Festival is held on the last Saturday of July, with the ***Gifu Shinbun*** Nagara River National Fireworks Display a week later. Approximately 30,000 fireworks are set off at each event.

Mt. Kinka, the 329-metre peak next to Gifu Park, provides a backdrop to the fireworks. The summit, accessible via a ropeway or hiking trails, delivers a 360-degree panoramic view across the Nagara River and the city below and is home to Gifu Castle, a castle museum, and a squirrel park.

Oda Nobunaga used the castle as his headquarters when unifying Japan, but the castle was destroyed in 1601, after the Battle of Sekigahara. The current castle only dates back to 1956. At the foot of Mt. Kinka, Gifu Park, contains a three-storied pagoda, the Gifu City Museum of History, the Kato Eizo-Toichi Memorial Art Museum, the Nawa Insect Museum, and the boarding area for Kinka-zan Ropeway.

Gifu City Museum of History, predictably, focuses on Gifu's past, with a model of the castle town as it was in the Warring States Period and a recreation of the *Rakuichi-ba* Free Market established by Oda Nobunaga to promote the town's economy by drawing in merchants. Associated with the history museum, the Eizō & Tōichi Katō Memorial Art Museum, founded in 1991, is dedicated to works by Eizō and Tōichi Katō, well-known Japanese artists who were both born in Gifu. The Yanaizu Folklore Museum in the Yanaizu-chō area of the city is the other branch of the Museum of History. The Nawa Insect Museum, founded in 1919 by Yasushi Nawa, Japan's *Insect Man*, provides a closeup look at rare and attractive species from around the world. Other museums include a Science Museum, with a planetarium and rooftop observatory, the Museum of Fine Arts, devoted to local art and artists although it does contain pieces from around the world and the Sanko Art Museum houses tea utensils and paintings by Renoir, Chagall, and Ryuzaburo Umehara.

Gifu is also home to a number of other festivals through the year:

- The Dōsan Festival and Gifu Festival on the first weekend in April, both of which include street vendors, flea markets, and floats paraded through the city.

- Gifu Nobunaga Festival on the first weekend in October with a procession of horses and warriors through the city's main streets.

- Tejikara Fire Festival on the second Saturday in April at Tejikarao Shrine and the second Sunday in August at Nagara River Park. Portable shrines are carried aloft amidst a rain of falling sparks.

- Near the end of August Takigi Noh, a traditional form of Japanese theatre takes place on the banks of the Nagara River, lit by bonfires and the fires aboard cormorant boats.

Other attractions include:

- Bairin Park, with over fifty types of plum trees which form a popular springtime attraction.

- Onsen* and *ryokan* inns located along the Nagara River. Springs with a high iron content are thought to be beneficial for a variety of ailments.

- Mount Dodo, north of the Nagara River, is the tallest mountain in the city, with numerous hiking trails. At the mountain's southern base, Matsuo Pond is a popular autumn coloured leaves attraction.

- The ruins of Kanō Castle, built after the Battle of Sekigahara, and designated a National Historic Site.

- The ruins of Kawate Castle, used as a meeting place for the cultural and social elite from Kyoto during the Muromachi period.

- Inaba Shrine, Kogane Shrine, and Kashimori Shrine, considered to be a family since the god at the first is married to the goddess at the second, and they're the parents of the deity at the third.

- Kanō Tenman-gū shrine, built to protect Izumii Castle (predecessor to Kanō Castle).

- Tejikarao Shrine in the east of the city, dating back to 860.

- Buddhist temples include Jōzai-ji, Zuiryō-ji, Jōdo-ji and Shōhō-ji, home to the Gifu Great Buddha, the first and largest basketwork-style dry-lacquered Buddha in Japan, and one of the three largest Great Buddha images in Japan.

#### Related Glossary Terms

Drag related terms here

#### Index

Find Term



GINKAKU-JI

Officially *Jishō-ji* (Temple of Shining Mercy), *Ginkaku-ji* (Temple of the Silver Pavilion) is an elegant Zen temple associated with the *Shokoku-ji* branch of the Rinzai sect. Located in the foothills of Kyoto's eastern mountains, the temple is an outstanding example of Japanese landscape architecture.

Ashikaga Yoshimasa (1435–1490), the eighth Muromachi *shōgun*, built his retirement villa on the site of an abandoned monastery in the grounds of today's temple. He modelled it on *Kinkaku-ji* (Temple of the Golden Pavilion), his grandfather's retirement villa at the base of Kyoto's northern mountains. The villa was converted into a Zen temple in accordance with his will and named *Jishō-ji*, taken from his Buddhist name, Jishōin, after Yoshimasa's death.

Plans for the villa date back as far as 1460, and the intention to build it was announced in 1465, when orders went out to find materials of the highest quality for his new home. Shortly afterwards the Onin war (1467-77) reduced much of Kyoto to ashes. Yoshimi's home went up in flames as well, and when the war was over he set about building a new residence on the site. He moved there formally when construction was completed in 1483 and the villa served as his home from 1484 until his death on 27 January 1490. He had become a Zen Buddhist monk in 1485.

Ginkakuji is famous for the main building on the site, the two-storey Kannon Hall (*Kannon-dono*), the Silver Pavilion, which is said to take its name from Yoshimasa's plan to cover the pavilion with silver leaf in imitation of *Kinkaku-ji*, although no silver was applied, possibly due to financial considerations or the increasing severity of the Onin War.

Alternatively, the nickname may have evolved as a reference to the silvery appearance of moonlight on the black lacquer which made up the building's exterior.

The building's lower storey contains the room where Yoshimasa practised meditation while the upper storey holds a gilt statue of Kannon, the Buddhist goddess of mercy,. The interior of the building is not open to the public.

The nearby *Tōkudō* (Buddha Hall) served as Yoshimasa's home and private chapel.

Yoshimasa spent much of his retirement pursuing the arts, including the tea ceremony and the northeast corner of the building has a tearoom, reputedly the oldest in Japan and the prototype on which future tea ceremony rooms were based. It overlooks a moss garden that was originally modelled on *Saihō-ji* temple built by Muso Soseki (1275-1351) in Kyōto's Nishikyō Ward. The garden was redesigned during the Kan'ei Period (1624-1644).

According to temple records, *Ginkaku-ji* originally consisted of twelve buildings, but only two, the Kannon Hall and the *Tōkudō* survived a disastrous fire in the Tembun Period (1532-1555). By the start of the Meiji Period (1600-1868), the temple had fallen into disrepair but was restored with municipal support assisted by private donations.

Today, *Ginkakuji* consists of the Silver Pavilion and half a dozen other temple buildings. Walking a circular route around the grounds takes the visitor past the meticulously maintained Sea of Silver Sand and the massive sand cone said to symbolise Mount Fuji.

Beside the sand garden the *Hondo* (main hall) displays paintings on its *fusuma* sliding doors but is off-limits to visitors. After passing by the *Tōkudō*, the path takes visitors through Ginkakuji's moss garden and then climbs the hill behind the buildings which delivers views of the temple grounds and the city beyond.

## Related Glossary Terms

## Philosopher's Path



# HAKONE

Located less than a hundred kilometres from Tokyo in the mountainous southwestern part of [Kanagawa Prefecture](#), Hakone is part of the volcanically active [Fuji-Hakone-Izu National Park](#), centred around [Lake Ashinoko](#). Noted for hot springs, natural beauty and views of nearby [Mount Fuji](#), Hakone is a popular destination for Japanese and international tourists.

During the Edo Period, *Hakone-juku* was important checkpoint to control traffic along the [Tōkaidō highway](#) between Edo (Tokyo) and Kyoto. The checkpoint formed the border of the Kantō region.

Travellers on the Tōkaidō had their travel permits and baggage examined under laws that restricted the travel of women and weapons. A short, cedar lined section of the highway and a [reconstructed Hakone Checkpoint](#) with gates, housing for officers and soldiers, a prison chamber and a lookout tower are located between [Moto-Hakone](#) and [Hakone-machi](#) on the southern shore of Lake Ashinoko. The nearby Hakone Sekisho Shiryokan museum has related exhibits.

Some of the original highway between Moto-Hakone and Hakone-Yumoto. remains today, with the best preserved section running from Moto-Hakone to Hatajuku via the Amazake Chaya, a tea house serving *amazake* (hot, sweet rice wine) and Japanese snacks. It's a bit under a two hour walk, just under half way to Hakone-Yumoto, but from there the modern road runs over the old highway and there's no footpath for pedestrians.

There are half-hourly buses along the route, so it seems you can still walk the good bit of the ancient highway and use the bus to get you the rest of the way.

The traveller's most likely way into Hakone is through [Odawara](#), and Hakone-Yumoto.

Personal experience (weather conditions permitting) suggests an anticlockwise progress through the area. Odawara, on the main Tōkaidō *shinkansen* line, is an obvious starting point, though the private [Odakyu railway](#) offers services from Tokyo's Shinjuku station all the way to Hakone-Yumoto, including the [Romancecar limited express](#).

From Odawara, the [Hakone Tozan Line](#) runs along the Hayakawa River valley on the way to Gora, with switchbacks as it makes its way up the steepest gradient on a Japanese railway line. From Gora, the Hakone Tozan Cable Car goes up the mountainside to Sounzan, at one end of the [Hakone Ropeway](#), which carries visitors on a thirty minute two leg journey to Tōgendai, on the shore of Lake Ashinoko.

With ropeway cars departing at one-minute intervals, given the right weather conditions, visitors can enjoy views of Mount Fuji as they cross the Ōwakudani geysers in the [Great Boiling Valley](#).

A stop at Ōwakudani provides a chance to try the black eggs, boiled on site, with the shells turned a mottled black by to a chemical reaction with the sulphurous water. According to legend, each one you eat will add seven years to your life..

From Tōgendai sightseeing cruises cross Lake Ashinoko (the crater of the Hakone Volcano) in highly decorated Disneyland-style pirate ships pass the lakeside [Hakone Jinja](#) Shrine, with *torii* gates in the water, *en route* to Moto-Hakone and Hakone-machi. A clear day will deliver views of Mount Fuji but they're not guaranteed.

From there, a Hakone Tozan bus can deliver you back to Hakone-Yumoto or Odawara.

Other attractions in the area include:

- [Hakone Detached Palace](#), a summer palace for the Imperial Family, on the southern shores of Lake Ashinoko between Moto-Hakone and Hakone-machi. surrounded by a park with walking trails and views across Lake Ashinoko towards Mount Fuji.
- [Hakone Botanical Garden of Wetlands](#) in the highlands of Fuji Hakone Izu National Park with over 1700 varieties of marsh and alpine plants native to Japan and boardwalks through different types of marshland. The gardens are accessible by bus from Gora, the terminus of the Hakone Tozan Railway.
- [Hakone Open-Air Museum](#) with a variety of sculptures and artwork in a parkland setting and a substantial collection of paintings, prints, sculptures and ceramics by Picasso
- [Pola Museum of Art](#) with paintings, sculptures, ceramics and glassware by Japanese and European artists and rotating displays from the permanent collection which includes works by Cezanne, Monet, Picasso and Renoir.
- [Hakone Museum of Art](#) in Gora with displays of Japanese ceramics from prehistoric times through the Edo Period, a moss garden and the Sekirakuen landscape garden (only open on weekends, national holidays and through November).
- [Hakone Komagatake Ropeway](#) from Hakone-en on Lake Ashinoko to the summit of Mount Komagatake, where a mountaintop shrine (Mototsumiya) is an attraction. The ropeway's main claim to fame are the views it offers towards Mount Fuji and back towards the coast.

The area's main claim to fame, however (apart from the Fuji-viewing side of things) lies in the numerous *onsen ryokan*, traditional Japanese inns with hot spring baths. Facilities vary, prices are relatively high due to proximity to Tokyo, and if your accommodation doesn't have its own onsen, something nearby can be arranged. T

here's even a hot spring theme park ([Hakone Kowakien Yunessun](#)) at Hakone-machi, a Mediterranean-style public bath divided into two sections (with or without a bathing suit) with unique baths including a coffee bath, a wine bath and a cypress bath.

Getting around is made easier through the [Hakone Free Pass](#), which delivers unlimited use of most forms of transport for two or three days as well as discounts at many hot springs, museums, restaurants, and other locations.

The Free Pass can be bought at a number of outlets, including Tokyo's Shinjuku Station, the stations at Odawara, Hakone-Yumoto, Gora, Sounzan and Togendai Station, and the ports at Moto-Hakone Port and Hakone-Machi. Japan Rail Pass holders are best off traveling to Odawara on a JR service and picking up the Free Pass there.

## Related Glossary Terms

**Ashinoko Lake, Mount Fuji, Odawara**



# HAMANA LAKE

With an area of 65.0 km² and a circumference is 114 km, Lake Hamana, near the southwestern end of Shizuoka Prefecture is Japan's tenth largest lake. It was a fresh-water lake until an earthquake in 1498 cut the sandbank that had closed it off from the Sea of Enshu.

A 16th century tsunami opened the mouth of the lake further, and the result is a salt lake with an intricate shoreline that is a significant source of cultivated eels, oysters, nori and soft-shelled turtles along with wild caught sea bass, whiting, blowfish (*fugu*), pike, conger and flounder. The region is also known for strawberries and mikan oranges.

The lake has been developed as a resort area, with the major drawcards concentrated around Kanzanji-onsen Hot Spring, a relatively new hot spring resort on the northeast of the lake with more than a dozen hotels and *ryokans*. Most of the baths are found in hotels, and many are accessible to day trippers for a small fee. Kanzanji also attracts wind surfers, sea kayakers and parasailers in summer.

Since the Tokaido *Shinkansen* crosses the southern end of the lake, it is easily accessed from Tokyo, Nagoya and Osaka, but the fastest *Nozomi* do not stop in Hamamatsu. Using the next fastest option (*Hikari*) it is around an hour and a half from Tokyo, slightly less from Osaka and roughly half an hour from Nagoya. From Hamamatsu it's a 40 minute bus ride to Kanzanji Onsen (frequent departures at least twice per hour) but the bus trip is not covered by the Japan Rail Pass.

Nearby attractions include:

- Kanzanji temple, believed to have been founded in 810 by the famous monk Kobo Daishi (Kukai). The grounds extend over the forested peninsula with walking tracks through the forest, a large statue of the Buddhist Goddess of Mercy and views across the water.

- Hamamatsu Flower Park, with some 100,000 plants covering 3,000 different species. There is a western garden with a fountain, a rose garden, lawns, a western garden with glass houses, Balinese and Mexican gardens, as well as a Japanese garden with pine forest and a stream.

- Hamamatsu City Zoo, with over 450 animals including gorillas, orangutan and other monkeys in one of the largest collections of primates in Japan.

- Hamanako Pal Pal Amusement Park with a Ferris wheel, roller coasters, merry go rounds and water slides and merry-go-rounds.

- Kanzanji Ropeway, connecting Hamanako Pal Pal with the summit of Mt. Okusa-yama, which offers a free observatory and Hamanako Music Box Museum.

- Sightseeing boats offer thirty minute or one hour cruises out of Kanzanji's inlet. Boats can be boarded at Kanzanji Temple or the entrance to Hamamatsu Flower Park.

- Bentenjima island, where the sea meets the lake, was originally a small peninsula of the lakeside, and was formed by cutting off by the earthquake in 1498. It is a popular spot for fishing, digging clams and water sports.

- Former Arai Checkpoint on the Tokaido route between Tokyo and Kyoto, located on the southwest side of the lake 700 metres west of JR Araimachi station. The buildings were rebuilt in 1855, making it the only remaining Edo Period checkpoint. The historic Kinokuniya Inn is close by.

On weekends, a free tourist bus (the Flower Go) connects Kanzanji Temple, Hanasaki no Yu public baths, Pal Pal Amusement Park, Hamamatsu Flower Park and Okusa-yama's upper ropeway station, running hourly. It operates every day during peak tourist season.

Attractions slightly further afield include:

- Maisaka Shukuwaki-honjin, an inn for *samurai* and commoners, the only such inn left on the Tokaido.

- The Nakamura Residence, a preserved samurai house north of Bentenjima over the Ufumi Bridge.

- Makayaji Temple, dating back to the Kamakura Period with Heian-style garden and historic wooden statues, short walk or shorter taxi ride from Mikkabi Station on the private Tenryu Hamanako Line, which runs from along the north coast of the lake between Kakegawa and Shinjohara.

- The Sakichi Toyoda Memorial House, the birthplace of the founder of the Toyota company with a museum that includes Toyoda's shed, where he worked on his inventions.

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## Related Glossary Terms

Drag related terms here



# HANAMACHI

*Hanamachi* or *flower towns* are the *geisha* quarters of Japanese cities, containing *okiya* (*geisha* houses), *ochaya* (teahouses where *geisha* entertain customers) and a *kaburenjō* (meeting place, including a theatre, rooms where classes can be held, and offices that deal with payments and regulations).

*Hanamachi* are separate from and not to be confused with courtesan districts (*yūkaku*, pleasure quarter or red-light district) where prostitution was the name of the game. There were originally three such districts, established in the 17th century: Shimabara in Kyōto (1640), Shinmachi in Ōsaka (1624–1644) and Yoshiwara in Edo (modern day Tokyo, 1617). While the *geisha* culture, which emerged in the mid-18th century, may have started there, the practitioners weremoved into separate areas.

Kyoto has five *hanamachi*, referred to as *kagai* or *gokagai* in the local dialect, mostof them clustered around central Kyoto (Gion Kōbu and Gion Higashi, Miyagawachō and Pontochō) with Kamishichiken, separated from the others, near Kitano Tenmangu Shrine in the northwest of the city. Shimabara, the courtesans' district in the west of the city, dating back to before the *geisha* culture emerged, is now defunct but remains as a tourist attraction.

Of the five districts, Gion Kōbu, Pontochō and Kamishichiken have the highest status and are subsequently the most expensive, attracting powerful businessmen and high-ranking politicians (Gion Kōbu seems to have the very highest ranking).

Kyoto *hanamachi* stage annual public dances (*Ōdōri* ) by *maiko* and *geiko* over several weeks, usually in the spring. Tickets are relatively inexpensive (¥1500 to ¥4500) with a number of performances. *Miyako Ōdōri* , in Gion Kōbu, runs through April and has the greatest number of performances. *Kitano Ōdōri* in Kamishichiken covers the last week of March and first week of April, *Kyō Ōdōri* in Miyagawachō runs through the first half of April with *Kamogawa Ōdōri* in Pontochō running through most of May. *Gion Ōdōri* in Gion Higashi is much later in the year, in early November.

The five districts combine for special performances on a weekend in late June at a larger venue, and tickets for these are significantly more expensive.

Tokyo *hanamachi* include Shinbashi, Akasaka, Asakusa (the city's oldest *geisha* district), Yoshichō, Kagurazaka, Mukojima and Hachiōji, with the latter about 40 kilometres west of central Tokyo.

There are three *hanamachi* in Osaka, Kita Shinchī, within walking distance of Osaka Station, and famous for nightclubs, bars and late night restaurants, Minami Shinchī (only one teahouse) and Shinmachi, the city's first licenced pleasure quarter.

Kanazawa, second only to Kyoto as far as active *geisha* are concerned, has three well preserved *hanamachi*, Higashi Chaya (Eastern Teahouse), Nishi Chaya (Western Teahouse) and Kazuemachi. Higashi Chaya is the largest and best known, with many houses used for high-class entertainment and others converted into speciality shops and cafes. Shima and Kaikaro Teahouses are open to the public. Nishi Chaya is smaller, effectively a single street, and Kazuemachi is smaller again.

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## Related Glossary Terms

Geisha



# HIMEJI

With a population over half a million, Himeji is the second largest city in Hyogo and was reportedly considered as the site of a relocated national capital after the Great Kantō earthquake struck the region around Tokyo.

If that notion sounds far-fetched, you can probably ascribe it to the city’s centre where sits the widely considered Japan's most beautiful surviving feudal castle.

Designated both a national treasure and a UNESCO world heritage site, Himeji Castle remained intact for over 400 years, miraculously surviving a bombing raid that destroyed sixty per cent of the city on 3 July 1945. Travellers on the Sanyo Shinkansen from Osaka, Okayama and Hiroshima can catch a decent view of the castle since Himeji station is so close.

Other attractions in the city include Engyō-ji temple, Mount Seppiko, Tegarayama Park and Kokoen Garden in Tegarayama Central Park and Kokoen Garden.

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# HOKURIKU *SHINKANSEN*

With the first 228km section scheduled to open in March 2015, the Hokuriku *Shinkansen* is an extension of the Nagano *Shinkansen*, opened on 1 October 1997 in time for the 1998 Winter Olympics, branching off the Jōetsu and Tōhoku lines at Takasaki. The first extension from Nagano to Kanazawa will be followed by a second extension to Fukui and Tsuruga. Work on that section started in 2012 and should be completed by 2025.

The section between Nagano and Kanazawa will include stops at Iiyama, Jōetsu-Myōkō, Itoigawa, Kurobe-Unazukionsen, Toyama and ShinTakaoka while the second extension will add Komatsu, Kagaonsen, Awaraonsen, Fukui, Nan'etsu and Tsuruga to the *Shinkansen* network.

A further extension looping back to Osaka is planned, but the route is yet to be decided. There are three possibilities, linking to the Tokaido *Shinkansen* at Maibara, Kyoto, or Shin-Osaka, and they're worth a look because they provide insight into issues surrounding the routing of *Shinkansen* lines.

The Maibara route, with a standard *Shinkansen* track to Maibara is the shortest, with good access to Kyoto and Nagoya but mean a longer travel time to Shin-Osaka along existing, Tōkaidō *Shinkansen* tracks that are already running at close to maximum capacity. That may become less of an issue when the Chuo *Shinkansen* opens as far as Osaka in 2045.

The Kyoto option would upgrade the Kosei Line to Kyoto, by regauging the line to support *Mini-Shinkansen*, or using Gauge Change Trains. With no new construction to *Shinkansen* standards that would be the cheapest option, but would limit train speeds to a maximum of 160 km/h so the trip would be slower.

The Wakasa route would involve building a *Shinkansen* track along the shortest route to Osaka, but would bypass Kyoto. With all-new construction it would be the most expensive.

The Hokuriku line will offer four levels of service: *Kagayaki* (Tokyo - Kanazawa, limited stops), *Hakutaka* (Tokyo - Kanazawa, all stations) a shuttle between Toyama and Kanazawa (*Tsurugi*) and a continuation of *Asama* services from Tokyo on the Nagano *Shinkansen* line.

When the first part of the new line opens, travel time between Tokyo and Kanazawa will be cut from 3 hours 47 minutes on the existing route (take the Joetsu *Shinkansen* to Echigo-Yuzawa and switch to a narrow gauge train with a maximum speed of 160km/h) to 2 hours 30 minutes.

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# JŌETSU SHINKANSEN

Built to connect Tokyo and Niigata and to *promote regional development* the Jōetsu Shinkansen seems to have been the brainchild of Niigata-born Prime Minister Tanaka. Tanaka allegedly drew his proposed route on a map in red pencil. Tanaka's preferred option was the way into Tokyo, terminating at Shinjuku, but economic forces forced the railway authority to a line branching off the existing Tōhoku Shinkansen at Ōmiya. Services began in November 1982.

JR East operates two categories of train on the line: the faster *Toki* and double-decker *Tanigawa*. *Toki* services run between Tokyo and Niigata while the slower all-station *Tanigawa* and double-decker *Max Tanigawa* only travel as far Echigo-Yuzawa, with a winter only branch line to the nearby ski resort of Gala-Yuzawa.

From Tokyo, the services call at Ueno, Ōmiya, Kumagaya, Honjō-Waseda, Takasaki, Maebashi, Kōgen, Echigo-Yuzawa, Urasa, Nagaoka, Tsubame-Sanjō and, finally, Niigata, providing tourists with access to onsen hot spring and ski resorts in Gunma and Niigata.

Route details and maps: <http://www.jreast.co.jp/e/routemaps/joetsushinkansen.htm>

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## Related Glossary Terms

**Akita Shinkansen, Chūō Shinkansen, Hokuriku Shinkansen, Kyushu Shinkansen, Nagano Shinkansen, Sanyō Shinkansen, Shinkansen, Shinkansen (History), Tōkaidō Shinkansen, Tōkaidō Shinkansen**

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## KAMAKURA PERIOD

The Kamakura Period saw Japan ruled by the Kamakura Shōgunate, established in 1192 by Minamoto no Yoritomo. Japanese politics was refashioned as the emperors and their scholar-courtiers in Kyoto lost power and a feudal system built around the *samurai* warrior caste emerged. The period lasted until the emperor Go-Daigo revolt against the Shōgunate in 1331. The brief reestablishment of imperial rule became the Ashikaga Shōgunate.

Conflict between the Minamoto and Taira clans over dominance of the Imperial court (the Gempei war) ended when the Taira were defeated by Minamoto Yoshitsune in 1185.

Minamoto Yoritomo's headquarters in relatively remote and easily defended Kamakura, about 50 km south of Tokyo, became the effective centre of government. While the emperor reigned as the cultural and religious figurehead in Kyoto, Yoritomo created his own military administration (*bakufu*, or tent government) and reorganised the country, appointing local governors and officials and demanding absolute loyalty from his vassals.

His authority was confirmed when he was granted the official rank of *Shōgun* in 1192. After Yoritomo's sudden death in 1199, his son Minamoto no Yoriie was unable to control the other warrior families. Yoritomo's in-laws, the Hōjō clan, took over. By the early thirteenth century, a realignment within the *bakufu* saw the Hōjō establish a regency, with the head of the clan wielding real power while the *Shōgun* became a powerless figurehead in a direct reflection of the changed relationship between emperor and *Shōgun*. The arrangements did not go down well in Kyoto. Tension between Kyoto and Kamakura saw the Jōkyū War, also known as the Jōkyū Disturbance or the Jōkyū Rebellion, break out in 1221.

Retired Emperor Go-Toba sought out allies from the Taira, other enemies of the Minamoto and the monasteries and set out to overthrow the Shōgunate. There was a battle outside Kyōto, which the Hōjō forces won and the imperial court came under the direct control of the Shōgunate.

The Hojo installed two of their own military governors in Kyoto, seized the imperial court and manipulated the imperial succession. Toba was exiled, and Toba loyalists forfeited their estates which were redistributed to Hojo allies. The result bolstered the transformation of Japanese society, which was further strengthened in 1225.

Third regent Hōjō Yasutoki set up a Council of State to exercise judicial and legislative authority at Kamakura. In 1232, the Council adopted the *Goseibai Shikimoku*, a new legal code that underlined the shift towards a concise statement of duties and punishments that remained in effect until the Meiji Restoration of 1868.

These arrangements brought peace, which lasted until the Mongols turned their attention to Japan. Having established the Yuan Dynasty, Kublai Khan looked to expand China's sphere of influence and demanded that Japan pay tribute, threatening reprisals if they failed to do so. In rejecting the demands, Kyoto cited Japan's divine origin, dismissed the messengers, and prepared to deal with the threatened reprisals, which came in 1274.

Six hundred ships carrying more than twenty thousand Mongol, Chinese, and Korean troops reached Kyūshū and engaged the Japanese forces at Hakata, but were forced to pull back when a typhoon, the *divine wind* (*kamikaze*) decimated their fleet. Kublai launched a second invasion in 1281, which saw seven weeks of fighting in northwestern Kyūshū before a second typhoon took out the Mongol fleet.

Kyūshū remained on alert for a possible third invasion, but the Mongols had problems closer to home to worry about. Still, years of preparations to defend the country were a drain on the economy. New taxes levied to maintain preparations exacerbated financial stresses and inheritances divided family properties. As landowners were forced to turn to moneylenders Kamakura loyalists who had fought the invaders turned to the Shōgunate looking for rewards that failed to eventuate.

The end of the Kamakura Shōgunate came about through its own attempts to hold on to power by allowing other clans to increase control of their own regions and alternating the throne between different lines of the imperial family. The scheme worked until Emperor Go-Daigo defied the arrangement by naming his son as his successor.

The Shōgunate responded by exiling Go-Daigo in 1331. Loyalist forces rebelled, and the siege of Kamakura saw Nitta Yoshisada conquer the city, but the rebellion was an anti-Kamakura rather than pro-Imperial movement.

When Go-Daigo set out to restore imperial authority and reassert the throne's political power, Ashikaga Takauji, from the Minamoto clan, drove him from Kyoto, set the Northern Court contender on the throne and established the Ashikaga Shōgunate, which, despite sixty years of struggle between the Northern and Southern Courts (the Nanbokuchō period) lasted until 1573.

The Kamakura Period saw changes in Japanese society and culture as Buddhism, which had been limited to the elites in the imperial court, spread through the wider community. New sects were introduced as Zen, with its emphasis on self-discipline, concentration, and simplicity found followers among the samurai and the *Jōdo* (Pure Land) sect which assured salvation to commoners found followers among the wider populace.



# KANAZAWA

With a population that's nudging towards half a million, Kanazawa, apart from its status as the capital of Ishikawa Prefecture, ranks as the biggest city in the Hokuriku region, which takes in Toyama Prefecture and Fukui Prefectures as well.

Ruled by the Maeda family, the second most powerful feudal clan after the Tokugawas through the the Edo Period, the former castle town's cultural achievements almost rivalled Kyoto and Edo (Tokyo). Like Kyoto, the city escaped Allied bombing during World War Two, so parts of the old town, including the *geisha* entertainment district, have survived and the city boasts many historical attractions and museums.

Kanazawa's main attraction is, however, *Kenrokuen*, one of Japan's three best landscape gardens, located directly opposite Kanazawa Castle in the centre of the city. It was originally the castle's outer pleasure garden and comprises ten hectares filled with trees, ponds and waterfalls.

*Kenrokuen*, along with the city's historical attractions, traditional handicrafts and performing arts and its proximity to the Japan Alps, Hakusan National Park and Noto Peninsula National Park makes the city a major tourist destination, attracting around seven million travellers every year.

With castles regarded as symbols of the feudal system during the Meiji Period, Kanazawa Castle became the base for the Ninth Division of the Imperial Army, with many buildings torn down and much of what remained destroyed by fire in 1888. After World War Two, the site became the main campus of Kanazawa University until a new site was developed and opened in 1998. The *Ishikawa* Gate and the *Sanjikken* Longhouse survived all that, and part of the site has been rebuilt with plans to recreate much of the rest.

Also known for traditional cuisine, high-quality gold leaf and lacquerware, the city isn't easy to reach from Tokyo (despite the seven million tourists), but that should change when the Hokuriku Shinkansen commences operating in 2014.

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## Related Glossary Terms

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# KANSAI

The Kansai in the south-central region of Japan's main island Honshū is centred on the cities of Osaka and Kyoto and stretches west along the Seto Inland Sea past Kobe, Himeji and Kōbe. To the east it reaches Japan's largest freshwater lake, Lake Biwa.

As a cultural and historical entity, the region is often contrasted with Kantō (Tokyo and surrounding areas). Kansai people are seen as pragmatic, entrepreneurial and down-to-earth (the influence of Osaka merchant culture) with a sense of humour, as opposed to the more sophisticated, formal and reserved Kantō people.

The Kansai region can claim to the earliest beginnings of Japanese civilization, the country's first capital in Nara, Kyoto's shrines and temples, and traditional forms of art that evolved in Kyoto (*Noh* and *Kabuki*) and Osaka (*Bunraku* puppet theatre).

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# KINOKUNIYA

The Kinokuniya chain of bookstores, the largest in Japan, dates back to 1927 and the Great Kanto Earthquake prompted a lumber and charcoal dealer to move to a new building in Shinjuku, Tokyo. The business was refashioned into a book store and opened on January 1927 with an art gallery on the building's second floor.

That building burnt down during an air raid in May 1945 but reopened in December of the same year. Postwar growth saw the business expand to the point where the chain now has 56 stores around Japan as well as branches in the United States, Taiwan, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand and the United Arab Emirates.

The Sydney branch was originally located in Neutral Bay but subsequently relocated to George Street in the Central Business District.

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## Related Glossary Terms

Drag related terms here



# KITAKAMI

Australians might be disinclined to call a city with a population nearing 100,000 *a small place*, but if Kitakami, a city located in Iwate Prefecture was a more significant location the faster *Shinkansen* services would stop there, wouldn't they?

Kitakami, at the junction of the Kitakami and Waga Rivers, is on the Tōhoku *Shinkansen* and the Tōhoku Main Line, both of which connect Tokyo and Aomori Prefecture.

But even small places have their attractions and claims to fame. Kitakami is famous for the *sakura* that bloom in the riverside Tenshochi Park, one of the best hundred places in Japan to view cherry blossoms.

There are more than 10,000 cherry trees planted alongside the Kitakami River, and they come into blossom for one to two weeks towards the end of April. The result is a tunnel of cherry blossoms that earns the park a rating among the Tohoku region's best three cherry blossom locations alongside Hirosaki Castle and Kakunodate.

During the *sakura* season, visitors can stroll along a two kilometre riverside path, enjoy the vista from one of the sightseeing boats that operate from a jetty at the south end of the park, sample the wares of food vendors at both ends of the path and enjoy *sakura*-related festival events.

Other attractions include the Michinoku Folklore Village, an open air museum next door to Tenshochi Park where thirty preserved farmhouses and other buildings are set up to display aspects of traditional life in the Tohoku region, the nearby Kitakami City Folklore Museum, with displays of Buddhist art, and the region's natural and the cultural history, and Kitakami Michinoku Traditional Dance Festival, held in the summer.

Kitakami also boasts a site reputed to be the grave of the Heian Period *waka* poet Izumi Shikibu.

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## Related Glossary Terms



# KŌBE

The capital of Hyōgo Prefecture, Kōbe is the fifth-largest city in Japan, thirty kilometres west of Osaka on the north shore of Osaka Bay, stretching onto the lower slopes of Mount Rokko. Part of the Kyoto-Osaka-Kōbe conurbation, the city has a population around the 1.5 million mark but did not officially exist until 1 April 1889.

Hyōgo Port was opened to foreign trade at the same time as Osaka on 1 January 1868, and had earlier links to the outside world as one of the ports from which imperial embassies to China departed. During the Kamakura Period, it was an important hub for trade with China and other countries.

Much of the shipping activity is centred on Port Island and Rokkō Island, reclaimed islands developed to give the port room to expand.

The main transport hub is Sannomiya Station, with Kōbe Station to the west and ShinKōbe Shinkansen Station to the north. Kōbe has two subway lines, with the Kaigan Line running along the coast, and the Yamate-Seishin Line towards the mountains.

The city is the point of origin of Kōbe beef, a noted centre for saké production thanks to nearby mountain water, and the site of one of Japan's most famous hot spring resorts, Arima Onsen.

The Great Hanshin Earthquake on 17 January 1995 killed thousands of people, rendered over two hundred thousand homeless, flattened tens of thousands of buildings, destroyed much of the city's transport infrastructure and diminished much of Kōbe's prominence as a major port though it remains Japan's fourth busiest port for container shipping.

Kōbe's recovery from the 1995 quake is celebrated every December with the *Luminarie*, where the city's commercial centre is decorated with illuminated metal archways.

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# KYUSHU SHINKANSEN

A logical extension of the Sanyō *Shinkansen* linking ShinŌsaka with Hakata in Fukuoka, work on the Kyushu *Shinkansen* that runs parallel to the Kagoshima Main Line began in 1991 with the section from Kagoshima to ShinYatsushiro opening on 13 March 2004. That brought a reduction in travel time despite the need to change to a narrow gauge train for the rest of the journey to Hakata. Travel time between Kagoshima and ShinYatsushiro went from 130 minutes to 35, and the four hour trip between Kagoshima and Hakata was halved. When ShinYatsushiro to Hakata opened on 12 March 2011 the trip was further reduced to an hour and 20 minutes.

A line from Fukuoka to Nagasaki, the Nagasaki *Shinkansen*, was included in the 1973 Basic Plan but was renamed the Nagasaki Route and then the West Kyushu Route. The plans were modified after concerns over the need to duplicate existing narrow-gauge Nagasaki Main and Sasebo Lines, and local opposition to the final section in Nagasaki. Construction of the 45.7 km section from Takeo-Onsen to Isahaya began in 2008, and work on the 21 km section from Isahaya to Nagasaki commenced in 2012. The line is due to open by March 2023, with Gauge Change trains running on the narrow gauge line between ShinTosu and Takeo-Onsen and standard gauge *Shinkansen* lines either side of it.

The 1973 Basic Plan included an East Kyushu *Shinkansen* line from Hakata to Kagoshima, and a Trans-Kyushu *Shinkansen*, from Kumamoto to Ōita connecting with the proposed Shikoku *Shinkansen* to Matsuyama, Takamatsu and Osaka. Those plans have been shelved and are unlikely to be reconsidered until lines under construction have been finished.

Stations on the Kagoshima Route are Hakata, ShinTosu, Kurume, Chikugo-Funagoya, ShinŌmuta, ShinTamana, Kumamoto, ShinYatsushiro, ShinMinamata, Izumi, Sendai and Kagoshima-Chūō.

Three levels of train run on the line, with *Tsubame* (named for the former Hakata-Kagoshima limited express service) running once or twice hourly stopping at all stations between Hakata and Kumamoto. Some services go on to Kagoshima-Chūō.

*Sakura* services run hourly throughout between ShinOsaka and Kagoshima-Chūō making the journey in 4 hours 10 minutes, with one or two additional services an hour between Hakata and Kumamoto or Kagoshima-Chūō.

The fastest *Mizuho* services operate a limited number of services between ShinOsaka and Kagoshima-Chūō, stopping at Hakata, Kumamoto and Kagoshima-Chuo. Although *Mizuho* cannot be used with the Japan Rail Pass, the JR Sanyo-Shikoku-Kyushu Pass and Kyushu Rail Pass are valid.

On the West Kyushu or Nagasaki Route construction of stations at ShinTosu and Saga is on hold but when the line is completed in 2023 trains will stop at Takeo-Onsen, Ureshino-Onsen, ShinŌmura, Isahaya and Nagasaki.

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## Related Glossary Terms

**Akita Shinkansen, Chūō Shinkansen, Hokuriku Shinkansen, Jōetsu Shinkansen, Nagano Shinkansen, Sanyō Shinkansen, Shinkansen, Shinkansen (History), Tōhoku Shinkansen, Tōkaidō Shinkansen**



# LUMINARIE

Reputedly Japan's best display of lights, Kōbe *Luminarie* runs through early to mid-December, attracting large numbers of visitors (between three and five million every year over the past decade) and raises, according to **Wikipedia**, \$1.3 million in donations and \$6.1 million in sponsorship and merchandise sales.

*Luminarie* is the plural of *luminaria*, which my **Dictionary** app defines as: *a Christmas lantern consisting of a votive candle set in a small paper bag weighted with sand and typically placed with others along a driveway, sidewalk, or rooftop as a holiday decoration or, in New Mexico a Christmas Eve bonfire.*

The flamboyant light displays began in 1995, a bare eleven months after the Great Hanshin Earthquake devastated Kōbe in January that year. Two hundred thousand individually hand painted lights were donated by the Italian Government and the installation was produced by Valerio Festi and Hirokazu Imaoka.

The original intention was a one-off display that would be a symbol of hope, recovery, and renovation and run through December, but popular demand has seen it become an annual event, scaled back to twelve days covering two weekends in early December.

Each light is said to represent a life lost during in the earthquake, and the whole display is powered by electricity generated from biomass in order, so it's environmentally friendly.

Corporate sponsors include JR (Japan Rail) West, Hankyu Corporation, Nestle Group Japan and Hanshin Electric Railway.

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# MAGLEV TRAINS

The spread of shinkansen-like services across the globe means a number of countries are looking towards using magnetic levitation rather than conventional wheels and axles to drive the next generation of Very Fast Trains. With vehicles levitated above a single track (guide way) by magnets creating lift and thrust, maglev trains should prove faster and quieter than wheeled systems and deliver a smoother ride. They should be able to accelerate and decelerate more quickly, should be unaffected by weather and would be more energy-efficient. The big plus lies in the fact that the system is relatively quiet, with minimal noise impact and no air pollution in a dense urban setting.

However, while maglev technology negates wear and tear on tracks and rolling stock in conventional systems, maglev tracks are much more expensive to build, requiring completely different infrastructure along the entire route.. On the other hand, they require less maintenance and have lower operating costs. Maintenance schedules, in fact, are more akin to those applying to aircraft, based on hours of operation, rather than speeds reached and distance travelled.

Still, it is hardly a new technology. The earliest patents for a train that ran along these lines were awarded to German inventor Alfred Zehden in 1905 and 1907. There have, however, only been a handful of practical commercial applications. The first was a low-speed shuttle that ran 600 metres from Birmingham International Airport to the nearby railway station between 1984 and 1995, when obsolete electronic systems made it increasingly unreliable.

Preceding it, and considerably faster, were pilot projects built in Hamburg (a 908 m track for the first International Transportation Exhibition in 1979) and a 31.5 kilometre test track in Emsland where trains regularly reached speeds approaching up to 420 kilometres per hour. The company's licence for the latter facility expired at the end of 2011. Similar demonstration systems went in at Expo 86 in Vancouver and West Berlin, and trial versions of maglev technology have been installed in the USA.

But despite widespread activity and investigation there are currently only two maglev systems in full-time commercial operation, with two under construction. Shanghai's high-speed Transrapid system began operations in April 2004, linking Pudong International Airport with Longyang Road Metro station on the eastern edge of the city. The system operates over a hundred services every day, covering the 30 km line in 7 minutes at a top speed of 431 km/h. Plans to extend the line to Shanghai Hongqiao Airport (35 km) and then to the city of Hangzhou (200 km) have proved controversial and subject to repeated delays.

Just under a year later, in March 2005, the low-speed HSST Linimo line commenced operations in time for the 2005 World Expo in Japan and carried over 10 million passengers in its first three months. With a top speed of 100 km/h, but on a 9 km line with nine stations that was never the main issue. Similar systems are under construction in Beijing and at Seoul's Incheon Airport.

The most interesting project as these pages are concerned, however, is the Chuo Shinkansen maglev. Slated to take some of the pressure off the Tokaido line by cutting tunnels at an estimated cost of US\$82 billion to build, it's subject to the usual pressures associated with shinkansen routes in Japan. A maglev line along the existing Tokaido corridor would be much cheaper, but there are issues with noise pollution and speed-related technical difficulties. Eventually, the trip between Tokyo and Osaka may be reduced to an hour. Trains would travel via Nagoya at speeds up to 500 km/h, but the Tokyo-Nagoya link is not slated to open until 2025 with another twenty years needed to complete the line to Osaka.

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## Related Glossary Terms

**Chūō Shinkansen, Shinkansen**



# MERIKEN PARK

Apart from the Hotel Okura Kōbe and Kōbe Meriken Park Oriental Hotel the reclaimed parkland area known as Meriken Park home to some of Kōbe’s most iconic contemporary structures including the Kōbe Maritime Museum, the red Kōbe Port Tower and the Museum of Art and Design to victims of the 1995 Great Hanshin Earthquake that preserves a section of damaged waterfront as a reminder of the earthquake's destruction.

Half of the Kōbe Maritime Museum building is devoted to the Museum itself, with exhibits covering the port’s history and role as a connection between Japan and the outside world while the remainder of the building houses the corporate museum of Kawasaki Heavy Industries, with exhibits devoted to the history of the company and its products.

To the west of the Maritime Museum the 108-metre Kōbe Port Tower offers a restaurant, a rotating cafe, with three observation decks that offer 360 degree views of the city.

Sightseeing cruises depart from the nearby Nakatottei Chuo Terminal.

Meriken Park takes its name from a rendering of *American* into Japanese, and refers to the eastern or seaward side of the Old Foreign Settlement.

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# MISHIMA TAISHA SHRINE

Eight hundred metres east-southeast of JR Mishima Station, the Mishima Taisha Shinto shrine is reputed to be the grandest shrine on the Izu Peninsula. According to tradition and Nara period records, the shrine was originally located on Miyakejima and transferred from place to place before being moved to the present site in the mid-Heian Period. With the building repeatedly destroyed by fire and earthquakes the current structure dates from 1866, rebuilt after the 1854 Ansei Tōkai Earthquake. The shrine consists of three parts: the Haiden (oratory), the Honden (sanctum where the shrine deities dwell), with the Heiden in between.

In his youth Yoritomo Minamoto (1147-1199) had been exiled from Kyoto to Nirayama, ten kilometres south of Mishima and is reputed to have worshipped at Mishima Taisha seeking divine assistance in the war against his arch-rivals, the Taira clan. After nearly twenty years in exile, he rose up in arms against the Taira in 1180 and went on to establish the Kamakura Shōgunate in 1185. Since he believed he had won the war thanks to the deities of the Mishima and Hakone Shrines, he made annual visits to both on New Year's Day and rebuilt the Mishima shrine, which was extensively patronized by the Odawara Hōjō, Imagawa and Tokugawa clans.

During the Edo Period, Mishima Taisha and the post town of Mishima-shuku was a famous pilgrimage stop on the Tōkaidō highway, with travellers about to cross or just down from the 15 kilometre stage through the Hakone pass resting there.

The temple precinct includes a 1,200 years old fragrant olive tree designated a national natural monument, monuments engraved with haiku by Bashō and Wakayama Bokusui. A small museum holds significant cultural items including a lacquerware casket donated to the shrine by Masako Hojo (1157-1225, wife of Yoritomo) containing cosmetic utensils and articles from the late Heian Period listed as one of the National Treasures of Japan.

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## Related Glossary Terms



# MOUNT FUJI

One of the country's Three Holy Mountains and, at 3,776 metres the country's highest peak, Mount Fuji's almost perfectly symmetrical cone is arguably the most common symbol of Japan. Situated 100 kilometres southwest of Tokyo Followers of Shinto have worshiped Mount Fuji since at least the 7th century. To Japanese people it's *Fuji-san*, but the apparent honorific (-*san*, as in ***Hughesy-san*** or *Suzuki-san*) translates as *mountain*.

Call it Mount Fujiyama and you're committing tautology (literally *Mount Fuji Mountain*).

There are a number of explanations for the name, including suggestions that it translated as *immortal*, *without equal* or *never-ending*. Edo Period scholar Hirata Atsutane favoured *a mountain standing up shapely as an ear of a rice plant*. As a national symbol, the mountain appears in countless artworks, with Hokusai and Utagawa Hiroshige producing collections called ***36 Views of Mt. Fuji***. Hokusai also managed ***One Hundred Views of Mount Fuji***.

The mountain itself is an active stratovolcano 50 kilometres in diameter at the base, rising to a summit crater 500 metres wide and 250 metres deep, the result of four phases of activity. The first, *Sen-komitake*, provided the mountain's core, followed by a basalt layer (*Komitake Fuji*) several hundred thousand years ago. *Old Fuji* formed over the top of that around 100,00 years ago with New Fuji believed to date back around 10,000 years. The volcano sits above the junction of three tectonic plates (the Amurian/Eurasian, the Okhotsk/North American and the Filipino)which form, respectively, western Japan, eastern Japan, and the Izu Peninsula.

Its most recent eruption (16 December 1707 - 1 January 1708) deposited volcanic ash over the Kanto plain, Tokyo, and as far as the northwest Pacific coast 280 kilometres away. The eruption formed a new crater halfway down the mountain's east flank. While there has been no activity for three hundred years recent activity, including the 2011 Tōhoku earthquake and *tsunami*, has prompted some concern.

As the focal point of the Fuji-Hakone-Izu National Park the mountain is the most popular tourist site in Japan. More than a quarter of a million people make the ascent every year, most planning to catch the sunrise (*goraikō*, or *arrival of light*) by making the ascent during the night or staying in huts scattered along the four major access routes to the summit. Peak climbing season is from July to August. Visitors are discouraged from attempting the ascent at other times due to extreme weather conditions and the risk of avalanche.

The ascent passes through ten stations, with the first located at the foot of the mountain and the tenth at the summit. There is, however, no need to climb all the way.

Sealed roads go as far as the fifth station, predictably around halfway up the mountain, around 2,300 metres above sea level. There are four, with four routes to the summit: the Lake Kawaguchi, Subashiri, Gotemba, and Fujinomiya routes and four more from the foot of the mountain to the fifth stations (Shojiko, Yoshida, Suyama, and Murayama).

Assuming you're not interested in climbing all the way, the most popular fifth station takes you on to the Kawaguchiko route. It's not the closest to the summit (that is on Fujinomiya) but it has a larger car park, is most easily accessed from Tokyo and has the most mountain huts where climbers can rest or stay. Depending on your starting point, the ascent from the fifth station takes between three and eight hours with from two to five hours needed for the descent. It takes about an hour to get around the crater and its eight peaks.

Assuming you're not interested in the climb and possible issues with altitude sickness, popular Fuji-viewing locations include the Fuji Five Lake (*Fujigoko*) region on the northern side of the mountain.

Slightly further away, Lake Ashi and the Hakone region also provide highly rated views of the mountain. In favourable conditions it can be seen from Yokohama, Tokyo, and as far away as Chiba, Saitama, Tochigi and Lake Hamana.

It can also be seen from trains travelling between Tokyo and Nagoya (and thence Osaka and Kyoto) with the best view around ShinFuji Station. But there's no guarantee. Clouds and poor visibility often obscure the mountain, even from the relatively close *shinkansen* line (speaking from experience). Visibility is said to be better during the cooler seasons than in summer, and early morning and late evening are reckoned better prospects than the middle of the day.

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## Related Glossary Terms

**Ashinoko Lake, Hakone**



# MYODANI

Dormitory suburb of Kōbe, home to a shopping centre adjoining the subway station. It is one of four campuses of Kōbe University.

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# NAGANO SHINKANSEN

Built to connect Tokyo and Nagano in time for the 1998 Winter Olympics the Nagano *Shinkansen* forms the first section of the planned Hokuriku *Shinkansen* that will extend to Kanazawa, Tsuruga and eventually Osaka. *Asama* services, named for an active volcano alongside the line take a minimum of 79 minutes to complete the journey, travelling via the Tohoku and Joetsu *Shinkansen* to Takasaki before branching off onto the first stage of the Hokuriku *Shinkansen*. The services replaced the Shinetsu Main Line limited express services which took 2 hours 50 minutes from Tokyo's Ueno Station to Nagano.

After leaving Tokyo, trains stop at Ueno and Ōmiya on the Tohoku *Shinkansen*, Kumagaya, Honjō-Waseda and Takasaki on the Joetsu *Shinkansen*, then Annaka-Haruna, Karuizawa and Sakudaira on the run into Nagano.

The Hokuriku *Shinkansen* extension from Nagano to Kanazawa should open in March 2015 with the 113-km extension from Kanazawa to Tsuruga, approved for construction in December 2012 scheduled to be completed in 2025.

Route and maps: <http://www.jreast.co.jp/e/routemaps/naganoshinkansen.html>

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## Related Glossary Terms

**Akita Shinkansen, Chūō Shinkansen, Hokuriku Shinkansen, Jōetsu Shinkansen, Kyushu Shinkansen, Sanyō Shinkansen, Shinkansen, Shinkansen (History), Tohoku Shinkansen, Tōkaidō Shinkansen**



# NAGOYA

Located in the centre of the fertile Nōbi Plain plain at the head of Ise Bay, around two-thirds of the way between Tokyo and the Kyoto/Osaka conurbation, Nagoya is the industrial hub of Japan's third largest metropolitan region, the Chūkyō Metropolitan Area (population over 8.75 million). Just under two and a half million people live in the city, which dates back to 1610 and Tokugawa Ieyasu's decision to move the capital of Owari Province from Kiyosu, around seven kilometres away, to a more strategic location.

Nagoya Castle was constructed as the seat of the Owari branch of the Tokugawa clan and the town of 60,000 people, complete with shrines and temples was relocated to the new site. Around the same time, the nearby Atsuta Shrine was designated as a way station on the Tōkaidō road linking Kyoto and Edo (modern Tokyo) and Nagoya developed as a combination castle and shrine/transit town.

The second-most venerable shrine in Japan, Atsuta dates almost two millennia and houses the sacred *Kusanagi no mitsurugi* sword, one of the three imperial regalia of Japan. Not something that you'd put on public display, but there are over four thousand other artifacts on the grounds and the shrine hosts around seventy festivals every year.

Geographic position coupled with political clout saw the city develop as the hub of the surrounding region. At first it was cotton, ceramics and timber that drove the growth, but when Japan started to transform during the Meiji Era, Nagoya became an industrial centre.

A local company that made looms for textile mills moved into the automobile business in the 1930s. That was Toyota, and Honda and Mitsubishi grew up in the same area.

World War Two saw the city's manufacturing infrastructure turn towards military hardware, with around 25% of its workforce working in factories that produced almost half of the country's combat aircraft. That would have been enough to ensure U.S. Army Air Force attention, but the area also produced machine tools, railway equipment, tanks and military vehicles. The result was a series of bombing raids that destroyed much of the city and had almost half the population flee to the countryside.

Most of the city's historic buildings were destroyed, but the firebombing resulted in wide streets bulldozed through the rubble that make modern Nagoya a remarkably car-friendly city. That also means the city's public transport infrastructure isn't as highly developed as it is in other major centres (notably Tokyo and the Kansai region).

Nagoya Castle was hit on 14 May 1945, but postwar reconstruction of the main building was completed in 1959, and the concrete replica even has lifts. Other attractions include the Toyota Commemorative Museum of Industry and Technology, built on the site of one of the company's original loom factories near Nagoya station, the Nagoya/Boston Museum of Fine Arts, Tokugawa Art Museum and surrounding Japanese garden, Nagoya City Science and Art Museums, and Aichi Prefectural Museum of Art, where the collection includes works by Picasso, Matisse, Paul Klee and an assortment of Expressionists, Surrealists and postwar US and Japanese artists as well as Edo-period paintings and traditional crafts.

Temples and shrines include *Kōshō-ji*, founded in the 17th century by the Tokugawa family, *Shiroyama Hakusan* Shrine, formerly Suemori Castle, sixteenth century *Togan-ji*, where a huge wood block is said to purge sins if you touch it, *Nittai-ji*, *Arako Kannon* (the oldest building in Nagoya, with *Tahoto* pagoda intact after 472 years) and *Osu Kannon* Temple, which dates back to the Kamakura era but was moved to its current location in 1612.

Home to the head offices of, among others, Toyota Motor Corporation, Brother Industries, Makita, Suzuki Motor, Noritake, Olympus Optical and Yamaha, the city is also known for incredibly hot and humid summers, the fifteen-day Nagoya Sumo Tournament, the World Cosplay Summit for fans of Japanese animation, *miso* sauce, shrimp *tempura*, broad flat *kishimen* noodles and an eel dish called *hitsumabushi*.



# ODA NOBUNAGA

Oda Nobunaga (23 June 1534 – 21 June 1582) was a powerful warlord from the Fujiwara clan. Through a combination of strategic alliances and military conquests, he overthrew the Ashikaga Shōgunate and unified half of Japan at the end of the Warring States period. He restored stable government and established conditions that allowed Toyotomi Hideyoshi to become the first ruler of the whole country since the Ōnin War. Tokugawa Ieyasu went on to establish the Shōgunate that ruled Japan until the Meiji Restoration in 1868.

Oda Nobunaga was the second son of Oda Nobuhide, a deputy *shugo* (military governor) in Owari Province. In 1549, he succeeded to his father's estate. Though Nobunaga was Nobuhide's legitimate successor, the clan was divided into many factions. The clan was technically under the control of Owari's *shugo*, Shiba Yoshimune, but Nobuhide's brother Oda Nobutomo used Yoshimune as his puppet. He challenged Nobunaga's succession, then murdered Yoshimune when he supported and attempted to aid Nobunaga.

Nobunaga persuaded another uncle, Oda Nobumitsu, to join his side, killed Nobutomo in and then formed alliances with Shiba Yoshikane, Yoshimune's son, the Imagawa clan from Suruga Province and the Kira clan of Mikawa Province to ensure his borders were secure.

He still had internal rivals in the form of his brother Nobuyuki and his supporters, who rebelled, were defeated, and then pardoned when Nobunaga's mother intervened. They planned another rebellion before Nobunaga faked illness to get close to Nobuyuki, and then assassinated him in Kiyosu Castle. By 1559, Nobunaga had eliminated opposition within his clan and province.

Then, in 1560 he defeated Imagawa Yoshimoto, who was moving towards Kyoto, allegedly planning to bolster the Ashikaga Shōgunate. His forces outnumbered those of the Oda clan, but a mixture of enemy complacency, cunning and helpful weather saw Imagawa defeated and the clan's influence on the wane.

Nobunaga strengthened his position by forging an alliance with Tokugawa Ieyasu, *daimyō* of the neighbouring Mikawa province and leader of the Matsudaira clan.

In 1567, Nobunaga moved north, capturing Inabayama Castle and renaming both castle and the surrounding district Gifu. It became his centre of operations as he became involved in Ashikaga Yoshiaki's quest for revenge after his brother, the thirteenth Ashikaga Shōgun was murdered. Nobunaga marched on Kyōto and made Yoshiaki Shōgun.

But the new Shōgun had no intention of being anyone's puppet. Yoshiaki set about secretly forging an anti-Nobunaga alliance and persuaded Takeda Shingen to move on Kyoto through Tokugawa territory. Ieyasu was defeated at the Battle of Mikatagahara, but night raids caused Takeda to pause. He died shortly afterwards, victim, according to different sources, of an old war wound, a sniper's arrow or pneumonia.

With their leader dead, the Takeda forces retreated, which left Nobunaga free to deal with Yoshiaki. Nobunaga deposed him and sent him into exile. That was the effective end of the Ashikaga Shōgunate, although it officially lasted until Yoshiaki died in 1597. Around the same time Nobunaga destroyed the Asakura and Azai clans, leaving the Takeda clan, now led by Takeda Katsuyori as the centre of resistance to his ambitions.

Nobunaga destroyed them in 1582 and was about to launch invasions into Echigo Province and Shikoku when one of his allies, Akechi Mitsuhide, ambushed him on an overnight stay at Honnō-ji temple in Kyoto. Nobunaga committed *seppuku* in one of the inner rooms, but the coup d'etat was short-lived. Eleven days later Mitsuhide was killed when his army was defeated by Toyotomi Hideyoshi at the Battle of Yamazaki.

Nobunaga instituted a number of changes in Japanese military and economic customs which, in turn, contributed to his success in bringing the country towards reunification.

Military victories stemmed from tactical innovations, new technologies and developments in castle fortifications. He built up the warrior class, appointing officials on the basis of ability rather than social status or personal relationships. Many of his innovations went on the form the basis of practices by the Tokugawa Shōgunate.

Other changes moved the economy from a rural base with the growth of castle towns linked by roads that facilitated trade and also the rapid deployment of military forces. International trade was encouraged and expanded. A move towards a market economy saw monopolies and tolls abolished and closed guilds and associations opened.

Nobunaga's headquarters at Azuchi Castle beside Lake Biwa was reputedly the greatest castle in Japanese history, and practices inside the complex established the tea ceremony as an environment to where business and politics were discussed. An interest in Western art and weaponry extended as far as support for Jesuit missionaries and the first Christian church in Kyoto, though Nobunaga was not a convert himself. That support reflected a long-standing rivalry with the Tendai Buddhist sect, a powerful force in traditional politics, and the Ikkō sect, who formed a major obstacle to his ambitions to unify the country.

## Related Glossary Terms

Sengoku period



# ODAWARA

Located on the Ashigara Plains, in the far west of Kanagawa Prefecture, with the Hakone Mountains to the north and west, Odawara is a logical point of entry to Hakone hot springs resorts and Fuji-Hakone-Izu National Park. The Yugawara area within the city boundaries is a well-known hot spring resort.

Five railway lines pass through Odawara, with the Tokaido *Shinkansen* offering a 35 minute trip from Tokyo Station on *Hikari* or *Kodama*, though the fastest *Nozomi Shinkansen* does not stop there, Rail alternatives are the regular Tokaido Line, with a 100-minute journey passing through Shinagawa, Kawasaki and Yokohama or the private Odakyu Line, where the Odawara Express from Shinjuku takes two hours to make the journey. From Yokohama Station, it's 16 minutes by *Hikari* or *Nozomi* or 56 minutes on the JR Tokaido Line, transit times that make it possible to live in Odawara and commute to Tokyo or Yokohama.

A castle town, Odawara was the capital of the Hōjō clan during the Sengoku period. After the Hōjō had been defeated in the Battle of Odawara in 1590, the territory came under the control of Tokugawa Ieyasu. Odawara flourished as a post town on the Tōkaidō highway connecting Edo (Tokyo) with Kyoto.

After the Meiji Restoration, Odawara Domain became Odawara Prefecture, which was in turn merged with Ashigara Prefecture and incorporated into Kanagawa Prefecture in 1876. As the economic and political focus in Kanagawa shifted north to Yokohama, Odawara went into decline, a situation that was exacerbated when the original route of the Tōkaidō Main Line bypassed the city.

The Great Kantō earthquake of 1923 devastated Tokyo and the surrounding prefectures (Chiba, Kanagawa, and Shizuoka) and caused widespread damage. Ninety percent of the buildings collapsed, and fires in the rubble took care of most of what survived the quake.

Things started to revive when the Tanna Tunnel brought the Tōkaidō Main Line through the city in 1934 and on 15 August 1945, Odawara was the last Japanese city to be bombed during World War Two.

As suggested above, visitors are most likely to pass through Odawara *en route* to Hakone, but Odawara Castle is rated as the best example of a castle in the immediate area around Tokyo. It is a popular sightseeing spot, with the castle tower offering views over the city, and a highly-rated venue for *sakura* viewing in spring.

Odawara is known for *kamaboko* (steamed processed fish), *himono* (dried fish made from a type of horse mackerel) stockfish, *umeboshi* (salted plums), traditional herbal medicines, paper lanterns, and lacquerware.

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## Related Glossary Terms

**Hakone**



# ŌNIN WAR

Although it only lasted a decade and was largely restricted to the Kyōto region the Ōnin War (1467–77) ushered in *Sengoku jidai*, the Warring States Period (1490–1590), a struggle between the *daimyō* houses that ended when Oda Nobunaga, Toyotomi Hideyoshi, and Tokugawa Ieyasu managed to unite Japan towards the end of the sixteenth century.

Triggered by a disputed succession to the Shōgunate, the war resulted from longstanding factional rivalries between Hosokawa Katsumoto, prime minister (1452–64) for *Shōgun* Ashikaga Yoshimasa, and his father-in-law Yamana Sōzen. The Onin War was thus a conflict between the two most powerful *daimyō* families, the Hosokawa and the Yamana.

Shōgun Ashikaga Yoshimasa's rule had seen cultural developments known as *Higashiyama Bunka* (the Culture of the Eastern Mountain) including the tea ceremony and developments in flower arrangement, noh theatre, poetry, garden design and architecture.

Yoshimasa was just fourteen when he succeeded his elder brother, Yoshikatsu, and by age twenty-nine he seems to have had enough. He planned to retire (which may not have been unusual in itself) and give up real authority (which, it seems, was), a decision that may have been prompted by another succession dispute between the Hatakeyama and Shiba clans which had drawn in the Hosokawa and Yamana. His desire for a quiet life, based around the tea ceremony, poetry and meditation, may have been understandable but was never a realistic prospect.

The problem was that he didn't have an heir, and he adroitly solved the problem by appointing his younger brother Yoshimi, who had taken monastic vows, to the position in 1464. That would have been fine if his wife Tomiko hadn't adroitly produced a son, Yoshihisa, in 1465. Naturally, mother wanted son to take over from father and, predictably, father seems to have changed his mind.

Younger brother Yoshimi was allied to the Hosokawa, so their Yamana rivals supported the infant's claim to the Shōgunate. In 1466 Yamana Sōzen and Hosokawa Katsumoto began to gather troops near Kyoto. Both called for support from their relations and vassals, with the Yamana lining up 80,000 supporters against 85,000 on the Hosokawa side, armies that were the largest seen in Japanese history up to that stage.

But no one wanted to be held responsible for starting the war, and Yoshimasa remained as Shōgun. As the clans raised their armies and marched them to Kyoto, he issued a decree in an attempt to defuse the situation. Whoever attacked first would be declared a rebel, which carried with it the threat of execution and, more seriously, the confiscation of all the clan's property.

Yoshimasa may have been weak, but this was a powerful threat when the two sides were closely balanced and still in the process of recruiting allies. The threat was never going to be enough to defuse the situation as the niggling between the two sides intensified. Raids were followed by retaliation, retaliation by raids.

A Hosokawa mansion burned to the ground. A Yamana rice shipment was intercepted.

Rumours that Yamana Sozen was going to attack the Imperial Palace prompted the removal of the Emperor and the Imperial family to the Shōgunate's headquarters in the Muromachi District. Yamana attacked the Imperial Palace,

Hosokawa supporters burned a Yamana general's mansion, along with the block in which it was situated, to the ground.

By July, northern Kyoto was in ruins in a medieval equivalent of the Western Front in World War One. By September anyone who could get out of the city was gone as reinforcements for the antagonists flowed in.

A realignment in 1468 when Yoshimi broke with his brother, who duly declared his son the favoured successor, did nothing to stop the fighting, which continued unabated.

Katsumoto scored a political victory when he convinced Shōgun and Emperor to denounce the Yamana as rebels, but the carnage continued, unaffected by the deaths of Hosokawa Katsumoto and Yamana Sozen in 1473.

Two years later Yoshimasa emerged from seclusion and began to order feudal lords on both sides out of Kyoto. Many obeyed and began to disengage, but the fighting continued until 1477 when Yamana leader Ouchi Masahiro agreed to leave. He burned the section of Kyoto he'd controlled, the last one that had remained reasonably intact, on the way out.

In the end the war finished because no one had the strength to carry it on.

In the meantime, Yoshimasa had been planning *Ginkaku-ji*, the Silver Pavilion that would match his grandfather's *Kinkaku-ji*. His complacent attitude to what had been going on around him effectively sanctioned private wars and skirmishes between the *daimyō*. As they made their way back from Kyoto, no part of Japan escaped the violence. Fighting in the provinces continued for another century until Oda Nobunaga, Toyotomi Hideyoshi and Tokugawa Ieyasu were able to reunite the country in the late 16th century.

## Related Glossary Terms

Sengoku period



# ONSEN

Although *onsen* is the word for hot springs in Japanese, the term usually refers to facilities and inns around the springs as much as the springs themselves. Volcanic activity means there are thousands of *onsen* across the archipelago, a key element in the domestic tourist market.

*Onsen* come in many forms, with outdoor and indoor baths operated as public or private concerns, with the latter often part of a hotel, *ryokan* or bed and breakfast operation. While *onsen* are often found in the countryside, there are establishment that offer similar facilities in many major cities. They are a major attraction for Japanese couples, families or company groups who want to relax.

Traditionally, *onsen* were located outdoors, using water from geothermally heated springs, as opposed to *sentō* (indoor public bath houses where baths use heated tap water). Water in an *onsen* must contain at least one of nineteen designated chemical substances and be warmer than 25 °C before any reheating takes place. Major resort hotels feature themed spa baths and artificial waterfalls. An *onsen* may have separate baths with different waters offering differing mineral compositions and healing properties.

Men and women bathed together until gender separation was introduced during the Meiji Restoration. Mixed bathing persists at some *onsen*, which usually also provide the option of women-only baths or different hours for the two sexes. Bathers are not usually allowed to wear Swimsuits are not permitted in most *onsen*, though some require guests to wear a swimsuit in mixed baths.

Guests are expected to wash and rinse themselves at bathing stations equipped with stools, hand held shower heads, wooden buckets, and toiletries before entering the water and entering the *onsen* with traces of soap on the body is unacceptable.

Guests usually bring a small towel with them to use as a wash cloth and set the towels off to the side of the baths, or fold the towels and place them on their heads. It is unacceptable to place a towel in the water, or to wring a wet towel into the baths.

Many *onsen* ban tattoos, which are associated with the Yakuza and the rule is often strictly enforced, foreigners included.

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## Related Glossary Terms

Drag related terms here

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# PHILOSOPHER'S PATH

The two-kilometre-long Philosopher's Path (*Tetsugaku no michi*) in the northern part of Kyoto's Higashiyama district follows a canal lined by hundreds of cherry trees, making it one of the city's most popular *hanami* (cherry blossom viewing) spots.

The canal the path follows is a branch of the Lake Biwa Canal which tunnels 20 kilometers through the mountains to nearby Shiga Prefecture. The canal dates back to the Meiji era and was used to power Japan's first hydroelectric power plant. The aqueduct in the grounds of *Nanzenji* is part of the canal.

The path begins just down the hill from *Ginkakuji* and ends at *Nyakuoji Jinja Shrine*. Along the way, it passes two temples (*Honen-in* and *Anrakuji*) and *Otoyo no Koto Shrine*. With the temples at either end and nearby Eikan-do Zenrin-ji, a total of five temples and two shrines makes the path a popular attraction for sightseers at any time of year. It is particularly spectacular (and crowded) in spring and autumn. That popularity is reflected in the number of restaurants, cafes, and boutiques along the way.

The path gets its name due to Kyoto University professor Nishida Kitarō's habit of using it as part of his daily stroll to work from the time he was appointed to the philosophy faculty in 1910 until he retired in 1928.

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## Related Glossary Terms

**Ginkaku-ji**

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# SANNOMIYA

The name of a district as well as the station that acts as the transport hub of the Sannomiya is, in effect, downtown Kōbe, having superseded Motomachi and Sannomiya which lie just to the west of Sannomiya. The district's rise to prominence began when the Sogo Department Store moved to a new location beside the existing station.

JR West, Hankyu Railway, Hanshin Electric Railway, Kōbe Municipal Subway, and New Transit (the Port Island monorail) all use the station facilities, with two subways on the Seishin-Yamate and Kaigan Lines.

The area to the north of the station is a noted eating and drinking district. On the edge, Nankinmachi is the only Chinatown in western Japan and to the east, towards the port, the Old Foreign Settlement has a number of luxury brand shops and fashion. Center Gai Shopping Street runs west from Sannomiya through Motomachi and is an arcade lined with shops selling almost anything the average consumer is likely to want.

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## Related Glossary Terms

Drag related terms here

# SANYŌ SHINKANSEN

In the wake of the Tōkaidō *Shinkansen*'s success, it was extended westward to connect Shin-Ōsaka with Hakata Station in Fukuoka, a project that was completed in 1975, bringing Kōbe, Himeji, Okayama and Hiroshima onto the system. The fastest (*Nozomi* and *Mizuho*) services on the line can take passengers from Hakata to Osaka in less than two-and-a-half hours, and with the right connections the trip to Tokyo can be done in under six hours.

From Hakata, the Kyushu *Shinkansen* continues south to Kagoshima.

After Shin-Ōsaka, *Kodama* (the slower, all-station) services stop at Shin-Kōbe, Nishi-Akashi, Himeji, Aioi, Okayama, Shin-Kurashiki, Fukuyama, Shin-Onomichi, Mihara, Higashi-Hiroshima, Hiroshima, Shin-Iwakuni, Tokuyama, Shin-Yamaguchi (formerly Ogori, renamed in October 2003), Asa, Shin-Shimonoseki and Kokura, before arriving in Hakata around five hours later.

There are usually three *Nozomi* services per hour (two Shin-Osaka > Hakata and one Shin-Osaka > Hiroshima) with most northbound trains providing a through service to the Tokaido Shinkansen. The other super express service (the *Mizuho*) provides a through service to the Kyushu Shinkansen to Kagoshima with six round trips per day in mornings and evenings. *Nozomi* and *Mizuho* trains cannot be accessed by Japan Rail Pass holders but they are covered by the JR Sanyo-Shikoku-Kyushu Pass and JR West Sanyo Pass. A *Hikari* service from Tokyo continues as far as Okayama every hour, serving all stations between Shin-Osaka and Okayama, while *Sakura* operate between Shin-Osaka and Kagoshima-Chuo stopping at a few more stations than the faster services.

In practical terms, the Tokaido, Sanyo and Kyushu lines run more or less as a contiguous southbound line. Services run between the Tokaido and Sanyo lines, so it is possible to travel from Kagoshima to Osaka, for example, though you'd need to change trains if you're going on to Tokyo.

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## Related Glossary Terms

**Akita Shinkansen, Chūō Shinkansen, Hokuriku Shinkansen, Jōetsu Shinkansen, Kyushu Shinkansen, Nagano Shinkansen, Shinkansen, Shinkansen (History), Tōhoku Shinkansen, Tōkaidō Shinkansen**



# SENGOKU PERIOD

Lasting from the Onin War (1467-77) to the reunification of Japan at the end of the sixteenth century, the Sengoku period was marked by social and political upheaval until political power was consolidated under the Tokugawa Shōgunate. A century and a quarter of almost-constant civil war mean it is also known as the Warring States period.

The aftermath of the Onin War saw a weakening of central authority, with regional *daimyō* including the Shimazu, Takeda, and Imagawa, establishing independent domains to fill the vacuum. While some clans were able to expand their spheres of influence, others were weakened and toppled by more capable underlings in a process termed *gekokuujō* (literally, "low conquers high"). With the Emperor a marginal ceremonial and religious figure and the Shōgunate less powerful than it had been everyone else was out to secure their own niche in the pecking order. At the same time, despite political instability there was economic growth as the *daimyō* built up their armies and their support base through flood control and land reclamation. Agricultural production expanded, and harvests increased substantially. New gold, silver, copper, and iron mined fostered the development of foundries. Cultivation of cotton, which had been imported, started in Mikawa Province and cotton became the principal fabric. Those advances produced surpluses that generated trade with China and Korea and the domestic economy developed as the use of currency became widespread.

Commercial considerations saw the rise of centres where commodities were exchanged and distributed. Kyōto resumed its role as the country's industrial and commercial hub, and powerful merchants attained a degree of autonomy as towns grew up around the castles of influential *daimyō*. The desire for freedom also saw peasants weary of debt and taxes unite with monks from the Pure Land sect in uprisings (*Ikkō-ikki*) seeking to set up independent domains, with the most successful, in Kaga Province, remaining independent for nearly a century.

But despite the positive aspects of these developments, it was obvious someone needed to reimpose central authority. Oda Nobunaga re-established the Muromachi Shōgunate after his armies entered Kyōto in 1568. Nobunaga's attempt to unify the country ended when he was assassinated by one of his generals in 1582.

Toyotomi Hideyoshi continued the process, conquering Shikoku and Kyushu, and while he united Japan in 1590 by defeating the later Hojo clan in the siege of Odawara he died in 1598 without leaving an adult successor.

After Tokugawa Ieyasu's victory at the battle of Sekigahara in 1600, it took another fifteen years to finalise the process with the end of the Siege of Osaka. The ensuing Tokugawa Shōgunate lasted until the Meiji Restoration in 1868.

Paradoxically, over a century of civil war, Confucianism, classical Chinese poetry and ink painting and the Japanese classics diffused across the country, spread by Zen priests and poets invited to the provinces by the new Sengoku *daimyō* and wealthy merchants. Zen-influenced poetry and art flourished, along with landscaping and the tea ceremony in an era that brought a transition from a decentralized feudal system to a centralized state.

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## Related Glossary Terms

**Kamakura period, Oda Nobunaga, Ōnin War**

# SHAMISEN

The three-stringed *shamisen*, a plucked instrument played with a plectrum (*bachî*) can be played solo, or in ensembles with other *shamisen*, flute, *ko-tsuzumi* (a small, hourglass-shaped shoulder drum or large floor drum (*taiko*) as an accompaniment to *geisha* dances and Japanese dramatic forms, notably *kabuki* and *bunraku*.

The *shamisen* derives from the Chinese *sanxian* introduced to Japan through the Ryūkyū Kingdom (Okinawa), where it became the *sanshin* around the sixteenth century.

The instrument was introduced to *geisha* culture in the mid-eighteenth century, and *geisha* are expected to learn to play the instrument, which takes years to master.

The instrument is similar in size to a guitar or banjo, with a fretless neck and strings stretched across a resonating drum-like rounded rectangular body (the *dō*), which amplifies the sound of the strings. The *bachî* is often used to strike both strings and skin, creating a highly percussive sound.

The *sao*, or neck of the instrument is usually divided into pieces that fit together, since most *shamisen* can easily be disassembled and stowed away. The pegs used to wind the strings were traditionally fashioned out of ivory, but are increasingly fashioned out of wood and plastic. The three strings were traditionally made of silk (more recently, nylon) stretched across the *dō*, raised from it by a bridge, or *koma*, which can be made of bamboo, ivory, ox-bone, rosewood, buffalo horn, *kōki* wood or plastic and rests directly on the taut skin. The lowest string is laid lower so that it buzzes, creating a characteristic timbre similar to the buzzing of a sitar). Rather than working from a set tuning, as with a guitar or a violin, the *shamisen* is tuned according to the register of the singer, or the player's personal preference.

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## Related Glossary Terms

**Geisha**

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# SHINKANSEN

You might think *Shinkansen* translates as *bullet train*, but the term means *new trunk line*, and applies to a network of high-speed lines operated by the Japan Railways (JR) Group of companies. All services except the Akita and Yamagata *Shinkansen* run on tracks built for and exclusively used by high speed trains.

Services on the main routes operate at three levels:

- **fast**, stopping only at major centres, badged as *Nozomi* (Tokaido and Sanyo), *Mizuho* (Sanyo and Kyushu), *Hayabusa* and *Hayate* (Tohoku)
- **semi-fast**, stopping at intermediate centres, *Hikari* (Tokaido and Sanyo), *Hikari Rail Star* (Sanyo), *Sakura* (Sanyo and Kyushu), *Yamabiko* or *Max Yamabiko* (Tohoku)
- **local**, stopping at all stations on the Shinkansen line, labelled as *Kodama* (Tokaido and Sanyo), *Tsubame* (Kyushu), *Nasuno* or *Max Nasuno* (Tohoku)

Services on other lines run as *Komachi* (Akita), *Tsubasa* (Yamagata), *Toki* or *Max Toki* and *Tanigawa* or *Max Tanigawa* (Jōetsu) and *Asama* or *Max Asama* (Hokuriku/Nagano)

*Shinkansen* services have carried nearly 10 billion passengers, but the only injuries and the single fatality have been caused by closing doors. Passengers have, however, suicided by jumping both from or in front of moving trains. There are also issues with noise, particularly with the problem of tunnel boom, caused by trains coming out of tunnels at high speed.

For convenience, frequency, punctuality and passenger comfort *Shinkansen* services are hard to beat. Trains depart with split second punctuality, carriage interiors are spacious, seats usually face forward but can be turned 180 degrees to create a group of seats facing each other. Most trains have both non-reserved seats and reserved seats in two classes, but reservations are required for *Hayabusa*, *Hayate* and *Komachi*.

Regular seats are laid out in threes on either side of an aisle and offer generous leg room. The equivalent of airline business class on airplanes comes in Green Cars, with two seats on either side of the passageway, foot rests, reading lights, electrical outlets for both seats and a seat warmer. The newest trains on the Tohoku *Shinkansen* offer the equivalent of first class with single seats and additional amenities.

Trains have overhead shelves that handle airline carry on baggage and there is space for two or three suitcases behind the last row of seats in each carriage on a *first in best dressed* basis. There's probably enough room to fit a suitcase into the space in front of your seat, though it's not the most comfortable solution.

For travellers who live outside Japan discounts offered by the Japan Rail Pass make *Shinkansen* travel an extremely cost effective means of travel on all services except *Nozomi* and *Mizuho*, but you can only access regular seats.

Most trains are served by food carts with a selection of snacks, drinks and boxed *bento* meals. WiFi is available on some trains between Tokyo and Shin-Osaka, but requires a subscription or a one-day pass that has to be purchased before you board the train.

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## Related Glossary Terms

**Akita Shinkansen, Chūō Shinkansen, Hokuriku Shinkansen, Jōetsu Shinkansen, Kyushu Shinkansen, Maglev Trains, Nagano Shinkansen, Sanyō Shinkansen, Shinkansen (History), Tōhoku Shinkansen, Tōkaidō Shinkansen**

The *Shinkansen* network dates back to a pre-War proposal for a standard gauge railway line between Tokyo and Shimonoseki. There were plans to extend the line to Korea through an undersea tunnel and on to Beijing, connecting with the Trans-Siberian Railway, possibly even extending to Singapore. Those plans were abandoned in 1943, but there had been some construction work and some tunnels on the network date back to the original project.

As the post-war Japanese economy rebuilt, traffic on the Tōkaidō Main Line grew steadily and by the mid-1950s, the line was operating at full capacity. The Railway Ministry decided to revisit the standard gauge *Shinkansen* project after a newly introduced train set a world speed record of 145 km/h for a narrow gauge train. A standard gauge line would deliver higher speeds and government approval in December 1958 allowed construction of the first segment of the Tōkaidō *Shinkansen* to begin in April 1959 at an estimated cost of ¥200 billion. The final cost was nearly double that figure.

Completed in time for the Tokyo Olympics the line began service on 1 October 1964 and had an immediate impact, carrying one hundred million passengers up to 13 July 1967, and passing the one billion mark in 1976. As a result, it was extended to connect Shin-Ōsaka with Hakata (Fukuoka). That line, the Sanyō *Shinkansen*, was further extended when the Kyushu *Shinkansen* from Hakata to Kagoshima was completed in 2011. A West Kyushu route to Nagasaki running Gauge Change trains capable of running on an existing narrow gauge line between is under construction and should open by March 2023.

Work on the Tōhoku *Shinkansen* connecting Tokyo with the north of Honshū commenced in November 1971, and the line opened in stages from June 1982. The line reached Aomori in December 2010. An extension passing through the Seikan Tunnel should reach Shin-Hakodate, on Hokkaidō in March 2016 and Sapporo by 2035.

Branch lines of the Tōhoku *Shinkansen*, the Yamagata *Shinkansen* (Fukushima – Shinjō) and Akita *Shinkansen* (Morioka – Akita) run on the Tohoku line from Tokyo, then branch onto lines where the original narrow gauge has been upgraded. Since these are not purpose built Shinkansen lines the maximum speed is limited to 130 km/h, but travel time is reduced since passengers no longer need to change trains at Fukushima and Morioka.

Planning for the Jōetsu *Shinkansen* connecting Tokyo and Niigata was initiated in 1971 by Niigata-born Prime Minister Tanaka, and services began on 15 November 1982, branching off the Tōhoku *Shinkansen* at Ōmiya.

Completed in time for the 1998 Winter Olympics, the Nagano *Shinkansen* branches off the Jōetsu and Tōhoku lines at Takasaki and forms the first section of the Hokuriku *Shinkansen*, with an extension from Nagano to Kanazawa scheduled to open in March 2015. From there, the line should proceed on to Tsuruga and will eventually loop back to Osaka.

Work on the Chūō *Shinkansen*, a *maglev* (magnetic levitation) line from Tokyo to Osaka via Nagoya was due to commence in 2014, with the line following the shortest route through (as in under) the Japanese Alps from Shinagawa to Nagoya with 86% of the 286 km route underground.

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**Related Glossary Terms**

**Akita Shinkansen, Chūō Shinkansen, Hokuriku Shinkansen, Jōetsu Shinkansen, Kyushu Shinkansen, Nagano Shinkansen, Sanyō Shinkansen, Shinkansen, Tōhoku Shinkansen, Tōkaidō Shinkansen**



# SHIZUOKA

Shizuoka, centrally located between Tokyo and Nagoya along the Tokaido Corridor is the capital of Shizuoka Prefecture and the prefecture's second-largest city. The prefecture is wet by Japanese standards, but Shizuoka is the sunniest of Japan's major cities due to the absence of summer fog and a location that shelters it from northwesterly winds off the Sea of Japan. The name is made up of two *kanji*, *Shizu* ("still" or "calm") and *oka* ("hills").

Shizuoka Domain was created out of the older Sunpu Domain in 1869, and the name was retained when the city was incorporated. The area has been inhabited since prehistoric times, and the Toro archaeological site indicates a significant Yayoi period (400 BC-300 AD) settlement in what is now the central city.

Shizuoka is on the Tōkaidō Main Line from Tokyo to Osaka and is served by the Tōkaidō Shinkansen, limited express and regional trains.

Since the modern city was founded in 1889 Shizuoka has seen its share of misfortune.

The day the Tōkaidō Main Line connection opened (1 February 1889) a fire destroyed most of downtown Shizuoka. Post-typhoon floods in 1914 inundating the downtown area and the city had been rebuilt after a 6.4 magnitude earthquake in 1935 when another fire destroyed much of the central business district. Since there were few significant military targets in the area, the city was largely unaffected by air raids until a firebombing raid on 19 June 1945 inflicted high casualties and significant destruction.

The city is known for high-quality green tea, strawberries grown on inclined stone walls, wasabi, citrus fruits especially Satsuma, lotus roots, roses and peaches. Local delicacies include *oden* (boiled eggs, *daikon* radish, *konnyaku* and fish cakes stewed in beef stock and dark soy sauce), *zōni* soup (rice cakes cooked with vegetables in broth) and *tororo* (grated yam soup). A *tororo* restaurant named Chojiya in the Mariko-juku area of Shizuoka dates back to 1598 and was depicted by Hiroshige in his prints of the fifty-three stops along the Tōkaidō.

Scenic attractions include:

- Nihondaira, a scenic plateau in the centre of the city, with views of Mt. Fuji, Southern Alps, Izu Peninsula and Suruga Bay.

- The Nihondaira Ropeway connecting Nihondaira to Kunozan Toshogu Shrine.

- The ruins of Sunpu Castle, built in 1599, destroyed in 1869 and subsequently turned into a park which is a popular venue for hanami (*sakura* viewing).

- Kunōzan Tōshō-gū shrine, the burial place of Tokugawa Shōgun Tokugawa Ieyasu, might have lost a number of structures but thirteen remain. The Honden and Heiden, built in 1617, are protected as Important Cultural Properties. The museum has displays, including *tachi* (Japanese swords) and suits of armour.

- Shizuoka Sengen Jinja, a group of three Shinto shrines that enjoyed the patronage of the warrior clans who dominated the area through the Kamakura and Muromachi: periods. The complex burned down in 1804 and was subsequently rebuilt in the Momoyama style, with extensive lacquer, wood carvings, and gold leaf.

- Mariko-juku, the twentieth of the fifty-three stations along the Tōkaidō road in Suruga Ward, was one of the smallest post stations on the Tōkaidō. It's a 30 minute bus ride from JR Shizuoka Station, with row-houses from the Edo Period and the aforementioned long-established Chojiya tororojiru restaurant. The post station is the subject of [a classic ukiyo-e print by Ando Hiroshige](#). The neighbourhood is also home to Sumpu Takumishuku, a try-it-yourself facility for traditional crafts and can be previewed [here](#).

- The Toro archaeological site in Suruga Ward dates back to the late Yayoi period in the first century. The remains were discovered in 1943 by workers constructing a World War Two munitions plant, excavated in 1947 and 1948 and re-excavated between 1999 and 2004. Today, the site has reproductions of ancient pit-houses and high-floored granaries as used as far back as the 3rd and 4th centuries B.C., along with reconstructed rice paddies and associated canals and waterways. The site is preserved as a National Historic Monument with a museum displaying artifacts unearthed in the dig.

- Shizuoka Prefectural Museum of Art at the foot of Nihondaira includes [a Rodin wing](#) with a collection of the sculptor's works along with other European sculptures.

- A 25-minute walk from JR Yui Station, Tokaido Hiroshige Art Museum features Utagawa Hiroshige's ***Fifty-Three Stations of the Tokaido*** ukiyo-e woodblock prints.

- The Miho Peninsula in city's Shimizu Ward features *Miho no Matsubara*, a seven-kilometre stretch of seashore is lined with pine trees designated as one of New Three Views of Japan and added to the World Heritage List in 2013.

## Related Glossary Terms

Drag related terms here

# SHIZUOKA PREFECTURE

Shizuoka Prefecture in central Japan halfway between Tokyo and Osaka stretches along the Pacific coast between Suruga Bay and the Minami Alps and east to the Izu Peninsula, a resort area sometimes referred to as Japan's Riviera. Shizuoka has a subtropical climate, hot and humid in summer and, being close to the warm Kuroshio Current, wet by Japanese standards.

The Fuji volcanic belt extends to Izu Peninsula, so an abundance of hot springs makes the prefecture a tourist attraction, alongside features, including Suruga Bay, the Sea of Enshu and Lake Hamana. Tea is the prefecture's most famous product.

The province of Suruga dates back to the early Nara period. Early in the eighth century, the capital was relocated to a more central location on the Abe River at Sunpu, which became the capital of the Imagawa clan during the Muromachi period.

The city changed hands several times after the Imagawa clan were defeated at the Battle of Okehazama, and ended up being controlled by Tokugawa Ieyasu, who made Sunpu the site of a secondary court after he retired from the Shōgunate in 1606.

For the next two hundred and sixty years, Sunpu was *tenryō* (directly administered by the Shōgunate), ruled by the *Sunpu jōdai*, the Shōgun's nominee, officially based in Sunpu.

In 1869, after the end of the Tokugawa Shōgunate, Tokugawa Iesato was assigned the short-lived Sunpu Domain, which became Shizuoka Prefecture in 1871, and expanded to absorb Hamamatsu Prefecture and the western part of Ashigaru Prefecture in 1876. The merger brought the city of Hamamatsu and the Izu Peninsula into Shizuoka.

Scenic and tourist attractions include Mount Fuji, Lake Hamana, the sand dunes in Hamamatsu and Omaezaki and the rickety suspension bridges in Sumatakyo Gorge.

Oigawa Railway operates one of a handful of steam engines operating in Japan between Kanaya Station in Shimada and Senzu Station in Kawanehon on a line built to carry workers and materials upstream to a dam construction site. The line runs through a mountain area with no cities or towns. Most passengers are tourists visiting one of the *onsen* resorts along the way, hikers bound for the Southern Alps, train enthusiasts or photographers. The line operates a variety of historic locomotives and period carriages. From Senzu, the company's Ikawa Line is the only rack-and-pinion railway in Japan, running north as far as Ikawa, at the foot of the Southern Alps with 61 tunnels and 51 bridges in just 25.5 kilometres. Both lines are highly rated scenic routes during the *sakura* and autumn leaf seasons.

The prefecture is host to a number of festivals and special events

- During the *sakura* season on the first weekend in April the Shizuoka Festival recreates Tokugawa Ieyasu's custom of taking daimyō to view the cherry blossoms at Sengen Shrine. A flower-viewing procession with four hundred performers, a cherry blossom dance in the evening and costumed merchants selling food to visitors are some of the highlights.

- In Shimoda, the southern-most city on the Izu Peninsula the three-day Kurofune Matsuri (Black Ship Festival), held on the third weekend of May, is the city's major tourist attraction. The festival commemorates the arrival of Commodore Perry and the Shimoda Treaty which opened Shimoda and Hakodate to American ships in 1854 with a parade of marching bands and naval officers in period costumes. Events emphasising Japanese art and culture feature *origami*, *ikebana*, martial arts, Japanese Tea Ceremony and *taiko* drums.

- Shizuoka City's Abekawa Fireworks display on the banks of the Abe River upstream from Abekawa Bridge on the last Saturday of July features 15,000 aerial fireworks and fifty ground-based set pieces.

- *Shimizu Minato Matsuri* (Shimizu Port Festival) on the first Friday, Saturday and Sunday in August commemorates the opening of Shimizu port to international trade with mass dances featuring 30,000 performers on the first two days and a seaside fireworks display on the Sunday.

- The biggest event on the calendar, however, is the Daidogei Street Performance World Cup, an annual international busker's festival held in November in central Shizuoka City. The competition attracts over two million visitors each year to watch street performers from around the world in performance spaces around downtown Shizuoka City, with a main stage in Sunpu Park (*Sunpu kōuen*).

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# SŌAMI

Painter, art critic, poet, landscape gardener, and master of the tea ceremony Sōami, also known as Kangaku Shinsō (1472-1525) was the last of three generations of connoisseurs who served as artistic custodians of the Ashikaga Shōguns' art collection.

As the son and grandson of painters and connoisseurs (Geiami and Nōami, respectively), he is a significant figure who specialised in landscapes painted on screens and sliding doors in Muromachi-period mansions and temples. Some of his greatest pieces covered over twenty *fusuma* panels, depicting Japanese landscapes using Chinese techniques.

As a critic, in 1511 he revised his grandfather's famous catalog of Chinese paintings, the *Kundaikan sayū chōki* (compiled in 1476).

Sōami's work was strongly influenced by the philosophy of Zen and his landscape work can be seen in two of the most celebrated Zen temple gardens in Japan, *Ryōan-ji* and *Daisei-in*, both in Kyōto, and both outstanding examples of *kare sansui*, dry landscape combinations of stones and sand used to suggest mountains and water. He is also believed to have planned the garden of Ginkaku-ji, the temple on the site of the villa built by his patron, Ashikaga Yoshimasa.

*Daisen-in* also holds a set of landscape *fusuma-e*, but with the paintings done on sliding doors in environments where flash photography is forbidden there are few examples of his work available to view away from their original setting. The reader can get a sense of his work from the *Landscape of the Four Seasons* (<http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/works-of-art/41.59.1,2>).

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# TAKAYAMA

The name means *tall mountain*, and in a mountainous country, predictably, there's more than one of them. To avoid confusion, the Takayama in the mountainous Hida region of Gifu Prefecture is commonly labelled *Hida-Takayama*. With a population around the hundred thousand mark, Takayama is a compact city with a downtown area that's easy to cover on foot, though some attractions (Hida Folk Village, for example) are best accessed by bus. Interestingly, a series of local government mergers since the mid-1930s have made Takayama the largest city in Japan as measured by surface area.

Located in the heart of the Japanese Alps, Takayama is the major transport hub for the Hida region, and the surrounding ski resorts and *onsen* have delivered a high (three star) rating in the **Michelin Guide**. The city is well worth visiting for its beautifully preserved old town, festivals held in spring and autumn, *sakura* (mid- to late-April, around three weeks after Nagoya) and autumn foliage (late October into the first week of November).

Takayama is part of the heavy snow area with snowfall on most days throughout the winter. The annual snowfall comes in at around five metres between the end of November and early April.

The city rose to prominence during the feudal period as a source of high quality timber. Skilled carpenters from Takayama are believed to have worked on the Imperial Palace in Kyoto, and many temples in Kyoto and Nara and the city was important enough to be placed under the direct control of the Tokugawa *Shōgun* in the seventeenth century.

As a result, in spite of relative isolation, it was a prosperous centre that developed its own regional culture over a period of some three centuries.

Takayama is famous for its well-preserved merchant quarter (*Sanno-machi*, three narrow lanes lined with wooden buildings housing *saké* breweries, boutiques and museums), *Takayama Jinya* (the building from which the *Shōgun*'s representative administered the area), *Takayama Yatai Kaikan* (Takayama Festival Float Exhibition Hall, where the festival floats are stored), the Hida Folk Village (an open-air museum that recreates a traditional mountain village), *ramen* noodles and Hida beef.

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# TŌHOKU SHINKANSEN

Construction work on the 674 km Tōhoku *Shinkansen*, connecting Tokyo with Aomori on the northern end of Honshū, commenced in November 1971, and the line opened in stages from June 1982. The line runs through a more sparsely populated region of Japan's main island and reached Aomori in December 2010. An extension of the line passing through the Seikan Tunnel should reach ShinHakodate, on the northern island of Hokkaidō in March 2016 and Sapporo by 2035.

Branch lines running off the Tōhoku *Shinkansen*, the Yamagata *Shinkansen* (Fukushima – Shinjō) and Akita Shinkansen (Morioka – Akita) are labelled mini-*shinkansen* routes.

Services on both lines run on the Tohoku Shinkansen line from Tokyo, then branch onto lines where the original narrow gauge has been upgraded. Since these are not purpose built *Shinkansen* lines the maximum speed is limited to 130 km/h, but travel time is reduced since passengers no longer need to change trains at Fukushima and Morioka.

Planning for the Jōetsu *Shinkansen* connecting Tokyo and Niigata was initiated in 1971 by Niigata-born Prime Minister Tanaka, and services began on 15 November 1982, branching off the existing Tōhoku *Shinkansen* at Ōmiya.

Completed in time for the 1998 Winter Olympics, the Nagano *Shinkansen* branches off the Jōetsu and Tōhoku lines at Takasaki and forms the first section of the Hokuriku *Shinkansen*, with an extension from Nagano to Kanazawa scheduled to open in March 2015. From there, the line should proceed on to Tsuruga and will eventually loop back to Osaka.

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## Related Glossary Terms

**Akita Shinkansen, Chūō Shinkansen, Hokuriku Shinkansen, Jōetsu Shinkansen, Kyushu Shinkansen, Nagano Shinkansen, Sanyō Shinkansen, Shinkansen, Shinkansen (History), Tōkaidō Shinkansen**

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# TŌKAIDŌ SHINKANSEN

Government approval of the *Shinkansen* project in December 1958 allowed construction of the line between Tokyo and Osaka to begin in April 1959 at an estimated cost of 1.5 billion yen. The final cost was nearly double the original figure.

Completed in time for the 1964 Olympics the 515.4 km line began service on 1 October 1964, cutting the trip between Tokyo and Osaka from six hours and forty minutes to three hours. By 1965, it was down to just over three hours, and the service had an immediate impact, carrying one hundred million passengers up to 13 July 1967, and passing the 1 billion mark in 1976.

Today, with up to thirteen sixteen car 1,323 seat trains per hour in either direction, the *Tōkaidō Shinkansen* is the world's busiest high-speed rail line.

As a result of the line's success, it was extended westward to connect Shin-Ōsaka Station to Hakata Station in Fukuoka (the *Sanyō Shinkansen*).

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## Related Glossary Terms

**Akita Shinkansen, Chūō Shinkansen, Hokuriku Shinkansen, Jōetsu Shinkansen, Kyushu Shinkansen, Nagano Shinkansen, Sanyō Shinkansen, Shinkansen (History), Tōhoku Shinkansen**

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# TOYAMA

Capital of Toyama Prefecture, located on the coast of the Sea of Japan coast in central Honshū, Toyama is about 200 km north of Nagoya and 300 km northwest of Tokyo.

Traditionally an agricultural area, modernisation after the Meiji Era saw Toyama become an important industrial region, initially producing medicine and paper, then moving into heavy industry and chemicals as power generated by hydroelectric projects in the mountainous hinterland became available.

The city's importance as a centre for aluminium, ball-bearing and steel production saw an air raid that destroyed 99.5 percent of the city in August 1945. Postwar reconstruction, based around a plentiful water supply, a well-developed drainage system and agricultural forestry, fishery, commercial and manufacturing activity has seen Toyama become one of the most influential cities on the Japan Sea coast.

Attractions in the city include the Botanic Gardens, Toyama Castle, the Museum of Modern Art, Toyama Folk Village and Gohyaku-rakan, the Hills of 500 Buddhas.

Rail access will become easier when the Hokuriku (Nagano) Shinkansen line is extended to Toyama in 2015. Current access from Tokyo involves taking the Joetsu Shinkansen to Echigo-Yuzawa and transferring to the Hakutaka limited express train. Rail access to and from Osaka and Kyoto is delivered through a spectacular service that crosses the central cordillera by way of Takayama.

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# UMEDA

The station complex comprising the JR Osaka Station and facilities shared by four railway companies is one of Osaka’s two transport hubs.

As a result, it forms the centre of a bustling district with an abundance of shopping and entertainment options in the world’s largest network of underground shopping malls, as well as above ground redevelopments in a former freight rail yard in northern Osaka. Recent developments include Osaka Station City, Grand Front Osaka, and Umeda Sky Building. The 2.6 kilometre Tenjinbashisuji Shopping Street is located nearby.

Above ground level, the station complex takes in the JR Osaka Station and Hanshin Umeda Stations, with Hanshin Railways, Umeda Station, Midosuji Subway Line’s Umeda Station, Yotsubashi Subway Line’s Nishi-Umeda Station and Tanimachi Subway Line’s Higashi-Umeda below ground level.

While more than 2.3 million passengers pass through the facilities every day, Umeda only ranks as the fourth busiest station complex in Japan.

The equivalent on the south side of the city is Minami, centred around Namba Station.

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